

Exploring the implementation of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in English for Medicine programs of a Sri Lankan university

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Background to the Study

This study aims to address certain issues that were encountered with the introduction of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) to English for Medicine programs in the Faculty of Medicine, University of Colombo. As the students and the teachers faced many difficulties with CLIL as a result of being weak in L2 in the case of students and teachers being insufficiently trained in teaching Medical material/jargon, it prompted this research on using CLIL more effectively.

In investigating the above mentioned problem with the introduction of CLIL, the following were researched:

- What is the nature of the content based courses being used at the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Colombo?
 - To what extent does the course reflect ideas of best practice in CLIL?
 - What are the strengths and weaknesses in terms of the best practice identified in the literature?
 - Are there ways in which the implementation of CLIL can be enhanced?

The main question and the three corresponding questions offered a solid investigation to the existing problem at the Faculty of Medicine, English for Medicine programs. A detailed examination was done regarding the nature of the content based courses being conducted at the Faculty of Medicine, with consideration to the best practice of CLIL. Further, their strengths and weaknesses were looked at and finally methods of enhancement of the existing courses were examined.

Rationale

CLIL is a range of language teaching approaches that involve the integration of subject specific content and language which utilises the target language as the medium of instruction. The introduction of the CLIL approach has offered language teachers and lesson material producers a new teaching approach which will promote more advantages and success to university students.

Research Methods – Material employed

Due to time constraints a document analysis was conducted on the teaching resource used as the basis of an English course for medical students at the university. The main focus for the study was the lesson material that was used for the 2009 Intensive Course in English titled *A Content and Language Integrated (CLI) Course in English for First Year Medical Students* (C2A1 IRQUE Project 2009). An analysis of the student handbook was carried out for the purpose of data analysis by looking at its contents that relate to the mainstream curriculum along with a comparison to four main areas (medical subject matter, the integration of content and language with a linking to teaching and learning activities, texts provided and visual presentations) of best practice identified in the literature review.

Outcomes and critical reviews

The analysis revealed significant variations between the materials and the best practice advocated in the literature. These included a lack of balance between a focus on medical content and language learning, with an over-emphasis on the former. Visual presentations were not used in ways consistent with other approaches to CLIL and the range of text types dealt with was not extensive.

Conclusions and recommendations

From the study and analysis that was carried out with the students' handbook, it was concluded that there were many shortcomings. After comparing the lesson material with the literature and the best practices advocated in the literature, it was observed that there were certain areas that were overlooked or done differently.

In order to overcome the above mentioned shortcomings, it should be emphasised that numerous features should be adopted for the English for Medicine programs to be more effective. They are as follows:

- Maintaining a relationship between CLIL and ELT
- Maintenance of a balance and integration between content and language
- Using a syllabus design with an integrated approach acknowledging competency
- Exploiting the use of visual presentations/discussion points for introduction of texts
- Seeking assistance from content experts/teachers
- Integrating grammar
- Including additional components such as glossaries, listening and speaking tasks, poetry and dramas

Thus from the study that was conducted on the implementation of CLIL, it can be concluded that CLIL means not merely presenting content and language, but an integration of the two with the main intention of teaching and learning language more effectively.

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