

An examination into how CLIL can contribute to a young child's heritage language and cultural identity: A case study of a Japanese language school for Anglo-Japanese children in the UK

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Abstract

CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) is an innovative language education approach to language teaching and learning which borrows from sociocultural theory. This study examines an UK school run by volunteers that teaches the Japanese language through immersion and cultural education to bicultural bilingual children born to English and Japanese parents. The education principles and objectives the school adopts reflect the dual focus of CLIL whereby the foreign language is employed for the learning and teaching of both content and language. Using data from teacher interviews, class observations and discussions with the pupils themselves, the CLIL approach of teaching culture and cultural customs through the medium of the child's heritage language was examined in both how the children's Japanese language improved and how it reinforced their sense of identity as being Anglo-Japanese. Data showed that these young children grow-up confident, positive and proud of their double identities and heritage language.

CLIL, it is argued can be an effective pedagogy for the teaching and learning of heritage languages as well as in shaping cultural affiliation and identity.

Keywords

CLIL, Japanese, Heritage language, Bilingualism, Bicultural children

1. Introduction

CLIL (Content, Language and Integrated Learning) has been widely implemented in educational systems in Europe since the mid-1990s based on its multilingual education policy. CLIL is a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is

used for the learning and teaching of both content and language. Marsh (2012) states that the motivation behind CLIL was based on the bilingual initiatives established in Canada and the aim was to design and adapt the then current language teaching methodology so that it would reach a wide range of students and provide them with a higher level of competence in foreign languages.

In the EU context CLIL has been implemented as a tool to enhance multilingualism and intercultural understanding of its citizens who are consistently in flux and mobility. Foreign language education can be a stepping stone to not only learning a language but also the culture that the language stems from. The CLIL approach can therefore be the ideal platform to foster intercultural learning and understanding.

This study examines an immersion school run by volunteers that teaches the Japanese language through immersion and cultural education to bicultural bilingual children born to English and Japanese parents. The education principles and objectives the school adopts reflect the dual focus of CLIL whereby the foreign language is employed for the learning and teaching of both content and language. The main aim of this particular research was to examine how CLIL can contribute to a young child's heritage language proficiency, intercultural learning and cultural identity of being Anglo-Japanese children in the UK.

Uriu & Douglas (2017) show how the adoption of CLIL can have positive affects for heritage language learners of Japanese in the USA. However this research is still relatively new and there remain many areas untouched especially within mixed heritage language learners who reside in the UK.

Charalampidi & Hammond (2017) suggest that although bilingual educational programmes and CLIL in the UK have attracted interest, in general there has been little work undertaken involving other foreign languages, especially as far as community/heritage languages are concerned. This research aims to address that gap.

3. The data

This study is based on data taken from a Japanese language supplementary school based in the UK that has a strict Japanese only policy. Through this focus on Japanese immersion they aim to teach both cultural education and the Japanese language to mixed race children born to a Japanese and UK born parent. The classes and cultural events at the school are held twice a month and all teachers and organizers are volunteers. The school has its own website and attracts many within the local community and from those further afield who make long car journeys to attend the school.

The education principles and objectives the school adopts reflect the dual focus of CLIL whereby the foreign language, Japanese, is employed for the learning and teaching of both content and the language itself. Textbooks based on the Japanese language curriculum in Japan are used and the classes and cultural events at the school are also part of the curriculum.

Data was obtained from teacher interviews that examined teaching philosophy, teacher class objectives and how teachers combine content and language teaching within their classes. Interviews were also conducted with the Japanese and UK born parents. Interviews focused on parent perception of their child's heritage language acquisition, their identity and how the school contributes to the growth of these two important factors that can shape the development of their child's bilingualism and bicultural image. In depth interviews were also conducted with the children themselves. The children were all UK born and their ages ranged from elementary to secondary school level and 17 children in total were interviewed.

4. Results

Results showed that parents were satisfied with how the school reinforced the identity of their children as being Anglo-Japanese and spoke of how their children were very proud of their cultural heritage. Although the classes are only

conducted twice a month they suggested that being with other children who are also bicultural allowed them to share their experiences and stories of being Anglo-Japanese within their own communities and reinforced their sense of being special and different to other British born children.

The children talked of how they feel different and how the school teaches them more about their cultural heritage. The children stated that although they find Japanese difficult, especially reading and writing, they are proud of the fact that they can speak a language that the general public within the UK can't speak.

5. Conclusions

These findings suggest that the positive linguistic and cultural outcomes the children gained can be used as evidence for the potential of CLIL in supplementary schools not just in the UK but also in Japan as an effective pedagogy for the teaching and learning of heritage languages.

References

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