

Content and Language Integrated Learning: From Theory to Practice

Rosy Yumnam

Abstract

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is defined as a dual-focused educational approach where the curriculum subjects are taught through a language that is not generally used by the instructors and the learners. This article explores the theoretical approaches of CLIL and further deliberates on the various classroom practices to effectively integrate the teaching of language and content in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom. In the CLIL approach, society plays an important role in the learner's second language acquisition process. The study explores content from various disciplines to teach the English language. The classroom practices show that the learning of content and language takes place in a social environment which encourages its application in real-life situations. The tasks and activities employed in the classroom practices greatly augment the learners' creativity, cognitive skills, and motivation level, which in turn enhance the integrative learning of content and language.

Keywords: Content, CLIL, ESL classroom, language

Introduction

The term Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) was coined by David Marsh (1994) and defined as the condition when a foreign language is used to teach parts of subjects or subjects with a dual aim, i.e., to concurrently learn the content as well as a foreign language. CLIL is also defined as a "dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language" (Coyle et al., 2010, p. 1). As CLIL is used in

varied contexts and because of its broad definition, it can have diverse forms of pedagogy (Kampen et al., 2016). Over the years, in the teaching and learning of a second language, there has been an observance of a gradual movement from the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) to the Communicative Language Teaching Method (CLT). The CLT came to be applied to minor languages and so Bilingual Education became an offshoot of the CLT. CLIL arose under the purview of bilingual education and covers a huge possibility of potential language learning scenarios. This was a significant motive for embarking on this study. The article explores the theoretical approaches of CLIL and further deliberates on the various classroom practices to integrate the teaching of language and content in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms.

CLIL: A Theoretical Reading

The practical application of the CLIL approach in the classroom relies on the principles of the second language acquisition theory (Coyle, 2008). It is believed that the CLIL method is influenced by the principles of the second language acquisition theories such as the Natural Approach, the Communicative Approach; the Constructivism Learning Theory; and the Social Interactionists and Social Theories. In all these four learning theories, the acquisition of a learner's second language has its basis in the major role played by society. CLIL is described as a "naturalistic language learning" (Dalton-Puffer et al., 2010, p. 6) educational setting where the learning of language takes place in a natural setting. Therefore, it is believed that CLIL draws its principles from the reception-based theory of language acquisition, i.e., "Krashen and Terrell's Natural Approach (1983) and Krashen's Monitor Model (1985)" (Dalton-Puffer et al., 2010, p. 6).

In the Communicative Approach, conveying meaning using the target language is its main focus while communicating, irrespective of the accuracy of form. So, CLIL draws its principle from the Communicative Approach. Conversely, CLIL also draws its principles from Bruner's Constructivism Learning Theory, which believes in the idea of an active learning practice whereby the learners construct new perceptions, ideas or concepts with their existing knowledge (Dalton-Puffer, 2007). Relatedly, CLIL is influenced by Vygotsky's Socio-cognitive Development Theory, which stresses the idea that a learner's cognition development takes place in a socially interactive environment (Ibid.). These language

theories describe the learner's relationship with their environment. So, the society and environment play a pertinent role in the teaching-learning process in the CLIL approach.

Furthermore, Coyle (2005) developed a framework called the *4Cs Framework for CLIL* which are: Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture. Taking the *4Cs Framework for CLIL* as the base, Coyle explains the guiding principles as follows:

- **Content:** The core theme of a learning process is successful and well-crafted content that helps in effectively acquiring skills, knowledge, and comprehension.
- **Communication:** Language is the medium/channel of communication and also the medium for learners to acquire the knowledge and skills required for learning.
- **Cognition:** For an effective CLIL approach, the learners' thinking skills have to develop in the process of learning. The learners are encouraged to construct and develop their comprehension.
- **Culture:** As the world is pluricultural and plurilingual, there is a need of indulging in tolerance, forbearance, and understanding. Instruction through a foreign language promotes and encourages international understanding. The important notion of 'otherness' is the means to discover the individual 'self'. Through pluricultural citizenship, it is believed that culture can be widely interpreted.

Hence, in Coyle's 4Cs Framework, critical thinking and creativity are required to understand the subject and further, language skills assist to communicate the acquired knowledge within the society. This framework fulfils the attempt to concurrently learn language and content.

The various features of CLIL as described by Mehisto et al. (2008) are characterized as Multiple Focus, Safe and Enriching Environment, Authenticity, Active Learning, and Scaffolding. In 'Multiple Focus', learning of different subjects is incorporated. In 'Safe and Enriching Environment', different activities based on the content and the language used are employed, thereby enhancing the motivation level of the learners. Relatedly, the activities are based on authentic learning materials and the use of authentic language. 'Active Learning' takes into account the learner's interest in learning the language as well as the content by giving a fair amount of autonomy. Further, in 'Scaffolding',

the learner's interest and autonomy in the CLIL classrooms is facilitated by the teachers. So, in a CLIL approach, the content teachers are required to assist the language learning process as well so that the learners can master the content through the language. Therefore, integrating content and language begins at the ground level where teachers and students can negotiate and plan the content to be studied.

Being learner-centred can imply the emphasis specified by the CLIL teacher's learning goals on meeting the learners' aims for learning the content as well as the language of instruction. Thus, the CLIL approach opens an avenue to provide a "safe" and comfortable classroom where second language learners are given the space to explore and investigate various target language learning strategies while learning the required content (Mehisto et al., 2008). Concurrently, the CLIL classroom boasts of activities that raise understanding of the way language is used in the study period and also motivation level of the learners is raised by using "authentic learning materials" and "authentic language" (Mehisto, 2012, p. 22).

In the CLIL approach, language is used to nurture critical thinking and problem-solving, at the same time, the learner's understanding of other disciplines is also enhanced (Gabillon, 2020). The CLIL approach reinforces the significance of the cognitive perspective of students and teacher feedback to "find a solution in a productive joint learning project" (Wegner 2012, p. 29). Research shows that CLIL students exhibit better development of listening skills, oral communication skills, and writing skills (Liubinienė, 2009). Furthermore, Alnoori (2019) demonstrates that the development of business writing is more positive when using CLIL. Research by Gene et al. (2015) establishes that while teaching writing skills, the incorporation of language and content learning using the CLIL approach tends to be more effective. Concurrently, research on learning vocabulary using CLIL shows its effectiveness when compared to regular classes (Pietilä & Merikivi, 2014). Therefore, in light of the above discussions, the learning of English as a second language has shown better development by using the CLIL approach.

Methodology

Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

1. To explore the theoretical aspects of the CLIL approach
2. To check the effectiveness of the CLIL approach in the classroom

Research questions

The study further will progress by addressing two pertinent research questions:

- How can the theoretical approach of CLIL be applied for effective classroom practices?
- How can the content from various disciplines be explored to teach the English language?

Study design

The content from various disciplines is explored to teach the English language. The target level of learners is young learners in the age group of 9 to 15 years. The study was conducted in a school (Classes IV-VIII) in Imphal, Manipur, in Northeast India. The paper further details the various classroom practices where CLIL is employed to effectively integrate the teaching of language and content. The classroom practices are elaborated in detail by dividing them into the following sections:

1. Using content from different disciplines
 - For class VI students
 - Number of student participants - 25
2. Working by themes
 - For class VII students
 - Number of student participants - 30
3. To focus on tasks and activities in the classroom
 - For class VIII students
 - Number of student participants - 26
4. To teach Grammar in context
 - For class IV students
 - Number of student participants - 32
5. To teach Vocabulary in context
 - For class IV students
 - Number of student participants - 32

Findings and Discussions: CLIL in the Classroom

Learning a second language through specific, explicit, and interconnected content inculcates upon the learners a sense of motivation which assist in effective learning. Learning takes place in congruence with how the learner perceives, identifies, traverses, and discovers skills and content. This discovery harnesses the thinking ability of the learners through their learning experiences provided by a CLIL approach to teaching. Relatedly, the lessons being offered may be science, humanities, mathematics, and social science but the lesson's content can be designed so that it fits the learner's context. So, the lessons may be designed for functional, academic, and communicative purposes to furnish learning a second language simultaneously with the lessons being offered. As the content for learning in this approach is in harmony with the ways of the learners, the real-life experiences about their families, culture and communities can be harnessed.

The classroom practices are described as follows:

1. Using content from different disciplines (for class VI students)

Teaching Science and English language:

Divide the class into five groups. Ask each group to read lessons/texts on sedimentation and give a brief oral presentation. The following questions are given to each group for the discussion and presentation:

1. How is sedimentation used in daily life?
2. Can you give daily examples for decantation?
3. Describe the process of filtration.
4. Discuss the process to purify water at home for drinking.

In the course of the activity, it was observed that the students actively participated in the group work. The students in each group read the text and discussed the assigned questions for further understanding. In this process, it was found that the cognitive skills of the students were enhanced. They were given space to think and apply their learning in real-life situations, thus learning in their social environment. The students came up with examples of sedimentation like water treatment, separation of tea leaves by straining, and separation of rice and water. They also spoke on the importance of sedimentation in daily life. The process of filtration and its importance were described in simple steps.

For decantation, they gave examples like the separation of oil and water, water and dirt, and making juice and cream. The students informed that these examples were examined and explored at home. They were asked to write about their observations and prepare an oral presentation. During the discussions and oral presentations, it was observed that while researching the content, their language skills were enhanced. In the whole process, the integration of the learning of content and language can be observed. As CLIL emphasizes the role of society in the acquisition of a learner's second language, therefore, the example clearly shows its effectiveness in language classrooms.

2. Working with Moral Science themes (for class VII students)

Teaching moral values and English language skills: Using the narratives of Chainarol, a folktale of Manipur.

Chainarol is a folktale of Manipur, rich in values reminiscent throughout its narrations. *Chainarol* is the tradition of personal combat between two warriors (Moiremba and Athouba) who fight under a code of conduct institutionalized in society. In the folktale, combat takes place to settle a conflict. The real winner of the combat is Moiremba but Athouba cheats and wins the combat. As Athouba wins the combat by dishonest means, his inner mental conflict consumes him to death. The real-life value embedded in the narrative is the triumph of righteousness. The narrative brings out the trials of the victory of righteousness and the downfall of evil.

To teach listening skills in the classroom, the students are given listening tasks and after they have internalized the linguistic information, speaking skills can be taught. The teacher can read the text, *Chainarol*. Based on the text, questions are given to the students to test their comprehension.

After listening to the tale, ask students to speak about their understanding of the text and then about their views on values that can be drawn from the text. The class is then divided into groups of four. Each group is given a paragraph from the text and asked to analyze it. This is followed by a group discussion on the topic 'Values in *Chainarol*' where the students can listen and interact in the target language, i.e., English. The students are then asked to speak on any value which they think is important in their lives. The students are further given a group activity to investigate and write about the various forms of folktales of the various communities of Manipur.

In the above classroom practices, it was observed that the motivation level of the students was greatly enhanced as they enjoyed the group discussion. The tasks and activities engaged the students to listen, observe, and apply the target language. In the task to find out and write about the various forms of folktales, they explored the life and culture of the different communities of Manipur, which made them reflect and rethink the rich cultural diversity of Manipur. Values, like honesty incorporated in the folktale, made them think critically and relate to their real-life situations. This made them speak on the importance of virtues like truthfulness, punctuality, and kindness. In the process, their language skills were also improved.

3. Focussing on Cultural Diversity in the classroom (for class VIII students)

Teaching Culture and English language skills: Using Leithak Leikharon, another folktale of Manipur

Leithak Leikharon is a folktale chronicling the myth of the creation of the Meitei community of Manipur. This mythical story of creation is represented in the present day in the ritual dance of the *Lai Haraoba* festival of Manipur (Singh, 2003). The following tasks and activities are given to the students:

Task 1:

Divide the class into two groups. Ask one group to find and write the origin of the *Lai Haraoba* festival of Manipur. The other group is asked to find the different dance forms of the festival and they can be further asked to perform in the class. The learners are then asked to write their observations and discuss in class.

Task 2:

The students are divided into groups of four. Each group is given pictures like graphics, shawls, figurines, and traditional dresses of different communities of Manipur. The students are asked to find information about the pictures. They are then asked to write and present the information in the class. The students are further asked to participate in a group discussion based on the content presented in the class.

The researcher observed that these activities motivated the learners. This example comprising the various activities showcases active learning and

motivation which are important CLIL characteristics. These tasks and activities engaged the student participants in learning by investigating, which enhanced their communicative and interpersonal skills. The first task made them explore the various dance forms and the origin of the festival. It was observed that the performance made them learn with fun. The observation of the students was varied and interesting. Some of the students started comparing it with other dance forms of other communities. One example is the performance of *Liando La*, a folksong of the Vaiphei community. Some of them also made critical comments based on their cultural representation, historical and social elements. These ideas made the students use the target language in a natural setting, inducing their active learning. In the second task, the students were actively engaged to find information on the pictures assigned to each group. One important finding of this task was that the students became more aware of their culture and identity. The researcher found that the students interacted with their family members and neighbours to get information. This greatly enhances their cognitive, creative, and language skills. By introducing communicative learning, the teachers assist the student participants in sharing and discussing their writings, thus enabling them to achieve learner autonomy. The performance of the different forms of dance also creates a platform for the students to explore their creativity and cognitive skills, thereby enhancing their language learning process.

4. To teach Grammar in context (for class IV students)

To teach Social Studies (physical features of the Thar Desert) and language (Simple Present Tense)

The following is an example of the sentences which are used for this section on learning simple present tense.

“The Thar Desert lies in the north-western part of India. It is a vast arid region and forms a natural boundary between India and Pakistan. A part of it extends to Pakistan also. In India, it extends from Gujarat in the west to Punjab and Haryana in the north. A major part of this desert lies in Rajasthan” (Nagesh & Nandy, 2018, p. 38).

The above sentences are statements indicating facts. So, simple present tense is used here. This can be used to teach simple present tense in context. At the same time, it also augments the learning of content. After familiarizing students with the simple present tense, they are asked to

use in their sentences the physical features and dimensions of Manipur and discuss them in class.

In this task, the researcher observed that the students were keener on the visuals of the descriptions. So, a map was used to enhance their comprehension. Then, they started describing the physical features and dimensions of Manipur using the simple present tense. They were also encouraged to write. Some instances of the use of simple present tense are, “Manipur *lies* in the northeastern part of India. Imphal *is* the capital of Manipur. Manipur *is* famous for its natural beauty. We love Manipur”. This made them learn the use of simple present tense while learning the physical features of the Thar Desert and Manipur. From this example, it can be seen that there is an integration of content and language.

5. To teach Vocabulary in context (for class IV students)

To teach Science (Pollution) alongside Vocabulary

The following is an example of the sentences which are used for this section to teach Pollution and Vocabulary.

All living and non-living things around us together form our environment. Many human activities have spoilt the environment. Adding harmful substances to our environment is called pollution and the harmful substances that cause pollution are called pollutants. (Gupta, 2018, p. 118)

After reading the above passage in class, words like living, non-living, environment, harmful, pollution, pollutants, etc. can be taken up from the chapter on Pollution. These words from the text are written on pieces of cards. Ask a student to pick a card. They are then asked to describe the word to the class. By repeating this exercise, the students learn the vocabulary in context. They are further asked to use them in their sentences.

The researcher observed that the students were hesitant at first. Slowly, the teacher guided them and made them comfortable to describe the words according to their understanding. The answers were varied and it added different dimensions to their comprehension of the vocabulary and the context as well. The motivation and confidence level of the students were enhanced as learning took place in a safe environment. Another crucial observation was that the students started using the vocabulary they had learnt in their own varied contexts. Some instances of the use

of the vocabulary they had learnt are, “The use of plastic bags is *harmful* to our environment. Planting of trees is beneficial for our *environment*”. This shows the integrated learning of content and language.

Conclusion

The foremost aim of CLIL classrooms is to enrich the communicative skills of learners through the subject lessons. In the CLIL approach, society plays an important role in the learner’s second language acquisition process. In the preceding classroom practices, it is seen that the CLIL approach can be effectively used to concurrently teach content and language. The learning of content and language in the above practices takes place in a social environment which encourages its application in real-life situations. The tasks and activities employed in the class also greatly augment the learners’ creativity, cognitive skills, and motivation level, which in turn enhances the integrative learning of content and language. Through scaffolding, the learners are given enough space to work on their own, to explore their creative and critical faculties thereby developing their language through learning the content. However, materials to be used to integrate the teaching of content and language need to be modified to suit the purpose of delivering effective learning of the English language. The study paves way for further research into developing and employing materials from various fields to integrate the teaching of content and language.

References

- Alnoori, B.S.M. (2019). Writing skills developed through language integrated content. *Amazonia Investiga*, 8(19), 362-368. <https://journals.indexcopernicus.com/api/file/viewByFileId/966248.pdf>
- Coyle, D. (2008). CLIL: A pedagogical approach from the European perspective. In N.H. Hornberger (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of language and education* (2nd ed., Vol. 4, pp. 1200-1214). Springer.
- Coyle, D. (2005). *CLIL: Planning tools for teachers*. University of Nottingham.
- Coyle, D., Hood, P., & Marsh, D. (2010). *Content and language integrated learning*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dalton-Puffer, C., Nikula, T., & Smit, U. (Eds.). (2010). *Language use and language learning in CLIL classrooms*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Dalton-Puffer, C. (2007). *Discourse in content and language integrated learning (CLIL) classrooms*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Gabillon, Z. (2020). Revisiting CLIL: Background, pedagogy, and theoretical

- underpinnings. *Contextes et didactiques [Online]*, 15. <https://journals.openedition.org/ced/1836>
- Gene, M., Juan-Garau, M., & Salazar-Noguera, J. (2015). Writing development under CLIL provision. In M. Juan-Garau and J. Salazar-Noguera (Eds.), *Content-based language learning in multilingual educational environments* (pp. 139-161). Springer.
- Gupta, V. (2018). *Oxford advantage science, Student's book-4*. Oxford University Press.
- Irengbam, A. (Ed.). (2012). *Chainarol (Way of the warrior)*. Human Rights Alert.
- Kampen, V.E., Admiraal, W. & Berry, A. (2016). Content and language integrated learning in the Netherlands: Teachers' self-reported pedagogical practices. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 21(2), 222-236. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13670050.2016.1154004>
- Liubinienė, V. (2009). Developing listening skills in CLIL. *Kalbu Studijo*, 15, 89-93. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228757068>
- Marsh, D. (1994). *Bilingual education & content and language integrated learning*. International Association for Cross-cultural Communication, Language Teaching in the Member States of the European Union. University of Sorbonne.
- Mehisto, P. (2012). Criteria for producing CLIL learning material. *Encuentro*, 21, 15-33. http://www.unifg.it/sites/default/files/allegatipara_garafo/21-01-2014/mehisto_criteria_for_producing_clil_learning_material.pdf
- Mehisto, P., Marsh, D., & Frigols M.J. (2008). *Uncovering CLIL: Content and language integrated learning in bilingual and multilingual education*. Macmillan.
- Nagesh, C. & Nandy, S. (2018). *Oxford advantage social studies, Student's book 4*. Oxford University Press.
- Pietilä, P., & Merikivi, R. (2014). The impact of free-time reading on foreign language vocabulary development. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 5(1), 28-36.
- Singh, C.M. (2003). *A history of Manipuri literature*. Sahitya Akademi.
- Wegner, A. (2012). What students and teachers think about CLIL? *International CLIL Research Journal*, 1(4), 29-35.

Rosy Yunnam is an Associate Professor in the Department of English Language Teaching at The English and Foreign Languages University, Regional Campus, Shillong. rosyyunnam@efluniversity.ac.in