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Challenges in Implementation of Content Integrated Language Instruction at Elementary School Level

Manisha Kumari

Research Scholar, Department of Teacher Education, Central University of South Bihar, Gaya, Bihar, India. Email- Email- maneisha.sharma@gmail.com

Mitanjali Sahoo

Assistant Professor, Department of Teacher Education, Central University of South Bihar, Gaya, Bihar, India. E-mail: drmitanjali1976@gmail.com

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Corresponding Author: Mitanjali Sahoo, E-mail: drmitanjali1976@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) or Content Integrated Language Instruction (CILI) is an integrated pedagogical approach which gives attention to both content and language learning. Like every pedagogical approach, this approach too has its share of challenges in practical application and best practices. This research paper aims to identify the challenges of implementing Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) or Content Integrated Language Instruction (CILI) in the Indian context through qualitative study. 64 learners of grade VIII of a government school of West Bengal and 12 teachers were selected purposefully for the study. Through classroom observation, informal conversation and interview, it was found out that there were many challenges in its ideal implementation. But through proper training and awareness, these challenges can be easily overcome because CLIL is highly flexible in nature and can be adapted to use in any kind of educational system.

Keywords: CLIL implementation, Indian context, challenges, large classroom size.

INTRODUCTION

Content and Language Integrated Learning or Content Integrated Language Instruction is a dual focused language teaching approach. It is integrative in nature where both language and content are taught through collaborative activities. This pedagogical approach is mainly used for teaching second, foreign or any other language. This approach is an umbrella term which covers more than a dozen of educational approaches like Content based language Instructions, bilingual education, Immersion Program and Content Integrated Language Instruction etc. (Mehisto, Marsh and Frigols, 2010). Pablo and Gandara (2020) state that the term Content and Language Integrated Learning is often used to refer to various language teaching which are based on the concept or idea of Content

Based Instruction (CBI) or Content Integrated Language Instruction. In this research paper the terms Content Integrated Language Instruction (CILI) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) are used interchangeably.

The genesis or origin of CLIL practice is interestingly quite old though it was in the year 1994 when this expression was thought of in Europe (Mehisto et al., 2008). This innovative educational approach was adopted by the Europeans Union in order to create bilingual and multilingual citizens who would contribute to the ever-changing global economic system and improve the relations and cooperation among European nations (Griffiths, 2019). When it comes to defining CLIL, there are not one but many scholarly definitions. Like Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010), define it as an integrated educational approach where an additional language is used for teaching, learning of both content and language. Both the content and language are interwoven.

The CLIL approach is successfully being implemented in European, American and even Asian countries. Asian countries like Singapore, Malaysia, China, Japan and Taiwan are enthusiastically implementing this dual focused educational approach and have contributed to research in this area. Hu (2021), talks about the interest of Chinese academician in the CLIL implementation and research. Darvin, Lo, & Lin (2020), put forth that the CLIL approach has successfully spread its wings in Asia, Latin America and other countries where English is a language widely spoken and used in socio-economic context. But unlike other South Asian countries where CLIL is being implemented in classrooms and is a focus of research in the area of language teaching and learning, its implementation and research in the Indian context is very limited. Very few research literature (like Anuradha & Viswanathan, 2019; Justine & Ramganesh, 2013; Sunil, 2018; Kothuri, 2019; Lal & George, 2021) regarding the theory and practice of CLIL is available in the Indian context. All these researchers have talked about the viability and scope of CLIL in Indian classrooms. Sunil (2018), experimented CLIL on speaking skill of secondary students and found out that it is highly beneficial. Lal & George (2021) have discussed about the scope of CLIL in India and have found that it can be implemented here easily by following the basic principles. CLIL@India, a three years project, was launched in the year 2016. Four universities from India and three from Europe co-funded by Erasmus+ programme of the European Union came together to study the effect of CLIL in the Indian context. The study concluded in the year 2019. The main objective of the study was to boost and preserve the multilingual nature of India. However, there is no empirical data available regarding the benefits of this project. Chaudhary (2017), points out in her research that there is a lack of awareness regarding the concept and implementation of CLIL among school teachers in the state of West Bengal. Therefore, it is quite evident that CLIL as a language teaching approach is still unexplored both in terms of practice and implementation. Though there is literature regarding the scope of implementation of CLIL in India, but the real experiences of classroom implementation of CLIL remains unexplored in the Indian context. So, this research paper aims to explore and identify the challenges that teachers would face in the real classroom situation in India. The paper would also focus on finding the strategies that would help in overcoming the challenges.

Research Questions

This research paper poses the following research questions –

1. What are the challenges of CLIL implementation in the Indian classroom?
2. What are some of the strategies to overcome the challenges related to CLIL implementation?

METHODOLOGY

This research paper follows the qualitative research methodology. Survey based research design has been followed to get an understanding regarding the problems faced by the teachers during CLIL implementation in the classroom. Qualitative research gave the scope to understand the nature of problems faced by the learners as well as by the teachers in the implementation of CLIL approach in the Indian context. Since, this study is centered around CLIL classroom teaching-learning practices,

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teaching material was prepared very carefully following the principles of CLIL material preparation. The content and language were integrated together to meet the content and language learning goals. The content was based on Social Science curriculum of West Bengal Board of Secondary Education. A total of 4 (four) chapters comprising of fourteen (14) lesson plans were taught to the learners in twenty- two (22) classes. Detailed lesson plans consisting of collaborative activities were prepared to transact each lesson through the CLIL approach. Classroom observation, informal interview, and video recording was used to study the learners' attitude and the challenges of CLIL implementation in class, then survey and interview method was used to study the attitude and awareness of teachers regarding implementation of CLIL approach in classrooms.

Sample and Sampling Technique:

The participants of the study consisted of 64 grade eight (VIII) learners studying in a government Hindi medium school located in Rishra, West Bengal, India. One section of grade eight (VIII) was taken intact in order to maintain the homogeneity of the samples. In order to understand the attitude and awareness of teachers regarding CLIL implementation, 12 teachers were selected. All the samples for the study were chosen purposefully.

RESULTS

Data was collected through classroom observation, video recordings, informal conversation and interviews. A period of three months (12 weeks) was spent for teaching through CLIL approach to class VIII learners. Data was analyzed qualitatively through discussion. This research paper consists of two research questions and each was analyzed separately. Narrative analysis technique has been used to understand the insights of learners and teachers regarding the challenges faced by them in CLIL classes.

Identifying the challenges in CLIL implementation in the Indian classroom

i. Classroom Size

The most crucial challenge that affected the CLIL implementation was the classroom size. Several research studies have proved relationship between academic performance and classroom size. Oguejioffor & Obiakor (2020), reveals in a study that large classroom size has a negative impact on the academic performance of the learners. CLIL approach involves a lot collaborative and interactive group and pair work activities. Indian classroom is generally very big in terms of number of students. The government run schools are more heavily populated as compared to private schools. The study was conducted in government higher secondary school; therefore, the classrooms were heavily populated. Class VIII E was taken intact for the study which comprised of 64 students. Due to large classroom size, the teacher found it very difficult to manage the classroom and conduct activities in stipulated time. The learners took almost a week (6 classes) to adapt themselves to CLIL way of teaching-learning. Large classroom strength also poised issues in use of teaching-learning material. The students at the back were not able to see the videos, flashcards or hear the audio clipping which disturbed the classroom setting. In an ideal classroom teaching-learning, one lesson plan is completed in one class (one period of 40 minutes) but because CLIL is an activity based pedagogical approach and also due to large number of learners, it was very difficult to complete one lesson plan in one (1) period. Therefore, it took twenty-two classes (22 periods of forty minutes each) to complete fourteen (14) lesson plans. The large classroom is truly a challenge in classroom implementation of CLIL in the Indian context.

ii. Lack of CLIL Material

Lack of appropriate CLIL teaching material has been voiced by many researchers in Europe as well as in many South Asian countries. Banegas (2013), finds out in his study that lack of appropriate CLIL material is one of the many crucial challenges that hinders successful CLIL implementation. Since CLIL as a language teaching approach remains unexplored in India, there is a

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serious dearth of CLIL teaching-learning material. Appropriate CLIL material gives an idea to the teachers on how to integrate language and content goals with appropriate collaborative activities. Many teachers talked about this problem during the informal interview sessions. For this study, CLIL material was prepared based on grade eight (VIII) curriculum of West Bengal Board of Secondary Education. CLIL material preparation was a very time-consuming affair consisting of many steps from creation, adaptation, validation of materials and pilot testing the material. While preparing material for this study, it was observed that the main challenge lies in the integration of content of a particular subject like history, geography, political science or biology with that of subject specific language goals. In this regard San Isidro(2018), says that the integration of language and content should have cross-curricular features. This cross-curricular feature can be multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary or interdisciplinary in nature based on the level of the learners.

iii. Lack of Resources

One of the most crucial observations during the study was that the majority of Indian schools lack resources. The government run school where this study was conducted did not have projector, smart board, internet connectivity and other stationary items required to prepare charts and teaching aids. During the study it was very difficult to play video or audio over the laptop. Most of the learners were not able to see the video or hear the audio, this disturbed the class discipline. A lot of teaching aids like charts, flash cards, print outs, markers, portable speaker had to be purchased in order to ease the teaching process. During the interview, the teachers revealed that they do not have finances to purchase these items and hence it would be difficult for them to adapt CLIL approach in the classroom.

iv. Lack of teacher training

CLIL as an approach is highly innovative; it requires skills and expertise on part of teachers. This study reveals that majority of teachers are unaware of how to teach with the help of CLIL approach. During conversations and informal interviews, the English teachers confessed that if they are trained properly, they would love to teach the second language through the CLIL approach. Di Martino, & Di Sabato (2012), have rightly said that proper CLIL training is the key to CLIL success. The teachers should be able to scaffold the learners efficiently. Scaffolding is an important element of CLIL approach as it helps to support both language and content learning.

Apart from knowing the scaffolding technique which has the potential to generate a lot of communicative language, CLIL teacher should be able to understand the process of language and content integration. Teachers need to be trained so that they learn the art of content and language integration. During this study, through the informal interviews, some of the teachers revealed that there is a lack of professional development training in state government schools. The teachers further added due to the lack of training, they are not able to keep themselves professionally updated. So, it is quite easy to understand that when there is lack of regular in-service teacher training, how can one expect training for creating awareness regarding specific pedagogy. Teachers' conversation gave clear insight that they lack even the basic knowledge regarding CLIL approach.

v. Attitude of teachers towards CLIL approach

Data collected during this study also reveals the attitude of teachers regarding the CLIL approach. Most of the science and social science teachers believe that CLIL implementation is nearly impossible in Indian classrooms because once the learners reach the elementary stage, they only focus on science and mathematics content. It is the belief of the learners that understanding science and mathematics content would help them in securing a seat in engineering and medical college which have better job prospects. Teachers confessed that when learners do not show interest in language learning, why should they waste their time in integrating the content with language. So, this cold attitude of teachers towards CLIL approach is one of the many challenges in the path of classroom application of CLIL approach. CLIL involves smart lesson planning with innovative and engaging

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activities. The activities should challenge the learners to think critically and activate their higher order thinking skills. 4C's planning guide (content, cognition, communication, culture) is very crucial to CLIL lesson planning (Coyle,2007). A CLIL teacher should be trained on how to integrate these four elements with the content and guide learners on how to use language for learning. Coyle (2007), explains that the component of communication in 4C's framework helps the learners in learning how to use the language to learn and construct new knowledge.

Teachers' interviews also highlighted the time constraint in teaching. One of the social science teachers said that in a forty minutes (40) period, it is difficult to conduct activities. They find it difficult to complete the vast syllabus in a normal and traditional classroom teaching scenario because often the students are involved in other activities like NCC, sports and other school activities. Teaching through CLIL approach may make it even more difficult to complete syllabus since it consists of activity- based teaching with scaffolding measures. Thus, time constraint is another factor that challenges teachers from taking up this approach in the classroom.

Another issue that came to light during this study was that language teachers and subject teachers would hesitate to work together. In this study, the target language to be taught through CLIL approach was English; social science was being taught through English language whereas in the traditional method it was taught through Hindi language. Now, English teachers revealed that most of the subject teachers are from vernacular medium and so it would be very tough for them to work with the subject teachers. And since, subject teachers do not have command over English language, they find it difficult to integrate content with language.

Proposed strategies to overcome the challenges in CLIL classroom

Where there are challenges, there are strategies to overcome those challenges. A good pedagogical approach is one which has the potential to cater to the needs of every kind of learner. As discussed earlier in this paper, Smart lesson planning with innovative activities is very crucial to CLIL approach. The findings of this study reveal that a large classroom size is a big hindrance to successful execution of a CLIL lesson. In India, most of the government classrooms have a disproportionate teacher-student ratio, the school lacks basic and technological teaching resources. But does that mean Indian classrooms will be devoid of this enriching learning experience? Research in this field says that CLIL approach can be adapted to any learning context because of its flexible nature. Coyle(2007), says that Content and Language Integrated Learning has various models and that it has the potential to fit into any educational context.

Zarobe (2013), talks explicitly about the constantly evolving and flexible nature of CLIL. She says that the CLIL approach has diverse applications based on the educational contexts. She further adds that the application of CLIL differs from one country to another due to social and cultural variances. Therefore, it is absolutely possible to implement CLIL in Indian classroom with smart and sustainable strategy. The need is to understand the methods of its application by studying the needs analysis of the learners in a particular educational context.

For this study, the level and the language learning needs of the learners were analyzed through observation, informal interview and conversation. The samples (N=64) spoke Hindi and Bengali as their first language (L1). English was taught as second language and hence it was the target CLIL language. Through informal interviews and classroom observation, the learners revealed that they do understand basic English but cannot understand complex vocabulary or sentences. For speaking skill, they could only speak basic English sentences like-

‘I have done my work.’

‘My name is’.

‘My aim in life is’.

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At grade Eight (VIII), they failed to talk about '*deforestation*' using content specific vocabulary. As for the writing skill, the learners could not write coherently, even the sentence structures were not accurate. So, after deep and detailed observation, the learners' needs were understood. Since, they could not understand English properly, so bilingual/multilingual medium of instruction was used to transact lessons in CLIL approach. Hindi, English, and Bengali were used to give instructions, explain topics and communicate during collaborative activities. Vocabulary cards, mind maps, concept maps, graphic organizers etc. were used to provide scaffolding to the learners. Writing activity with vocabulary card was very popular among the learners. Activities like running dictation, comic strip dialogue writing, writing questions for pictures were very engaging and helped the learners to collaborate effectively.

The school lacked technological resources, hence more of flashcards, charts, posters were used as teaching aids. Skill of questioning was used to generate contextual and meaningful classroom communication. Learners were motivated to use higher order thinking skill to construct new knowledge. During the study, a lot of story-telling, drama, songs, audio clips recorded by the teacher, and role play activities were used to involve learners in cognitively challenging tasks. The CLIL teacher used the art of effective questioning strategy to keep the learners engaged. Since, the CLIL material prepared was based on the needs of the participant learners and was culturally linked to them, it helped to raise the motivation of the learners. So, preparing good material can be one of the strategies for better CLIL implementation.

In this way, there was an improvement in the way learners used language for learning. Therefore, the findings of this qualitative study reflect that CLIL is contextual and diverse in nature.

CONCLUSION

The positive impact of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) on second language acquisition has been proved through empirical data in researches from around the world. In a linguistically rich country like India where school education follows a Three Language Formula to maintain the linguistic diversity of the country, it is very important to have a smart and practical language learning approach. In this context, on the basis of empirical studies, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) or Content Integrated Language Instruction (CILI), can prove to be highly beneficial. But in a country like India with massive population, big classrooms are very common which can turn out to be a challenge for the implementation of CLIL. This paper has tried to highlight those issues and discuss the possibility of its implementation in the Indian context. The findings reveal that a large number of learners in a single classroom creates a big challenge because the teacher is not able to complete the activities on time. A lot of time is wasted in managing the class and giving instructions. Through observation and informal interview, it was found out that most of the teachers are unaware about the principles of CLIL approach, hence the first step would be to create awareness among teachers. Secondly, teachers need to be trained properly and rest everything would fall in place because CLIL approach is very flexible in nature. It can be customized according to the needs of the learners and according to the educational system. The benefits of CLIL are manifold and therefore Indian students should be allowed to experience this enriching pedagogical approach. It will help the learners in developing Cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) in second or any additional language.

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