# LET'S CLIL WITH CHILDREN'S STORYBOOKS

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## ABSTRACT

Action research was implemented to see if the proposed Task-based CLIL model is effective in achieving the dual goals of content and language learning among 205 junior high school students who receive the implementation of co-teaching a biology curriculum in English in Kaohsiung City. The lessons were conducted once a week, 45 minutes per session, and lasted for 15 weeks. The aim of this research is to verify the effectiveness of storytelling in a CLIL learning situation. A questionnaire and a focus group interview were conducted to collect data from the students to see how they perceived the model with their own experience of it. According to the collected data, students stated that they had improved themselves in both English proficiency and subject content knowledge. They also stated that tasks offered them more language use opportunities to interact with peers. However, some problems were also identified, such as task organization and time arrangement. As CLIL is subject-focused, language teachers may also have to develop their own knowledge of new subjects in order to teach effectively. Based on the challenges, teachers could revise the teaching method to be in tune with students' needs and tasks' specific functions. This study can shed light on how CLIL can be successfully implemented in junior high school bilingual settings.

**Keywords:** Task-based CLIL, children's storybooks, action research.

## INTRODUCTION

CLIL is defined as a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language (Coyle, 2007; Coyle et al., 2010). According to the European Commission of languages, the main objectives of CLIL are threefold: (1) to allow students to broaden their knowledge of a subject (2) to improve student's abilities in a foreign language (3) to give students an intercultural perspective of the subject, thus motivating students' interest in and molding holistic attitudes toward other cultures. CLIL stands for Content and Language Integrated Learning. This means studying another subject (for example, science, history, or literature) and learning a language, such as English, at the same time — integrating the two subjects (Ioannou & Pavlou, 2011). The definition is broad because integration can happen in many different ways. A successful CLIL program depends on the cooperation between language teachers and content teachers. Each is an expert in his or her own field, so they need to share both their respective principles and information. Since CLIL was implemented in educational institutions at different levels, many positive learning outcomes have been reported in language learning, subject matter knowledge, cognition, and cross-cultural awareness (Chen, 2022; Coye, Holmes, & King 2009; Yang, 2016; Zou & Gao, 2018). Thanks to its great potential to improve both language and content learning simultaneously, many language teachers are eager to try it in their classrooms. However, teachers are often overwhelmed by their difficult choice among a multitude of CLIL models, which comprise a wide range of potential models: single or dual, semi or complete immersion, translanguaging, modular thematic blocks, and language showers (Coyle, 2007). Gabillon (2020) identified 216 types of CLIL programs based on factors such as intensity, grade level of program onset, compulsory status, starting linguistic

level and duration. As Coyle et al. (2010) have pointed out that while there are lessons to be learned, ideas to be borrowed and developed based on existing models, one size does not fit all — there is no one model that fits all contexts. This indicates that teachers have to work out a model of their own or make changes to the established ones according to their own educational contexts (Hsu. 2020). In this study, an attempt has been made to incorporate tasks into the 4C framework of CLIL to keep the integration and application of content and language. In order to promote the bilingual country policy, Executive Yuan (2018) put forward the "2030 Bilingual National Policy Development Blueprint" in December 2017, along with "strengthening our English ability" and "enhancing the national competitiveness" to make Taiwan a bilingual country (The National Development Council, 2018; Hemmi & Banegas, 2021). Thus, the study aims at exploring the effectiveness of the Task-based CLIL model, which is employed to teach junior high school students biology through action research to realize the appropriateness of the CLIL bilingual course and provide future directions for bilingual teachers when designing activities.

## LITERATURE REVIEW
### The 4C Framework of CLIL
In the present study, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) was introduced in order to better address students' needs since CLIL is proposed as an innovative, integrated educational approach, aiming to promote multilingualism and multiculturalism (Järvinen, 2007). CLIL is often seen as the instrumental use of a second language to teach another subject, as the language itself ceases to be the direct object of teaching and learning. Contrary to traditional language teaching viewing language learning as translating ideas in the mind with grammatical rules or as a linear process of input-processing-output, factually, in learning language, a number of other factors need to be taken into consideration such as communication skills, knowledge of subject matter, cultural awareness and cognitive processes. From modern educational perspectives, CLIL goes beyond such an atomist view of language learning and takes a holistic view of language learning. Coyle et al. (2010) proposed a 4C framework integrating the four contextualized building blocks of language learning: content (subject matter), communication (language learning and using), cognition (learning and thinking processes) and culture (developing intercultural understanding and global citizenship). The strength of this framework is that it integrates content learning and language learning within specific contexts and acknowledges the symbiotic relationship that exists between these elements. That is to say, language learning should not be separated from content, cognition and cultural understanding. Tasks provide a means of how to get this approach implemented in practical teaching and achieve the goal of integration. Such a claim or hypothesis is made that subject content knowledge can be effectively and efficiently acquired by learners when tasks are incorporated into the 4C framework, and working through tasks can provide chances for learners' interaction, which can help them achieve the multiple purposes of learning (Cenoz, Genesee, and Gorter, 2014; Yang, 2016).

There are various ways to classify tasks. Information gap activity involves a transfer of given information from one person to another – Prepare an exhibition, Create a leaflet, or Carry out an experiment. The reasoning-gap activity involves deriving some new information from given information through a perception of relationships or patterns, such as presenting an experiment, taking part in a performance or in a TV game activity. Opinion-gap activity is related to organizing a debate or writing an article for a magazine, creating a radio broadcast."(Mancebo, 2020; Ellis, 2003) There are eight points to remember when incorporating CLIL into your young learners' classrooms.

    1. Introduce the world through many core subjects

2. Let students lead the way by asking their own questions
3. This supports strong student engagement.
4. Match the content to the student's language ability
5. Present content in an interesting and challenging way
6. Allow students to organize the co
7. Give students an opportunity to talk about what they have learned
8. Provide a summative project to complete the CLIL lessons

**Stories and communication, culture, cognition**

Stories enhance children's verbal or nonverbal interactions with their peers and it's very true, especially at children's early stages of a CLIL program. Factually, stories serve as fantastic resources in a CLIL context to provoke children's reactions to meaning, content, and form. The obviously seen participation is to repeat certain formulaic phrases, chunks, or words, to role play the part of a dialogue, or to express what and how they feel. Stories give children opportunities to retell the story and to talk about alternative endings. As a consequence, stories can help learners increase language fluency and advance in their content knowledge. In sum, stories become fantastic bridges to use and understand a new language and a great source of content that will progressively prepare students for global communication about a variety of themes and topics in the CLIL classroom.

When it comes to stories and culture, people assume that stories are windows open to the world. They bring in views about different people, new countries, and diverse cultural values. Stories help children show curiosity, openness, awareness, and acceptance towards other ways of understanding life and thus help integrate children from different migrant backgrounds attending the CLIL classroom (Logioio, 2010; Satriani, 2019) As for stories and cognition, stories often involve multimodality since the linguistic and thematic information is commonly complemented with pictures and with sounds, which help children reconstruct the storyline (Karin, 2021). Stories involve predicting, guessing for meaning, and linking it to prior knowledge on a topic. In this sense, stories become scaffolding tools for the learning process which, first, help children feel supported by listening to or reading about a story topic. Retelling the plot individually or in a joint task can enhance learners' cognitive and social skills. Identifying characters, and comparing and contrasting actions, would develop reasoning, and finding alternative and creative endings or solutions (Tsai, 2019; Rengarajan, 2017); therefore, stories promote the incorporation of cognitive learning in the CLIL classroom.
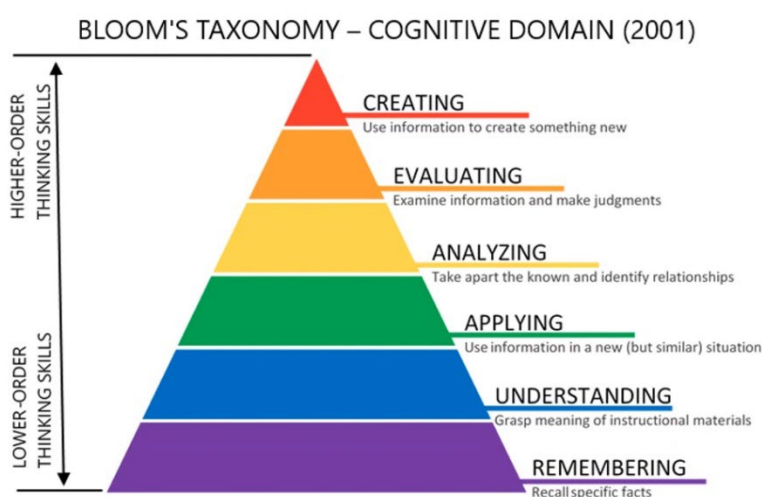
Why choose storybooks? Although the term "CLIL" is modern, the technique is as old as learning itself. Any time someone learned about something else — engineering, art, cooking — while they learned and practiced a foreign language, they were using CLIL (Mart, 2012). In the past, it was believed that there are vertical cells, and each cell has a color that camouflages, avoids predators, attracts a mate or communicates information, and even expresses an emotion or physical condition with skin color (Piner, 2013; Satriani, 2019). Other scientist proposed that the Tweaking of these cells can instantly change their ability to absorb heat. A didactical program was designed and proposed. Subsequently, the learning situation will be implemented and analyzed to conclude the research. Stories accompany us from early childhood to adulthood. As children, we love listening to the stories that our parents and grandparents tell us. In our youth, we read stories at school and watch them on television. As adults, we like to relax by reading newspapers or an interesting book after a day full of work. Stories are an integral part of our daily life surrounding us naturally. Therefore, I decided to use the story as an aid for native English teachers co-working with foreign teacher so as to

bilingually instruct students Biology with English. The stories not only encourage children to use their imagination fantasy to create an imaginary world, but also to become a part of it and enjoy it. Because stories are something that is natural for children, using them in the teaching and learning process is natural too.

**Bloom's Taxonomy-cognitive domain**
CLIL is a promising educational approach that helps learners to acquire competences to utilize newly acquired knowledge to tackle complex issues collaboratively. Designing CLIL courses requires serious consideration and planning to facilitate deeper learning on a subject content through a medium language as a cognitive as well as communicative tool. Within procedural scaffolding from teach, model, practice to apply, teachers should specify what knowledge and cognitive skills are demanded by a the topic of chameleon and then contemplate how to help learners to construct knowledge and develop such cognitive competencies, and the following figure 1 of Bloom's taxonomy is to show the basis of designing a CLIL course.

**Figure 1 of Bloom's taxonomy**



BLOOM'S TAXONOMY – COGNITIVE DOMAIN (2001)

HIGHER-ORDER THINKING SKILLS

CREATING
Use information to create something new

EVALUATING
Examine information and make judgments

ANALYZING
Take apart the known and identify relationships

APPLYING
Use information in a new (but similar) situation

UNDERSTANDING
Grasp meaning of instructional materials

REMEMBERING
Recall specific facts

LOWER-ORDER THINKING SKILLS

**RESEARCH DESIGN**
**The Purpose and Research Questions**
In this study, two types of tasks are employed to help learners acquire knowledge of the storybook *"The Mixed-Up Chameleon"* and learn to apply it to language production tasks. The first group of tasks, named input tasks, consists of KWL charts and mind maps. The second group of tasks, named output tasks, consists of discussion and reader theater performance. As a whole, input, output, and interaction are all integrated while learners are engaged in accomplishing the tasks. The purpose of this study is to investigate the learning effectiveness of the proposed Task-based CLIL model from a junior high school students' perspective, and try to answer the following research questions: (1) What do students feel about the learning effectiveness of the model in terms of 4Cs? (2) What are the strengths and weaknesses of using the model to learn the English storybook "The Mixed-Up Chameleon" ? (3) What are their suggestions for dealing with the weaknesses arising from learning?
3.2 Participants

All the participants are the 7th graders from one junior high school students in Kaohsiung. Each class has around 25 students within each class. The teacher (i.e. the author) taught the students in this school. This course is aimed at helping students understand how CLIL affect

their learning of English storybooks. It is mainly taught in English, but sometimes with the assistance of Chinese, the mother tongue of both students and the teacher, to make necessary explanations or translations for better understanding. The teacher has been trained as an English language teacher for over 15 years.

**A Two-part Action Research**
Action research (AR for short) is defined as any systematic inquiry conducted by teachers for the purpose of gathering information about how teachers teach and how their students learn. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) AR consists of the following self-reflective cycles: 1) Planning in order to initiate change; 2) Implementing the change (acting) and observing the process of implementation and consequences; 3) Reflecting on processes of change and re-planning; 4) Acting and observing; 5) Reflecting.

**The First Part of Action Research (AR1)**
AR1 consists of three input-related tasks. The first task is a KWL chart, which is a graphical organizer designed to help learners in learning (Woolfolk, 2007). The letters KWL are an acronym, for what students already know, want to know, and ultimately learn in a lesson of the course. The KWL chart is often used as a form of instructional reading strategies that guides students through the reading of texts and stimulates learners to think and relate while reading. The second task is mind map drawing, which is used to visually organize information. The third task is summary writing, which is a brief restatement of the main ideas of readings in learners' own words. It should include all the main and supporting points expressed in their own words in a condensed manner, and omit unnecessary details like examples, explanations and other unimportant information.

**The Second Part of Action Research (AR2)**
AR2 involves output-related task of discussion and the performance of reader theater. Students are assigned to have deeper thinking to coordinate how to perform reader's theater. Planning, writing and delivering are three key elements in making good oral presentation.

**Instruments**
In this study, a questionnaire and a focus group interview (FGI for short) are the two research instruments used at the end of the semester to collect data about the research. A questionnaire can help the researcher get three information. The questionnaire consists of 10 questions, which mainly involve students' attitude about the effectiveness of Task-based CLIL, the accomplishment of 4Cs, and the effectiveness of input and output-related tasks. FGI is an interview with a small group of students on a specific topic. Groups typically consist of six students who participate in the interview for 30 minutes. In this study, 13 students were invited to take part in the focus group interview; one from each of the thirteen classes serve as representative for each class. The interview questions are mainly about their perception of the Task-based CLIL, strengths, and weaknesses of the model, problems encountered in learning and suggestions on how to improve learning.

**RESULTS**
**Results From the Questionnaire**
Prior to the end of the semester, a questionnaire was issued to students to collect their overall perception of the effectiveness of Task-based CLIL. A general question in it is concerned about their general experience of whether Task-based CLIL is an effective model for them to acquire both language and subject content knowledge; some specific questions are about whether they feel that they have improved in one aspect of the 4Cs, that is, content

knowledge, communication, cognition and culture. Other questions are about the application of tasks in the process. 250 questionnaires were given out to the students and 205 were gathered as valid ones; those with all the same choice in one column or more were eliminated as invalid. A table about the responses and the percentage for each choice from the questionnaire is counted and given below. Figure 7. A graphic comparison of the different responses from the questionnaire

**Figure 2 A Graphic Comparison of the Different Responses**



A Graphic Comparison of the Different Responses
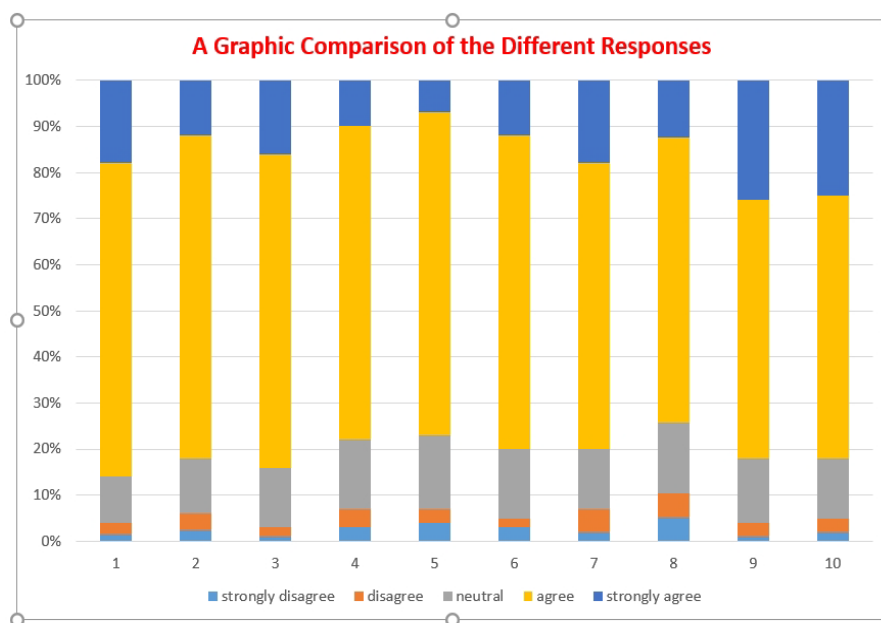
A graphic chart is made on the basis of the responses from the junior high school students questionnaire so that a direct image has been made. From the students' responses in the questionnaire, it can be found that the responses to questions 1, 2, 3, 9, and 10 with "strongly agree" and "agree" responses are more than 80 percent. The rest of the responses are over 70% positive. It can be certainly concluded that students generally appreciate the model. For Question 9 and 10, the students gave an overall positive evaluation of the Task-based CLIL model. Questions 2 and 3 are concerned about the acquisition of content and knowledge. From the students' responses, they have perceived their motivation and are willing to make efforts in these two areas. For Question 6, it is a general question about the use of tasks in this model, and responses are positive about the tasks in the learning process. Students recognize that both input-related tasks and output-related tasks have helped them with learning English storybooks and English.

**FINDINGS AND REFLECTION**

Overall, students are positive about the Task-based CLIL model for learning English storybooks. From the questionnaire, a large number of students gave positive responses to the model. From the FGI, more information has been collected about why the model works or how it will work better. First, Task-based CLIL is an effective model to integrate the 4Cs. From the results of the questionnaire and FGIs, students have improved themselves in subject content knowledge, language, and cognition. With the students' mother tongue, students are quite satisfied with the process of enjoyment in learning English storybooks. Especially from the topic of colors, the real-life experience they have been involved, they would like to manage to obtain the higher level thinking skills in their future learning. Students in the FGI

mentioned that the most obvious gain is the increase of daily life vocabulary (Heilmann & Nockerts, 2010). Through the process, they realize how to really use English to give orders, to express, to communicate and to share feelings. In addition, in the process of completing tasks, many higher-order cognitive skills are engaged as well. Contrary to traditional memorization, students are happy to learn how to build vocabularies through their daily life communication. As for culture issue, students broaden their global perspectives by reading the storybook, and from the characteristics of "chameleon," students learn their habitats, food, movement, and so on. They also get familiar with new vocabularies from the story such "leaf, sand, flower, tree." Though easy words, students could use them naturally in their communication. Also some sentence structure "When the chameleon sit on…" that appears in the story. During the lesson the pupils work as a whole class, in groups, in pairs as well as individually and actively practice speaking, listening, and reading skills, thus contributing to the amazing reader theater performance at the end of the semester. Another thing students gain is the ability to make comparison and collect information. This also solve the problems of the difference among students initial learning point. With group discussion and peer influence, those students originally under challenge are willing to learn from the students who can pay attention to class activity. In terms of task organization, input tasks and output are separated into two phases, in which input tasks precede output ones. That means the students need to be exposed to some essential subject content before taking on output tasks. In order to lessen the students' difference during their task completion, we teachers adopt more flexible plans and therefore new tasks are well prepared for students who are overwhelmed with the challenge of tasks.

By using Task-based CLIL, students have to take on more responsibilities for their learning in a group, and this is also what they learn from this project. Traditionally, teachers need to prepare different level materials, such as A and B and C. However, with a view to be involved into group team spirits, lower development students are more willing to consult other members in their group. In Taiwan, the learning difference of students characteristics lay a significant factor for teachers' effective instruction or not. Thanks to CLIL, students themselves also see the bright side in learning biology and English on the same pace. Instead of psychological reliance on the teacher, students would like to work together in class and after class. Gradually, students' learning styles are changed. It takes some time for students to adapt themselves to the Task-based CLIL, because they all want to work together to draw the mind map and to perform the reader theater on the stage as a team.

Generally speaking, people assume that Taiwan students are more accustomed to lectures given by the teacher. They believe teachers are more professional and authoritative in subject knowledge, and they prefer to being exposed to the processed and definite information delivered by the teachers from the textbook. However, in this project, it seems that students have started to think about their autonomy in their study. Many responses from the FGI indicate directly that they place more dependence on the peers and team work. As junior students, it is a good start for them to build a good way for learning by themselves. And it also give credits on the concept that a successful CLIL lesson often uses graphic organizers such as time lines, Venn diagrams, mind maps, or charts (illustrating cause and effect, chain of events, etc.). Graphic organizers require students to analyze the information and make sense of it, for example, real-life-like activities are to bridge the gap between the learning situation and the normal use of language.

**Revised Plan**

According to the feedback data collected from students, they are quite satisfied with the flexibility in their learning as teachers offer them chances to discuss, to share, to report, and to perform. Tasks are important in developing students' abilities in many areas but they cannot replace the important role of the teacher. Therefore, a wide variety of options to design students' working sheet would be the next issue for teachers to figure it out, with the tasks can be arranged according to their specific functions, students would gain more after their interacting with peers. Some students mentioned that the input tasks can run through the whole semester to stimulate students' prior knowledge and give a purpose for their final reader theater performance; while others postulated that the output-related tasks seem to be more complex and time-consuming. These two tasks might be assigned at the early stage of the semester so that more guidance can be given and the preparation process can be longer.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this study, an action research is employed to see if the proposed Task-based CLIL is an effective means of teaching subject content in English. Data from the questionnaire show that students as the main stakeholders hold a positive attitude towards the effectiveness of this model in both their personal experience of the model and some specific areas like subject content, language and cognitive development, and cross-cultural understanding. Data from the FGI indicate the benefits and problems underlying in the implementation of this model. In terms of the benefits, students stated that they had developed not only the 4Cs but also other skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, and communications skills. The input-related tasks effectively help students gain the disciplinary content from the reading assignments and make clear about the relationship between the main ideas. The output-related tasks help them move up to a higher level of cognition. Students' attention has shifted away from the learning of language per se to explore the deeper meaning and relationship. The most important implication of this research is that with the emerging new ideas, teaching models and theories, teachers can take bold steps in introducing them into their classroom and follow action research to make improvements in teaching with a theoretical framework. Last but not least, limitations of this study should not be ignored. As CLIL is subject-focused, language teachers need to polish their own knowledge of new subjects in order to teach effectively. The design of a learning situation is a conscious and careful process. Teachers must consider the context of the pupils, the spaces that they will require and the resources that they will have available. Despite that, there are others variable aspect that influences the situation and teachers should take it into account. Namely, the rhythm of the voice, the structure of the discourse, the methods to keep the attention and interest of the children, the appropriate use of the linguistic level, etc. Teachers must also structure classes carefully so that the students understand the content of the lesson, as well as the language through which the information is being conveyed in a meaningful way (Griva & Kasvikis, 2015; Gabillon, 2020).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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