

THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING (CLIL) AT THE HIGHER COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY- SULTANATE OF OMAN

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ABSTRACT

The basis of this research is to study the potential of introducing CLIL in teaching the English language at the higher college of Technology in the Sultanate of Oman. The study highlights several dimensions to implement this approach in this particular context. It presents some expected benefits including language proficiency, learners and teachers attitudes, and culture appropriateness for this context. Moreover, implementing such new approach will encounter lots of challenges. Therefore, the main challenges which need to be thoroughly discussed are teachers' preparation, designing materials, context issues and level of learners. The study proposes that implementing CLIL in this context is possible only if these challenges were addressed prior to introduce the approach officially.

KEYWORDS: *CLIL, approach, implementation, benefits, challenges.*

INTRODUCTION

The trend of using the English language as a medium of instruction to teach specific subjects has gradually spread in the last few decades (Nunan, 2003). Different approaches to this have been implemented and used to deliver knowledge for learners around the world. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is one of the recent and more promising approaches. It is “an umbrella term” covering several educational approaches such as CBI, immersion, bilingual education, multilingual education and others. CLIL provides and offers the knowledge learnt from these approaches in a flexible way (Mehisto et al, 2008:12).

CLIL aims at teaching both content and the target language. However, there is no clear evidence whether it can or should offer a balance between content and language proficiency. There are various views about the implementation of CLIL in different contexts. Coyle et al (2010) propose that CLIL is appropriate to maximize learners' language success. However, CLIL is also about

content not just language features. Therefore, the success of CLIL should include both language success and subject content success simultaneously.

In this paper, we argue that there are benefits to implement CLIL in the core curriculum at the Higher College of Technology in Oman. We are interested in this topic because it allows us to present our views and knowledge about implementing CLIL in our own context. Moreover, lots of research is needed to evaluate and judge the validity of this approach. This work in particular will support the proper implementation of CLIL and will address several expected challenges in our context.

The second section of this paper will describe our context. The third section will discuss bilingual education including the implementation of CLIL. This will be followed by two separate sections, which focus on the benefits and challenges of implementing CLIL in our context. The main focus of this paper will be section six in which we discuss and suggest some pedagogical implications taking into consideration the benefits and challenges mentioned in section four and five. Finally, the last section will conclude and summarize all previous discussions and suggestions.

Context

In this paper our focus will be at the Higher Colleges of Technology in the Sultanate of Oman, where we spent the last years teaching the English language. There are six main specializations at the college including Engineering, Information Technology (IT), Applied Sciences, Business Studies, Pharmacy and recently Photography and Fashion Design. (http://www.hct.edu.om/college_history.asp).

Studying any of these specializations requires passing the English language course offered at the English language center. All students take a placement exam at the beginning of the year and they are allocated in the appropriate level depending on their grade. However, there are four levels and each level lasts a full semester (four months). Students have to pass all assessments before they move from level to level and then to begin their main studies of their specialization.

Teachers at the English language center are from different nationalities, educational backgrounds, and have varied experience. Most are recruited on a two years contract basis. One third of these teachers are new every year and they face many challenges such as the level of learners (lower than expected), culture, co-education system and others. The main duties of these teachers is to teach and assess students using a course book and following the assigned instructions and procedures of the management.

Students receive acceptance to study at the college depending on their grades at General Diploma “Secondary School Certificate”. Their ages are between 18 and 20. They study to get diploma degree to get a job in Oil field or private sector. However, companies claim that their knowledge of the field terminologies is limited and additional efforts are needed to improve the level of these students particularly their language knowledge on their specialization.

WHAT IS CLIL AND HOW DOES IT DIFFER FROM OTHER APPROACHES?

The roots of CLIL belong to the appearance of Bilingual education, which is offered in several approaches. Bilingual education is usually referred to “the use of two or more languages of instruction in teaching subjects”. The languages are used to teach subject matter content rather than just the structure of the language (Cummins & Corson 1997). However, many authors claim that the term bilingual education is a simple label for a complex phenomenon (Cazden & Snow, 1990). That is to say, different approaches were implemented including Immersion, Content Based Instruction (CBI) and CLIL consecutively under the umbrella of bilingual education. The core of these approaches is very similar from one to another.

Definitions of Immersion, (CBI), CLIL and other approaches in Bilingual education are very difficult and confusing to distinguish the difference between them. This is clear if we note that Immersion and CBI aim to improve students’ language proficiency by teaching subject matter through L2 (Wannagat, 2007). That is to say, teaching language skills for future use, whereas CLIL is about teaching new language skills for the current use.

Lemberger (1997) listed some factors affecting the work of bilingual teacher. These factors are divided into main sections; society, community, school, classroom and sub-derived sections. Most of these factors contribute in the success of implementing CLIL. Basically, each factor represents a variable that affects the proper use or failure of implementing CLIL in any context. I presume that these factors play an important role and considered as guidelines for the good use of CLIL in any context. In this essay we will present some of these factors as benefits or challenges for the implementation of CLIL in our context.

Contextual Factors Affecting the Work of a Bilingual Teacher			
Society	Community	School	Classroom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies–local, state, federal • Legal mandates, decisions • Bilingual program models • Funding • Research • Teacher certification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents • Businesses • Health and social services • Other institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration (principal, school board, superintendent) • Teachers (bilingual/ monolingual) • Other support staff • Students • Physical plant • Curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students (bilingual/ monolingual) • Curriculum materials • Teaching practices • Assessment practices • General content • Language and cultural content

Table 1: Contextual Factors Affecting the Work of a Bilingual Teacher (Lemberger, 1997: 10)

According to Courcy et al (2002) Immersion or Content-Based language programmes are sometimes promoted as the best way of achieving high levels of proficiency in languages other

than English. Somers and Surmont (2012) tried to present clear-cut conclusion about the main differences between CLIL and other approaches, particularly Immersion. They conclude that there are massive similarities and there are also minor differences, which make the conclusion mysterious and similar to what previous research suggesting these similarities and differences (Cummins, 2000, cited by Coyle, 2007). One of the main differences between these approaches is that the aim of immersion programs is to reach L2 proficiency similar to that of first language users, whereas CLIL programs is not aiming for such objectives. Consequently, CLIL attempts to achieve functional proficiency (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2010:372).

March and Maljers initially introduced CLIL in the mid 1990s. It is an approach for learning content through foreign or second language. That is to say, it focuses on both the language and the subject (Coyle et al, 2010). Moreover, it provides flexible way of learning (Mehisto et al, 2008).

Coyle et al (2010) also stresses that the use of CLIL will improve students' proficiency of the target language. It gives them the chance to be exposed to the target language in classes. In addition, Students can use the target language in different situations, which promotes linguistic competence of learners (Coyle, 2006). Dupuy (2011) further demonstrates that CLIL has not only improved the target language proficiency but also expanded both first and second language awareness. Since learners have used the target language as the medium of learning certain content, CLIL has transferred from language-aware instruction to content-aware instruction (Ting, 2011).

Recent research present some doubts about the proper implementation of CLIL. Munoz (2007) claims that CLIL has presented the most outstanding features of communicative approach. This leads to the fact that CLIL may be a new face of communicative approach. However, Bruton (2011: 524) argues that the process of what is actually happening in CLIL classes may in fact be different to 'the CLIL defended on paper'.

Coyle (2007) proposes that CLIL is a flexible approach and it encourages teaching in various contexts to certain curriculums. In our context, the curriculum aims to prepare potential technicians, while lesson objectives are confined to the language focus and therefore inform the learners' attitude to the learning. As a consequence, CLIL seems to be a more efficient approach to introducing more than one language in the typical classroom without underestimating other subjects embedded in the curriculum. It also grows the knowledge of the subject matter, increases language abilities, raises learners' motivation and knowledge of the subject. Such an approach might promote bilingualism together with subject knowledge (Baker & Jones, 1998). Furthermore, (Bruton, 2011) regards CLIL has its identity away from Communicative language Teaching (CLT) and obviously both emphasize on meaningful communication. Our context recently applies CLT in a wide range of teaching practices, although the teachers are able to implement CLIL in their teaching practice as long as it shares bilingual education with CLT. Moreover, the curriculum in Higher College of Technology will almost be the same with minor modification in the delivery plan. Therefore, we will further discuss the implementation of CLIL in our context derived from CLT approach.

BENEFITS OF IMPLEMENTING CLIL

Language Proficiency

Different approaches in Bilingual education focus on the learners' proficiency development. Learners acquire the abilities to learn from the second language by 'developing study skills' (Coyle, 2007:548). In addition, we totally agree with Coonan (2007:643, cited by Hunt, 2011) who states that when the learners are engaged cognitively, they learn languages more successfully.

Coyle et al (2010) noted that the use of CLIL improves students' proficiency as they have been exposed to the target language in classes. Accordingly, Dupuy (2011) demonstrated that CLIL has not only improved the target language proficiency but also extended both first and second language awareness. Moreover, Mehisto (2008) agrees that implementing CLIL synthesizes language abilities rather than focusing on teachers' performance, he also distinguishes that the materials provide some linguistic features and register, which improves students' linguistic awareness.

According to Liubiniene (2009) CLIL helps to integrate students' language abilities. For this, our teaching experience and our knowledge share the fact that these students are interested in all information related to their specialization. This means that they may develop their skills in CLIL classes and can be observed in their attitude in the class. As a consequence, it proofs the value of developing certain skills using CLIL for the reason to improve their study skills, which leads for a better proficiency.

Learners and Teachers Attitude

Marsh (2000) assumes that CLIL programs can develop a feel good attitude among students. This is clear when they achieve higher proficiency level (regardless of how modest it eventually is) may have a positive effect on their willingness to learn and develop their language competence. Research projects conducted in various contexts have illustrated that the attitudes and motivation to learn a second language can vary not only from language to language but even within the same group of learners and also within different age groups (ibid).

A remarkable case is a study carried out in the Basque Country by Cenoz (2001). The study tried to analyze the attitudes towards English of three different groups of students. The first group consisted of students enrolled in the fourth year of primary education; the second one of second-year secondary education students and the third one was designed of first-year high school students. The findings showed that the first group held significantly more positive attitudes towards the Second language, whereas the third group presented the least positive ones. The researcher used both psychological and educational factors to explain these results. The third group's reaction would be based on older students' rejection of the school policy as a result of the change from a family identity to a more individual and peer group identity. The other is connected with the various teaching methodologies used in primary and secondary education. In primary education learners enjoy the oral-based approach and methodologies based on drama and story telling, whereas in secondary education and high school grammar and vocabulary become obvious and the methodology is usually teacher-centered. The conclusion to be drawn is therefore

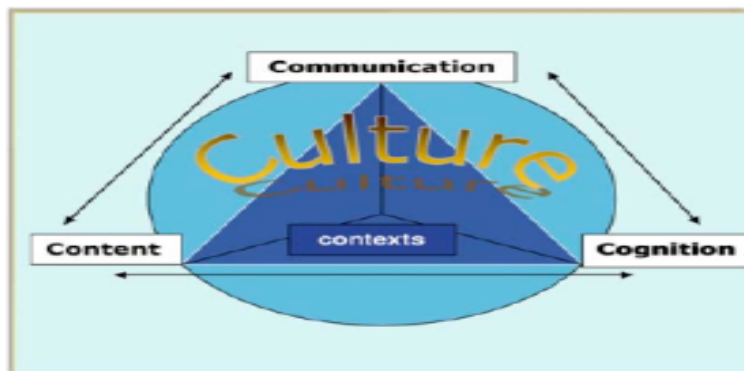
that there is a failure in attitudes towards the second language due to both psychological and educational issues and this leads us to think whether the use of CLIL approach may help to avoid or at least reduce the effect of the mentioned factors.

Implementing CLIL will be an enormous addition for learners and their willingness to learn a second language. Learners often claim that part of their success is related to ability of the teachers. They falsely believe that if they have a native teacher they will gain more but they forgot the fact that teaching is a skill and it is not about only fluency. According to Lasagabaster and Sierra (2010), immersion teachers are commonly native speakers, whereas CLIL does not require native speakers. Additionally, Coyle (2010) states that CLIL enables learners to be more self-confident. Another interesting point is that CLIL accepts all learners ages and levels.

Lasagabaster and Sierra (2010) argue that the vast majority of immersion programs suits young learners (starting age), whereas CLIL illustrates certain similarities with the late immersion programs implemented in education taking Canada as an example (ibid: 371). Therefore, both teachers and learners are qualified to perceive the language and succeed in the process of learning a second language. It also means that teachers will play the role of a learner, as they are required to learn new things simultaneously with their students. In fact, CLIL gives chance for teachers to discover new interests and abilities by teaching content for their students.

Culture Appropriateness and Context

Several definitions used referring to 'culture' and its relation to learning and teaching a second language. Some of these definitions have included communities and others preferred the use of societies. For example, Mehisto et al. (2008) refer to 'community' rather than culture. Coyle, (2005) presents what he called the 4Cs framework for CLIL and one of these 4Cs is culture and in fact he suggested two main things. First, the relationship between languages and culture is very complex. Second, Culture is the link between the other three Cs, which are content, communication, and cognition. However, this is not about what is exactly meant by culture rather than showing the influence of culture on using CLIL as an approach to teach English language. Therefore, culture in this section means the relation of different parties such as the subject,



The 4Cs framework for CLIL (Coyle, 2005).

community and the institution where teaching takes place in the process of implementing CLIL. Moreover, culture is the sum of the relationships of learners, teachers, subject, classroom and

anything relates to the teaching process. In simple words, what is needed in CLIL to be effective is the culture of the new language. The culture of the first language may hinder the implementation of CLIL. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001) language is served as a tool of individual and social interaction. Coyle et al (2010) suggest that CLIL offers considerable amount of opportunities for intercultural interaction and the success of CLIL depends on the spirit of classroom. Overall, CLIL enables students to refer to the target language in authentic way and students can construct their cultural identity by studying contents Sudhoff (2010).

Learners learn the language using their own ways of thinking derived and affected by their culture. However, CLIL allows these students to acquire new ways of thinking and analyzing by learning a second language (Sudhoff, 2010). Coyle et al (2010), claim that languages and cultures have been shaped informally and this is how CLIL gathers learners' culture awareness. In other words, the ways we think are determined by culture. Overall, the new culture of the second language will definitely promote the way of thinking and language awareness. Moreover, CLIL gives a special care for culture and this will facilitate acquiring the second language in its culture rather than formulating the language using the learners' culture, which may conflict with the process and structure of the first language.

CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING CLIL

Teachers and Difficulties to Implement CLIL Effectively

Implementing CLIL in the Oman context in particular and in the second language acquisition context in general faces a number of challenges. These challenges are mentioned as follow. The proper use of CLIL requires qualified teachers who can deal with issues related to the language and subject matters. Therefore, one of the most challenges that will face implementing CLIL is the potential of teachers to apply this method. As we clearly stated in our context section that most teachers at the Higher College of Technology are new and on two years contract basis. These teachers have to adapt themselves with the new system and college policies, which usually takes a semester or two depending on the teacher and his/her abilities to understand the process of teaching in the institution. It is difficult to check the abilities and their background knowledge about teaching. In fact it is time consuming and there are no real guidelines to evaluate their practices. Hoare (2010) states that when institutions choose teachers for CLIL, they tend to choose the ones with excellent English proficiency and the ones who can accept new ways of teaching. From our experience this is not always the case where the college sometimes needs to fulfill the shortage of teachers by ignoring the level of these teachers.

Hoare (2010) and Lorenzo (2008) argue that teachers have limited understanding of theories and rationales of CLIL, due to the lack of enough and efficient training of language teachers. In addition, Costa and Angelo (2011) illustrate that one of the reasons that English-Medium Education fails is that teachers' incorrect ways of teaching. Graaff et al (2007) suggest that CLIL teachers are supposed to facilitate the input, the meaning-focused processing, form-focused processing, output production and the use of different strategies. Similarly, the absence of proper training has led teachers into a rather uncomfortable situation (Moate, 2011). Teachers even feel 'tired, stressful and fearful' when they try to implement foreign language mediated approach of

teaching (ibid). This feeling makes teachers more confused and willing to complete their contract and leave after two years rather than renewing for another couple of years. We believe that this is one of the main reasons why expatriate teachers leave before they even complete their period.

Materials, Assessment and Curriculum Adoption

The students at the Higher College of Technology will study different majors as mentioned earlier in the introduction. Currently, they are studying in mixed classes where students from different majors are in a single class before they pass their exams and start their major studies. It is clear that each major will require its own unique materials including course books, educational aids, and assessment designed for each one of them. Moreover, learners have to be in classes designed for each major. That is to say, engineering students will be together and IT students will be together. Dalton-Puffer (2007) states that it is quite obvious that CLIL classes are not designed for language goals but there are still language expectations in CLIL classrooms. The danger of CLIL materials is that it has to cover both linguistic and content aspects (Coyle et al, 2010). This means that the current syllabus has to be reviewed and new course books have to be designed that suits the needs and objectives for each major. According to Lasagabaster and Sierra (2010: 372), 'the materials used in immersion programmes are aimed at native speakers, whereas CLIL teachers often use abridged materials'. This suggests another difference between CLIL and other approaches used in Bilingual education.

The assessment system in CLIL varies whether to assess language or content and what type of measurements used (Coyle et al, 2010). Teachers are asked to create new ways of assessment that suits both matters of implementing CLIL. The current assessment criteria of CLIL depend on the regular tests (Morgan, 2006). However, according to Colombo and Furbush (2009), the disadvantage of regular tests is that they fail to assess various levels of English language. Regular tests mainly focus on the content areas and pay little attention to the language features (Morgan, 2006; Colombo and Furbush, 2009). As a result, Colombo and Furbush (2009) listed three principles of assessment. First: to measure deep comprehension of both the subject and the language conducted by the teacher. Second: using various ways of measurement. Third: matching assessments with students' performances.

Content, Levels, and Resources to be provided

Most current teachers at the Higher College of Technology have very little knowledge about CLIL or have no clue what CLIL is all about. Therefore, content of the new syllabus and whether to focus on language or content is an issue that has to be discussed and addressed. As an example, if the content is difficult, learners will tend to use their L1. Therefore, the opportunities of using L2 might be limited (Bruton, 2011; Seikkula-Leino, 2007). In addition, Lorenzo (2008) claims that teachers in CLIL classes tend to spend more time on the content rather than L2 input. We believe that it depends whether the teacher is the language teacher or the major teacher. Again, this will reflect on the selection of teachers whether to concentrate on language teachers or subject teachers.

Another issue is the level of the new syllabus and the criteria of moving from one level to another. This will require consultation and some college policies have to be amended. This is

why the educational system of the school might also affect the implementation of CLIL (Bruton, 2011).

Implementing CLIL will of course require new resources. The College has to arrange and prepare all materials needed for both students and teachers. Students will basically need new course books and new resources to be placed in the library. Teachers of each major will require specific materials and tools. For example, engineering major teachers may require some materials for demonstration in their classes and this is the case with all other majors. Teachers' rooms have to be fully equipped with all needed requirements. Training also might be unavailable for most teaching staff due to the financial circumstances (Bruton, 2011). In general, there will be additional expenses to implement this approach but still can be achieved if CLIL implemented gradually and not out of a sudden decision.

Pedagogical Implications

Having discussed both benefits and challenges of implementing CLIL in our context, we will include some pedagogical implications with reference to the previous discussions on benefits and challenges in our context.

Qualified CLIL Teachers

First, it is well known that teachers who are qualified to use CLIL in teaching are not usually available. Moreover, the levels of the teachers and how they teach become very vital in implementing CLIL in classrooms (Coyle et al, 2010). This tells us that we need to train and develop our current resources -teachers- to be the first pillar of implementing CLIL. Therefore, the best way is to train teachers, the new teachers in particular. Obviously, the college should provide a plan for their two years teaching contract. The plan must include training and the proposed achievements among the two years. This allows the new teachers to renew their contract after their first period due to the fact that the institute offers training opportunities rather than working routinely.

The lack of training has lead teachers into a rather uncomfortable situation (Moate, 2011). It also gives the management of the college an opportunity to keep the current teachers rather than asking for new teachers. The management of English language center should take into account group training, peer observation and university-wide awareness rising constantly with the college management. Bruton (2011) suggest efficient teacher training in the development of the language, content focusing on language and skills. Training should aim to develop the needed skills for teachers to implement proper CLIL. Each teacher will be allocated with subject tutor from the beginning of his work at the college. This allows the teacher to acquire and gain knowledge about the content of the specialization. Mehisto, Marsh and Frigols, (2008) propose subject and language teachers collaborate and participate their issues into their classes.

Students' awareness

Students often tend to compare with other systems applied in other colleges and they may ask why they study English in this method rather than the usual general classes. Therefore, there is a need to conduct a conference about the implementation of CLIL to inform students and rise

awareness about its usefulness and to address any doubt raise by students. Students also will be informed that they will be in groups of the same specialization. Mixed specialization classes will no more be used. Students of each specialization will be together as CLIL will include the focus on content beside language features. There is no reason to allocate an engineering student in IT class even it is a language classroom. Engineering student will be interested in terminologies and issues related to engineering but an IT student will be interested to learn about technology and programming for example. Introducing CLIL for learners so they have awareness and reason for studying content and how it facilitates their studies. This can be in an orientation at the beginning of the semester or via teachers. Informing students about the implementation of CLIL will attract their attention and will raise doubts of misunderstanding. This will lead for quality implementation of CLIL.

Syllabus development and College policies

The new syllabus should follow the objectives and vision of the college. Therefore, it is very important to be consistent with college rules and bylaws. As a result, making some standards regarding the application of CLIL will promote the actual and effective implication. The policies of the College have to be revised in a way that suits all three parties: institution, teachers and students. The new framework of implementing CLIL should present a new system of education that satisfies teachers' practices and students' needs. Lasagabaster (2008) mentioned that in fact making my context, especially my college to be a leading institute in the area on the best practices and experienced common place for CLIL programs. Collaboration with other colleges, universities, and institutions will increase the level of good practice. Taking the views and ideas of other similar contexts will benefit the actual practice of CLIL.

Materials, assessment system and resources

Teachers can prepare their own materials once they can consider both language and content learning. They can also modify the current materials according to the specific purposes and use discussed with the subject teacher. Teachers can use all present materials including magazines, articles and academic textbooks. In addition, it is more important to train teachers how teachers implement CLIL and make full use of classroom practice. Teachers can provide students with possible resources of their study and encourage students to explore more by themselves. Language and subject teachers should have a sequence of regular meetings and discuss what to be included and what to omit. These meetings are concluded with one main meeting with other subject and language teachers to decide learners' needs and the new trends in the field so they can adopt efficient and proper materials.

CONCLUSION

Content and Language Integrated Learning is a promising area of study and it represents unique methods of delivering language with content of different subjects. It is also a complex method and different variables are included in this process. Therefore, future studies should take in account different variables and paths for implementing CLIL in this context in particular. This will affect the final conclusion and success of implementing CLIL properly and to developed current practices of this method.

This paper presented four angles of implementing CLIL at the Higher College of Technology. It started with a discussion about the position of CLIL in bilingual education and its relation to other approaches. This paper then highlighted the benefits and challenges of CLIL at the Higher Colleges of Technology in Oman. Thereafter, it concluded with the best ways and practices on how to implement CLIL.

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