

Promoting CLIL in Higher Education in Japan

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Abstract

Under the pressure of increasing international mobility and the needs of international enrollment, the world is experiencing a rapid increase in the teaching of academic subjects through the medium of English in countries where the first language of the population is not English. Many universities in Asia and Europe are taking action and trying to find a practical approach to achieve those objectives by offering degree programs and courses in English. As one of the EFL countries, Japan needs to take part in this trend with an approach that is suitable and appropriate for learners' needs and the reality of their actual learning environment. Therefore, the promotion of CLIL in Higher Education in Japan is necessary and could be an innovative solution for most of the issues that have been discussed over the past few years.

Key words: CLIL, Effective learning, Internationalisation of universities, using English in an EFL context

Introduction

There are no "good" or "bad" teaching/learning methods; it is just that a method can be used effectively or ineffectively in a given context. There is no "best" strategy, only a "better" strategy depending on the levels we teach, the purposes we share with the learners and the goals we aim for. I have been teaching English to a wide range of students, from pre-school children to adults, for more than 15 years and I have learned and realized many things. Something common that I have learned from the variety of ages, proficiency levels, and learning goals of different learners is the importance of language learning with a content focus in meaningful contexts, especially in an EFL country like Japan.

Under the pressure of increasing international mobility, most universities these days are trying to enhance the employability of their own students and to offer instructions in a global language, Eng-

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lish. Universities prepare not only their own students but also their staff to be able to function academically in English in order to encourage international enrollment. It is such a rapidly developing phenomenon that most universities are taking action and trying to find a practical approach to achieve those objectives. Therefore, promoting CLIL in Higher Education in Japan is necessary and could be an innovative solution for most of the issues that have been discussed over the years.

In addition, the Ministry of Education in Japan has changed its policy toward ELT. The Ministry has been promoting “introduction of classes in English” in the universities (MEXT 2012) and emphasizing the importance of communicative English learning more than ever. Furthermore, the 2020 Tokyo Olympics are approaching and now is really a good time to think about English education and English learning from a different perspective and with a different approach. I believe that using CLIL could be a new challenge in most of the universities in Japan, but at the same time, it will be an inspiration for all teachers with different subjects and areas, including those who teach English as a foreign language.

In this paper, first I will briefly discuss three main reasons why I suggest promoting CLIL in higher education. Next, I would like to emphasize the importance of creating a community to support teachers using CLIL. Finally, I will briefly mention some possible issues involved when using CLIL.

Why CLIL?

Here are three main reasons why I would like to suggest using the CLIL approach in higher education:

- 1 Japan is an EFL country
- 2 CLIL provides learners with a real opportunity to use English meaningfully.
- 3 CLIL could be one of the keys to promote the internationalisation of universities

First of all, Japan is an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) country. People in an EFL environment rarely have a real opportunity to use English in their daily life unless they create an immersion-like environment at school or artificial settings such as British Hills in Fukushima, or the upcoming English Village in Tokyo. Certainly, situations like traveling to another country, studying abroad, making foreign friends to communicate with, doing business with foreign partners, etc. would also be great opportunities to speak English but most of them, in a way, generally happen for a short period or infrequently. In some sense, no matter how hard people in Japan study English at school, get good grades and high scores in the exams, it is actually quite difficult for most of them to use English on a daily basis. Many people always wonder why they cannot speak English fluently after learning it for more than 6 years; however, the fact is that they are not actually using it for daily communication.

Secondly, CLIL can provide learners with a real opportunity to use English meaningfully. CLIL stands for “Content and Language Integrated Learning”. It involves teaching a subject (e.g. history, geography, mathematics, economics, etc.) through the medium of a foreign language (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010). CLIL is currently defined educationally as a dual approach to language and subject specific teaching and learning in an integrated way. Thus, it emphasizes language for communication and learning through specific subject content, which can increase learners’ motivation in a more practical way.

“In Europe, which is moving slowly towards integration, CLIL has been highlighted as a key tool for intercultural learning, one which allows us to transform knowledge into understanding.” (Hansen-Pauly, 2009)

In CLIL, English is not used for communication alone, but to mediate knowledge. According to Henry (2012:24), motivation is “ a highly important determiner of success in all forms of instructed knowledge acquisition”. Therefore, the CLIL approach will help students to use English for authentic communication as they need to understand and actually use the language for a practical purpose, which will help them to be more active in their learning process. As stated in *Uncovering CLIL* (p.12), “ language maintenance and learning lifelong process requires continued use and ongoing investment”.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan is promoting the internationalisation of universities, and one of the goals is to introduce classes in English (MEXT, 2012). As CLIL will help students learn their subjects in English, the doors of the universities will be opened more to other nationalities who would like to come and study in Japan. Nowadays, many universities realize the growing pressures of globalization and the need to attract more and more international students; they promote staff and student exchanges and prepare them for the global job market. Therefore, it is important for teachers, learners and certainly the schools to be aware of this rapid change and understand how it is affecting our current teaching and learning, or will be in the near future.

Creating a community to support teachers using CLIL

In order to implement CLIL in a more effective way, there are many things we need to take into consideration when we prepare for it. One of them is essential support for teachers. It is very important to create a community, a helpful environment to support teachers using CLIL. As CLIL is still new not only for language teachers but also for most teachers who have not majored in English or TESOL, it would be extra work for them to learn how to use CLIL in addition to their own research

and daily teaching. Therefore, it is crucial to offer teachers a space to share their perceptions and experiences, to learn more about this methodology and to be supported not only by their schools but also their fellows. By creating this community, we will be able to identify the types of support that are needed and also help teachers to use CLIL more effectively and improve their teaching skills. CLIL teachers need to have skills in many areas, including content knowledge of their subjects, pedagogy, understanding of language acquisition, materials development, etc. In addition, cooperation between the content teachers and language teachers would also be a crucial element for successful CLIL teaching and learning, which would also give language teachers a new role to explore.

Besides providing regular support at school, it will also be inspiring and encouraging to send teachers to overseas CLIL conferences or intensive training courses during the longer school holidays. For example, two years ago, I had the opportunity to attend a two-week intensive teacher-training course in Oxford, specially for teachers who wanted to learn how to use the CLIL approach effectively in their classes. There were 20 teachers participating in this training course; 19 of them were European and I was the only one from Asia. CLIL has been developed and disseminated throughout Europe in most schools. So although this approach is still new in Japan, it is gradually spreading throughout Europe.

In that intensive course, one third of the participants were language teachers and most of them were subject/content teachers. It was a special occasion and a great opportunity for us all to get together and talk about issues when using CLIL from different perspectives, on both the content and the language sides. We shared our ideas and exchanged our opinions through different kinds of discussion topics, not only during the course but afterwards. We all kept in touch after the course and continued sharing information among the group.

This training course was designed for different teachers who wished to implement CLIL in their classes. It was not only for those who taught content subjects and needed to deliver their courses in English but also for those who were teaching language courses at tertiary/academic level and wanted or need to branch out into CLIL. There were many activities and workshops offered in this course. Content included the main components of CLIL, materials evaluation, planning and giving a CLIL lesson with a partner, some other methodologies that can be combined with CLIL, assessment in CLIL, etc. As a teacher, I have learned a lot from the students and teaching itself; however, it is also very important for teachers to be on the learners' side again and we need to be inspired and encouraged as students.

An intensive training course once in a while such as this would be greatly helpful for teachers who would like to try CLIL. In Japan, as mentioned earlier, CLIL is still a new methodology, and teachers who are using it are promoting and struggling with it at individual levels. Therefore, in order to imple-

ment CLIL more effectively, creating a community to support teachers and provide occasional trainings will develop most teachers' competence to teach confidently and effectively in English.

Some possible issues and solutions when using CLIL

I attended a conference this summer called ICLHE (Integration of Content and Language in Higher Education), which is an international organization specializing in CLIL. The conference lasted for four days and there were more than 100 people from different countries attending it. This year, the conference was held in Brussels and specifically addressed issues related to the teaching and learning of content and language in higher education.

There were many different attempts and practices in different universities, and here are two main common issues that most universities have shared:

1. Materials development
2. Support for teachers

First, materials development. In a CLIL course, we basically need to use materials in English. Reading the texts in English may not be difficult but using English to explain and understand could be a challenge for some teachers and students. Teachers may need to develop some worksheets to supplement or rewrite the materials in a simpler way. To my surprise, in some Dutch schools I visited a few years ago, they had actually rewritten the whole textbook in order to use CLIL more effectively in class and help students understand the meaning in simpler, plain English.

A quote from Peeter, David and Maria (2008, p22) "The language input needs to be simple enough and presented in a reader-friendly manner so as to facilitate comprehension, while at the same time being sufficiently content-rich and cognitively challenging to capture students' interest."

In addition, developing an archive of CLIL materials, lesson plans and schemes of work to assist teachers interested in exploring this innovative methodology would also be helpful and encouraging.

Second, support for teachers. It is important to create a community to support teachers, as I mentioned above. It seems to be difficult sometimes for most universities to find the time to get all the teachers together as they are too busy with their own research and daily teaching. There are some possible solutions to this problem. For example, some European universities created a special CLIL coordinator position to manage most of the issues and act as intermediary between the school side and the teachers, and sometimes provide one-to-one consultation with the teachers when necessary. It might also be possible for some organizations such as language schools and teachers' colleges to provide

training modules for undergraduate and postgraduate trainee teachers. In addition, teacher exchange would also be a good experience for teachers to be refreshed by learning something from other universities. Furthermore, it would also be helpful to include CLIL content in initial teacher training for the next generation.

Teaching in CLIL requires more preparation time and greater co-operation among teachers. Teachers specifically trained in CLIL are rare. Therefore cooperation between content teachers and language teachers is important. Teachers using CLIL do not need to have native or near-native competence in English for all forms of delivery, although naturally they need a high level of fluency. Language teachers, in this sense, would be able to help and work on the project together. And this might lead to another question that, when the majority of courses in a university are taught by content teachers through the medium of English, what might eventually become the role and status of the EFL teachers? This would be another possible issue to discuss at another opportunity.

Conclusion

I believe that CLIL is one of the key educational methodologies that respond to the need to internationalize education. As we usually learn by doing, it is necessary that learners use language to learn, and learn to use language, in a real meaningful setting, particularly for EFL countries. Connection with reality is important. This methodology is an integrated, process-oriented approach to language teaching. Many students tend to get demotivated by grammar-focused instruction for tests and superficial communication activities in non-meaningful contexts. By using CLIL, students need to understand the text in English, which also helps them to learn to think in English. That enables them to express themselves in English more fluently and understand in English without translating what they want to say. Once students experience using English in a real setting, it is much easier for them to use English and arrange it in their own way (Koike, 2013)

At the present time, CLIL is not a common or widespread teaching and learning method in Japan yet; however, introducing the CLIL approach will open a new learning world and promote students' language learning. The classroom will become a place for improving not only language and subject content, but also students' thinking skills as well. Students need to be actively engaged and it is important for them to produce the language. Using CLIL is also about change. Development requires change, and change can be difficult sometimes. However, it is not always about changing what we do, it can also be about changing the way we think about what we do. As the world is changing rapidly, universities need to make changes to meet the society's requirements and so do the teachers and the students.

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日本の高等教育機関でCLIL教授法を取り入れる必要性

アニータ・小池

グローバル人材育成のため、徐々に増えている他国との交換留学や留学生の受け入れの必要性に応じて、英語圏以外の国々が大学の授業を英語で学ぶ機会を多く設けている。アジアとヨーロッパにある多くの国々が本格的な国際化に向けて、英語で学位が取れるプログラムを続々と用意し始めている。英語を外国語として学んでいる（EFL）国の一つである日本もこの流れに沿って、学習者のニーズに適し、実際の言語学習環境に沿ったアプローチを見つける必要がある。クリル教授法 (CLIL) は過去何年もの間で討論してきた様々な英語習得のための課題への革新的な解決法にもなるのではないかと考え、高等教育機関などでの取り入れを提案している。

キーワード：クリル教授法、効果のある学習方法、大学のグローバル化、EFL