Bilingual Education through CBLT and CLIL: Students' Perspectives of Integrated Learning of English and Buddhism

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Abstract

Content-based language teaching (CBLT) and Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) are encouraged in Thai schools especially for bilingual education programmes. The effectiveness of the two approaches seems well-grounded, regarding that of students' language and academic achievement. The author was concerned by the lack of research on students' perspectives of teaching and learning through CBLT and CLIL which seemed to be important for the development of teaching practices and materials responding to students' need and their learning styles. This research study aimed to develop and implement CBLT/CLIL based textbooks which integrated English and Buddhism. The research study further explored the students' perspectives after learning through CBLT/CLIL programme to answer the question: 'What are the perspectives of learning through CBLT/CLIL held by the students?' 20 students in Grade 1 – 9 who enrolled in the CBLT/CLIL programme at the Sunday school administrated by a temple in Bangkok were the research participants. The source of data was from a 5 Likert-scale questionnaire and the data was statistically analysed by using mean and standard derivation. It was found that the participants had a positive experience in learning CBLT/CLIL programme ($\bar{x}$= 4.23, S.D. = 0.34, Good). They evaluated their teacher's lesson planning, teaching material, teacher's feedback and teacher's characteristic of which quality were considered 'very good' and 'good'. The study suggests that the four aspects of teaching and learning through CBLT/CLIL should be further investigated through qualitative methods in order to gain rich information which can be an insightful account of the proper use of CBLT/CLIL approach in the future.

Keywords: content-based language teaching, content and language integrated learning, bilingual education, integrated learning

Introduction

English is an international language and this means that the language is used by people from different parts of the world. Undoubtedly, English is one of the languages mostly used in tourism and it is necessary for communities nearby the popular temples in Bangkok for foreign tourists. As a result of the importance of English especially for the touristic purpose, Wat Rajathiwatwihan has opened Sunday school. The school was established with the aim to teach and tutor children in nearby its community. The school is open for the students from grade 1 to grade 9. English is one of the subjects taught in the school and the main objective of learning English at the school is to cultivate students' English communicative skill for presenting the information of the temple to tourists visiting there.

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Objectives

This research study aims to develop an English and Buddhism education integrated textbook and to investigate the perspectives of teaching and learning through CBLT and CLIL held by the students enrolled in English lessons at the Sunday school of Wat Rajathiwatwihan.

Research Questions

In order to achieve in the research objectives, this research study pursues to answer the following questions, 'Are the students 'perspectives of learning through the CBLT/CLIL programme positive or negative?' and 'What are their perspectives of teaching and learning CBLT/CLIL programme?'.

Theoretical Framework

Bilingual education helps limited English proficient students develop language skills in their native (non-English) language (Chin, 2015). Bilingual education in Thailand is known as English Programme (EP) in which English is used as a medium of Instruction for at least four core subjects: science, mathematics, English and physical education (Phongploenpis, 2016). According to UCLES (2017), content subject classes can provide rich opportunities for language development. The integration of language and content can be made through two methodologies: CBLT (Content-Based Language Teaching) and CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning). The two methodologies are premised on "the belief that language and content are inseparable in communication and that the learning of both is enhanced by integrating the two" (Valeo, 2013). Both tend to be the methodologies of bilingual teaching and suitable for the current research on developing and implementing the integrated learning English and Buddhism education.

Methodology

This research project involved the design and implementation of 10-week CBLT/CLIL programme by the researcher's student teachers for their students in grade 1 to 9. The CBLT/CLIL programme was in the form of co-planning and designing the curriculum with reference to the concepts of Dale and Tanner (2015) for integrating language and content learning (English and Buddhism education).

The researcher was responsible for conducting an 18-hours-lecture on CBLT and CLIL for 80 student teachers who have taught at the Sunday school. The main rationale behind the lecture was to introduce the basic concepts and theoretical underpinnings regarding CBLT and CLIL to the student teachers. The lecture also covered lesson plans integrating English and Buddhism. They would then apply those concepts to their teaching practice.

Two collaborative meetings were organized before the implementation the CBLT/CLIL programme at the Sunday school of Wat Rajathiwatwihan. In the first meeting, the researcher discussed with the student teachers to identify their problems and needs, particularly related to integrated learning through CBLT and CLIL. This enabled them to set the language objectives for the cross-curricular unit. These language objectives were related to the content-obligatory language required for that particular unit which at the same time was applied to the content subject involved. They mainly covered some vocabulary, grammatical features, and sentence patterns relevant to certain knowledge of Buddhism education. Then, the researcher mapped their curricula to identify the potential topics to be taught, planned and matched their teaching schedules in relation to the target language objective (English). Then, the researcher and the student teachers designed or revised the teaching materials such as reading texts, extra handouts, notes, and exercises,

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which were then shared and discussed among the project team members in the second collaborative meeting. Individual student teachers then tried out the materials within their own teaching schedule, sometimes being observed by the researcher and other members in the research team.

The research participants were students from grade 1 to grade 9 (N=20) who enrolled in the Sunday school of Wat Rajathiwatwihan Temple with free of charge. During the enrolment, all of the students and parents were informed of the research project and its procedures. They consented to participate in the research project through attending the CBLT/CLIL programme and completing the questionnaire after completing the CBLT/CLIL programme.

This study employed a one-page-questionnaire which contains 21 items (Appendix). All of the 21 items were written and asked in Thai for the participants to fully understand each of them. The participants indicated the degree of their agreement on a 5-point scale towards the CBLT/CLIL programme in relation to their teacher's CBLT/CLIL based-lesson planning, -teaching and -material, feedback, and characteristics. The questionnaire also included one open-ended question which intended to collect the students' further information besides those were stated in the closed-ended questions (item 1-20).

The questionnaire was an efficient tool for gathering quantifiable information rapidly and systematically. The questionnaires was sent to each participant (N=20) who had finished the English course at the Sunday school. Each of them responded to the questionnaire and addressed the research questions regarding individual's perspectives of experience CBLT/CLIL programme in the Sunday school of Wat Rajathiwatwihan Temple. The partcipants' opinions given in the 20 closed questions were analysed quantitatively by means and standard deviations. No answer was given in the open question.

Literature Review
CBLT and CLIL

According to Shaw (1997, p.262 cited in Hoare, Kong, & Bell, 2008), Content-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) is based on an institutional philosophy which regards language as a means of communicative tools rather than a subject matter. In line with this, CBLT is based on the premise that focusing on meaning in an L2 content-rich curriculum gives an appropriate context for students to learn the L2 as they learn content (Hoare, Kong and Bell, 2008). This is supported by Davidson and Williams (2001 cited in Schleppegrell and Oliveira, 2006) who state that the integration of language and content has pedagogic value because it allows the language to be used in a meaningful way. In CBLT programmes, L2s are taught via subject matters (Valeo, 2013) e.g. science, mathematics, social studies, and psychology. One purpose of CBLT is to support L2 learners in acquiring L2 abilities required for their current and future needs and the focus in CBLT programmes tends to be primarily on the language development.

Numerous evaluations of CBLT in foreign language programmes have reported increased learner satisfaction, improvements in language proficiency, and enhanced content knowledge and academic achievement (Valeo, 2013). Kang (2015, p.43) found that EFL learners were satisfied with a CBI course firstly because it had increased their confidence in using the target language and secondly it had helped them better understand discipline-specific terms and concepts. The effectiveness of CBLT in facilitating students' L2 learning has been well documented over the past several decades (Lo, 2015, p. 443). CBLT programmes are likely to be helpful in supporting students because CBLT is as a tool enabling students successfully study mandated content knowledge through a second language.

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Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is a dual-focused teaching approach in which bilingual learners learn both content and language (UCLES, 2017). CLIL is an umbrella term referring to a dual focused educational approach in which content courses are taught through the medium of a foreign language (Yang, 2015). According to Denman, Tanner, and Graaff (2013), the principle of CLIL is that 'foreign language development is facilitated in subject classes, and content knowledge development is supported by content-based language learning strategies in language classes'.

Comparative studies of CLIL learners and those studying languages as core subjects have shown language learning benefits in favour of CLIL learners (Valeo, 2013) especially in European contexts where studies on assessing learners' academic performance confirm the prominent enhancement in CLIL learners' receptive linguistic competence (Coonan, 2007; Dalton-Puffer, 2008 cited in Yang, 2015). Further, productive competences such as speaking skills are also enhanced in CLIL education. Yang's (2015) study reported that CLIL had increased the participants' (N=29, native-Mandarin Chinese speakers) English proficiency especially in receptive skills (listening and reading).

In Thailand, CBLT and CLIL is theoretically welcomed as being feasible as it is seen as being able to motivate content learning, develop students' multiple intelligences and help them achieve positive attitudes towards the relevance of English. Nevertheless, to further enhance the effectiveness of CBLT, it has been proposed that teachers have to recognize the relationship between language and content and then help students to acquire the academic language to access content knowledge instead of simply exposing students to a large amount of language input via content subject learning (Lo, 2015, p. 443-444). Likewise, Yang's (2015, p. 362) longitudinal study examines a tertiary CLIL programme in Asia in terms of its 29 learners' linguistic and content achievements and the relationships between the two. Yang (2015) claims that CLIL is a relatively fresh approach in Asian contexts, which has not attracted equivalent attention.

It is clear that the integration of language and subject matters appears in CBLT and CLIL. Both CBLT and CLIL aim to create interesting, meaningful instruction that draw learners' attention and meet their needs regarding the achievement in a foreign language and subject matters. CBLT is defined as a form of language instruction in which academic content topics from other non-language subjects are used to organize the curriculum and support language learning. CLIL is one way to support bilingual learners who are learning through an L2 and who need to learn the academic language to achieve in subjects.

Previous research affirms the success of CBLT and CLIL. However, the planning for integrating specific language development within a mandated content curriculum (Religion Education) is not researched and suggested from the students'persepctives. For this research study, CBLT is and CLIL interchangeable. The former is to introduce linguistic features essential for learning content in relation to Buddhism and the latter is for strengthening learners' understanding of Buddhism and practising English.

Findings

The descriptive statistics ($\bar{x}$ and S.D.) were used to show the students' perspectives of teaching and learning through the CBLT/CLIL programme at the Sunday school. The scale from 1.00 – 1.49 means 'very poor', 1.50 – 2.49 means 'poor', 2.50 – 3.49 means 'fair', 3.50 – 4.49 means 'good', and 4.50 – 5.00 means 'very good'. The research findings answered two questions which were described in the following sections.

Positive Experience of CBLT/CLIL Programme

Most of the students have a positive experience in learning through the CBLT/CLIL programme ($\bar{x}$= 4.23, S.D. = 0.34, Good). The 18 items were classified as 'Good' experience and two items were classified as 'Very good' experience. They were item10 and 18. Based on the finding of item 10, the students perceived that CBLT/CLIL based-handouts and -learning media made learning easily to understand ($\bar{x}$ = 4.55, S.D. = 0.83). The finding of item 18 showed that the students considered their teacher serious with their teaching ($\bar{x}$= 4.65, S.D. = 0.49).

Lesson Planning

Table 1 showed the students' perspectives regarding teacher's lesson planning (item 1-4). It found that learning through the CBLT/CLIL programme, the students were aware of the course syllabus (item 2, $\bar{x}$= 3.95, S.D. = 0.89), the learning objectives (item 2, $\bar{x}$= 4.45, S.D. = 0.69), and the measurement/assessment criteria (item 4, $\bar{x}$= 4.10, S.D. = 0.97). Furthermore, the students reported that CBLT/CLIL based-handouts/learning material were well prepared (item 3, $\bar{x}$= 4.30, S.D. = 0.93).

Table 1
Students' Perspectives of Teacher's Lesson Planning

Students' Perspectives of Teacher's Lesson Planning	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation
1. I was weekly informed of course syllabus.	3.95	0.89	Good
2. I was clearly informed of learning objectives.	4.45	0.69	Good
3. Hand-outs and learning materials were well-prepared.	4.30	0.98	Good
4. I was clearly informed of measurement and assessment criteria.	4.10	0.97	Good

Teaching and Material $\bar{x}$

As can be seen from Table 2, the participants held positive perspectives toward their teachers' teaching and material (item 5-11). The participants agreed that their teacher taught what had been stated in the course syllabus (item 5, $\bar{x}$= 4.10, S.D. = 0.97) and the learning content had included moral issues (item 6, $\bar{x}$= 4.25, S.D. = 1.07). The teacher's teaching was considered interesting (item 7, $\bar{x}$= 3.85, S.D. = 0.81) and their instructional language was perceived as appropriate (item 8, $\bar{x}$= 4.10, S.D. = 1.07). Relevant to these, their explanations/instructions were regarded as well-connected (item 9, $\bar{x}$= 4.30, S.D. = 0.73). The teacher's material was perceived as comprehensible (item 10, $\bar{x}$= 4.55, S.D. = 0.83) and relevant to the learning content (item 11, $\bar{x}$= 3.95, S.D. = 0.94).

Table 2
Students' Perspectives of Teachers' Teaching and Material

Students' Perspectives of Teachers' Teaching and Material	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation
5. Teacher taught what had stated in the course syllabus.	4.10	0.97	Good
6. Teacher's learning content had an example of morality.	4.25	1.07	Good
7. Teacher's teaching always makes lessons interesting for me	3.85	0.81	Good
8. Teacher's language of instruction was easy to understand and appropriate.	4.10	1.07	Good

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Students' Perspectives of Teachers' Teaching and Material	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation
9. Teacher's explanations and instructions are well-connected.	4.30	0.73	Good
10. Teacher's hand-outs and learning media made learning easily understand.	4.55	0.83	Very good
11. Learning's assignment is relevant to learning content.	3.95	0.94	Good

Teacher's Feedback

Table 3 showed the participants' perspectives of teacher's feedback which included teacher's answers to their question(s) and recommendations. The participants found their teacher's feedback useful (item 12, $\bar{x}$= 4.00, S.D. = 1.26). Their teacher consistently gave clear answers (item 13, $\bar{x}$= 4.40, S.D. = 0.68), recommendations (item 14, $\bar{x}$ = 4.35, S.D. = 0.75) and assessment (item 15, $\bar{x}$ = 4.30, S.D. = 0.73) to them. These findings were relevant to how the participants reported the environment during the interaction with their teacher. The participants felt free to ask their teacher questions (item 16, $\bar{x}$ = 4.30, S.D. = 0.86) and to share or discuss in the classroom (item 17, $\bar{x}$ = 4.40, S.D. = 0.60)

Table 3
Students' Perspectives of Teacher's Feedback

Students' Perspective of Teacher's Feedback	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation
12. Teacher's feedback was useful.	4.00	1.26	Good
13. Teacher could give a clear answer to my question.	4.40	0.68	Good
14. Teacher recommended additional learning resources.	4.35	0.75	Good
15. Learning assessment and feedback were consistently given to me for improving my work.	4.30	0.73	Good
16. I could talk to my teacher when I had a question.	4.30	0.86	Good
17. I felt free to share my opinions, ask questions, and discuss in the classroom	4.40	0.60	Good

Teacher's Characteristics

In terms of teacher's characteristics (item 18-20), the overall results show that the participants were satisfied with their CBLT/CLIL teacher. As can be seen in Table 4, they perceived their teacher's personality appropriate (item 20, $\bar{x}$ = 4.25, S.D. = 0.85). The teacher's characteristics found in CBLT/CLIL included serious ($\bar{x}$ = 4.65, S.D. = 0.49) and punctual ($\bar{x}$ = 4.05, S.D. = 1.19).

Table 4
Students' Perspectives of Teacher's Characteristics

Students' Perspectives of Teacher's Characteristics	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation
18. Teacher taught his/her lesson seriously.	4.65	0.49	Very good
19. Teacher started and finished the class on time.	4.05	1.19	Good
20. Teacher's personality was appropriate.	4.25	0.85	Good

Discussion

The present research answered two questions: 'Are the students 'perspectives of learning through the CBLT/CLIL programme positive or negative?' and 'What are their perspectives of teaching and learning CBLT/CLIL programme?'. The research results

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have confirmed the effectiveness of CBLT and CLIL approach. Based on the research results, the majority of the participants have a positive experience in learning through the CBLT/CLIL programme.

Interestingly, the findings regarding the participants' perspectives of teacher's lesson planning showed that the participants could understand what was delivered in the classroom. This is in line with previous research (Valeo, 2013; Lo, 2015; Yang, 2015; UCLES, 2017; Hoare, Kong and Bell, 2018) which reported the effectiveness of CBLT/CLIL in terms of enhancing students' understanding of teaching content and language in the classrooms. However, this study investigated whether and to what extent the students understood the learning and teaching process when CBLT/CLIL were implemented. Based on the research results, they perceived that their teacher had explained course syllabus, learning objectives, and measurement/assessment criteria to them. Most of all, they could assess their teacher's learning material. This was a good sign showing that CBLT/CLIL could draw students' attention throughout each of lessons.

Secondly, this research study allowed the participants to evaluate their teachers' CBLT/CLIL teaching and material while the previous studies (Valeo, 2013; Lo, 2015; Yang, 2015; UCLES, 2017; Hoare, Kong and Bell, 2018) showed the effectiveness of CBLT/CLIL by testing students' achievement in either content or language proficiency or both of them. It might be argued that teachers' teaching practice and material conducted in this study were assessed through the lens of the students (participants) themselves, rather than their learning competency.

Next, the research results depicted the interactions among the participants and their teacher while CBLT/CLIL was implemented. Based on the research results, it might be argued that teaching through CBLT/CLIL, a teacher, as a facilitator, came into play in the classroom. Moreover, learning through CBLT/CLIL, the participants were likely less anxious with asking, sharing, discussing their ideas. All these results have shed the light on the reasons why CBLT/CLIL was successful in enhancing students' learning and their academic achievement reported in the previous studies (Valeo, 2013; Lo, 2015; Yang, 2015; UCLES, 2017; Hoare, Kong and Bell, 2018).

Finally, while the previous research reported learners' characteristics during engaging in CBLT/CLIL programme, this research study observed CBLT/CLIL teacher's characteristics and came up with the characteristics expected in the classroom. It might be argued that CBLT/CLIL did not make any negative impact on teacher's expected characteristics.

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Conclusion

This current research investigated students' perspectives of learning through CBLT/CLIL. While CBLT and CLIL was well-documented in regard of its effectiveness of enhancing students' achievement in both content and language, this study attempted to investigate CBLT/CLIL's impact on teachers regarding lesson planning, teaching material, feedback, and characteristics through the lens of the students. The source of data was from a 5-Likert scale questionnaire completed by 20 students in Grade 1-9 who enrolled in English lesson at the Sunday school of Wat Rajathiwatwihan. The descriptive statistics (mean and standard derivation) were used. Based on the data analysis, the students have had a positive experience of learning through CBLT/CLIL programme. The study suggests that the four aspects of teaching and learning through CBLT/CLIL should be further investigated through qualitative methods in order to gain rich information which can be an insightful account of the proper use of CBLT/CLIL approach in the future.

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Appendix

The questionnaire

I think…	5	4	3	2	1
1. I was weekly informed of course syllabus.					
2. I was clearly informed of learning objectives.					
3. Hand-outs and learning materials were well-prepared.					
4. I was clearly informed of measurement and assessment criteria.					
5. Teacher's explanations and instruction are well-connected.					
6. Teacher's language of instruction was easy to understand and appropriate.					
7. Teacher's hand-outs and learning media made learning easily understand.					
8. Teacher's teaching always makes lessons interesting for me.					
9. Teacher could give a clear answer to my question.					
10. Teaching and learning content had an example of morality.					
11. Learning assessment and feedback were consistently given to me for improving my English and Buddhism learning.					
12. I feel free to share my opinions, ask questions, and discuss in the classroom.					
13. I could talk to my teacher when I had a question.					
14. Teacher started and finished the class on time.					
15. Teacher taught his/her lesson seriously.					
16. Teacher taught what had stated in the course syllabus.					
17. Teacher recommended additional learning resources.					
18. Learning's assignment is relevant to learning content.					
19. Teacher's feedback was useful.					
20. Teacher's personality was appropriate.					
My additional opinion.					

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