

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF CLIL/CBI APPROACH IN AN EFL CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates students' perceptions of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) or Content Based Instruction (CBI) approach in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. The purpose of the study is to develop interpersonal communication skills of EFL students beyond language learning and to propose an English Course modal for University students. This study was conducted applying a sample English Course to develop interpersonal communication skills of 66 fourth year students from the University of Computer Studies, Mandalay in 2017-2018 academic year. Students were engaged with different topics related to 'Communication' through CLIL/CBI approach to explore their knowledge and develop interpersonal skills. Students completed a questionnaire and answered the interview to describe their perceptions of the instructional design, the materials and topics used in the sample English Course at the end. The research findings indicate that most students enjoy CLIL/ CBI teaching approach rather than learning English language alone.

KEYWORDS: *EFL classrooms, Interpersonal skills, Communication, CLIL/CBI approach*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), CBI approach has been commonly practiced to develop English language proficiency and to teach the content for many years. CLIL and CBI are umbrella terms that are used for teaching not only English language but also teaching social equality and justice and arousing personal intellectual growth through topics or content. EFL context in the 21st century learning and teaching environment is more than teaching English alone. Moreover, beside technical skills, students are required to be competent in interpersonal communication skills, which is one of the soft skills or

transferrable skills that is essential for effective communication at the workplace. Therefore, EFL instructors are constantly upgrading the English curriculum to enhance the students' interpersonal communication skills and knowledge that will enable the graduates to successfully cope with the 21st century working environment.

This study aims to propose the English Course model that has been implemented in the fourth year Computer Science Course of the University of Computer Studies, Mandalay in 2017-2018 academic year. The main objective of the paper is to ascertain the effectiveness of a sample English Course design which entirely focus on the topics related to 'Communication' in developing students' interpersonal skills, knowledge, and overall learning process. The presentation of the paper is as follows. First, it outlines the theoretical overview providing the rationale for the conduct of CLIL/CBI teaching method in EFL classroom. Second, it elaborates on the methodological tenets employed to collect and analyze data in this study. In that section, the proposed English Course outline that was implemented in the University of Computer Studies, Mandalay is presented. Then, the findings of the study are presented in the subsequent section. Afterwards, the findings are discussed in light of relevant literature. Some concluding remarks are provided at the end of the paper.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to J.C. Richards & T.S. Rogers (2014), CLIL and CBI are built around the core principles, one of which states that people learn a second language more successfully when they use the language as a means of understanding content rather than language alone. It was cited by K. Elwood (2018) that CBI is an earlier model of CLIL. And the term CBI and CLIL are

interchangeably used in this paper (Brown & Bradford, 2014; Lai & Aksornjarung, 2018).

There are four main objectives of CLIL provision suggested by Eurydice (2006): socio-economic, sociocultural, linguistic and subject related. Out of these objectives, the first three are related to developing interpersonal communication skills of the students. These objectives are: to prepare students for life in a more internationalized society and offer them better job prospects in the labour market, to convey to students values of tolerance and respect to other cultures. Through the use of the CLIL target language, it enables students to develop language skills which emphasize effective communication, motivating students to learn languages by using them for real practical purposes.

With reference to Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Nikula & Smit, 2010; Lasagabaster, 2008 and Wolff, 2007, the 4Cs is focused on CLIL framework: Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture. Regarding CLIL learning goals, there is an emphasis on intercultural knowledge, understanding, and communication while CBI emphasizes on the acquisition of academic content and related language. In addition to these main objectives of CLIL teaching method, according to Coyle (2008), teaching about one specific topic in a few class sessions can also be called CLIL.

Regarding CBI teaching approach, both language and content are emphasized (Stoller, 2008). Lee & Chang (2008) also reported in Asian context that CBI benefits learners by enhancing motivation to learn English. There are three fundamental models of CBI: sheltered, adjunct and theme-based (Brinton, Snow & Weshe, 2003). Out of three models, adjunct model of CBI was adopted in this study, which focus on learning both content and language. "Communication" topics were used to help students improve basic communication skills, interpersonal skills, listening, speaking proficiency in English and develop knowledge related to communication and cultural issues.

Bearing in mind the review of the concepts of CLIL/CBI learning approach, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Did students in this study like CLIL/CBI teaching approach?
2. Why did / why didn't they like it?
3. What topics students like, and why?

3. METHODOLOGY

A sample English Course was conducted for 66 Computer Science students (Male=22, Female=44) in the University of Computer Studies, Mandalay. It was a semester long course in 2018-2019 academic year. English Course constitutes 2 credit units for the final grading and there were 3 periods per week for a 15-week

long semester. The topics and course materials used are exclusively related to 'Communication'.

To find out students' perceptions of the proposed content and instructional design, students completed a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire. The questionnaire used in the study of Y. Reiko, T. Hideo & O. Katsuaki (2015) was slightly modified. Students were instructed to rate the questions as 5 for strongly agree to 1 for strongly disagree, comparing the previous English courses which only focused on English language teaching alone.

Adjunct model of CBI learning approach or a sample CLIL course for EFL learners was designed in this study. In the questionnaire, there are open questions to find out what types of topics students enjoy learning in EFL class and how they felt about the materials used in the English course.

3.1. The Proposed Course Outline

Topics that were used in the English course are related to 'Communication'. Some of which are extracted from the reference book: "C21 Communicating in the 21st Century" (3rd Edition) by Eunson Baden. The main topics included in the proposed Course are described in the followings.

3.1.1. Communication Today

Under this topic, students were engaged with general spheres of human communication, communication models, communication channels and strengths and weaknesses of each channel, communication break down and success, communication issues and ethics.

3.1.2. Nonverbal Communication

Regarding nonverbal communication skills, students were made aware of nonverbal aspects based on the non-verbal communication model.

3.1.3. Team Communication

For team communication, groups and teams dynamics, reasons of joining and leaving groups and teams, strengths and weaknesses of teams, effective teams, roles people play, synergy vs social loafing and how to increase synergy, virtual teams and issues are included.

3.1.4. Interpersonal Communication

Under this topic, students learn self-talk, active and effective listening, effective questioning and giving feedback, assertiveness and emotional intelligence.

3.1.5. Intercultural Communication

With regard to intercultural communication, students learn the definitions of culture, acculturation, Bennett's developmental model, Globe' model, Hall, context model, Huntington's clash of civilization model,

intercultural communication issues, solutions and practices.

3.2. Teaching methods

Participatory learning method was extensively used. For each topic, the instructor managed the class giving more time for students talking than teacher talking time. Students were engaged with issues, discussion topics and scenarios for pair work, group work and brainstorming sessions after every instructor lecture or presentation. Reading materials, handouts and lecture slides were shared with the students on Moodle prior to the lecture time.

3.3. Assessment system

3.3.1 Multiple choice questions on Moodle Learning Management System

Tutorials were assigned as multiple choice questions on Moodle Learning Management System. Students are required to possess the related knowledge or content that they have learned in the classroom to be able to answer the tutorials well.

3.3.2 Writing assignments and essays related to issues and scenarios

Semester-end written exam is arranged to test students’ writing performance, composition skills and critical thinking related to issues and scenarios. Students also have to deal with writing assignments.

In a CLIL/CBI approach focused English course, there may be varieties of topics to be used. However, the proposed English Course focused on ‘Communication’ related topics only. The reason of choosing ‘Communication’ topics particularly is because It was intended that students will become more aware of their strengths and weakness in interpersonal communication process through learning theories, models, strategies and practices.

4. FINDINGS

Table 1. Students’ response to CBI language teaching approach questionnaire

Questions	SA+A	N	SD+D
1	60%	35%	3%
2	92%	7%	-
3	77%	22%	-
4	46%	35%	17%
5	42%	27%	31%
6	96%	4%	-
7	71%	21%	7%
8	46%	17%	3%
9	85%	17%	-
10	85%	21%	-
11	82%	14%	3%
12	82%	17%	-

According to the findings of the questionnaire results regarding CBI language teaching, table 1 describes students’ responses by three categories: Strongly agree and Agree (SA+A), Neutral (N), Strongly disagree and Disagree (SD+D) to all 12 questions

It was found that 60% of the students enjoy foreign publisher’s textbooks in English. In this proposed English Course design, no text book was used and only reference materials, lecture slides and handouts were shared with the students on Moodle. Regarding students’ perceptions of the instructor’s medium of classroom instruction in questions 2 and 4, 92% of students prefer the teacher using English in class whereas only 46 % of them appreciate the teacher use Burmese. It was also discovered that nearly half of the students still feel embarrassed to use English with their classmates.

In the proposed CLIL/CBI Course outline, formative and summative assessment methods are applied. Pair work activities, discussions and presentation sessions are learners’ center formative assessments. For the summative assessment, multiple choice questions on Moodle and Essay type questions in the semester-end exam are the two summative types used in this study. To investigate students’ perceptions of the assessments, questions 3, 9, 10 and 11 are engaged in the questionnaire. It was found that majority of students enjoyed both formative and summative assessments in this proposed course.

Table 2. Students’ response to question 6 and question 12 (Mean and Standard deviation)

Item	Mean	Std
Q 6. I liked CLIL/CBI language teaching method better than skill-based teaching.	4.48	1.16
Q 12 I think the topics are appropriate for developing my interpersonal communication skills.	4.44	1.15

To investigate students’ overall perceptions of CBI approach in developing their interpersonal communication skills, responses to question 6 and question 12 are analyzed. 96% of the students liked CLIL language teaching better than skill-based teaching. Regarding the topics used in the proposed course, 82% of the students appreciated the topics and materials for developing their interpersonal communication skills. Mean and Standard deviation of the students’ responses are 4.48 and 1.16 for Question 6 and 4.44 and 1.15 for Question 12 as shown in table 2.

The following figure describes the percentage of students who described the most interested topic for CBI approach in developing their interpersonal skills development. Nearly 80% of students responded that they enjoyed intercultural communication topic whereas only 8% of them described nonverbal communication is

interesting. And it was found that 14% of the students' responses went to 'team communication' topic.

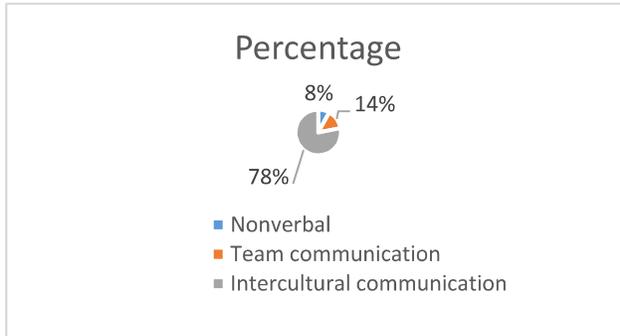


Figure. Students' topic preference on CBI approach

Qualitative Data

Qualitative findings also support the quantitative data. Students' responses to the open-questions in the questionnaire and the interview results describe that CLIL/CBI teaching method is more interesting and engaging than the skills-based language teaching approach which focus on English alone. Some open question responses are described below:

- I am very interested in this teaching method.
- I enjoy CBI teaching method a lot because we can discuss a lot with friends and understand the topics.
- I like CBI teaching method because it gives us a lot of knowledge and experience that are very useful in life.
- I think CBI teaching method is better than Skills-based language teaching. I can focus on one topic and get to know this topic internally.
- It's good. We got to learn many knowledges and experiences as we haven't learned this type of English.
- We feel free to discuss with each other and get more knowledge.

5. DISCUSSION

To answer the first research question 'Did students like CLIL/CBI?', the quantitative data was analyzed. The result supports the positive answer. The findings of question 6 in the questionnaire shows the students' positive response to the use of CLIL/CBI approach in EFL classroom. Then, question 12 result supports that majority of students thought the materials and topics used in the proposed English Course are appropriate in developing their interpersonal communication skills. However, very few percent of students who didn't like the CLIL/CBI approach were also found.

The results of open-questions in the questionnaire answer the second research question. Common reasons of why students appreciate CLIL/CBI approach is that the topics are engaging and it gives them a lot of

knowledge and experience. Another reason is that students enjoy participatory learning techniques used in the course and they had a good chance to share each other. However, very few students felt a little bored as they were learning the same topic for many periods.

For the third research question "What topics students liked and why?", according to the open question in the questionnaire, it was found that majority of students enjoyed 'intercultural communication' and 'team communication' topics most. Why they like the topic 'team communication' is because they get much knowledge about roles people play in a group or team, team dynamics and how people work in an effective team. As students from the University of Computer Studies, Mandalay have to do software projects each semester and they are practically participating in teams in terms of academic requirement. Students said they become aware of their practical nature of their roles in the team and strengths and weaknesses of the teams they belong to after discussing 'team communication' topic in English Course. With regard to 'intercultural communication' topic, students responded that they enjoyed learning about communicating with people from different cultures. They said they got a lot of knowledge about acculturation and they become more aware of themselves in terms of their strengths and weakness and they had a good chance to learn strategies for effective communication.

Out of many different topics to be engaged in CLIL/CBI English Course, it was discovered that 'communication' related topics are specifically appropriate in developing students' interpersonal communication skills. As described by the suggestions of Eurydice (2006), students in this study thought that the proposed English course is a good preparation for them to enter a more internationalized society and to offer them a better job opportunities in the labour market. It was also discovered that the students in this study were very interested in intercultural communication topic, which was in line with the discussion of Dalton-Puffer (2011), who emphasized on CLIL learning goal as developing intercultural knowledge, understanding and communication. Therefore, it is suggestible that the proposed English Course be conducted in other Technological Universities or Computer Universities in Myanmar for a semester.

Then, the research findings over students' most interested topic in CLIL/CBI approach in this study reflects the focus of CLIL framework "Four Cs", and it supports to consider the practical needs of EFL students in designing the English Courses in Universities in Myanmar. Graduates of the ASEAN member states should be equipped with work readiness skills as AEC (ASEAN Economic Community) is being implemented. For a successful mobility of skilled workers in ASEAN region, graduates are required to be competent in

intercultural communication skills, team skills and interpersonal skills beyond technical skills.

6. CONCLUSION

The study undertaken contributes the positive outcomes of CLIL/CBI approach in developing interpersonal communication skills of EFL students in the University of Computer Studies, Mandalay. It was intended to propose a sample EFL Course outline that aims to develop not only English language proficiency but also related knowledge and content in an EFL classroom. As the 21st century workplace demands interdisciplinary knowledge and soft skills beyond technical skills, English curriculum needs to be upgraded according to the needs of the learners. In this study, majority of students perceived that CLIL/CBI approach is more engaging than the traditional language teaching approaches and they found the topics used in the Course are interesting and helpful to improve their interpersonal communication skills. As a further study, students should be engaged with a comparison of teacher selected topics and students selected ones as an experimental research.

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APPENDIX

CLIL/CBI Language teaching Approach

1. I liked foreign publisher’s text book in English.
2. I liked my teacher using English in Class.
3. I enjoyed pair work and group work.
4. I wanted my teacher to use Burmese in Class.
5. I was embarrassing to use English with my classmates in classroom activities.
6. I liked CLIL/CBI language teaching better than skill-based teaching.
7. Reading materials help understand the content of the topic.
8. Videos help understand the content of the topics.
9. Discussions help understand the content of the topic.
10. Answering multiple choice questions was a good experience.
11. Writing an essay in English was a good experience.
12. I think the topics are appropriate for developing my interpersonal communication skills.
13. How do you feel about theme-based language teaching (the instruction that teachers spend

- classes to teach about one topic)? Please write your opinion about it.
14. What topic did you like best? Why?
 15. What other topics do you want to learn? Write as many topics as possible.