



Applying CLIL Model in Overseas Language Immersion

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Abstract

The purpose of launching Culture and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) model in the overseas immersion program offered by Post-basic Chinese Program at Defense Language Institute (DLI) was to provide culturally based foreign language education to language learners via a culture-integrated immersive learning environment. The CLIL model aimed to engage learners in meaningful real-life tasks and to enhance learners' proficiency in the target language as well as cultural knowledge about the target-language-spoken regions and countries. The primary goal of the CLIL-model based overseas immersion program at a host university in Taiwan was to emphasize on social and cultural studies of the target-language countries and regions in order to enhance the learners' linguistic and sociolinguistic competence. Pedagogical strategies employed included implementing content-based immersion curriculum, designing real-life scenario-based learning tasks, and creating a post-immersion cultural research showcase. An online Diagnostic Assessment tool was used to measure participating students' pre- and post-immersion listening and reading proficiency. The results demonstrates that the all 9 students' both listening and reading proficiency was enhanced after completing the 4-week long overseas immersion program. In addition, a post-immersion learning-attitude survey demonstrated the 9 students' accelerated learning motivation, confidence and risk-taking tactics. In conclusion, this program successfully equipped the participating learners with professional language and cross-cultural competence.

Keywords: *Overseas immersion, culture and language integration, content-based learning.*

1. Background

Defense Language Institute (DLI) is the largest language college in the world, which accommodates over 3,500 military students enrolled in over thirty language programs and taught by over 1,800 language instructors. DLI provides high quality language training to future military linguists in order to enhance the national security of the United States. During the past decade, DLI has transformed from a military training institute to a fully accredited college specializing in foreign language education. The transformation of the organization calls for a revolutionary change in classroom instruction, curriculum design and program development. The Chinese Post-basic Program at DLI piloted applying the Culture and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) model in its overseas immersion program.

2. CLIL-Based Overseas Immersion

The CLIL model has refaced the way of language learning since it was proposed in 1990s. According to Marsh (1994), the creator of this term, the concept of CLIL evolved from and integrated "language immersion" and "content-based instruction", two effective and prevalent methodologies in language education [6]. CLIL develops not only language learners' language proficiency but also their cultural understanding and motivation (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010) [2]. A content-based overseas language immersion program was launched in the Chinese Post-Basic Program. Unlike conventional language study abroad programs, the CLIL-based immersion curriculum focused not only language proficiency gains but also target-area knowledge and intercultural awareness. The overseas immersion program also aimed to enhance students' learning self-efficacy so that they would be more motivated and prepared for their future assignments to cope with emerging international and regional issues with both linguistic and sociolinguistic competence.

Students enrolled at the Post-basic Chinese Department were required to participate in a four-week immersion program at National Chengchi University (NCCU) in Taipei, Taiwan. The program consisted of lectures on various cultural and social topics taught by Chinese subject-matter experts as well as a variety of learning tasks requiring higher level language proficiency, such as roundtable discussions, debates and interviews. All lectures were delivered by a subject matter expert at the hosting university instead of by a language teacher. In addition, students participated in field trips and excursions accompanied by Chinese language partners and NCCU staff/tutors to enhance what they learned in the classroom. Driven by the CLIL model, this immersion program aimed to stimulate the participating students' linguistic and sociolinguistic learning via reflecting on their learning from daily lectures



offered at NCCU in Taiwan as well as interaction with the locals. Participating students were required to conduct a mini research on one interested topic during their immersion program in Taiwan and to present their research outcome to military and academic leadership as well as their teachers and peers after completing the immersion trip. The participating students were encouraged to collect information related to their selected topic in Taiwan with the help of local language tutors via survey, interview, roundtable discussion, etc.

It is commonly known that overseas language immersion is pricy. In the current literature, there are very few studies presenting any convincing program evaluation data for content-based overseas language immersion. The question remains: does the CLIL-based overseas immersion program help improve students' proficiency level and learning motivation?

The two program evaluation questions for this CLIL-based overseas immersion program are:

1. Does the CLIL-based overseas immersion curriculum enhance students' language proficiency levels?
2. Does the CLIL -based overseas immersion program help improve students' language learning motivation and attitude?

3. Data Collection

3.1 Evaluation methods

The target subjects of this evaluation study were 9 military linguists enrolled at Chinese Post-basic Program at DLI during the second and third quarter of Fiscal Year 2018. All these trainees were required to participate in a 4-week long overseas immersion program hosted by National Cheng-chi University in Taipei, Taiwan.

Boulmetis and Dutwin (2011) illustrated the diverse circumstances under which each evaluation model can be used and offered practical advice on identifying data sources and collecting the data [1]. A single-factor quasi-experimental quantitative study was designed to explore the above two evaluation questions: proficiency gain and learning attitude change. In this program evaluation, the independent variable was the CLIL-based overseas language immersion program while dependent variables were the subjects' language proficiency levels and language learning beliefs, such as self-efficacy, attitude motivation and confidence.

For the first evaluation question, the Online Diagnostic Assessment (ODA) was adopted as the instrument to conduct the pretest-post test design. All the subjects were required to take pre-immersion and post-immersion ODA tests which measures examinees' listening and reading proficiency. The post-immersion ODA scores were compared with pre-immersion ODA scores to tell whether or not the subjects' language proficiency was improved after the intervention of total language immersion programs.

As for the second evaluation question, a 10-question survey was conducted to all the subjects to evaluate the enhancement of their learning attitude. According to Creswell (2005), survey research is adopted to a sample or to the entire population of people in order to describe the attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of the population [3]. The 10-question survey in Appendix A covering various aspects of language learning attitude was used as the instrument to investigate how the immersion experience changed a learner's motivation and strategies.

3.2 Population and sample

The population of the study are college-level intermediate and advanced Chinese language learners. Among the 9 subjects in this study, 7 trainees were Non-Committed-Officers (NCO, E5-E7) and 2 trainees were Senior Airmen. All the trainees were professional military linguists who had completed DLI Basic-course Chinese program. They were deployed in various domestic and overseas American military bases and performed Chinese language related military tasks. Their military units sent them back to DLI to complete the 19-week long post-basic course in order to enhance their language proficiency to a superior level. Due to security reasons, many of the demographic characteristics of the samples in this study, such as military rank, gender, age, service years, are released or described in further details.

3.3 Data collection procedure

The 9 subjects were required to take ODA within one week before departing for immersion destination and one week after returning. Subjects were asked to log into the website of ODA and to complete the assessment. Results of the assessments was saved with each student's learning profile. The



teaching teams of the Chinese Post-basic program collected the results of each student and submitted to me and DLI Immersion Language Office, who was responsible for recording the ODA results of each immersion group in the database.

An Immersion Specialist from Immersion Language Office coordinated this immersion trip. The specialist met the immersion students during an after-action briefing after they were back to the classrooms. During this briefing, the Immersion Specialist asked the students to complete the survey. The specialist also gave the instruction of survey, explained the purpose of the survey and clarified the students' concern and questions if it is necessary. Each student was issued a copy of survey and was asked to complete the survey within 10 minutes. Students were asked not to write down their names on the survey form. Based on their immersion experience, the students indicated whether they agreed with the statements related to learning attitude by circling a number next to the statement, where 4=strongly agree, 3= agree, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree, 0=no opinion. After all the students complete the survey, the Immersion Specialist collected the survey paper and calculate the means of the group's response to each question. The survey results were entered into the database of Immersion Language Office. The original survey paper was kept in a safe in the Office.

4. Data analysis

Two sets of univariate data were analyzed: ODA test scores (measurement) and results of the survey on learning attitude.

4.1 ODA results

The below table displays the 9 subjects' pre-and post-ODA records.

Subject	Pre-Immersion ODA Scores (Reading/Listening)	Post-Immersion ODA Scores (Reading/Listening)
Student 1	23/25	25/26
Student 2	23/25	29/27
Student 3	25/29	29/29
Student 4	23/25	26/29
Student 5	19/23	26/26
Student 6	26/28	30/33
Student 7	28/30	30/33
Student 8	25/27	31/32
Student 9	26/26	35/33

Table 1. ODA Results Analysis

4.2 Learning-attitude survey results

The following data analysis is based on the post-immersion self-assessment survey results of the 9 subjects who participated in the 4-week overseas language immersion in Taiwan. The descriptive statistics demonstrates the mean, standard deviation and variance of each of the 10 questions asked in the survey.



	# 1	# 2	# 3	# 4	# 5	# 6	# 7	# 8	# 9	# 10
count	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
mean	3.53	3.81	3.90	3.80	3.59	3.60	3.73	3.50	3.80	3.92
sample standard deviation	0.53	0.40	0.32	0.48	0.48	0.48	0.48	0.42	0.42	0.31
sample variance	0.28	0.13	0.10	0.17	0.24	0.22	0.23	0.19	0.18	0.12

Table 2. Post-immersion Self-assessment Survey Results

5. Findings

The above ODA data analysis demonstrates that the all 9 subjects' both listening and reading proficiency was enhanced after completing the 4-week long overseas immersion program. There are various reasons for this significant improvement within a short time. Kitsantas (2004) revealed the three factors benefiting students who studied abroad: enhancing intercultural skills, gaining proficiency in subject matter and socializing [5]. The findings of this evaluation echoes various quantitative and qualitative studies in the field that recognized the unique role of study abroad programs play in improving students' language and cultural competence.

In addition, the learning-attitude survey demonstrated the 9 students' accelerated learning motivation, confidence and risk-taking tactics. Subjects in this study were all language learners enrolled in extremely intensive training programs at DLI. The opportunity to go overseas or to another location could be cherished by subjects as a change or a break from rigid traditional classroom environment. This overseas immersion provided a different level of authentic language input, opportunities of interaction with locals and maximal exposure to target culture. In general, the effects of overseas immersion on subjects' cognitive and psychological transformation were enormous.

6. Conclusion

Foreign language educators have long recognized the benefits and significance of overseas language immersion programs (Freed, 1995) [4]. In this age of globalization, overseas immersion has had increasing significance in the field of foreign language education. Despite of family, financial, psychological and social barriers, language learners are motivated to go overseas in search of a transformative learning experience and a unique and authentic learning environment (Sanchez, Fornerino and Zhang, 2006) [7]. The successful application of CLIL model in the Post-basic Chinese Program's immersion program provided participating trainees with a transformative learning experience and had remarkable impact on the learners. The results of the study thus provided convincing evidence of promoting CLIC-based overseas immersion programs for college-level language learners.

References

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Appendix A

Post-Immersion Self-Assessment

Instruction:

Based on your immersion experience, please indicate whether you agree with the following statements by circling a number next to the statement, where 4=strongly agree, 3= agree, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree, 0=no opinion.

1. The immersion experience has increased my confidence in using the target language.	4 3 2 1 0
2. The immersion experience has increased my motivation in using the target language.	4 3 2 1 0
3. As a result of the immersion experience, I have improved my ability in using appropriate communication strategies.	4 3 2 1 0
4. As a result of the immersion experience, I am more willing to take risks linguistically.	4 3 2 1 0
5. The immersion experience has made me more tolerant of language parts that I do not know.	4 3 2 1 0
6. As a result of the immersion experience, I have less anxiety in talking with native speakers.	4 3 2 1 0
7. As a result of the immersion experience, I am more in charge of making decisions about my learning (prioritizing, using learning strategies, reflecting and analyzing learning process...	4 3 2 1 0
8. The immersion experience has enhanced my ability to understand the target culture imbedded in the target language.	4 3 2 1 0
9. As a result of the immersion experience, I have improved my ability in identifying and using available resources for my learning.	4 3 2 1 0
10. As a result of the immersion experience, my overall language proficiency has improved.	4 3 2 1 0