

Teachers' Beliefs and Practices in Implementing CLIL in an Indonesian Primary School

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Abstract

This study investigates teachers' beliefs and practices in implementing CLIL in an Indonesian primary school context. Drawing on narrative inquiry, fruitful themes and subthemes were generated from the thematic analysis of teachers' stories, representing their teaching experiences in CLIL classes. Involving four CLIL teachers with 5–11 years of teaching experience, this study reveals that the teachers believed CLIL was a good approach for encouraging students and teachers to improve their competencies in English and content subjects. As students had different levels of English proficiency and motivation, the teachers believed that CLIL classes should be carried out in meaningful and engaging ways. They also believed that school stakeholders and teacher colleagues' support was very prominent in assisting them to teach in CLIL classes. In its implementation, CLIL classes were carried out for mathematics, natural science, citizenship, and social science subjects, while other subjects were delivered in Bahasa Indonesia. As English was the main language for classroom instruction and daily communication, the school stakeholders provided several supporting programs to familiarize teachers and students with using English both inside and outside classrooms. Beyond the current implementation of CLIL, the teachers hoped for improvements in school facilities and more time allotment for teacher professional development and teaching preparation. The findings also imply that implementing CLIL requires complex competencies of the teachers and adequate support from school stakeholders.

Keywords: *Cambridge curriculum, CLIL, primary school, teacher's belief.*

INTRODUCTION

Content and language-integrated learning (CLIL) has become a current trend in global education since it is considered effective to enhance students' skills in both content subjects and languages, especially foreign languages. CLIL is effective in helping students learn a new language and develop other skills, such as cultural awareness and cognitive and general academic knowledge (Deswila et al., 2020; Le & Nguyen, 2022). In a CLIL class, students are enthusiastic and well-engaged during the lesson (Farah & Khoiriyah, 2023) as they have a more positive attitude toward using English in the classroom. It indicates that more exposure to English through the CLIL approach can enhance their motivation to learn and use English, which is, to a certain extent, influenced by a bilingual learning environment (Buckingham et al., 2023; San Isidro & Lasagabaster, 2022). Teachers' positive attitude can also promote

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positive classroom atmosphere for language learning. Eventually, it motivates the students to express themselves effectively and securely (Sakashita & Shinozaki, 2024). Even though the students have different English proficiency levels, they are generally capable of understanding concepts in English since they practice meaningful use of English and, in this case, students with lower English proficiency levels need more support (Lázaro-Ibarrola & Azpilicueta-Martínez, 2021; Mahan et al., 2021; Pladevall-Ballester, 2015).

In the last decade, CLIL has been promoted in many pre-primary, primary, and secondary school systems in Asia, following English as a medium of instruction (EMI) that has been previously popular in higher education (Gilanyi et al., 2023). CLIL has been implemented in many countries, and studies about CLIL have been carried out by several researchers. Moreover, English has become the main foreign language that is integrated into content subjects. A study in Taiwan reported that CLIL helped enrich students' English vocabulary and foster their science knowledge in science subjects. Students were also motivated to have more subjects delivered in English. Even though they were enjoying CLIL, they sometimes expressed limited knowledge of the content subjects (Huang, 2020). In Japan, CLIL was employed in history subject to highlight the traditional products of Japan. It revealed that the students were able to utilize diverse English expressions during the lesson. They could also have a good focus on the lesson, whether it was delivered in Japanese or English (Ito, 2018).

Despite its advantages, some challenges in implementing CLIL were also reported. The lack of relevant resources and qualified teachers has become a major challenge in some countries (Le & Nguyen, 2022). Students' various English proficiency levels and interests could also become problems in CLIL classes if the teachers are not ready for such conditions. In addition to fostering students' motivation in CLIL classes, the CLIL approach requires the development of teachers' professionalism and competencies and school facilities to become the focus of improvement (Deswila et al., 2020; Khoiriyah, 2021).

CLIL is generally carried out by content subject teachers or English language teachers who learn other content subjects. Nevertheless, not all content subject teachers or English language teachers are familiar with CLIL, nor do they have adequate training regarding CLIL in their pre-service teacher education. Consequently, knowledge and skill exchanges are important for both types of CLIL teachers. These CLIL teachers must collaborate to enhance their CLIL practices, support knowledge acquisition, and improve their English proficiency and cooperation skills (Scherzinger & Brahm, 2023; Zhu et al., 2023). Furthermore, CLIL teachers occupy more than one identity when playing their roles. They have roles as an English language teacher, a content subject teacher, and a CLIL teacher who can balance teaching both the English language and the content subject (Deswila et al., 2020; Valdés-Sánchez & Espinet, 2020). Moreover, this must be supported by a curriculum design that encourages English proficiency development for both teachers and students and a student-centered approach in its instructional process. Thus, CLIL teachers need adequate methodological and linguistic competencies (Kashiwagi & Tomecsek, 2015; Luo, 2022; Pineda et al., 2022).

Several previous studies have examined the practices and teachers' beliefs of CLIL. Teachers' beliefs represent a set of assumptions, principles, and values that teachers hold true regarding their teaching practices. It plays a key role in determining teachers' decisions about their classroom teaching and modifying students' learning behaviors (Fives et al., 2019; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017). Bárcena-Toyos (2020) reported that CLIL practices did not represent the integration of content and language learning strategies since the teachers focused more on teaching content subjects with a lack of academic language awareness. It was suggested that teachers who taught CLIL needed to have good language awareness to integrate content and language in the instructional process. Another study carried out by Vázquez et al. (2020) revealed that the teachers were generally positive about their participation in

the CLIL training and development program. However, content subject teachers seemed less confident in implementing CLIL than language teachers. They also did not get enough opportunities to develop their CLIL specialization. It was emphasized that more educational facilities regarding CLIL specialization were needed to support the implementation of CLIL, and it had to start with pre-service teacher education. Lo (2019) also reported that CLIL teachers experienced changes in their beliefs and language awareness that were affected by several factors, such as learning experience, school context, and subject discipline. It implied the importance of continuous professional development for CLIL teachers.

Studies on CLIL have also become the concern of a few researchers from Indonesia. In Indonesian schools, the CLIL approach is usually practiced in collaboration with other approaches or methods, such as bilingual education, project-based learning, task-based learning, and genre-based learning (Khoiriyah, 2021). The implementation of CLIL requires several strategies, including needs analysis, professional development workshops for teachers, syllabus and materials design, implementation, and evaluation. Obviously, the implementation of CLIL needs planning and the active participation of CLIL teachers and school stakeholders (Farah & Khoiriyah, 2023). Setyaningrum and Purwati (2020) also reported that the teachers have integrated thematic content materials in their English language teaching, and the students were, thus, able to utilize simple use of English in relation to the thematic content materials, such as parts of the body in natural science and numbers in mathematics. The need for good English proficiency and pedagogical competencies was also emphasized.

The previous relevant studies have looked at CLIL practices and teachers' roles, emphasizing teachers' competencies in teaching content subjects and languages. They highlighted the need for continuous professional development. Meanwhile, previous studies on CLIL in Indonesia focused more on curriculum design and materials development while support from school stakeholders remains underinvestigated. Those studies have not given much attention to teachers' lived experiences as the main actors in CLIL classes although their lived experiences can represent the actual CLIL practices in classrooms. Furthermore, the types of required support have also been unexplored. To fill this void, this present study aims to investigate teachers' beliefs and practices in implementing CLIL in an Islamic primary school in Indonesia that have been underinvestigated in previous studies. Although CLIL teachers in this school hold bachelor degrees in English education or English letters, they have never undergone any specific courses on CLIL. However, they have to teach CLIL subjects that are beyond their educational backgrounds. Therefore, this present study is guided by the following research questions:

- 1) What are the teachers' beliefs on implementing CLIL?
- 2) How do the teachers carry out CLIL classes daily?

METHODS

Research Design

This study adopted narrative inquiry to elicit the facts from CLIL teachers' lived experiences (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). Drawing on stories from a narrative frame that represent past, present, and future expectations, this study tried to figure out the teachers' beliefs and practices in implementing CLIL in an Islamic primary school in Central Java, Indonesia.

Research Participants

Four teachers from an Islamic primary school in Central Java, Indonesia, who had 5–11 years of teaching experiences, were invited to participate in this study voluntarily. They had signed the informed consent form before their participation in this study. The name of the

school and all the participants' names were anonymized for ethical considerations, especially to keep their privacy safe.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were gathered by using narrative frames and semi-structured interviews. The narrative frames tried to elicit the teachers' experiences through stories. Subsequently, this was followed by semi-structured interviews to gain deeper insights and confirm the teachers' statements obtained from the narrative frames. All the data were in the form of stories. Overall, the data were collected from July to August 2022. All the data collection process was undertaken in Bahasa Indonesia through an online environment by using WhatsApp application and email.

The data were then analyzed by employing thematic analysis. The data were read several times to find emerging themes and subthemes that indicated the teachers' beliefs and practices in implementing CLIL. Ultimately, conclusions were drawn based on the results of the data analysis. Significant excerpts were also provided as evidence for each emerging theme and subtheme. To ensure the trustworthiness and rigor of this study, member checking was employed by sharing the interview transcripts and the final draft of this manuscript with the participants and allowing them to give feedback and interpretations (Glesne, 2016).

FINDINGS

Teachers' Beliefs in Implementing CLIL

Two themes can be figured out from the results of the data analysis. The first theme is teachers' beliefs about implementing CLIL in classrooms. All the teachers were pretty sure that they were ready to teach in CLIL classes because they hold bachelor degrees in English education or English letters that equipped them with sufficient knowledge and skills in both spoken and written English. They felt happy and challenged to practice their English language skills and help students improve their English proficiency levels too. Even though they perceived that they lacked knowledge in teaching content subjects, they still felt confident enough due to their adequate English proficiency. While English language teachers generally do not pay much attention to content subjects (Dale et al., 2021), they should also be able to teach content subjects in this school. Although they initially felt challenged since they had to learn new vocabulary and teaching materials, they were still willing to learn and practice.

According to them, the teaching materials in a primary school were still manageable.

"My educational background equips me with English language skills and teaching methodology, but I still need to enhance my knowledge to teach natural science and mathematics. So, I read more and usually review the teaching materials several times." (Teacher 2, translated by the authors)

On the other hand, some of the teachers felt a little bit worried about teaching in CLIL classes and teaching young learners. They dealt with their worries by being willing to learn and fostering their competencies.

"I still need to improve my skill in classroom management, especially to teach young learners, because I do not think that I had enough practice at university." (Teacher 3, translated by the authors)

In dealing with these challenges, they seemed to maintain their positive attitude towards teaching in CLIL classes. They strongly agreed that the current curriculum that they adopted could foster both teachers' and students' knowledge and skills in English language and content subjects. They adopted the Cambridge curriculum, and it helped them a lot in providing teaching materials and understanding concepts within the content subjects they taught. All the teachers also reported improved English proficiency, making them more confident to teach in CLIL classes.

"After 11 years, I feel happy and challenged to always create fun learning experiences for my students. Using an international curriculum is a plus for teachers and students. My speaking and listening skills have improved, and I get many creative ideas to teach in my classes. My focus is to make my students active and confident." (Teacher 1, translated by the authors)

In classrooms, the CLIL teachers observed that some students showed very good progress in joining CLIL classes, but there were also a few students who could not comprehend the materials very well or showed less interest in joining the classes.

"I feel sad if my students do not do the task due to their low motivation. I work hard to make my students understand the materials, but they often do not tell me that they do not understand them." (Teacher 2, translated by the authors)

This affected their beliefs about teaching students with different levels of English proficiency and cognitive ability in CLIL classes. They strongly believed that the CLIL approach should be carried out in fun and attractive ways. As a result, they were often thinking of interesting ways to teach the content subjects. They utilized realia to teach the concepts within the content subjects, did experiments, employed various learning media (both printed and audio-visual), and created fun learning activities with brain gym and ice breaking.

"My students are good at technology, even though their English proficiency levels are still varied. They still need improvement They like fun learning activities and dislike monotonous ones. Therefore, I design various and challenging activities for them." (Teacher 1, translated by the authors)

It implies that in addition to mastering the language and content subjects, CLIL teachers also had to understand their students well, such as their language proficiency levels, cognitive abilities, learning styles, and digital literacy levels. This knowledge would help the teachers provide suitable learning experiences that can promote their students' learning in CLIL classes.

The CLIL teachers also believed that support from school stakeholders and teacher colleagues was crucial to the implementation of CLIL. They believed that their teacher colleagues were the best partners for sharing teaching materials and experiences. They were often looking forward to collaborating with other teachers, especially in teacher workshops, inviting them to share their knowledge, insights, experiences, and classroom best practices. In addition, the school stakeholders also played essential roles in maintaining and enhancing CLIL practices. The teachers asserted that there was support from the school stakeholders in many ways regarding their English proficiency levels and teaching practices. They were also excited about having opportunities to learn from and collaborate with international educators,

which were facilitated by Cambridge International Education, from which they adopted the curriculum.

*“My colleagues help me a lot by sharing teaching materials and activities.”
(Teacher 2, translated by the authors)*

“School stakeholders are very supportive and encourage me to improve my English language skills. They also provide some programs to improve our competencies as teachers.” (Teacher 4, translated by the authors)

It indicates that schools implementing the CLIL approach should perceive their teachers as major investments. Consequently, school stakeholders need to plan and design sustainable professional development for their teachers and provide facilities to help teachers enhance CLIL practices within their classes.

In addition, the teachers hoped for more school facilities to support their teaching practices, such as laboratories and realia. They also needed more preparation time before teaching whereas they had a tight schedule as CLIL teachers, homeroom teachers, and other additional jobs. This sometimes made them unable to prepare their classes well due to the limited teaching preparation time.

“I think that the school stakeholders should provide more facilities for teaching and learning and more programs for enhancing students’ English proficiency. I also perceive that sometimes I cannot teach effectively since I only have a little time to prepare my teaching materials and activities.” (Teacher 2, translated by the authors)

Teachers’ Practices in Implementing CLIL

In this school, the CLIL approach was integrated into the national curriculum, and not all subjects were delivered in English. CLIL was used for English as a foreign language, natural science, and mathematics subjects in which the Cambridge curriculum was adopted. Several subjects within the national curriculum were also delivered in English, including social and natural sciences and citizenship. On the other hand, several subjects including Bahasa Indonesia, Javanese, Arabic, physical education, and religion were delivered in Bahasa Indonesia although they still used English for general classroom instructions; the materials were in Bahasa Indonesia.

“For Cambridge subjects and thematic materials [taken from the national curriculum], we use English, but, for other subjects, we use Bahasa Indonesia; however, we still speak English for giving instructions, and the students also speak English, such as asking for permission.” (Teacher 1, translated by the authors)

When talking about the practices of CLIL in classrooms, several subthemes emerge from the data analysis results. First, it deals with teaching activities. The CLIL teachers used to provide meaningful and fun activities for the students. They chose to deliver teaching materials through various media and teaching activities. For this purpose, they used to refer to the reference books that were provided by the school stakeholders and add several references that they obtained from YouTube and other learning resources that were available online. They began their classes by providing a brain gym or icebreaker activities to foster a good mood in

the students. They also avoided lecturing during their classes because the students did not like just listening to the teachers' lectures. Therefore, the teachers designed teaching activities that enabled all the students to actively participate in CLIL classes.

"The challenge is how to deliver the materials because the book only consists of the concepts with limited elaboration, so I explain the materials by using online resources and YouTube I design simple and fun activities. I also like using PowerPoint and realia." (Teacher 4, translated by the authors)

"I try to simplify the teaching materials and explain them as easily as possible so that my students can understand." (Teacher 2, translated by the authors)

"I feel worried when my students are not ready yet to join my class, so I utilize brain gym and icebreaker activities to get their attention and focus." (Teacher 3, translated by the authors)

The students' vocabulary was also enriched as they learned new materials. However, several students had problems with vocabulary. To assist them, the teachers deployed several strategies, such as highlighting the main vocabulary before explaining the materials and reviewing it before the lesson.

"I am worried that my students have difficulties because of their limited English vocabulary, so I ask them to have a vocabulary book to write down the vocabulary that they have learned. I also review the vocabulary before the lesson." (Teacher 1, translated by the authors)

The second subtheme on the teachers' practices in implementing CLIL pertains to the use of the languages, which are English and Bahasa Indonesia. The use of the languages depends on the student's grades. In the first grade, Bahasa Indonesia was used more often since the students were still adapting to the learning environment. At this grade, the main goal was still to familiarize the students with using English in classroom instructions and introduce essential vocabulary for daily interactions. Thus, the teachers primarily introduced daily expressions and general classroom instructions. The use of Bahasa Indonesia was then reduced as the students came to higher grades, and English became the main language that was spoken in classrooms.

"Yes, we try to use full English in classrooms. We speak Bahasa Indonesia very little for CLIL subjects For first graders, it is still 50:50 [the use of English and Bahasa Indonesia]. We are still developing in many aspects." (Teacher 1, translated by the authors)

Ultimately, the third subtheme is about the supporting programs. The supporting programs were designed to help the students and the teachers practice their English inside and outside classrooms. The main goal was not only mastering content subject materials but also fostering their English proficiency levels. In cooperation with the teachers, the school stakeholders carried out several supporting programs, such as the weekly English forum that aimed to primarily practice English language skills and the teachers' workshop that was commonly held every semester to enhance the teachers' teaching performance.

“We have WoW; it is words of the week. The students should memorize some words or create English sentences before entering classroom. There is also PoE, the police of English, that monitors the students’ daily communication practices. We have Assembly as well; it is such a kind of student performance.” (Teacher 1, translated by the authors)

It can be seen that the implementation of CLIL was supported by the school stakeholders through several programs beyond CLIL classes to create a conducive learning environment for using English in daily communication and interaction within the school environment.

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, the teachers were confident enough to teach in CLIL classes since they already had good English proficiency, and they considered the materials of the content subjects as manageable. However, as they came to the classes, their beliefs changed. Teaching CLIL classes is not just being able to deliver content subjects in English. In addition, classroom management and students’ characteristics should be given more concern. CLIL teachers’ English proficiency is pivotal and helps them deal with some challenges in the implementation of CLIL. While teachers’ language proficiency often becomes an issue in CLIL classes as reported in the previous study (Lazarević, 2022), this study reveals that other factors, such as content subject mastery and classroom management, should also be considered essential because the teachers’ educational backgrounds did not provide adequate training for teaching in CLIL classes. However, the teachers’ willingness to learn and practice also becomes the key to success in the implementation of CLIL. The teachers were critical enough in identifying their needs and applying strategies in their classes to assist the students’ learning and deal with the challenges. Even though CLIL teachers might experience changes in their beliefs (Lo, 2019), the CLIL teachers in this study generally held consistent positive beliefs about CLIL. It was influenced by the positive impacts that they had experienced, such as the enhancement of their competencies and those of the students.

When it comes to classroom practices, the teachers needed to consider many aspects during their teaching. The teachers believed that they should create meaningful and fun learning activities to get the students’ interests and foster their motivation. Implementing various activities can facilitate students’ diverse learning styles which can maintain their positive attitude while joining the learning process (Naenah, 2022). Students’ various levels of English proficiency have also encouraged the teachers to find teaching strategies that best suited all the students, which included modifying learning activities and using mixed languages according to the students’ English proficiency levels. These findings are in line with the findings of the previous study by Smala (2013) which suggested that CLIL teachers should apply a multitude of pedagogical considerations, such as learning content subject concepts, accessing teaching resources in English, translating and simplifying teaching materials, and modifying the language to be more understandable for their students. Moreover, the teachers reported that the students were good at technology, and, therefore, integrating technology into classroom activities were also helpful (Katemba, 2020). Furthermore, to assist students with lower English proficiency, the teachers provided systematic language support, such as giving vocabulary drill and simplifying the language, and designed learning activities that were less stressful and more encouraging for the students. By applying these strategies, the teachers had essentially attempted to maintain the students’ motivation, which became one of the teachers’ challenges when teaching in CLIL classes (Deswila et al., 2020; Khoiriyah, 2021). Previous studies also reported that language constraints in CLIL classes could be managed by providing

systematic language support and more detailed instructional explanations (Lázaro-Ibarrola & Azpilicueta-Martínez, 2021; Mahan et al., 2021; Pladevall-Ballester, 2015).

Despite the importance of classroom practices, curriculum design is also essential to CLIL (Luo, 2022; Pineda et al., 2022). In this study, the school implemented the national curriculum and adopted the Cambridge curriculum for three subjects: English as a foreign language, mathematics, and natural science. The subjects within the national curriculum that included thematic materials were also delivered in English. It aligns with the previous study, which indicated that thematic materials within the national curriculum could be delivered using the CLIL approach (Setyaningrum & Purwati, 2020). On the other hand, several subjects, including Javanese, Arabic, Bahasa Indonesia, physical education, and religion, were taught bilingually. This practice enabled the teachers and students to use more than one language simultaneously, so the students with lower English proficiency did not feel ashamed and demotivated.

The school stakeholders also offered several supporting programs to encourage the students' practices of using English that could promote better engagement in CLIL classes. Regular workshops and training were carried out to improve CLIL teachers' teaching performance and English proficiency. This is line with the previous study that suggested school stakeholders to provide routine workshops for teachers to improve their English proficiency and teaching methodology because being CLIL teachers requires both language and pedagogical competencies (Valdés-Sánchez & Espinet, 2020). In this study, the workload also became an issue, which caused limited time for teaching preparation. In addition to optimizing current workshop programs, the teachers also needed more allotted time for teaching preparation by reducing their workload so that they will have more time to design teaching materials and activities prior to teaching in CLIL classes.

CONCLUSIONS

Teachers' beliefs and practices in implementing CLIL for primary school students have been explored. First, the teachers were confident enough to teach in CLIL classes because they had good English proficiency as a result of their educational backgrounds. Although they found some challenges in content subject mastery and classroom management, they could find strategies to deal with these challenges. They were also supported by their teacher colleagues and the school stakeholders. They believed that CLIL classes should be carried out in interesting and attractive ways to maintain the students' attention and foster their motivation. CLIL materials were derived from both the Cambridge and national curriculums. Daily teacher-student communication and classroom instruction were carried out in English. The school stakeholders, in collaboration with the teachers, also provided several supporting programs to foster the students' English proficiency, which were undertaken beyond classrooms.

This study implies that being CLIL teachers in a primary school require both linguistic and pedagogical competencies. CLIL teachers need adequate support from school stakeholders and teacher colleagues. School stakeholders should provide adequate facilities and periodical professional development activities to enhance CLIL teachers' competencies. In addition, school stakeholders are also suggested to reduce CLIL teachers' workload and give them more time for teaching preparation. For CLIL teachers in Indonesia, they must be responsive and adaptive with the condition that students are not accustomed to use English on a daily basis. CLIL teachers also need to employ suitable strategies to deal with this circumstance and share problems and solutions with their teacher colleagues.

This study was limited to just one school that adopted the Cambridge curriculum and involved only four CLIL teachers with some years of teaching experience. Since the purpose of this study was to explore the CLIL teachers' beliefs and practices, this study did not employ quantitative data at all. This study also merely employed narrative frames and semi-structured interviews to gather the data from the CLIL teachers. Further studies are suggested to investigate teachers' beliefs and practices in implementing CLIL at different levels of education or in schools with different curricula. Future studies should also involve more participants, employ more data collection techniques, gather quantitative data, and engage both novice and senior CLIL teachers.

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