

HELPING WITHOUT ENGLISH: PARENTAL ROLES AND REALITIES IN A CLIL CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the experiences of parents with limited English proficiency in supporting their children's education within Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) settings. By conducting interviews with three parents whose children attended an English-medium elementary school in Indonesia, the study investigated how parents' English proficiency influenced their involvement, the challenges they faced, the strategies they employed to overcome these barriers, and their suggestions for school support. The findings revealed key difficulties such as language barriers and limited ability to provide academic assistance. Even so, parents found ways to manage the challenges by adopting some strategies, such as private tutoring, translation tools, and encouraging their children to study more independently. The findings also showed that parental involvement in CLIL settings was influenced not only by language skills, but also by the effort parents put into supporting their children's motivation, independence, and academic success. This study highlights the crucial role of collaboration between schools and families, while also suggesting ways that schools can better support parents in multilingual learning settings. By presenting these insights, the study adds to existing discussions on bilingual and multilingual education and illustrates how parents take an active role in CLIL environments.

KEYWORDS: *CLIL, Limited English Proficiency, Parental Involvement*

INTRODUCTION

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach, which integrates subject matter with the use of a foreign language, has been widely applied in many non-English speaking countries, including Indonesia. Nevertheless, the involvement of parents especially parents with limited English proficiency (LEP) in supporting their children's learning in such settings has not been widely examined. A UNESCO survey found that more than 40% of parents struggled to support their children school assignments if given in a foreign language (UNESCO, 2023). This finding revealed the issue of language barriers in providing learning support at home. Although the cognitive advantages of bilingualism have been widely discussed (Coyle et al., 2010), research on how parents'

language skills affect their ability to assist children in CLIL contexts remain limited, particularly within Indonesia's growing bilingual education system.

In Indonesia, as the bilingual education system becomes more widespread in elementary schools, parents with limited English proficiency encounter specific challenges. Studies by Wahyuningsih and Mua'dib (2023) indicated that 82% of parents with minimal English proficiency struggled to comprehend their children's CLIL assignments, and Hasibuan et al. (2024) documented difficulties in explaining subject matter taught in English. Epstein (2011) underscored the critical role of parental support in student success, yet there is limited understanding of how language barriers hinder parents' ability to help with schoolwork or communicate with teachers.

This qualitative study explored how parents managed the challenges of helping their children learn in English, especially when they had limited English proficiency (LEP). It examined the challenges faced by LEP parents and explored the strategies they adopted to bridge the support gap at home. Using a qualitative case study approach, the study offers valuable insights into the realities of parental challenges and strategies in CLIL-based primary education and provides recommendations for schools to better support families, ensuring that CLIL remains accessible and meaningful for all learners, regardless of their home language background. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What were the challenges faced by LEP parents in supporting their children's learning in CLIL environments?
2. What were the strategies LEP parents employed to deal with these challenges and assist their children's academic development?
3. What were the LEP parents' perspectives on how schools could better support families?

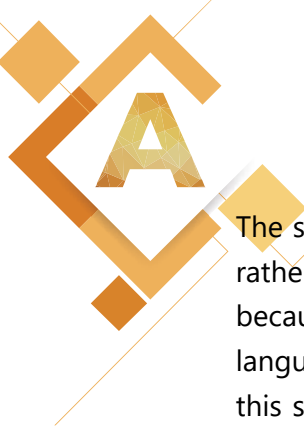
LITERATURE REVIEW

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is an educational approach where students learn a subject and a second language at the same time, typically using the target language, often English as the medium of instruction. Its roots lie in earlier immersion programs and bilingual education models, particularly in Canada and parts of Europe. CLIL emerged in response to increasing globalization and the need for multilingual competence, aiming to foster both subject understanding and language acquisition in authentic, meaningful context (Coyle et al., 2010). Currently, CLIL is widely implemented across Europe and in non-European contexts, such as Indonesia, where it is used to enhance students' English proficiency while maintaining national curriculum standards.

In education, the role of parents is very important because they are often the first source of support when children need help with their school assignments at home (Hermida, 2021; Rosdiana & Aini, 2022); Sarair et al., 2022). In CLIL contexts, however, the assignments and other academic activities or tasks are provided in English which may be significant obstacles for parents with LEP. These linguistic challenges will reduce their capacity to provide meaningful assistance in their children's academic development and may contribute to lower levels of parental engagement in children's language acquisition (Bakti et al., 2025). Research has shown that many Indonesian parents struggled to understand CLIL assignments, particularly when complex subject matter was taught in English, which limited their ability to assist with homework and academic learning. Wahyuningsih and Mua'dib (2023) in their study found that to enhance their children English language learning, parents were willing to provide supports for their children's English language learning by supplying internet connection, interacting in English on daily basis, sending their children to English courses, and accompanying their children in learning English at home. However, the study also showed that not all parents were confident with their English ability, particularly when the materials were in advanced English.

Due to their linguistic incapacity, several studies revealed that parents with LEP experienced emotional and psychological challenges when supporting their children's language learning at home. Parents could feel lack of capacity to assist their children's English-based schoolwork, and this might affect them emotionally and psychologically. Several studies discovered that many parent experienced feelings of frustration and inadequacy, which could put pressure on the parent-child relationship (Fata et al., 2022). In certain situations, children might perceive their parents as less competent, thereby reducing parental authority and weakening the sense of support at home (Sumanti & Muljani, 2021). These psychological effects not only affected parents' emotional well-being but might also lower children's confidence in seeking help from their parents, further complicating the learning process in CLIL contexts.

Studies also showed that parents with low English Proficiency (LEP) implemented learning strategies, such as online resources, videos, audio, and electronic or digital books to facilitate their children's academic progress in the context of CLIL (Zemzemiyeh et al., 2024). While these studies did not particularly focus on parents with LEP, they emphasized the extensive use of complimentary materials outside of school contexts. More directly, Aeni and Limbong (2023) accounted that LEP parents frequently depended on using external resources, such as language programs or courses to support their children's language acquisition. Taken together, these adaptive strategies showed some strategies parents navigated the challenges of supporting their children's learning in a bilingual context.



The studies mentioned above, however, did not specifically explore CLIL settings, but rather bilingual education in general. Unlike bilingual education, CLIL is different because it requires learning content subjects through English, and inadequacy language proficiency can hinder students' understanding of the material. Therefore, this study investigates the challenges and strategies used by LEP parents to support their children's education in a CLIL elementary school in Indonesia, and how they influence parent-child relationship dynamics.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative case study approach to explore the experiences of LEP parents supporting their children in CLIL-based primary education. A case-study design was chosen to gain a deep understanding of the parents' lived experiences, challenges, and strategies, allowing the study to capture the context-specific nature of their involvement (Creswell, 2018). Homogenous purposive sampling was used to select participants who had specific characteristics and were information-rich regarding the study's focus on limited English proficiency (LEP) (Palinkas et al., 2015). For this purpose, three parents of elementary school students enrolled in a CLIL in an urban elementary school in Indonesia were contacted through a recommendation by a homeroom teacher based on the specific characteristics set up for the purpose for this study. The criteria were as follows: 1) Parents with a child or children enrolled in the CLIL school, and 2) parents with LEP.

Three female participants were opted to take part in this study (see Table 1). Nevertheless, this small number of participants could not be generalized into different contexts. Before the study commenced, the participants received a consent form outlining the study's purpose, their rights, and confidentiality measures. They were informed of their rights to withdraw at any time without consequence. All data and recordings were approved by the participants and securely stored on encrypted devices. The names of participants in this study were replaced with pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, lasting 45 to 60 minutes. The interview questions used in this study were based on earlier research (Wahyuningsih & Mua'dib, 2023). Sample questions of the interview included: "What kinds of struggles do you face when assisting your child with English based homework?", "What strategies do you use to support your child's learning despite the challenges?", and "How do these experiences impact your relationship with your child?". All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, transcribed verbatim for further thematic analysis.

TABLE 1. Participants' background information

No.	PSEUDONYMS	OCCUPATION	CHILD'S GRADE
1	Risna	Housewife	Grade 4
2	Rahma	Employee	Grade 4
3	Diba	Entrepreneur	Grade 4

Thematic analysis was used to examine the data collected from the interviews. This technique was chosen because it was able to systematically identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes that emerged from qualitative data. The analysis process followed the stages developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), starting from the introduction of data, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, naming themes, to preparing a report of the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

This section presents the main findings of the study based on LEP parents' experiences in supporting their children's learning in CLIL settings. The results are grouped into key themes, including the challenges parents faced, the strategies they used to cope with language barriers, and their views on the impact of English-medium instruction on their children.

1. CHALLENGES DUE TO LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

All parents struggled particularly with subjects like mathematics and science when taught in English. Even when the content was manageable, the language barrier made it harder to understand or explain to their children. For instance, Risna shared that she could grasp mathematical formulas, but struggled with understanding word problems in English. She stated, *"I understand math, and I understand the formula too, but when it comes to word problems, I don't understand."* Similarly, Rahma noted that her difficulties began specifically when dealing with math and science, *"When it comes to mathematics and science, I start to have difficulties."*

Diba also echoed the same feeling that emphasized the difficulty did not lie in the content itself but in the language used to present it. She highlighted, *"Math itself isn't difficult, but it's the English language that makes it hard."* Further, Risna also noted that CLIL tasks required not only language proficiency but also a level of logic or critical thinking their children had not yet developed, *"Mathematics requires logical thinking, but my child's logic hasn't quite developed yet."*

2. STRATEGIES USED BY PARENTS TO SUPPORT LEARNING

To cope with the language barrier and support their children's learning, LEP parents adopted various strategies, including the use of translation tools, enrolling in private tutoring, and fostering learner independence. Many parents relied on tools like Google Translate to make sense of assignments, with Diba and Risna sharing, *"I usually open [Google] Translate"*, meanwhile Rahma noted, *"I have to read it first before I can help my child,"* that indicated the need to understand the task themselves before offering help. Additionally, all parents sought external academic support by enrolling their children in private tutoring, particularly for English and math. Diba mentioned, *"In the end, I enrolled her older sibling tutoring,"* and Rahma added, *"I use two different tutoring services to support my child."* This indicated that LEP parents invested in supplementary education.

Alongside these supports, LEP parents also encouraged their children to develop independence in learning, as Diba explained, *"I get my child used to doing what they can first, then ask questions."* Basically, even though children faced challenging tasks, parents tried hard to foster resilience and a sense of responsibility by telling them to do tasks independently before asking for help. This proactive approach demonstrates LEP parents' intention to support their children's English language learning, even though they struggle with English.

3. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND RELATIONAL IMPACT

LEP Parents expressed a sense of regret over not having learned English earlier in life, which they now saw as a barrier to effectively supporting their children's education. As Risna reflected, *"I think about it so often, why didn't I learn [English] back then."* This feeling of missed opportunity often translated into moments of strain or self-perceived inadequacy during parent-child interactions. Rahma recounted being told, *"Mom, that's wrong,"* after hearing the explanation from the teacher. Diba also said, *"My child just says, 'Oh Mom, how come you don't know English?'"* These experiences reveal how language barriers can affect not only academic support, but also emotional dynamics within the family.

4. PERCEIVED CHILD OUTCOMES

LEP Parents always observed encouraging developments in their children's learning. Even though parents and children struggled with problems in following lesson in English, they noted improvements in confidence, independence, and willingness to communicate. Rahma shared, *"Now she's more active, more confident in speaking."*

Risna also agreed that her child had growing ability to manage tasks independently, *"Because my child can already manage."*

Moreover, LEP parents expressed an appreciation for the long-term benefits of CLIL and were aware that the current challenges were part of a broader developmental process. Diba, for instance, emphasized that, *"At least my child isn't falling too far behind."* These reflections suggest that, over time, parents began to see the value of CLIL not only in terms of academic outcomes, but also in fostering important life skills in their children.

5. EXPECTATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

LEP Parents generally reported a lack of support from schools in helping them navigate their role in supporting children's English-medium learning. Risna remarked, *"I don't think there's any... There are only a few parents who can't speak English."* This statement was also supported by another participant. Diba stated simply, *"It seems like there's none."* Rahma thus expressed a desire for more structured assistance. She suggested the potential value of school-led workshops or training sessions, *"I hope the school can offer a workshop or some sort of small training for parents."*

DISCUSSION

REDEFINING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

The findings indicated that parents often struggled most with assisting their children when doing CLIL-based homework especially in subjects like mathematics and science. These subjects do not only involve knowledge, but also complex vocabulary and abstract concepts when presenting in English. However, the findings also suggested that while language barriers posed a challenge, the parents did not necessarily stop from being involved. Instead, they redefined their roles from direct academic assistance to facilitating access to external supports through translation tools, tutoring, and encouraging independence. This is in line with previous study by Aeni and Limbong, 2023) who found that Indonesian parents with LEP sought for external assistance such as language courses to enhance their children's English development. The findings highlight that parents with LEP in CLIL contexts adapted to their involvement, rather than being absent. They showed resilience and creativity in supporting their children's education. Therefore, CLIL-based schools should perceive parents with LEP as their partners to facilitate and foster learner autonomy.

Besides logistical strategies, the study also revealed psychological dimensions, such as feelings of inadequacy, guilt, regret, or worry, might influence how parents view their roles. While these emotional aspects have been explored in broader bilingual education

studies (Lo, Y. Y., & Fung, 2020), similar work remains understudied in Indonesian CLIL classrooms. The study suggested that such emotions could lead to unexpectedly positive outcomes as children could become more independent when parents were not able to provide language support. This result is consistent with the previous study showing that when parental assistance was limited, learner autonomy could be promoted (Little, 2007).

Nevertheless, one limitation of this study is the small and homogenous sample, which consisted of only three parents, all mothers. The perspectives captured may not reflect the diversity of experiences among fathers, caregivers, or parents from varying socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, reliance on self-reported data could introduce bias, as parents may overstate or understate their level of involvement or concern. Despite these limitations, the findings carried important implications for schools implementing CLIL. First, they pointed to a need for stronger school-home partnerships, especially in terms of communication and accessible support (López, F. A., & Correa, 2022). Schools could consider offering bilingual resources, workshops for parents, or regular check-ins in a language the parent understands. Moreover, parents expressed a clear willingness to grow alongside their children, as seen in those who enrolled in English classes themselves or integrated English into household routines. Supporting this motivation could have a ripple effect on both the parents' and children's learning trajectories.

CONCLUSIONS

This study discovered how parents with limited English proficiency influenced their children's academic success in CLIL programs, identified the challenges faced by LEP parents, and evaluated the effectiveness of alternative support strategies in bridging the parental support gap. Using a case study approach, this study showed that through private tutoring, translation apps, and consistent encouragement, these parents turned language barriers into learning and growth opportunities. Even with low English skills, the parents were still able to develop independence, confidence, and motivation in their children. This study also highlighted that parental involvement in CLIL contexts went beyond assisting with homework; an act of nurturing and advocacy. To this end, schools can adopt inclusive practices such as providing Bahasa Indonesia guides for complex subject content, offering foundational English or CLIL workshops, employing bilingual communication tools, and facilitating peer-support networks among parents. These efforts can bridge the gap between home and school, making learning more accessible and collaborative for all families. Future research may employ longitudinal studies, on how these interventions influence long-term academic outcomes and family engagement. Ultimately, fostering inclusion in CLIL education requires recognizing and

empowering all parents, regardless of language background, to participate meaningfully in their children's educational journeys.

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