Implementation of CLIL Pedagogy in Preschool Context in China

Zhenyu Wang

Philippines Christian University, Manila, Philippines

Abstract: *This paper explores the implementation of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) pedagogy in the context of preschool education. CLIL is an educational approach that combines the teaching of a subject with the learning of a second language, aiming to develop both content knowledge and language proficiency simultaneously. While CLIL has been widely studied and implemented in primary and secondary education, its application in preschool settings remains relatively unexplored. This discussion examines the benefits and challenges of introducing CLIL in preschools, considering factors such as curriculum design, teacher training, and age-appropriate instructional strategies. Furthermore, it delves into the potential cognitive and linguistic advantages of early CLIL exposure, highlighting its impact on language development, cognitive flexibility, and cultural awareness among young learners. The paper also addresses concerns surrounding the potential overload of young learners and offers suggestions for adapting CLIL principles to suit the developmental needs and interests of preschool children. By synthesizing existing research and theoretical frameworks, this discussion contributes to the ongoing discourse on CLIL implementation and provides insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers seeking to enhance language learning opportunities in the early years of education.*

Keywords: CLIL Pedagogy, Preschool Teaching, Second Language Acquisition

1. Introduction

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is a new approach in contemporary education. Unlike the language immersion teaching pedagogy and content-based instruction, CLIL is a dual-focused education approach that adopt an additional language in teaching and learning on both content and language (Mehisto, 2008). In CLIL pedagogy, learning and teaching content and language are balanced and interwoven, both sharing 50/50 portion in an ideal situation. The design of CLIL pedagogy brings flexibilities on scaffolding students' learning which covered from pre-school to tertiary level education contexts. As a flexible pedagogy, there are no certain prescriptive models for CLIL but only with pedagogical principles. CLIL emphasize language playing as a significant tool in following aspects in classroom: language of learning, language for learning and language through learning (Coyle, 2010). These three notions stand for to apply language in classroom not only in using, learning and teaching situation, but also involve in thinking.[1-4]

2. CLIL pedagogy in Preschool Context

Considering the kindergarten has already adopted bilingual education, children can learn English in language lessons under immersion language. In order to discuss the necessity and applicability of CLIL in this context, finding out the difference between language immersion and CLIL might be the proper way. Lasagabaster (2009) states the one of the common similarities between immersion and CLIL is the communicative approach, but the major difference between them is immersion carries language out in present of the student's context such as home and society, and under CLIL student only contact language in formal instruction context. Somers (2012) argues Lasagabaster's statement that immersion is hard to be applied in student's context in a second language situation, and CLIL can also be accommodated in student's context such as second, heritage or community language. In this context, due to the low-level language proficiency and monolingual family background, language immersion is more likely applied in formal instruction context. Language immersion emphasizes student acquiring language in a completed lingual environment but in this case the only immersion environment for students is school yard. In other words, [5-6]children merely have opportunities to apply English

outside of school. Besides, immersion students are lack of capability to display the variety and complexity that produced by native speaker (Tedick, 2003).

Unlike the unitary of immersion, CLIL is more flexible and can be referred as an "umbrella" that includes various approaches (Marsh, 2008). Mehisto indicates CLIL include various educational approaches such as language showers, CLIL camps, overseas/local projects, student exchanges and all kinds of immersions (Mehisto, 2008). CLIL can not only exist in classroom context, but also penetrate in in-and-out school activity and daily life. Compare with immersion program, CLIL is obviously favorable in a kindergarten classroom. [7]Through CLIL program, pre-school students would be more facilitated to learn contents and acquire language at the same time. Furthermore, children's low level of English proficiency can be properly accommodated via CLIL by reducing content and combining L1/L2 in teaching practice. Also, children's learning interest and curiosity can be facilitated by various activities alongside with CLIL. Their motivation and understanding in both content and language will be largely encouraged by CLIL. Thus, CLIL pedagogy is applicable and beneficial in preschool context. [8-11]

3. The Challenges of CLIL Pedagogy implementation

In this particular context, the external issues – such as changing of educational policy and government regulations – would not be impact the implementation of CLIL. Internally, administrators will support CLIL program regardless expenditure. Therefore, the biggest challenges of CLIL implementation are following: how to make staffs and teachers comprehend CLIL and how to train them to be a CLIL teacher.[12]

Teachers' perception is crucial before CLIL program implementation. Genesee (2016) mentions teachers should have a depth understanding about their roles: no matter what specialization they are, they must see themselves as both language and content teacher (Genesee, 2016). Papaja (2013) also states CLIL teachers should be sufficient not only in second language but also the linguistic competence in teaching context (Papaja, 2013). Considering the fact, although most of the local teachers pass the National College English Test and satisfied for communicative purposes. Nevertheless, it is really hard to expect them to have the reflection upon their language and ability through English. Bowler (2007) points out a raising problem in this situation: local teacher's lack of adequate knowledge of English might cause difficulty in CLIL teaching practice, which might encourage administrators to arrange foreign teachers to teach specialized content (Blower, 2007). But foreign teachers in kindergarten only provides English teaching and generally they do not have any language skills in student's L1, which is Mandarin. Also, foreign teachers are lack of the in-depth knowledge of teaching subject. In CLIL implementation, both local and foreign teachers would probably put themselves in incertitude: what exactly am I going to teaching and how can I teach content and language together considering I have never been doing this before?

Vázquez (2018) suggests that the success of CLIL program not only requires teachers to have linguistic and subject competence, but also collaboration between teaching contents and languages; teachers should develop language consciousness coherently through teaching input to student's output. This consciousness is way beyond language competence and reach to a pedagogical and theoretical level. Based on this aspect another challenge appeals: how can teachers develop linguistic consciousness to adopt teaching content to a new language and apply this into teaching procedures?

4. The support of CLIL pedagogy

In the beginning of discussion, the difference between immersion and CLIL has already discussed. Question 3 will mainly discuss in what aspect can CLIL support pre-school students. Coyle (2000) indicates CLIL offers an "naturalistic environment" learning experience for young learners which allows them to learn. In a natural learning environment, children's motivation and learning interest can be largely encouraged by engaging in authentic content and authentic language (Marsh, 2000). Indeed, CLIL classroom provides a natural situation of language using that boost student's motivation towards language learning. Mehisto (2008) indicates preschool learners in CLIL are in the circle of "learn to use the language, and use language to learn", which students are more engaged in an environment that fulfilled with resources of language and content, meanwhile developing their other abilities and skills.

Despite language and subjects, preschool student's creative and critical thinking skills can also be developed, which is lack in contemporary pre-school education in China. CLIL environment enhances

student's ability to construct knowledge and to think; in specific, student's thinking ability includes "analyzing, differentiating, organizing, classifying, comparing, matching, synthesizing, guessing, evaluating, and creating" (Hanesová, 2014). These thinking abilities are crucial to offer the flexibility in the cognitive development of preschool students. Like Piaget (1952) mentions the preschool learners are in the most important age to construct their animistic thinking and deductive reasoning. It is urgent to encourage student to develop their critical thinking ability in childhood under the current Chinese education framework, which be easily found and train through CLIL classrooms. [13]

Besides, the cooperative learning environment in CLIL classrooms also benefits preschool learners. Student's learning experience, retention, social skills and academic achievement are facilitated through classroom cooperative activities. Cooperative learning in CLIL promotes student's interaction and facilitates the development of cognitive and personal growth (Casal, 2008). Cooperative activities can help preschool students to have a better understanding on the difference between individual and other fellow students, in order to make them to have group work to gain the early interconnectivity with society. Classroom become more inclusive with the implementation of CLIL. Alongside with subject learning and language acquisition, student's critical thinking and cooperative ability can also be development. This is what exactly preschool educators looking for.[14-17]

5. The implement of CLIL in preschool context

Considering all the benefits, implementing CLIL in preschool context seems applicable. But here comes question again: what is the most appropriate way to implement CLIL effectively in preschool context? At this particular part a successful CLIL implementation should be divided to two stages: the first stage includes how to make teachers, staffs and parents have a better comprehension on CLIL; the second stage includes how to make students more engaged in this program.

Before initiate CLIL program, administrations shall prepare program guidelines. The core of the guideline might include: administrative management, teaching materials, teachers with adequacy in language and subject contents, curriculum, pedagogy and methodology etc. Ioannou-Georgiou (2008) suggests teachers shall get enough support of these following aspects: pedagogical, linguistic, practical and psychological support. Pedagogical support indicates the methodology, knowledge of subject contents and language; linguistic support includes the aids in lexicon, grammar and pronunciation; practical support means the ability of finding subject-relevant materials and resources; and psychological support requires teachers should manage their emotion appropriately, such as stress management and encouragement. Furthermore, [18]teachers also need to concern of classrooms such as L1/L2 use portions, the choice between formative or summative assessments. Regardless the CLIL training process, teachers should also be collaborative to share and discuss efforts and outcomes of CLIL. Most importantly, syllabus and curriculum should be arranged correctly in accordance of student's actual demand.

The priority thing for students to adapt CLIL pedagogy is to make a resonation for them. Students don't have any CLIL experience before, therefore they might need transition period to get used to this new approach. Some students might get stress, disappointment or even frustration when they first attend CLIL classroom. These scenarios will true to happen to students. Student should get enough support when in their first CLIL class, which means not only the selection of content and language, but also their feelings and emotions should be taken care. Create a safe and nature environment for preschool students can help them establish their confidence. Relaxed, zero-pressure supportive atmosphere can be created by gradual instruction (Ioannou-Georgiou, 2008). Also allow students to express their own voice and thoughts also helps them to get familiar to the new teaching environment.

6. L1 and L2 in CLIL classroom and major focus

CLIL is a flexible approach that integrate content and language together. One thing needs to be aware is that CLIL classroom is not monolingual. Classroom language can categorize as both daily language and academic language for both L1/L2. L1 plays a crucial role in teaching and learning. According to the comparison research by Lin (2017), shifting between both daily and academic L1/ L2 is easier for creating joint construction and applying student's life experience into classroom. One of the characteristics of preschool teaching context is the low English proficiency of children. Thus, applying L1 in preschool classrooms is necessary and should be encouraged. One of the merits is "CLIL allows for the planning of systematic and functional use of L1 and L2 in different stages and

phases of the learning process", which is more flexible while applying both daily and academic L1/L2 to bridge the multiple resources of daily oral language, oral academic language and written academic language in both L1/L2 (Lin, 2015).

In teaching practice, Kiely (2011) offers some principles to guide L1 and L2 use in classroom: 1. Increase the exposure of L2 to maximum level; 2. Manage and give instructions in L1; 3. Use L1 to support learning and check comprehension; 4. focus on L2 accuracy in pronunciation; 5. Teach L1 terms for subject; 6. Promote interlingual work – explore both L1/L2. In CLIL classroom, L1 and L2 should be coexist but not separate. Zanoni's (2016) research indicates students are tend to use L1 to avoid misunderstandings and ambiguities. The language choice and code-switching is making effectively sense in explaining terms and phenomenon such as mathematics and science in this context. There is no conflict of applying L1 and L2 in CLIL classroom. Lasagabaster (2013) states that the use of L1 can enhance to scaffold content and language learning, as long as learning is mainly maintained in L2. Adopting English as a monolingual teaching is deemed to be an ineffective way; the usage of L1 should be encouraged.

While discussing the content focus in preschool context, on of the key concern is the content relevance with the 4Cs model. CLIL is laid on the foundation of 4Cs model: communication, content, cognition and culture; and culture perception is embedded through the learning and development of communication, content and cognition (Coyle, 2010). To perfectly fit CLIL, the following subjects in specific are suitable in preschool context: mathematics, social sciences, values and culture appreciation. Jäppinen (2005) mentions that "analogical reasoning is the basis of CLIL thinking which laid on comparing the similarities and differences between two languages in semantic, cultural and social science aspect." Analogical reasoning is interwoven with cognitional development and it can be gained in math and science class. [19]

Besides, communicative competence and intercultural competence can also be scaffolded through culture and value lessons (Dalton-Puffer, 2009). Communicative competence can be explained as: understand when to talk and not; understand whom to talk and not; and understand the manners in speech act. In other word, communicative competence can be referred as a manner of speaking. A research conducted by Cyole (2009) mentions that student's intercultural competence, such as creating awareness and respect cultural difference, can be developed in appreciation of cultural variety. García (2012) emphasize making contact with culture diversity in early age leads students to draw comparisons, awaken interest in diverse lifestyle, values and beliefs. [20-22]

Therefore, providing different content focus in math, science, value and culture makes a good fit for CLIL's 4C principles. Through the integration learning of content and language, students not just simply acquire language and learn subject-matter contents, but also develop their cognitive and communication skills. Through culture learning, students are exposure into an alternative perspective, which deepen their awareness of otherness and themselves.

7. Conclusion

This paper presents a discussion on the implementation of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) pedagogy in the context of preschool education. CLIL is an approach that combines the teaching of subject content with the acquisition of a second language. The objective of this study is to explore the potential benefits and challenges of implementing CLIL in preschool settings, considering factors such as curriculum design, teacher training, and language proficiency of both teachers and students.[23-26]

The discussion begins by providing an overview of CLIL and its theoretical foundations, emphasizing its suitability for early language learning. It then delves into the specific considerations and modifications required for implementing CLIL in preschools, including age-appropriate content selection, integration of language and content learning, and scaffolding techniques to support young learners.

Furthermore, this paper examines the potential advantages of CLIL in preschools, such as enhanced language acquisition, cognitive development, and cultural awareness. The importance of creating a language-rich environment and fostering positive attitudes towards language learning is highlighted. Additionally, the challenges associated with CLIL implementation in preschools are discussed, including the need for specialized teacher training, ensuring balanced language development, and maintaining age-appropriate instructional practices.

The discussion also explores practical strategies for successful CLIL implementation in preschools, including collaborative planning between language and content teachers, incorporating multimodal resources, and integrating play-based activities to support language and content acquisition.

Overall, this paper provides valuable insights into the implementation of CLIL pedagogy in the preschool context. By considering the potential benefits, challenges, and strategies, educators and policymakers can make informed decisions about incorporating CLIL into early childhood education, fostering holistic development and promoting multilingualism from a young age.

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