



# MOTHER LANGUAGE

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## Impact of Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) Schooling on L1 Competence: A Case Study on Students with Language-Based Learning Disability (LBLD)

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**Abstract:** This study examines the impact of content language integrated learning (CLIL) on the academic language development of students with language-based learning disabilities (LBLD) in a bilingual context, focusing on the different dynamics between first language (L1) and second language (L2) proficiency. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from teachers, students, and parents. While teachers express positive views on CLIL, the unexpected trend of students favoring the CLIL language (English) over their mother tongue (Bangla) suggests a proficiency gap. Parental concerns include slow language development, motivational challenges, and instances of translation from L2 to L1. Performance data indicate consistent results but unveil challenges for students with LBLD. The study calls for a balanced approach that combines CLIL principles with the strategic use of the mother tongue and addresses motivational factors, offering educators

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and policymakers essential insights in the context of bilingual education.

**Keywords:** Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), Language-Based Learning Disabilities (LBLD), Mother Tongue, Proficiency, Case Study.

## Introduction

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is an innovative educational approach that involves teaching academic subjects in a language other than the students' mother tongue, aiming to promote bilingualism and enhance comprehension of subject matter. CLIL encompasses a diverse range of practices wherein an additional/second/foreign language is utilized to instruct curricular subjects such as science, history, mathematics, or art, among others (Dalton-Puffer et al., 2010). Initially conceptualized as a dual-focused method drawing on both content and language learning (Fruhauf et al., 1996; Nikula & Marsh, 1997; Marsh & Langé, 2000; Marsh et al., 2001), CLIL is considered 'integrated' (Nikula & Marsh, 1997). It aims to provide students with rich and varied input, encompassing different language functions, genres, academic language, and classroom language. Furthermore, CLIL seeks to foster student engagement and complex output (Swain, 1985) while nurturing students' learning and cognitive strategies to address the dual challenge of acquiring new material through a foreign language (Halbach, 2009).

CLIL differs from traditional foreign language teaching primarily in that it creates a learning environment that replicates the conditions under which the mother tongue is acquired, as the language is learned concurrently with the content (Coyle

et al., 2010). It goes without saying that the best-known line of research examines the effectiveness of CLIL in language outcomes, because “many researchers involved in CLIL studies have been applied linguists” (Merino & Lasagabaster, 2018, p. 2) and because the improvement of L2 learning is the primary reason for providing CLIL. Conversely, L1 development, content absorption and critical competences receive much less attention. Furthermore, while CLIL has gained global recognition and acceptance, there is a growing demand to assess its impact on students with language-based learning disabilities (LBLD). This article explores the effects of CLIL instruction on the first language (L1) competence of students with language-based learning disorders, specifically focusing on dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). We aim to investigate whether exposure to CLIL influences the development of both L1 and L2 in students with LBLD and whether their participation in CLIL enhances metalinguistic awareness, potentially improving their proficiency in the first language.

## **Conceptual Issues**

### ***Language Based Learning Disability (LBLD)***

Since LBLDs are “a spectrum of difficulties related to understanding and using spoken and written language” (Newhall, 2012), most of the academic problems of these children stem from difficulties in language and literacy skills (Abbott et al., 2010; Siegel, 2006). They may also have difficulties in paying attention, memory and executive functions etc. These problems manifest themselves in different ways in language classrooms, especially when dealing with a second language. The most common learning disabilities are dyslexia, ADHD, dyscalculia, dysgraphia and dyspraxia. Each of these conditions can be

present with a variety of symptoms and can be diagnosed through a combination of clinical and educational testing.

In mid-secondary school (class 7-8), students with LBLD face difficulties in note-taking, time-management, and language proficiency, particularly in a foreign language like English. LBLD encompasses difficulties in reading, syntax, vocabulary, spelling, and verbal expression, both in L1 and foreign languages. Research highlights academic gaps, dropout risks, and self-esteem issues among students with LBLD, necessitating targeted interventions (U.S. Department of Education, 2002; Hardman et al., 2011; Mortimore & Crozier, 2006; Klein, 1993; Gilroy & Miles, 1996; Riddick, 1996; Kavale & Forness, 1996).

### ***The Role of L1 in CLIL***

In the context of CLIL, the role of L1 is crucial and multifaceted. L1 serves as a cognitive scaffold, providing learners with a familiar foundation upon which they can build new knowledge in the target language. Research by Marsh and Wolff (2007) highlights the cognitive benefits of leveraging the L1, emphasizing that a strong conceptual grasp in the native language facilitates the acquisition of new concepts in the target language. Makarova (2009, p. 49) claims that “banning the first language from communicative learning a second language can actually reduce cognitive and metacognitive opportunities for students.” Based on the evidence, Lasagabaster (2013) confirms that vocabulary items could be better learned by providing the L1 equivalents rather than providing definitions or paraphrases in L2. This concept aligns with Cummins’ (1981) notion of linguistic interdependence, emphasizing the transferability of cognitive skills across languages. Cummins (2001) also argues that a positive affective environment, facilitated by the use of the

L1, fosters students' engagement, reduces anxiety, and thereby enhances overall learning outcomes. The nurturing of students' cultural identity and fostering a sense of belonging are also linked to the use of the L1 in CLIL classrooms (Lasagabaster et al., 2014). According to Marsh and Coyle (2010), the rate of L1 use in CLIL classrooms is complex and context-dependent. They emphasize the significance of a striking balance between the use of L1 and target language based on learner needs and pedagogical aims. In particular, during the early phases of learning new material, their approach acknowledges the function of L1 as a cognitive tool for scaffolding comprehension. Storch and Aldosari (2010) also affirm:

The use of the L1 by the learners seems to serve important cognitive, social and pedagogical functions. This is of course not to say learners should be encouraged to use L1 extensively. Rather . . . to restrict or prohibit the use of L1 in L2 classes is to deny learners the opportunity of using an important tool. (372)

Marsh and Coyle (2010) advise teachers to utilize the L1 strategically, especially when explaining complex topics, in order to ensure understanding and build a solid basis for future learning in the target language, as per their Content-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) approach. In addition, they also emphasize the gradual reduction of L1 use as students become more proficient in the target language, aligning with the principle of linguistic interdependence. This approach aims to support learners in transitioning from the familiar ground of their first language to the challenges of content learning in the target language. Accordingly, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) underscores the importance of gradual transition to the target language to ensure sustained language development (Council of Europe, 2001).

### ***CLIL Schooling in Bangladesh***

English version schools in Bangladesh have seen a rapid increase in students, primarily for bilingual education. These schools follow the national curriculum to meet the growing demands for English language proficiency in the job sector. Parents are also interested in sending their children to English version schools due to wider job opportunities and easy access to higher education. In Bangladesh, English version schools are an optional choice. NCTB introduced English version textbooks in the late 1990s, directly translating Bengali medium textbooks, using the same testing and assessment policies for both groups of students. Though English version education is not formally declared CLIL, the curricular model closely relates to CLIL. In addition, like CLIL, English version education aims to increase learners' motivation for studying foreign languages and promote their communicative competences for future work and study abroad. In English version schools Bangla (L1) is taught as a single compulsory subject and all other subjects are taught in English (L2). In these schools, English is introduced as the medium of education from the very elementary level. It has been observed that the curricular model adopted for CLIL in secondary-level English version schools in Bangladesh aligns with CLIL Model B2 as proposed by Coyle et al. (2010). This model is recommended for learners aged between 2 and 19 years. It possesses the following key characteristics:

#### **Bilingual Education: CLIL Model B2**

Learners study a significant part of the curriculum through the CLIL language for several years intending to develop required content learning goals and advanced language skills:

- Learners participate in international streams and develop advanced CLIL language skills for these specific subjects. This is complemented by language learning which focuses on interpersonal skills and cognitive language proficiency.
- Often linked to international certification, and national/ regional special status assessment and recognition
- Assessment of key principles in CLIL language, with parallel first-language assessment of major concept (21)

## **Literature Review**

In recent years, studies have been employed around the world to gather information about the implementation of CLIL including the learners' and teachers' attitude, belief and perception about CLIL (Nikula & Marsh, 1997; Yassin et al., 2009), and thereby providing valuable information for educators, administrators, and policy-makers. Studies support that CLIL assist positively in improving target language proficiency and the acquisition of content knowledge (Nikula, 2008).

Research shows that using English as a medium of instruction for various subjects is more effective in achieving functional language proficiency in CLIL students compared to non-CLIL students. CLIL students have higher social and academic language competences, better skills in applying lexical knowledge, and perform better on cognitively demanding tests of academic language ability (Hewitt, 2011; Hou, 2013; Klimova, 2013; and Morgado & Coelho, 2013).

Lasagabaster and Doiz (2016) study with 221 CLIL students from the Basque Autonomous Region Community (BAC;

Spain) revealed longitudinal data showing that participants perceived that their improvement in English was greater in CLIL lessons than in regular English foreign language courses (EFL). Similarly, Syzdykbayeva (2017) in her study with 69 students of Kazakhstan, where CLIL was newly introduced, revealed that students were mainly positive about CLIL because they found CLIL to be beneficial for developing their English skills, preparation for a better career and the need for further education. Findings of Child's (2017) study indicated that CLIL developed sixth grade Finnish students' cognitive skills, metalinguistic awareness and critical thinking which are essential for future success. In their 2007 study Hüttner and Rieder-Bünemann found that CLIL instruction helped children improve in both macro and micro-level competencies. The CLIL group had more advanced control over micro-level features of narration, such as consistency of anchor tense and use of correct verb forms, and were more competent in some macro-level features. In addition, Jackson (2012) found that combining CLIL with genre process writing significantly improved students' writing skills. In the Inferential analysis of t-tests at the beginning of the semester, Jackson observed no significant difference between the control group and the test group. However, compared to the control group, the test group made fewer grammatical errors at the end of the semester.

Previous researches support that CLIL enhances metalinguistic awareness of the students, providing a deeper understanding of language structures beyond the linguistic domain. Young (2018) conducted his study on learner motivation to learn a foreign language among 12-year-old students in Scotland using reflective journals, focus groups and questionnaires. The findings suggest that CLIL has a strong impact on motivation to learn the language, makes lessons more engaging and fun,

and creates more opportunities for pupils to speak the target language. Milne and Perucha (2010) and Thogersen (2013) compared stylistic differences and meta-discursive devices used by lecturers in their L1 and L2. Both studies shared a similar conclusion is that English lectures appear to be more formal than those in the L1, resembling written academic prose and paper styles. In addition, Ljosland (2010) investigated the ways in which English interacts with students' first languages. The researcher concluded that interaction in different languages creates a favorable framework for carrying out different activities that enrich the learning process.

In terms of first language (L1) development and content learning, CLIL programs show significant effects. Research has shown that well-implemented bilingual education can positively influence L1 proficiency through a focus on language development and maintenance, as observed in studies like Thomas and Collier's (2002). Marsh and Langé (2000) found that CLIL positively influences L1 level as learners often transfer language skills and cognitive strategies acquired in L2 back to their L1. Bilingual education enhances content learning by providing students with cognitive advantages, such as improved problem-solving skills and a deeper understanding of subject matter through the acquisition of multiple languages. For example, Clarkson (1992, 2007) and Dawe (1983) found that bilingual students excel in mathematics when they are proficient in both languages, possibly due to increased metalinguistic awareness (Clarkson, 2007). This understanding helps them understand how each linguistic structure operates independently, enhancing their performance. Cummins (2001) also admits that saying, "bilingualism is associated with enhanced linguistic, cognitive, and academic development when both languages are allowed to develop," (4). However, the outcomes may vary based on

the specific program, individual student characteristics, and socioeconomic and cultural factors.

CLIL, despite its benefits, can negatively impact the development of L1, especially in the early stages. Research by Huhta (2010) suggests reduced vocabulary and grammatical accuracy due to students focusing on acquiring the target language and navigating content areas. Research on the negative impact of CLIL on learners' L1 competence highlights concerns such as language interference, reduced exposure to the L1, potential language shift, limited instructional time in L1, and cognitive overload. Scholars such as Lasagabaster and Ruiz de Zarobe (2010) discuss how CLIL programs, with their emphasis on content instruction in the target language, may lead to interference in the clarity and accuracy of expression in the learners' L1. Additionally, Cenoz, Genesee, and Gorter (2013) and Dalton-Puffer et al., (2010) point out that reduced exposure and instructional time in L1, combined with the cognitive demands of simultaneous content and language learning, can impede the development of advanced linguistic skills and cognitive abilities in the learners' native language. According to Genesee (1987) high exposure of L2 at early primary level can slow down literacy skills in L1.

While a substantial body of international research supports the benefits of CLIL in improving language proficiency, content learning, and metalinguistic awareness, the literature also reveals concerns regarding its potential negative impact on first language (L1) development, especially in early educational stages. Although studies from contexts such as Spain, Kazakhstan, Finland, and Scotland (e.g., Lasagabaster & Doiz, 2016; Syzdykbayeva, 2017; Child, 2017; Young, 2018) offer valuable insights into CLIL's advantages, they are primarily

situated in bilingual or multilingual educational environments with institutional support and established CLIL frameworks.

In contrast, in Bangladesh, there has been limited research on both CLIL and learning disabilities. For instance, Kamal (2022), in a study involving 30 tertiary-level students, found that while CLIL was effective in improving students' English vocabulary and grammar, it did not contribute significantly to the development of their literary knowledge. Some students found the approach boring and disappointing, particularly those who preferred traditional literary analysis. Others believed that CLIL undermined the core objective of literature courses, which is to deepen literary understanding.

In the context of inclusive pedagogy, Islam (2022) examined the perceptions of twelve EFL/ESL teachers working in schools regarding students with learning disabilities. Although the teachers lacked sufficient knowledge and training about learning disabilities, they expressed a positive willingness to accommodate learners with diverse needs in their classrooms, despite the limitations in pedagogical and infrastructural support.

Therefore, the approach followed in this study is of particular interest because (i) it provides evidence of the L1 performance of students with language-based learning disabilities (LBLD) studying in schools practicing CLIL principles, (ii) it includes students' self-assessments of both L1 and L2 performance, (iii) the study employs a data triangulation method to ensure the validity of its findings, and (iv) it addresses the monolingual Bangladeshi education context where CLIL programmes have existed for two decades but remain largely unexplored in terms of inclusive and linguistic outcomes. This study seeks to fill this gap by providing empirical evidence on how CLIL affects both L1 and L2 performance among learners with LBLD, and thereby

contributing to the growing global conversation on inclusive and bilingual pedagogy.

Understanding the trajectory of academic language development both in L1 and L2 is crucial for educators and policymakers to tailor effective instructional strategies for students with LBLD. While CLIL programmes aim to enhance L2 proficiency, it is essential to explore whether early involvement in CLIL impacts the growth of academic language skills in students' primary language. There is a need to discern whether the emphasis on content and language integration in CLIL schools contributes equally to the growth of academic language skills in both L1 and L2 for students with LBLD. To address these concerns, the present study sets out two main objectives: (i) to investigate the pattern of academic language development in L1 among students with LBLD enrolled in CLIL schools, and (ii) to examine potential disparities in academic language growth between L1 and L2 among the same group of students. Accordingly, this study aims to answer the following research questions: First, how does early involvement in CLIL schools affect the academic language development in the L1 among students with LBLD?

Second, do students with LBLD in CLIL schools demonstrate comparable levels of academic language growth in their L1 and L2? If not, what factors might be contributing to these disparities in language development?

## **Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

This study adopted a qualitative exploratory case study design using data triangulation to gain a comprehensive understanding of how CLIL affects L1 development among students with

language-based learning disabilities (LBLD), specifically dyslexia and ADHD, in English version schools in Bangladesh. A mixed-methods approach was employed, integrating qualitative insights with quantitative survey data to enhance reliability and depth.

### ***Participants***

The study involved eighty (N=80) participants including 30 students aged 8-15 diagnosed with LBLD by certified professionals, 30 subject and language teachers, and 12 parents. Teachers offered insights into CLIL practices and student performance, while parents shared perspectives on language use at home. From the overall pool, a sub-sample of 10 students, 10 teachers, and 5 parents was purposefully selected for in-depth semi-structured interviews. The snowball sampling technique was used to identify participants based on referrals from teachers and parents.

### ***Instruments and Data Collection Methods***

To ensure a well-rounded understanding, the study employed a questionnaire, FGD, semi-Structured Interviews, document analyses (such as student work, exam script) and Classroom Observations.

A structured questionnaire using Likert-scale items was administered to 30 teachers. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS to obtain descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation). The questions assessed teachers' perceptions of CLIL, language use, and the role of Bangla in instruction. A focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted in natural settings with 30 parents and was recorded with their consent. The recordings were transcribed and analyzed thematically. The discussion explored topics such as students' language preferences, academic confidence, learning experiences, and parental concerns. In addition, student work

samples, including classwork, homework, creative writing, and examination scripts in both English and Bangla, were collected and analyzed. Particular attention was paid to language complexity, grammar, vocabulary, coherence, spelling, and structural patterns.

All 30 student participants were observed over a six-month period, with data collected at months 1, 3, and 6. During this observation period, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sub-sample of the students. The observations focused on students' oral communication and interaction behaviors in their first language (L1), as well as written texts in L1 produced during classwork and examinations.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

Informed consent was obtained from all participants or their guardians. The anonymity and confidentiality of participants were ensured throughout the research. Participants were reassured that their responses would be used solely for academic purposes, and no identifiers would be included in the published results.

### ***Data Analyses Procedure***

A qualitative content analysis of responses was conducted to identify themes across the interviews. This is a method that involves the identification of connections within and between themes (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). To identify different issues, the transcribed text was reviewed three times by the interviewer. In this stage to derive codes from the data, an inductive coding approach is utilized. The data was coded using free nodes to identify differences and consistencies which means if there were connections between themes, they were identified and used for interpretation. Reading and re-reading the data revealed recurring patterns of information displayed by the participants. The final categories were formed from several

responders' identification of similar themes. Any exceptional remarks made by the respondents were also noted.

Similarly, from the teachers, data were collected through a questionnaire in a quantitative manner about their overall perception regarding CLIL, reflections on their own use of L1 at school and the performance of students with LBLD in L1. To complement the qualitative findings, quantitative data were collected from teachers through a questionnaire. This quantitative approach aimed to gather numerical insights into teachers' overall perceptions regarding CLIL and the performance of students with LBLD in L1. The use of quantitative data allows for a more structured understanding of the grade-based aspects of teacher perceptions. This study combines qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine the impact of CLIL on L1 learning in students with LBLD. The qualitative analysis provides rich, contextual insights, while the quantitative data increase the study's depth by adding a numerical dimension.

## ***Data Analysis***

### ***Data Collected from Teachers***

Data collected from the teachers were analyzed using IBM's Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software and placed in the following chart. The chart provides insights into educators' perceptions of CLIL and language use in teaching.

| Sl. no | statement   | N  | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------|---|----|---------|---------|------|----------------|
| 1.     | Students are benefited by CLIL  | 30 | 2       | 5       | 4.03 | 0.890          |
| 2.     | Teaching other subjects in English increases amount of using English by the students outside the classroom? | 30 | 3       | 5       | 4.01 | 0.608          |

| Sl. nO | statement   | N  | Minimum | Maximum | Mean  | Std. Deviation |
|--------|---|----|---------|---------|-------|----------------|
| 3.     | Teaching all subjects in English develops students' skills in reading and writing alongside verbal and non-verbal communication | 30 | 1       | 5       | 3.10  | 1.269          |
| 4.     | My experience in teaching subject content through English is positive   | 30 | 2       | 5       | 3.83  | 1.262          |
| 5.     | CLIL helps students develop their language skill  | 30 | 3       | 5       | 3.83  | 1.262          |
| 6.     | CLIL helps students develop only their subject knowledge  | 30 | 2       | 5       | 3.37  | 1.245          |
| 7.     | CLIL helps students develop both their subject knowledge and language skill   | 30 | 2       | 5       | 4.40  | 1.589          |
| 8.     | Teaching other subjects in English have the same level of competence in both: Bengali and English                               | 30 | 1       | 5       | 2.93  | 0.884          |
| 9.     | I support that Bangla (L1) should be used in CLIL classes   | 30 | 1       | 4       | 2.59  | 1.49           |
| 10.    | I use Bangla for teaching vocabulary  | 30 | 3       | 4       | 3.33  | 0.649          |
| 11.    | I use Bangla for illustrating anything with example   | 30 | 3       | 5       | 4.17  | 1.658          |
| 12.    | I use Bangla only when my students find difficulties in understanding anything  | 30 | 3       | 5       | 3.963 | 1.394          |
| 13.    | If they are taught two or three subjects in Bangla in school their Bangla will be improved                                      | 30 | 2       | 5       | 4.00  | 0.450          |

**Table-1:** Teachers' perception about CLIL and language use in teaching

The above table presents survey data from 30 respondents, assessing their perspectives on CLIL and language use in teaching. Notably, a majority of educators (Mean = 4.03, Std. Deviation = 0.890) believe that students benefit from CLIL, and there is a consensus (Mean = 4.01, Std. Deviation = 0.608) that teaching subjects in English enhances students' English usage outside the classroom. However, opinions vary regarding the impact of teaching all subjects in English on developing diverse communication skills (Mean = 3.10, Std. Deviation = 1.269). While most respondents express positive experiences teaching subject content in English (Mean = 3.83, Std. Deviation = 1.262), there is a divergence in views on whether CLIL primarily aids language skill development (Mean = 3.83, Std. Deviation = 1.262) or subject knowledge alone (Mean = 3.37, Std. Deviation = 1.245). Notably, a substantial consensus exists that CLIL contributes to both subject knowledge and language skills (Mean = 4.40, Std. Deviation = 1.589). Furthermore, respondents generally acknowledge a lower level of competence in Bengali than English when teaching other subjects in English (Mean = 2.93, Std. Deviation = 0.884). The support for using Bengali (L1) in CLIL classes is moderate (Mean = 2.59, Std. Deviation = 1.49). Interestingly, instructors tend to use Bangla strategically, such as for teaching vocabulary (Mean = 3.33, Std. Deviation = 0.649) or when students face difficulties in understanding (Mean = 3.963, Std. Deviation = 1.394). The data also suggests a strong consensus that teaching two or three subjects in Bangla can improve students' proficiency in the language (Mean = 4.00, Std. Deviation = 0.450).

Therefore, the data reveal that teachers believe CLIL effectively enhances students' English proficiency and supports the development of both language skills and subject knowledge. However, they also observed that students often show lower

competence in Bangla when all subjects are taught in English. There was strong agreement that introducing two or three subjects in Bangla could help reinforce students' L1 skills. Overall, the findings reflect a balanced perspective, acknowledging the benefits of CLIL while recognizing the importance of using the native language to support comprehension and promote balanced language development.

### ***Data Collected from Students***

The collected data from students offer valuable insights into their self-assessment of academic performance and language preferences. The majority of students assigned themselves higher grades in English language and literature than in Bangla language and literature, reflecting a perceived proficiency gap. In response to the question 'As a student in your class how would you like to grade (A, B, C, D, E, F) yourself?' students provided their self-assessment about their academic performance in different subjects. The following chart shows students' self-assessment reports:

| Eng Lang | Eng lit | Bangla lit | Bangla lang | Math | Science | Art   | Games | Spelling & Dictation in Bangla | Spelling & Dictation in Bangla | Creative writing |
|----------|---------|------------|-------------|------|---------|-------|-------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|
| A+=4     | A+=3    | A=1        | A=2         | A=4  | A=4     | A+=7  | A+=3  | A=1                            | A+=6                           | A=3              |
| A=10     | A=9     | B= 6       | B= 6        | B= 6 | B= 6    | A=9   | A=17  | B= 5                           | A=10                           | B= 7             |
| B= 9     | B= 14   | C=8        | C=7         | C=10 | C=8     | B= 10 | B= 10 | C=8                            | B=9                            | C=9              |
| C=7      | C=4     | D=7        | D=8         | D=4  | D=5     | C=4   |       | D=12                           | C=5                            | D=11             |
|          |         | E=5        | E=3         | E=4  | E=7     |       |       | E=4                            |                                | E=5              |
|          |         | F= 3       | F= 6        | F= 2 |         |       |       |                                |                                |                  |
|          |         |            |             |      |         |       |       |                                | N = 30                         |                  |

Table-2: Students' self-assessment report

The table-2 summarizes students' self-assessments of their academic performance across various subjects, revealing distinct confidence levels. Students show higher confidence in English language, art, and games, with many rating themselves in the A and B categories. In contrast, their self-assessments in Bangla literature, Bangla language, and Bangla spelling and dictation are notably lower, with many students placing themselves in the C, D, and lower categories. Therefore, the students have more confidence in handling English spelling and dictation than in performing the same in Bangla.

Interestingly, when asked about their preferred language for communication, a significant number of respondents (N=21) felt more comfortable speaking in Bangla (though not in standard Bangla) but found English easier for writing tasks. Notably, all students (N=30) expressed a negative sentiment towards shifting to a Bangla Medium schooling, citing difficulties in Bangla writing. In response to a question like, 'To answer any creative question in Bangla what do you do?' Several respondents (N=14) commented that they had never considered answering any question they had not previously studied. They stated, "I don't attempt to write". Some of the respondents (N=19) affirmed that it was due to lack of motivation, whereas another significant percentage of respondents (N=9) said that Bangla seemed to be an extremely challenging subject. In this regard a respondent said,

Because of time constraint, I never could finish the Bangla exam (S 17).

Thus, the challenges associated with creative writing in Bangla were highlighted by responses indicating a lack of motivation or, in some cases, extreme difficulty. Time constraints emerged as a notable factor affecting performance in Bangla

exams for a subgroup of students. These findings underscore the complex dynamics of language preferences, proficiency, and perceived difficulties among students.

### ***Data Collected from Parents***

The data collected from parents provides rich insights into the language development experiences and challenges faced by their children within a bilingual educational context. To capture the depth and complexity of these experiences, the responses were thematically analyzed. The emergent themes reflect key areas of concern and perception, including language use at home, the influence of English-medium instruction, difficulties in Bangla language proficiency, and parental attitudes toward language support strategies.

### ***Language Use and Parental Choice in Educational Contexts***

All parents (N=12) assured that their home language is Bangla but because of the greater demand for English in the job market they admitted their children to English version schools. One parent (P=3) highlights the unforeseen consequence of their child's enrolment in an English-medium school, where the child's Bangla proficiency lags, leading to academic challenges:

All of my family members speak Bangla. I was afraid that my daughter would struggle with an English version of school and whether it would become a pressure for her. But now I see her Bangla is weak... her academic Bangla has not developed well. (P 3)

This illustrates the tension between home language practices and institutional language demands, which can result in unintended consequences for the development of Bangla proficiency.

### ***Concerns over Language Development and Proficiency Imbalance***

A notable number of respondents (N=8) expressed concern over the slow language development of their children, with some attributing it to an apparent reluctance to engage in verbal communication. In response to the question, “How do you see your child’s language development? Do you think his/her English and Bangla proficiency is the same?” a number of parents reported that the improvement in Bangla was very slow (N=8). Some of the respondents (N=6) shared that their children seemed unwilling to talk to others. Parents also reported that their children’s Bangla proficiency was weaker compared to their English skills. Two respondents said,

They cannot elaborate any ideas like their non-LBLD classmates. In reading they misread and most often cannot find the inner meaning of a text. (P 11, P 2)

While responding to the next question from the researchers, “What are the problems that your child encounters in reading and writing Bangla?” parents identified specific difficulties in reading and writing Bangla, including an inability to elaborate ideas and misconceptions in text interpretation. In response to the question, “What is your child’s motivation level in reading Bangla texts?” the respondent parents (N=7) said that they use Bangla as their home language, yet their children’s development in reading and writing in Bangla is not satisfactory. In comparison, their proficiency in English is better than in Bangla. Parents (N=11) pointed out spelling as the most difficult area. Another parent shared,

My son can never complete a Bangla examination because of the ratio between the duration of the exam and the tasks they need to complete does not match, the time is insufficient. My son always leaves at least one question unanswered and eventually gets lower grades. (P 10)

### ***Dependence on English for Comprehension***

Many parents (N=7) noted their children's tendency to seek English equivalents for unfamiliar Bangla terms. This reliance on English synonyms extended beyond academic reading to everyday communication.

When my son faces any difficult Bangla word, he asks me what its English term is. While reading a Bangla textbook, if he comes across any unknown word, he asks for an English synonym for it. In everyday communication, he does the same thing. For instance, if he goes to buy something and the shopkeeper says the price in Bangla, he will turn to me and ask what the number stands for. (P 8)

Parental support in Bangla was found to be limited. While some parents (e.g., P 2) expressed openness to using Bangla explanations to improve their children's proficiency, most lacked the time or resources to provide such support.

If we reply using one or more Bangla synonyms, they may get used to it... it may help in improving their Bangla, I guess. (P 2)

In response to a relevant question, "Have you ever supported him with a wider and clearer explanation in Bangla in such a case?" the parent replied,

No, but I think my son understands English better than Bangla. (P 4)

So, concerns about reliance on English translations and the preference for English synonym clarification indicate complex dynamics in language preference and proficiency among these bilingual learners.

### ***Challenges in Writing Bangla***

Three respondents (P=4, P=7, and P=9) shared that while writing their children frequently forgets the graphic symbols of the Bangla alphabet. This lack of fluency in Bangla writing further exacerbates their difficulties in performing well in assessments.

### ***Lack of Engagement with Bangla Learning Materials***

Parents were also asked about the motivation level of their children for reading Bangla texts. Parents (N=12) reported that their children found Bangla difficult. They preferred to read English storybooks and watch English cartoons or films. This limited exposure and interaction with Bangla texts appears to negatively affect motivation and proficiency.

My child prefers reading English books. They find Bangla boring and hard. (P 7)

### ***Positive Attitudes toward Integrating Bangla in Subject Instruction***

Interestingly, parents acknowledged the potential benefit of teaching two or three subjects in Bangla to enhance language proficiency. In response to the question, “What do you think, if they are taught two or three subjects in Bangla in school, their Bangla will improve?” the parents answered positively and supported the idea. In this regard, one parent’s opinion was particularly interesting. He said,

Bangla is taught in schools as a subject only. There are some subjects like moral science, Bangladesh and Global Studies, etc., that can be taught in Bangla. My child has some problems... I mean she takes time in learning. We cannot teach her Bangla at home... she has huge academic pressure from school. So their difficulties with Bangla remain as difficulties.

But I think it's a good idea to teach one or two more subjects in Bangla. (P 6)

Findings from parents reveal concerns over their children's weak Bangla proficiency despite Bangla being the home language. While students show better skills and motivation in English, they struggle with reading, writing, and spelling in Bangla. Many rely on English translations, and parents often feel unequipped to support Bangla learning. However, most parents positively viewed the idea of teaching two or three subjects in Bangla to strengthen their children's L 1 skills.

### ***Data Revealed from Observation Record***

All the learners were observed for consecutive six months and data was collected after a regular interval (after every three months that means 1st month, 3rd month and 6th month) to keep the record of their visible development in language growth. It has been found that according to the academic record the cases' performance in their language tests remains almost consistent. The grade they achieved in formative tests within this period in Bangla shows that only two cases made slight improvement and another two cases' grade deteriorated at the latest test than their earlier. While in similar tests in English there are six cases whose grade increased slightly, three cases got higher grades and another two cases' grade got down. However, the overall performance of the cases is better in English than in Bangla. Test papers of these cases also revealed that in writing in English they use a more expressive language and a comparatively complex sentence structure. The length of their compositions also increased according to word count, ranging from 10 to 50 words. While in their Bangla answer scripts they wrote short answers using simple sentences and the easiest synonyms available. The standard and the length of their Bangla composition have not

improved in any remarkable manner. Occasionally, sentence structures, irrelevant vocabulary, and expressions typical of spoken language are found in their scripts. For example, instead of দাঁড়িয়ে আছি (standing), they wrote খেড়িয়ে আছি (wandering around); instead of মেঘ-বৃষ্টি (cloud-rain), they wrote বাদল (cloud); and instead of শীত (cold), they wrote হীম (chilling). During the observation period few parents supported with data. Parents reported that their children made more spelling mistakes in Bangla than in English. A parent said,

My son frequently forgets Bangla spellings. In learning English vocabulary and spelling, he uses strategies like mnemonics, but in learning Bangla, he tries to memorize and fails. I noticed my son directly translates some expressions and short sentences from English to Bangla and uses them in both speaking and writing. For example, he says, ‘আমি তার সাথে মিলেছি’ instead of ‘আমার সাথে তার দেখা হয়েছে’ (which means ‘I met him’). Or he says, ‘তারা আপন আপনদের মধ্যে খেলছে’ instead of ‘তারা নিজেদের সাথে / চেনা-জানাদের সাথে খেলছে’ (which means ‘they play with their group mates’). (P 9)

Another parent shared his concern, commenting as,

My child has several issues with ADHD and schooling... he is bullied by his classmates... sometimes teachers misbehave. In the last exam, he failed to pass in Chemistry and Bangla Language. I requested the teacher to shorten the syllabus, but he refused and misbehaved with me. He said my son sleeps in class and questioned what he does at home. I also talked with my son about it, and he replied that the classes are too boring. The teacher only teaches rules which are too difficult, and his voice remains the same throughout the class, like a monotonous song. My son generally achieves good grades in English. I admit he is not the top scorer in his class, but still, it is okay, I think. However, his Bangla does not improve, and

I am really afraid whether he can pass the board exam. (P 11)

The observation revealed that learners showed better progress in English than in Bangla, with improvements in English writing complexity and length. Bangla performance remained mostly stagnant, marked by spelling errors, simple sentences, limited vocabulary, colloquial expressions, and direct English translations. Parents reported challenges such as ADHD, bullying, and a lack of teacher support affecting Bangla learning.

### ***Discussion***

The comprehensive data collected from teachers, students, and parents provides a clear understanding of the dynamics surrounding Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), language proficiency, and preferences in a bilingual educational context. Teachers generally express positive attitudes towards CLIL, indicating that they believe students benefit from this approach, and that it contributes to both subject knowledge and language skills. The data reveals a consensus among educators that teaching subjects in English increase vocabulary and enhances students' English usage outside the classroom. Teachers acknowledge strategic use of LI, such as in teaching vocabulary or when students face difficulties in understanding. These results are consistent with Marsh and Langé's (2000) study findings. The notion is that CLIL enhances both subject knowledge and language skills, emphasizing the dual benefits of this approach in a bilingual educational context.

In CLIL-practicing schools in Bangladesh, almost all subjects (seven to eight) are taught in English. The respondent's students reported that English was not a barrier to learning. Those

exposed to CLIL from their elementary years performed better and felt more comfortable with English than with their mother tongue, Bangla. Student data reflect a perceived proficiency gap, with students assigning themselves higher grades in English (L2) than in Bangla (L1), and expressing a preference for English in creative writing. Even though Bangla is their native language, they feel less confident using it academically. These points support the argument that early CLIL exposure may negatively affect L1 academic development among LBLD students, especially when L1 instruction is marginalized. The emphasis on English appears to create a proficiency gap that influences students' perceptions of language competence and preferences. While CLIL principles support the simultaneous growth of all taught languages, the current practice does not sufficiently promote L1 development.

The study also identifies several factors that contribute to the disparities in language development among students with LBLD in CLIL schools. One significant factor is instructional emphasis. The predominance of English as the medium of instruction for most subjects reduces the time and focus dedicated to academic Bangla. Although teachers acknowledge the strategic use of Bangla in certain situations, their prioritization of English for content delivery is insufficient to support meaningful L1 development.

Motivation and exposure also play a crucial role. Students exhibit greater motivation and comfort with English, which is reinforced by more engaging instructional methods and materials. Bangla, despite being their home language, is often less favored for reading and writing tasks, further limiting practice and weakening proficiency. Parents reinforce these observations,

reporting frequent spelling difficulties, direct translations from English, and a general lack of enthusiasm for learning Bangla. These findings align with Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis (1979), which suggests that proficiency in one language can influence the other. However, the current CLIL practices seem inadequate in fostering balanced academic language development for students with LBLD, raising concerns about their preparedness for academic demands in Bangla. Another contributing factor is parental support and the home environment. While Bangla is spoken at home, many parents feel unequipped to assist their children with academic tasks in the language. Additionally, time constraints and heavy academic pressure limit opportunities for Bangla learning at home, further affecting students' performance in examinations. Lastly, student-specific challenges and contextual issues exacerbate the situation. Students with LBLD often face additional barriers such as ADHD, bullying, and boredom in Bangla classes, all of which hinder their engagement and learning. Reports of teacher misbehavior and refusal to accommodate individual needs further intensify these challenges.

However, as a potential solution to address the imbalance in language development, both parents and teachers support the integration of two or three subjects in Bangla within the school curriculum to strengthen students' proficiency in their first language. Teachers expressed strong consensus that introducing subjects such as Moral Science and Bangladesh and Global Studies in Bangla could significantly aid L1 development.

This multifaceted dataset underscores the complex interplay of language proficiency, preferences, and challenges in a bilingual educational context, offering valuable insights for

educators, researchers, and policymakers to tailor effective language instruction strategies. The findings support the notion that a thoughtful integration of CLIL, strategic use of the native language, and addressing motivational factors can contribute to a more holistic language development approach for students in bilingual settings.

### ***Recommendations***

Based on the findings and discussion, the following recommendations are proposed to address the disparities in L1 (Bangla) development among students with Language-Based Learning Disabilities (LBLD) in CLIL-based bilingual education settings in Bangladesh.

Firstly, schools should adopt a more balanced approach to bilingual education by integrating Bangla more meaningfully into the curriculum. While CLIL has been effective in enhancing English (L2) proficiency, the current overemphasis on English has limited students' exposure to and development in Bangla. Introducing two or three subjects, such as Moral Science or Bangladesh and Global Studies, in Bangla can provide necessary academic input in the first language and help strengthen students' L1 skills. This dual-language approach can promote balanced language development and better align with the principles of CLIL, which advocate for the growth of all languages used in instruction.

Secondly, to address students' difficulties in Bangla spelling, vocabulary, and academic writing, teachers should incorporate targeted instructional strategies tailored to the needs of students with LBLD. Techniques such as guided writing, contextual

vocabulary instruction, and scaffolded support can gradually build confidence and competence in Bangla, particularly in academic tasks.

Thirdly, parental involvement plays a critical role in supporting students' L1 development. Schools should consider conducting workshops to guide parents on how to effectively assist their children's Bangla learning at home. Alongside this, user-friendly resources and tools should be provided to help parents support homework and reading activities. Establishing open and collaborative communication channels between teachers and parents is also essential, as it enables the timely identification and resolution of language-related challenges. These combined efforts can significantly enhance academic language development in Bangla and contribute to a more equitable and supportive bilingual education system.

Finally, it is important to recognize and respond to the additional challenges faced by students with LBLD, such as ADHD, classroom boredom, peer bullying, and lack of teacher empathy. Schools should develop inclusive policies and offer regular training for teachers to build awareness and equip them with strategies for supporting students with diverse learning needs.

## **Conclusion**

To sum up, this extensive research explores the complex dynamics of content and language integrated learning (CLIL), providing insights into language acquisition, competency, and difficulties in a bilingual learning environment. The study uncovers a proficiency gap among students, favoring the CLIL language (English) over their mother tongue (Bangla). This

unexpected trend suggests a potential imbalance in language development, urging a reevaluation of bilingual education strategies. Parental perspectives reveal concerns about slow language development, motivational challenges, and instances of direct translation from English to Bangla, highlighting areas for targeted support. The six-month performance data indicates consistent results in language tests but underscores challenges faced by students with LBLD, including bullying, academic struggles, and teacher misbehavior. Addressing these issues is imperative for the overall well-being and academic success of students in bilingual settings. The study emphasizes the need for a nuanced approach, balancing CLIL principles with strategic use of the native language and addressing motivational factors. Tailoring instructional strategies to the diverse needs of students, particularly those with LBLD, is crucial for fostering holistic language development. These insights provide valuable guidance for educators, researchers, and policymakers seeking to enhance the effectiveness of bilingual education programs and create an inclusive learning environment for all students.

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