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Content and Language Integrated Learning:
The English case with economics students

Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos y Lenguas Extranjeras:
El caso del inglés con estudiantes de Economía

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ABSTRACT

Content and Language Integrated Learning is an approach which refers to teaching subjects such as history, math, science, or some others through a foreign language. This document is the product of a research which has the purpose to deepen in how the 4Cs (Content, Communication, Cognition, Culture) are developed in a CLIL lesson. This study drew on a qualitative research design a qualitative approach and on the procedures of the case study method. About the sample, it is constituted by two professors and two classes from the Bachelor's in International Business of the University of Colima. The research was carried out in Villa de Álvarez, Colima from August to December 2019. Two interviews and two non-participant observations were the data collection tools and the data analysis was done based on Charmaz's theory through the platform Atlas.ti. Results indicate that the 4Cs elements are present in the lessons, but on occasions, unnoticeable to the involved participants.

KEYWORDS: CLIL Approach, 4Cs, Content, Communication, Cognition, Culture

RESUMEN

Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenido y Lengua (AICLE) es un enfoque que se refiere a enseñar materias como historia, matemáticas, ciencias u otros a través de una lengua extranjera. Este documento es el producto de una investigación con el propósito de profundizar como son las 4cs (Contenido, Comunicación, Cultura, Cognición) desarrollados en un plan de clase de AICLE. La investigación está basada en un enfoque cualitativo desde los procedimientos del método caso de estudio. Sobre la muestra, está constituida por dos profesores y dos grupos de la Licenciatura en Negocios Internacionales de la Universidad de Colima. La investigación se llevó

a cabo en Villa de Álvarez Colima de agosto 2019 a diciembre de 2020. Dos entrevistas y dos observaciones no participativas fueron las herramientas de recolección de datos y el análisis de estos se realizó a partir de la teoría de Charmaz (2014) a través de la plataforma Atlas. Ti. Los resultados mostraron que los cuatro elementos están presentes, pero incluso a veces sin que los participantes involucrados lo noten.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Enfoque CLIL, 4Cs, Contenido, Comunicación, Cognición, Cultura

Introduction

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is an approach which has been used around the world in order to teach subjects through a foreign language but carrying out some adaptations for effective learning. As a result, as argued by Van, Admiraal & Berry (2016), "teachers perceive CLIL to be a unique pedagogy and its uniqueness lies to a great degree in the fact that it seeks to integrate content teaching with language teaching" (p. 233). However, one of the main concerns when implementing the CLIL curriculum is to secure this integration evenly, to avoid just teaching content in English without a focus on the language or any other elements of the approach. This integration occurs when attention is paid to four CLIL key elements known as "the four Cs of CLIL: Content, Communication, Cognition and Culture". (Brown & Bradford, 2017).

Thus, the aim of the study was to explore how the main elements of this approach were included in a lesson taught in English at an International Business Bachelor program. The research was carried out at a Higher Education Institution in Colima, Mexico where CLIL has been a suggested approach to teach some major courses as a strategy for internationalization. The research was guided by the following questions approached through a qualitative stance using study case method processes:
1. How are the four main elements of CLIL (the 4 Cs: Content, Communication, Cognition and Culture) developed in the lesson?
1.1. How is content dealt with in the lesson?
1.2. How does communication take place?
1.3. What type of cognitive tasks do learners do?
1.4. How far is the culture component part of the lesson?

Understanding the limitations of this study being small-scale and locally situated, it is expected that its results contribute to increase our knowledge of how CLIL is undertaken and what CLIL outcomes are at local contexts.

Literature review

Teaching a foreign language is really challenging when you do not know what your student's preferences are, even though the approach Content and Language Integrated Learning arrived and took care of those issues enabling students to learn through a curricular subject. Lesca (2012) defined CLIL as "an approach which integrates the teaching of content from a curriculum subject with the teaching of a non-native language" (p. 3) and as it is said, learning English through the use of subjects is better for acquiring it than learning it the traditional way (Várkuti, 2010).

According to Ávila (2013) there are some before the implementation of CLIL, the implied stakeholders such as faculty and students, should be fully knowledgeable of the specificities of the approach, e.g. the 4Cs. (p. 151) "CLIL is meant to improve both the subject and the L2, with a main focus on specific and soft competences. Its general parameters are called 'the 4Cs',

as CLIL develops in four directions: Content, Cognition, Communication, and Culture (Carolla & Bettolo, p. 3, cited in Meyer 2010; de Zarobe 2013; Scott 2014)". As a matter of fact, a successful CLIL lesson should combine the 4Cs which Coyle (2010) states as the following, taking math subject as example:

- Content: What is the math's topic? e.g. algebra, ratio, linear graphs
- Communication: What math language will learners communicate during the lesson? e.g. the language of comparison for comparing and contrasting graphs
- Cognition: What thinking skills are demanded of learners? e.g. identifying, classifying, reasoning, generalizing
- Culture (sometimes the 4th C is referred to as Community or Citizenship): Is there a cultural focus in the lesson, e.g. do learners from different language backgrounds calculate in the same way? What symbols do they use? In multilingual contexts, it is important to take time to talk about methods used in different cultures represented by learners in the classroom (p. 2).

In addition, Cross (2013) described the 4Cs as follows:

- Content: refers to the course area or discipline and curriculum -subject matter, theme, topics- including the target knowledge and skills.
- Communication: makes reference to the language used to create and convey meaning about the target curriculum (knowledge, concepts, skills). For example: Giving instructions on using software.
- Cognition: implies the reasoning skills which allow the learner to make sense of knowledge, experience and the environment; for example: recalling, applying, analyzing, etc.
- Culture: the social, pedagogical and disciplinary ways to interact with knowledge, experience and the environment; for example social conventions to interact in the target language, classroom conventions for class interaction, and academic use of the target language.

Therefore, Content and Language Integrated Learning could be one of the most suitable approaches to have students learn the language while learning content and extending their cultural knowledge. By implementing this approach, students are conscious of the formal characteristics of the language and its strategical use which promotes the development of problem solving, spontaneity and motivation (Salamanca, 2018). However, it is difficult to assure that the 4Cs (content, communication, cognition and culture) are being included or developed in the lesson. Besides, not all institutions and teachers have approved these components, for example, Lynch (2014) mentions that "the traditional interpretation of CLIL as a 4C-based methodology (cognition, culture, content, and communication) is explained and then criticized as being not sufficient, with a further 'C' being added (context), resulting in a new interpretation of CLIL which is better described as being 4C+1 (but not 5C, as the extra 'C' encapsulates the others)" (p. 69). And not leaving aside the fact that students need to receive scaffolding in order to understand and build the context (Arnold, 2010).

It should also be taken into consideration that teachers play an important role in this process, because they are required to modify the language used at the moment of teaching the content in a second language, for example, modify the language level, modify the content topic and give students a great deal of examples and definitions (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Some concerns have arisen about teachers not being able to exploit the potential of CLIL provided they do not develop the required 'CLIL mindset' and the methodological competences to bring about success in the implementation of the approach (Meyer, 2010).

Although the advantages showed on the findings above, some others merely state that CLIL is

not a language lesson, it is used to have students learn about different contexts of the world and that way students will be able to acquire a target language (Klimova, 2012). Apart from this, it is argued that CLIL is not a suitable approach, at least not for Mexico because of the drawbacks in our environment such as language teacher's lack of subject knowledge or the subject teacher's lack of knowledge of the language (Calviño, 2016).

Method

Research design

Regarding the methodology, this study is based on a qualitative approach from the perspective of the case study method. Case study is then a method in which the researcher takes the role as an observer and tries to analyze the situation or issue presented related to a real-life phenomenon. Whereby, the most suitable method is a case study that according to Yin (1994) is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" (p. 3). While Kumar (2011) describes a study as qualitative Kumar (2011) points out that a qualitative study aims at describing a phenomenon, problem or event; in addition, qualitative measurement scales are used and the data is analyzed without quantifying it (p. 32).

Participants

Two classes and two professors from the University of Colima participated in this study. Currently, the students are doing a degree in International Business in English at the School of Economics and the professors teach their courses in this program using English for instruction. Moreover, some of the students are native speakers and the rest have English as a second language. Students are between 21-22 years old and they were selected for this study considering their characteristics since they take the subject Culture, Economy and Business in Europe in English.

Data collection and analysis

The strategies used to collect the data in this study were chosen according to the characteristics of the qualitative approach, an interview and a nonparticipant observation were carried out. Generally, nonparticipant observation is a technique used for those researchers who want to collect the data without having to interact directly with their participants (Williams, 2008). Whereas, the interview is also a technique which contains a series of questions which would be asked to a specific participant in order to collect the information. Thus, an audiotape was the tool for collecting the data while the interview was being carried out, recording the interview is useful in order to get evidence of the most important answers which can be part of the outcomes. In addition, an observation record was designed for this research in order to keep a register of the elements during the observation. Once the collection was done, the analysis was carried out through the platform ATLAS.ti© taking into account Charmaz's (2014) theory.

Ethics approval

Considering what Flick (2015) mentions, "ethics must play a role in your considerations of how you plan a study, the people you want to work with and the way you (or your collaborators) should act in the field" (p. 99). Thus, it is expected that the researcher takes an ethical stance as well as those involved too. As well as, it is forbidden to take this research for personal interests in search of one's own good.

Findings

Four main categories emerged from the research done; these were subject matter, use of the language, low-and-high-order thinking skills and perceptions on culture. These elements are presented below.

Subject matter

Subject matter is a concept related to the topics or content included in a class. In the case of the lessons observed, content was not planned or delivered drawing on the CLIL approach, actually the class is not focused on the CLIL approach because a language objective was not included in the lessons. However, it showed certain characteristics taken from this approach as the presence of a detailed programme and a content class objective to develop in class efficiently. Therefore, subject matter was delivered taking into account the features of the CLIL approach such as teaching techniques, content and materials according to the students' language level, needs and their progress in the program of study.

In addition, it was noticeable that content was handled using the pedagogical strategy Flipped classroom which is implemented along with ICT. For example, the teacher uses videos at the beginning of the activities and students need to pay attention to answer a series of questions that were given beforehand and discuss them at the end of the activity. Flipped classroom is a strategy in which students are in charge of getting familiar with the content, they look for the topic and try to understand it for later development in class throughout some subject activities carried out with the help of individual or team working techniques such as lectures, panel sections, presentations or small projects which at the end of the tasks teacher solves and explains the topic for not leaving doubts and build a better students' understanding. Of course, the professor considers the implementation of some theoretical subjects and practical subjects giving the scaffolding that students require, and it is important to make emphasis on the ending and starting of the activities in order to keep a routine and consolidate the studied subject matter.

Use of language

Talking about this aspect, English was used as a communication tool and played an important role in both classes observed because without it, students would not have had the opportunity to extend their learning and strengthen their skills of the language. Regarding this aspect, it was found that students use a different language to the native one for communicating with each other during the class. The language developed in this case is English which students feel comfortable with and they speak fully or most of the class in English. However, it should be noticed that as there is not a language objective for the classes, there is no language content taught in the lesson. Regarding the language component, the professors of the class strongly believe that students are exposed to its learning unconsciously. In addition, according to one of the professors, increased students' talking time is expected for a better learning development; but, according to the observation results, at times the teacher's talking time exceeds students' talking time, and on occasions, students' and teachers talking time is equal depending on the activities developed. For example, it was observed that the professor tries to generate an environment for freer communication in which they feel confident to have conversations among them as well as participating by contributing with their knowledge about any topic. It is also noticeable when the professor is explaining something, he does most of the talking, which takes around twenty minutes, and students are able to ask or share their opinions taking the control of the talking time too.

Low-and-high-order thinking skills

Thinking skills are essential elements of this process because students are able to learn and make decisions independently and effectively. They were evidently developed within the classes observed and it could be a way to provide learners with an effective cognitive progress guided by the professor who is in charge of promoting the engagement of cognitive skills for a deeper understanding of the content. Taking into account the observed classes the way they include the cognition element is by the application of learning through challenging tasks. In CLIL, cognition includes the engagement of higher and lower order thinking skills in class tasks. In the case of the classes observed, most tasks involved higher-order thinking considering they were beyond repeating or memorizing information and more into analyzing and synthesizing it. A clear example of a higher-order thinking skills task during the class can be that learners are in charge of reflecting about how culture affects the way they do business and at the same time they are challenged to understand and solve the problems presented in that area. Therefore, reflection and reasoning are important elements on this process because students must complete a series of tasks such as individual reflections, team reflections for later making way to the plenary sessions and panel sessions where they are expected to give their points of view and conclude all together about a topic, of course students' opinions and how they are performing are important elements in the class sessions.

Perceptions on culture

Regarding culture, perceptions about other cultures and countries are a way to enable us to understand social problems and how others react to it. In these classes, it was found that one of the professors includes and works with this component but without even noticing it. He mentioned that the cultural aspect is presented when they compare the examples in business during the class, so that culture becomes an important feature. On the other hand, the other professor pointed out that students need to consider different points of view and notice the differences and similarities we have with other countries in order to build an intercultural knowledge. Moreover, the topics of the lesson are about culture because it is part of the class, actually it is a culture class in which students are expected to gain awareness about it and, obviously, the professor tries to make emphasis on becoming aware of the business culture that there is in the Mexican context and that prevalent in other countries because it is an international business degree. Even though culture is sometimes presented without even noticing it in other classes, comparisons with other countries' business cultures are always an emerging theme in the lessons.

Discussion

This study aimed to deepen in how the 4Cs of CLIL are developed in a lesson; however, it can be concluded that even when the language of instruction was English, the lessons observed did not draw on the CLIL approach, considering that no language objectives were stated, nor specific language content was dealt with. Nevertheless, it was found out that the 4Cs elements under study were actually developed, despite being unconsciously included. Therefore, this section focuses on discussing the four subsidiary questions stated above.

How is content dealt with in the lesson?

Subject matter is a concept related to the topics or content included in a class. In this case, content is not planned or delivered drawing on the CLIL approach, actually the class is not focused on the CLIL approach because there is not a language objective, even though the classes are

taught completely in English. However, certain characteristics taken from this approach could be identified, such as the presence of a detailed programme and a content class objective to develop it in class efficiently. Considering that content is about subjects such as art, citizenship, classics, economics, environmental studies, geography, history, literacy, mathematics, etc. (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), it can be concluded that the classes observed fulfill this description.

Additionally, in the classes observed, subject matter, teaching techniques and materials are adapted so that they better meet students' language level, needs and the semester where they are at. Besides, Flipped Classroom, the teaching method used, promotes students' engagement with the content in an autonomous way leading to the co-creation of knowledge and understanding, features which align with Richards and Rodgers's (2014) recommendation to emphasize the learning on students' interests, peer-cooperative work and critical thinking for which teachers modify the language used at the moment of teaching the content in a second language, for example, modify the language level, modify the content topic and give students a great deal of examples and definitions as occurred in the observed lessons. Besides, the participating professors believe that learning through the use of subjects is better for acquisition of English than learning it in the traditional way as Várkuti (2010) points out.

How does communication take place?

Communication plays an important role in both classes observed for which they make use of English as a means for instruction and communication which students feel comfortable using in oral and written forms; it is considered that the tasks of the class involve students actively in the use of English which coincides with Coyle (2007), and Coyle, Hood & Marsh (2010) who mention that learners have to produce subject language in both oral and written forms (Quoted by Bentley, 2010, p. 7). On the other hand, contrary to what the CLIL approach implies, the classes in this study do not have a language objective, so language content is not core in the lessons. However, since students speak the target language while they focus on study content, it seems content and language are integrated (Coyle, 2007).

In addition, regarding the teacher's and students' talking time, another aspect considered in the communication component for which CLIL aims at increasing students' talking time (STT) and decrease teachers' talking time (TTT) (Coyle, 2007; Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010), this was partially accomplished as in the observed classes at certain times it occurred so -when students shared opinions-, at others, the teacher's talking time outweighed students' -in lecturing mode when explaining- and also student and teacher talking time were equal depending on the activities developed. Nevertheless, the professors tried to generate the environment and students' confidence for free communication.

What type of cognitive tasks do learners do?

When referring to the cognitive element, CLIL literature highlights the involvement of students' thinking skills throughout tasks. Additionally, Richards & Rodgers, (2014) suggest that students should work on the development of thinking skills (higher-order, lower-order) and create their own definitions. The classes in this study are considered to engage students cognitively by means of challenging tasks which mainly involve the development of higher-order thinking among which are evaluation, reflection, and problem-solving.

How far is the culture component part of the lesson?

Culture is an important component of CLIL throughout the language learning process, thus it is expected that students build an intercultural knowledge in order to understand the language (Richards & Rodgers, 2014) and perceptions of other cultures and countries are a way to enable students to understand social problems and how others react to it. In the classes observed for this study, the cultural component is introduced when students are asked to compare how business transactions are carried out in different countries, this implies that an emphasis is made on the business culture of such countries. It is important to highlight that even when the cultural element in these classes is not consciously addressed, it is likely that, as suggested by Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010), the inclusion of authentic materials and curricular linking leads to an awareness of cultural differences and similarities thus the cultural component may be unconsciously addressed. (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010, pp. 54-55).

Conclusions

This paper has presented the findings of a qualitative case study aimed at deepening in observing the Content, Communication, Cognition and Culture elements of a CLIL lesson in two higher education courses in Villa de Álvarez, Colima. It is possible to conclude that even though the lessons observed were not driven by the CLIL approach, the four main elements to be studied were identified, some of which were developed unconsciously. It can be stated that the lessons aimed at the learning of content taught in English as means of instruction, and that the Flipped Classroom methodology implemented actively engaged students' cognitive skills. In addition, being the lessons part of an International Business Bachelor programme, frequent comparisons between the local and international culture were made which can be related to the culture component of the CLIL approach. At the beginning of this study, it was assumed that the CLIL approach drove the lessons of the courses studied, being the one suggested by the institutional internationalization strategy; the results showed CLIL elements were unconsciously developed, and the participants involved were not aware of the approach being implemented. This calls for further research on the teaching approaches and methods used at the program and institution under study.

Acknowledgements

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b) **Purpose:** Here the writer states and explains the research objectives, intentions, questions or hypothesis.
c) **Research method:** In this part, the author mentions and justifies the research method that was selected, describes briefly the subjects, the context and the research procedures, as well as the instruments that were used for the data and information collection.
d) **Product:** Here, the writer presents the main findings, the degree to which the research objectives were reached and the answers to the research questions.
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e) **Main findings.** Synthesize, present, interpret and argue the most significant results found.

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