

# Bilateral Peer Immersion Program (BPIP): A CLT Tool in a CLIL Course

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## Abstract


Although Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) aims to teach both content and the target language simultaneously, it lacks a communicative and collaborative approach for EFL learners. To address this issue, a Taiwanese private university implemented the Bilateral Peer Immersion Program (BPIP), immersing learners from two different non-native-speaking (NNS) countries in a 'language bath' for extended periods to focus on communicative and collaborative learning. BPIP was introduced in a 14-week English as a medium of instruction (EMI) course called Books & Newspaper Discussion, which taught physics research to senior physics students in English. Board games were used as course materials alongside BPIP, significantly enhancing learning effectiveness and students' communicative and collaborative speaking skills improving attendance and contributing to better results compared to a previous group of students who did not have access to these course materials. Over 70% of the learners felt a dramatic improvement in their conversational skills in the target language with BPIP.


**Keywords:** Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL); English as a medium of instruction (EMI); Bilateral Peer Immersion Program (BPIP); Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

## INTRODUCTION


Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) courses struggle with assessing content knowledge and language skills within a short time, and the real focus of a language, which is communication and collaboration with peers is completely lost. Though board games as course materials in English as Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms lowered students' anxieties and created an error-friendly atmosphere, students' speaking skills could not be improved. It wasn't easy to get Taiwanese students to communicate their thoughts freely and collaborate effectively with their peers in the EFL classrooms, even after making Immersion (Swain, 1974) mandatory. Thus, precise learning goals and objectives were missing in these CLIL courses which were merely target language (TL) enrichment measures, packaged into content teaching. So, foreign teacher teaching physics research in an EFL classroom at a private university in Taiwan

thought of a Bilateral Peer Immersion Program (BPIP) where the students are immersed in a 'language bath' with peers from other non-native speakers (NNS) of English countries like India. BPIP enables hearing and speaking in authentic everyday contexts as naturally as their mother tongue without any pressure or vocabulary stress, thus providing the necessary Comprehensible Input (Krashen, 1985) and Comprehensible Output (Swain, 1995) to the learners (mutually by the groups to each other). Instead of selecting peers from native speakers (NS) of English countries like the USA, UK, Australia, etc, the foreign teacher selected the NNS of English. Since peer interactions in EFL classrooms did not work, the foreign teacher selected the second category of NNS namely the English as a Second Language (ESL) country like India where the target language (TL) was used in social contexts, instead of the EFL country like Taiwan where English was used only in the educational setting. Also, the NS could be introduced to the Taiwanese students

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at a later time, so that they don't get intimidated with their fluency. The BPIP is an important part of communicative language teaching (CLT) which aims to develop communicative competence enabling learners to use language fluently and appropriately in various social contexts.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

According to (Hymes,1978) in communicative language teaching (CLT), fluency is more important than accuracy. In the present research, it was felt that the CLIL course had objectives only to build the Physics research and problem-solving skills in addition to the TL skills but ignored the communicative aspect of peer-to-peer interaction. Krashen (1985) emphasised the importance of Comprehensible Input, before extracting the output for measuring the learners' productive and receptive skills. Therefore, towards the end of the 14-week semester, after providing substantial inputs in the TL, the Bilateral Peer Immersion Program was tried with inspiration from the French Immersion program by Swain, 1978. According to Cummins, 1994, CLIL teachers need to enhance the learner-learner interaction using cooperative and collaborative learning in addition to the usual instruction between teacher and learner. The BPIP was thought to provide such learner-learner interaction (Luo, 2022) in addition to cooperative and collaborative opportunities exploring the cultural aspects of the two different countries involved. BPIP is thus an activity-centred learning, meeting the communicative and cultural needs of the learners, which are part of the 4Cs of the CLIL courses, the other two Cs being content and cognition. Board games were previously used as course materials (Mohan, 2024) which became excellent tools to implement and assess such CLIL courses and create an error-friendly atmosphere for the learners, providing both time and space to the students' anxieties about learning a new language. With the use of both BPIP and board games as course materials all the 4Cs of CLIL courses were met in the Books & Newspaper Discussion Course.

### METHODOLOGY

In the 14-week semester EMI course titled "Books & Newspaper Discussion," board games were previously used as both implementation and assessment tools for teaching physics research in the Target Language (TL), which was English. The course objectives of the Books & Newspaper Discussion course are shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1:** Course Objectives of the EMI Course "Books & Newspaper Discussion"

<p><b>Listening</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Audio files of Reading-1 &amp; 2</li> <li>•PowerPoint presentation on course inputs</li> </ul>	<p><b>Speaking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Snakes &amp; Ladders and Speak, Read &amp; Write Boardgame</li> <li>•10-minute oral presentation on research topic</li> </ul>
<p><b>Reading</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Vocabulary Building Boardgame &amp; Study sheets with course inputs</li> </ul>	<p><b>Writing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•15-Page term paper and 250 word abstract of research topic and writing content questions in the target language</li> </ul>
<p><b>Bilateral Peer Immersion Program</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Immersive speaking experience with Indian students on food, amusement &amp; physics</li> </ul>	<p><b>Making</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•10-PowerPoint slides on research topic and content assessment using Multiple Choice Popsicle boardgame</li> </ul>

While board games provided an error-free environment and put the students at ease, their conversations were limited to English words, lacking communicative aspects and collaborative learning abilities. Consequently, a significantly different approach was considered to facilitate interaction between foreign students and Taiwanese students in the bilateral peer immersion program (BPIP). The inspiration for this bilateral peer immersion program was derived from the French immersion program in Canada (Swayne, 1980). Instead of only the foreign teacher speaking in class, it was believed that having foreign students of the same age, department, and course interact with the Taiwanese students would be more effective in improving their speaking skills. Therefore, the bilateral peer immersion program was thought to be introduced with foreign students from an ESL country like India interacting with Taiwanese

EFL students. The foreign teacher faced the challenge of deciding how two sections of the EMI course would interact with their foreign counterparts. She decided to use a bilateral peer immersion method for both the first and second sections of Taiwanese students after choosing specific themes of food choice and amusement choice for both sections respectively with their oral informed consent.

A pre-course and a post-course questionnaire were implemented in the cloud for both the sections of the Books & Newspaper Discussion EMI Course students who were 21 in number with 14 boys and 7 girls. The pre-course questionnaire consisted of some numerical problems in physics in the form of multiple-choice questions to assess the physics (content) knowledge of the students along with their reasons and motivation for doing the Books & Newspaper Discussion Course. The post-course questionnaire had questions on the learning effectiveness and qualitative feedback of the students of the BPIP orientation and implementation. The attendance and the results of speaking, reading, writing, and total communication of the present students were compared to the first iteration of the same foreign teacher with a different batch of 21 students but without course materials like board games or the BPIP.

The second iteration of the Books & Newspaper Discussion had only the board games as course materials and the present iteration was the third iteration of the EMI course which had both the board games and the BPIP as course materials. The course objectives of the Books and Newspaper Discussion EMI course are given in Figure 1 including the important aspect of communicative language teaching (CLT) called the Bilateral Peer Immersion Program.

### **Bilateral Peer Immersion Orientation**

BPIP Orientation involves data collection on the chosen topics. Separate Google Meet sessions were organized for the first and second sections. The first section discussed food choices, while the second section focused on places of interest. Each Google Meet session lasted for one hour. Taiwanese students shared information about food options and places to

visit in Taiwan. They also inquired about dietary restrictions or preferences regarding dining or sightseeing. After considering their input, we visited a hot pot restaurant for the first section and an amusement park for the second section. The conversations during the data collection on April 24th, 2024, via Google Meet focused on planning a class picnic in Taiwan for May 15th, 2024. The foreign and Taiwanese second-section students emphatically chose the amusement park as their destination, with the Palace Museum as the backup plan in case of rain.

### **BPIP Implementation**

During the A1 Implementation on April 14, 2024, two foreign teachers and two foreign students engaged with Taiwanese students in English. The event had four tables, each with one foreign individual and three Taiwanese students, facilitating conversations over a shared meal. Despite dietary restrictions, one of the foreign teachers actively participated, interacting with students and exchanging ideas. The foreign students also expressed their passion for singing, and dancing, and their desire to explore the vibrant night market. After enjoying the amusement park ride, all the students of the second section and the foreign teacher from the visiting country returned to the private university. The visiting students delivered engaging term paper oral presentations with PowerPoint slides to the Taiwanese students, resulting in excellent interaction between the two groups. The Taiwanese students utilized Google Translate to ask the visitors questions.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Figure 2 shows the learning effectiveness responses quantitatively on a Likert scale of the third iteration of the Books & Newspaper Discussion EMI course which is nearly 85% and two more qualitative questions in the learning effectiveness responses are recorded in Figures 3 and 4. In Figure 3 a majority of the students felt that the learning was more interactive with more discussions and many found the board games to be interesting. Teaching in English created more exposure to the TL and hence more opportunities to speak. In Figure 4 the students have gained Physics facts and most of

them felt that their writing/speaking and presentation skills have improved along with their conversation skills because the course was taught in English and their confidence in using the English Language drastically increased as they were forced to think and speak in the TL. Many students appreciated the board game section and their interactions in class had improved due to the EMI course which

proves that unless the students are forced into situations where they must use the TL, they will never willingly shift focus from their L1 to the TL. So, to make the bilingual goal a reality, students at all levels in schools and universities should be asked to speak, read, and write a few content questions in the TL, which would make their bilingual journey gradual and easier.

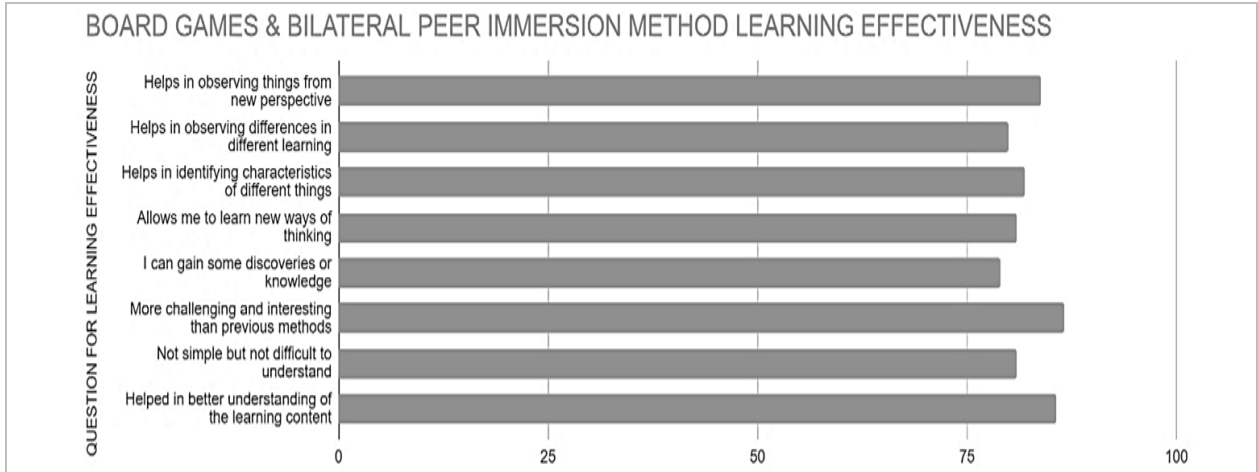


Fig 2: The Learning Effectiveness during the use of Board games and the bilateral peer immersion method

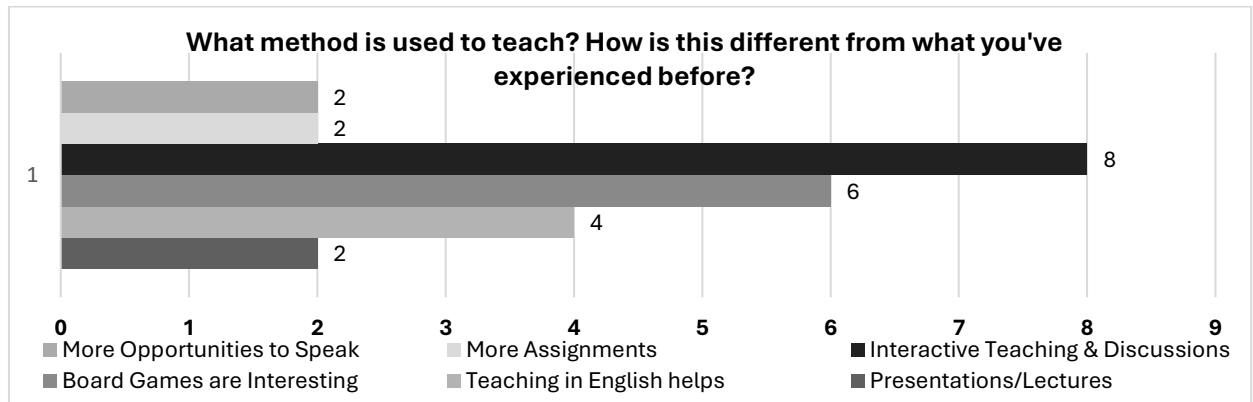


Figure 3: Student responses on the methods of teaching and their difference

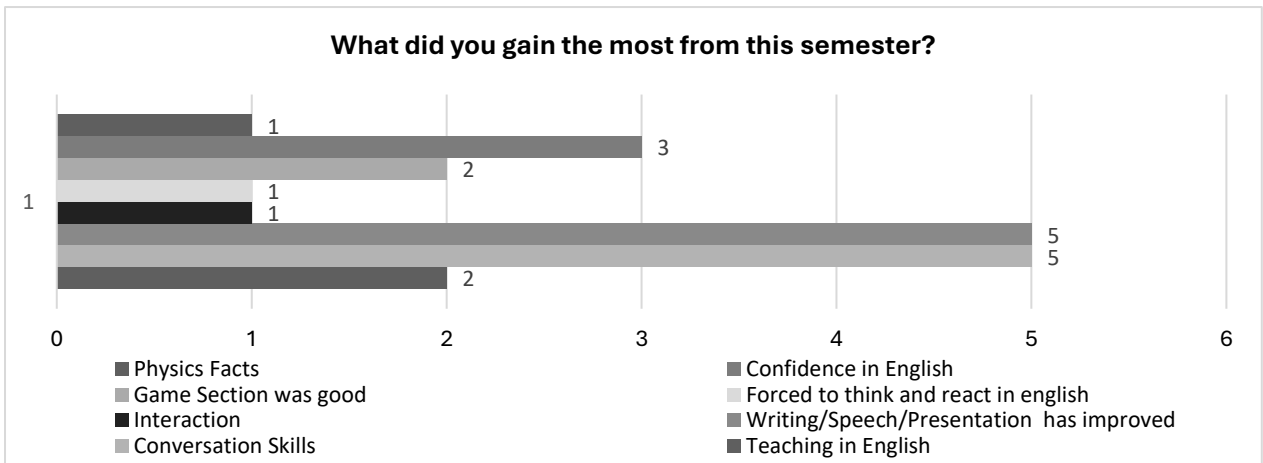


Figure 4: Student responses on the most gain in the current iteration of the course

Figure 5 shows the comparison of the attendance of the first iteration of the Books & Newspaper course without course materials and the third iteration of the same EMI course with both the board games and BPIP as course materials. Though the boys' attendance remained at 100%, the girls who lacked course materials never had full attendance. But when board games and BPIP were used as course materials about 5 girls had 100% attendance. Figure 6 shows that the speaking, writing, and total communication of both boys and girls improved drastically with the use of both board games and BPIP as course materials compared to the iteration without the course materials. Only the reading skills of both the boys and girls

have reduced with the introduction of board games and BPIP as course materials than the iteration without course materials. This can be attributed to the excess of reading material in the third iteration of reading-1 and reading-2 and the use of excessive words from both the reading materials in the vocabulary building board game, as compared to the first iteration of the Books & Newspaper Discussion course, which only had a reading of their abstract and study sheets and no option of using board games to assess the reading skill. Board games were thus able to help both with the implementation and assessment of the TL skills of the EMI course students.

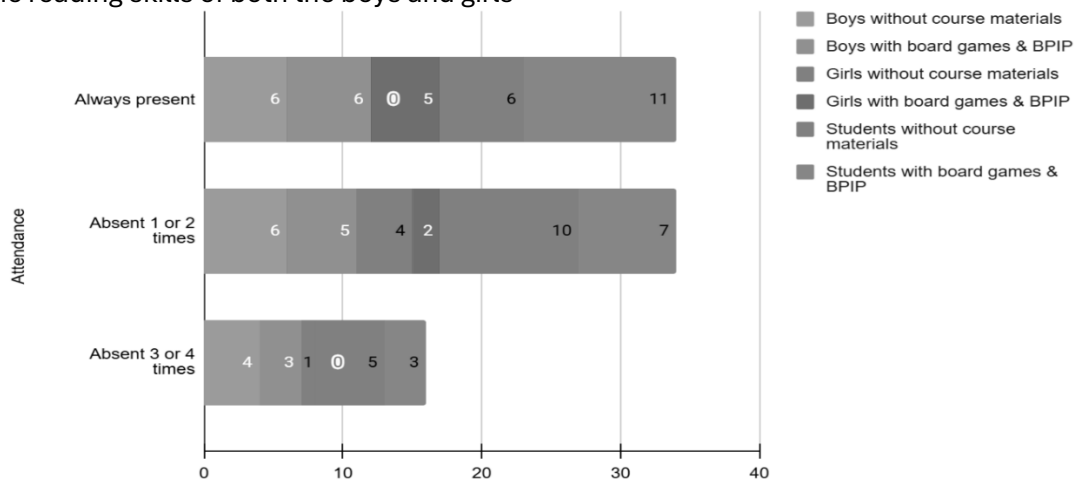


Figure 5: Attendance comparison of the B&N Discussion course without course materials and with board games and BPIP as course materials

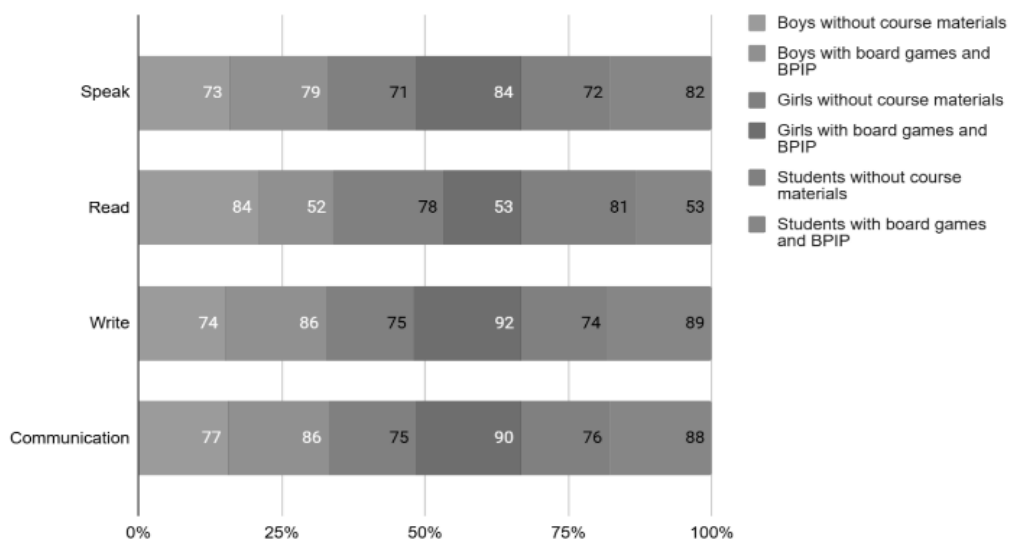


Figure 6: Comparison of Speak, Read, Write, and Communication of boys and girls without course materials and with both board games and BPIP as course materials.

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The following is the result for the questions in the post-test questionnaire regarding the qualitative feedback of the students in the third iteration of the Books & Newspaper Discussion:

- About 76% of Taiwanese students liked interacting with the Indian students and 14% did not like the interaction because they were shy of interacting also because of the short duration of time in the public space at the hot pot restaurant and the amusement park. So many students felt that the BPIP should be implemented inside the FL classroom in a controlled atmosphere, and the foreign teacher also felt that it would be easier to observe and assess quantitatively the lexical density and the subject of conversation of the learners.
- 70% of the Taiwanese students liked the BPIP which gave them opportunities to communicate and collaborate effectively in real-life situations.
- During the BPIP data collection stage, 28% of the Taiwanese students discussed with Indian students about the culture of the two countries, 24% of the students had introductory conversations, 19% of the students discussed their hobbies and 29% of the students did not respond to the question with an answer as they had forgotten their conversations as the post-test questionnaire was at least 10 days after the BPIP implementation.
- With regard to the topics discussed during the offline meeting between the Indian and Taiwanese students during BPIP implementation, 33% of students talked about the lecture topics in their subject areas, 29% talked about their daily activities, 14% talked about their goals and hobbies and again 24% of students did not respond to the question as they had forgotten their conversations.
- 52% of the Taiwanese students felt that the BPIP was better in making them speak in English whereas 38% of the Taiwanese students felt that the conversational Snakes and Ladders board game was better in making them speak in the target language (TL).

## **CONCLUSION**

BPIP, an important component of Communicative Language Teaching, is vital for all CLIL courses as the first goal of learning a language is to communicate with other people, and only after that comes the content knowledge and language mastery.

Most CLIL courses are always confused about the assessment of content and language and completely fail to teach the communicative and collaborative aspects of language, especially speaking skills in the target language (TL)

Board games as course materials created an error-friendly atmosphere for the Taiwanese students to practice their speaking skills, but only the BPIP provided the platform for strong interpersonal communication for students looking to improve their speaking skills in the TL to apply for higher education in the native English-speaking countries.

BPIP should not have native speakers (NS) immediately but only non-native speakers (NNS) specifically from English as a Second Language (ESL) countries like India where the target language (TL) is spoken in social settings instead of English as a foreign language (EFL) country like Taiwan, Vietnam, Japan, etc., where the TL is spoken only in the educational setting. The BPIP with NS can be explored at a later stage when the Taiwanese students have overcome their apprehensions of learning a new language.

Taiwanese students should embrace the fact that the non-native speakers (NNS) of the target language (TL) cannot match the speed and accuracy of the native speakers, and they should not get demotivated in their language-learning journey. Accepting the strengths and weaknesses of their classmates and themselves will go a long way in learning to work collaboratively to develop problem-solving skills.

Much-needed learner-learner interaction was made possible in the BPIP approach along with the board games as course materials which was extremely important to enhance collaborative learning instead of the usual teacher-student interaction. All the 4Cs of content, cognition,

communication, and culture in CLIL courses could only be met when the BPIP approach and board games are used as course materials.

### FUTURE RESEARCH

Further action research should be conducted using BPIP in real-time, thus helping the learners overcome the barriers of time and space. This could also make the assessment of TL easier for further researchers. All such CLIL and EMI courses could invite foreigners from the expat community residing in Taiwan for such BPIP, which could drastically improve the students' speaking skills and provide the expat community with authentic Taiwanese cultural exchange.

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