

# **Establishing Inclusiveness in Content and Language Integrated Learning**

**Hengzhi Hu**

Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi, Malaysia

p108937@siswa.ukm.edu.my

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5232-913X>

## **Abstract**

In the realm of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), an enduring debate exists around whether it should be conducted exclusively with selective students or inclusively for all students. While the answers vary from case to case, I adopt an inclusive approach to CLIL and propose that an expanded framework focusing on establishing inclusiveness in CLIL while ensuring its benefits is necessary. In this paper, based on a summarization of the underlying reasons for elite CLIL and effective teaching practices that embrace inclusiveness in CLIL, I propose a framework that embeds learner diversity at its core. This framework recognizes the immediate classroom context wherein inclusive CLIL occurs, involving learners in an engaging and differentiated learning environment supported by teachers. Beyond the classroom context, it focuses on embracing inclusiveness within an institution, where teacher collaboration, professional development, and an inclusive organizational culture are conducive to effective CLIL. Community engagement is considered the broader context in which inclusive CLIL is promoted, with various members such as researchers, families, and policymakers involved. The rationale behind this framework lies in addressing the issue of inclusive CLIL in applied linguistics, which involves not only connecting the micro relations of applied linguistics to the macro relations of socio-cultural and political aspects of foreign language education but also ensuring that all students have access to the benefits of CLIL.

## **Keywords**

CLIL, inclusive education, foreign language education, learner diversity

## **Introduction**

For the past decades, a dynamic research agenda has established itself around inclusive education, the necessity of which was reinforced amid the COVID-19 pandemic, which erected effective barriers to learning. Although we have entered the post-pandemic era, the lessons learned from remote education and mixed-mode learning continue to encourage us to ponder over how to ensure access, presence, participation, and success for all learners. As “a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education” (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005, p. 13), inclusion is a critical feature in foreign language (L2) education. This entails academic staff catering to the needs of a diverse classroom consisting of individuals with heterogeneous cultural and linguistic backgrounds, interests, skills, aptitudes, and levels of academic competency.

CLIL, “a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language” (Coyle et al., 2010, p. 1), has gained currency in bilingual education. Egalitarianism is one of the most controversial issues in the research agenda and application of CLIL, with researchers and educators seeking to rationalize the practice of merely admitting capable learners to elite CLIL programs out of consideration that the cognitive and linguistic challenges of CLIL

could only be handled by learners who are talented and academically strong or have privileged backgrounds (Bathla & Pant, 2023; Dzulkurnain et al., 2024; Hashmi, 2019). On the other hand, numerous researchers have inquired into selective CLIL and attempted to substantiate that CLIL is, in fact, a panacea for all learners regardless of their differing socio-educational advantages or competence levels (Bakken & Brevik, 2023; Hu et al., 2022; Klewitz, 2021).

The debate surrounding the inclusivity of CLIL remains unresolved, and implementing inclusive CLIL remains challenging. This highlights the need for a comprehensive framework that addresses both linguistic and content needs while promoting equity and inclusivity. Such a framework would involve collaboration among stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, and researchers (Mortimore, 2023), to create a supportive learning environment that can accommodate the diverse needs of all students.

### **Content and Language Integrated Learning: Setting the Context**

CLIL has emerged as a significant educational approach in bilingual and multilingual settings, wherein content and language are taught simultaneously. This dual-focused method aims to enhance both subject matter learning and language proficiency (Coyle et al. 2010), making it particularly relevant in today's globalized world (Tanaka, 2019). CLIL is grounded in several educational theories. For example, cognitive learning theory posits that learning occurs through active mental processes. CLIL supports cognitive development by engaging students in meaningful content, thus promoting deeper understanding and retention (Liu & Chang, 2023). The sociocultural theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction and cultural context in learning. CLIL classrooms, which often include collaborative activities, align well with this theory by fostering language development through social interaction (Zhang & Jamaludin, 2024). Communicative language teaching focuses on interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. CLIL adopts this approach by integrating language use in real-life contexts, making language learning more relevant and practical (Ikeda et al., 2022).

Several frameworks guide the implementation of CLIL, ensuring its effectiveness and coherence. Two prominent frameworks are the 4Cs Framework and the Language Triptych. The 4Cs Framework, developed by Coyle et al. (2010), comprises content, communication, cognition, and culture. Content refers to the subject matter from various disciplines, communication involves using language to learn while learning to use language, cognition entails developing thinking skills that link language and content, and culture encompasses interpreting and understanding the significance of content in a cultural context. This framework ensures that CLIL is not just about language learning but also about the holistic development of the learner, integrating cognitive and cultural dimensions (Redlich & Pattison, 2024).

The Language Triptych highlights the different linguistic dimensions that need to be addressed for successful CLIL implementation. It includes the language of learning, which covers the vocabulary and grammar needed to access content; language for learning, which involves the language functions required to operate in a classroom setting, such as asking questions and collaborating; and language through learning, which refers to the incidental language learning that occurs through engaging with content (Coyle et al., 2010). This triptych underscores the need to address various aspects of language to ensure comprehensive language development in CLIL.

Research on CLIL has documented numerous benefits and challenges. Among the benefits, studies have shown that CLIL students often outperform their peers in traditional language programs in terms of language proficiency (Hu et al., 2023). The integration of content and language promotes higher-order thinking skills and cognitive development (Bathla & Pant, 2023). Additionally, CLIL can make learning

more engaging and relevant, leading to higher levels of student motivation (Zhang & Jamaludin, 2024). However, despite these advantages, several challenges must be addressed to ensure successful CLIL implementation. For instance, effective CLIL implementation requires teachers to be proficient in both the subject matter and the target language (TL), posing a significant challenge (Hu, 2023). Developing suitable materials that address both content and language objectives can be time-consuming and resource-intensive (Cimermanova, 2020). Moreover, evaluating both content knowledge and language proficiency simultaneously remains a complex task (Tan & Lan, 2023).

### **Elite CLIL: Underlying Reasons**

One primary reason for the elitist nature of CLIL is its inherent cognitive and linguistic demands. CLIL requires students to simultaneously grasp complex subject matter and advanced language skills, which can be daunting for those without a strong academic foundation. Research indicates that students from privileged backgrounds, who typically have access to better educational resources and support systems, are more likely to thrive in CLIL environments (Caira et al., 2024). This pre-existing advantage creates a barrier for students from less affluent backgrounds, who may struggle to meet the dual demands of the curriculum.

Pedagogically, CLIL necessitates a high level of proficiency from educators, both in the TL and the content area. Effective CLIL instruction involves not only teaching subject matter but also facilitating language acquisition through that content. This dual focus requires teachers to possess advanced skills and undergo specialized training, which is often more accessible to schools with ample resources (Hu, 2023). Consequently, education providers in less advantaged areas may lack the qualified staff needed to implement CLIL effectively, further entrenching its status as an elite approach.

Institutionally, the resources required for successful CLIL implementation are significant. Developing CLIL-specific materials that align with both language and content objectives is a resource-intensive process. Education providers with limited funding may find it challenging to produce or procure such materials, making CLIL programs more feasible in well-funded institutions (Huang, 2020). Additionally, the ongoing professional development necessary to keep teachers adept at CLIL methodologies is often underfunded in education providers serving lower socio-economic communities (Farah & Khoiriyah, 2023).

The elitist tendencies of CLIL are also reinforced by the selective admission practices of some CLIL programs. In an effort to maintain high academic standards and successful outcomes, some education providers may prioritize admitting students who already demonstrate strong academic and linguistic abilities. This selective approach can exclude students who might benefit the most from integrated language and content instruction but lack the initial proficiency or support to succeed without additional help (Tompkins, 2022).

Moreover, the socio-cultural context in which CLIL is implemented can exacerbate inequalities. CLIL programs often emphasize languages that hold significant socio-economic capital, such as English in non-English speaking countries. Students who are already exposed to these languages outside of the formal education setting, typically those from higher socio-economic backgrounds, have an added advantage (Chang & Cheng, 2022). This socio-cultural bias towards certain languages can marginalize students who do not have the same level of exposure or support in their home environments.

### **Inclusive CLIL: Effective Strategies**

One of the foundational strategies for making CLIL inclusive is differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction involves tailoring teaching methods, materials, and assessment techniques to meet the

diverse needs of students. This approach allows teachers to provide various entry points into the curriculum, ensuring that all students can access and engage with the content. Research by Satayev et al. (2022) emphasizes that differentiated instruction is critical in CLIL settings as it addresses the varying levels of language proficiency and content knowledge within a classroom. Teachers can use a range of scaffolding techniques, such as visual aids, graphic organizers, and simplified texts, to support students with lower language proficiency while challenging advanced learners with more complex tasks.

Scaffolding is another essential strategy in inclusive CLIL. Scaffolding involves providing temporary support to students as they develop new skills and understandings, gradually removing this support as they become more proficient. Rubio and Conesa (2022) highlight the importance of scaffolding in CLIL, where the dual focus on language and content can overwhelm students without appropriate support. Effective scaffolding strategies include pre-teaching vocabulary, using visual and contextual clues, and encouraging peer collaboration (Suryani et al., 2023). By scaffolding both language and content learning, teachers can help all students progress at their own pace and build confidence in their abilities.

Formative assessment is a powerful tool for promoting inclusivity in CLIL. Unlike summative assessment, which evaluates student learning at the end of an instructional period, formative assessment provides ongoing feedback that can guide instruction and support student learning. Espinar and Cortés (2021) argue that formative assessment is particularly beneficial in CLIL classrooms, as it allows teachers to identify individual learning needs and adjust their teaching strategies accordingly. Techniques such as peer assessment, self-assessment, and regular feedback sessions enable students to reflect on their learning, set goals, and take ownership of their progress.

Collaboration between language and content teachers is another effective strategy for inclusive CLIL. The integration of language and content requires expertise in both areas, and a collaborative teaching model ensures that students receive comprehensive support. Cao (2021) and Hu and Mi (2024) suggest that co-teaching arrangements, where language and content teachers plan and deliver lessons together, can enhance the quality of instruction and provide a more cohesive learning experience. This collaboration also allows teachers to share insights and develop interdisciplinary teaching practices that benefit all learners.

Incorporating students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds into the CLIL curriculum is crucial for inclusivity. Recognizing and valuing students' home languages and cultures can enhance their engagement and motivation. Charalampoglou and Karras (2023) advocate for a translanguaging approach in CLIL, where students use their entire linguistic repertoire to make sense of the content and express their understanding. This approach not only validates students' linguistic identities but also facilitates deeper learning by allowing them to draw connections between their prior knowledge and new concepts.

Professional development for teachers is essential to implement inclusive CLIL effectively. Teachers need to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to address the diverse needs of their students. Hu (2023) emphasizes the importance of ongoing professional development that focuses on inclusive teaching practices, language support strategies, and intercultural competence. By investing in teacher training, education providers can ensure that their educators are prepared to create inclusive CLIL environments that cater to all learners.

### **Inclusiveness in CLIL: An Under-Investigated Area**

The assumption that CLIL naturally fosters an inclusive learning environment is prevalent in the literature. Researchers and scholars, buoyed by positive findings, often maintain that inclusion is an automatic outcome of CLIL instruction. This perspective has led to a rose-tinted scenario where the

needs of all learners are presumed to be met simply through the implementation of CLIL. However, this assumption neglects the complexities and challenges involved in truly inclusive education.

In mainstream education or an L2 class, the focus typically remains on 'normal' learners, who constitute the majority group (Gooden, 2021). As a result, the specific needs of learners requiring additional support are often overlooked or inadequately addressed. This oversight underscores a critical area of under-investigation in CLIL research: the strategies and practices necessary to ensure that all students, regardless of their background or abilities, can benefit from CLIL.

One of the primary reasons inclusiveness in CLIL is under-investigated is the high cognitive and linguistic demands it places on students. As mentioned, the dual focus of CLIL requires learners to process complex subject matter while simultaneously acquiring a new language (Caira et al., 2024). This can be particularly challenging for students with lower language proficiency or those with learning difficulties. Research has not sufficiently explored the extent to which CLIL can accommodate these learners without appropriate scaffolding and differentiated instruction.

Moreover, the implementation of CLIL often requires significant resources and specialized training for teachers. Effective CLIL instruction demands a high level of proficiency in both the subject matter and the TL (Farah & Khoiriyah, 2023). Education providers with limited resources may struggle to provide the necessary professional development for their teachers, resulting in uneven implementation and varying levels of inclusivity. The disparity in resource allocation and teacher preparedness is another aspect that has not been thoroughly examined in existing research.

The limited focus on inclusiveness within CLIL research is further evidenced by the lack of empirical studies that specifically address the experiences of marginalized or disadvantaged learners in CLIL settings. While some studies highlight the general benefits of CLIL, there is a dearth of research investigating how these benefits are distributed among different learner groups (Hu et al., 2023). Without a comprehensive understanding of how CLIL impacts all students, educational stakeholders cannot develop strategies to address existing inequities.

Additionally, there is a need for more research on the role of cultural and linguistic diversity in CLIL. While some scholars advocate for incorporating students' home languages and cultures into the CLIL curriculum (Charalampoglou & Karras, 2023), empirical studies on the effectiveness of such practices are limited. The potential of approaches such as translanguaging, which allows students to use their entire linguistic repertoire to engage with content, remains under-explored.

### **Establishing Inclusiveness in CLIL: A Framework**

Existing frameworks of inclusive CLIL tend to be micro in context. For example, Maurizio (2016) proposes that inclusive CLIL should include:

- **Stimulating Cognitive Flexibility:** Encouraging adaptable thinking.
- **Multi-Sensory Learning:** Using realia and objects, and incorporating videos, tables, diagrams, and charts.
- **Well-Planned Teaching Units:** Ensuring thorough planning of teaching units.
- **Cooperation and Material Exchange:** Fostering teamwork and the sharing of resources.
- **Diverse Learning Tools:** Providing various tools to help all learners achieve objectives.
- **Structured and Accessible Activities:** Designing activities that are well-organized and easy to access.
- **Intercultural Learning:** Promoting the appreciation of different viewpoints.
- **Motivational Atmosphere:** Creating an environment that encourages learning.

- Specialized Vocabulary and Structures: Providing key L2 vocabulary, grammatical features, and information on subject-specific text conventions and structures.
- Customizable Content: Allowing learners to tailor the content to their needs.
- Integration of Technologies: Incorporating technological tools into the learning process.

This proposal principally focuses on CLIL as a classroom activity, akin to other proposals made by, for instance, Fachriyah and Perwitasari (2023), Firmayanto et al. (2020), and Porcedda (2021), overlooking the multifaceted nature of CLIL that involves not only classroom instruction but also the broader educational ecosystem.

Another relevant framework is the DIDI Framework proposed by Siepmann and Cañado (2022). This framework posits that recognizing learner diversity in CLIL justifies the inclusion of all learners in a single L2 classroom and the adoption of differentiation strategies, ultimately leading to the integration of language learning and content learning. It is supported by the beliefs that teachers should be designers of an inclusive and engaging learning environment; that collaboration and dialogue are important prerequisites to ensure all learners can achieve the goals of learning an L2 and subject matters; that learning should be made explicit according to student needs and learning objectives; that students should be put at the center of learning; that learning should be made multimodal to promote multiliteracy; and that scaffolding is important to help learners make learning progress.

However, this framework tends to be very conceptual, as it simply recognizes and links important notions together. Similarly, although it has well-established underlying principles that support embracing inclusiveness in a CLIL classroom, the broad ecosystem within which CLIL is positioned is not sufficiently considered. As such, based on Byrne and Opell's (2023) proposal that CLIL involves not only the immediate classroom context but also the broader community along with its stakeholders, it is essential to expand the framework to encompass these wider elements.

Therefore, as shown in Figure 1, a framework is proposed that recognizes the contexts—namely classroom, institution, and community—in which inclusive CLIL should occur. The core of this framework is recognizing learner diversity in CLIL because diversity is essential to fostering an inclusive educational environment. Here, diversity is a broad concept that refers to students' educational needs, “especially those that need tailored responses due to sociocultural disadvantage, health restrictions, high intellectual capacities, special language requirements, disabilities, or serious personality disorders” (Madrid & Cañado, 2018, p. 244). Acknowledging and embracing diversity is the main principle of promoting inclusiveness in CLIL as it ensures that all learners have equitable access to learning opportunities. By addressing the diverse needs of students, teachers can create a more engaging and supportive classroom environment, which is essential for effective language and content learning. The principle of recognizing diversity extends beyond the classroom to the institution and community, emphasizing the need for systemic support and collaboration to create a holistic and inclusive learning ecosystem.

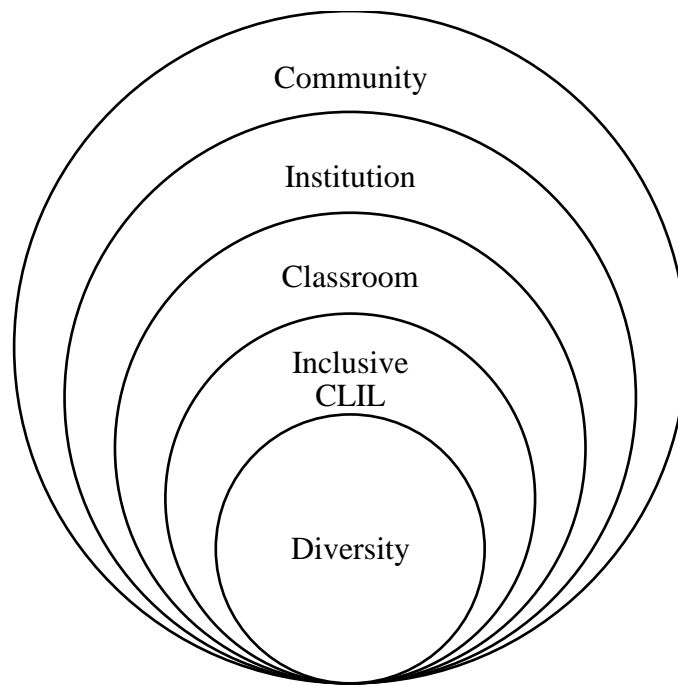


Figure 1. Framework of Inclusive CLIL

Addressing the diverse needs of students is necessary in the immediate classroom context, which involves teachers and students as the primary CLIL stakeholders. Teachers play a crucial role in implementing CLIL effectively, as they must integrate language and content instruction in ways that are engaging and accessible to students. Students, on the other hand, benefit from a learning environment that supports their cognitive and linguistic development simultaneously. As such, effective strategies should be tailored to accommodate varying levels of language proficiency and subject matter understanding (Klewitz, 2021). Differentiated instruction, which involves modifying teaching methods and materials to cater to the diverse learning needs of students (Satayev et al., 2022), can be particularly beneficial. Scaffolding techniques, where teachers provide temporary support structures to help students progress to higher levels of understanding and skill, are also essential in a CLIL classroom. This might involve breaking down complex tasks into manageable steps, using visual aids, and providing clear examples and models (Rubio & Conesa, 2022). Furthermore, formative assessment practices, such as regular feedback and informal assessments (Espinar & Cortés, 2021), can help teachers monitor student progress and adjust instruction accordingly. These assessments allow teachers to identify areas where students may need additional support and to celebrate their successes, thereby boosting their motivation and confidence.

Moving beyond the CLIL classroom, an inclusive culture should also be embraced within an institution, involving teachers, leaders, and administrators. Establishing inclusiveness in CLIL at this level continues to involve catering to all learners' needs and ensuring that every student has the opportunity to succeed. This starts with teacher cooperation. Collaborative planning sessions, peer observations, and shared resources allow teachers to develop and implement strategies that address the diverse needs of their students (Ivanova, 2018). By working together, teachers can create lesson plans and activities that are differentiated and inclusive, ensuring that all students, regardless of their language proficiency or learning style, can access and engage with the content. Teacher professional development is another critical component in promoting inclusiveness in CLIL. Continuous professional development opportunities should be provided to help teachers stay updated with the latest CLIL methodologies, L2

acquisition theories, and technological tools (Hu, 2022). Training in differentiated instruction, inclusive teaching practices, and the use of assistive technologies can equip teachers with the skills they need to support diverse learners effectively.

Inclusive culture promotion within the institution involves creating an environment where diversity is valued and all members feel respected and supported. This can be achieved by implementing policies that promote equity and inclusion, providing resources and support for students and staff from diverse backgrounds, and encouraging open dialogue about inclusivity and cultural sensitivity (Spencer-Iiams & Flosi, 2020). Leaders and administrators play a crucial role in setting the tone for this inclusive culture by modeling inclusive behaviors, recognizing and addressing biases, and ensuring that institutional practices reflect a commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Beyond the institution, establishing inclusive CLIL also involves community participation, with support from researchers, parents and families, local organizations and community groups, and policymakers. Researchers play a vital role in providing evidence-based practices and sharing findings that can inform and improve CLIL implementation. By collaborating with educators, researchers can help develop innovative strategies and tools that address the diverse needs of learners. Likewise, parents and families are essential partners in creating an inclusive CLIL environment. Engaging parents in the learning process, keeping them informed about their children's progress, and providing them with resources to support language learning at home can significantly enhance student outcomes (Asthana, 2023). Schools can organize workshops and information sessions to educate parents about CLIL and how they can contribute to their children's success.

Local organizations and community groups can also provide valuable resources and support for inclusive CLIL programs (Byrne & Opello, 2023). Partnerships with libraries, cultural centers, and businesses can offer students additional learning opportunities and real-world experiences that enrich their education. Community involvement can also help create a more supportive and inclusive environment for students from diverse backgrounds. Policymakers play a crucial role in promoting inclusive CLIL by enacting policies that support multilingual education and provide adequate funding and resources for schools. Policies that prioritize, for example, teacher training, curriculum development, and the integration of technology can help ensure that CLIL programs are accessible and effective for all students (Bathla & Pant, 2023). This collective approach ensures that CLIL programs are not only effective in promoting language proficiency and content mastery but also inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the needs of all students.

## **Conclusion**

Inclusiveness in CLIL is a topic of enduring significance, demanding a multifaceted effort from various stakeholders. Establishing inclusive L2 education requires collaboration beyond the immediate classroom, extending into broader institutional and community contexts. For educators, this means continuously developing their skills through professional development and cooperative practices to meet diverse learner needs effectively. Institutions must foster a culture of inclusiveness, supported by policies and resources that enable equitable learning opportunities. Engaging parents, local organizations, and policymakers further strengthens the support system for students, ensuring that inclusiveness permeates every level of education. By adopting a holistic and collaborative approach, we can create an educational environment that not only promotes language proficiency and content mastery but also ensures that all students have the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities.



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## **Auhor Bio**

Hengzhi Hu, PhD in Education (Teaching English as a Second Language), is a lecturer at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. He has extensive experience in foreign language teaching across various socio-cultural contexts, including China, Australia, and Malaysia. His research interests focus on bilingual education and second language acquisition, with a particular emphasis on Content and Language Integrated Learning.