

## **Factors influencing the choice of CLIL classes at university in Japan**

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### **Abstract**

CLIL is relatively new in Japan but growing in popularity, particularly in English language-learning contexts. Recent government figures show that as many as one third of all universities offer classes that may be considered CLIL. CLIL is being adopted both by individual teachers and in department or campus-wide programs. Teachers and administrators may adopt CLIL based on an understanding of its benefits, including the efficiency and effectiveness of its dual focus and the complementary relationship between language and content classes which develops in CLIL contexts. However, in contexts where students have an individual choice to study in a CLIL class, they are unlikely to be aware of the full range of research into these advantages. What then are their choices based on? This qualitative study of a university-level CLIL program in Japan seeks to identify factors involved in students' choice of CLIL classes. Results from semi-structured interviews with students indicate that when they choose CLIL classes over traditional language classes, they do so with some understanding of the advantages of CLIL, based on their previous learning experiences. Participants cite the dual focus of CLIL classes and the authenticity of purpose which they can provide. The sense of challenge was also noted as setting CLIL apart from more traditional language classes. Students acknowledged that CLIL classes were demanding but chose to join a CLIL class in order to challenge themselves. A final deciding factor seemed to be intellectual curiosity about the content of the CLIL classes. Other factors associated with class choice in general were also revealed including scheduling issues and the reputation of, or a prior relationship with, the teacher. Surprisingly for a Japanese context, the influence of peers and senior students was not seen as a major deciding factor in the choice of CLIL classes.

### **Introduction**

Content classes taught in an additional language are becoming more common around the world; in particular, English is often used as a medium of instruction. Such classes are adopted by both teachers working individually at a small scale in their own classrooms, and in institutional, regional or nationwide programs. They are seen in many patterns and known by many names: English-medium instruction (EMI), Immersion Education, Languages Across the Curriculum, Integrating Content and Language in Higher Education (ICLHI) to name a few. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is often seen as an umbrella term for the whole range of program designs where content classes are conducted in a language other than the home language of the school or university where they are being offered (Garcia, 2009), and this term will be used for the purposes of this paper.

### **The Position of CLIL in Japan**

The idea of CLIL is still somewhat new in Japan and is spreading slowly (Pinner, 2013a). As Ikeda, Pinner, Mehisto and Marsh (2013) have said, “If CLIL in Europe is a toddler, CLIL in Japan is a new-born baby, but it is slowly and steadily crawling forward in Japanese education” (para. 4). CLIL programs in Japan are somewhat difficult to track as the term CLIL is not yet widely used. However, programs that could be included under a broad definition of CLIL, even though the practitioners involved are not aware of CLIL as a term, are common (Iyobe & Jia, 2013). While in Europe and elsewhere CLIL may be seen mainly as a primary or secondary school phenomenon, in Japan it is occurring largely at the tertiary level.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) does not specifically track CLIL programs. It does, however, track undergraduate classes taught in English through a comprehensive bi-annual survey of all universities in Japan. It reports that nearly a third of all universities in Japan (222 universities in total) offer some courses taught in English (MEXT, 2011). The MEXT definition used in tracking these English-taught courses refers to classes conducted entirely in English, excluding those whose primary aim is language instruction. This definition is somewhat limiting and does not cover the full scope of CLIL practice.

CLIL practice can be seen as being on a continuum. At one end of the continuum, there is soft CLIL in which classroom teachers, often language teachers, integrate content into

primarily language-focused classes. At the other end of the continuum, hard CLIL refers to content classes conducted in the second language, where language-learning aims are secondary (Bentley, 2010). Using the MEXT definition described above, hard CLIL classes would be counted. However, soft CLIL programs would not fall under this definition, meaning that the true extent of CLIL in Japanese universities is perhaps under-represented in the official figures.

Although exact figures are not available, earlier research indicates that the bulk of CLIL courses in Japan fall into one of two categories (Brown & Iyobe, 2014). First there are content classes positioned as part of a language-learning program, primarily English, and offered by language-teaching faculty members, often foreign, who may have some knowledge of the field or discipline being taught. The second group is composed of classes offered by content specialists, Japanese or international faculty, who teach in English but often have little or no training in language teaching. It may be useful to think about these two patterns through the language-embedded vs. adjunct CLIL framework proposed by Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010).

CLIL classes offered by language-teaching faculty may be seen as falling into the language-embedded CLIL model. In this model, the teacher is sensitive to the language-learning needs of students and is able to give the students language-learning support. Teachers in language-embedded CLIL have both language-learning and content-related outcomes in mind when planning their courses. Also, students are assessed, at least in part, with reference to language-learning aims.

On the other hand, CLIL classes offered by content faculty may be best thought of as adjunct CLIL since students will typically have language preparation classes before or at the same time the content classes are conducted in English. However, language learning outcomes may not be explicitly part of the content course itself. It should be noted that while Coyle, Hood and Marsh (2010) talk about the need for coordination between the language and content faculty in an adjunct CLIL model, in many if not most cases this may be difficult in the Japanese university context due to the following factors: a strong sense of faculty autonomy, a general reluctance to collaborate on professional development, and differing views of education between language and content faculty (Iyobe, Brown, & Coulson, 2011). In fact, a

lack of communication between language and content teachers in CLIL programs may be the norm rather than the exception (Brown & Iyobe, 2014).

### **The choice of CLIL**

The choice to implement and be part of a CLIL program rests on three interrelated sets of factors influencing the motivations of institutions, teachers and students.

#### ***Institutional choice of CLIL***

Institutions choose to implement CLIL for a variety of interconnected reasons. In the European context, Coleman (2006) examined universities adopting content programs taught in languages other than the university's home language. He identified both major and minor factors that lead universities to offer such programs, especially in English. A practical desire to attract qualified international students is one leading factor. English is the acknowledged lingua franca of academia in most fields and it is quickly becoming the lingua franca of international education as well. Another important contributor to the adoption of CLIL is the prestige of the university as CLIL is seen to provide status as an innovator in both education and research. A third major factor is the pedagogical aim of improving the international competitiveness of local graduates. English-medium education is seen as providing an advantage in both career and further education opportunities. Minor contributing factors included a desire to improve research output and the need to supplement the income of the institution or program through fee-paying international students.

In Japan, institutional choice to implement CLIL programs may be governed by similar, though slightly different, factors. First, there is considerable official government support for greater internationalization of universities (Yonezawa, 2010), especially for classes conducted in English (MEXT, 2009). In addition, as in Europe, Japanese universities are experiencing a demographic crisis with a shrinking university-aged cohort of domestic students to draw on. This demographic pressure leads some universities to recruit students from abroad and/or attempt to make their institutions more attractive to domestic students. Content programs taught in foreign languages, especially English, may serve both purposes. First, they can open the door to international enrollment without placing the burden on international students to acquire academic-level Japanese proficiency. In addition, for local enrollment, CLIL may build the prestige of the university and give it a reputation for

academic rigor and pedagogic innovation, as well as an international allure (Brown & Iyobe, 2014).

This prestige value may be a powerful motivator for some Japanese universities. Aspinall (2005) reports that demographic pressures are forcing some universities to lower hurdles for entrance as they "try to meet the criteria of new students rather than vice versa" (p. 215). This is seen by some as a decline in standards and has led to concerns about the declining value of university degrees. It is possible that CLIL is seen as a valued-added option in such cases, something to distinguish a university, or in some cases, a single department, from others as well as give it a competitive edge in student recruitment.

### ***Teacher choice of CLIL***

Teachers, whether they are familiar with the term CLIL and the associated literature or not, tend to choose to be part of a CLIL program through some understanding of its benefits. For language teachers, the dual focus of CLIL offers a unique way to develop a complementary relationship between language and content and gives an authenticity of purpose often missing from more traditional language lessons (Pinner, 2013b). CLIL offers both meaningful, concrete input and authentically communicative output. For content teachers, CLIL provides an opportunity to give students an advantage in an increasingly competitive world. For instance, studying in a CLIL program may be a way for students to distinguish themselves in the job market as well as in academic contexts. In addition, implementing CLIL is sometimes seen as an opportunity for professional development, a kind of new challenge, or as a route to developing effective social capital in the university community (Brown & Iyobe, 2014). Doiz, Lasagabaster and Sierra (2011) report that, from a faculty perspective, benefits of a CLIL program may include the following: personal gains in language proficiency, academic gains in access to teaching materials, and classroom gains in the motivation and commitment of students along with lower class sizes.

There are also some indications that Japanese faculty members, being aware of the dominance of English in academic publishing, see CLIL as a chance to give students access to the wider academic world (Brown & Adamson, 2012). They see CLIL as a chance for students to learn how to work with academic sources in both their L1, Japanese, and L2, English. Adamson and Coulson (2014) refer to this use of translanguaging as an effective

way to support the students' growing academic literacies. Lasagabaster (2013) refers to this as bilingual training and argues that strategic use of L1 can be a key advantage of CLIL.

Of course, not all teachers choose to be part of a CLIL program. In cases where CLIL is imposed in a top-down manner, Mehisto (2008) warns of the potential for disjuncture, a feeling of threat about one's own competence that leads to resistance to the change to the new paradigm. Top-down implementation of CLIL also often leads faculty members and others to worry about domain loss for the home language of the university community. In Japan, there is also often concern about the capability of both faculty and students to thrive in an English-medium environment and their right to use their home language in academia .

### ***Student choice of CLIL***

In many contexts where CLIL is offered, students have a choice between a CLIL class, and a parallel content class offered in the home language of the institution. Thus, a student could study chemistry in their first language or in a second language in a CLIL class. In such cases, why do students choose the CLIL option? Working with university students in the natural sciences in the Turkish context, Bozdoğan and Karlıdağ (2013) found that students' choices to join an English-taught program seemed to be influenced by several interrelated factors. The students reported that the CLIL program offered them a sense of esteem and prestige, a sense that they were part of something special. They appreciated the challenge posed by CLIL and felt that their accomplishment was worthwhile. The students also pointed to pedagogic benefits, improvements in L2 proficiency, as well as practical benefits. Studying content in English gave them access to a wider academic world than they could normally access in Turkish due to the dominance of English in academic publishing. They also sensed that they would be in a better position to obtain and take advantage of opportunities to study abroad by doing at least some of their undergraduate studies in English.

### **CLIL vs. Language-focused classes: The current study**

The current study focuses on a case where students are offered a choice between a CLIL program and what might be called traditional language classes: skills-focused classes based on reading, writing or other facets of the language. The study attempts to determine what factors influence the students' choice of CLIL.

***Context of the study***

The study was conducted at a small semi-rural university in Japan. Participants were all Japanese L1 speakers in their second year of a 4-year International Studies degree and were taking English-language classes as part of the requirements for graduation. They were exposed to CLIL as part of the required English program. Nine of the 14 required English courses in the students' first year were language-embedded CLIL classes based on a variety of topics related to International Studies. Class themes varied by teacher but included topics such as urbanization, migration issues, international development, intercultural communications, globalization and cultural studies. A shift from soft to hard models of CLIL was part of the program design. As the year progressed, the CLIL courses shifted from what can be thought of as soft CLIL, where language needs and outcomes are an important part of course planning, to hard CLIL, which is more content-driven. The remaining five required courses consisted of more traditional skills-focused general English classes including Reading, Writing, Oral Communication and Grammar. As such, students had experience in both CLIL and skills-focused class work in their first year of university studies.

By the students' second year, the required courses in the language program were normally complete; however, students still had to take at least five additional English courses from a range of elective options. These options included skills-focused classes such as advanced reading, advanced writing, and media listening as well as hard CLIL options. The study took place as students were making their choice whether to continue studying in CLIL courses or to entirely shift to general English courses. Approximately one third of the 180 student cohort chose to make CLIL part of their elective program.

***Data collection***

The study was based on data generated in semi-structured interviews with eight students who had chosen to continue with CLIL as part of their elective studies. Students were interviewed one-on-one with interviews lasting between 40 and 60 minutes. Interviews were conducted in a mixture of Japanese and English, with the researcher allowing students to guide the choice of language to ensure that they were comfortable and able to express themselves clearly. All eight participants were informed of the purpose of the project in a bilingual written statement and gave their consent to be recorded and for their data to be used.

The recorded data was transcribed and analyzed using what Kvale (2008) calls meaning condensation. Based on a close reading of the interview transcripts, portions of the text pertaining to a particular point or important insight were identified. Comparing these natural meaning units across all transcripts, common ideas and central themes emerged. Then, the transcripts were re-examined with these central themes in mind, revealing additional natural meaning units. The themes discussed below emerged from the transcribed data through several iterations of this process. These themes will be described and supported by excerpts taken from the transcripts. Some interviews were conducted partially in Japanese so, where necessary, excerpts of the transcripts used below were translated into English by the researcher and checked with back-translation by a Japanese L1 translator. Excerpts are identified by the participant's pseudonym. Where necessary, the names of teachers and other students referred to by the participants have been removed. In order to better represent the participants' actual voice, excerpts are presented as is, including non-normative phrasing and word choice.

### ***Participants***

The participants in the study were all full-time, second-year university students majoring in International Studies. They are identified by pseudonym in Table 1.

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>
Miho	F	21
Yoshiaki	M	23
Yasuko	F	22
Yoichi	M	21
Akemi	F	21
Megumi	F	21
Mika	F	21
Reiko	F	22

*Table 1: Participants' profiles*

### ***Results and discussion***

Data collected in this study seems to indicate that the participants were making the choice to join a CLIL class based on three major factors: intellectual curiosity about the content, a perception of the benefits of CLIL classes, and a sense of challenge and accomplishment.



Other factors including the students' relationship with, or image of, the teacher and practical issues of class scheduling may also have been relevant.

### ***Intellectual curiosity about the content***

The idea of choosing a CLIL class because of the content came up repeatedly in the interviews. Participants reported that curiosity about the content was important to them. Miho, for instance, reported that the class topic of one of her chosen elective classes appealed to her. "I was really interested in the contents of the class and Food Security." Mika also reported an interest in the class topic but was more specific. She was excited about the idea of studying a particular writer in the original English.

Actually I have an interest in (teacher's) class topic so I took the first class but then the class was (too easy). So then I took another teacher's class and I saw the topic was [Jared] Diamond. Diamond in English? Wow! I also like History so then I took that class.

Speaking of another CLIL elective class, Megumi was also attracted by the specific text, "I wanted to read Anne Frank's diary in English."

Participants also reported that their previous experiences with similar or connected content drove their decision making. Yoshiaki referred to his experience in a first-year class contributing to his decision to join a particular second-year course. "We read a lot about Gandhi and that philosophical angle really interested me so I wanted to join the class." Of course, previous experiences with the content were not necessarily limited to in-class experiences. Yoichi explained that he joined a particular class because he had already read another book (in Japanese translation) by the author of the main class text. "I was interested in the course because I knew about [Jared] Diamond from before. I bought his other book *Guns, Germs and Steel*."

And finally, participants noted the connections between the CLIL classes and other L1-taught classes they were taking concurrently. Miho, in explaining her choice of a CLIL class focusing on history, noted that, "This semester, I took the History of Mediterranean Civilization. So it has connections between this class and that class, so I took this class."

This perception of the value of connection with other learning experiences is consistent with Edsall and Saito (2013), who, in a review of the connection between content and motivation, find that relevance is key. They conclude that “While teacher enthusiasm for a subject can be highly motivational, establishing relevance to a students’ chosen degree subject and future career are important in improving student motivation” (p. 85).

However, it should be noted that this focus on the content of the class was not a deciding factor for all participants. In the following excerpt, Akemi explains that she was interested in the class topic but would not have taken the class if it were taught in her L1.

I was interested in the class theme, Intercultural Communication so I wanted to learn about it. But I think learning in English makes me concentrate on the topic so if Japanese teachers taught that, it's boring. I won't take that class.

Yasuko expressed similar reasoning in her choice of a CLIL class. In this excerpt, her answers to the interviewer’s questions indicated that she was actually not interested in the class topic.

Q. Thinking of the class you are doing now, Collapse, I'm going to ask you to imagine you were doing this class all in Japanese. What do you think would be different for you?

A. Ummm. Honestly speaking, I will not take it. Because if I take this class in Japanese, it means I am interested in Collapse very much. In other, ordinary Japanese class, I take it because I am interested in it very much. But I am not interested in Collapse so much. Sorry, I will not take this class.

Q. So, can I say you took this class because it's in English and because it's hard? Not because of the topic?

A. Yes. Exactly

So, for some of the participants, the content was a less important factor than the perceived challenge of the CLIL class, as discussed further below.

### ***Perceived benefits of CLIL***

As discussed above, participants had experienced both soft and hard CLIL classes as part of the required English program. As such, they seemed to have a sense of the potential benefits of CLIL, both in terms of language and content learning. In terms of benefits for their language learning, participants seemed to focus on notions of authenticity and appreciate that CLIL could give them an opportunity for real language use in a way that general English classes could not. Miho reported that CLIL helped make her language skills somehow more real.

Lots of stuff I know about from grammar books but taking this class I saw how they are actually used. I feel like my English skills are becoming more real. I think my English improved more in this kind of class than by studying English.

In a similar vein, Yoichi and Yoshiaki both focused on the idea of using English or being active in English.

Up to now English classes were only about English, about grammar or speaking. But by using English I can learn the content and I think the class using English is really effective for me. (Yoichi)

When I first heard about this kind of class, I thought it would activate my English. Taking in real content in English really means something. (Yoshiaki)

Reiko, on the other hand, was interested in both the integrated and active aspects of language learning in CLIL classes. "Through the (CLIL class), every skill is included, reading, writing and listening and also speaking and using English. It's all included. Maybe I am becoming better." She continued by saying that she recommends this class to new first year students. "I could get every skill of English. And compared with other classes, in this class we should use more English so it may be helpful to get skills. "

This sense of CLIL classes as being somehow more real or more effective for language learning than skills based EFL classes is consistent with Pinner's (2013b) finding that authenticity was a major component of students' satisfaction with a university CLIL program in Japan.

In terms of specific language skills, participants reported that speaking and reading seemed to improve the most through their experience in CLIL. Akemi said that "Speaking and Reading. They both improved. They are good for me in this class."

Students also seemed to feel that studying content through their L2 would give them a different perspective on the topics and enhance or support their learning. Miho, for example, discussed this in terms of L1 and L2-taught classes giving her different perspectives on a topic. "Learning something in English makes me think about it differently than when I learn about it in Japanese. The connections between the two ways of thinking are really important." The participants also seemed to be aware of the dual-focus of CLIL classes. Akemi for example noted that both her language skills and content knowledge improved. "I learned both English and Intercultural Communication."

Of course, students were not entirely positive about the role of CLIL in their studies. They had a realistic understanding of both pros and cons of the approach. Yasuko in particular was concerned with the potential for language issues to interfere with content learning.

I think there are merits and demerits [of CLIL classes]. Merits are, I can get many times to learn English, to touch English. But the demerit is, for example, Microeconomics in English. Taking this class means learning something new in English. And learning something new is difficult at first and this is in English so more difficult. So if I can't understand what you say I can't understand the Economics. And if they want to work in bank or something economics industry or business it is a disadvantage for them. If they can't understand, they should study by themselves in Japanese but ... Anyway, this is a challenge.

That being said, all participants did say that they would recommend the CLIL classes to other students. Reiko went as far as saying that the CLIL classes should not be elective. "These

classes should be required. (Without the CLIL classes), students would come to study English less."

### *Sense of challenge*

It seems clear that the participants perceived CLIL classes as being more difficult than general English classes. The topics themselves were intellectually challenging, operating in L2 was demanding and the workload associated with the CLIL classes was heavier than in other English classes. This may explain why 2/3 of students in the cohort did not continue with the CLIL classes when they completed the required courses. However, for the students who did choose CLIL, the difficulty was perceived as a challenge leading to a sense of accomplishment and, perhaps prestige or self-satisfaction. One repeated theme arising from the data was the sense that the CLIL classes were somehow worth doing. As Yoichi explained, "These classes have value." Yoshiaki and Miho expressed similar opinions.

This is a chance to think about things we don't normally think about and change the way we think or see things from a different perspective. (Yoshiaki)

Even if your [English] level isn't so high, you can join the class and maybe find some people who are the same level as you. Or you can see some higher level people and learn from them. Even if it's hard, it's worth working through it. (Miho)

There was also a sense that the difficulty, or challenge itself was part of the attraction. As Yasuko reported above, she took the CLIL elective classes, at least in part, because they were hard. She continued saying:

And, like, (teacher's) class is difficult so it means that the students who will take the class is also - Such students have high level English skills. So if I join the class, I can develop my English skills together. I thought.

In terms of workload, some participants referred to the heavier workload, compared to other English classes, as part of the attraction of the CLIL courses. Akemi described the workload as an opportunity, something that pushes her to meet her potential.

In other classes, we don't have so many assignments but in other classes we don't have so many chances to use English too. I thought I have to get many assignments. If I am not given many assignments I don't do anything.

Megumi expressed a similar sentiment saying, "I want to read many books and articles in English but I don't alone. I want to read many books to prepare to attend the class." This sense of being pushed was also a factor for Reiko who said "Of course, taking credits is important but I want to really improve. I should read more and I should prepare for the classes. And the content is more difficult thing, more academic."

Later in her interview, Reiko expressed a belief that the content of the CLIL class is important in generating the motivation needed to deal with the heavy workload.

I looked at all the classes' syllabus on line and I thought food security was interesting. Other classes tend to language or culture and actually I am not interested in that kind. If the contents is not interesting, you won't feel like to attend class or do homework and the skills won't - and you can't get skills. The contents are connected to motivation.

Taking CLIL classes, perceived as challenging, also seemed to be a way to differentiate oneself from peers. Miho made a point of differentiating herself from peers who seek out easy classes.

Some of my friends choose classes that are easy to pass but I think that's the wrong way of thinking. We shouldn't just take 'easy A' classes. We need to challenge ourselves and stretch our abilities.

And Yoshiaki noted that he chose classes based on interest, though he acknowledged the perception of difficulty among his peers.

My thinking is a little different than some students. Some of my friends say things like 'wow' or 'you are taking really tough classes' but I don't think about it that way. I just take classes I am interested in.

Mika also discussed CLIL classes as a way to differentiate herself and her academic choices from her peers. “Choosing an easy class just to get a good grade? It’s just a waste of time. But if someone wants to play a lot, I won’t recommend (CLIL Classes). ”

This sense of the challenge of CLIL differentiating oneself from one’s peers seems to be consistent with findings from other contexts. Bozdoğan and Karlıdağ (2013), for example, described Turkish students in a CLIL program saying, “They describe a feeling of success and confidence when they compare themselves to other students. ... In addition, they consider fully understanding the course content as a sign of success and accomplishment” (p. 98).

### ***Other factors***

Along with content, benefits and challenge, several other factors emerged from the data; however, these were not seen to be related to the fact that the classes were CLIL-oriented. For one, participants reported that their relationship with the teacher, or the teacher’s reputation, was an important factor in their decision making. Megumi said that she chose a CLIL class in part because of the teacher’s classroom practice, “I really like (teacher)’s class style. It suits me.” Yoichi also mentioned experience with a teacher as a factor, “(Teacher) taught some of my first year classes. So I got curious about how they would teach in these (CLIL) classes.” Reiko also mentioned experience with the teacher as a factor saying, “I believe in (teacher). I learned from him in first year so his class level is very suitable for me.”

In some cases, the participants seemed to be choosing a given elective class in order to avoid a teacher with whom they had had a negative experience. Yoshiaki explained that he made the choice to join one class to avoid a teacher that he found to be too nice.

I didn’t like (teacher)’s class. To be frank, it was too easy and they are too nice to us. They give points for trying hard even when we don’t do well. I don’t think I learned anything. So I choose a different class this time.

Direct experience with the teacher was not the only factor. The teacher’s reputation was also influential. Yasuko reported that she chose a CLIL elective class with a teacher she did not know personally.

The most important reason for me to choose that class was that I thought I can develop my English skills. In my image, (teacher) is the most umm, Sorry. Last year, (teacher's) Core English class was the highest level class right? So the class was so difficult, in my image. So if I took (the teacher's) class, I could develop my English skill more and more.

This focus on the relationship with the teacher, or their reputation, is commonly seen in Japan and is a major factor in student decision making in most fields, not only CLIL or language classes (Lee-Cunin, 2005).

Another factor, which may be important in explaining the low take up of elective CLIL classes, is the timetable. Several students reported that the CLIL elective classes were offered at inconvenient times, many in the first period of the morning. This seemed to influence some students' decision to not take those classes.

Interestingly, some factors that are commonly seen to be important in student decision making in Japan were not seen as major factors in this study. Lee-Cunin (2005) reports that the voice of peers and older students is often influential in choosing classes. This can be seen in Mika's comments about listening to older students' voices. "I talked to friends and (older students) about classes many time. 'How was the class?' 'How was the teacher?' I got good advice." Akemi expressed a similar idea.

Sometimes I talked to my friends about what classes I am going to take. And before we choose classes we often talk about it and if I want to take class, before the class starts I always ask the friends how the teacher is.

However, for other participants in this study, as seen above, students made a point of distancing themselves from their peers' choices. In fact, when specifically asked in interviews about what classes their friends or classmates chose, many participants reported that they went out of their way not to be influenced by those voices, as illustrated by this excerpt from an interview with Miho.



I heard a lot from older students – like what happens in class, what kind of homework there is. I hear that this teacher is hard or that teacher is easy. But I thought on my own which teacher's class I want to take and that's where I went.

Lee-Cunin also says that students in Japan often choose a class almost by default: they need to be in some class and they fall into one. In this kind of compliance-based decision making, students are not really choosing classes: rather they are simply meeting requirements for graduation. This kind of class choice was not seen in the current study. While the CLIL classes did fulfill requirements for language credits, they were perhaps not seen as an appropriate default choice by students.

### ***Implications***

This study has some fairly clear implications for practice for language teachers implementing CLIL classes as electives in a language-learning program. In particular, there are implications for teachers hoping to create CLIL classes which will be meaningful and motivational for students. Firstly, since students are choosing to join CLIL courses based largely on their intellectual interest in the content, it seems that teachers should be as clear as possible in their syllabus design so that students can see, before they choose the class, exactly what the contents will be. This is also an opportunity for teachers to explain the benefits of the dual focus of CLIL, another factor which seems to attract students to CLIL options.

In addition, since connections to other classes are an important factor in the students' decision making, the choice of content for a CLIL class seems to be a key consideration. Teachers may want to implement classes that are connected to others their students are studying. Aligning CLIL classes with the students' major or field of studies seems appropriate as it allows students to find connections between what they study in CLIL course and what they study in other courses. In some contexts, the decision about course content will be made for teachers by administrators or other policy makers. However, in a Japanese university context, a strong tradition of faculty autonomy (Poole, 2010) means that the decision to take on CLIL and the choice of contents will likely be up to individual teachers in many cases. This is particularly true if CLIL is being implemented by language teachers as part of the language-learning program. Therefore, teachers wishing to implement CLIL should have knowledge of

content courses offered in the home language of the institution to students in a particular faculty.

A final implication may be related to the finding that students are attracted to CLIL because of, rather than in spite of, its difficulty – they appreciate the challenge of CLIL and see it as a way to distinguish themselves from peers. Teachers hoping to attract students to CLIL classes may want to capitalize on this. Rather than emphasizing the fun aspects of class, as is common in language programs in Japan (Seargeant, 2009), teachers may want to play up the challenge and serious nature of CLIL.

### ***Limitations of the research***

This study is based on data generated in interviews with self-selected volunteer participants and, as such, the findings may be influenced by the participants' English proficiency level. At the university where this study was conducted, students are divided into higher and lower English proficiency groups, with the cut off being approximately 470 points on the TOEFL (pbt) on entry into the university. This proficiency grouping does not limit the students' choice of elective classes; it is simply an administrative grouping. Students from both the higher and lower proficiency groups chose CLIL elective classes and all were invited to participate in the research project. However, by coincidence, all of the participants in this study were in the higher proficiency group. This may have been due to lack of familiarity with the researcher among the lower-proficiency group. In the participant's first year at the university, the researcher taught classes only for the higher-proficiency group, and thus, lower-proficiency students may have been uncomfortable participating in interviews with an unfamiliar faculty member.

This slant towards higher proficiency may have an impact on the results. In a related study by colleagues (Adamson & Coulson, 2014), the entire cohort of 180 students from which this study's participants were drawn, was surveyed about their experiences in one of the soft CLIL required classes in their first year. The results showed some interesting differences. Higher proficiency students were much more likely to see the dual purpose of CLIL classes. They reported perceiving the CLIL classes as being about both language and content. Lower proficiency students were much more likely to see the CLIL class as either a language class or a content class, but not both. In addition, higher proficiency students focused on the

benefits of CLIL and seemed to appreciate the challenge while lower proficiency students focused on the difficulty and seemed confused or unclear about the goals of the class. These findings are consistent with Nobuyoshi (2014) who, in an unrelated study of CLIL and motivation among Japanese undergraduate students, found that higher language-proficiency is associated with the perception that CLIL is worthwhile and an appreciation of the dual nature of CLIL. It seems clear that these level differences may have an influence on both students' actual decision making and on how they respond to interview questions about it. It is hoped that continuing data collection with future cohorts can correct this deficiency.

### **Conclusions**

CLIL programs are implemented at universities for a variety of reasons. Institutional-level choice appears to be influenced by the pragmatic need for student recruitment and questions of prestige. Teachers make their choice to adopt CLIL on a pedagogical basis and with a pragmatic concern for the potential future benefits to students. Students appear to choose to be a part of a CLIL program based on their interest in the contents, their perceptions of pedagogic benefits and a personal sense of challenge. For a teacher involved in CLIL, understanding these three inter-connected levels of motivation can inform successful decision making about the implementation of CLIL classes.

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