

Learning Subject Matter through the Medium of English: Perspectives from the Field

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Background

- CLIL (Content Language and Integrated Learning) or EMI (English as a Medium of Instruction)
- CLIL includes “learning to use language appropriately whilst using language to learn effectively” (Coyle et.al, 2010, p. 42).

A. CLIL (EMI): Challenges

- Klaassen and De Graaff (2001), Coleman (2006), Marsh, Hau and Kong (2000) , Kirkgöz (2009) , Byun et al. (2011)
- Coyle et.al (2010): if the language level is too high for the students, then effective learning cannot take place but if the cognitive level is lowered to match the low level of language competency of the students, then learning is restricted

B. CLIL (EMI): Positive Outcomes

- Gilzow and Branaman (2000)
- Burger and Chretien (2001)
- Stoller (2004)
- Mehisto and Asser (2007)
- The positive effects of this CLIL approach is strictly linked to the context (Xanthou, 2008).

C. Reasons

- *Internationalization* and *globalization* seem to be synonymous with CLIL (Brumfit, 2004; Graddol, 1997).
- “two for one” –content knowledge and increased language proficiency (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

- “One of the most significant educational trends world-wide is the teaching of a growing number of courses in universities through the medium of English” (Graddol , 1997, p. 45) .
- Most universities in Europe, for example, offer English medium courses with Business, Engineering and Sciences leading the way (Coleman, 2006).

Petra Christian University, Indonesia



Founded in 1961

- Faculty of Letters
- Faculty of Civil Engineering and Planning
- Faculty of Industrial Technology
- Faculty of Economics
- Faculty of Arts and Design
- Faculty of Communication Science

22 undergraduate departments (and 2 graduate departments)

9,900 students

- The EMI policy has been officially implemented since the second semester of 2011/2012 academic year.
- This research was carried out in 4 out of 6 faculties in June 2012.
 - The Fac. Of Letters was excluded
 - The Fac. Of Communication Studies misunderstood the policy
- 13 classes observed
- 13 teachers (Master degree holders – mostly from foreign universities, never attend trainings on CLIL, are asked to teach in English)
- 382 students of Batches 2008-2011 aged 19 to 22 years old

Research Tools

- A questionnaire containing 11 closed and open-ended questions.
- Classroom observation
- Evaluation of teachers' speaking performance
- Interviews (13 teachers, 26 students)

FINDINGS

A. Students' Opinion

The majority of the students thought that their teachers were able to use English as the medium of instruction:

- To explain the course material
- To communicate in English
- To use English throughout the class meetings

- ‘Do you wish to have other students experience the use of EMI?’

- YES:

- Because of the importance of English mastery
- Because the use of English in the classroom brought them to feel another learning atmosphere
- Because other students should “taste” the experience of using English outside a language classroom

- NO:

- Because they prefer *Bahasa Indonesia* as the medium of instruction
- Because they have some problems

● Challenges:

- 75% of the students prefer to use Indonesian → (learning in their native language would be easier and more likely to be understood.)
- Language level used for the course material is inappropriate with students' current language level.
- It is difficult to get the students participate actively → (preference towards the 'lecture mode' & language barrier)

- “I do not like English to be used as a medium of instruction. It is difficult to understand the theories. Even if the teachers use *Bahasa Indonesia*, I think I still have difficulties because the materials used for this subject are already difficult” (Student 5)
- “I think the problem is on my understanding of the language, not the content of the subject. If the class is taught in Indonesian, I am sure I can achieve at least B grade” (Student 3)
- “I just do not want to participate because I am afraid of making mistakes.... grammar , vocabularies, content of the lesson ... everything. And I do not want to be judged. It is better to keep silent. I feel safe” (Student 2)

B. Teachers' Opinions

- They are confident that their current English performance is sufficient enough to deliver their subjects
- They can improve their language performance
- Students coming from different countries could also join the course.

- Perceived difficulty

- Low proficiency of the students

- Solutions:

- code-switching
 - Using charts, pictures
 - Writing the technical terms and formulas on the boards/slides.

- “My students understand simple instruction English but it is difficult to express themselves in English and to understand science concepts in the language” (Teacher 7)
- “In my opinion, my students have trouble following the materials presented on the textbooks because these materials are actually more suitable for proficient students” (Teacher 1)

Discussion

- The majority (if not all) of the students came from Indonesian medium institutions. The abrupt change of medium of teaching and learning process apparently created unfamiliarity to the concepts taught and might slow down or hinder their content learning.

- The nature of content language such as in Mathematics and science has already imposed a heavy burden on all students regardless of the language of instruction. The use of EMI make the students find it more difficult to deal with content-area texts and lectures.

- In addition, during their school years, these students were exposed to learning the general language not the language for academic purposes. Moreover, many students learnt English with the major aim of passing language examinations.
- Cummins (1986) : the basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and academic language proficiency (CALP). It takes 2-3 years for language learners to be proficient in BICS as compared to 5-7 years in CALP.

Suggestions

- The current practice in the university in which the students are required to attend English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) class for once per week for only one semester is obviously insufficient.
- More language courses, especially content-based EAP courses (Evans & Green, 2007), should be offered . Only students who can pass the content-based EAP courses should be allowed to participate in EMI courses.

- A content teacher who has high language proficiency might have difficulties in delivering a lesson in English simply because language score does not necessarily reflect the teachers' ability to teach subjects in English.
- In addition to pedagogic trainings, training programs in oral English presentation skills should also be offered.
- Teachers should also be encouraged to work collaboratively with English language teachers or their colleagues who are proficient in English.

- Students cannot escape the influence of their mother; the students' mother tongue will always exist in classrooms.
- The use of the mother tongue should be limited and selective.
- This skill too needs to be shared and included in the teachers' trainings

- A bilingual class policy as a substitute for EMI policy especially for freshmen and students with low English proficiency.
- In bilingual classes, both students' native language and target language are used by the teachers.

- Students will understand the content subjects better because there will be conceptual transfer which involves “the understanding of a concept in one language being used to help understand a similar concept encountered in another language” (Kenner et.al, 2008, p. 120).
- The use of more than one language to investigate the same material encourages students to compare the vocabulary and structures involved, thus increasing knowledge about how language works. (Kenner et al. , 2008)

Final Thoughts

- A medium of instruction should become an enabling tool in which it facilitates the learning of subject content (Kyeyune, 2004).
- A medium of instruction should not be the cause of students' academic failure. It should help the students to develop their academic competency.

Suggestions for Further Research

- (1) Do other Indonesian students and teachers in different types of universities encounter similar language problems in their EMI courses?,
- (2) How do Indonesian university students and teachers at different education levels (e.g., graduate vs. undergraduate) perceive their EMI courses?,
- (3) What are the effective strategies used teachers giving English instruction to overcome their and their students' English language difficulties?

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