TEACHING LANGUAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF A CONTENT-BASED SUBJECT

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Abstract: The objectives of the research are to know teaching language in the context of acontent-based subject. Related to the purpose of this research, the methods used are questionnaires. The subjects of the research are Primary School Brunei. The sample is 40 students. The instruments used are questionnaires. The data used are primary. Data collection techniques are based on questionnaires. The results of the study indicate that there is a teaching language context of a Content-based subject affecting the teaching process in schools.

Introduction

Content and Language Integrated Learning has become a rival topic in language learning and teaching circles around the world, particularly in Europe. European Union recognize to promote in a range of policy documents since last century (PDST, 2014). However, not all proponents agree on definition of CLIL. This study adopted the notion put forward by Peña et al., (2020), that CLIL is 'not a new form of language education. It is an innovative fusion of both. This idea is further elaborated by Michael Luna (2016) who states that CLIL refers to a dual-focussed, learning and teaching approach in which a non-language subject is taught through a foreign language, with the dual focus of being on acquiring subject knowledge and competences as well as skills and competences in the foreign language (Turhan & Karadağ, 2019; Pereira, 2016).

It seems that CLIL has much in common with Language Across the Curriculum (LAC): long viewed as an important aspect of ESL development in bilingual communities (Straight, 1998), where language teachers seek to support the teaching of other subjects through the medium of a unifying language. Some teachers might question whether a language teacher can integrate elements of a Content-based subject such as science into their language lessons, and some might experience anxiety if faced with the prospect. However, (Pease & Pease, 2006) believes that: Science has become such a dominant part of our culture that regardless of whether or not we go on to study science at a higher level or go into a science-related career, we all need to have some awareness of how science works.

We need to be able to interpret scientific information coming at us from the media to make everyday decisions that affect our lives whether to vaccinate our children, which toothpaste to buy etc. It can be seen almost as an obligation that language teachers assist subject teachers in areas such as science so that their learners can maximize their understanding, and as Davies says, fully participate as citizens in their community. The study reported in this chapter – a project aimed at developing materials to integrate the teaching and learning of English and environmental science in Brunei, outlines the necessity for active involvement of English teachers in combining subjects such as language and science, as a positive step towards the immediate goals of LAC (or CLIL), and the wider goals of citizenship.

Learning subjects such as science in a second language is often viewed as a daunting task by pupils and teachers alike. In many cases, the curriculum dictates that certain subjects must be taught in the second language, usually English. Brunei is a small country (population 330,000) situated between two large Malaysian states, Sabah and Sarawak, on the island of

Borneo. There are many cultural, ethnic, and linguistic similarities between Brunei and Malaysia, and both countries have adopted Bahasa Malayu as their lingua franca. On independence in 1984, Brunei Darussalam developed a policy of Dwi Bahasa: both Malay and English are used as mediums of instruction in schools, with key subjects such as maths, geography, and science being taught in English from primary 4 upwards.

This policy replaced the previous system of having students enrolled in either an English stream or a Malay stream within a school (Martin, 1996). The rationale behind the policy was based on 'the realization that effective use of English was essential if students were to succeed in a study at tertiary level overseas, and if the country was to have a voice in international business, economic and political arenas' (Burns and Charleston, 1997, p. 290).

The English-medium subject curricula aim to prepare students to sit the Cambridge GCE 'O' and 'A' level exams in Forms 5 and 6 respectively. These are internationally recognized examinations, and a pass at 'A' level is generally accepted as the criteria for university entrance. However, these examinations were designed for native speakers of English, not L2 users, and students in Brunei often feel under great pressure to learn the subjects to be examined and to grapple with the English necessary to express themselves.

The shift from Malay to English in primary 4 has been criticized as being 'abrupt rather than gradual (Romaizah, 2005: 122) and as such, can pose a problem for pupils' understanding. The assumption, says Romaizah, is that primary 4 pupils have sufficient proficiency to start learning a discipline-based subject in English – which may be their second or even third language. However, if pupils do not possess the necessary language skills, they will start to lag academically, the situation becoming more severe as each school year passes. This is a worrying situation for teachers. Many of the words used in science books, including primary school textbooks, are of very low frequency and will probably be unknown to pupils. How does a teacher cope with this situation? Romaizah conducted a series of unstructured classroom observations of primary 4 science lessons in two Bruneian primary schools and found that teachers were often under pressure from pupils to translate into Malay (Vinet & Zhedanov, 2011).

Literature Study

In the past, initial teacher preparation courses often paid little attention to the issue of materials development, perhaps as Tomlinson (2003) states because it was assumed the teachers lacked the necessary experience or expertise to design materials for themselves. More

recently though, there has been a shift in focus from knowledge about teaching and related topics (Mann, 2005: 106) towards a view of teacher education as an ongoing engagement between received knowledge and experiential knowledge and Mann believes that knowledge of materials forms an integral part of this new focus (Judycki et al., 2017).

Nowadays many undergraduate and master's level programs actively encourage student teachers to get to grips with materials development, but it is often unclear how teachers are prepared for the task, or what (if any) evaluation of the materials takes place post-teaching practice. Canniveng and Martinez (2003) believe that not enough emphasis is put on teachers' previous experiences and cognitions when asking them to design materials for teaching practice (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2015).

Most INSERT courses they say, require teachers to first reflect on the theory of materials design, followed by a simple practice task. Tomlinson (2003: 448) believes this to be the wrong way round: 'the real benefits come not from the greater knowledge gained from study but from the greater awareness and skill which comes from the monitored experience of the process of developing materials. In other words, the most important aspect of materials design, from a trainee teacher's perspective, is the reflection that comes after designing and using the materials, as well as the design process itself (Sabtu et al., 2019).

Many EFL teacher training handbooks pay scant attention to the issue of materials development, focusing instead on issues such as methodology and the teacher's knowledge of the English grammar system. An exception is Mert & Özgenel (2020), which focuses very much on teacher evaluation, adaptation, development, and use of materials.) For the most part, books that do offer advice on materials development (usually to supplement an area of the coursebook where insufficient practice is provided) tend to highlight mechanical aspects of design, such as layout and visual appearance.

Lamprianou & Athanasou (2019) gives a checklist of aspects of materials design that a trainee-teacher should take into account before designing 'worksheets' which includes advice such as 'be neat, clean, with level lines of neat writing, clear margins, different components, well-spaced. While this advice is helpful, it does not address other issues involved in materials design, such as creativity and the language learning and cognitive demands of a task (Assaly & Smadi, 2015).

One of the aims of the Borneo project was to foster in student-teachers an understanding of the far-reaching demands of various task types, as well as highlighting aesthetic features of good materials development. Perolli Shehu (2019) lists two characteristics associated with

good presentation of a new language: clarity and memorability. He emphasizes the need for clarity when teaching the new language point, and memorability in that learners do not forget it. Memorability can be achieved through innovative design and the use of materials.

Recearch Method

The research utilized in this research is a qualitative method that focuses on the bibliography research (Schools, 2014). It means the researcher utilized relevant information about teaching language from the literature. Literature review becomes one way of study on second resource of information (Creswell, 2007).

Result and Discussion

Addressing the issue of difficult language in science textbooks

How can teachers help pupils to learn the often-complex scientific vocabulary presented in their textbooks? If pupils understood the language, their ability to comprehend the topic would undoubtedly be much better, thus increasing exam pass rates. Language across the curriculum (LAC) has long been viewed as a means of increasing pupils' language abilities in subject areas that are not taught in their L1 (Mappiasse & Bin Sihes, 2014) . One of the aims of LAC is to bridge existing curricular and disciplinary boundaries, to create an integrated learning environment, and to energize the disciplines in new ways.

LAC plays a particularly important role in the education system of bilingual countries, as it helps to achieve the dual aims of teaching subjects such as science, geography, and maths, and at the same time, improving pupils' skills in the L2 (Cummings, 2017). The implementation of LAC means that language teachers can help subject teachers, by using their expertise to help students learn the often complex language which surrounds many subjects. In doing so, English language courses often gain more credibility from students, who now see them as having a solid purpose: to help with their understanding of other core subjects. Thus it can be seen that LAC (or CLIL) serves dual purposes within an educational establishment (Lehwaldt, 2016).

Designing tasks for vocabulary development

When designing tasks for language teaching, a teacher should be aware of the cognitive as well as the language demands he/she is placing on the child. Gordani (2010), defines cognitive demands as those related to using the foreign language, and to uses of mother tongue in connection with learning the foreign language. When dealing with young learners, it is of

paramount importance that the task is within their cognitive capacity, that is it is one they can not only understand how to do but one which is designed in such a way as to be fun and stimulating (Luna, 2016).

As a starting point, the teachers were asked to come up with a list of features they believed to be important in designing materials for young learners. This is the list they produced: (a) Colour graphics incorporating a variety of styles (eg: cartoons, line drawings, photographs), (b) Simple instructions, (c) No more than ten new words in a task, (d) Tasks that involve some kind of motor coordination, such as drawing, cutting out, or colouring, (e) Tasks that involved cognitive demands such as searching for something which might be hidden, (f) Tasks that involved a competitive element, (g) Tasks that involved a joke or something funny.

Not all the features listed above could be included in any one task, but some – such as using simple instructions or giving no more than ten new words in a vocabulary task, should be treated as universal and therefore always be adhered to. Concerning the tasks that included aspects of motor coordination, the task should not require a learner to spend an inordinate amount of time carrying out tasks that were not directly linked to language learning, that is make and do type tasks. This type of task was judged to be important though as it would appeal to Bodily Kinaesthetic learners (Darling-hammond et al., 2017).

Conclusion

This project has shown that trainee English teachers at the primary and secondary level, with little preparation, can design materials to help teach the complex language of science. I felt that the activities they designed were cognitively stimulating, sought to develop more than one discrete skill in each task, and were interesting for learners to complete. This is the type of task that teachers should be aiming for, rather than resorting to L1 translations or code-switching to teach difficult words or concepts.

The project has highlighted some important issues for teacher training – some of which are specific to the region but others with more global applicability: (a) The project highlighted the need to raise awareness of environmental and conservation issues, especially in countries where there is currently no Environmental Education program on the syllabus. (b) The project was useful for helping student-teachers learn how to design vocabulary development activities and the types of activities that are most beneficial in developing certain skill areas. (c) The project helped in providing feedback for trainers and course tutors to see where students'

strengths and weaknesses lie: what trainee-teachers do well, what they don't do well and as a result, the areas that need to be focused on more in our training programs.

Several researchers have mentioned the role of teacher reflection in materials design (e.g. Canniveng and Martinez, 2003; Tomlinson, 2003). Unfortunately, it wasn't possible to gather formal feedback from the student-teachers in this project after they had completed teaching practice and trialed the materials in their classes. An interesting follow-up project might ask teachers for feedback on the materials they had designed: whether they were useful in helping to teach cross-curricular vocabulary, what modifications they might make after trialing them, and which types of the task they found most beneficial – and at what levels.

Conversational feedback I received from the students I supervised in teaching practice was that the syllabus for both English and science was so demanding, particularly at the secondary level, that it was often hard to find the time to fit in supplementary materials. The coursebooks in themselves were pretty demanding and schools required that all the material in them be taught. This postscript raises another issue that trainers seeking to develop materials with student teachers must take into account: will there be room in the syllabus to present teacher-developed materials? If not, is supplementation possible at all? A solution to this problem might involve further dialogue between the teaching establishment and the colleges which prepare teachers. Materials development is an integral part of a teacher's education, and as such, the syllabus must allow for teachers who wish to supplement what is provided with their materials.

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