



CLIL Readiness in Emerging Bilingual and Multilingual Education Settings: System-Level Considerations for Schools and Policymakers

Author Name and Affiliation

Aynur Ismayilli Karakoç, Partnership for Education, Cambridge University Press & Assessment. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5852-8359>

Corresponding Author Email

aynur.karakoc@cambridge.org

Abstract

While CLIL (content and language integrated learning) has been widely discussed from a pedagogical perspective, less attention has been given to the organisational and system-level conditions that support successful implementation. Drawing on both CLIL literature and practical experiences working with educators, school leaders, and policymakers across a range of educational contexts, this article explores six key readiness considerations for schools implementing or refining CLIL programmes. These considerations are organised into three broad areas: strategic readiness, instructional readiness, and equity and sustainability readiness. Rather than presenting a universal model, the article argues that CLIL readiness is context-dependent and should be understood as an ongoing institutional commitment to creating the conditions in which both content and language learning can flourish.

Keywords

1. CLIL implementation
2. School readiness
3. Multilingual education
4. System-level planning
5. Language–content integration

AI Declaration

Linguistic refinement was partially supported by an AI tool in the preparation of this blog post.

**Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Mario Velazquez, the editor, for the constructive guidance and support provided throughout the review process. I am also grateful to the reviewers, Kris Nordgaard Steele and Michela Gronchi, for their thoughtful feedback and valuable suggestions, which helped strengthen the blog article.



CLIL Readiness in Emerging Bilingual and Multilingual Education Settings:

System-Level Considerations for Schools and Policymakers

As multilingual education gains momentum globally, schools face increasing pressure to provide language learning experiences that are meaningful and aligned with real-world communication needs. CLIL (content and language integrated learning) has emerged as a response to this demand by integrating language and subject learning, positioning language as a vehicle for learning rather than an isolated subject (Coyle, 2007). Through appropriate linguistic support, learners engage with curriculum content while simultaneously developing communicative competence. Having worked on CLIL initiatives within established European contexts and, more recently, with educators and school leaders across a range of emerging bilingual and multilingual education settings, I have observed a recurring challenge. While literature on CLIL pedagogy is extensive, schools that are exploring CLIL often seek guidance on broader questions of organisational readiness, implementation planning, and system-level decision-making. The reflections presented in this article are therefore informed not only by the literature but also by my own practical experience and conversations with stakeholders across different regions who are adapting CLIL-inspired approaches to their own contexts.

Literature on CLIL pedagogy often lacks guidance on broader questions of organisational readiness, implementation planning, and system-level decision-making. The reflections in this article are informed by literature but also by practical experience and conversations with stakeholders across different regions who are adapting CLIL-inspired approaches to their own contexts.

Why CLIL?

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction often treats language as the object of study. CLIL, by contrast, treats language as the medium through which knowledge is constructed. This provides more naturalistic learning contexts, expanding vocabulary and enhancing language acquisition through meaningful engagement with subject content. CLIL is not viewed uniformly across the literature; it has been conceptualised diversely as a pedagogical approach, a policy initiative, and a mechanism for educational internationalisation. One influential approach is Coyle's 4Cs Framework (Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture), which has provided a widely recognised pedagogical foundation for CLIL since its introduction (2007). While these 4Cs underpin effective classroom practices, scholars have also highlighted the context-dependent nature of CLIL implementation and cautioned against assuming uniform outcomes or universally applicable models across settings (Cenoz et al., 2014).

CLIL also has a long history in many European education systems and has informed a substantial body of research and practice. Beyond Europe, CLIL-inspired programmes have emerged across different regions such as Asia and South America, often motivated by internationalisation agendas, multilingual education policies, or efforts to strengthen English-medium learning opportunities. However, these implementations often differ from European models in response to local language ecologies, curriculum requirements, teacher



preparation pathways, resource availability, and broader educational priorities. As a result, CLIL may take different forms and serve different purposes across contexts. The discussion that follows focuses primarily on educational contexts where bilingual and multilingual programmes are still emerging or developing, rather than on long-established European CLIL systems.

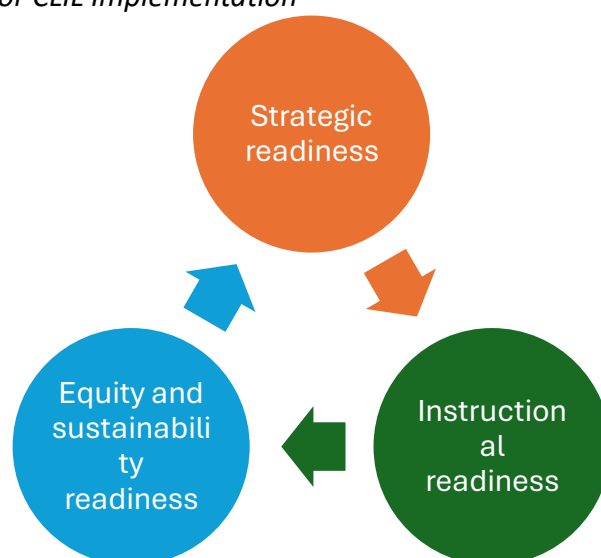
Consequently, there is no single pathway to CLIL implementation. Schools and education systems may adopt and adapt CLIL according to their own needs, capacities, and strategic objectives. Despite these various approaches, successful implementation requires organisational and institutional conditions that extend beyond classroom pedagogy (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010). This blog therefore focuses on key readiness considerations that education leaders, policymakers, and schools may wish to consider when implementing or refining CLIL programmes.

Key System-Level Considerations for School Readiness

Successful and sustainable CLIL implementation often depends on a set of interconnected enabling conditions. Drawing on practical experience and stakeholder engagement across different contexts, six recurring areas emerged as particularly important when schools and education systems were considering CLIL implementation. For the purposes of this discussion, these can be grouped into three broad areas of readiness: strategic readiness, instructional readiness, and equity and sustainability readiness, shown in Figure 1. The six considerations are organised around these three areas and are intended to help schools reflect on their preparedness for CLIL in ways that are responsive to their own educational needs and priorities. Several considerations cut across categories; for example, teacher development contributes to both instructional quality and long-term sustainability. These readiness considerations are only some of the factors that may influence successful CLIL implementation and should be interpreted in relation to local contexts, priorities, and educational goals.

Figure 1

School Readiness for CLIL Implementation





Strategic Readiness

Determining the Type of CLIL

Schools should first decide which CLIL model aligns with their resources, staffing, and long-term vision. In my experience, this is often one of the earliest decisions schools face when adopting CLIL-inspired approaches. For instance, Knight (2022) suggests soft and hard CLIL models, where some subject course objectives are reinforced, while hard CLIL places greater emphasis on subject content alongside language development. Many schools begin with soft CLIL as a low-risk pilot before progressing to harder forms as staff confidence and institutional capacity grow.

Selecting CLIL Subjects and Respecting Cultural Sensitivities

Schools and policymakers should also consider which subjects are appropriate for CLIL instruction. School leaders frequently highlight subject selection as one of the more sensitive decisions during implementation. Cultural considerations play an important role: some may prefer national history, literature, or values-based subjects to be taught in the first language. Schools and policymakers should consult parents, align decisions with local curriculum frameworks, and ensure that chosen subjects do not conflict with cultural expectations. Practical factors also matter; subjects requiring heavy technical vocabulary may initially pose challenges. Selection should therefore balance feasibility, cultural appropriateness, and long-term educational goals.

Instructional Readiness

Resources and Materials

High-quality resources are essential for meaningful CLIL learning (Mehisto et al., 2008). Schools should evaluate whether they will adopt bilingual textbooks, CLIL-specific textbooks, or teacher-created materials. Visual supports, graphic organisers, and digital resources are particularly valuable for reducing cognitive load.

Supporting Students' Language Development While Learning the Subject

CLIL implementation requires deliberate planning for ongoing language development. Mechanisms should be established for supporting language progress, such as CEFR-aligned tools and formative assessment practices. These assessments should provide meaningful feedback rather than penalise students for incomplete language proficiency. Additional support classes, language workshops, or co-teaching models with language and subject teachers can help bridge gaps and enable learners to access both content and language effectively.



Supporting Teachers

Successful CLIL requires evaluating teachers' capacity and providing ongoing support (Pavón Vázquez & Ellison, 2018). Across multiple contexts, concerns about teacher capacity and language proficiency consistently emerge as implementation challenges. While teachers require sufficient language proficiency to model functional communicative language, proficiency should not become a gatekeeping criterion that excludes otherwise capable educators. Structures should be created to encourage joint lesson planning, shared resource development, and ongoing dialogue between EFL and subject teachers, as collaborative planning and co-teaching have been shown to strengthen CLIL implementation and student learning outcomes (Bejerano et al., 2025).

Equity and Sustainability Readiness

Promoting Equity and Supporting Vulnerable Learners

CLIL programmes must proactively address the needs of disadvantaged students, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, learners with limited parental involvement, and pupils with special education needs and disabilities (Llinares & Cross, 2023). System-level planning should include differentiated materials, targeted language support, and additional scaffolding. Without deliberate equity strategies, CLIL risks widening existing achievement gaps. Therefore, equitable access must be built into the programme from the outset, not as an afterthought.

Closing Thoughts

CLIL readiness should not be viewed as a procedural checklist completed before implementation begins. Rather, it represents an ongoing institutional commitment to creating the conditions in which both content and language learning can flourish. The six considerations discussed here represent only some of the factors that may influence successful CLIL implementation. Schools that invest time in establishing these conditions are more likely to achieve equitable and sustainable outcomes, while those that adopt CLIL without sufficient preparation may struggle to realise its intended benefits.



References

- Bejerano, M. J., Sakhiyeva, A., Segizbayeva, B., & Maksutova, Z. (2025). *Joint planning of subject and language teachers to implement CLIL (content and language integrated learning) in chemistry lessons*. Camtree Research Lesson Study Report. <https://doi.org/10.71779/303>
- Cenoz, J., Genesee, F., & Gorter, D. (2014). Critical analysis of CLIL: Taking stock and looking forward. *Applied Linguistics*, 35(3), 243–262. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amt011>
- Coyle, D. (2007) Content and Language Integrated Learning: Towards a connected research agenda for CLIL pedagogies. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 10(5), 543–562. <https://doi.org/10.2167/beb459.0>
- Coyle, D., Hood, P., & Marsh, D. (2010). *CLIL: Content and language integrated learning*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009024549>
- Knight, B. (2022). A research-based approach to professional development for English as a Medium of Learning teaching staff. In P. Watkins (Ed.), *The Better Learning Research Review* (pp. 21-28). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009152167.005>
- Llinares, A., & Cross, M. (2023). New challenges for CLIL. *AILA Review*, 35(2), 169–179. <https://doi.org/10.1075/aila.00054.edi>
- Mehisto, P., Marsh, D., & Frigols, M. J. (2008). *Uncovering CLIL: Content and language integrated learning in bilingual and multilingual education*. Macmillan.
- Pavón Vázquez, V., & Ellison, M. (2018). Examining teacher roles and competences in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). *Linguarum Arena*, 4, 65–78. <https://ojs.lettras.up.pt/index.php/LinguarumArena/article/view/3967>