(3)CONTENT LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING: THE CORE PRINCIPLE OF THE LATEST ECUADORIAN EFL CURRICULUM

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Abstract

Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) appeared around the 1990's in Europe and it has been expanded throughout the world. These days it is used in several educational contexts and it has been incorporated into the latest Ecuadorian EFL Curriculum as one of its core principles. Thus this article discusses the background of CLIL, as well as it examines its core features and benefits in the language classroom. It also discusses the four main components of CLIL – Content, Communication, Cognition and Culture – as CLIL lessons need to consist of activities based on these 4Cs. It will be emphasized that Communication is divided into three subcomponents. This work then analyzes the four major steps that need to be taken into account when designing and delivering effective CLIL lessons.

Key words: Curriculum; Methodology; EFL; CLIL; Components; Communication

Introduction:

Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) appeared around the 1990's in Europe and it has been expanded throughout the world. These days, it is used in several educational contexts and it has been incorporated into the latest Ecuadorian EFL Curriculum as one of its core principles. The other principles included in this curriculum are the Communicative Language Teaching, Thinking Skills, International Standards (e.g. CEFR), and Learner-centered Approach. Thus this article focuses solely on CLIL, as it is the major, guiding methodological approach for the teaching of English as a foreign language, both at primary and secondary English classroom settings throughout Ecuador.

There are critical aspects and a lot of theory behind CLIL that novice and even experienced teachers need to know before they embark on the task of designing and implementing lessons based upon CLIL. Specifically, this article examines the background, core features, and benefits of CLIL in the language classroom. In addition, the four components of CLIL – Content, Communication, Cognition and Culture – will be analyzed. It is crucial to learn about the 4Cs, since CLIL lessons need to consist of activities based on these 4Cs. Among the 4Cs, Communication has a major role as it entails three ways that need to be carefully taken into account when planning CLIL lessons. This work then deals with four major steps that need to be considered when engaging students in lessons based on CLIL.

Development

Although the term CLIL came into existence only recently during the early 1990s, it is not new in the field of education, especially in ESL language education. That is, prior to 1970, the need to design programs that integrate language and content was a common phenomenon for various geographic, demographic and economic reasons. The aim of this type of instruction was to provide children with bilingual education and to enable them to acquire language skills for authentic communication and understanding with the natives from specific linguistic regions, such as national borders or big cities (Hanesová, 2015).

In 1994, the acronym CLIL was coined by David Marsh, a member of a team working in the area of multilingualism and bilingual education at a Finnish University (Marsh, Maljers & Hartiala, 2001). Marsh based the concept of CLIL on the experience of

Canadian immersion and British LAC programs. The original concept of CLIL was used to designate instructing students through a foreign language. According to Marsh (2012), in 1994 the launch of CLIL in Europe involved both political and educational reasons; therefore, "the political driver was based on a vision that mobility across the European Union required higher levels of language competence. The educational driver . . . was to design and otherwise adapt existing language teaching approaches so as to provide a wide range of students with higher levels of competence" (p. 1).

During the 1990s, CLIL became the most widely used term for the integration of content and language education in Europe. In 2005, Marsh suggested CLIL to be "a general 'umbrella' term to refer to diverse methodologies which lead to dual focused education where attention is given to both topic and language of instruction" (Kovács, 2014, p. 48-49).

In addition to understanding how CLIL evolved, it is important to know about its core features, and these are as follows: multiple focus approach, safe and enriching learning environment, authenticity, active learning, scaffolding, and cooperation. By learning about these features, we will obtain a more complete picture of what CLIL is all about. According to Lesca (2012), *multiple focus approach* refers to a high degree of integration that needs to occur between language and content classes as well as among different subjects. *Safe and enriching learning environment* involves the notion that effective teachers should encourage their students to experiment with language and content at the same time. This can be possible for students as they access to authentic materials and learning environments in a guided manner. *Authenticity* is concerned with making connections between in-class learning and students' lives; this should take place on a regular basis as well as additional connections should be made with other speakers of the CLIL language. Moreover, it should frequently be employed current materials from media or other authentic sources. *Active learning* entails making students have a major role in CLIL lessons, that is, class activities should be based on a peer cooperative work/learning. Additionally, students need to be prompted to engage in communication as often as possible, whereas teachers are expected to be guiders and facilitators. *Scaffolding* is concerned with providing students with support for their language needs. It also involves building on students' existing knowledge and meeting their different learning

styles. *Cooperation* lies in the notion that a high level of cooperation is suggested at school when teachers plan their lessons and this cooperation should involve parents and the community as well.

Among the many important benefits that CLIL has the following ones stand out: Learners are more successful and more motivated than those in traditional content classrooms. Learners look at content from a different and broader perspective when it is taught in another language (Multi-perspectivity) (Wolff, 2004). Learners develop more accurate academic concepts when another language is involved (Lamsfuss-Schenk, 2002).

CLIL has four main components that make up a framework that can be used for lesson and material planning. This is a 4Cs framework, which is comprised of Content, Communication, Cognition and Culture and it "offers a sound theoretical and methodological foundation for planning CLIL lessons" (Perez & Ramiro, 2010, p. 3). In order to come up with a successful CLIL lesson, all the 4Cs need to be included and combined. As stated by Coyle (2005), *Content* entails subject matter (e.g. themes and topics), development of skills, creation of understanding and acquisition of knowledge. Gondová (2013) pointed out that content should be connected with everyday life. As a result of a meaningful connection between content and everyday life, pupils should learn not through theory but by means of practice that is reinforced by theory (Pokrivčáková, 2013). Within CLIL, *Communication* lies in the notion that learning of a language is supported by communication, as it serves as a tool for communication; therefore, language should receive the greatest emphasis. Thus activities that promote student-student, student-group, group-group communication should be implemented in the classroom. In order to make this happen, appropriate scaffolding needs to be at the center of the teaching-learning process. *Cognition* involves higher-order thinking skills, which means that cognition within CLIL does not consist of transferring information from teachers to students nor memorizing information. On the contrary, CLIL cognition entails higher order thinking and leads learners to develop their own ways of understanding language and content (Coyle, 2005). The *Culture* component helps students to better understand themselves and to broaden their understanding about other cultures. In order to do so, it is recommendable to have students work with authentic materials. Cultural differences

help students to select suitable language for a better interaction during different culture-related situations.

When attempting to plan effective CLIL lessons, Culture and Content, they are being considered *"Step 1".* It may seem obvious, but language practice shows that a majority of novice CLIL teachers spend most of their time searching or trying to find good materials from different sources without having a clear idea of what is their main goal to teach. Write ideas on a paper before beginning to search will be helpful. Make sure of what you want to include in your plan from the topic you have selected for your CLIL classes.

Material Research, it is being considered *"Step 2",* English books and internet resources that will be able to provide the appropriate material according to the learners' level and profile.

Cognition, it is being consider *"Step 3",* propose critical thinking activities using Bloom's Taxonomy that have different levels of understanding and challenge learners to take part in different thinking levels. Proposing different kinds of tasks is usually a source of engagement for learners and promotes a student centered approach to our teaching.

Communication, it is being consider *"Step 4",* so here it is key to analyze the language to be used to provide proper scaffolding. Once the content is clear and the tasks have been chosen, it is vital to adapt all the materials to the language level of our students.

Communication within CLIL is also concerned with the notion that language serves as a learning tool, which operates in three ways or subcomponents: OF – FOR – THROUG, according to The Language Triptych, proposed by Coyle in 2002.

a. language of learning, that is, the learning of key words and phrases to access content,

b. language for learning focusing on the language students will need to carry out classroom tasks such as explaining, and

c. language through learning to make room for unpredictable language learning that may arise as the lesson unfolds.

CLIL models are diverse, making them flexible enough to be context-specific and complementary to a range of teaching methodologies, but they do share favorable characteristics of constructivist approaches and communicative language teaching (CLT). These characteristics include some strategies such as: learner-centered class, text-based

learning (books), task-based learning (TBL), the necessity to create different kinds of activities to encourage the use of English language for different purposes, high levels of interaction among teachers and learners and learners themselves (cooperative and collaborative work), intensive language input, teacher modeling and scaffolding, teacher enthusiasm, and teacher and learner motivation (Coyle, 2007; ÇekreziBiçaku, 2011; Kilmova, 2012).

It takes a lot of time to produce meaningful lesson plans for each class session in order for teachers to provide learners with effective CLIL classroom instruction. In this regard, Mehisto (2012) provides criteria that are broken down into these 10 fundamental focus areas and they can be used as further support when designing lessons: 1) Make progress visible; 2) Promoting academic language proficiency; 3) Encouragement of learner's autonomy and learning skills; 4) (Alternative/ Authentic) Assessment; 5) Creation of a safe learning environment; 6) Cooperative learning; 7) Authenticity; 8) Fostering critical thinking; 9) Scaffolding; 10) Meaningful learning.

An effective lesson plan involves understanding of more than just what is going to be taught – the objectives and how the lesson will be taught – materials, equipment, and activities, it also entails sequencing, pacing, difficulty, responding to individual differences, monitoring learner versus teacher talk and timing.

Conclusions:

The Minister of Education of Ecuador adopted CLIL as one of the core principle of the 2016-2017 Ecuadorian EFL Curriculum. Thus the 4 Cs framework is expected to be used as the main framework to implement the EFL Curriculum into primary and secondary schools and it unites learning theories, language learning theories and intercultural understanding.

CLIL assumes that subject teachers are able to apply methodologies, design strategies, create activities and exploit materials, giving them opportunities to draw on the communicative approach for English language learners.

By carrying out the suggested framework, learners will have the chance to develop their linguistic and cognitive skills when they build up and explain their experiences, ideas, tasks, and so on.

Due to the lack of CLIL course books, training or a specific methodology in Pre-School and Primary Education, teachers need to produce their own materials in order to make them truly CLIL context responsive.

As CLIL has become the model of the learning process in EFL primary and secondary Ecuadorian schools, teachers have to be aware of the resources and materials that they can use to design their classes. A wide range of training courses have to be given to teachers, so they can implement CLIL into their classrooms successfully.

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