

【実践報告】

Pilot Study: Applying the Hard CLIL Approach to an Educational Counseling Class in a Japanese University

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Abstract: In Japan, students study English as a compulsory and elective foreign language course for several years, but near in the future, English will be a subject from the 3rd grade. Educators are pursuing more effective ways of teaching English in the Japanese education system. The purpose of this paper is to identify how the *hard* CLIL approach in a Japanese university affect both the students and instructors. The instructors did one-time team teaching for the students taking an “Educational counseling” class. This class is compulsory for students who want to earn a teaching certificate. Although the amount of collected data was limited, both the advantages and difficulties of applying CLIL in the classroom are clarified.

Key words: content and language integrated learning (CLIL); *hard* CLIL;
soft CLIL; Japanese students; English language teaching

Introduction

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) emphasized the importance of language education by citing the need for “improving Japan’s global competitiveness and enhancing the ties between nations” (2017). The government wants students to be more active and enthusiastic, emphasizing the need for active learning. The MEXT (2014) indicated that students should be able “to reason, make decisions or express oneself in order to solve problems by oneself.”

So, the decision was made for elementary students in Japan to begin their English education starting in the 5th and 6th grade on a national level. It was considered as an “International Understandings Studies” activity (not a subject) so students would not earn grades. However, starting from 2020, English will be a subject from the 3rd grade, with more

focus on output activities (Wilkinson, 2015). Thus, it is essential for primary and secondary school teachers to be aware of this transformation.

In Japan, students usually study English as a compulsory and/or elective foreign language course for three years in junior high school and another three years in high school. However, according to the Education First EF English Proficiency Index, the data indicates that Japan ranked 49th place out of 88 non-majority native English-speaking countries, placing in the *low proficiency* category. Compared to other Asian countries, Japan ranked 11th out of 21 countries. This result is getting worse every year. In fact, it was ranked 37th out of 80 countries, and 9th in Asia the previous year (2018).

CLIL

CLIL is a relatively new teaching approach within the field of second language education. It was first described in the 1990s in Europe, where there has been a political push to improve language learning for its citizens. This is called “MT + 2” (mother tongue plus two languages) (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010, p.155). Students learn both content and language. For instance, students would learn subjects like science in another language. This is a “dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language” (Coyle et al., 2010, p.1). This approach allows learners a different learning experience compared with other foreign language learning settings. Because “thinking and learning skills are integrated,” Bentley pointed out that this experience increases learners’ confidence and allows them to develop skills to communicate with others in both their target language and first language (Bentley, 2010, Unit 1, location 104).

Other researchers identified various examples of CLIL’s potential as cited in Barbero and Gonzalez:

- Learners benefit from higher quality teaching and from input that is meaningful and understandable.
- CLIL may strengthen learners’ ability to process input, which prepares them for higher level thinking skills, and enhances cognitive development.
- In CLIL, the learners’ affective filter may be lower than in other situations, for learning takes place in a relatively anxiety-free environment.
- Learners’ motivation to learn content through the FL may foster and sustain motivation towards learning the FL itself (2014).

Although Japanese university students study English for at least six years, most of their time is focused on learning grammar and lexical items explained in Japanese. Furthermore, students had few opportunities to produce output. Learners may experience low English input and output which reduced the opportunities to practice communication. In a CLIL program, communication “goes beyond the grammar system, but at the same time does not reject the essential role of grammar and lexis in language learning” (Coyle et al., 2010, p.54).

Hard CLIL

When subject teachers teach content in English, it is called the *hard* CLIL approach. In Europe, it is typical that “academic subjects are taught in English by non-native content teachers” (Ikeda, 2013). It sounds ideal, but it is unrealistic in Japan since subject teachers usually do not have sufficient linguistic training and teaching materials are not adequate (Yoshihara, Takizawa, and Oyama, 2015). One way to overcome this problem includes coordinating between the language and content instructors. However, as cited in Brown, it may be common that these instructors do not communicate enough (2015). In his writing, McDougald (2016) pointed out that English teachers and content teachers may feel they are “invading” each other’s teaching territory.

The purpose of this paper was to conduct a pilot study for the third-year students in a Japanese university who are enrolled in a teacher training course, and to explore participants’ perceptions of the *hard* CLIL approach.

Pilot study: *Hard* CLIL approach to a group of junior students in Japan

The project was team teaching: the content teacher taught the class in English, and the language teacher supported the language aspect. The instructors did not use Japanese for the whole class period. The class title was “Educational Counseling” and the students met once a week for 90 minutes during the spring semester in 2018 academic year. This class was for students who are taking a teacher training course. The content instructor is Japanese who earned a Master’s Degree in Counseling Studies from the United States. The class consisted of 30 undergraduate junior students majoring in English communication and Japanese literature. English skills ranged from low to high intermediate. This class was compulsory for students who want to earn a teaching certificate. It was a one-time pilot study, and the material was prepared by the instructor and handed to the students a week

before the trial date. Students were asked to go over the material and check for unknown vocabulary for the class. Most of the content was review items from that course and previous courses, and the purpose was to go over them again in English. During the study, students were required to work in groups of three or four. Students did some collaborative activities in English.

Data Collection and Results

To investigate the participants' perceptions of this pilot study, 15 item questionnaires and one open-ended questionnaire were asked. A simple online Likert questionnaire, written in Japanese, was given to the students after the class. Students were asked to mark a – strongly agree, b – agree, c – neutral, d – disagree, or e – strongly disagree. Then, students were asked to express some comments, identify benefits and difficulties at the end. Among 30 students, only 11 of them replied to the survey (See table 1).

Table 1 *After-class Questionnaire Results of students' reflection (n=11)*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1 I have enjoyed the class.	3	2	3	1	2
2 The content and activities positively affected on my motivation to study English.	4	1	2	2	2
3 The content was interesting.	1	4	3	1	2
4 I like to learn English.	3	3	3	1	1
5 I have understood the instructors' English.	2	2	2	1	4
6 The amount of English usage by the instructors was appropriate.	3	4	0	3	1
7 The amount of Japanese usage by the instructors was appropriate.	3	3	1	1	3
8 The English difficulty was appropriate.	0	0	4	5	2
9 I have felt that this lesson focused on content rather than English.	0	4	2	5	0
10 I have felt that this lesson focused on English rather than content.	1	6	3	1	0

11 I have enjoyed a pair work / group work.	3	2	2	1	3
12 I like studying specialized course.	4	5	1	1	0
13 I have an interest in studying specialized course in English.	0	3	3	2	3
14 If I study specialized course in English, my English ability will be increased.	1	4	0	4	2
15 I would like to take a class in English again.	1	2	2	3	3

Students expressed their positive and negative ideas, and those were organized in the table (See table 2). From the survey, it is evident that there were mixed feelings. Some students had positive attitudes while others had negative ones.

Table 2 *After class students' comments over the pilot study*

Positive ideas	Negative ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was enjoyable, but there were several things that I could not understand. • I am impressed to the content instructor's English ability. • It was pretty new to us and it was unique. • It was really enjoyable. • I was surprised! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I did not want to experience this kind of class right before the finals. • It was difficult. • I do not understand why we did this pilot-study. I understand that learning content in English may positively affect our English ability. But I do not understand why this class. Also, I did not understand instructors' English, so the whole 90 minutes were difficult. • I am not an English major student. So, I do not understand why we did this.

After the lecture, the instructors went over their own work. Both instructors emphasized that preparation was not sufficient. When the content teacher prepared for this lecture, he spent more time than usual, yet he did not have enough time to verify some important vocabulary and phrases. Although the language teacher had opportunities to check the content material, the two instructors could not spend enough time together to review the lesson plan. Thus, it was challenging for the language teacher to support the content teacher during the class. Although it was a team teaching, both teachers agreed that the support by the language teacher was not effective.

Discussion

Unfortunately, only 11 students completed the online survey. A possible reason for that was because of the data-collecting method. Students were asked to complete the online survey outside of class, so many of them did not access the survey. To avoid this outcome, the survey should be completed right after the class in the classroom. Although the number of collected results was small, their comments identified some significant ideas.

From the data, 5 students enjoyed the class and they were motivated towards learning English. However, 5 students could not understand the instructors' English and 7 felt that the English level was too challenging. This could be a problem in a *hard* CLIL setting since individuals should be familiar with fundamental words in order to study content. This type of language is defined as "Language *of* learning" (Coyle et al., 2017, p.37). It is mainly focused on providing the basic concepts and skills related to a particular topic. Since the content can vary, students need to learn the fundamental vocabulary or terminology (Coyle et al., 2010, p.37). Thus, language *of* learning is necessary for students to understand the content itself.

This leads to an interesting finding. It was a pilot study of *hard* CLIL, yet more students thought the class focused on English rather than content. This type of CLIL is called *soft* CLIL (Ikeda, 2013). When the main focus is to learn English, usually the language teacher teaches English by integrating content into his or her classes. It is "a type of content and language integrated instruction taught by trained CLIL language teachers to help learners develop their target language competency as a primary aim and their subject/theme/topic knowledge as secondary aim" (Ikeda, 2013). Thus, when language instructors teach their classes, they are sensitive to the language-learning demands from students and are willing to provide support. Then, both language related and content related outcomes are in their mind (Brown, 2015).

From the survey, more students enjoyed studying their specialized course lessons. But because of their English ability, most participants might have felt the pilot study was just an English class rather than a time to study specialized content. That could explain why more students think the CLIL approach would not positively affect their English abilities and why they do not want to take a *hard* CLIL type class again. As cited in Brown (2015), researchers pointed out that "lower proficiency students tend to consider the CLIL class as either a language class or a content class." Then, as Jimenez and et al. mentioned,

“students experience difficulties when studying content in a different language from their mother tongue, but far from being a disadvantage, this challenge also may drive them to higher involvement in their learning process, so that they embrace the contents better and more fully” (2014). Needless to say, a number of students could not experience this kind of advantage during the pilot study.

To overcome this problem, students should have more opportunities to take English classes. Non-English major students in the experiment class were not taking English class. However, it leads to another problem that most students in Japanese universities usually have fewer opportunities to choose their classes. In other words, they have to choose a class almost by default to meet requirements for graduation. Thus, it was logical to see students comments like *“I do not understand why we did this pilot-study. I understand that learning content in English may positively affect our English ability. But I do not understand why this class...”* and *“I am not an English major student. So, I do not understand why we did this.”*

On the other hand, there were several positive comments. From those comments it could be fair to infer that those students seemed to have a sense of the potential benefits of CLIL approach class. Some students like and want to study English. Also, they enjoyed the CLIL approach class. Further studies should include identifying consequences about non-English major students taking a *soft* CLIL class, and a longitudinal study on *hard* CLIL approached class.

Other Considerations

During the experiment, *scaffolding* was not sufficient. One instructor’s task is to make sure that students understand the directions and explanations given and that they know how to express their thoughts related to the content. Students should communicate with others thorough pair work, group work, chatting, debating, and so on. Thus, students should know how to ask questions, express their thoughts, and expand the conversation. Instructors and students should carefully focus on how to use those functional language skills for quality learning. The content instructor’s comments reflected that students should have practiced some basic classroom English prior to this pilot study. Thus, it is obvious that instructors need to consider possible linguistic difficulties students may face. Halback emphasized that instructors need “to develop the appropriate language awareness and planning skills that allow them to foresee students’ possible language needs and provide

the necessary language input to deal with them” (2014). It was the language teacher’s task to rephrase more to support the students and the content teacher. Then, the instructors could demonstrate speaking activities using model texts and provide constructive feedback.

Unfortunately, the instructors could only meet twice prior to the lesson, so the coordination between content and language teachers was not sufficient. As mentioned earlier, students’ possible language needs should be predicted although it is impossible to identify all of them. It was obvious that the instructors should find better ways to coordinate at the planning stage.

Conclusion

Most students in Japan have had at least 6 years of English education, but in the future, English will be required when children begin 3rd grade. A student who aims to become a teacher is now required to have a higher English ability. Thus, it is beneficial to experience various types of English learning approaches. One of the purposes of this pilot study was to identify how the *hard* CLIL approach affects the learners. Unfortunately, the amount of data was not enough. Obviously, this is the greatest limitation of the study. However, there were some important findings. Since most students were non-English major students, some of them thought that this pilot study was a language-focused class, rather than a content-focused class. Other participants expressed their positive feeling and showed that they may want to take a CLIL-focused class again.

Another purpose of the study was to identify the instructors’ perception. For this one-time pilot study, the content instructor spent more time on preparing for class than usual. It indicates that the content teacher may experience more workload if he needs to teach a full semester in a CLIL approach. The language instructor felt the importance of preparation since it was a team-teaching study. However, the amount of preparation time was not sufficient. Thus, it may be challenging to conduct a semester-long team-teaching course.

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