

Developing intercultural communicative competence in French-medium content and language integrated learning courses through teacher scaffolding

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ABSTRACT: The increasing popularity of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) courses has attracted the attention of Chinese language educators. Many scholars have examined its functions of facilitating the development of content and language. However, intercultural communicative competence (ICC), as a core aspect of CLIL's 4Cs (communication, content, cognition, and culture) framework, has been hardly analysed. Moreover, most studies on CLIL courses have been conducted in English-medium contexts, with scant attention paid to CLIL programs delivered in languages other than English. Drawing from sociocultural theory, this study aims to investigate how Chinese students develop ICC through teacher scaffolding in French-medium CLIL courses and their views on facilitating ICC in CLIL courses. The study collected data from a six-week classroom observation of twenty Chinese French-major undergraduates and interviews with seven of these students. The findings revealed that teacher scaffolding, i.e. explaining academic language, drawing on previous knowledge and linguistic scaffolding, helped to develop the participants' ICC. This research addresses the gap in understanding how teacher scaffolding can facilitate students' ICC development in a French-medium CLIL course, providing pedagogical guidance for CLIL teachers on how to promote ICC.

Keywords: Content and Language Integrated Learning, intercultural communicative competence, teacher scaffolding, French learning, microgenesis.

Desarrollo de la competencia comunicativa intercultural en los cursos acordes con la metodología Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos y Lenguas impartidos en la lengua francesa a través del andamiaje docente

RESUMEN: La creciente popularidad de los cursos en metodología Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos y Lenguas Extranjeras (AICLE) ha llamado mucho la atención de los

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pedagogos del idioma chino. Muchos estudiosos han examinado sus funciones relativas a facilitar el desarrollo del contenido y el lenguaje. Sin embargo, como aspecto fundamental del marco de enseñanza de las 4Cs (comunicación, contenido, cognición y cultura) de AICLE, la competencia comunicativa intercultural (CCI) ha sido poco analizada. Además, la mayoría de los estudios en los cursos de AICLE han sido realizados en contextos de la lengua inglesa, con poca atención prestada a los programas de AICLE impartidos en idiomas distintos del inglés. Basándose en la teoría sociocultural, el presente estudio tiene como objetivo investigar cómo los estudiantes chinos desarrollan la CCI a través del andamiaje de los docentes en los cursos acordes con la metodología AICLE impartidos en francés, y sus puntos de vista sobre la facilitación de la CCI en dichos cursos. Este estudio recopiló los datos a partir de una observación de seis semanas en un aula con veinte estudiantes universitarios de la Filología Francesa, y de las entrevistas con siete de ellos. Los resultados revelaron que el andamiaje de los docentes, por ejemplo, el idioma académico explicativo, basándose en el uso de conocimientos previos y el andamiaje lingüístico, ayudaron a desarrollar la CCI de los participantes. Esta investigación aborda el vacío de la comprensión de cómo el andamiaje de los docentes puede facilitar el desarrollo de la CCI de los alumnos en un curso en metodología AICLE impartido en la lengua francesa, proporcionando orientación pedagógica para los docentes de AICLE sobre cómo promover la CCI.

Palabras clave: Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos y Lenguas Extranjeras, competencia comunicativa intercultural, andamiaje docente, estudio de francés, microgénesis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is mainly applied in Europe, and has been spreading across the continent since the mid-1990s (Coyle *et al.*, 2010). To support CLIL pedagogies, Coyle (1999) proposed the 4Cs conceptual framework, which covers content (subject matter), communication (language), cognition (learning and thinking) and culture (social awareness of “self” and “others”). This framework offers a holistic perspective and overcomes the limitations of focusing solely on improving students’ linguistic competence. Pawan (2008) indicates that CLIL teachers can promote those four elements by using scaffolding strategies, yet the literature on how teacher scaffolding promotes the 4Cs, particularly intercultural communicative competence (ICC), is limited. According to sociocultural theory, learning takes place in social interactions, and “scaffolding” refers to those temporary but essential supportive interactions assisted by experts to develop higher levels of understanding (Vygotsky, 1978). The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) refers to the domain of knowledge in which learners cannot independently function, but where they can achieve by being given scaffolded assistance; only assistance provided within the ZPD could be regarded as effective scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978; Ohta, 2000). Therefore, this study aims to explore teacher scaffolding within the ZPD to develop students’ ICC in French-medium CLIL courses, and the students’ opinions of these practices. The study highlights the importance of scaffolding, and provides guidance on how to implement scaffolding strategies to enhance students’ ICC in CLIL courses.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Teacher Scaffolding in CLIL courses

Coyle *et al.* (2010) define CLIL as a dual-focused educational approach where an additional language is utilised for both content and language teaching and learning. Although current research has shown that CLIL offers advantages for both language and content learning (Lin, 2016; Roiha & Sommier, 2018; Ho *et al.*, 2019), the attainment of dual goals in CLIL courses can pose challenges for students. These challenges include the simultaneous navigation of multiple tasks such as acquiring subject knowledge, organising classroom interactions, and expressing ideas with appropriate language (Martínez Agudo, 2019). Li and Zhang (2020) further indicate that the potentiality of content and language learning is primarily realised by the mode of classroom interaction, calling for adequate scaffolding and high levels of support (Gibbons, 2015; Lo & Lin, 2019). CLIL teachers should thus first evaluate the students' situation in real time to determine a ZPD where the students' potential capacity to internalise new knowledge can be activated under teachers' scaffolding, and then play the role of "scaffolding" within the ZPD to achieve the dual purposes of a CLIL classroom.

Some studies have explored the effects of teacher scaffolding in CLIL courses on language acquisition and content knowledge (Lo *et al.*, 2019; Lin & He, 2017). For example, An *et al.* (2019) highlight the need for linguistic scaffolding to help students understand non-technical vocabulary in science texts by explaining general academic vocabulary, morphemes and idioms. According to Pawan (2008), linguistic scaffolding consists of the oral presentation of materials, simplified language, slowed pacing, direct instruction of form and meaning, and vocabulary teaching, while cultural scaffolding consists of students' prior knowledge, literature from the students' culture, and the language teacher's translation and instruction. Later, Mahan (2022) developed a framework for analysing scaffolding which involves comprehension strategies including drawing on previous knowledge, academic language development, and supportive materials. However, previous studies show that scaffolding strategies are still aimed at language acquisition and content knowledge. Additionally, although scaffolding in CLIL courses has been analysed, most studies are conducted in an English as a foreign language (EFL) educational context, while related research in French CLIL courses is less explored (Lo *et al.*, 2019), calling for more attention in this area.

2.2. Intercultural communicative competence in CLIL courses

According to Coyle's (1999) 4Cs conceptual framework, one of the major aims of CLIL is to develop students' ICC. The literature suggests that students' ICC develops in CLIL courses, including directly affecting their attitudes towards different cultures and enhancing their interest in intercultural aspects (Doiz *et al.*, 2014). For example, related studies show that CLIL students are more willing to interact with foreign speakers than their non-CLIL peers, and that their cross-cultural awareness has been reinforced (Roiha & Sommier, 2018; Yang, 2021). However, teachers express difficulties in promoting ICC in CLIL courses, especially when students have grammatical and lexical problems, as they struggle to present both cultural knowledge and linguistic forms to students at the same time (Méndez, 2013; Pérez-Gracia *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, Pawan (2008) has analysed different types of CLIL

teacher scaffolding and found that cultural scaffolding only accounted for 6% of the studied scaffolds, which offers insufficient evidence for ICC development in CLIL courses. Therefore, more pedagogical guidance and training to promote ICC need to be given.

In sum, the above-mentioned studies show the importance of teacher scaffolding for the promotion of students' ICC, but previous research has not provided enough evidence of ICC development through teacher scaffolding, especially in French-medium CLIL courses.

Byram (1997, p. 44) suggests that ICC encompasses five dimensions:

- attitudes: students are open-minded and curious, willing to suspend disbelief in both their own culture and others;
- knowledge: students are familiar with various social groups in both their own nation and that of their interlocutor, as well as with the overall processes of interpersonal and societal interaction;
- skills of interpreting and relating: students can analyse and explain texts or events from a different culture and compare them to similar ones from their own culture;
- skills of discovery and interaction: students can gain knowledge of a new culture and its customs, and use these to engage in real-time interactive communication; and
- critical cultural awareness: students can critically evaluate their own and others' cultures based on explicit criteria.

Therefore, based on Byram's (1997) model, this study aims to investigate how teacher scaffolding in the ZPD promotes ICC development, manifested in two aspects: first, other-regulation to self-regulation, i.e. a progression from comprehending cultural knowledge assisted by a more experienced person to being able to understand it independently (Vygotsky, 1978); and second, learner autonomy, which is defined as their ability and willingness to internalise new knowledge, make decisions and act independently (Little, 2007; Li, 2017). The following research questions are proposed:

Q1: How does the teacher scaffold students' ICC in a French-medium CLIL course?

Q2: What do students respond to teachers' scaffolding for their ICC development?

3. METHODS

3.1. Contexts and participants

This case study was conducted during an intensive reading programme that aims to enhance integrated language skills and foster intercultural communication through exposure to French culture. The programme is worth four credits, and requires students to attend two sessions each week. The textbook incorporates different aspects of French culture, including sports, education, arts and politics. Each unit covers one theme with three intensive reading texts. The teacher usually first addresses linguistic and grammar difficulties, and then conducts intercultural communication activities based on the unit theme.

Twenty sophomores (16 females and 4 males) and a Chinese teacher of French from a university in central China participated in the study through convenience sampling. Seven of the

students (5 females and 2 males) expressed their willingness to take part in interviews. All the participants signed the research consent form which was also approved by the institution, and anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study. The students in this study were elementary French learners, as they had no exposure to French learning before entering the university and only had one year of French learning experience at the time of the study.

The teacher had over ten years of teaching experience and held a PhD degree in French Literature. Having worked at the Chinese Embassy in France for ten years and being proficient in French, the teacher was well-equipped to navigate cultural differences between the two nations. Her experience and expertise facilitated effective intercultural communication and contributed to the success of the programme.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

Three sets of data were collected in the form of classroom observations, interviews and documents. Twenty-four sessions of classroom discourse were audio-recorded (45 minutes per session), while seven students took part in semi-structured interviews, each lasting half an hour. All the interviews were conducted in the students' first language (L1). The classroom discourse and interviews were transcribed verbatim. Documents included national- and university-level policy documents concerning CLIL courses, curriculum guidelines, and classroom-level data such as lecture slides and textbooks.

Students' interviews were analysed thematically based on Byram's (1997) ICC model, while classroom audio-recordings were subjected to a two-step analysis: first, scaffolding episodes were identified, referring to instances where teachers assisted students in their improvement; and second, classroom discourse was analysed through microgenesis to investigate learning instances over short periods of time and reveal students' ICC development (Gánem-Gutiérrez, 2007). Based on previous literature, the scaffolding functions developed by Pawan (2008) and Mahan (2022) were adapted: academic language (AL), previous knowledge (PK), and linguistic scaffolding (LS). Definitions and examples of each type of scaffolding from the transcriptions are as follows.

- (1) AL: The teacher provided linguistic expressions or explained the subject-specific terminology in the target language, or directly translated it into the students' mother tongue to help them understand cultural knowledge (taken from Mahan, 2022). For instance: 其实应该是正好相反的。这个CDD你翻译成定期合同，实际上是限期（期限劳动合同）。CDD是临时合同（有期限合同），CDI是长期合同（无限期合同）。
(Actually, it should be the opposite. You translate CDD as a fixed-term contract, but it is actually a limited-term contract. CDD is a temporary contract, and CDI is a permanent contract.)
- (2) PK: The teacher assesses what the students already know, refers to prior knowledge, embeds new knowledge, or uses relatable examples from their own country for comprehension and communication (taken from Mahan, 2022). For instance:
Elle a dit la géométrie de grands jardins le rend célèbre dans le monde entier. Géométrie 是几何，它不像中国园林，基本上都是自然的东西。中国的园林再小、再微观，比如一个假山，也是像真山一样，而他们（法国的园林）比较人工。

(She said that the geometry of the large garden makes it famous in the world. Géométrie is geometric. It's not like Chinese gardens, which are basically all natural. Chinese gardens, even smaller or more microscopic ones, like a rockery, are like a real mountain, whereas they (French gardens) are more artificial.)

- (3) LS: Simplifying the target language, for example by shortening selections, speaking in the present tense, avoiding the use of idioms etc. (taken from Pawan, 2008). For instance:

Au bord de la Seine. Le long 是沿着，但住的话应该是定点的。如果你的表达是 Je marche le long de la Seine 或者 Je conduis le long de la Seine 都是可以的。

(On the banks of the Seine. Le long is along, but if you live somewhere, it means it is a fixed place. If the expressions are “I walk along the Seine” or “I drive along the Seine”, both are right.)

It should be noted that AL focuses on explaining misunderstandings because of a lack of cultural knowledge, while LS concentrates on correcting wrong expressions related to students' language proficiency.

Two raters transcribed the recordings and coded the scaffolding episodes to achieve inter-rater consistency. They reached 94.2% agreement across all scaffolding functions. Any discrepancies between the two raters were negotiated until agreement was reached.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. RQ1: How does the teacher scaffold students' ICC in the French-medium CLIL course?

An analysis of scaffolding episodes offers insights into how teacher scaffolding affects the development of ICC.

Excerpt 1 (Scaffolding in relation to knowledge)

1 S1: *Le sujet des épreuves écrites de spécialité du baccalauréat général. Je parle en chinois, c'est 普通学士学位专业笔试科目。*

(“Le baccalauréat général” written examination subjects, which, in Chinese, are “general Bachelor's degree professional written examination subjects”)

2 T: *Pardon, un petit remarque. Baccalauréat on ne dit pas 学士学位。学士学位, c'est après des études universitaires – par exemple, vous après 4 ans d'études universitaires, vous aurez la licence. La licence, c'est 学士学位。 Mais baccalauréat, c'est 高中毕业文凭。*

(Excuse me, a small point needs to be mentioned. You say baccalauréat is a Bachelor's degree. A Bachelor's degree is what you get after four years' college study. For example, after four years' college study, you will get a certification. The certification is a Bachelor's degree. But a baccalauréat is a high school diploma.) (AL, PK)

In Excerpt 1, because of their insufficient knowledge of the French educational system, S1 interpreted “baccalauréat” as a test to obtain a Bachelor's degree. The teacher interrupted and clarified terms by explaining them in both the target language and the student's L1. This is one aspect of Byram's (1997) ICC model, which involves being familiar with cultural

knowledge for interactions. This example shows that when meeting unfamiliar terminology, students might refer to the dictionary but may get the wrong answer (Mahan, 2022). Since CLIL teachers and students normally have a common language and cultural background, the teacher is able to locate what students do not understand, and provide scaffolding in time to help students comprehend the unfamiliar culture-specific terms (Mahan *et al.*, 2018, Lin, 2015). Here the teacher recognised that students know the meaning of a Bachelor's degree and a high school diploma, so she explained the difference between a baccalauréat and a Bachelor's degree, first in the target language and then by directly translating it into the students' L1. This process shows that students' linguistic and cultural knowledge has been promoted through the teacher's explanations of AL.

Excerpt 2 (Scaffolding in relation to skills of interpreting and relating)

1 T: *Il a parlé du BAC des examens.* 高考我们翻译成法语（我们把高考翻译成法语），我们就直接用 *Gaokao*，但是我们高考是哪种类型的考试呢？*C'est un examen? C'est une épreuve? C'est un test?* 是这三种里面的吗？

(He just mentioned the BAC exam. If we translate the college entrance examination into French, we just use "gaokao". But what kind of exam is it? Is it "un examen"? Is it "une épreuve"? Is it "un test"? Does it relate to these three expressions?) (LS, PK)

2 Ss: *Concours.*

(Exams)

3 T: *Oui, c'est un concours.* 那（这些表达）什么不同呢？为什么说高考是 *concours*，不说 *c'est un test*。专四我们要说，*c'est un test*。

(Yes, we use "concours". But what are the differences between these expressions? Why do we use "concours" to refer to college entrance examinations, but not use "un test"? For TFS-4, we use "un test".) (LS)

4 S2: 感觉

(feels)

5 T: 大家用的都是对的，大家的感觉也都是对的，但是标准是什么呢？

(Everyone uses it correctly, and your feelings are also right, but what are the standards?)

6 Ss: ...

(Pause)

7 T: 实际上 *un examen* 就像我们期中考试、期末考试一样，是用来考察 *les connaissances des aptitudes*。通常它是有一个及格线的。然后 *test* 就像专四一样，是为了确定一个水平。

(In fact, "un examen" is like our mid-term exam and final exam, used for testing skills and knowledge. It usually has a passing line. And "test" is like TFS-4, which aims to determine a level.) (PK)

This excerpt shows that the students' skills of interpreting and relating have been promoted through teacher scaffolding. The teacher extended answers with related cultural knowledge of their country (Line 1), followed by asking about the differences in expressions for exams (Line 3). Students could find the right expression but did not know the reason (Line 4, Line 6), and then the teacher explained and related to the students' own culture (Line 7). This shows that other-regulation can be achieved through LS and PK, where two types of scaffolding play a role. In CLIL courses the balance of language and content should be mediated by students' needs and challenges (Hu & Gao, 2020). In this dialogue the teacher realised the students' potential language ability development and probed the small differences between

various expressions, meeting the requirement of providing vocabulary to talk about cultural diversity for ICC (Mahan, 2022). Meanwhile, relating students' target cultural knowledge to their own culture can serve as a channel to make cultural teaching more effective (Gay, 2002), since they can use proper expressions to communicate with others about their own culture. Therefore, both language ability and ICC have been enhanced through LS and PK.

Excerpt 3 (Scaffolding in relation to skills of discovery and interaction)

1 S3: *Les cyclistes ont besoin de prendre un test pour dopage. Est-ce qu'ils dépensent autant de temps sur ce test pour assurer la justice?*

(Bike riders are required to undergo doping tests. Do they spend the same amount of time on this test to ensure fair play?)

2 T: *La question c'était? Est-ce que vous pouvez répéter votre question ou bien reformuler votre question?*

(What is your question? Can you repeat your question or reorganise your question?)

3 S3: *Est-ce qu'il dépense...*

(Does he spend...)

4 T: *Mettre du temps à faire quelque chose? Passer du temps à faire quelque chose? 花多长时间吗? 你是想说?*

(Spending time on doing something? How long does it take? Do you want to say how long does it take?) (LS)

5 S3: *Je pense que, ce n'est pas tout le monde a passé le même temps pour tester afin de s'assurer que le jeu est équitable? 就是每个人做检测的(所花)时间, 因为有的人做(检测做)得快, 有的人做得慢, 每个人停留的时间不一样。*

(I mean, does everyone spend the same amount of time testing to ensure the game's fairness? It is the time for everyone to do the test, because some people test fast, and some people test slowly, so everyone stays for a different amount of time.)

6 T: *同样的时间? 跟什么同样的时间?*

(The same time? Compared with what?)

7 S3: *就是每个人做检测的时间, 因为有的人做得快, 有的人做得慢, 每个人停留的时间不一样。*

(It is the time for everyone to do the test, because some people test fast, and some people test slowly, so everyone stays for a different amount of time.)

8 T: *问得很专业。*

(A professional question)

9 S4: *Je crois qu'il se déroule par étape et les contrôles antidopage se passent entre les étapes. Donc...*

(I think this test is set up at every stage and is set between each stage, so...)

10 T: *Je pense que tous les cyclistes doivent être dans les mêmes conditions. 他们的要求肯定是一样的。可能提交送检样品 en même temps, 在赛前或者是赛后的规定时间内。Il faut le donner pour le test. 但是具体的我不知道, 我想 Chacun doit être dans les mêmes conditions. 肯定是条件要求是一样的, 大家可以课后去上网查一下。*

(I think the conditions of races are the same for every cyclist. Their requirements must be the same. Maybe they need to submit samples at the same time, before or after the competition, and within the specified time. They all need to do the test. I don't know the details, but everyone's conditions are the same. You can search on the internet after class to check it.) (PK)

In Excerpt 3, S3 used the wrong expression, “dépendent autant de temps” (Line 1), so the teacher asked S3 to clarify their question (Line 2). S3’s hesitation showed his difficulties in expression (Line 3), and then the teacher provided the right expression, “passer du temps” (Line 4), where the student’s ZPD had been identified and the teacher is able to provide LS. Finally, S3’s use of “passé le même temps” shows that he has absorbed the linguistic knowledge and developed from other-regulation to self-regulation (Line 5). This correction indicates that the teacher’s LS encourages students to use the right collocation and promotes students’ linguistic ability in CLIL courses.

It is worth noted that the teacher did not provide a model answer. Rather, she encouraged students to search for themselves after class (Line 8), scaffolding students to develop their skills of discovering new cultural knowledge. There is evidence of self-regulation when students internalise the knowledge; this is also part of ICC, fostering skills of discovery and interaction. In fact, no instructor can possess or foresee all the knowledge that students may require in the future, and many teachers have not had a chance to explore the cultures that their students may encounter, but teachers can construct intercultural knowledge together with their students (Byram *et al.*, 2002). The teacher’s role is to help students develop ICC attitudes and skills, but not to serve as the only source of cultural knowledge. Teachers’ long-term scaffolding imperceptibly enhances students’ spontaneity of intercultural communication, which will be shown in their later work.

Excerpt 4 (Learner autonomy to develop skills of interpreting and relating)

I S5: 值得注意的是有很多国家官员和年轻人会采购奢侈品，这个原因可能是跟中国的“关系”和“面子”有关。

(The French purchase luxury goods for personal use, usually in traditional shopping malls, which are the characteristics of luxury goods in the French market. However, as the teacher illustrated before, there are some differences between Chinese luxury markets and French luxury markets. It is worth noting that many state officials and young people will purchase luxury goods, which may be related to China’s cultural emphasis on “relationship” and “face”.)

Excerpt 4 is evidence of learner autonomy in intercultural communication. It is generally believed that the goal of scaffolding is to achieve learner autonomy, which means that learning responsibility gradually shifts from the teacher to the student (Van de Pol *et al.*, 2010). After talking about the features of French people’s luxury shopping habits, S5 transitions naturally to present the equivalent Chinese phenomenon and tries to analyse the underlying reasons without the teacher’s scaffolding, which shows that skills of interpreting and relating to other cultures have been developed. Vygotsky (1978) suggests that every function in cultural development appears twice: first cognitively, developed with the help of others (such as teachers’ scaffolding), and then on an intrapsychological level where students can function independently. Evidence for microgenetic development consists of the reduced need for other-regulation and the increased presence of learner autonomy.

Excerpt 5 (Learner autonomy to develop skills of discovery and interaction)

I S6: Mais c’est le 16^e, qui est l’arrondissement assez typique avec ses beaux immeubles et ses rues calmes. Quand on veut décrire une personne chic nous pouvons dire très 16^e. Mais

*je l'ai trouvé sur l'internet, et je n'ai trouvé aucune information particulièrement pertinente, je ne sais pas si c'est vrai ou faux.
 (But it is the 16th district, which is a typical administrative district with beautiful buildings and quiet streets. When we want to describe a fashionable person, we can say "very 16th". But I found it on the internet, and I did not find much related information. I do not know whether it is true or false.)
 2 T: C'est vrai.
 (Yes, it is true.)*

In this excerpt S6 came across some idioms online, but when S6 could not confirm the expression he asked for the teacher's help. This kind of dialogue also happened in the later weeks of the semester, indicating that students had attempted to discover cultural knowledge, and their autonomy in discovering intercultural elements had been cultivated unconsciously. This self-regulation in the learners' discourse proves that the teacher had succeeded in facilitating students' independent development in their terms of their ability to discover intercultural knowledge.

4.2. What do students respond to teachers' scaffolding for their ICC development?

4.2.1. Attitudes

When the teacher talks about culture in class, apart from the culture itself, she also provides us with culture-related vocabulary and expressions, so I am probably braver in talking to people. (Daisy)

One of the most obvious attitudes shown in the interviews was that students were more self-assured and flexible when interacting with people from different cultures. This may be because of two reasons; the first is their linguistic development, which is the most basic course objective. The underlying goal of language teaching is to mimic a native speaker in terms of linguistic proficiency, awareness of what is "proper" language, and understanding of a nation and its "culture" (Byram *et al.*, 2002). LS and AL in the CLIL course improve students' linguistic abilities and guide better intercultural communication. Another reason is that CLIL courses reduce pure attention to linguistic forms, and instead subtly integrate linguistic knowledge into content and cultural teaching, so learners may be unconscious of progress in language learning, while they also feel more self-confident in communicating.

4.2.2. Skills of discovery and interaction

I thought that French people advocate equality and do not have a sense of hierarchy. But the teacher told us that they are good at dealing with relationships. At first I didn't believe it, but I changed my mind after watching some French movies. (Charlotte)

When the teacher presented new cultural knowledge that conflicted with Charlotte's prior beliefs, she did independent research online to obtain further corroborating information. This exemplifies how students can not only acquire cultural knowledge from their teacher, but also enhance their learning through independent research. As instructors cannot anticipate their students' future cultural information needs, it is essential for students to develop their

own knowledge-seeking skills (Byram *et al.*, 2002). Through the provision of scaffolding, teachers facilitate the development of a bridge between cultural knowledge and the students, and promote the development of their ICC as well.

4.2.3. Students' critical cultural awareness

Before taking this course, I preferred native speakers to be our teachers ... because I believed they are more likely to have a deep understanding of a country since they were born and have lived there for a long time. But now I do not have a specific preference for teachers' nationality. A native French person may view French culture from one perspective, but a teacher may talk about French culture from the perspective of an overseas student, and both views are very important. (Élior)

This is one aspect of critical cultural awareness. Byram *et al.* (2002) indicate that it is risky to assume that there is a single, reliable description of another country, or that only those who are native speakers can truly understand the context. Due to their upbringing, native speakers may encounter difficulties in objectively analysing familiar experiences, which may result in biases. Conversely, exposure to foreign cultures inevitably enables individuals to recognise the relativity of their thinking, thereby enabling them to avoid stereotypes and develop a profound appreciation for cultural diversity (Méndez, 2013). Therefore, non-native teachers and learners may be at an advantage because they can adopt an external perspective towards a culture and compare it with their own, thus fostering reflection and a more nuanced comprehension. Byram *et al.* (2002) suggest that the “best” teacher is someone who can assist students to view their own cultures from the perspectives of others and find relationships between other cultures.

5. DISCUSSION

The analysis suggests that teacher scaffolding has contributed to students' ICC development. In instances where the students encountered difficulties in understanding culture-specific terminology, the teacher provided AL in their target or native language. This is particularly relevant in cases where certain terms are closely associated with a specific culture, since CLIL teachers frequently utilise L1 to facilitate students' understanding, especially in making connections between concepts in L1 and the target language (Dalton-Puffer, 2007). In the teaching process the teacher rejected the notion of languages as isolated systems and instead employed all available language resources, which is also consistent with Lin's (2015) view that one of the advantages of CLIL is its flexible use of language resources.

In addition, the teacher drew on students' prior knowledge in keeping with the requirement to develop ICC, encouraging students to compare unfamiliar cultural elements with those with which they were familiar (Byram *et al.*, 2002). The teacher did not blindly instil new cultural knowledge, but rather evaluated the students' ZPD to identify the ratio of new and old information and reinforce the links between them. If there were cultural differences leading to misunderstandings, the teacher interpreted them by making connections with the students' own cultural context to make this knowledge clear.

Moreover, LS is an inherent component of cultural instruction. Hu and Gao (2020) note that CLIL teachers' lack of language analytic awareness may result in inadequate lan-

guage coverage, but this study shows the teacher's high level of analytic awareness, since they not only identified problematic uses of French, but also provided various expressions for the students to choose from, and elicited students' reflections on the rationality of their expression through LS.

Additionally, CLIL teachers use literacy instructions to guide students to express their views and sustain classroom dialogue fluently. When perceiving students' linguistic needs, the teacher in this study provided real-time LS to allow students to absorb and use this linguistic knowledge in their expressions immediately, thereby achieving the linguistic purpose of the CLIL courses. Therefore, all the excerpts indicate that three types of scaffolding within the students' ZPD effectively facilitated ICC in this CLIL courses, and fostered learner autonomy in developing skills of interpreting and relating as well as skills of discovery of and interaction with other cultures.

However, these three types of scaffolding are not independent, but mutually complementary and supportive. The type of scaffolding chosen by teachers is dependent on their students' needs, and teachers should provide guidance at the appropriate time, balancing both content and language needs in CLIL. Teacher scaffolding needs move closer to the implicit type, while learner autonomy develops as scaffolding moves towards more independent and self-regulated performance, demonstrating a positive acquisition of ICC.

The findings from the interviews showed that not only did the students become more confident in intercultural communication, they also became more active in developing their intercultural communication skills within and beyond the classroom. Also, their views of particular culture-related problems became more critical as a result of the teacher's prolonged scaffolding.

6. CONCLUSION

The study aimed to investigate the efficacy of teacher scaffolding in promoting students' ICC in CLIL courses. The results indicate that the implementation of scaffolding strategies positively impacts students' ICC development, while successful scaffolding requires teachers to identify appropriate moments within ZPD and provide assistance accordingly, and learner autonomy gradually emerges through continuous and prolonged scaffolding.

The microgenesis highlights the dynamic nature of scaffolding in the learning process, which varies depending on teachers' pedagogical decisions during dialogic interactions. Our findings suggest that effective scaffolding should be responsive to students' moment-to-moment intercultural communication needs and extend beyond the classroom to facilitate learners' autonomous ICC development. However, a limitation of this study lies in the lack of analysis of students' individual differences. Further study could examine individual students' personal ICC development as a result of teachers' scaffolding in CLIL courses.

This research also provides valuable pedagogical guidance for CLIL teachers to promote students' ICC through scaffolding. Successful scaffolding in CLIL involves: (1) assessing students' current competence; (2) enquiry-based scaffolding tailored to students' needs; (3) explaining culture-specific terms flexibly using all available language resources; (4) taking opportunities to develop students' language skills when they encounter difficulties in expressing their culture-related views; and (5) fostering learner autonomy through natural social teach-

er-student interactions. The positive outcomes of scaffolding for ICC development include students becoming more open to different cultures, incorporating teacher scaffolding into their own expressions, using interpreting and relating skills and discovery and interaction skills when encountering intercultural knowledge, and becoming more critical in intercultural communication.

In conclusion, while promoting ICC in a French-medium CLIL course is a worthwhile endeavour, it is crucial to ensure that scaffolding is provided appropriately to maximise its effectiveness. Teachers should receive training on when and how to implement scaffolding strategies, and the microgenetic approach can provide valuable insights into the functioning mechanisms of effective scaffolding behaviours to enhance the quality of interactions and facilitate effective learning.

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