

Effectiveness of the CLIL Methods for Japanese Learners of English

Fumi Wakui

Abstract

This research focuses on whether the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach works for Japanese learners of English and discusses the feasibility of introduction of the CLIL lessons to the education system of Japan. Due to globalization, more Japanese need to use English at work, but most of them have difficulty with English. Under these circumstances, an increase in the number of good English speakers is required in Japan. There are plenty of successful CLIL studies in Europe, so there is a high potential that CLIL can help Japanese students' English abilities improve effectively (Yamano, 2013). This research consists of the two parts, qualitative and quantitative. In the qualitative research, one eight-year-old Japanese girl was given the CLIL lesson of mathematics, and her responses in the lesson were recorded and analyzed. In the quantitative research, eleven Japanese who had experience of the CLIL answered a questionnaire about the effectiveness of the CLIL approach and the practicability of introducing the CLIL approach in Japan. In the qualitative research, the participant was only one Japanese girl, but the participant understood a new concept of mathematics in English. In the quantitative research, all the participants claimed that learning

subjects in English helped their English abilities to improve, and nine out of the eleven participants agreed with the effectiveness of the CLIL method for Japanese. These suggest that there is the possibility that the CLIL approach works for Japanese.

Key words: CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), Japanese learners of English, English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

Literature Review

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) method has drawn attention in Japan due to the start of compulsory English education in primary school since 2011. Before that, English was taught from junior high school in Japan. The reason why the Japanese government moved up the starting point of English education is that most Japanese are not able to use English at work, which is regarded as one of key issues in Japan. According to Yamano (2013), there are plenty of successful CLIL studies in Europe, so Yamano (2013) claims that there is a high potential that CLIL can help Japanese students' English abilities improve effectively.

One weak point of conventional English education in Japan is that it focuses on knowledge and memorization. In Japan, most English classes are grammar-centered and teacher-centered, where students focus on remembering English grammar and vocabulary. As a result, most Japanese are not used to speaking and using English. On the

contrary, CLIL education enables students to have practical and real use of English because students learn subjects such as math and science in English in CLIL class (Sasajima, 2011). Yamano (2013) compared CLIL classes to non-CLIL classes (conventional English class), and she argued that CLIL class can promote students' language through learning. In other words, students in CLIL class can reproduce more English words, phrases, and sentences in class.

There are some disadvantages in CLIL education. Sasajima (2011) pointed out that students' English in CLIL education tends to include inaccurate usages. Also, Sasajima (2011) mentioned that it takes a long time to obtain the effect in CLIL method. However, these problems could be solved because English education in Japan starts at primary school. It means that students have 12 years to learn English before entering university. Students have enough time to develop authentic English skills. In addition, if students continue to use English for 12 years, their errors would be reduced with more input. Practice makes perfect, which is true of language acquisition. Therefore, the CLIL method should be introduced in English education in Japan from primary school level so that students can learn subjects in English and effectively improve their English skills.

Methodology

To examine whether CLIL education works for elementary school students in Japan, two methods, qualitative and quantitative research methods, were conducted. In the qualitative research, an

experiment was conducted on an eight-year-old Japanese girl whose English is at the beginner level. The participant's responses were recorded during the class and the data of recordings in the CLIL lesson were analyzed. The content of the class was four-digit numbers, which was chosen from the school textbook of mathematics which the participant was using, but she had not learned it yet at that point. The materials used in the experiment were copies of the participant's school mathematics textbook. The materials are written in Japanese, so the parts of Japanese explanation were covered with paper. In addition, the textbook includes some exercises, so the exercises were used to check whether the participant understood the content in English. In the quantitative research, the participants were eleven Japanese who had previously learned subjects in English. They answered a questionnaire about the effectiveness of the CLIL approach regarding both understanding of contents and improvement of English abilities. The questionnaire also included questions about the feasibility of introducing the CLIL approach to the education system of Japan.

Results

In the qualitative experiment, the CLIL math lesson (introduction of four-digit numbers) was given to the eight-year-old Japanese girl. As materials for this lesson, copies of her school math textbook were used, but she had not learned the chapter yet. The materials are written in Japanese, so the parts of Japanese explanation were

covered with paper. During the class, her utterances in Japanese and English were recorded by an IC recorder. This recording was about 20-minute long. Out of the recording, the script for explanation part of four-digit numbers was as follows:

T: Today we are going to learn big numbers, “thousand.” Do you know “thousand”?

P:

T: First, take a look at this picture. (Show her a picture in the textbook). There are many one yen coins. The girl is Chihiro, and she is counting one yen coins. How many one yen coins are there in the block?

P: Ten, ten, ten, ten!

T: Ten times ten, so this block has 100 coins.

P: *Ju no katamari..... hyaku.* (a block of 10...100) **100 no katamari?** (a block of 100?)

T: Yes, well, how about all the blocks?

P: *Sen.* (thousand)

T: Really? One, two, three..... twenty-three.

P: *Three, four.....twenty-three.* (Count together)

T: Yes, twenty-three hundred. That is, two thousand three hundred. Thousand is *sen*. *Sen* is 10 hundred. 20 hundred is two thousand.

P: *Two thousand!*

T: Yes, and there are three hundred more. So, two thousand three hundred.

P: *Ni sen sanbyaku.* (2300)

T: Yes, that's right. In English, two thousand three hundred.

P: Two thousand three hundred.

T: Yes, good! How about this?

P: Go. (5)

T: Umm... 5 ten, so..

P: 5 ten.

T: No, fifty. Fifty-four.

P: Fifty-four.

T: Yes, so there are two thousand three hundred fifty-four coins. Can you write the number? (Give her a pencil.)

P: Ni sen sanbyaku gojyu yon? (2354?)

T: Yes. Do you know how to write the number? *Kaite goran* (Write down). Yes, good job! In English, two thousand three hundred fifty-four. Say it.

P: Two thousand ...three hundred ...fifty-four.

T: Good! Let's move on to the next question. In this picture, how many thousands, *Nanko* (how many) do you see?

P: Niko. (2)

T: Yes, two, two thousand. How many hundred?

P: Sanko. (3)

T: Yes, three hundred, and how many ten?

P: Fifty.

T: Yes, and four, right? So, this is two thousand three hundred fifty-four.

P: Two thousand three hundred fifty-four.

T: Yes, can you read the number? Say the number?

P: Two... thousand three ... hundred ... fifty-four!

Notes:

T: Teacher, Japanese researcher, **P: Participant, One yen coin (¥1 coin):** Japanese coins,

(xxx) : English translation of utterance in Japanese, **(xxx):** action

The results show that pictures for explanation and a little use of the first language are inevitable for the participant to understand not only the concept of four-digit numbers but also what the teacher said in English. At first, the participant did not understand what the teacher said or the concept of thousand. Instead, she just said what she saw. For example, when she saw a picture of several blocks of 10 times 10, 100 coins, she said “ten, ten, ten, ten!” It shows that the participant tried to guess the meaning of what the teacher said using the visual item. In addition, use of the first language also promoted the participant’s understanding of the concept and English words. When the teacher translated Japanese words which the participant said into English, the participants understood the words such as thousand and hundred. By looking at the pictures and numbers, listening to English words the teacher gave to her again and again, and practicing saying numbers in English, the participant matched all the things in her mind and understood the idea and the English words to express the idea. In the last part of the recording, the participant gave correct answers to the exercise questions in the

textbook. Therefore, even though Japanese students do not understand English well, by using proper visuals and a little help of the first language, it is possible that students learn a concept of math in English and read numbers.

In the quantitative research, the Japanese participants answered the questionnaire. Regarding the effectiveness of learning contents in English, as shown in Figure 1, most of the participants understood contents more than 65%, and 64% of the participants understood contents more than 80%. However, the two participants, 18% of them understood less than fifty percent. In addition, what was helpful to them for understanding is shown in Figure 2. Most of them chose support from their instructors and classmates.

Figure 1.

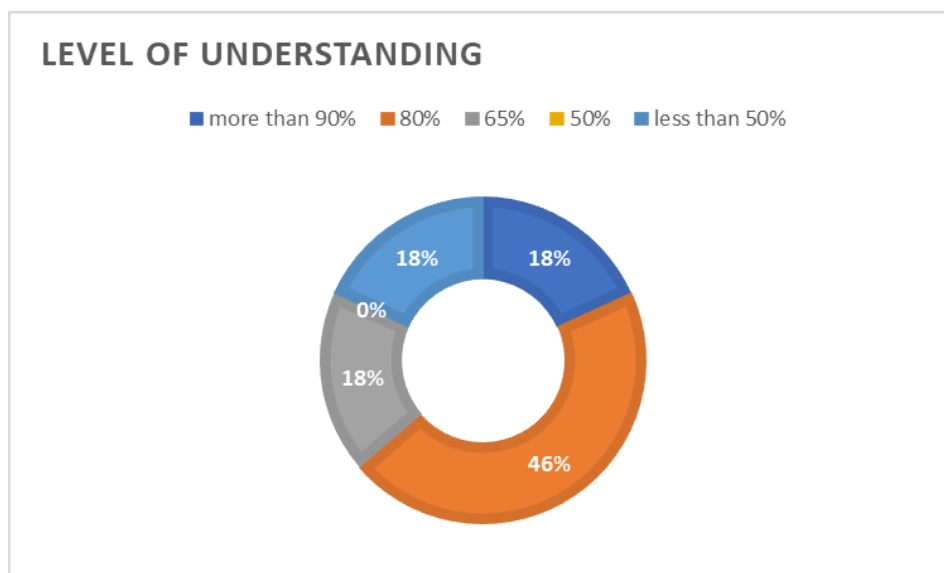
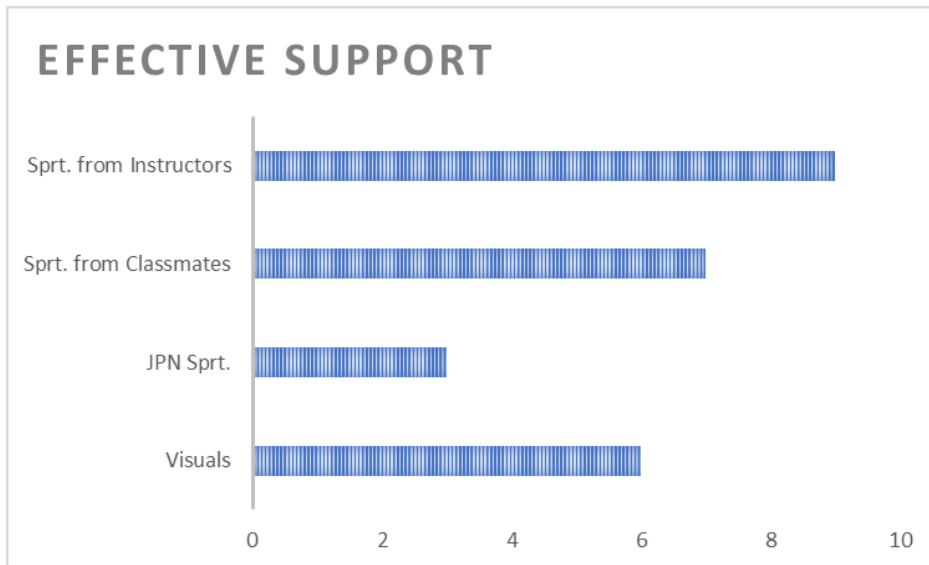
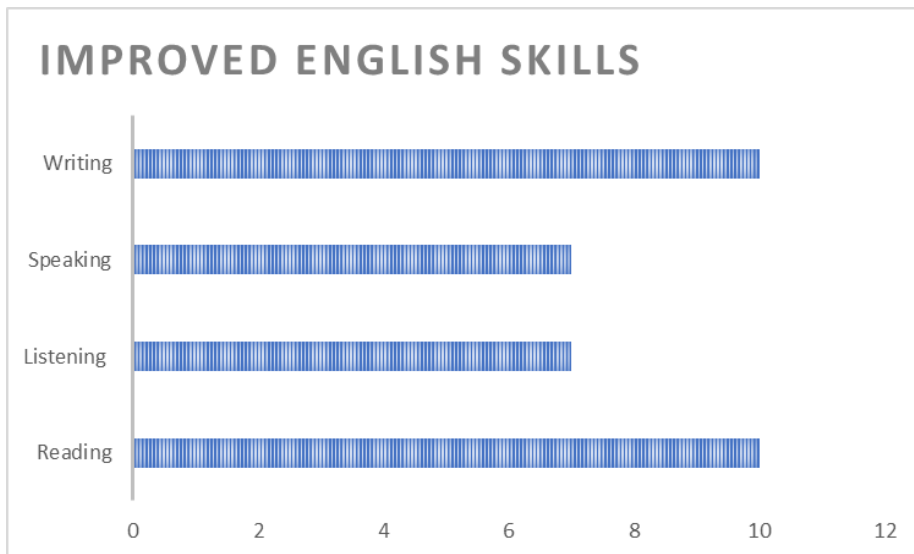


Figure 2.



Regarding the effectiveness of improving English skills, all the participants, 100% of them agreed that learning subjects in English led to improvement of their English skills. In addition, the skills they improved are shown in Figure 3. More than half of the participants considered all the four skills as improved skills, but almost all the participants raised writing and reading skills.

Figure 3.



Regarding the feasibility of introducing the CLIL method into the Japanese education, as shown in Figure 4, most of the participants showed the positive attitude, while only the two participants answered negative to the question. In addition, the answers to the question about an appropriate time to start learning in the CLIL method are shown in Figure 5. While three of the eleven participants chose high school and college in total, eight of them, 67% chose elementary and kindergarten. No one chose junior high school as an appropriate time.

Figure 4.

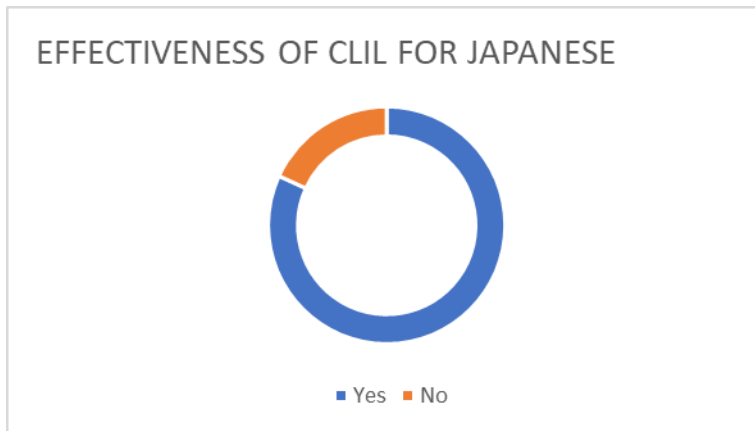
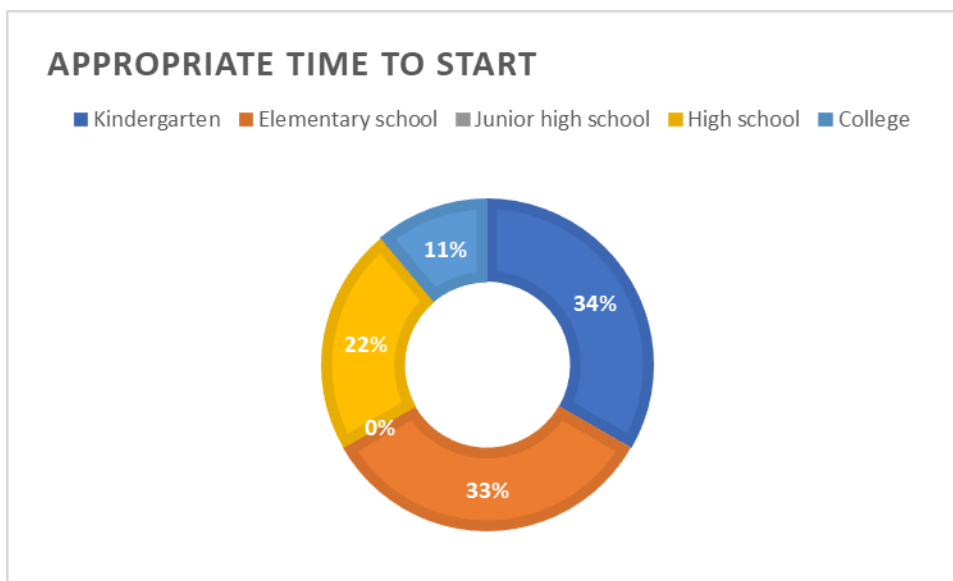


Figure 5.



Conclusions

There are three main conclusions in this research regarding the effectiveness of the CLIL method in understanding the contents, the effectiveness of the CLIL method in improving English skills, and the feasibility of introducing the CLIL method into the Japanese education.

How well Japanese learners can understand contents in English depends on how long the learners studied in English. In the quantitative research, 64% of them understood the contents very well and most of them understand more than 65%. However, two participants chose less than fifty percent. The two participants learned subjects in English for three months to one year, which are not long. Sasajima (2011) pointed out taking a long time to learn contents as a disadvantage of the CLIL method. If they learned for a longer period, the results can be changed. In the qualitative research, the participant fully understood the new math concept in English with some visuals and Japanese support. Also, in the quantitative research, most of them claimed that support from instructors and classmates were helpful to understand contents. If Japanese learners can get these supports enough, and study in the CLIL method for more than two years, the effectiveness of the CLIL method in understanding contents will increase.

Regarding the effectiveness of the CLIL method in improving English abilities, there is the possibility that it is quite effective for Japanese learners. Yamano (2013) claimed that in the CLIL class, students tended to use more English because the CLIL class promoted language use through learning. In this research, the results supported this idea. The results of the quantitative research were found to be positive in terms of the effectiveness in improving English skills, because all the participants agreed with this point.

However, in the qualitative research, the participant could say only a few English words such as thousand and numbers. More research in situations where sentence level English is required is necessary to examine this point, but there is still a high possibility for its effectiveness.

The practicality of introducing the CLIL method in Japan also has the potential because most of the participants agreed to this point. The two participants were the same participants who answered negative to the question about the effectiveness of the CLIL method in understanding contents. Thus, the two participants learned for a short period and understood the contents less than fifty percent. If they learn for a longer time, the results can also change as well.

From these results, there is the possibility that the CLIL approach works for Japanese. However, in order to make the CLIL method effective in Japan, we need to remember that it takes time for the CLIL method to take effect in understanding contents and improving English abilities. In the quantitative method, most of the participants chose elementary school and kindergarten as an appropriate time to start learning the CLIL method. Therefore, the CLIL method should be introduced from elementary school. If so, Japanese learners can learn in the CLIL method for at least twelve years, and this would be a period long enough for the CLIL method to take effect.

References

- Ikeda, M. (2013). Does CLIL work for Japanese secondary school students? Potential for the “weak” version of CLIL. *International CLIL Research Journal*, 2(1), 31-43. Retrieved from https://www.alttrainingonline.com/uploads/5/8/4/9/58498655/ikeda_clil_in_hs_icrj-vol21-article3.pdf
- Mehisto, P., Marsh, D. & Frigols, M. (2008). *Uncovering CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning in bilingual and multilingual education*. London: Macmillan Education.
- Sasajima, S. (2011). CLIL to wa [What Is CLIL?]. In S. Sasajima (Ed.), *CLIL Atarashii Hasso no Jyugyo* [CLIL, A New Idea for English Lessons] (pp.8-47). Tokyo: Sansyusya.
- Yamano, Y. (2013). Utilizing the CLIL approach in a Japanese primary school: A comparative study of CLIL and EFL lessons. *Asian EFL Journal Research Articles*, 15(4), 160-183. Retrieved from <https://www.elejournals.com/963/asian-efl-journal/the-asian-efl-journal-quarterly-volume-15-issue-4-december-2013/>