

The Future of EFL Teachers

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Abstract

More and more schools in Asia, Europe and South America, from elementary schools to universities, are using Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodology for teaching academic subjects. It has currently become one of the most popular teaching and learning models, especially in non-English speaking countries. It also means that more and more subject teachers are trying to or are actually required to teach their classes in English. In particular, the use of English-medium instruction (EMI) in higher education is increasingly required. In Japan, since English is learned and used as a foreign language, using CLIL in Japanese schools can certainly provide students with a real opportunity to use English meaningfully and can also be helpful to increase their motivation to learn English. However, the question here is, when the majority of courses in schools are taught by subject teachers through the medium of English, what might eventually become the role and status of EFL teachers in the future and how will they deal with it? This trend towards learning in English is certainly not only catering to the global standard and the diversity of students, but is also actually changing the way of teaching and learning English itself. As Mehisto, David and Frigols (2008) mentioned, since in reality our world is rapidly becoming a global village, it certainly has a big influence on how we teach and learn.

Keywords

CLIL, EMI, EFL teachers, subject teachers, future English education, Teachers' collaboration, Teacher training

Introduction

According to Dearden (2014, p8), "There appears to be a fast-moving worldwide shift, in non-anglophone countries, from English being taught as a foreign language (EFL) to English being the medium of instruction (EMI) for academic subjects". Most countries in the world have been influenced by the trends of globalization and thus most schools have been trying to meet the requirements of the global standard by making efforts to promote English as the medium of instruction. As CLIL is "a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of

both content and language” (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010, p.1), it is indeed a practical approach to killing two birds with one stone, and thus it has been adopted in many schools and continues to grow at a fast pace.

The Ministry of Education in Japan has also been promoting the “introduction of classes in English” in the universities since 2012 (Koike, 2014). A growing number of the nation’s universities, and even some secondary schools, are increasingly offering some classes or entire courses taught in English. Therefore, the purpose of learning and teaching English should accordingly be reconsidered and modified. As an EFL teacher, I wonder how our roles could be coordinated and changed to meet the current needs of English teaching and learning in Japan. In this paper, firstly, I will describe some current EFL class situations based on my observations. Secondly, I would like to mention some important challenges to consider and prepare for, concerning both teachers and students. Finally, I will discuss some possibilities and potentials of EFL teachers’ new roles in the near future, including some feedback from the CLIL classes I have visited and related conferences I have attended recently.

The Current Situation of EFL classes

The main purpose of EFL classes in Japan is to improve students’ English proficiency, and the focus has been more on the purpose of communication than the language itself during the last few years. The topics and content used in EFL classes could be different depending on the level of the students and the focus each EFL teacher chooses for the class. Some general topics that are often used in EFL classes are daily greetings, small talk, shopping, food, travel, leisure, business situations and so on. Students usually practise those topics in pair work and express their opinions through discussions and presentations. However, students cannot really use what they have learned immediately outside the classroom, as Japan is an EFL country.

Although the government has started introducing English lessons from the third grade of elementary school (MEXT 2014), in most classrooms the lessons are more concerned with fun activities like singing songs, playing games and experiencing cross-cultural understanding by getting to know teachers from foreign countries. In secondary schools, EFL teachers are encouraged to use more communicative approaches but they still have the burden of preparing students for university entrance examinations; and in fact, some students do not think that communicative language teaching will help them to pass the traditional entrance examinations and they sometimes feel that the activities are more like fun and games than serious learning.

When students take compulsory English classes in the university, their mindset is still that of learning English as a foreign language and it seems that many university graduates cannot use English fluently at their workplaces even after studying it for at least 6 to 8 years at school.

Indeed, EFL teaching methods in Japan have been criticized for decades. Therefore, I believe that

CLIL could be a ray of hope for improving EFL teaching methods and changing the whole English learning process and system in Japan. Some top-tier universities have started implementing this teaching and learning method and successful results have been reported (Watanabe, Ikeda & Izumi, 2011). According to Mehisto, Marsh & Frigols (2008), students in CLIL programmes can understand and master a language much faster than those who only learn it as a subject. CLIL can stimulate not just knowledge and experience but also the language itself. It helps to increase students' motivation and encourage them to notice language while learning the content and doing the tasks, which is a crucial factor for successful language learning.

Three Main Challenges for Students

There are three main challenges for students to face when they study their subjects in English. First, they may not have enough English proficiency to understand the content of that subject in English. Although CLIL in higher education may focus on content more than language, students still need to attain a certain level of English in order to understand the content of the subjects they are learning. Second, they need to communicate with each other and listen to the teachers' talk in English, besides understanding the written words in the textbook. Therefore, speaking and listening skills will need to be improved drastically as they now have a real need to use English with a meaningful purpose. Third, students are learning the content and the language at the same time, so it is necessary for them to be more active in class and be more responsible for their own learning.

Four Main Challenges for Subject Teachers to Consider

Here are some concerns for subject teachers to take into account when they teach in CLIL classes. First, they may not have sufficient confidence to teach their subject in English. Second, few subject teachers have received language teaching training and some of them may have difficulties when they evaluate their students' understanding of the content and their English use at the same time. Third, it would be a challenging and time-consuming process to plan, prepare CLIL lessons and even create materials tailored to their dual purposes. Most teachers are already preoccupied with their own subject preparation, so it could be a burden to feel the necessity to teach students the basic language skills in their classes. Fourth, unlike in regular language classes, teachers in CLIL classes usually need to teach students with mixed English levels.

Potential New Roles for EFL Teachers

The language levels of both students and teachers could be a major issue in CLIL classes. According to Celce-Murcia (2001), many schools just ask their teachers to conduct lessons in English without providing proper training or support or considering their teachers' actual English ability. Therefore, it is

crucial to have EFL teachers' help and collaboration. Based on those challenges mentioned above, I would like to share my thoughts on EFL teachers' future roles and summarize them in 5 main points as follows.

(1) Preparing students for CLIL learning. EFL teachers can prepare students to learn in English by conducting a pre-CLIL programme before the CLIL course starts. In this pre-CLIL programme, students could improve their English proficiency, and learn more vocabulary related to their subjects and some particular expressions for academic purposes. Practising four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) with the content they are going to study will help students to experience and be ready with the basic skills they need. Students will also learn to be more responsible through learning in CLIL classes.

(2) Preparing subject teachers for CLIL teaching. There are two kinds of learning workshops in which EFL teachers can help subject teachers to build their confidence for teaching in English. One workshop is about language teaching. EFL teachers can conduct regular language teaching workshops and microteaching sessions. Especially through occasional microteaching sessions, subject teachers can improve their teaching skills and gather some ideas by observing other teachers' teaching practice at the same time. Most subject teachers haven't received any language teaching training before so it will be helpful for them to learn some language teaching techniques, such as how to give instructions, talk in a comprehensible way, support students when they don't understand certain words and help them to use English actively during the class. In addition, it is also important for EFL teachers and subject teachers to have meetings regularly in order to learn from each other, and create supportive teamwork. When I attended CLIL training courses in Canterbury and Oxford, I had the opportunity to observe different subject teachers' classes. After each observation, we spent some time sharing ideas and exchanging opinions on how to improve each other's teaching skills. It was very refreshing and inspiring. The other workshop is to help subject teachers improve their English skills. Some were actually worried about that their pronunciation and grammar might influence the students' learning. In this way, if the school budget is limited, it is certainly better to use the existing human resources, EFL teachers, more effectively.

(3) Contributing to the English syllabus and lesson planning. By collaborating with subject teachers, EFL teachers could contribute to orientating the English language syllabus, based on the subjects and the content that students need to learn, and what vocabulary and expressions are required in CLIL classes. They could plan the basic schemes of language skills that need to be learned and provide extra help for lower level students. One big concern in CLIL classes is that students' English levels would be mixed; in fact, there could be a big gap between the bottom and the top. As CLIL is not a language class, it would be difficult to divide students by their English levels. Therefore, if time allows, EFL teachers could help students with lower English ability by giving extra after-class sessions to improve their English and help them catch up with the content they may have missed. In addition, schools need to maintain standards in subjects taught through English so all teachers and students have a common

understanding about what needs to be done in order to achieve acceptable levels of subject knowledge.

(4) Developing materials. EFL teachers can collaborate with subject teachers regularly and develop some supplemental materials for CLIL classes. Subject teachers are teaching content through language, not the opposite, but language is still an important part of CLIL classes. Students need to know a lot of academic words and expressions when they take CLIL classes; therefore, in addition to joining the pre-CLIL programme mentioned above, it would be greatly helpful for them to have supportive material for their own reference, to help them understand the content clearly. When I visited a Dutch university called University College Roosevelt, some teachers used textbooks written in English and some used textbooks written in Dutch with supplemental worksheets on the side to help students understand some technical terms in English. One secondary school near that university even actually remade the whole textbook from Dutch to English, in order to use CLIL methodology more effectively.

(5) Beyond EFL teaching. It could be an opportunity for EFL teachers to train themselves to be content experts, as well as English teachers. They could decide on a subject, a theme, or a project that they are interested in and find some support materials or seminars to help them gain the knowledge. Since many EFL teachers have experienced content-based instruction (CBI), it might be a potential career development to transfer their CBI classes into content/subject classes as part of the CLIL programme. Personally, I believe that CLIL could give EFL teachers a new opportunity to explore their potential to teach a subject in English. Furthermore, EFL teachers can function as coordinators. When I attended the ICLHE (Integrating Content and Language in Higher Education) conference in Brussels, I learned that some schools in Europe actually have special CLIL coordinators who help subject teachers develop materials, share ideas, make lesson plans, and have regular meetings to get feedback and check progress. In those schools, CLIL coordinators usually have higher English language skills and they sometimes also help subject teachers with their English, which is exactly something that EFL teachers can do.

For further reference, the following are seven roles that language teachers could play in a CLIL programme, described by Dale and Tanner (2012) in a 'Collaboration in CLIL' rubric that they created (2012, p.24).

- 1 Language coach or instructor for colleagues
- 2 Giver of learner feedback
- 3 Stimulator of spoken and written language
- 4 Language methodologist
- 5 Team worker
- 6 Assessor
- 7 International consultant

Conclusion

Teaching a subject in a second language is not easy. It requires not only the knowledge of that subject but also a specialist pedagogical expertise. Few teachers in higher education have received training on how to teach languages, and they have to consider their methodology more carefully than when they teach their own subjects in their own native languages. Since the flow and the purpose of English learning is changing, it is important for EFL teachers to be aware of their changing roles in their teaching practice. Therefore, it is crucial for subject teachers and EFL teachers to collaborate.

By collaborating with each other, teachers can exchange ideas, give feedback, develop strategies, and also be able to create a powerful teaching and learning system. By sharing responsibilities, subject teachers and EFL teachers can help each other with subject-specific vocabulary and the language functions required by the subject and create more effective lesson plans accordingly. Giving EFL teachers new roles will not only help the subject teachers but also EFL teachers themselves to develop their teaching skills and explore their new potentials. Here is a nice quote from Arthur Ashe for us to keep in mind; “Start where you are, use what you have, and do what you can.”

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