

Telecollaborative Task Design in a Content-Language-Integrated-Learning Context: Content, Communication, Cognitive, Culture



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Abstract: This study explores approaches on telecollaborative task design in a Content-Language-Integrated-Learning (CLIL) context for language courses. This study discusses integration of task-based telecollaboration into a CLIL course and concludes feasible guidelines on the task design in terms of content, communication, cognitive and culture. The results of the study may give insights for telecollaborative teaching practitioners.

Keyword: Task Design; CLIL; Telecollaboration

1. Research Background

Telecollaboration and CLIL are trendy pedagogies that have increasingly captured the attention in SLA field. Many researchers have discussed on the possibilities and advantages on their integration (O'Dowd, 2018; Gao & Liu, 2019; Zhao, et al 2020). Considering that learning is built around non-linguistic content in the CLIL context (Coyle, 2002) and language is the tool for content learning, applying online technologies with more authentic materials and communications with target language users is beneficial to build up a more qualified context for CLIL learning. O'Dowd (2018) took the lead to proposing the innovative online learning in the form of Telecollaboration or Virtual Exchange (VE) in CLIL for more learning effectiveness.

A typical telecollaboration project, as O'Dowd (2018) suggests, should involve the engagement of groups of learners in extended periods of online intercultural interaction and collaboration with partners from other cultural contexts or geographical locations as an integrated part of their educational programs and under the guidance of educators and/or

practitioners. There are advantages of combination with telecollaboration and CLIL, as the CLIL framework provides curriculum content in L2 learning and combination with telecollaboration contributes to raise multilingualism and multiculturalism as well as global competence of learners (Dooly & Vinagre, 2022).

2. Literature Review

The first issue in task design lies in the determination of the learning objectives of the task. Due to telecollaborative features, the telecollaborative learning classes normally contain two different groups of students who are geographically and culturally different. Language proficiency, learning needs and perceptions, and learning settings may be various. Thus, task instruction with clear goals leading to more intense collaboration is crucial (Müller-Hartmann & Kurek, 2016). One of the biggest advantages of integration of telecollaboration and CLIL might be due to the explicit and unify objectives setting up by the syllabus of a CLIL course. As Fontecha (2008)'s review, a qualified syllabus of CLIL should contain a content and a language component, which

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contributes to both content-obligatory language objectives and content-compatible language objectives. As tasks given in the CLIL context, the objectives of the tasks should fulfill the demands of syllabus with a dual-focus on content and language for online collaboration.

Once the goals have been set, telecollaborative teaching practitioners then decide which types of tasks should be arranged in the project. O'Dowd and Waire (2009) conclude 12 kinds of telecollaborative tasks and categorize them into three types: information exchange, comparison and analysis, and collaboration and product creation.

When practitioners decide which types of tasks should be arranged, some factors need to be taken into consideration. First, the medium supporting designed tasks should be carefully chosen. Different media will lead learners to different kinds of interaction (Hampel, 2006; Wicking et al., 2021). Second, depending on different types of tasks and various online communication tools, tasks can be conducted synchronously or asynchronously. Third, O'Dowd and Waire (2009) state that it is helpful for learners to access telecollaborative tasks in an appropriate sequencing as it will require more interactivity and close relationship for collaboration. Helm and Guth (2010) propose the sequence for each of the three phases, "which should follow a 3-step cycle: pre-task, in-task, post-task, with the pre-task preparing the learners for the task, and after the performance of the actual task a reflective post-task phase in which linguistic or intercultural issues, for example, can be discussed". This study further discusses on telecollaborative task design on language courses in a CLIL context based on the above conclusions.

3. Theoretical Framework

The integration of content and language is based on four key elements of CLIL teaching, known as the 4Cs of CLIL: content, communication, cognition, and culture. A CLIL practice should follow the principles of active and cooperative learning (Coyle et al., 2010) and draws heavily on learning from a

sociocultural perspective to "provide students with opportunities for meaningful input and output in L2 and meaningful engagement with content" (Brown, & Bradford, 2017). In the sociocultural theory, language and culture are indivisible from each other (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978), as Brown (1980) claims that "culture is really an integral part of the interaction between language and thought". A language could lead people to define culture as well as to reflect culture. Coyle et al. (2010) propose that social interaction could contribute to deep learning which involves the critical analysis of new ideas and abilities to solve problems in unfamiliar contexts. In this way, "language, cultural understanding, cognitive engagement and thinking are all connected to the content and context of CLIL" (Coyle et al., 2010).

Thus, CLIL methodology asks for meaningful, communicative tasks for learners to accomplish in a cultural context. It promotes learning by doing. Thus, it is vital to provide authentic and meaningful materials as input for task-based CLIL and motivate learners to be more interactive, participative, and autonomous in learning. In addition, tasks of CLIL should be carefully designed to let learners develop abilities cognitively (remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create) coinciding with their particular knowledge domains (factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive) (Andrés, 2012).

4. Telecollaborative Task Design in a CLIL Context

The first issue of telecollaborative task design in a CLIL context goes to the understanding of CLIL context. Luther (2000) states that a qualified method of learning requires emphasizing collaborative learning, explicit course criteria of competency and dynamism to let learners think critically and cognitively, as well as a learning community allow learners actively share different ideas and perspectives. The context of the CLIL should be this kind of environment or system of relations, factors and connections to a learner's content and language learning, as Glickman (1991) notes that "effective

teaching is not a set of generic practices, but instead is a collection of context-driven decisions about teaching” . Contextualizing learning provides a learning experience with actual use through more relevant, significant, and valid materials and promotes scaffolding and knowledge connections to the set objectives (Joseph & Nation, 2018; Hunter & Daw, 2021).

From the perspective of TBLT theories, it also highlights the context where learners are expected to be actively involved in their immediate reality (Skehen, 2003). Tasks here resemble real-world dynamics thus which promote learning objectives of practicality, authenticity, and meaningfulness (Pan et al., 2021; Potvin et al., 2021). Learners are able to explore more potential through interactions with partners under authentic situations. The more explicit and genuine tasks can be given to learners, the more possibilities they can achieve the learning objectives by putting their knowledge and skills into practice. Thus, a task-based CLIL context is where learners are encouraged to get involved in real communication by completing authentic tasks in a relatively natural environment that requires genuine language use. For fostering interaction among learners from different cultural affiliations, it is essential to adopt appropriate tools and methodologies for integral communication which concerns fruitful interactions in the real world (Cubero, 2021).

This is the function that telecollaboration works in a CLIL context. Online collaborative tasks can facilitate collaboration to let learners geographically and culturally different have a shared concept to create products. The nature of VE tasks enables them to have significant features beneficial for task-based learning. First, telecollaborative tasks engage learners in “real” interaction with target language speakers or with learners from other cultures and give them first-hand experience of “real” intercultural communication (O’Dowd, 2016). Second, telecollaborative tasks offer learners to reflect and learn from their intercultural encounters and interactions through “the variability in

meaning-making, the linguistic and cultural assumptions made in constructing knowledge” (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). As telecollaborative task-based learning advocates for language enhancement, skills development, cultural awareness, and real-life meaningfulness (Cubero, 2021), it can be claimed that telecollaboration employed in a CLIL context can foster the integration of content, cognition, communication, and culture into a holist to achieve a maximized effectiveness of CLIL.

The second issue then goes to how to employ telecollaboration in the CLIL context. According to the above mentioned, the key lies in engaging telecollaborative tasks function under a CLIL 4Cs framework, or more precisely, engaging telecollaborative tasks enhance the quality of learning in the aspects of content, communication, cognition, and culture.

Telecollaborative tasks in the CLIL context should be flexibly content-driven. As Eslami and Garver (2013) stress that “teacher and students can be using the same words to talk, read, and write about topics in content areas, yet still not communicate effectively if teachers don’t make explicit the discourse styles and ways of using the language of the content area”, the design of tasks should be carefully balanced the domains of content and language in concordance with the learning objectives. Krashen (1985) believes that comprehensible input is an important factor in SLA, thus, telecollaborative tasks should be designed to provide familiar resources of input and engage learners to be exposed to content through their collaboration. It asks that content is structured through contextual real-life and knowledge. Through learners’ interpretations of content input and recalling content information till the task completion, new knowledge construction and retention are accomplished as well.

Telecollaborative tasks in the CLIL context should be communication-oriented. Tasks should provide opportunities for learners to use the target language spontaneously and naturally with a communicative and practical goal, and to develop

language skills by understanding how it works, its rules, forms, and vocabulary (Netten & Germain, 2012). Within a meaningful and purposeful CLIL context, language is regarded as a vehicle to perform, learn, and reflect content through authentic telecollaborative tasks. Language stands on content and content reinforces language skills through meaningful, interactive, communicative, and constant exposure to the foreign language (Lialikhova, 2019). Task-based telecollaboration in the CLIL context should pursue genuine language use which also motivates learners to meet various communicative purposes, so learners are able to receive richer, more varied, and interesting input rather than limited in a physical class, which will increase learners' positive affections to language use.

Telecollaborative tasks in the CLIL context should be cognitive-demanding. Rastelli (2018) points out that tasks facilitated through audio or visual input contribute to activating learning through processes that should be challenging to learners at a cognitive level. Tasks need to be grounded in social interactions and prolong the long-term memory of learners; thus, learners will keep employing cognitive skills in order to accomplish the tasks. According to Chomsky (2006)'s views, language is a system of interrelated cognitive structures, and task-based telecollaboration in the CLIL context should strengthen the link between language and thinking. A well-designed telecollaborative task should be able to trigger learners' thinking at a higher level and lead to an in-depth understanding during constant social interactions with partners. It is necessary to leave space for learners to think and analyze the input and explore issues and solutions in cooperative modes. In the 4Cs framework, cognition is also the link between language and content, it asks for interpretation, abstract thinking, concept formulation and awareness, critical thinking, and memorization abilities (Coyle et al., 2010). Thus, it is suggested that cognitive actions related to a task better be organized from simple to complex or from lower-order to higher-order thinking regarding

remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

Telecollaborative tasks in the CLIL context should be intercultural-diverse. From a sociocultural perspective, language, thinking, and culture are constructed through interaction (Coyle, 2010). According to Byram (1989)'s study, intercultural learning is contributed by collaborative meaning-making, so it is essential to extend social interaction through online collaborative tasks. Telecollaborative tasks provide opportunities for learners to raise awareness of diversity and develop intercultural knowledge and skills in interactive settings, as Byram (1997) explains that it is "an ability to see and manage the relationship between themselves and their own cultural beliefs, behaviors and meanings, and those of their interlocutors". CLIL is potentially featured with intercultural interaction, and it is believed that a broad intercultural environment can be accessed by learners when employing telecollaborative tasks in the CLIL context. The key to cultivating learners' intercultural communicative competence is to engage them in "interculturally challenging tasks which required high levels of negotiation and collaboration" (O'Dowd, 2021).

Conclusion

According to the discussion above, when employing telecollaborative tasks in the CLIL context, it is suggested that tasks be intercultural-diverse, cognitive-demanding, communication-oriented and content-driven, which enhances the task attractiveness "in relevance to students' needs, communicative potential, relevance to the world, openness and choice as well as a cognitive challenge" (Kurek & Müller-Hartmann, 2017).

As discussed above, for better telecollaborative tasks design, it should be also taken consideration into several factors involving in task types, mediums supporting, combination of synchronous and asynchronous patterns, task sequencing, full task cycle; telecollaborative teaching practitioners should keep balance between task support and task demand,

ensure enough openness for learners to interpret tasks, and carefully deal with cultural contradictions and tensions between learners.

Even though various telecollaborative tasks are suggested for adoption for English language learning, little is known about what and how tasks should be better designed affect language learning through different variables, especially under a CLIL context. Although this study provides theoretical support to telecollaborative task design in a CLIL context, further experiments based on the above discussions are still needed to explore the feasibility and effectiveness of the conclusions.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that she has no conflicts of interest to this work.

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