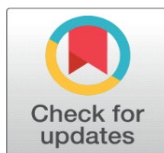
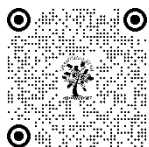


IMPLEMENTING CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING (CLIL) AT THE DIPLOMA LEVEL IN KERALA: PREPARATORY PHASE OF THE EXPERIMENT

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ABSTRACT

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) represents a significant pedagogical shift from traditional, teacher-centred methods to a more learner-centred approach. In CLIL, the emphasis is placed on integrating content learning with language acquisition, fostering deeper engagement and autonomy among students. This transition necessitates a careful preparatory phase that begins with identifying learners' needs and progresses to creating opportunities for active participation and independent learning in the classroom. The evolving role of teachers in guiding this process, alongside the personalized nature of the learning experience, redefines the overall concept of education. This paper outlines the key stages in the preparatory phase of a CLIL experiment conducted in a polytechnic college in Kerala, offering insights into how this approach transforms both teaching and learning practices.

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1. TEACHING THROUGH THE CLIL APPROACH

CLIL involves a significant shift in the perception of learning, emphasizing a practical and constructive approach that places the learner at the centre of the educational process. This approach necessitates a transformation in pedagogical principles, with textbooks adapted to support both content and language learning. Classroom interactions became more interactive, fostering an active learning environment where students are engaged participants rather than passive recipients of knowledge. The researcher, with the guidance of a supervisor, developed a CLIL model tailored to equip learners in the current context. The experimental group included semester two students of Diploma in Mechanical Engineering, Civil Engineering and Electrical and Electronics Engineering. The process involved several stages, including the preparation of a tool for both the pilot study and final administration, ensuring its effectiveness in achieving the dual goals of content comprehension and language acquisition. The following are the main stages involved in this process.

A. IDENTIFYING THE LINGUISTIC AND SUBJECT BASED NEEDS OF LEARNERS

The first step in the adaptation process was identifying the learner and learning factors relevant to CLIL implementation. This included assessing the learners' levels and needs, along with the content and language aspects, linguistic

requirements, cognitive demands, and the actual learning environment. These factors were identified through detailed discussions and the results of an achievement test and questionnaire. Additionally, elements such as independent learning, creative thinking, motivation, interest, and confidence were taken into account to ensure a comprehensive approach to meeting the learners' needs.

B. IDENTIFYING THE ROLE OF CLIL TEACHERS

The role of CLIL teachers in the classroom is minimal, as they primarily function as facilitators to enable learning. This requires extensive research and preparation before classroom sessions, as teachers must plan thoroughly to ensure effective learning. While they intervene and provide scaffolding, when necessary, much of the learning process is indirectly guided and controlled by the teacher. This approach allows learners to take an active role in their education while still benefiting from the teacher's subtle direction and support.

CLIL offers various opportunities for collaborative teaching, including team teaching, where both content and language teachers work together. Another approach involves the content teacher delivering subject material while the language teacher focuses on language elements during a separate language hour. Alternatively, the language teacher can assist in preparing materials, with the content teacher handling classroom instruction independently. In evaluation, the language teacher may assess language components, or the content teacher may evaluate both content and language if proficient. In this study, all forms of collaboration were explored. For testing the efficacy of the prepared materials, team teaching was employed, and during the final test, the language teacher observed classroom activities while both teachers jointly handled the evaluation.

CLIL encourages collaboration between language and content teachers. In the initial phase of the final experiment, a team-teaching strategy was implemented, with the content teacher directing the learning of subject matter while the language teacher led the instruction of language aspects. In the final phase, the language teacher transitioned to an observer role, providing peer reviews on classroom activities. Based on this feedback, adjustments were made to the materials and teaching techniques used. During the assessment phase, the language teacher assisted in identifying language errors in students' answers. This more passive role in classroom instruction was adopted to ensure the study remained practical and aligned with classroom realities.

C. PREPARATION OF MATERIALS AND CHOOSING ACTIVITIES FOR TRANSACTION

The core subject of the second semester in Mechanical Engineering, "Basic Mechanical Engineering," was selected for adaptation as it was newly introduced and lacked a readily available textbook for learners. The syllabus and curriculum provided the foundation for the subject, while reference books were accessible for guidance. This situation presented an ideal opportunity to develop adapted materials for classroom instruction. The content teacher and language teacher collaborated to create materials that integrated content learning activities with ample opportunities for language development. Additionally, reference books from Civil Engineering and Electrical and Electronics Engineering were utilized in the adaptation process to ensure a comprehensive approach.

The core subject textbooks, originally prepared for lecturing, needed to be adapted to align with the CLIL methodology. These adaptations focused on making the materials more interactive, transforming them into workbook-style resources that included instructions for self, pair, and group activities. Additionally, opportunities for language development were embedded within the materials. For Mechanical Engineering, the units were fully adapted for classroom use, while in the other two branches, Civil Engineering and Electrical and Electronics Engineering, the classroom activities were streamlined to function independently, without relying on fully adapted materials.

Various CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) activities were incorporated into the adapted materials and the learning process. A careful selection of activities was made, though many proved impractical in real classroom settings due to local limitations. Activities such as information gap tasks, peer learning methods, and language games were experimented within the classrooms. These activities sparked intense discussions and interactions, creating ample opportunities for integrated language and content development. Additionally, self, pair, and group work were effectively utilized to enhance classroom engagement and collaborative learning.

Tasks that include information gap activities foster interaction in the classroom, and this study incorporated such tasks to assess their effectiveness. One example was the jigsaw reading task, where materials were provided for self-study. The module was divided into units, with each unit assigned to different groups of learners. Alongside these units, information gap materials were also distributed. Learners engaged with the content and discussed it individually, in pairs, and within both small and larger groups. Throughout this process, learners filled in the information gaps presented in the tasks, even within the smallest groups, which made communication essential and inevitable.

One technique employed in task preparation was based on Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences theory. This approach supported various intelligences through individual and group learning processes, as well as peer teaching. Interpersonal, intrapersonal, linguistic, and kinaesthetic intelligences were specifically nurtured, while visual, musical, mathematical/logical, and naturalistic intelligences were supported through the materials and inputs provided. Additionally, learners were asked to prepare write-ups reflecting their understanding. Their responses often included descriptive pictures and graphic representations, showcasing how they internalized and expressed their learning through these diverse forms.

The learners involved in this study were not beginners in L2 English, but had a foundational grasp of basic language units and structures. The study aimed to help them apply these existing language skills while providing additional support tailored to specific content needs. For example, learners were given advance vocabulary and, at times, support in their mother tongue. Essential language structures, such as those related to comparison, describing a process, and passive voice, were presented in a table format for easy reference. These structures were displayed via PowerPoint, allowing learners to access them as needed during lessons. Pronunciation, stress, and intonation were addressed during teacher talk and through corrective feedback on their communication. Content-related input was provided through various resources, including pictures, realia, lectures by other scholars, and YouTube clips.

D. EXPERT VALIDATION AND TESTING

The most crucial aspect of the study was testing the efficacy of the adapted study materials. This phase provided valuable insights into the practical aspects of various activities, involving ongoing revisions and experimentation to ensure the materials were well-suited to the local classroom context. The researcher learned extensively during this period, continually refining the materials and testing different activities to optimize their effectiveness for the learners.

The materials, after being tested for efficacy, were submitted for expert validation by a team of four teachers, consisting of three subject teachers and one language teacher, all with a minimum of fifteen years of experience and exposure to various teaching methods. Based on the guidance of the language expert, certain materials, particularly the evaluation questions and teaching aids, were restructured. Additionally, adjustments were made to the selection of activities and the evaluation rubric to further refine the effectiveness of the materials.

E. ACTIVE LEARNING OF CONTENT AND LANGUAGE- LEARNING BY DOING

CLIL fosters a learner-centred approach, with classroom techniques and activities designed to revolve around the learner. In this approach, the teacher acts as a facilitator, supporting and empowering students to engage in self-learning. CLIL emphasizes language skills, making communication and teamwork essential to the learning process. In this study, self-learning, pair work, and group learning constituted about seventy percent of the total tasks. For example, to connect previous knowledge to the new unit, learners were asked to identify objects in the classroom and consider the materials from which these objects were made. An important aspect of this approach is creating a favourable and familiar learning environment that enhances students' engagement and understanding.

In the CLIL context, learning through active involvement in tasks is a key feature, providing an experience distinct from traditional methods. Unlike merely listening to lectures and taking notes from the teacher's perspective, CLIL encourages learners to engage deeply by connecting topics to their own level of understanding and relating them to prior knowledge. This approach allows learners to construct their own knowledge and develop the language necessary for learning. The active nature of this method promotes lasting understanding and treats language acquisition as a skill to be developed.

Various classroom practices in the study, such as analyzing passages, creating tree diagrams to organize ideas, comparing different aspects, preparing materials for peer teaching, and using realia like metals, alloys, composites, ceramics, and polymers, all contributed to fostering learning. While these tasks can be challenging and require more critical thinking from learners, they enhance the permanence of learning. The focus in this study was not only on the final outcomes but also on the learning process itself, highlighting the importance of how knowledge is acquired and retained.

The activities were designed to support learning within groups, where individuals assist one another, allowing slow learners to benefit from group dynamics without undue stress, as faster learners often take on the role of explaining ideas. Efforts were made by the teacher to engage slow learners actively in the learning process, fostering a natural learning environment among students. This approach promoted a sense of togetherness and reassured learners that their ideas would be heard and accepted, encouraging participation without inhibition. Small groups thus became centres of learning and communication within the classroom. Most tasks emphasized pair work to maximize communication for each participant. Although teachers occasionally relaxed their usual focus on accuracy and fluency, introducing grammatical aspects as units rather than strict requirements, the primary emphasis was on meaningful interaction. As Dale and Tanner observe, "Meaningful interaction is also important in CLIL. Learners who focus on communicating about the meaning of what they are learning are likely to become more effective language learners than those who concentrate mainly on grammatical accuracy" (12).

In this study, both student talk and teacher talk were employed as effective tools for learning. Teacher talk played a limited but crucial role, intervening when necessary, while student talk was central to the learning process. Learners were encouraged to engage in conversation as it was integral to their learning experience. This approach allowed them to develop various skills, including listening, reading, and writing, with a particular focus on the often-neglected skill of speaking. Despite its importance in language acquisition, speaking is frequently underemphasized in existing curricula. In this study, speaking was not treated as an artificial activity, but was rooted in the concrete aspects of content learning. This emphasis on speaking, supported by classroom interactions such as explaining, clarifying doubts, and seeking help, created a conducive environment for language generation. The teacher highlighted the use of short phrases and sentences rather than complete sentences, fostering a relaxed atmosphere that prioritized communication over perfection. This approach not only enhanced learners' language use, but also boosted their confidence by encouraging casual, content-focused conversations.

In the CLIL classroom, learning was primarily an informal peer teaching and learning process. This approach enabled learners to progress from their current level of understanding to a higher level through various discussions and peer interactions. Additionally, each group was allocated fixed time slots to formally demonstrate their understanding, adding a structured component to the learning process. Doubts were addressed according to the learners' level of understanding, and the ample material support and input provided made the peer learning process engaging and effective.

In preparing various tasks and adapting texts, every effort was made to infuse them with engaging activities. The use of pictures, realia, and familiar objects created an interesting learning environment. For instance, intriguing facts under a "Do you know?" section, such as the relationship between the sinking of the Titanic and the metal used in its construction, invited learners to share their views with peers without fear of making errors. Learners were given ample freedom, which not only enhanced their personal responsibility and learning but also boosted their creativity. This approach allowed each learner to carve out a unique learning path tailored to their preferences. Small achievements, such as talking to a peer or explaining a topic to a group, fostered a sense of responsibility and motivation. CLIL supports "natural use of language (that) can boost a youngster's motivation and hunger towards learning languages" (Marsh 2000:6). The creativity displayed in peer teaching sessions showcased the learners' innovative ideas and revealed their existing knowledge and potential. Peer teaching increased engagement among both the teaching and learning groups, promoting a deeper understanding of the material. Learners also narrated stories and made familiar comparisons, further enriching the learning experience.

2. CONCLUSION

The CLIL experiment conducted at the polytechnic college in Kerala demonstrates the transformative potential of integrating content and language learning in technical education. Through careful planning and execution, it became evident that shifting from a teacher-centred approach to a learner-centred model not only enhances students' subject knowledge, but also significantly improves their language skills. The preparatory phase, which involved identifying learner needs, developing appropriate materials, and fostering teacher-student collaboration, proved to be crucial in the successful implementation of CLIL. The experiment also highlighted the importance of learner autonomy, as students actively engaged in the learning process, taking ownership of both content and language development. Teachers, meanwhile, embraced their evolving roles as facilitators and guides, creating a more dynamic and interactive classroom environment.

While the study achieved positive results, it also revealed challenges such as the need for ongoing teacher training and the difficulty of balancing content and language objectives. Nonetheless, the overall success of the experiment suggests that CLIL holds great promise for enhancing both vocational education and language proficiency in polytechnic institutions in Kerala. Future studies should focus on addressing these challenges and exploring long-term impacts on student outcomes.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None

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None

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