CLIL Projects for Critical Thinking and Digital Citizenship in Moroccan Classrooms

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Abstract

This study examines the effect of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) project-based learning, incorporating Moroccan culture and digital citizenship, on the critical thinking, cultural consciousness, and local identity of first-year middle school students in Morocco. The study employs a quasi-experimental design, involving an experimental group (n = 28) instructed using the CLIL strategy and a control group (n = 28) receiving traditional instruction. To evaluate progress in their critical thinking abilities and knowledge of Moroccan cultural traits, both groups were administered pre- and post-tests. The data was analysed using paired t-tests, which demonstrated a substantial increase in the post-test scores of the experimental group compared to the control group. These results indicate that integrating digital citizenship and local culture into CLIL can improve the critical thinking skills and cultural awareness of students. The significance of culturally applicable content and pedagogical approaches in the development of intercultural competence and awareness is underscored by the study. The results are limited by the small sample size and brief duration, indicating the necessity of additional research with larger, more diverse samples and extended time frames to verify them and investigate CLIL's effects in a variety of educational contexts.

Keywords: *CLIL, critical thinking, digital citizenship, Moroccan culture.*

INTRODUCTION

`Preserving and promoting local cultural identities has become essential in an increasingly linked global society. Education, being a crucial component of society, significantly influences this endeavor by integrating cultural comprehension and indigenous traditions into the curriculum. A novel strategy to do this is via the use of CLIL, which merges language learning with instruction in certain disciplines. CLIL enhances language proficiency and enables the integration of culturally important content, leading to more meaningful and engaging learning opportunities for students.

With its rich cultural variety and diverse language context, Morocco provides a unique and ideal setting for the application of CLIL. The nation's educational system is in a perpetual state of flux, striving to strike a harmonious equilibrium between the demands of globalization and

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the need to save and value its cultural heritage through digital citizenship and other educational strategies. In Morocco, it is essential for educational methods to foster a sense of local identity with academic skills, since Moroccan students often face the challenge of reconciling modernity and tradition. Integrating local cultural aspects such as the arts, music, and everyday life into language learning may provide a whole educational experience that strongly resonates with students' personal and cultural backgrounds

Despite the potential benefits of CLIL, there is a dearth of study on its specific impact on the development of local identity and cultural awareness, particularly in the context of Morocco. While several studies have examined the effectiveness of CLIL in enhancing language competency, there is a lack of research on its influence in promoting cultural understanding and identity formation. This study aims to investigate the influence of CLIL project-based learning, including Moroccan cultural elements, on the cultural identity and awareness of first-year middle school students to fill this gap in knowledge.

This study is important because it has the potential to provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers in Morocco and similar cultural contexts. This research has the potential to enhance the development of curriculum and teaching approaches by demonstrating the positive role of CLIL in promoting local identity, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. Consequently, this may aid in the development of a culturally sensitive educational framework. Furthermore, this study highlights the need for using culturally appropriate instructional approaches to provide a comprehensive and engaging learning environment that respects and values students' cultural backgrounds.

This research aims to examine the potential of CLIL project-based learning in improving young learners' understanding of and affiliation with their local cultural identity. Given the vital importance of education in shaping students' comprehension of their cultural heritage, it is of great importance to explore innovative instructional methods that may bridge the gap between language learning and cultural education. This study seeks to provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of this strategy, making a significant contribution to the broader discourse on educational innovation and cultural preservation. For example, in a CLIL project-based learning unit focused on local history, students could research and present on significant events or figures in their community's past, deepening their connection to their cultural identity. By integrating language skills with cultural content, students not only enhance their linguistic abilities but also gain a deeper appreciation for their heritage and a sense of pride in their local community as well as analytical thinking. As a result, students become more engaged and motivated to learn, leading to increased academic success and a stronger sense of belonging.

Furthermore, by incorporating CLIL into project-based learning, educators can employ multiple learning styles and abilities, providing a more inclusive and dynamic classroom environment. Ultimately, the combination of language learning and cultural exploration through CLIL not only enhances students' educational experiences but also fosters a greater understanding and respect for diverse cultures and histories. Students develop not only language skills but also critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration skills through CLIL. What is more, by connecting their learning to real-life experiences and issues, students are able to see the relevance and importance of their education, fostering a deeper sense of curiosity and passion for learning. In this way, CLIL not only benefits students academically but also prepares

them for success in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world. In this regard, the main question for this study is

How does CLIL project-based learning, incorporating Moroccan culture and digital citizenship, impact local identity and critical thinking in first-year middle school students in Morocco?

Content and Language Integrated Learning is an educational technique in which topics are taught in a foreign language to promote both content mastery and language fluency. This dual-focused strategy improves students' cognitive and language abilities while providing an immersive learning experience (Coyle et.al 2010). CLIL has gained popularity in recent years as educators acknowledge its ability to engage pupils more profoundly than standard language teaching approaches (Dalton-Puffer, 2011).Understanding the fundamental concepts of CLIL paves the way for investigating its larger implications, especially in varied cultural contexts. For example, in a CLIL Arabic class, students may learn about the water cycle in the Arabic language while also practicing their language skills through discussions and presentations. This not only helps students grasp scientific concepts more effectively but also enhances their proficiency in the foreign language by applying it in a real-world context (Kurniawati & Atmojo, 2024).

What is more, in today's linked world, the appropriate and ethical use of technology, known as digital citizenship, is crucial for developing local identities and promoting critical thinking. Ribble (2015) defines digital citizenship as the education of proper and ethical use of technology, which enables students to value and protect their local cultures while engaging with global digital platforms (Ribble, 2015). According to Ohler (2010), including digital citizenship in education promotes the development of critical thinking and ethical conduct (Ohler, 2010). This enables students to assess material critically and actively participate in their communities. Digital citizenship fosters the development of local cultures (Couldry et al., 2014) and promotes students to reflect on their roles and obligations in both real life and online communities (Brandau, et.al., 2021) by advocating for digital literacy and courteous online conduct. By encouraging students to engage thoughtfully and responsibly in online spaces, digital citizenship helps to create a more inclusive and respectful online community (van Toorn & Cox, 2024). In doing so, students not only enhance their own digital skills but also contribute to a safer and more positive digital environment for all users. Through the promotion of ethical behavior and critical thinking, digital citizenship plays a crucial role in shaping the future leaders of our increasingly interconnected world.

Furthermore, integrating local culture into educational frameworks (San Isidro, 2021), such as CLIL, is critical for instilling a feeling of identity and belonging in pupils. Local culture refers to the common behaviors, beliefs, arts, and traditions of a particular community or area that are fundamental to a student's identity (Banks, 2008). In Morocco, this includes traditional music, art, and everyday living, all of which are important for creating a strong cultural identity. Including these cultural components in school not only encourages ethnic pride, but it also offers pupils a more comprehensive, meaningful learning experience. For example, incorporating Moroccan traditional music and art into language and history lessons through CLIL can help students connect to their heritage and understand the significance of these cultural elements in their daily lives. By integrating local culture into education (Dolgunsöz &

Yiğit, 2022), students can develop a deeper sense of belonging and pride in their identity, fostering a more inclusive and enriched learning environment.

Common language, customs, and values have an impact on cultural identification, which is defined as a sense of belonging to a particular group (Hall, 2015). Culturally appropriate education may strengthen students' cultural identities, making learning more relevant and personal (Cummins, 2000). This is particularly crucial in multicultural and multilingual cultures such as Morocco, where varied cultural origins must be recognized and celebrated (Ennaji, 2005). Thus, the link between CLIL and cultural identity emphasizes the ability of educational practices to assist wider social aims. By incorporating students' diverse backgrounds into the curriculum, educators can create a more inclusive learning environment that validates all cultural perspectives (Siepmann, et.al 2023). This not only fosters a sense of belonging for students but also promotes mutual respect and understanding among different cultural groups. In the context of Morocco, where the population is made up of various ethnicities and languages, embracing cultural diversity in education is essential for building a cohesive and harmonious society. Ultimately, by integrating CLIL approaches that honor students' cultural identities, educators can help bridge cultural divides and promote social cohesion. This study will build on a few previous studies conducted in the Moroccan context but not investigate the link between CLIL, culture, and digital citizenship (Ben Hammou & Kesbi, 2019).

Another important educational point is critical thinking, which comprises the capacity to examine, evaluate, and synthesize knowledge in order to make sound decisions and solve issues (Paul & Elder, 2002).CLIL, which combines topic and language learning, enables students to think critically about subject matter while improving their language abilities. When paired with project-based learning, CLIL may boost critical thinking by involving students in real-world challenges and collaborative projects (Beckett, 2006). This relationship highlights CLIL's varied advantages in developing critical academic and life skills.

Integrating local culture into CLIL has enormous educational ramifications. Embedding cultural components into the curriculum allows educators to make learning more relevant and interesting for students (Ruiz de Zarobe & Jiménez Catalán, 2009). This technique not only improves language skills but also allows pupils to have a better awareness of their cultural background. In Morocco, where cultural variety is a distinguishing feature, such integration is crucial for fostering social cohesiveness and tolerance for cultural differences. These teaching initiatives may therefore be effective agents for cultural preservation and improvement.

Despite the potential advantages, there is a significant void in the research discussing CLIL's influence on cultural identity and critical thinking, notably in Morocco. Pérez-Cañado, M. L. (2012), found that studies often prioritize language competency and subject mastery above cultural and cognitive results (Pérez-Cañado, 2012). This study aims to fill that gap by investigating how CLIL, when paired with project-based learning and local cultural aspects, affects the development of cultural identity and critical thinking abilities among Moroccan middle school students. Filling this gap is important to creating more effective educational policies and practices.

In the Moroccan context, this study highlights the need for greater research into how educational methods might promote the development of cultural identity and critical thinking. Given the country's rich cultural past and varied linguistic terrain, it is so important to create teaching strategies that reflect and celebrate variety. This study provides a novel viewpoint by

concentrating on first-year middle school students, a vital period for identity formation and cognitive development. Understanding how this age group responds to CLIL may give valuable insights into the efficacy of such educational programs. By focusing on first-year middle school pupils, the researchers can gain a better understanding of how cultural identity and critical thinking skills are shaped during this crucial stage of development.

METHODS

The study employed a pre-test and post-test approach (Creswell, 2012) to assess students' knowledge of Moroccan cultural features and any changes in cultural perceptions and critical thinking after the intervention. The results were analyzed using paired t-tests using SPSS, providing valuable insights into the effectiveness of the educational intervention. The experimental group participants were taught using CLIL based on cultural components of Morocco as well as digital citizenship that helps maintain their local identity and boost their cultural awareness as well as critical thinking skills. Twenty first-grade pupils were chosen for test-retest piloting (Thabane et al., 2010), receiving pre- and post-test assessments in the same style as the primary test. The first phase lasted two weeks, determining the reliability and validity of the test instrument. The use of a representative sample improved assessment consistency over time (Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, 2007). Cronbach's alpha (Gliem & Gliem, 2003) was used to examine the test's reliability, showing a high degree of internal consistency. The test's validity was validated after pilot testing, with high Cronbach's alpha values indicating the reliability and accuracy of the findings. The test-retest results to check the validity of the scores and reveal consistency are displayed below:

Table 1. Case Processing Summary

		N	%
Cases	Valid	20	100,0
	Excluded[a]	0	,0
	Total	20	100,0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

The case processing summary indicates that all 20 student cases were considered valid, and no data were excluded, suggesting that the analysis was performed on a comprehensive dataset. This guarantees that both rounds of testing were completely represented and that the assessment of test-retest is based on a thorough sample. The incorporation of all participants emphasizes the accuracy of the data-gathering process and the reliability of the findings in evaluating the test's coherence.

Table 2. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,809	2

The reliability data indicate that the test results from the two testing instances have a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.809. The high alpha value implies a significant level of internal consistency between the two sets of scores, which suggests that the test produces reliable and consistent findings when it is performed numerous times. A Cronbach's alpha value greater than 0.7 is often regarded as outstanding, indicating that the test is consistently valid and reliable throughout several trials. The test's excellent degree of stability confirms its validity by consistently measuring student performance over time.

This experimental study, conducted at TAZI School in Casablanca, Morocco, adhered to stringent ethical standards throughout its execution and lasted three months. The teacher-researcher obtained official authorization from the school to carry out the study and implemented steps to give priority to privacy and anonymity while also safeguarding the respect, entitlements, and well-being of all participants. The study's ethical concerns embraced not just its design but also the collection, storage, and analysis of data, displaying a dedication to the utmost levels of expertise and integrity. Furthermore, the teacher-researcher demonstrated meticulousness in preventing any prejudice or personal inclinations throughout the intervention, therefore maintaining educational ethics. Adhering to ethical standards not only upholds the essential ideals of research ethics but also strengthens the credibility of academic outcomes in education.

Participants

Table 3. Sample of the Study

Group	Total students	Girls	Boys	Proficiency Level
Experimental	28	18	10	Pre-intermediate to Intermediate
Control	28	17	11	Pre-intermediate to Intermediate

The research sample included 56 students, with an equal distribution of 28 individuals in each group: experimental and control. The experimental group consisted of 18 female participants and 10 male participants, while the control group had 17 females and 11 males, leading to a greater percentage of females in both groups. The gender distribution in this study shows that the experimental group consisted of 64.3% females, whereas the control group included 60.7% girls. These percentages align with the existing classroom compositions and conform to the established norms and regulations of the educational system. Both groups demonstrated a range of language abilities, from pre-intermediate to intermediate, which

ensured that they could be compared in terms of competency. Applying complete groups maintains the fundamental dynamics of the classroom and improves the social validity of the research, hence increasing the relevance of the findings to actual learning settings.

Materials

The experimental group received instruction via the use of CLIL, which focused on cultural elements and digital citizenship. This approach included project-based learning, using the textbook "New Adventures 3" along with additional content on Moroccan culture. This part covered Moroccan cultural issues using CLIL. The topics included the daily lives of typical Moroccan adolescents, the arts in Morocco, and the musical soundscapes of the country. Students participated in projects focused on Moroccan traditions and used the internet as a digital tool to make posters. This experience helped to improve their digital citizenship and cultural awareness. The participants were treated with a focus on fostering cultural comprehension and digital responsibility via Content and Language Integrated Learning. The participants were encouraged to collaborate and communicate effectively with their peers from different cultural backgrounds. For example, students worked on a project to create a poster about traditional Moroccan music and its significance in the country's culture. By researching online and collaborating with their peers, they were able to gain a deeper understanding of Moroccan musical traditions and share their findings with others. This not only enhanced their digital literacy skills but also fostered a sense of cultural appreciation and respect for diversity among the participants. Through this collaboration, they were able to see the value of diverse perspectives and how it enriches their own learning. By actively engaging with each other and sharing their knowledge, the participants were able to build strong relationships and create a sense of unity within the group. Overall, this project demonstrated the power of teamwork and cultural understanding in fostering a more inclusive and harmonious community.

RESULTS

The study used a pre-test and post-test methodology to evaluate students' understanding of Moroccan cultural features and any changes in cultural perspectives after the intervention. The data was analyzed using paired t-tests in SPSS, which yielded useful insights into the efficacy of the instructional strategy. Overall, the results indicated a significant improvement in students' knowledge and appreciation of Moroccan cultural features and criticality following the intervention. This suggests that the instructional strategy was successful in enhancing students' cultural perspectives and understanding. The findings underscore the importance of incorporating culturally relevant content and pedagogical approaches in educational settings to promote intercultural competence and sensitivity. Importantly, the participants in the experimental group were instructed using CLIL that focused on the cultural aspects of Morocco. Additionally, they were taught digital citizenship, which aimed to preserve their local identity, enhance their cultural awareness, and develop their critical thinking abilities. The study used paired t-tests to compare the pre-test and post-test scores of both the experimental and control

groups. The table below displays the descriptive statistics for the pre-test and post-test scores of both the control and treatment groups.

Table 4. Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretest_C	10,14	28	2,206	,417
	Postestest_C	9,86	28	2,240	,423
Pair 2	Pretest_E	9,61	28	2,897	,548
	Postests_E	14,75	28	2,303	,435

The descriptive statistics provide the average scores, variability, and precision measures for both the control and experimental groups in their first and final assessments. The control group had a marginal decline in their average scores from the pre-test (M = 10.14, SD = 2.206) to the post-test (M = 9.86, SD = 2.240). On the other hand, the experimental group showed a significant rise in their average scores from the first assessment (M = 9.61, SD = 2.897) to the subsequent assessment (M = 14.75, SD = 2.303). The significant enhancement in the scores of the experimental group indicates that the instructional technique based on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), which emphasizes Moroccan culture and digital citizenship, substantially improved their comprehension and admiration of Moroccan cultural characteristics.

Table 5. Paired Samples Test

| | | Paired Differences | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | | | |
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Pretest_C - Postestest_C	,286	1,213	,229	-,185	,756	1,247	27	,223
Pair 2	Pretest_E - Postests_E	-5,143	3,556	,672	-6,522	-3,764	-7,653	27	,000

The findings of the paired samples t-test show that there is no statistically significant difference between the scores of the control group in the pre-test and post-test (t(27) = 1.247, p = 0.223). This suggests that there was no significant improvement in their cultural awareness. However, the findings for the experimental group indicate an important and statistically significant enhancement (t (27) = -7.653, p = 0.000) in their post-test scores when compared to their pre-test levels. The substantial rise in student performance clearly illustrates the efficacy of the CLIL-based educational approach, which successfully included Moroccan cultural

aspects and digital citizenship, therefore enriching students' cultural understanding and viewpoints as well as analytical skills. The results emphasize the need to integrate culturally relevant material and digital literacy into instructional methods to cultivate a more profound comprehension and admiration of the local culture among students.

DISCUSSION

CLIL has shown considerable promise in improving both language skills and topic knowledge. Nevertheless, the wider consequences of this phenomenon, namely in promoting regional identity and cultural awareness, have received less attention. The results of this study involving middle school students from Morocco show that the inclusion of indigenous cultural components and digital citizenship into CLIL project-based learning (PBL) may significantly influence students' cultural consciousness and analytical reasoning skills. This study highlights the potential for CLIL to not only enhance language proficiency and subject knowledge but also to foster a deeper appreciation for one's own cultural heritage and global citizenship. By integrating indigenous culture and digital citizenship into CLIL and PBL, educators can create a more holistic learning experience that prepares students for an increasingly interconnected world.

The significant enhancement in the post-test scores of the experimental group underscores the effectiveness of the strategy in augmenting students' comprehension of Moroccan cultural characteristics. This finding is consistent with the existing literature, which emphasizes the advantages of CLIL in enhancing both linguistic proficiency and understanding of subject matter, as Coyle et al. (2010) and Dalton-Puffer (2011) have highlighted that the immersive and captivating character of CLIL enables more profound learning experiences in comparison to conventional language teaching approaches. Furthermore, the integration of language and content in CLIL has been shown to promote higher levels of student engagement and motivation. This suggests that incorporating CLIL strategies into educational practices can lead to more effective and meaningful learning outcomes for students.

The study identified digital citizenship as a vital element that influenced students' local identities and encouraged the development of critical thinking skills. Ribble (2015) and Ohler (2010) support the integration of digital citizenship into education, asserting that it provides students with the necessary abilities to manage technology in a moral and responsible manner. The students in the experimental group gained a sophisticated comprehension of their cultural heritage and improved their digital literacy by using digital technologies in their work. This simultaneous emphasis not only enhanced their educational experience but also equipped students for engaged and knowledgeable involvement in the digital realm.

Integrating local culture into CLIL frameworks is crucial for cultivating a sense of identity and belonging among students. The research focused on several cultural aspects, including the daily life of a typical Moroccan adolescent, Moroccan arts, and musical soundscapes. These factors played a crucial role in fostering ethnic pride and enhancing the relevance and engagement of the learning process. Similarly, Cummins (2000) and Ennaji (2005) have emphasized the significance of culturally relevant education in enhancing students' cultural identities. Adopting this method is especially vital in cultures that are multicultural and multilingual, such as Morocco.

Integrating Content and Language Integrated learning with project-based learning resulted in an additional improvement in students' capacity for critical thinking. According to Paul and Elder (2002) and Beckett (2006), critical thinking is the capacity to examine, assess, and integrate knowledge to make well-founded judgments and resolve issues. The significant improvement in the post-test scores of the experimental group indicates that their critical thinking abilities were successfully nurtured via engagement in real-world difficulties and collaborative projects.

This study highlights the transformational potential of combining CLIL with project-based learning that incorporates local cultural aspects to improve students' cultural awareness, critical thinking, and personal identity. Integrating traditional elements such as music, art, and everyday life into the curriculum, together with digital citizenship education, enables students to develop cultural competency, critical thinking, and the skills necessary for responsible digital involvement. These strategies promote intercultural competence and social unity while conforming to global trends that emphasize inclusive and fair education. The findings underscore the necessity for policymakers to facilitate creative techniques via resource distribution and educator training, emphasizing the significance of culturally responsive pedagogy in maintaining cultural diversity while preparing students for a globalized environment (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This study enhances the conversation on educational innovation by providing insights into the development of effective learning environments that foster unity and critical thinking.

CONCLUSION

This study showcases the beneficial effects of CLIL project-based learning on the local identity, cultural awareness, and critical thinking skills of middle school students in Morocco. Still, the study's constraints include the limited number of participants and the brief time frame, perhaps failing to encompass the long-lasting impacts. Furthermore, the study was constrained to a single school, which may have an impact on the applicability of the findings. To verify these results, future research should include bigger and more varied groups, as well as extend over longer periods of time. Additionally, it would be advantageous to investigate the influence of Content and Language Integrated Learning in diverse cultural settings and among different age cohorts, analyzing the adaptability of these pedagogical approaches to varied educational situations. Additional research should explore the impact of teacher training on the effective implementation of CLIL and digital citizenship education. Researchers may help in the creation of more effective and inclusive educational methods by addressing these constraints and exploring new possibilities.

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