

Practice and Possibilities of CLIL in Junior High Schools in Japan: An Investigation of Self-Assessment in Cross-Curricular Learning

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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 them at random for the same term. 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 organized 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, and the result indicated that the learners of the experimental group were able to enjoy learning English referring to their background knowledge they had.

Keywords

CLIL, self-assessment, cross-curricular learning, autonomous learning, individual-reading,

1 Introduction

In EFL classrooms, many learners are struggling with learning English, and also many teachers are struggling with teaching English. Under EFL settings, it is unusual for learners, especially Japanese learners living in an mono-language nation, to experience opportunities to use English in their daily life. In EFL settings, classrooms should be a place 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 self-assessments of 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 they already 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. As an interim report of the whole research, this paper shows the statistic result between the experimental group and control group.

2 Method

2.1 Participants

The participants were the second year students (age 13 to 14) in a private junior high school in Tokyo, Japan: 27 students in the experimental group and 36 in the control group. As for their ability, according to the result of a nationwide proficiency test, they seem to be among almost same levels. Some students who had special background were removed from the participant list in advance. For example, the students whose parent was a native speaker of English or who had stayed abroad more than a year.

2.2 Materials

The reading materials used in this survey were based on science, math, history, Japanese, and home-economics. For example, the topic of the science material was ‘how are clouds formed’, and that of the math material was ‘parallelogram and trapezoid’. Both topics were already introduced to the participants in each subject lesson. The reading materials consisted of 80 to 120 words, and authentic materials were selected.

2.3 Procedure

This survey was conducted from October to March of the school year in 2013 and 2014. The participants read the reading materials on each subject based on their syllabus. After reading materials they answered the questions focusing on language forms, contents, and cognition. 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

As for the aspect of language forms, more than 50% of the participants did not show their interest in language learning. They tend not 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 shows that they tend not to use English outside of the classroom. They do not try to use it; on the other word, they have no chance to use English in their daily life except for schools. This result is related to cognition. However, in fact, 80% of them seem to be interested in foreign cultures, sports, and music. They seem to have a desire to get information of foreign events in English, but they do not have enough amount of input to do it. Selection of the reading materials which meet their interest is a significant factor for community.

4 Conclusion

Among their comments, more than 60% of them 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 seriously 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 language, in this study English, it is important to have a new viewpoint to enjoy

studying a foreign language. The use of CLIL based on authentic resources in class would help them find another new entrance to learning foreign language.

5 References

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