

# Awareness of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) Among School Principals, Teachers and Parents in the Puttalam Education Zone, Sri Lanka

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## ABSTRACT

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has been adopted as the pedagogical framework for bilingual education in Sri Lanka since 2012, aiming to develop both subject knowledge and English proficiency simultaneously. However, successful implementation depends critically on stakeholder awareness. This study investigated the level of CLIL awareness among teachers, principals, and parents in the Puttalam Education Zone, Sri Lanka. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from 105 bilingual teachers, 18 principals, and 165 parents through structured questionnaires. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze awareness levels across three dimensions: conceptual, pedagogical, and policy/structural awareness. Findings revealed that teachers demonstrated high conceptual awareness ( $M=3.82$ ) but moderate pedagogical ( $M=3.65$ ) and policy/structural awareness ( $M=3.41$ ). Principals showed concerningly moderate overall awareness ( $M=2.72$ ), while parents exhibited moderate awareness ( $M=3.24$ ) despite positive attitudes toward bilingual education ( $M=3.89$ ). The study concludes that targeted professional development for principals and systematic awareness programs for parents are urgently needed to support sustainable CLIL implementation.

**Keywords:** CLIL, awareness, school community, bilingual education, Sri Lanka

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

The forces of globalization have positioned English as the global lingua franca, essential for higher education, international business, and digital communication. In response, educational systems worldwide have sought innovative approaches to enhance language competence without compromising subject learning. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) emerged as such an approach in Europe during the 1990s, offering a dual-focused pedagogical model where subject content and language are learned simultaneously (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010).

Sri Lanka introduced bilingual education in government schools in 2001 as an initiative to provide selected subjects through the medium of English. Subsequently in 2012, the Minister of Education (Ministry of Education, 2016) formally adopted Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) as pedagogical framework intended to guide bilingual education practices. The bilingual education refers to program itself, while CLIL represents Instructional approach used to support its implementation. Despite over a decade of implementation, evidence suggests that CLIL principles remain poorly understood among key stakeholders, particularly in resource-limited provincial contexts such as the Puttalam Education Zone.

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although CLIL is officially promoted within Sri Lanka's bilingual education framework, there is insufficient empirical evidence regarding the level and nature of CLIL awareness among teachers, principals, and parents. This lack of systematic knowledge may hinder effective realisation of CLIL's potential benefits and limit the impact of policy initiatives designed to strengthen bilingual education.

### 1.3 Research Objective

The primary objective of this study was to measure and compare CLIL awareness among teachers, principals, and parents in selected schools of the Puttalam Education Zone, specifically examining:

- Conceptual awareness of CLIL principles
- Pedagogical awareness of CLIL teaching strategies
- Policy/structural awareness of national guidelines and school-level implementation

### 1.4 Significance of the Study

This study provides empirical evidence that can inform teacher training programs, principal professional development, parent communication strategies, and policy decisions regarding bilingual education in Sri Lanka.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework of CLIL

CLIL is underpinned by several theoretical frameworks. The 4Cs framework (Coyle et al., 2010) conceptualises CLIL as the integration of Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture. Cummins' (1979) distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) provides another foundational concept, highlighting that academic language development requires explicit support. CLIL aims to accelerate CALP development by engaging learners in authentic academic tasks within subject areas.

### 2.2 Teacher Awareness of CLIL

Research indicates that teacher awareness of CLIL principles is fundamental to successful implementation. However, studies consistently show that teachers often confuse CLIL with simple English Medium Instruction (EMI) without fully understanding its integrated nature (Macaro et al., 2018). In Sri Lanka, Wijesundera (2021) found that although teachers are aware of bilingual policy, their understanding of CLIL as a method for achieving dual content and language outcomes remains limited.

### 2.3 Principal Leadership in CLIL

School principals provide strategic leadership that determines whether CLIL initiatives succeed or fail (Fullan, 2014). Principals need professional awareness of CLIL's dual nature, pedagogical approaches, and long-term benefits. However, Suraweera (2016) noted that many Sri Lankan principals lack formal training in CLIL, limiting their ability to provide informed guidance to teachers.

### 2.4 Parental Perceptions of Bilingual Education

Parental attitudes significantly influence educational reforms. While parents generally support English-medium education due to perceived employment benefits, concerns about cognitive overload and erosion of national languages persist (Canagarajah, 2005). Research Gap: Few studies in Sri Lanka have systematically investigated CLIL awareness across multiple stakeholder groups within the same education zone.

## METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design using survey methodology. The design was appropriate for measuring awareness levels across a relatively large sample and for comparing awareness across different stakeholder groups.

### 3.2 Study Setting and Population

The study was conducted in the Puttalam Education Zone, Sri Lanka. The target population comprised all bilingual teachers teaching Grades 6-9, principals of schools offering bilingual education, and parents of students enrolled in bilingual classes.

### 3.3 Sample

The study was conducted in 18 schools offering bilingual education within the Puttalam education zone. The school represented the entire population of bilingual schools in Puttalam Education Zone. All principals of the selected schools participate in the study (n=18), representing a census of principals within the selected bilingual schools. In addition, 105 bilingual subject teachers who teach from Grade 6-9 and 165 parents of the students enrolled in bilingual classes were purposively selected. Teachers represented the subject areas including Science, Mathematics, Civic Education, Geography, Health, and ICT. Participants were drawn from all selected schools to ensure representation of key stakeholder groups involved in CLIL implementation.

### 3.4 Instruments

Three structured questionnaires were developed for teachers, principals, and parents respectively. Items measured:

- Conceptual awareness (understanding of CLIL principles and dual focus)
- Pedagogical awareness (knowledge of CLIL teaching strategies and scaffolding)
- Policy/structural awareness (familiarity with national guidelines and school policies)

All items used a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree).

### 3.5 Validation

Content validity was ensured through expert review by academics specializing in bilingual education. Face validity was established through pilot testing with 15 teachers, 3 principals, and 20 parents from non-participating schools, leading to minor wording adjustments. The reliability of the instruments was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficients. The reliability coefficients for the teacher, principal, and parent questionnaires were examined to ensure acceptable levels of internal consistency.

### 3.6 Data Collection and Analysis

Questionnaires were administered online to teachers via Google Forms and physically to parents through schools. Principal questionnaires were distributed in person. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) using SPSS software.

Interpretation of the mean scores 1.00-2.49 = Low awareness, 2.50 -3.49 = Moderate awareness, 3.50- 5.00 = High awareness. This classification was applied throughout the research study when interpreting awareness level across stakeholder groups.

To facilitate consistent interpretation of awareness levels, the following scales was adopted for mean score analysis.

### 3.7 Ethical Considerations

Approval was obtained from the Zonal Education Office and participating school. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study. To minimize social desirability bias, participants were assured that their responses would remain anonymous, participation was voluntary, and questionnaire items were phrased in a neutral manner.

## RESULTS

### 4.1 Teacher Awareness of CLIL

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for teacher CLIL awareness across three dimensions.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Teacher CLIL Awareness (n=105)**

Awareness Dimension	Minimum	Maximum	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Conceptual awareness	2.20	4.90	3.82	0.56
Pedagogical awareness	2.00	4.80	3.65	0.60
Policy/structural awareness	1.80	4.70	3.41	0.63
<b>Overall CLIL awareness</b>	<b>2.30</b>	<b>4.70</b>	<b>3.63</b>	<b>0.52</b>

Teachers demonstrated highest conceptual awareness (M=3.82), indicating good understanding of CLIL as a dual-focused approach integrating content and language. Pedagogical awareness was slightly lower (M=3.65), suggesting less confidence in implementing CLIL teaching strategies. Policy/structural awareness was lowest (M=3.41), revealing limited knowledge of national guidelines and school-level implementation frameworks.

Table 2 presents selected item-level responses.

**Table 2: Selected Teacher Responses to CLIL Awareness Items (n=105)**

Statement (Summarised)	Mean	SD
I can clearly explain the concept of CLIL to a colleague	3.88	0.81
CLIL lessons should always include both content and language objectives	4.02	0.74
I am familiar with the 4Cs framework (Content, Communication, Cognition, Culture)	3.59	0.93
I know how to plan tasks that support both subject and language learning	3.61	0.86
I understand national guidelines regarding bilingual/CLIL programmes	3.37	0.94

The highest agreement (M=4.02) was for the dual nature of content and language objectives, confirming that teachers understand the basic tenet of CLIL. However, familiarity with the 4Cs framework (M=3.59) and knowledge of national guidelines (M=3.37) were notably lower.

### 4.2 Principal Awareness of CLIL

Table 3 presents principal CLIL awareness.

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Principal CLIL Awareness (n=18)**

Awareness Dimension	Minimum	Maximum	Mean (M)	SD
Conceptual awareness	1.80	3.50	2.75	0.50
Pedagogical awareness	1.60	3.20	2.60	0.45
Policy/structural awareness	1.70	3.60	2.80	0.55
<b>Overall CLIL awareness</b>	<b>1.70</b>	<b>3.40</b>	<b>2.72</b>	<b>0.48</b>

Principal awareness was concerningly low across all dimensions. Conceptual awareness (M=2.75) indicated principals lack confidence in understanding CLIL principles. Pedagogical awareness was lowest (M=2.60), suggesting principals are unfamiliar with classroom strategies, integration techniques, and scaffolding approaches. Even policy/structural awareness (M=2.80), the highest dimension, remained below the neutral midpoint.

Table 4 presents selected principal responses.

**Table 4: Selected Principal Responses to CLIL Awareness Items (n=18)**

Statement (Summarised)	Mean	SD
I understand the key principles that distinguish CLIL from simple EMI	2.50	0.55
I am familiar with national guidelines on bilingual/CLIL implementation	2.60	0.60
I can explain to teachers how CLIL should be reflected in lesson planning	2.40	0.50
Our school has a clear policy or plan for CLIL/bilingual education	2.30	0.65

Principals showed particularly low ability to explain CLIL lesson planning to teachers (M=2.40), and most reported their schools lack clear CLIL policies (M=2.30).

### 4.3 Parent Awareness of and Attitudes toward CLIL

Table 5 presents parent awareness and attitude data.

**Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Parent CLIL/Bilingual Awareness and Attitudes (n=165)**

Dimension	Minimum	Maximum	Mean (M)	SD
CLIL/bilingual awareness	1.80	4.60	3.24	0.62
Attitudes towards CLIL	2.30	4.90	3.89	0.58

Parents reported moderate awareness levels (M=3.24), indicating some understanding of bilingual/CLIL programmes but incomplete grasp of pedagogical features. However, attitudes were strongly positive (M=3.89), suggesting parents support English-medium education primarily for perceived future benefits.

Table 6 presents selected parent responses.

**Table 6: Selected Parent Responses to Awareness and Attitude Items (n=165)**

Statement (Summarised)	Mean	SD
I understand why some subjects are taught through English at this school	3.36	0.83
I know that bilingual/CLIL aims to develop both subject knowledge and English	3.18	0.87
I can explain the main features of the bilingual/CLIL programme to others	3.07	0.90
I believe bilingual/CLIL will improve my child's English proficiency	4.02	0.79
I believe bilingual/CLIL will improve my child's future opportunities	4.08	0.76
I worry that learning subjects through English may be too difficult	3.45	0.92

Parents showed strongest agreement with statements about benefits for English proficiency (M=4.02) and future opportunities (M=4.08). However, their ability to articulate CLIL aims was limited (M=3.07 for explaining programme features). Moderate concern about difficulty (M=3.45) indicates mixed support and anxiety.

## DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Teacher Awareness

Teachers demonstrated moderate to high conceptual awareness (M=3.82) but lower pedagogical (M=3.65) and policy awareness (M=3.41). This pattern aligns with Wijesundera (2021), who found that Sri Lankan teachers understand bilingual policy but lack deep pedagogical knowledge for CLIL implementation. The gap between

conceptual and pedagogical awareness suggests that while teachers know *what* CLIL is, they remain uncertain about *how* to implement it effectively.

The moderate policy/structural awareness (M=3.41) is particularly concerning because teachers cannot align their practice with national guidelines without this knowledge. This finding supports Pérez-Cañado's (2012) observation that CLIL training often emphasises theory over practical and policy dimensions.

### 5.2 Principal Awareness

The finding of sampled principal CLIL awareness was moderate across all dimensions (overall M=2.72) represents a critical challenge. Principals are responsible for resource allocation, teacher deployment, professional development planning, and parent communication. Without adequate CLIL awareness, they cannot perform these leadership functions effectively.

This result echoes Suraweera (2016), who noted that Sri Lankan principals often lack formal CLIL training. However, the current study reveals that the problem is more severe than previously documented, with principals scoring below the neutral midpoint even on conceptual awareness. This suggests that existing awareness programs have been insufficient or have not reached school leaders.

### 5.3 Parent Awareness and Attitudes

Parents' moderate awareness (M=3.24) combined with strongly positive attitudes (M=3.89) presents both an opportunity and a challenge. The positive attitudes indicate a supportive environment that schools can leverage. However, limited awareness may lead to unrealistic expectations or misunderstandings about CLIL goals.

The finding that parents worry about difficulty (M=3.45) is consistent with Canagarajah (2005), who documented parental concerns about English-medium education eroding national languages. Schools need systematic parent communication programs to address these concerns and build accurate understanding of CLIL.

### 5.4 Comparative Analysis Across Stakeholders

Table 7 illustrates the comparison of CLIL awareness across stakeholder groups.

**Table 7: Comparison of CLIL Awareness Across Stakeholder Groups**

Stakeholder	Conceptual	Pedagogical	Policy/Structural	Overall
Teachers	3.82	3.65	3.41	3.63
Principals	2.75	2.60	2.80	2.72
Parents	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.24

Teachers demonstrated highest overall awareness, followed by parents, with principals showing the lowest awareness. This inverted pattern—where school leaders are less aware than teachers—is problematic because leadership awareness is essential for creating supportive implementation environments (Fullan, 2014).

### 5.5 Implications

**For Practice:** Professional development programs must target principals specifically, addressing conceptual, pedagogical, and policy dimensions of CLIL. Parent awareness campaigns should leverage existing positive attitudes while building accurate understanding of CLIL goals and expectations.

**For Policy:** The Ministry of Education should mandate CLIL awareness training for all principals of bilingual schools and establish minimum awareness standards. Parent communication guidelines should be developed to help schools explain CLIL programmes effectively.

**For Theory:** This study extends CLIL literature into the under-researched South Asian context and demonstrates the importance of multi-stakeholder awareness as a systemic factor in CLIL implementation.

## CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Summary of Key Findings

This study investigated CLIL awareness among teachers, principals, and parents in the Puttalam Education Zone, Sri Lanka. Three main findings emerged:

First, teachers demonstrated moderate to high conceptual awareness ( $M=3.82$ ) but lower pedagogical ( $M=3.65$ ) and policy/structural awareness ( $M=3.41$ ). While teachers understand the dual-focused nature of CLIL, they lack confidence in implementing CLIL strategies and knowledge of national guidelines.

Second, principals showed concerningly low awareness across all dimensions (overall  $M=2.72$ ), with particularly poor understanding of CLIL pedagogy ( $M=2.60$ ) and limited ability to guide teachers on CLIL lesson planning ( $M=2.40$ ).

Third, parents exhibited moderate awareness ( $M=3.24$ ) but strongly positive attitudes ( $M=3.89$ ), indicating support for bilingual education despite incomplete understanding of CLIL principles.

### 6.2 Main Conclusions

The study concludes that CLIL awareness among the school community in Puttalam Education Zone is uneven and insufficient for effective implementation. The most critical gap is among principals, whose low awareness threatens to undermine whole-school CLIL efforts. Teachers require pedagogical and policy-focused professional development. Parents need systematic awareness programmes to build accurate understanding while leveraging their existing positive attitudes.

### 6.3 Recommendations

**For teacher professional development:** Design training programs that move beyond conceptual introduction to focus on practical classroom strategies, lesson planning with dual objectives, and interpretation of national guidelines.

**For principal development:** Establish mandatory CLIL awareness workshops for principals, including school-level planning, teacher observation protocols, and resource allocation for bilingual programmes.

**For parent communication:** Develop parent information sessions and take-home materials explaining CLIL goals, addressing common concerns about difficulty and language balance, and suggesting home support strategies.

### 6.4 Limitations

This study has several limitations. It focused on one education zone, limiting generalisability to other regions. Data relied on self-report questionnaires, which may be subject to social desirability bias. The cross-sectional design captures awareness at one time point only. Future research should include classroom observations, longitudinal designs, and comparative studies across multiple zones.

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