



Localized CLIL Lessons for Grade 2 English Learners in Southwestern China

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Abstract

In response to the problems of limited English proficiency among young Chinese learners and insufficient adaptability of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) lessons, this study designed and implemented a localized “CLIL-ized” lesson model. The study invited 60 Grade 2 students from a primary school in Southwestern China to participate. The students were eight years old and had an introductory level of English proficiency. 16 CLIL-ized lesson plans were designed. Through classroom observation, the effectiveness of CLIL-ized lesson plans was examined, focusing on learners’ motivation for learning English, confidence in English use, and enthusiasm for communicating in English. Classroom observations in this study indicated increased students’ participation and willingness to use English during the lessons through increased use of visual auxiliary teaching materials and interactive games. At the same time, learners showed a stronger willingness to use the target language. The innovation of this study is to use CLIL-ized lesson plans to provide young learners with a new English learning environment, with practical implications for promoting the popularization of CLIL in primary education.

Keywords: CLIL, CLIL-ized lesson, CLIL-ized activity, young Chinese learners

Introduction

This study explored the effect of CLIL-ized lessons on young Chinese learners. In Chinese primary school English classes, a problem that many researchers have noted is the teacher-centered nature of the classrooms. CLIL is a student-centered teaching approach that can fully engage learners’ subjective initiative, mobilize their interest in learning language, and make

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students the protagonists of the class, with teachers as assistants to learners (Cumpăt, 2025). Many studies have shown that CLIL has positive effects in Chinese primary school classrooms and may add a new dimension to English language teaching in China (Yang, 2021). The participants in this study were second-grade primary school students from Southwestern China, a region where no English teacher had previously tried to integrate CLIL teaching into the classroom, and students had always been passive in absorbing knowledge. By bringing CLIL into this class, the teacher can impact traditional English teaching on a small scale, offering students a different classroom experience and helping to bridge the gap between English teaching and developed regions through this effort. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce CLIL into primary school English classes in Yunnan, as this offers an opportunity to bring effective educational approaches and methods to underdeveloped areas, prompting researchers to conduct this study.

Literature Review

1. Teaching English to Young Learners

Teachers select and use teaching methods, materials, and classroom activities that are suitable for young learners. Teaching methods and strategies suitable for adults cannot be used for young learners because they differ from those for adults (Dao et al., 2024). Young learners will bring the knowledge and skills learned in their native-language classroom to the foreign-language classroom through instinct (Copland et al., 2024). Young learners are in the early stages of foreign language learning. For instinctive reasons, they are born to like talking, playing games, and learning through visual and kinesthetic means.

2. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

CLIL is a dual education method that combines subject content with foreign language teaching, aiming to improve language ability through the acquisition of subject knowledge and, at the same time, deepen understanding of subject content through language learning (Sercu et al., 2025). Its core concept is the “4Cs framework,” namely *Content*, *Communication*, *Cognition*, and *Culture*, which emphasizes the organic integration of language and subject knowledge in real contexts (Xin et al., 2025). Studies have shown that CLIL not only improves students’ foreign language proficiency but also enhances their subject knowledge and intercultural awareness. CLIL has been widely used in bilingual or multilingual educational settings in Europe and elsewhere and is an innovative educational model that can effectively enhance students’ comprehensive abilities (Kim & Park, 2024).

3. CLIL Lesson Plans

A CLIL lesson plan aims to enable students to learn and use the target language while learning content knowledge (Alisoy, 2025). A complete CLIL lesson plan should include four aspects: Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture. At the same time, the four language skills should also be covered: Listening, Reading, Speaking, and Writing.

The Six-Steps pedagogy proposed by Kewara and Prabjandee (2018) is a concrete implementation framework for CLIL that aims to help students improve their language skills as they learn subject content through systematic steps. The Six-Steps teaching method is based on the core principle of CLIL, namely the fusion of content and language, and its theoretical basis comprises three types. The first is the constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that learners construct knowledge through interaction in real contexts. The second is social and cultural theory, which focuses on language as a social and cultural tool and advocates promoting the internalization of language and content through cooperative learning. According to Kewara and Prabjandee (2018), the Six-Steps pedagogy consists of the following six steps: *Greeting, Review, Directions, Task, Assessment and Delivery*.

Research Question

What are the effects of CLIL-ized lesson plans on young learners?

Methodology

1. Context of the Study

The school where the data collection was conducted in this study is in an underdeveloped city in Southwestern China. Each classroom is equipped with multimedia teaching equipment. The main data collection site in this study was the Grade 2 classroom. We designed 16 CLIL-ized lesson plans, each unit has one topic: Family, Body, Toy, Weather, Fruit & Vegetables, School subjects, Christmas, Number, Color, Geography, Action, Feeling, Job, Fairy tale, and Town and Food. Before the CLIL-ized lesson, learners typically learn the material from a textbook, a traditional ELT approach. As a result, CLIL was introduced to help students develop English proficiency and content knowledge.

2. Participants

Since this study was designed to implement CLIL with young learners, we first identified the age range of the participants as Grades 1 to 6, then began to look for opportunities in several primary schools in this city where the first author was located, and finally obtained opportunities in the primary schools where one of the first researcher's friends worked with the help of this friend. Since China's public schools are strict about outsiders entering, conducting research requires a recommendation from credible people, or from those studying at Chinese universities, arranged by the school. Therefore, through this friend's recommendation, the first researcher was successfully accepted by the school as a short-term teacher for an internship. As a result, the selection of participants, was a passive choice, because in China's primary school English education, there is a unified examination from Grade 3 to Grade 6, and the school cannot easily hand over the teaching task to a practicum teacher, and said that these classes have no extra class time for the first researcher to try the CLIL-ized lesson, the Grade 1 students are too young, and it is difficult for the first researcher to teach, so the most suitable is the second-grade class. In addition, the school director considered that the researcher had no teaching experience and was uncertain about managing students' classroom discipline, so he assigned grade 2 to the researcher to conduct the study. That class had the best classroom

discipline among the five grade 2 classes. The 60 participants in this study were all around eight years old. None of the participating students had any CLIL classroom experience before this.

3. CLIL-ized Lesson Plans

The CLIL-ized lesson plans in this study were designed for young Chinese learners and comprised 16 lessons, each lasting 40 minutes. Given that the participants were eight-year-old primary school students, we localized the content when designing the lesson plan to provide young learners with a better learning experience. Each lesson had three goals: 1) Young learners can identify the vocabulary of the theme of each unit, 2) Young learners can talk about their knowledge of different topics, and 3) Young learners can use the learned vocabulary to communicate orally. All lesson plans have been verified by three experts. After the experts' verification, we conducted a pilot study.

Table 1

Overall Picture of CLIL-ized Activities

Timeline		Activity Name	Learning Objectives
Week 1 (Unit 1-4)	Unit 1	Complete the blanks of family	1. To make students learn more new words and know more about different topics. 2. To help students understand that learning can be achieved in a second language. 3. To help students enhance oral skills and be more confidence to use English. 4. To encourage students to have more motivation to learn English.
	Unit 2	Complete the picture	
	Unit 3	Complete the crossword	
	Unit 4	Find the different weather	
Week 2 (Unit 5-8)	Unit 5	What fruits and vegetables do your friends like? Ask them and fill this form.	
	Unit 6	Complete the blanks	
	Unit 7	Color the Christmas tree and fill in the blanks	
	Unit 8	Count how many of each shape	

Table 1 (Continued)

Timeline	Activity Name	Learning Objectives
Week 3 (Unit 9-12)	Unit 9 Color the rainbow and complete the words of color	1. To make students learn more new words and know more about different topics. 2. To help students understand that learning can be achieved in a second language. 3. To help students enhance oral skills and be more confident to use English. 4. To encourage students to have more motivation to learn English.
	Unit 10 Complete the crossword	
	Unit 11 Observe the teacher's action and draw pictures about action	
	Unit 12 According to the words, complete the pictures of feeling	
Week 4 (Unit 13-16)	Unit 13 Find the different jobs	
	Unit 14 Draw a picture about the story and mark the characters	
	Unit 15 Complete the blanks	
	Unit 16 Draw a pizza and do a survey	

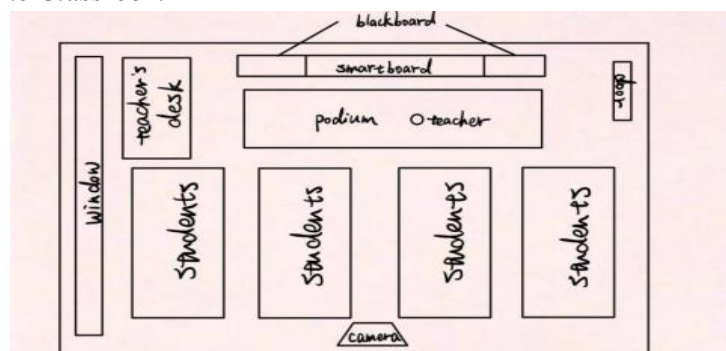
4. Instrument(s) and Procedures

4.1 Video Recording

Video recordings were used throughout the data collection process to explore the classroom environment of the CLIL-ized lessons and to observe phenomena during interactions in each lesson. Each lesson had a different topic and activities, all of which were recorded to gather learner feedback and identify any difficulties encountered during the teaching process. The data-collection videos were recorded with a mobile phone camera mounted on a tripod at the back of the classroom to capture a full view of the classroom environment during each lesson.

Figure 1

Camera Setting in the Classroom

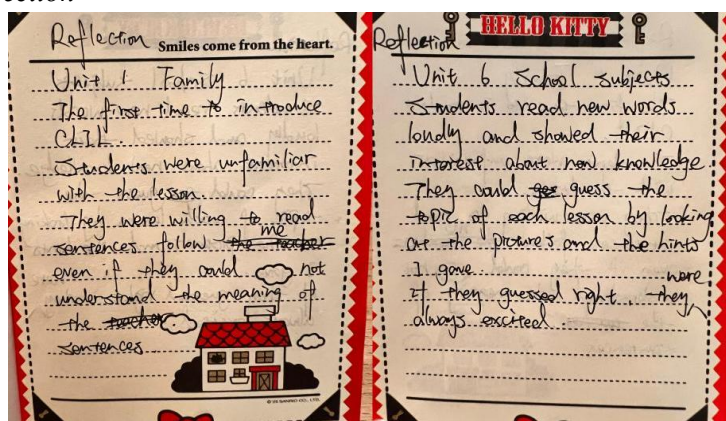


4.2 Researcher's Reflection

After completing each lesson, the first researcher immediately took notes during class to record students' participation, the classroom environment, phenomena that occurred during CLIL-ized activities, and how students completed the written tasks assigned by the teacher. This part belongs to the researcher's reflection generated during the data collection process.

Figure 2

Example of the Reflection



5. Data Collection

The objective of this study was to explore the effect of CLIL-ized lessons on young Chinese learners, but it was not directly measurable in terms of students' inner changes. Therefore, the data collection method used in this study was primarily classroom observation, and we analyzed the effects of CLIL-ized lessons on young Chinese learners by examining students' handouts.

In addition to video recordings referred above, there were also the teacher's reflections (the first researcher). Since the research question in this study concerned the effect of CLIL-ized activities, the participants were eight-year-old grade 2 primary school students, who were relatively young. Using these two data collection methods can more intuitively and scientifically obtain the data needed for the study. First, the video would be recorded throughout the entire research process. The first researcher was the teacher of the CLIL-ized lessons. The videos would be watched after each lesson. Second, the teacher's reflections after each lesson would be recorded.

The observation included classroom observation and rewatching video recordings after class. There were 16 lessons to be observed; each lesson was 40 minutes, four lessons per week, for a total of four weeks, lasting one month. The participants in the observed CLIL-ized lesson were Grade 2 primary school students.

6. Data Analysis

Researchers used coding to conduct a qualitative analysis of video recordings of classroom observations and after-class memos. This study used the simplified code of the training survey to the theoretical model. The process of coding is divided into three phases: 1) Open coding, naming each discrete piece of data, and generating a descriptive label. 2) Axial encoding, which compiles and organizes code into larger taxonomy items by identifying links and interconnections between codes. 3) Selective coding, unifying those groups that can be categorized under a single topic. These phases run through the grounded theory process of qualitative data analysis. Researchers observed the integration of CLIL into the English classroom through classroom observation, combined with the teacher's after-class memos and video recording data, such as transcribing, watching videos, and rewatching to capture key moments, to understand how the young learners participated in the classroom activities, their reactions to the activities, and their attitudes toward English learning after participation.

The lesson plan for this study was evaluated by three experts, all of whom are English teachers with 5, 7, or 10 years of experience teaching at the primary school level. The assessment mainly focused on two aspects: the content of classroom activities and students' language proficiency. After providing feedback, the teacher, the first author of this study, made appropriate adjustments. All data coding work in this study was completed by the first author, while the data interpretation process was jointly carried out by the researchers involved in this study. After the pilot study, researchers made reasonable modifications to the teaching plan based on problems encountered during practice, mainly including the types of classroom activities and the difficulty of classroom content.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, the school director approved the consent form and received a detailed description of the study objectives and the timing of data collection. After the school director approved, the participants were asked to sign the informed consent. Since the participants in this study were eight-year-old elementary school students, the forms were signed by the students' parents.

Participants were informed of the research objectives, methods, and the expected time for data collection. They were also informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study without penalty and that their identities would remain confidential. The researcher also informed participants that the recordings and results of the data collection process were unrelated to their grades in English-related courses. The researcher also informed participants that the camera would be positioned behind the last row of the classroom, that the video content would be kept confidential, and that no portraits or participants' privacy would be disclosed.

Findings

The findings of this study mainly focused on a theme to answer the research question: What effects do the CLIL-ized lesson plans designed in this study have on young Chinese learners? Table 2 presents the details of the thematic data analysis.

Table 2

The Thematic Data Analysis of Effect on Young Chinese Learners toward CLIL-ized Lessons

Codes	Categories	Theme
Greeting at the beginning of class	Language	Subjective
Speak in English	Ability	Motivation
Follow the English Instruction		Change
Cooperate with friends to complete activities		
Discuss with friends in Chinese		
Answer teacher's questions		
Hands up and answer questions	Psychological	
Read aloud follow the video	Factors	
Focus on learning new words		
Watching videos carefully		

At the beginning of the class, I stood at the podium and greeted the students. I tried to teach them how to answer, "How are you today?" However, the students did not understand the meaning of this sentence and just repeated it after me. I immediately taught the students to learn this sentence, familiarized them with the sentence "How are you today?" and taught them to answer, "Not bad." (Unit 1 Family, The Teacher's Notes)

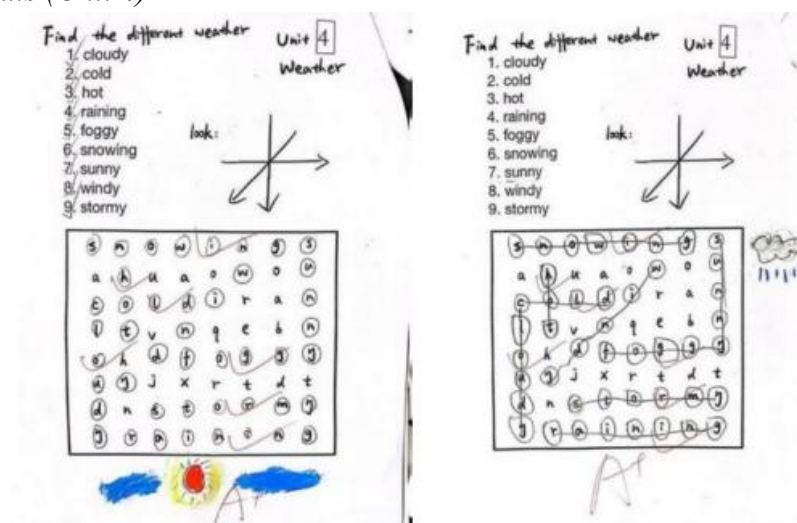
When CLIL was first introduced into primary school English classes, it was observed that when students were unfamiliar with the lesson, even if they could not understand the teacher's English, they were at least willing to follow along with the reading.

Figure 3

Students were cooperating with friends to complete the activity. (Unit 2)



It can be seen that when young learners participate in classroom activities, they communicate and cooperate with their friends in a friendly manner and complete the activities. This had gradually become a habit, and judging by the students' cooperation, they liked this approach to conducting activities. The activity of young learners could be transformed into communication with their friends, which could better promote the progress of classroom activities.

Figure 4*Activity Handouts (Unit 4)*

From the above activities, we can see that too many young learners in the same environment will lead to some uneven classroom rhythm, but a large number of students can also be seen as an advantage - students can discuss and help each other. In this activity, some students chose to ask their partners how to complete the activity. They used Chinese to discuss, which was a very practical behavior in CLIL-ized lessons.

Figure 5*Students were raising their hands to answer questions. (Unit 5)*

After I finished playing the video about fruits and vegetables in this lesson, I asked two questions: 1. "What is your favorite fruit?" 2. "What is your favorite vegetable?" The students learned some new words based on the relevant vocabulary they had already mastered and began to raise their hands to answer the questions. (Unit 5 Fruits & Vegetables, The Teacher's Notes)

It is clear from the above scenario that young learners are very confident in the knowledge they have mastered, want to show it, and have a desire to express what they have just learned. The hand-raising behavior suggested active participation and possible confidence in answering familiar questions. This phenomenon has a positive effect on young learners' English learning.

Notes from Unit 1 show that learners initially did not understand "How was your day?" This question, while the Unit 5 notes describe learners voluntarily answering questions about fruits and vegetables. It can be seen that learners have successfully mastered daily English communication and Q&A during the course of this study, and have learned to express themselves with greater confidence.

Figure 6

Students were watching a video. (Unit 7)



After I introduced the theme of this lesson, "Christmas", the students were very excited (children love to celebrate holidays). Then I started to play the video. While watching the animation, the students read aloud the words related to Christmas in the video. Sometimes when they saw interesting pictures, the students discussed with each other what this was and what that was. (Unit 7 Christmas, The Teacher's Notes)

Figure 7

Students were watching a video and some were counting along with the video. (Unit 8)



From the above scenes, it can be seen that students were full of curiosity about the videos prepared by teachers, because the theme of each unit was different. The content of the videos was mainly about word display, and students could easily follow the rhythm of the videos to read the words. In addition to the first display of the words in each video, it would also review

the whole thing. This process is also scientific and conforms to the rules of students' short-term memory, which well mobilizes students' enthusiasm for reading words aloud.

Discussion

In this study, young learners were always willing to communicate and participate in the classroom. Redlich and Pattison (2024) said that CLIL emphasizes the use of language in real-world contexts, allowing students to develop language skills naturally during the learning process while deepening their understanding of subject content through language. In this study, when students encountered familiar topics, they showed a more positive attitude, such as raising their hands to answer questions, and were more willing to use the English they had learned to express themselves. At this time, the teacher gave more opportunities, and the students gained more improvement in language skills.

Effective communication strategies can significantly improve learning outcomes in CLIL classrooms and enhance students' self-confidence and engagement (Mekonnen, 2025). The teacher used micro-expressions or nods to let students know their performance was good, which could also help prevent students from being interrupted when answering questions. Students could form a general impression of their performance from the teacher's behavior, thereby enhancing their self-confidence and their willingness to speak English. Those introverted and unsociable students also had more people raise their hands to speak in a positive classroom atmosphere. With the teacher's encouragement and guidance, more students were willing to speak English, and their communication skills improved.

Conclusion

Even though this study still has imperfections, such as students not achieving 100% optimal change and varying degrees of positive impact, based on the video recordings and the researcher's observations in the classroom. The classroom observations suggest that the localized lessons supported active participation and target-language use among many learners. Compared to traditional English teaching, the curiosity and vitality exhibited by young learners in CLIL-ized Lessons are becoming increasingly frequent. Their familiarity with English teaching instructions is also increasing, which is a change brought about by this study. Therefore, this study has value as a reference in this field, giving teachers who want to try this teaching method greater courage and confidence.

Recommendation and Implication

CLIL-ized lesson research is ushering in unprecedented development opportunities. With the growth of global education and the demands of multilingual literacy, this field urgently needs fresh perspectives and innovative exploration. We here sincerely call on emerging researchers to join the CLIL-ized journey to explore how to more efficiently integrate subject content and language learning and promote theoretical innovation and practical optimization of intercultural teaching. Your research can fill empirical gaps across different educational

contexts or develop more adaptive teaching models, providing scientific evidence for global CLIL-ized practitioners.

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