

Content and Language Integrated Learning for Nepalese EFL classes

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Abstract

A common understanding of teaching English in Nepalese context implies teaching the prescribed textbook lessons and learning means following the teachers' instructions. The school on the one hand, grades the students' achievement according to the score they have scored. The parents, on the other, evaluate their children's learning according to how beautifully they have written on their notebooks and how fluently they speak in English. This traditional practice of teaching and evaluating learners has paralyzed our system of teaching and learning. Therefore, it is high time we shift our practices to a more productive approach to teaching. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) meets the present needs. This paper deals with the ways CLIL is useful to the Nepalese context. In addition, it also puts light on the materials used in CLIL lessons, teacher's and students' roles and assessment in CLIL.

Key words: Content and language integrated learning, content subject, curricular content

Unconsciously... but CLIL

When I was in grade seven, one morning, the principal who also taught us English came into our class as a substitute teacher. He wanted to continue with his lesson but we disagreed. Instead, we requested him to take us to the library it was a best place to be in whenever our teachers were absent. But rather than letting us go to the library, he led us upstairs, to an unoccupied room. Some of us went inside to arrange the tables and chairs and others stood outside until everything was fixed. They had joined the tables and chairs and formed six clusters. We stood in front of the class. He, then, divided our class into six groups according to our roll number. Before having started the day's activity, he named the room 'Language Lab' and told that we would be going to the 'Language Lab' once a month.

We were given six different topics under 'Infrastructures of Development'. One of which that our group worked with was 'Water'. There was a common framework for all six groups. We were supposed to carry out the project with common steps though our contents were different. All of us discussed in our respective groups. We could go to the library to get additional information or use internet if it was available. We had to introduce the topic, present the situation in past and present, the benefits, the problems in its lack, preventive measures and conclusion. After writing, each group had to make a presentation orally. Finally, it had to be presented on the wall magazine in the best possible way. This experience of mine shows how a chapter from social studies ('Water' was one of the chapters on 'Infrastructures

of Development' in grade seven) is incorporated in English class through the use of classroom dynamics. Thus, it makes the basis for this paper.

What is Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)?

A very simple answer to the big question above, literally, would be, one of the ways of teaching language that is based upon some content. Introducing CLIL, Dalton-Puffer (2011) "CLIL is an educational approach in which curricular content is taught through the medium of a foreign language" (p. 183). My understanding about CLIL and one of its bases that it works on is written by Richards and Rodgers (2001), "language skills should be taught in the content subjects and not left exclusively for the English teacher to deal with" (p. 205). Larsen-Freeman (2000) has a similar idea that content based instruction is integrating learning of language with learning of some other content, often academics. According to her, such academics provide the language learners with natural content for language instruction. Perhaps, it was one of the reasons behind my low score in IELTS exam where I was told to speak on music for a minute. Afterwards, I was told to tell something on an advertisement that I found interesting. I thought it went well as I was familiar among my peers and teachers for the English I had to communicate with them. Surprisingly, I got least score in the speaking test whereas other skills were done well. I did not believe I had the score I had, but later I realized that it was not communication aspect of English (language) that I met the standard set but the understanding of the content I was given to. One of the reasons might be I had very little content to convey or I might not have conveyed anything.

When I was teaching in a private primary school, I used to hear similar complaints from parents that their child does not speak/ communicate in English fluently, hence her learning is dissatisfactory. They told their child was good at other subjects (taught in English) but English merely was below their expectation. I regret not having told that being able to speak fluently is not only the sign of their child's language development; their child learns language learning the other subjects, therefore, being good at social studies, geography or environmental science was also learning English subtly. It is because according to Nuffield (2000) CLIL programs raise the competence of the pupil in foreign language and also affect attitude to content learning and language learning (as cited in Wisemes, 2009). Similarly, in one of the studies Burger and Chretien (2001) found that the students in L2 English content based course gained significant overall competence and syntax that those students who attended three-hours English lecture (as cited in Gallardo Del Puerto, Lacabex, Lecumberri, 2009, p. 63). Had I met these scholars' ideas, perhaps, I would have scored better in IELTS speaking test too.

What materials for CLIL classroom?

I personally claim that English language as the medium of instructions in our schools, both public and private, has made use of CLIL more contextual in our context. In addition, the textbook we use in our schools are printed in English. CLIL is not exclusive to promotion of English as world language but embedded in the socio-economic, political and cultural traditions of different nations (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010). Therefore, English would not have been an obligation for us if we were not teaching English as a second language in our schools.

The benefit is, we can also use the authentic resources (from diverse culture, tradition, languages, geography and so on) translating them into English wherever necessary. The festival celebrated the other day (national, religious, local and so forth), an interesting or a relevant news article published on the newspaper, a visit to a cultural site, the international days celebrated worldwide (i.e. Environment day, Water day, AIDS day, International Labour day, Education day etc), current issues (for instance, earthquake, epidemics, flood and landslide etc), personal hygiene, maps (local, regional or world map), germinating seeds by the students, parts of a plant and so on could be the materials for CLIL classes; because, according to (Naves and Munoz, 1999) there are not enough materials available to teachers to meet (as cited in Naves, 2009). The teachers need to embed them to their school curriculum themselves. They not only serve the immediate need of the materials but also break the monotony of the regular textbook exercises and link "save time and give status to the foreign language" (Krisch, 2008, p. 97). Moreover, they provide the students with the content that they are already used to with; hence, they can use those materials in any way (for reading, writing or speaking exercises), that "enhance children's learning" (Proctor, Entwistle, Judge & McKenzie- Murdoch, 1995, p. 58). The tasks, thus designed, meet the content subject concepts (input) and the process that explicitly shows how understanding is expressed (output) (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010, p. 87) of the students. The inclusion of such local materials into the classes makes the classes easy to run as the students understand them more than those that are brought from some other contexts.

Student and teacher role in CLIL

The teacher I referred elsewhere used to make us sit in groups. Every month the

teacher used to assign us a short project that had to be presented in group as an issue in the of wall magazine. The title of the project used to be related to different subjects, not merely from the English, but also from social studies, environment science, moral values etc. He used to instruct us and we used to do the tasks. At the end of the month we used to be ready with a colourful wall magazine pasted our classroom wall.

While getting on with this paper now, after years, I feel I experienced CLIL a long ago. The role of the teacher and students in CLIL is also clear. A CLIL module may includes "group work, short presentation of the group-work results, longer student's presentation, observation of small scale science experiments and whole class discussion" (Dalton-Puffer, 2009, p. 202). The students produce the required product with clear instructions of their teacher. Similarly, the selection and gradation of the materials to be used in the class is also on the teacher's part. According to my experience, the teacher and students need to negotiate from very beginning of CLIL lessons until they end. When the teacher and students negotiate the complete process of the lesson they are working with teaching learning becomes successful. The negotiation includes both teacher's and students' role during the lesson. Similarly, it also clarifies the content the students focus on, the process in which the students work, form of the output and evaluation criteria. The clearer roles lead to better performance of integrated skills.

Assessment in CLIL

In grade seven classes the teacher used to award the best performing groups with 'merit cards'. He used to visit every group when we were discussing and making notes and provide with the necessary feedbacks.

Similarly, he used to grade both oral and written presentations. The group scoring the highest deserved 'merit cards' that were like the prizes we used to get in other terminal tests.

After learning activities are implemented in classroom, we need to make assessment of the learners in order to find their level of learning. Tests of a kind or others are necessary in order to provide the information of the achievement of groups of learners without which rational educational decisions are difficult to be made (Hughes, 1989). Regarding assessment, Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010) opine that "no matter what is taught and how it is taught, the mode of assessment determines the learner's perception of their teacher's intention and also shapes performance data" (p. 112). Therefore, it is necessary to assess the learners which not only help the learners but also the teachers themselves in finding out how well they make their teaching comprehensible.

In CLIL, assessment might be an issue because it includes both content and language. The prioritized content element is taken as the dominant element and language is intended to be learned securely alongside the content's concept and skills. Assessment could be collaborative, peers or self. We have purposed to use CLIL as an approach to be used upon EFL students; therefore, the teachers need to be clear both why they are assessing language as opposed to content and how they wish to do it (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010).

Why CLIL in Nepalese EFL classrooms?

I begin with the usefulness of CLIL with reference to the change that has recently taken place in Nepalese public schools. The public schools have greatly been attracted

towards English medium culture. Despite problems, as shared in the training sessions I visited, they are trying to make it a success. At this changed context, CLIL will function as one of the best approaches. There are three major challenges; first, the system's obligation that different subjects have to be taught in the frame of given syllabus, second, the difficulties in making the learners used to with English language which they are not competent at, in fact, they need a very serious instruction, and third, these two challenges have to be faced by the teachers who, in themselves, are not competent in English. However, we, English language teachers need not get hopeless because we have such challenges, CLIL would help us to a great deal, if used appropriately because according to recommendation of British government commission in the mid 1970s as Richards and Rodgers (2001) write that there needs focus on reading and writing in all subject areas in the curriculum, not merely in the subject called language arts" (p. 205). When language comes in integration with other subjects regularly, it will help both teacher and students to manipulate the language better.

The students in private schools may greatly be benefitted by this approach since they are used to using English and "CLIL promotes ability to communicate in the ways that traditional teaching does not" (Dalton-Puffer, 2009, p. 197). It may be used widely in all subjects where the students need to communicate in English as that had been done in Singaporean Primary Pilot Project in the 1970s where classroom texts had integrated science, math and language study (Richard & Rodgers, 2001, p. 206) because CLIL is to integrate that has been compartmentalized (Soetaert & Bonamie, (n.d.).

Of course, comprehensibility of the English language used while instructing the

students may be an issue when English is made the language of delivery of the contents other than English. Harmer (2001) writes the best activity might be a waste of time if students fail to understand what teacher meant, the instructions need to be kept simple and logical" (p. 4). The simple the instructions are the better understanding in the learners that leads the learners towards producing the output. Naves (2009) cites Naves (2002) "On-hand tasks, experiential learning tasks, problem solving tasks and so on" (p. 34) and activities that match with the objective of the lesson direct the class towards achievement. CLIL may be waste of time and resources if the teachers fail to build a strong link between their plans.

Tucker (1999) says that many children throughout the world are educated in second or foreign language for at least part of their formal education than exclusively in their mother tongue (as cited in Naves, 2009, p. 22). Nepal is one of those countries where despite many mother tongues, English is used as the medium of instruction. Though public schools had been using Nepali as the language of instruction in the past, they are shifting towards English. The private schools are already inside English language system. Such schools follow strict English language culture depending upon the availability of the manpower. The language of high education is English since a long time though the students have no choice regarding the language they want to use. Therefore, we need to find out a way which helps to overcome, if not possible, minimize our language problems. Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010) propose; CLIL plays a role in providing pragmatic response towards overcoming linguistic shortcomings, and in promoting equal access to education for all school- aged students including those with additional support needs" (p. 7).

The teachers, while teaching the subjects other than English, integrate their subject and language plans together in such a way that both of the objectives are addressed, hence, language competence develops in them gradually.

Conclusion

CLIL is relatively a new approach in Nepalese context where we have been practicing communicative language teaching (CLT) since a long time. However, CLIL could be the sought approach that addresses our requirements; all round development of language skills. CLIL provides authentic materials and setting for language learning. A conscious teacher, through a consciously planned lesson is able to develop all skills and aspects of language along with the content to a considerable degree. To make CLIL a success, the joint effort of educational authorities, parents and teachers at both the district and school level are actively involved in planning the policy to implement (Naves & Munoz, 1999, as cited in Naves 2009, p. 31) however, there must be urgent and significant change for teacher education to be fit for the purpose.

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Author's bio

Tara Sapkota is an M. Ed in ELT and an M.Phil. scholar at Kathmandu University. She has published articles and presented papers in ELT. She has been teaching English for last seven years and more recently training teachers. Her professional interests include action research, homegrown materials and teacher learning.

An activity for a CLIL Lesson for Grade 8

Festivals

Aims

Content: Festivals ('MagheSakranti Celebrated across the Country')

Language

Vocabulary: Festival

Grammar: Passive Voice (Simple Present and Simple Past)

Skills: Reading (reading comprehension)

Preparation

Prepare two sets of worksheets for students.

Procedure

- Provide each student with a copy of the passage 'Maghe Sakranti Celebrated across the Country'
- Tell the students to read the passage. Tell them to underline the words if they are difficult for them.
- Ask a student of the class to read the text aloud for the class.
- Discuss the meanings of difficult words with the students if there are any.
- Provides the students 'Worksheet 1'. Tell the students to write the answers in one sentence.
- Write the answers to the question on the board so that everyone can check. Underline the passive verb phrases. Tell the students to underline the verb phrases accordingly.
- Discuss Passive Voice (Simple Present and Simple Past) with the students.
- Provide the students 'Worksheet 2'. Tell them to write ten sentences on 'Dasain' or 'Tihar'.
- Ask any three students to read their sentences aloud for the class.
- Provide feedback on their tasks.

Variation

The teachers may ask more than one student to read the passage allowed.

The teachers may ask the students write answers on their exercises books if the arrangement of the worksheets is difficult.

Maghe Sakranti Celebrated across Country

Post Report

Kathmandu, Jan 15

Maghe Sakranti was observed across the country on Friday with much fun-fare. The festival celebrated on the first day of Nepali month Magh marks the end of winter when friends and families feast on ghee, *chaku*, yam, *sel roti*, sweet potato, sesame *ladoos* among other, delicacies.

“Maghe Sakranti marks the beginning of spring season. It is the time to celebrate good health,” said renowned culturalist Satya Mohan Joshi.

On this day, devotees throng the rivers close to their homes and take holy dip, also known as *MakarSnan*. Doing so, it is believed, frees one from various diseases and brings positivity and purity.

Maghe Sakranti is similar to solstice festivals in other religious traditions. Maghe Sakranti is also known as MakarSakranti, because it is believed that the sun enters the astrological sign of Makar from Dhanu on this day.

The Tharu community celebrated Maghe Sankranti as Magi festival, their new year. The Tharus, who traditionally worked as bounded laborers, used to observe Maghi as the day when the indenture with their employers was renewed.

After the bonded labour system was outlawed, the Tharu community started observing the festivals as the day of their emancipation.

The Tharu people in Kathmandu organized a fair in Tundikhel to celebrate Maghi. They showcased their cultural dances like Maghauta, Jhumara, Lathi, Hurdangwa and Mahutiya.

The Newar community in Kathmandu valley call Maghe Sakranti “Ghyo-ChakuSanun”, the day celebrated by eating ghee and chaku. On this day, married daughters are invited at their parental homes to celebrate the festival together.

WORKSHEET 1

Write answers to these sentences in one sentence.

1. When was Maghe Sankranti observed?

2. What was eaten in Maghe Sakranti?

3. What is believed to happen if people take holy dip?

4. Why is Maghe Sakranti known as Makar Sakranti?

5. What is Maghe Sakranti celebrated as by Tharu Community?

6. Traditionally, why was Maghe Sakranti celebrated by Tharu Community?

7. What was organized in Kathmandu by Tharu Community to celebrate Maghi?

8. What was showcased in Tundikhel by Tharu people in Kathmandu?

9. Who are invited at parental home to celebrate the festival?
