

Combining Content and Language Study in Islamic Higher Education

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Abstract

The study aims at describing the implementation of CLIL approach in the classroom setting of Islamic Economics major. It is the most promising and beneficial approach which integrates the teaching of content from a curriculum subject with the teaching of a non-native language (Coyle, Hood, Marsh, 2010). The research applied case role study through observing teachers' and students' interactions in three class lessons of Islamic Economics. The finding reveals that CLIL is implemented in line with principle of CLIL approach with the dimensions of content, communication, cognition and culture. In conclusion, CLIL is important in helping learners to develop skills in their first language and to develop skills to communicate ideas about economics.

Keywords: *content and language integrated learning, higher education, economics*

Introduction

That foreign language competence is important for students' in higher education to acquire is highlighted in curricular policy of IAIN Bukittinggi. To that aim, English is offered as a compulsory course for students of any major. With this course, students are expected to be able to survive through the wave of globalization era in which according to Oleksak (2007) the newest trends of knowledge, technology, and global access are distributed through universal language in this case English. Through learning EFL, higher education students' awareness will increase on the importance of English for their future career and life (Sinem, 2010).

One major in IAIN Bukittinggi in which English is taught as a compulsory subject for several semesters is Islamic Economics. This major prepares its students to gain expertise in Islamic Economics both in theory and in practice by the time they graduate that they will be able to apply this expertise in their future life. In light of the goal of this major, English is taught to help students to gain the current global knowledge and practical information on economics in general and Islamic economics in particular. In addition, with their good English ability both in general and economic context, it is possible for students to get access to the better professional career.

To achieve the previous aims, it is not sufficient to teach English only in terms of general knowledge and communication. In other words, Islamic economics should be embedded and integrated within the process English instruction in this major. To do this, content and language integrated learning (CLIL) can be applied. Dalton-puffer (2007) mentions CLIL as educational settings where a language other than students' mother tongue is used as a medium of instruction. However, this definition seems to be irrelevant with the context of this study since English in this major does not function as a medium to teach the subject but as a supplementary competence students' must achieve. Another more relevant idea is proposed by Coyle et.al (2010) who assert that CLIL-lesson is not a language lesson nor a subject lesson delivered in a foreign language but the instructional practice in which the language determined by the subject matter is used to learn and also to communicate.

In its application, four basic components of CLIL proposed by Coyle (2010) need to be implemented. These components include contents, communication, cognition, and culture, also known as 4Cs. Contents refer to progression in knowledge, skills and understanding related to specific elements of a defined curriculum. Communication refers to using language to learn whilst learning to use language. Cognition is developing thinking skills to link concept formation (abstract and concrete), and understanding and language. Finally, culture is exposure to alternative perspectives and shared understandings, which deepen awareness of otherness and self. The learning activities of CLIL lesson should be based on above 4Cs elements (Lesca, 2012). Thus, this study will make an attempt to explore how these four elements are involved in English instruction in Islamic Economics Major IAIN Bukittinggi.

Method

This study was conducted in IAIN Bukittinggi specifically in Islamic Economics major. English lecturer and fourth semester students of Islamic Economics major were observed to help researcher to gain understanding and information of how CLIL is implemented. The selection of these participants was based on the consideration that English course offered in this semester is the last level. Therefore, the integration between a field subject and language is very much demanded. The observation was conducted for three full meetings, 100 minutes for each. The data collected from the observation were qualitatively analyzed by considering those that are relevant to the 4cs elements of CLIL.

Results and Discussion

From the observation results, the researcher was informed that English instruction in Islamic Economics Major in IAIN Bukittinggi had to some extent implemented the 4cs elements of CLIL with the exception of cognition. The content aspect of CLIL is implemented throughout the learning process. The learning process for three meetings observed evolves around economic field especially product distribution and banking system. These materials were provided through reading, speaking, and writing activities. In reading activities, students were taught how to identify main and supporting idea as well as ideas relationship from the passage on economic related topic in this case product distribution and banking. The texts were also provided with glossary explaining the meaning of the economic related term followed by the exercises about the target reading skill. In writing, students were instructed to write simple text related to topic discussed.

It is interesting to consider the extent of content application of CLIL in English instruction in this context. While it is true the content of material in reading and writing activities has involved as subject matter as suggested by Selca (2012), it is important to consider whether students will get practical knowledge and skill from such process. Rather than providing students with the economic related text that they might forget, it is more meaningful to give the text that they will encounter and use in their field such as types of official letter as well as types of banking documents. They can be trained to understand and to write one of these texts or documents. One of the goals of teaching English in specific context is to familiarize students with the line of professional related field (Luna & Traifeller, 2017). By using these, the content will not only give more students about theoretical information on economic issues but also give them their practical use as the goal of English in Higher education to provide students with both theoretical and application understanding (Sinem, 2010).

The aspect of communication is seen through how the language is used in the process especially through oral interaction between the lecturer and students and among the students themselves. The lecturer and students' communication during the instructional process mimicked that of expected in EFL classroom. English as a medium of instruction is mostly used in general interaction such as opening classroom, clarifying students' understanding and the likes. In addition, some occurrence of code mixing of Indonesian and English was also found. The learning concept in this case economic field is explained in students' L1 due to students' insufficient level of understanding. However, students' were encouraged to communicate in the target language. In these classroom activities, they were involved in simulated interaction through role play related with the real situation of banking and product distribution context.

At this point, the concept of 'communication' especially related to language in CLIL brings up some intriguing issue. The classroom language condition and practice in this research site seems to be in contrast with that of Dalton-Puffer (2007) who claims that language serves as a medium of instruction in CLIL. In other words, Islamic economics subject should be taught and explained in English. However, the different condition was found in which the target language in this case English mostly serves as medium of interaction and to some extent instruction due to the fact that students' were involved in simulated economics related interaction. Nevertheless, such findings is relevant to the concept from Coyle et al (2010) who assert that in CLIL language is used both to communicate and to learn.

The last component found is culture. During the observation, the researcher witnessed that the lecturer did expose students to some cultural elements related to economics. However, this exposure is only provided to target culture only. In this case, students were introduced to how banking system work and is applied in the target culture and no reference to the local culture. The importance of cultural implementation into language learning is stressed by many theorists. Wei (2005) mentions that language serves both as a means of communication and as a carrier of culture. The process of foreign language learning should also include the aspect of local culture (Paige et al, 1999). Besides, it is unlikely that students will get involved in the target culture economics context, so the introduction, for example, to how banking system works and is applied in the local culture might more meaningful for students than that of before because they will probably be engaged in this context later on. Again, the aspect of practical application needs to be reconsidered.

Conclusion

From the results of the research, it can be concluded that English language learning in Islamic Economics Major in IAIN Bukittinggi has to some extent applied the elements of CLIL with the exception of cognition. However, some adjustment and improvement need to be made in instructional process by designing more meaningful activities for students, so they will gain more practical skill in economics field that they can apply in their future.

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