

# A case study of CLIL practices in the EFL classroom

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## Introduction

With the expansion of globalisation and increased contact between countries, being able to use English is essential. In Japan, all elementary schools have been required to introduce compulsory English lessons for the fifth and sixth graders since 2011. We would probably be able to see the results around 2018 and it is still difficult, in some sense, to imagine how much improvement would be made by learning English from the age of 11 years. In this paper, the current university students that I focus on are those who started their English lessons from the first year of junior high school and studied for six years before entering the university. However, it still seems to be difficult for many of them to think, express, research and present their ideas in their own words in English. Even though more communicative methods are adopted nowadays, English education in most of the schools is still primarily grammar-translation based. Japanese students can be quite inexperienced as far as English communication ability is concerned and that is one of the reasons why I am interested in CLIL methodology.

CLIL stands for "Content and Language Integrated Learning" which involves teaching a subject through the medium of a second or foreign language (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010). Learners acquire knowledge about the content of the subject and language at the same time. It is a methodology that can enhance an interest in learning English and enables students to improve their fluency by focusing more on the content rather than English itself. It is not a new or innovative way to teach English as a foreign language but it has been used in most European countries since the 1990s. Here are some benefits regarding CLIL methodology as illustrated on the European Commission's website (CLIL's Benefits, 2012):

- 1 It develops intercultural communication skills.
- 2 It improves language competence and oral communication skills.
- 3 It develops multilingual interests and attitudes.
- 4 It provides opportunities to study content through different perspectives.

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5 It allows learners more contact with the target language.

6 It increases learners' motivation and confidence in both the language and the subject being taught.

In short, the benefits of CLIL include aspects of motivation, development of language production and meaningful communicative ability, as well as learning the culture of a subject (Dale and Tanner 2012). In this paper, first I will introduce some activities we did in a required English course for sophomore students who majored in "Regional Development Studies." Next, I will explain the reasons why I suggest using CLIL methodology in the EFL course in the university. Finally, I will briefly discuss the possibilities and issues involved when introducing CLIL methodology.

### Some activities we did in the EFL course

Basically I had two goals for this oral communication course. The first was to help students feel comfortable and freer to communicate and express their ideas in English. The second was to help them gain some general ideas and knowledge about the world. After all, they were majoring in Regional Development and it would be better for them to know, for example, something more about India than just "curry and rice". Of course, students can learn more about different regions, and countries in their major subject courses; the content we included in this English course could be considered as "a starter" or something like a side dish to support their major subjects.

As mentioned above, one of the main goals of this course was to learn about different countries around the world. There was no textbook required in this course; instead, I asked students to choose a notebook they liked and name the notebook "My World Map". There were 15 classes in one semester and classes met once a week for 90 minutes. As the first class was for introduction and the last class was for the final speaking test, we actually had only 13 classes to create and develop the world map notebook. The time was limited and thus we divided the world into 13 regions. Here is a sample syllabus in Figure 1:

In addition, some regular activities that students usually did before the class and during the class are listed below in Figure 2.

#### (1) Pre-class activities

Every week before learning about a new region, students were given a map of that region and then they chose one or two countries that they were interested in. After they decided which country to research, they had to draw a

Fig.1

Class 1	Introduction	Class 6	North America	Class 11	North Europe
Class 2	East Asia	Class 7	South America	Class 12	South Europe
Class 3	Southeast Asia	Class 8	Central America	Class 13	North Africa
Class 4	South Asia	Class 9	East Europe	Class 14	South Africa
Class 5	West Asia	Class 10	West Europe	Class 15	Final Speaking Test

Fig.2

Pre-class activities	Main in-class activities	Some follow-up activities or for homework
Creating an initial mind map	45-second talk in pairs	Writing a summary about the country they chose or the article given in advance
Article reading	2-minute talk in small groups	Retelling what they had read or sometimes what their partners had said, etc.
	Q&A practice in pairs	Giving a mini-presentation in groups or in class

mind map with at least 5 keywords based on the country they chose. They usually tried first by themselves to see how many keywords they could come up with and then they did some research on the internet or read some books to add some more keywords about that country in advance before the class. That was the minimum requirement for their homework. Some of them drew their mind maps with colours, hand-drawn pictures, or adding some related photos to support their keywords. As Harmer (2011) also pointed out, some students are particularly visually oriented and can be influenced by what they see. In fact, students loved looking at each other's mind maps and they seemed to look forward to seeing the drawings and pictures in their partners' notebooks every time. It was also really a great pleasure to see their eagerness in creating their original world maps. Besides the mind maps, sometimes students were also asked to read a text related to that region and then they checked their understanding and the meaning of some important words in class with their partners or in small groups.

## (2) In-class activities

The first in-class activity I would like to introduce is a "45-second Talk", which requires students to answer a question or address a topic within 45 seconds. It was usually done in pairs and students took turns to speak and count sentences for each other. The speaking topics were basically based on each region that was assigned in that week but we also did some general topics such as their likes and dislikes, something in their daily life, shopping, etc. This activity could also be used for checking students' understanding with the reading text given in advance or for reviewing something they had learned in previous classes. By providing a limit for each speaking time, it helped and prompted students to think more quickly without giving them too much time to "translate" in their heads. Students had to focus on the message they wanted to deliver and thus their speech could gain a smoother flow. It was also a task that ensured everyone participated in speaking equally.

In addition, students were given a clear target regarding the number of sentences, which also depended on the level of each class. In the beginners' class, for instance, their final goal was to make more than 5 sentences within 45 seconds. Students were shown how to count their spoken sentences and by doing so they also had a concrete number to measure their own speech. This task provided students the opportunity to improve their fluency and helped them to be aware of the quality of the content they produced. I received some positive feedback from the students, who said that it was enjoyable and they felt the urge to say more sentences and try to add more information as their partner was counting for them.

The second activity is "2-minute Talk". It was a speaking task done in small groups and the topic was based

on the information, the keywords they found in advance as a pre-class task. Therefore, students had to do their homework in advance in order to do this activity and it seemed to be a good exercise for them to explain the keywords to their partners without using any prepared scripts. There were no strict rules about the keywords and thus students had the freedom to find the keywords (e.g. language spoken in that country, people, the capital city, religions, food, festivals, famous people, etc.) In fact, many students enjoyed this mapping activity and it helped them organise what they knew and had researched. Figure 3 to 5 shows some examples of the mind maps drawn by the students.

**(3) Follow-up activities**

There were some follow-up activities we did in the last 15 minutes of the class or sometimes at the beginning of the following class. For example, writing a summary. Students wrote a summary of what they had found out about the country (either from the class or from their partner) within a time limit (e.g. 10 minutes). Sometimes they were also asked to summarise or retell the article that was given in advance and then students checked their

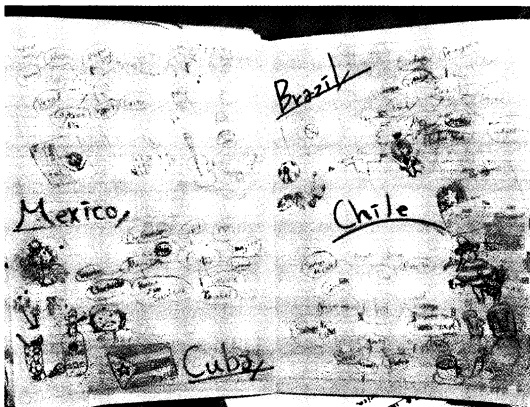


Fig.3

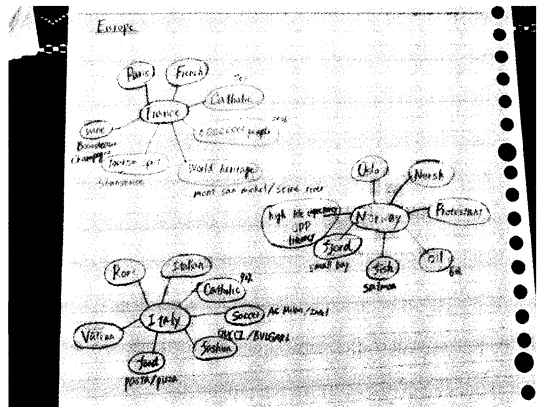


Fig.4

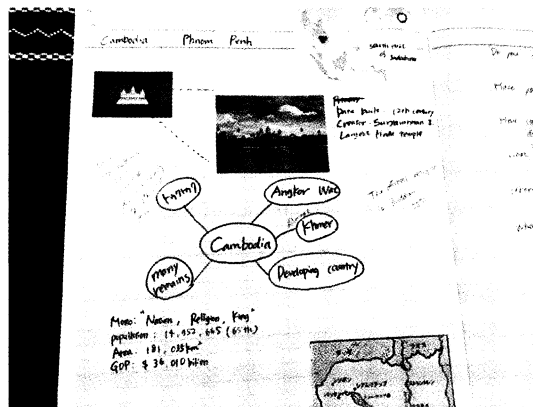


Fig.5

understanding by asking each other questions or reading each other's writing. The reason for giving the students a time limit is so they won't instantly react by going to their dictionaries but will try to use their own words instead. It was good practice for them to think in English, and a timer is definitely an essential and powerful tool to use for such activities.

The final Speaking Test was a QA Test for 10 minutes. Students did this test in pairs and thus they had to work with their partners regularly, organise the content that they had learned and practise how to ask and answer the questions. Basically students could ask any questions as long as they were related to the regions we did in class. However, there were three rules. First, 4 continents (Asia, Europe, America and Africa) needed to be covered and there should be at least 8 countries (2 countries from each region) mentioned in this QA test. Second, as 1 question was counted as 1 point and 1 answer was also counted as 1 point, 50 points were the minimum score to pass the test. Finally, not only casual questions about things like food or famous people, but also something more intelligent needed to be included such as the capital city, the language people speak in that country, the main religion, etc.

Aside from the number of questions and answers count, it was an interview exam that could assess both language skills and general knowledge that was related to the assigned regions. As the topic was familiar, authentic and interesting enough to inspire the students, they did quite well using English during most of the class time interacting with other students. Using CLIL methodology made the class more interesting and practical and at the same time students could pursue their individual interests. It was exactly two birds with one stone.

## **Analysis of the Results**

As a result of using CLIL methodology in this EFL classroom, I found three interesting points that show the effectiveness and efficiency of using this method. First, students spoke more sentences in the second half of the semester as they felt more comfortable using English and sharing their ideas with their speaking partners. They were more communicative and less afraid of making mistakes.

Figure 6 (above) shows the changes in the average number of sentences that students spoke in the spring semester. It could depend on the topic that is given each time and the progress for each student was also different.

Second, students were more motivated to speak English than at the beginning of the course. As they felt more comfortable using English for communication, they learned more vocabulary spontaneously on their own. As we all know, motivation is one of the key factors that determine the rate and success of second language attainment. Using English in a real setting like this does help students realise and learn how to use English meaningfully.

The third interesting point I found was that students started to become attached to their own world map notebook. In the final questionnaire, more than 75 percent of the class commented that they would continue making the notebook themselves, learn more about other countries they are interested in and that they felt the urge to learn more about Japan and Japanese culture.

Fig 6

	April-May	June-July
Elementary level classes	2-3 sentences	4-5 sentences
Pre-intermediate level classes	3-5 sentences	7-8 sentences
Upper-intermediate level classes	5-6 sentences	9-10 sentences

### Reasons for using CLIL methodology in university courses

I have worked as a language teacher since 2001 and I have tried many different kinds of communicative approaches in the classes. I also used many commercial textbooks published by those major publishing companies such as Longman, Oxford University Press (OUP), and Cambridge University Press (CUP) and so on. According to the feedback questionnaires I have collected, the results for most of my classes are quite positive and most of the students are satisfied with the lessons. Still, I have always felt that something is missing in the language course. It is true that most of the textbooks are well-balanced and cover all four skills (Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing) to help students use English effectively in some way, and the communicative approaches are enjoyable and supportive for both English learning and teaching. However, those daily topics and everyday situations are not really useful unless students have the opportunities to use the language. As Japan is an EFL country, English is not used much in daily life but rather as a measuring stick for most of the examinations or qualifications. Even though access to the internet and authentic materials is not difficult in Japan, and students are offered many different kinds of opportunities to study abroad or participate in some English-speaking events, the opportunities to actually use English are still quite limited.

There are two main reasons why I would like to suggest using CLIL methodology in the EFL course in university. First, as mentioned earlier, using CLIL methodology provides students with a real opportunity to use English meaningfully and can also help them to be responsible for their own learning. Learning subjects such as history, literature and science in English enables students to use it as a communication and learning tool. For example, the point of reading a text in English is to gain knowledge from that text and to obtain information, not to learn the structure of English or how to translate it into Japanese. CLIL methodology requires students to understand the text in English, which also helps them to be able to think in English. After they have been learning English for more than 6 years, I believe it is time for students to move on to the next level, which is "Using English". Once students experience using English in a real setting, they will be able to get used to thinking in English and learning in English. In an EFL course, learning English is basically the main purpose; however, most students still have an awareness that they are not good at English. In order to help them to be more confident using English, it is important to find something that can attract their attention. Consequently, learning something in English gives them a reason to explore and realise their potential abilities.

Second, as the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan is promoting the internationalisation of universities, one of the goals is to introduce classes in English (MEXT, 2012). Before

learning their main subject courses in English, as mentioned earlier, using CLIL methodology in the EFL classroom could be a “starter” and play an important role in enhancing students’ English learning and opening another possibility for effective language teaching. In addition, learning by CLIL methodology could be a strong support to complement their other related course work. Students can improve their four skills (Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing) simultaneously by using them to understand the content. According to Coyle (2010) CLIL practice is based on the 4Cs framework; Communication (using language to learn whilst learning to use language), Cognition (thinking and understanding), Content (developing knowledge, skills and understanding of the subject) and Culture (self and other awareness/citizenship) which, in my view, are exactly the essential skills that Japanese university students need to acquire.

In addition, university students have more vocabulary and general grammar knowledge to deal with reading texts, which is an essential skill in CLIL methodology. Some people suggest introducing CLIL at elementary school level and I am not at all opposed to the idea. However, when considering the necessary teacher’s training and provision of a supportive learning environment, personally, I think we may start with university courses. If learners know that they will have to learn some of their subjects in English in the universities; it may be a good opportunity to change their attitude towards learning English. It will provide a stronger and more practical stimulus to learn it. Students will be more motivated to learn and will be more easily involved in the subject. As they are studying something they chose as their major, hopefully, it will be interesting enough to inspire them. CLIL helps students learn English more quickly and gives them a strong motivation toward learning. That is, in fact, the key to improving their English.

### **Possibilities and issues regarding use of CLIL methodology**

As mentioned above, CLIL methodology is not only useful for subject teaching; it could also be a good way to activate and refresh the current state of English education in Japan. CLIL can stimulate not just knowledge and experience but also the language. It helps to increase learners’ motivation and encourage them to notice language while learning the content and doing the tasks, which is a crucial factor for successful language learning.

On the other hand, there are certainly some issues we may need to consider when using CLIL methodology in the EFL classroom. For example, the content I used in the sophomore course is more like a history or a geography subject; however, as I am not a subject teacher, the information I could provide was still quite limited. Therefore, it might be necessary to provide regular teachers’ training, workshops to offer language teachers additional ideas for using CLIL methodology. As language teachers are basically teaching the language, they need to have some support to find some interesting and practical “content” to base it on. The same can be said for the subject teachers, who may also need to have supportive language courses regularly or workshops to help them when they teach their subjects in English. For example, giving classroom instructions, methods of explaining words, content, etc. Other

issues such as the class size, learners' levels, materials and assessment policy would also need to be taken into consideration.

As an example, regarding the materials, I had the opportunity to visit a CLIL-based class in the Netherlands about two months ago and it was a biology class in a junior high school. The school actually has just started using CLIL methodology this year and so they are still learning how to adapt this approach by trial and error. The biology teacher told me that they actually remade the textbook in order to use CLIL methodology more effectively. There were two reasons. One was that biology is a new subject for the students in junior high school and the other was that it is sometimes difficult for the biology teacher to explain some technical terms in English, so they actually rewrote the textbook in Simple English for this trial course. In addition, they have a meeting once a month with the language teachers and learn more about CLIL methodology by giving trial lessons in front of other colleagues. They are learning, for example, how to present vocabulary, how to check understanding, how to provide input and so on.

Therefore, if possible, we could connect both subject teachers and language teachers to cooperate with each other. Some experimental courses could be arranged in order to see how it may work out and then teachers could find ways to improve and apply their teaching step by step. It would be a challenging and time-consuming process to plan CLIL lessons and create materials for it; however, it would definitely help teachers create more dynamic, engaging lessons and improve English education in Japan.

## **Conclusion**

Personally, I think the most effective way to learn a foreign language is to be involved in the environment of that language, such as the natural conditions of acquiring our first language or learning the language in a second language environment. However, in Japan, where learning a foreign language takes place in a more artificial setting, this is difficult. In that sense, using CLIL methodology would be more realistic and practical. CLIL is not only for subject teachers, but also can be adapted by language teachers, especially those who are fed up with using commercial textbooks. It could be challenging but if we look at it from a different perspective, using CLIL in the EFL classroom can not only increase the students' motivation but also may change their attitude towards English learning. Most students in Japan are used to studying in a grammar-translation way and thus CLIL methodology could be a new learning experience for them. Many communicative methods have been tried and explored, and much has already been discussed and done to meet the demand for effective and communicative language teaching and learning. However, I believe that CLIL methodology holds great potential and could open a new door for promoting and developing the curriculum for bilingual education in Japan.

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## 【Abstract】

## EFL教室で行われたクリル教授法の事例研究

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「一番効果的な英語学習法、英語教授法は何か」とは英語教育において世界共通の悩みである。この事例研究はクリル（CLIL）教授法を英語学習者のスピーキング力を高め、学習者がもっと自信を持って英語で発言するための方法として提案している。CLIL（Content and Language Integrated Learning：クリル）というのは理科や社会などの教科学習と英語の語学学習を統合したアプローチで、ヨーロッパでは広く使われている英語教育方法で、主に小学校から高校までで行われている。教科の内容を題材にして、英語でいろいろなアクティビティーを行うことで、教科の内容を理解していくだけではなく、英語の4技能を高めることもできる。これは英語を外国語として学んでいる日本の英語教育にも大きな効果をもたらすだろう。大学の国際化、グローバル人材育成プロジェクトが進んでいる中、クリル（CLIL）を英語クラスで応用し、英語で他の科目を学ぶ前の“ウォーミングアップ”として活用できるのではないかと考える。

キーワード：クリル教授法（CLIL 教授法）、モチベーション、大学の国際化、英語教育、英語学習

A worldwide question, which is continually asked all the time, is what is the most effective way to learn and teach English? The purpose of this case study is to examine how we can improve students' speaking skills and to help them use English more confidently by using CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) methodology. It provides students with a real opportunity to use English meaningfully and increases their motivation. It also can open a new door to effective language learning and teaching and promoting the internationalisation of universities. CLIL is not only for subject teachers but can also be adapted by language teachers. It could be challenging, but using CLIL methodology in the EFL course could be considered as “a starter” before learning other subjects in English.

**Keyword:** CLIL methodology, motivation, internationalization of universities, English education, English learning

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