

A Study of CLIL Activities in Japan II : In Search of Practical Effects in Middle Schools

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to detect how CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) activities work in Japanese school settings, especially in middle schools. The participants were the second-year students (age 13 to 14) of a middle school in Tokyo, Japan. They were divided into an experimental group and a control group. The participants of the experimental group were regularly given eight reading materials based on CLIL for six months, while the participants of the other group were given two of the materials irregularly. The reading materials were related to what the participants had already learned in other subjects: science, math, history, art, and so on. The materials were also prepared according to the syllabus of the school so that the participants could make use of their background knowledge easily. The answers of their comprehension checks and questionnaires were analyzed statistically. This research is the sequel to the previous one.

Keywords

autonomous learning, content, cognition, community, communication

1 Introduction

In EFL classrooms, many learners are struggling with learning English, and also many teachers are struggling with teaching English. In EFL settings, it is difficult for learners to have opportunities to use English in their daily life. In the settings, classrooms should be ideal places where they can use English as much as possible.

In order to detect some clues to and make suggestions for better teaching English to learners in EFL settings, this paper, in the perspective of the use of knowledge of their background, attempts to analyze the questionnaires and the interviews for the learners, focusing on CLIL aspects: content, communication, cognition, community. By using reading materials based on the syllabus of the school, this study investigates how the participants understand and find clues to unfamiliar words or

expressions making use of their background knowledge already they learned in other subjects: science, math, history, art, and so on. It is expected that significant awareness — when and how learners have their eyes opened to autonomous learning — would be suggested for better teaching.

2 Method

2.1 Participants

The participants were 37 second year students (age 13 to 14) in a middle school in Tokyo. According to the result of a nationwide proficiency test, they were seen as average students. Some students who had some special background were erased from the participant list in advance. For example, the students whose parent was a native speaker of English or who had stayed in a country where English is spoken more than a year.

2.2 Materials

The reading materials used in this survey were based on science, math, history, home economics, and Japanese. For example, one of the topics of the science materials was ‘how are clouds formed’, and that of the math materials was ‘parallelogram and trapezoid’. All of the topics were already introduced to the participants in each subject. The reading materials consisted of 100 to 120 words, and authentic materials were selected.

2.3 Procedure

This survey was conducted in a second year English class from September to February in 2013 and 2014. The participants read the reading materials after they had learned the topics in each subject based on their syllabus. After reading materials they answered the questions focusing on language forms, contents, and cognition. They were allowed to discuss with classmates to find out the answers. The answers were categorized into four groups: content, communication, cognition, community. The four factors are based on CLIL concept, and they are significant contributors. The data for

each factor was divided into two aspects: positive or negative.

3 Results

The result of control group already indicated that in the questions for language forms, more than 50% of the participants did not show their interest in language learning. They did not try to solve the problems positively by themselves. However, 90% of them answered that they understood the content of the reading materials, and they were able to infer unfamiliar words using their background knowledge and rather enjoy reading than ever. Also, the result showed that all of the participants in the control group had no chance to use English outside of the classroom. It means they have no place to use English in their daily life except for school. This result is related to cognition. However, in fact, 80% of them seemed to be interested in foreign cultures, sports, and music. They appeared to have a desire to get information of foreign events in English, but they did not have enough amount of input to do it. From the result, at the moment, it is clear that a selection of the reading materials which meet their interest is a significant factor for community. The eventual outcome including the result of the participants in the experimental group is going to be reported.

4 Conclusion

This research is imperfect at the moment and needs more detailed analysis. However, according to their comments, more than 60% of the participants in the control group mentioned that they wanted to talk with native speakers of English freely on business or trips. The result shows that they have a dream to be able to use English freely in the future. They are now on the middle way of learning English, and, especially, they are now in the input period. They are struggling with learning English. They might be irritated, because there are some walls that they cannot go over. In order to make their dream come true, teachers always need to choose well-thought materials and pay attention to what their students have learned or are interested in. CLIL offers some of the useful activities for the practical teaching and learning.

The purpose of learning foreign language is to learn not only language use but also the way of communication with people in foreign countries. For the learners who are not interested in learning foreign languages, it is important to have a new viewpoint to enjoy studying foreign languages. The use of CLIL based on authentic resources in class would help them find another new entrance to learning foreign languages.

5 References

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