



Using CLIL in ESP Teaching to Enhance Students' Specialized Knowledge

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Abstract. The significance of language knowledge and specialized knowledge in ESP teaching has been recognized by many scholars, particularly in light of the rapid development of globalization and integration. The aim of teaching ESP is to facilitate ESP learners' communication skills in a range of professional contexts and to utilize that knowledge in their future jobs (Rahman, 2015). Currently, conventional teaching approaches do not appear to well support the provision of specialized knowledge to ESP students. The purpose of this paper is to look into the impacts of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) on students' ESP learning during a seven-week intervention. Data was collected from students of a Business class at the ESP Department, University of Foreign Language Studies-The University of Danang (UFLS_UD) through a semi-structured interview. The results reveal that students' specialized knowledge improved over time during the intervention and that their confidence was promoted despite certain obstacles. It is also suggested that the CLIL method could be employed in ESP teaching to assist students in enhancing their English-interpreting skills.

Keywords: ESP · CLIL · Specialized Knowledge

1 Introduction

In recent years, along with the fundamental and comprehensive reform of education in Vietnam, many reform programs have been carried out. The National Foreign Language Project 2030 that we are implementing is also in that trend. To improve the quality of English teaching and integrate it into international education, the project specifically focuses on innovation in teaching methods. In addition, as Dovey [9] said, "ESP teaching attributes transferable from university to workplace, including "the ability to communicate effectively with colleagues and managers." Therefore, to adapt to the global economic changes and meet the higher demand from businesses and employers, ESP students should be equipped with not only language skills but also communication skills and certain specialized knowledge. However, through the researchers' teaching practice and research, the traditional teaching method (Communicative Approach) does not really support the provision of specialized knowledge to students, and that CLIL (Content and Language Integrating Learning) approach has been proven to bring certain advantages in providing ESP Students with specialized knowledge. In his study, Coyle [8] showed

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V. P. H. Pham et al. (Eds.): AsiaCALL 2022, ASSEHR 744, pp. 177–184, 2023.

https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-042-8_16

that CLIL could “raise learner linguistic competence and confidence”. This teaching method is also supported by Bicknell [3], who posed the question of why we should teach business English with traditional methods while CLIL can do it much more effectively. This method has also received the attention of some researchers in the country. In the Vietnam context, Nguyen [21] has studied the necessary requirements of applying CLIL in the teaching of International Studies subjects through English.

This study aims to examine the impacts of CLIL application on promoting specialized knowledge for students in ESP classrooms and the challenges they faced with this approach in an attempt to promote quality language learning for students in an ESP context at UFL, Danang University. Specifically, the study will address the following questions:

1. What are students’ attitudes toward CLIL approach in improving their specialized knowledge and assisting their language learning?
2. What challenges they have experienced when learning with this Approach?

2 Literature Review

2.1 ESP Students–Business English (BE)

According to Dudley Evans and St. John [10], one of the characteristics of ESP is that ESP is defined to meet the specific needs of the learners, generally designed for intermediate or advanced students. It may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of General English. Carter [5] identifies three types of ESP: English as a restricted language, English for Academic and Occupational Purposes, English with specific topics. In this case, English for Business and English for Tourism (or Business English and Tourism English) belong to the second type.

2.2 Specialized Knowledge and Its Role in ESP Teaching

According to Belcher [2], one of the roles of an ideal ESP teacher is that of a “content-knowledgeable instructor, capable of coping with a revolving door of content areas relevant to learners’ communities.

Dudley-Evans also added that a variation of the team teaching approach in ESP teaching is referred to as subject language integration. It refers to a situation in which both language and content are taught by the language teacher. In our ESP setting, “content knowledge” refers to both general and specialized knowledge. Specialized knowledge is defined as knowledge that is unique to an organization’s processes and procedures or knowledge that is at an advanced degree of understanding or expertise in those processes and procedures. Specialized knowledge encompasses a wide range of factual, theoretical, and practical knowledge, as well as competencies and skills specific to a certain discipline or career, among other things (Esc, 2022). When it comes to highly specialized texts in ESP courses, Hutchinson and Waters [13] agreed that they have “facial validity,” such as the ability to excite learners and make the language “more relevant.” As Spack [24] pointed out, the practice of ESP requires even more specialized knowledge and skills than the practice of teaching a certain subject.

2.3 Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

There has been a wide variety of definitions for CLIL. David Marsh, who is considered a leading expert in CLIL, defined CLIL as “a generic term that refers to the teaching of subjects in a different language from the mainstream language of instruction” (Marsh, [19]). According to Marsh [19], the term CLIL was first coined in 1996 “to denote a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language” (p.234). In another study, CLIL was defined as “an innovative model for languages education”, in which “mainstream curriculum content is delivered through the students’ non-native language” (Cross & Gearon, [7], p.6). In CLIL, a foreign target language (TL) is acquired to “pre-defined levels through using the language meaningfully as a medium of teaching and learning various contents across the curriculum together with the actual language of schooling.” (Wewer, [25], p.278). In addition, Cross [6] pointed out that the most striking difference between CLIL and similar content-related pedagogies is that CLIL focuses on developing both new content and language rather than “on content while teaching through the medium of another language”, or “using content to simply frame language around particular themes or topics that might only be incidental to the teaching of language” (p.25).

The survey report published in 2001 laid the foundation for the description of CLIL types. Bentley [1] classified CLIL into three types in the curriculum, which are:

-Soft CLIL: It is practiced as part of a language course, in which some content topics are taught during a language period.

-Hard CLIL: It is practiced as a partial immersion program; almost half of the curriculum is taught in the target language, and the subject would reflect what is taught in the target language.

-Modular CLIL: In this type, a subject is taught for a certain number of hours in the target language, and subject teachers select topics from the subject syllabus which they teach in the target language.

According to Cross and Gearon ([7], CLIL, as an “additive bilingual approach”, offers considerable benefits, which are: an academic achievement that typically matches or surpass monolingual approaches; positive gains in first language literacy development, and heightened levels of intercultural awareness and competence” (p.6). In another research, Koro [16] listed four main benefits of CLIL models: linguistic competence, motivation, cognitive competence and challenge, and intercultural competence. Gimeno, ÓDónaill and Zygmantait [11] also shared the same view when they stated that CLIL offers students some great benefits, such as promoting content knowledge and language competence, developing intercultural understanding, and enhancing students’ motivation and confidence.

Although much attention has been paid to the effectiveness of CLIL in language teaching, which had mentioned above, to the best of my knowledge, relatively few studies have examined teachers’ and students’ perceptions of CLIL in ESP classrooms in Vietnam.

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Research Setting

This study employs qualitative methods together with an experimental design that involves the implementation of an intervention. The intervention was conducted between December 2021 and February 2022 by the primary researcher, who also served as a teacher, to discover the impacts of the CLIL-based modules on students' learning. The study will be conducted within a 7-week remedial course in ESP curriculum, which is named "Specialized Module 2", or also known as Advanced Interpreting. The course includes seven modules, each lasting 180 min and delivered over seven consecutive weeks. The participants for the intervention were 34 final-year undergraduate students in a business class at ESPD, UFLS-UD, so they are mostly at the high level of linguistic skills. Twelve of these thirty-four students volunteered to take part in the interview conducted in the last week of the intervention.

3.2 Research Instrument

In this study, semi-structure interviews were chosen to explore the students' reflections on the effect of CLIL in their learning, especially their specialized knowledge. The interview was conducted in Vietnamese to ensure the authenticity and fluency of their responses.

4 Findings and Discussion

Although the CLIL method has not been officially applied in the curriculum at ESP Department, it has been applied to teach Advanced Interpretation (AI) (specialized module 2) for final-year students by the research team since 2019 with some encouraging results. We conducted random interviews with 12 students from class 18CATM02 who were enrolled in the academic year 2021–2022's. The findings demonstrate that although they did not know about CLIL, all 12 students were aware that specialized knowledge (SK) was integrated during lessons by teachers and gave them good help in interpreting practice. The students believed that their English-Vietnamese translation had been substantially enhanced thanks to their comprehension of specialized knowledge. The majority of the interviewees indicated that one of the advantages of being provided with specialized knowledge through language teaching is that it sparks their interest in interpreting and will be beneficial for their future careers in the field. The following are some additional advantages that the students offered:

- "Using specialized knowledge to learn interpreting improves my capacity to choose and select more relevant and contextually correct terms" (Thanh, 18CNATM 02).
- Since I now comprehend the meaning of technical words, my English-Vietnamese interpretation has improved. Thereby my translated sentences are no longer cliché. (Huong, 18CNATM02).

- As a result of the offered content knowledge, I have a deeper and thorough comprehension of business terminology; thus, I am able to translate Vietnamese to English using a more precise language. (Sam,18CNATM02).
- "Rather of gaining solely academic knowledge, I have accumulated extremely excellent and more usable information through the provision of specialized knowledge during the Interpreting lessons." (Tien, 18CANTM02).
- "I feel that studying interpretation skills combined with the acquisition of content knowledge is more exciting than studying the language itself since, in addition to learning the language, I also get information about the business world that will be extremely valuable to me when I graduate from university and join the future workforce. (Thuy,18CNATM02).
- "Being exposed to new specialized knowledge, such as Bitcoin, logistics, or artificial intelligence... Helps me discover a greater interest in this Interpreting class." (Phuong, 18CNATM02).
- When asked about the difficulties that they encountered throughout the course, in particular, those associated with the integration of SK, the majority of the difficulties that students have pointed out are concerned with the amount of time and effort that is spent studying the fundamental concepts and vocabulary that are connected to SK:
 - "Because some specialized knowledge (SK) is still too new, I have trouble understanding what I hear or see when I watch recordings or movies. I need to wait for the teacher to go over additional terminology and content knowledge (CK) before I can comprehend it and use it in the translation".
 - "The teacher typically assigns groups to interpret business-related or newly emerging fields such as AI, logistics, bitcoin, digital marketing... As a result, it took my group members and me a long time to learn about them in Vietnamese so we could interpret them on our own".
 - "When learning SK alongside interpreting skills, we must always prepare at home the background information pertaining to the subject being studied; otherwise, it will be challenging to complete the listening tasks".
 - "Although I want to study and grasp the CK the teacher is presenting in greater depth, there isn't much time allotted to it because it is integrated with interpreting".
 - "Since the teacher uses SK, there is a lot of specialized terminologies. Therefore students must not only be familiar with a wide range of English words but also have a strong knowledge of Vietnamese words in order to produce relevant interpretation".
 - "I struggle a lot when interpreting issues relating to business or SK because I have limited social and business knowledge.

However, making these efforts is worthwhile since it teaches students not just about the subject matter but also about the language.

The interview responses partially illustrate the advantages and usefulness of utilizing the Approach CLIL to teach ESP students, even though a large-scale survey and evaluation with more trustworthy quantitative data have not been conducted. Students who participated in the class with the integration of CLIL methodology appear to gain new, practical expertise in addition to linguistic proficiency and interpreting skills. This scientific project intends to enhance the quality of teaching and learning at the ESP Department with the help of these encouraging outcomes.

5 Conclusion and Suggestion

The study examined the impacts of CLIL Approach on facilitating students' SK. The findings suggest that although all of the respondents believe that CLIL is an efficient approach to learning SK while gaining language knowledge, there are several difficulties they have faced during their learning. Therefore, it requires teachers' proper preparation in how to deliver the contents and the activities in class to get the best result. It also asks for many concerns from the teaching and administrating staff before applying CLIL in teaching at ESP Department. The implications for English teaching and learning suggested in this study would help teachers enhance teaching quality. Thereby equipping students with a certain SK is considered a great advantage for students when participating in the future workforce.

This study has a few limitations, such as the fact that it was conducted on a total of just twelve ESP students from UFL-UDN. As a result, the reliability and validity of this research are not nearly as strong as they might be. However, the study is the prerequisite to considering whether CLIL should be comprehensibly and synchronously implemented in teaching at the ESP department. It also contributes to proposing a long-term strategy for innovating English teaching and learning, which is considered a key goal of the National Foreign Language Project 2025.

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