

CLIL and its potential application in primary English classes in an Islamic school

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Abstract

This study explored the emergence of soft Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) practices in English classrooms at an Islamic primary school in Indonesia. While CLIL is widely implemented in an international context, its application in local schools remains limited and often unintentional. This research aimed to examine how English teachers integrate the principles of content, language, and cultural values into their classroom practices, through a qualitative study involving classroom observations, interviews and document analysis. The findings reveal that teachers frequently integrated daily-life themes and Islamic cultural values into English instruction while employing communicative strategies to support language learning. However, cognitive engagement and cross-curricular integration remained limited due to limited instructional time and the absence of a formal CLIL approach. Despite these challenges, the findings suggest that soft CLIL principles can emerge naturally in Islamic primary school contexts. This study contributes to the growing literature on CLIL in Indonesian TEYL by providing empirical evidence of emerging soft CLIL practices and highlighting contextual considerations that may inform teacher professional development and future CLIL implementation in similar EFL primary education settings.

Keywords: CLIL; English for young learners; English teaching; Islamic school.

INTRODUCTION

English for Young Learners (EYL) has become an important component of primary education in Indonesia, responding to increasing societal demands for early English proficiency. EYL aims to introduce basic English skills to children during their formative years, with an emphasis on creating a positive attitude toward language learning through fun, interactive, and age-appropriate activities (Pinter, 2011). While English was not a compulsory subject in Indonesia's primary school curriculum before the enactment of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Regulation No. 12 of 2024, many schools, including Islamic primary schools, continued to offer English as a local content subject to respond to the growing demand for early English education (Zein, 2017; Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2024).

In response to the growing demand for more effective English teaching strategies for young learners, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

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has emerged as one approach that has gained international recognition for EYL. It has been widely recognized as a promising bilingual education model across Europe and beyond, with studies showing extensive positive learning impacts (Goris et al., 2019). Recent interest has also expanded to younger learners (Papaja, 2023), including in Islamic educational contexts that aim to combine language, content, and cultural values (Khoiriyah, 2021). CLIL allows learners to acquire a second language while simultaneously learning content from other subjects, such as science or mathematics (Coyle et al., 2010; Hidalgo & Ortega-Sánchez, 2023).

The CLIL approach is underpinned by the 4Cs framework, comprising Content (subject knowledge), Communication (language use), Cognition (thinking skills), and Culture (intercultural awareness), which together guide lesson planning and classroom interaction (Coyle et al., 2010). In practice, teachers who apply CLIL are experts in their own disciplines and also proficient speakers of the target language (Christison & Murray, 2021). CLIL is rooted in the belief that language is best learned when it is used for meaningful communication and linked to real-world content. It supports motivation and deeper learning by integrating meaningful topics into language instruction.

CLIL can be implemented in two broad ways: soft CLIL and hard CLIL. The former is language-driven and typically led by language teachers, incorporating cross-curricular themes into their lessons (Ellison, 2019). In contrast, the latter is content-driven and usually involves teaching academic subjects such as science or mathematics in English (Setyaningrum & Purwati, 2020; Ellison, 2019).

In primary classrooms, CLIL is often implemented in a 'soft' form, in which language instruction incorporates themes from other subjects, rather than a 'hard' form, in which academic subjects are taught through the target language. Soft CLIL is particularly effective for young learners because it provides meaningful learning contexts, enhances motivation through authentic content, and supports both language acquisition and cognitive development by connecting language learning with familiar topics and classroom experiences (Ellison, 2019).

In TEYL classrooms, soft CLIL is typically characterized by the integration of age-appropriate themes, meaningful communication, contextualized vocabulary learning, and interactive activities that connect language learning with learners' everyday experiences rather than formal subject instruction (Ellison, 2019; Coyle et al., 2023). Such an approach enables EYL teachers to promote language development through familiar contexts without requiring extensive curriculum restructuring or subject-specific expertise, making it particularly suitable for primary school settings.

These characteristics are consistent with the principles of English for Young Learners (EYL) pedagogy, which emphasizes meaningful and contextualized learning, active participation, and interaction through activities appropriate to children's developmental stages (Pinter, 2011). Such principles encourage teachers to create engaging learning experiences that support children's language, cognitive, and social development.

In the Indonesian context, the adoption of CLIL in EYL settings remains limited and largely informal, with most teachers incorporating CLIL principles implicitly rather than through formally planned CLIL programs (Setyaningrum & Purwati 2020; Khoiriyah, 2021; Kurniawati & Atmojo, 2025). Among these studies, Setyaningrum and Purwati (2020) found that thematic learning in primary schools aligns naturally with CLIL, even though there is a lack of formal training and structured implementation. This gap presents both a challenge and an opportunity for improving the quality of English instruction in early education.

Several studies have explored the implementation of CLIL in primary education in Indonesia. Setyaningrum and Khoiriyah (2022) revealed that teachers in public schools were already applying CLIL principles such as scaffolding, active learning, and thematic integration, although often unknowingly. Similarly, Setyaningrum and Purwati (2020) found that teachers developed materials based on school themes and used content from subjects like science and religion in their English teaching. However, they highlighted gaps in training and institutional support.

Lestari and Setiyawan (2020) emphasized the influence of global English and technology on EYL, noting that CLIL could respond well to these changes but required stronger teacher preparation. Setyaningrum, Setiawan and Anam (2022) further proposed translanguaging as a key scaffold in CLIL classes to help young learners navigate content and language, especially in remote learning contexts. Furthermore, Khoiriyah et al. (2024) demonstrated success in a 10-week CLIL enrichment program in an Islamic school, integrating Islamic themes into English through science-based content. Their work supports the feasibility of CLIL in religious settings yet was conducted as a short-term intervention rather than regular classroom practice.

Despite these contributions, most existing studies were conducted in public or general private schools. Few studies have specifically examined CLIL practices in Islamic state schools (*madrasah*), particularly those with no formal CLIL training or policy. Moreover, little has been done to capture the perspectives of school leaders alongside teachers in such environments. This study fills that gap by exploring how English is taught, particularly the emergence of soft CLIL practices from both teaching and institutional perspectives at an Islamic primary school.

Islamic primary schools, including *madrasah* such as MIN (*Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri*) or state Islamic primary schools, offer a distinct context for exploring the integration of CLIL. These schools combine the national curriculum with Islamic education. However, research specifically focusing on CLIL in Islamic school settings remains scarce, and the degree to which these practices align with CLIL is poorly understood.

Given the limited formal implementation of CLIL and the unique characteristics of Islamic primary schools, this study aimed to explore how English is taught at one State Islamic Primary School in Mataram and the extent to which CLIL-like practices are emerging. By examining the perspectives of English teachers and the school leader and analyzing teaching documents, this

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study contributes to the growing literature on CLIL in Indonesian TEYL by providing empirical evidence of emerging soft CLIL practices in an Islamic primary school and highlighting contextual considerations that may inform teacher professional development and future CLIL implementation. This study addresses the following research questions:

1. How are CLIL principles currently reflected in English teaching practices at an Islamic primary school?
2. What potential do these emerging CLIL practices have for supporting English teaching in the school context?

This study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the field of Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL). It contributes to the growing literature on CLIL in Indonesia by providing insights into emerging soft CLIL practices in an Islamic primary school context, while offering practical references for English teachers, school leaders, and policymakers in supporting teacher professional development and future CLIL implementation.

METHOD**Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative case study to explore English teaching practices and the perceptions of two English teachers and a school leader regarding the emergence of soft CLIL practices in an Islamic primary school in Mataram. A qualitative case study was considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth exploration of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context through multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, this design was suitable for identifying current teaching practices, exploring the presence of CLIL principles, and understanding the school's potential for adopting a more structured CLIL approach in the future.

Subject**Research Setting**

The study was conducted at one State Islamic Primary School (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri) in the urban area of Mataram, Indonesia. The school was purposively selected because it offers English as a local content subject, implements the Merdeka Curriculum, and was accessible and willing to participate. These characteristics made it an appropriate setting for exploring the emergence of soft CLIL practices in a real-life educational context (Yin, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participants

Participants were selected through purposive sampling because they were directly involved in English teaching and curriculum implementation relevant to the study. The participants comprised two English teachers and one school principal responsible for curriculum and instructional development. To maintain participants' confidentiality, the two teachers were identified using the codes Teacher 1 (T1) and Teacher 2 (T2), while the school principal is referred to by their institutional role throughout the study. Both teachers hold bachelor's degrees in English Education (S.Pd.), have approximately 5–15 years of teaching experience, and have participated in various professional development activities, including MGMP, PPG, educational seminars, and MOOCs organized

by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The school principal holds a master's degree in Education (M.Pd.), has approximately 25 years of teaching experience and five years of leadership experience, providing an institutional perspective on English language teaching and curriculum implementation.

Data Collection Procedures and Instruments

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with two English teachers and the school principal, along with document analysis. The data collection was conducted in several stages. First, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the school. Next, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the English teachers and the school principal. Following the interviews, relevant teaching documents, particularly lesson plans, were collected and analyzed using the 4Cs framework.

One semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant, lasting approximately 15–30 minutes. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they provide flexibility for participants to express their experiences and perceptions while allowing the researcher to explore issues relevant to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To explore teaching practices and perceptions in line with CLIL, this study applied Coyle et al. (2010) 4Cs Framework, which includes: Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture as the theoretical lens. The interview questions and document analysis were guided by this framework to identify soft CLIL features.

In the semi-structured interviews, participants were interviewed to explore the application of CLIL based on the 4Cs: Content (what topics are usually taught in the English lessons, and whether the topics include those from other subjects); Communication (what kinds of English language systems (grammar, or vocabulary) and skills (listening, speaking, reading, or writing) are emphasized during the lessons); Cognition (how to encourage students to think critically or understand concepts in English); and Culture (whether or not there are any cultural or religious themes included in teaching English). The interviews with the English teachers were conducted primarily in Bahasa Indonesia with occasional use of English, whereas the interview with the school principal was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated into English before analysis.

The interview with the school principal focused on institutional policy, curriculum goals, and readiness for formal adoption of CLIL. The topics include the role of English at the school, whether there are efforts to connect English with other subjects or themes, and how open the school is adopting innovative teaching approaches like CLIL. Additional questions address awareness of CLIL, challenges faced, and openness to innovation.

The analysis of the teaching document (Lesson plans) was also conducted using a rubric based on the 4Cs framework, comprising Content (the presence of cross-disciplinary topics), Communication (the plan to target particular language focus), Cognition (tasks that promote problem-solving or reasoning, and Culture (teaching materials that include Islamic, local, or intercultural values).

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Data analysis

The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis (TA) following Braun and Clarke (2006) theory, because it is suitable for analyzing both large and small datasets, including those generated from qualitative case study research (Braun & Clarke, 2017). This approach allowed the identification of recurring themes related to English teaching practices, teacher perceptions, CLIL features, and institutional support. Codes were initially derived inductively from the data, then mapped onto the 4Cs framework (Coyle et al., 2010).

The lesson plans were analyzed to identify the presence or absence of CLIL elements, particularly how content, communication, cognition, and culture were represented. Attention was given to whether English lessons incorporated cross-subject content, promoted communicative language use, encouraged cognitive engagement, and included cultural or Islamic themes. This analysis aimed to complement and validate the interview findings.

To ensure the validity of the findings, data triangulation was employed. Findings from interviews with teachers and the school principal were cross-referenced with document analysis. This allowed for comparison between reported practices and actual lesson planning, helping to confirm consistency and identify gaps between perceptions and implementation.

Finally, the findings were interpreted concerning established theories of CLIL (Coyle et al., 2010) and EYL pedagogy (Pinter, 2011). Implications were drawn for how CLIL might be further developed in Islamic primary school contexts, especially in low-resource or non-formal CLIL environments. Recommendations were made for enhancing teacher training, resource development, and curriculum integration to support sustainable CLIL practices.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section aims to address two research questions: (1) how CLIL principles are currently practiced in English teaching at an Islamic primary school, and (2) what potential CLIL holds for enhancing English instruction in this context. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis guided by Coyle et al., (2010) 4Cs Framework. Four themes: Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture emerged from the interview and document analysis and are presented in the following sections. The findings and discussions are presented and interpreted in light of relevant theories and previous research to provide a comprehensive understanding of soft CLIL implementation and its pedagogical implications.

Findings**Current Practices of English Teaching and Learning in an Islamic Primary School**

The teaching of English at the school is primarily conducted through traditional EYL methods with an emphasis on vocabulary, repetition, and oral communication. Both teachers reported that instruction follows the standard national curriculum with limited time allocation (one session per week), which reflects the status of English as a local content subject. Guided by Coyle et al.'s (2010) 4C Framework, the findings revealed the following:

Content

The analysis revealed that the Content dimension was reflected through the integration of contextual and familiar topics into English lessons, although the extent of content integration varied between teachers. While T1 incorporated students' everyday experiences into classroom activities, T2 relied primarily on textbook-based instruction with limited cross-curricular integration.

Teacher 1 (T1) reported efforts to enhance learning by integrating local themes and contextual knowledge, particularly relating to students' everyday lives (e.g., local transportation types): *"...I even innovate with existing sources and in accordance with the facts in the field around them, for example, transportation in the form of trains is not available here, so I only provide visuals and add transportation that is around."*

In contrast, Teacher 2 (T2) adheres more strictly to the textbook and does not integrate cross-curricular content, indicating a lack of systematic application of content integration: *"The topics taught are in accordance with the books and subjects (English), not related to other subjects..."*

Communication

The Communication dimension emerged as the strongest component of soft CLIL practices. Both teachers consistently emphasized vocabulary development and speaking activities, indicating that oral communication was the primary focus of English instruction.

Regarding skill development, both teachers prioritize vocabulary acquisition and speaking skills. They highlighted the use of repetition and simple vocabulary to support student comprehension: *"...we emphasize speaking and vocabulary..."* (T1) and *"...vocabulary and speaking are emphasized more with repetition..."* (T2)

Cognition

The Cognition dimension showed limited evidence of CLIL implementation. Although teachers attempted to stimulate students' curiosity through visual media and classroom interaction, opportunities for higher-order thinking were rarely observed. Encouraging students' critical thinking is challenging for both teachers. They reported: *"By providing pictures or other visual media... but however their critical levels are also different..."* (T1) and *"...I don't know how to stimulate them to be academically critical..."* (T2).

Culture

The Culture dimension was consistently reflected in classroom practices through the integration of local contexts and Islamic values into English teaching. Both teachers incorporated culturally relevant examples and religious values to make learning more meaningful for students.

Both teachers incorporated culturally appropriate content into their English teaching. T1 explained: *"...some of the transportation in the book I also added with transportation that is available in our context such as regional transportation...the term P2RA must be integrated...both the culture and religion we try to be in line."* T2 also reported: *"...it can be related to religion and culture, some vocabulary related to English such as prayer, mosque etc are still taught."*

Beyond classroom instruction, the school principal described various extracurricular and co-curricular activities that support the learning of English

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in that school, such as storytelling, expression days, and bilingual “*reporter cilik*” programs.

“...For co-curricular: as a habit and supporting activities, there are storytelling, expression day, literacy day, which lead children to participate in the activities of young reporters in two languages, collaborating with media offices such as RRI and TVRI NTB.” (The school principal)

These practices support what Coyle et al. (2010) refer to as “authentic language use” in CLIL, where language is practiced in real communicative contexts beyond textbook activities. Therefore, based on Coyle’s 4Cs Framework, the summary result can be seen in the table below:

Table 1. Summary Results of Current CLIL Status at the School

4Cs Component	Current Status at the Islamic School
Content	Some contextual and thematic integration by individual teachers, but no cross-subject planning.
Communication	Strong focus on vocabulary and speaking, especially in early grades.
Cognition	Limited higher-order thinking tasks; visuals and curiosity-based engagement dominate.
Culture	Integration of local and religious themes present in both materials and school initiatives.

However, the findings also reflect several systemic constraints, including limited time, lack of formal CLIL training, and minimal collaboration among teachers for cross-subject planning. In conclusion, while English teaching practices at this school show alignment with EYL principles and include elements of soft CLIL, their application remains teacher-dependent and lacks strategic planning. The school environment is supportive and culturally responsive, but there is a need for professional development to move toward more integrated CLIL implementation.

The Presence of CLIL Principles and Educator Perceptions

Although CLIL is not formally implemented at the school, teacher responses and institutional practices reveal several characteristics of soft CLIL. Using Coyle’s 4Cs Framework: Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture as an analytical lens (Coyle et al., 2010), this study found the following:

Content

The data revealed that the Content dimension reflected emerging soft CLIL practices through the integration of local contexts and Islamic values into English teaching. However, the extent of content integration differed between teachers, indicating that these practices remained dependent on individual teaching approaches.

T1 integrates local knowledge and Islamic values into English lessons, reflecting content integration at a basic level. However, T2’s reliance on textbook-driven instruction limits such integration. Both teachers explained:

“For other learning using English, there is none ... for English, I always connect and combine learning with context, I even innovate with existing sources and in accordance with the facts in the field around them ... For schools under the auspices of the Ministry of Religion, besides P5, we

have the term P2RA, namely the Rahmatan lil Alamin Student Profile which must be integrated into learning.” (T1)

“The topics taught are in accordance with the books and subjects (English), not related to other subjects. I teach grades 2 and 3. The materials are not too difficult, such as numbers, names of fruits, types of food, types of taste in food, names of animals, parts of animals' bodies, names of times (morning, afternoon, evening, night), and the school environment, sometimes simple present tense.” (T2)

Communication

The analysis showed that the Communication dimension was consistently reflected in teachers' emphasis on vocabulary development and speaking activities. These practices demonstrate the central role of oral communication in supporting English learning among young learners.

Both teachers focus on vocabulary development and speaking, prioritizing oral interaction. Teachers reported that vocabulary is repeated and reinforced through visuals and group activities. They reported: *“...we emphasize speaking and vocabulary, because that is what children can absorb well so far, because we learn English as a foreign language, not as a second language...” (T1)* and *“...vocabulary and speaking are emphasized more, because I teach grade 2 and 3 children who cannot write well...” (T2).*

Cognition

The analysis indicated that the Cognition dimension remained the least evident component of soft CLIL practices. Although teachers used visual media and real-life examples to engage students, opportunities for higher-order thinking and problem-solving were limited.

Cognitive development in the observed teaching practices remains limited. While visuals and realia are used to stimulate interest, tasks that involve higher-order thinking, such as problem-solving or critical reflection are rarely implemented. T1 reported: *“...their critical levels are also different. So as long as they are enthusiastic about learning, it is enough as their provision in understanding learning...”*. Along with that T2 expressed uncertainty about how to foster critical thinking:

“So far, I don't know how to stimulate them to be critical, because children are critical only by asking things but not too academically. Because they are children, the curiosity often about something without thinking its relation to academic matters.”

Culture

The analysis demonstrated that the Culture dimension was strongly reflected through the integration of Islamic values and local cultural contexts into English instruction. These practices indicate that cultural relevance became one of the most consistently implemented aspects of soft CLIL in the participating school.

Integration of religious and local cultural content is strong. T1 and the school principal emphasized the use of Islamic themes in English instruction, such as religious quotes and moral values, which supports culturally responsive CLIL practices.

“...For schools under the auspices of the Ministry of Religion, besides P5, we have the term P2RA, namely the Rahmatan lil Alamin Student Profile

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which must be integrated into learning. So that both culture and religion we try to be in line.” (T1)

“Another effort in introducing English to children is also by placing pamphlets containing quotes in English that come from Arabic Islamic quotes or advice as an integration with Islamic values.” (The school principal)

The school principal’s perspective reinforced the institutional openness to CLIL-like innovation. He cited collaborative training with organizations such as MGMP and INOVASI, indicating the school’s willingness to adopt new approaches. However, the lack of strategic planning, formal policy, and CLIL-specific teacher training means that practices remain fragmented. The school principal explained:

“...the biggest challenges in integrating English are limited human resources, and limited time allocation because the hours for local content are very limited... However, we continue to improve our teachers’ English language skills by participating in MGMP, KKG, and training programs provided by BDK Denpasar and other collaborating organizations”.

Additionally, the lesson plan reflects several characteristics of soft CLIL, although it is neither labeled nor intentionally designed as a CLIL unit. The lesson focuses on vocabulary related to fruits and simple sentence structures such as ‘Do you like...?’ and ‘I like/I don’t like...’, which are taught through oral communication, visual aids, songs, and interactive games.

The lesson partially reflects the content dimension through contextual vocabulary learning. Although explicit cross-curricular integration is limited, the topic of fruits provides opportunities to connect English learning with simple concepts related to health or science. Meanwhile, the communication dimension is the strongest element of the lesson plan. Learning activities emphasize meaningful oral interaction through pair work, classroom surveys, role-play, and question-and-answer activities that encourage students to use English for authentic communication.

The cognition dimension remains limited because most activities focus on remembering, repeating, and matching vocabulary. Opportunities for higher-order thinking, such as comparing, classifying, reasoning, or problem-solving, are not evident in the lesson. In contrast, the culture dimension is reflected through classroom routines and school values. Lessons begin and end with prayer, promote respectful interaction, and reinforce Islamic values alongside language learning, demonstrating the integration of local cultural identity into classroom practice. Overall, the analysis indicates that the lesson plan aligns most strongly with the Communication and Culture dimensions of the 4Cs Framework, while the Content and Cognition dimensions remain less developed.

Table 2. Summary of CLIL-Relevant Elements in the Lesson Plan

4Cs Element	Existence in the Lesson Plan	Examples from Lesson Activities
Content	Partially	Fruit vocabulary, expressing likes/dislikes
Communication	Strongly	Speaking practice, pair dialogues, surveys

Cognition	Need to be improved	Mostly repetition, matching, singing
Culture	Culturally aligned	Respectful interactions, prayer, school values

In summary, the school shows emerging CLIL characteristics, especially in terms of contextualized content, oral communication, and cultural relevance. However, the absence of formal structures and consistent teacher understanding prevents these practices from evolving into a fully realized CLIL model. Moreover, planning, teacher training, and curriculum support are necessary for full implementation of CLIL.

Discussion

Current Practices of English Teaching and Learning in an Islamic Primary School

The findings of this study reveal that while CLIL is not formally implemented, many of its principles emerge organically through teachers' intuitive practices and the school's supportive environment. These soft CLIL elements, including contextualized content, oral communication, and integration of cultural values, demonstrate how English learning can become both meaningful and identity-affirming for young learners. This resonates with Coyle et al. (2010) 4Cs framework, where content, communication, cognition, and culture interact to promote deeper learning experiences. The findings thus highlight that even without explicit training, teachers can create environments that reflect the communicative and cultural dimensions of CLIL.

Teachers' practices align with the principles of EYL outlined by Pinter (2011), who emphasizes that instruction for young learners should be age-appropriate, contextualized, and motivating. This also reflects elements of content-based instruction within EYL, a common feature in soft CLIL approaches (Ellison, 2019). In contrast, another teacher adheres more strictly to the textbook and does not integrate cross-curricular content, indicating a lack of systematic application of content integration, as also observed by Khoiriyah et al. (2024). Another teaching practice, such as the use of repetition and simple vocabulary to support student comprehension, a strategy that supports early-stage communicative competence, is consistent with findings by Setyaningrum and Purwati (2020), who found that Indonesian EYL classrooms favor oral communication due to students' linguistic readiness. Listening is practiced through modeled input and reading and writing are introduced gradually in later grades. This emphasis on vocabulary and speaking may be influenced by the learners' developmental stage, the limited instructional time allocated for English, and teachers' priority to establish basic communicative competence before introducing more cognitively demanding language tasks.

Beyond the classroom, the school principal explained a number of extracurricular and co-curricular activities, such as storytelling, expression days, and bilingual "*reporter cilik*" programs that support the learning of English in the school. Such institutional support for English learning, even in informal forms, reflects what Lestari and Setiyawan (2020) describe as schools' strategic

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adaptations to increasing societal demands for English proficiency. Nevertheless, the result also shows a number of structural limitations, such as time limits, limited opportunities for CLIL training, and lack of teacher collaboration across subject. These limitations echo findings by Kurniawati and Atmojo (2025), who found that while CLIL is conceptually promising, its implementation in Indonesian schools is hindered by a lack of institutional structure and teacher capacity. These structural constraints may explain why teachers implemented CLIL principles inconsistently and primarily through individual initiatives rather than through coordinated school-wide practices.

One of the most distinctive features of CLIL practice in this Islamic school is the integration of religious and moral values within English instruction. Teachers' use of greetings, Islamic quotes, and moral lessons in English reflects culturally responsive pedagogy that aligns language with students' sociocultural realities. As Ellison (2019) notes, CLIL should be adapted flexibly to reflect local contexts, allowing learners to connect language learning with their community values. Similarly, Khoiriyah et al. (2024) found that embedding Islamic themes in CLIL enhances student engagement and supports intercultural competence. Astuti et al. (2024) also demonstrated that integrating Islamic values into CLIL syllabi can deepen cultural relevance and strengthen learner identity, a practice showing promise at the school. In this sense, the Islamic school context provides an alternative model of CLIL, one that merges faith-based education with global communicative aims.

Despite these strengths, the study also uncovers significant pedagogical challenges. Teachers' focus remains on lower-order skills such as vocabulary recall and repetition, with limited opportunities for higher-order thinking. This echoes Puspitasari et al. (2016) observation that Indonesian CLIL practices often prioritize surface-level learning due to constraints in curriculum design and teacher preparation. Safitri et al. (2024) also noted that vocabulary remains the primary linguistic focus in most CLIL-based English teaching in Indonesian primary schools, with limited integration of higher-level linguistic or content tasks. The teachers' uncertainty about how to stimulate critical thinking also reflects a need for professional development in designing cognitively demanding yet age-appropriate tasks. Mehisto et al., (2008) emphasize that scaffolding strategies, such as questioning, comparing, and reasoning are crucial for helping learners move beyond memorization toward active construction of knowledge. These findings suggest that the limited emphasis on higher-order thinking may be influenced by teachers' limited experience with CLIL pedagogy and the practical constraints of teaching English as a local content subject with restricted instructional time.

The Presence of CLIL Principles and Its Potentials

Institutional factors further influence the implementation of soft CLIL. The school's leadership demonstrates openness to innovation, as shown by the school principal's support for teacher participation in programs like MGMP and INOVASI. Such leadership aligns with Lestari and Setiyawan (2020) assertion that administrative support is a prerequisite for sustainable CLIL development. However, the lack of systematic policies and CLIL-specific training keeps teachers' practices fragmented and dependent on individual initiative. As Setyaningrum et al. (2025) highlight, institutional collaboration, professional

mentoring, and consistent resource development are critical steps for evolving soft CLIL into structured programs. This difference between teachers' classroom initiatives and institutional support suggests that while school leadership encourages innovation, the absence of formal CLIL policies limits the sustainability and consistency of these practices.

The potential of CLIL in Indonesian Islamic primary settings reflects global trends where content-based instruction leads to deeper yet contextualized learning in EFL settings (Satayev et al., 2022). However, as seen in other local studies, implementation gaps remain due to teacher readiness and policy barriers (Mukadimah & Sahayu, 2021).

The findings also indicate the potential for curricular adaptation. Lessons analyzed in this study demonstrate how everyday topics, such as fruits, family, and hobbies, can be expanded into cross-curricular themes that integrate simple science, health, or moral lessons in English. This supports the content element of the 4Cs framework (Coyle et al., 2010), albeit at a basic level. These tasks give learners repeated exposure to language in context, promoting natural language use, a feature also highlighted in EYL pedagogy, which values engagement, action, and meaningful context (Ioannou-Georgiou & Pavlou, 2011; Pinter, 2011). Future materials could build on this by incorporating local cultural narratives and translanguaging strategies (Setyaningrum et al. 2022), allowing students to use both English and Bahasa Indonesia strategically for comprehension and expression. The lesson plan therefore reflects teachers' preference for familiar and practical learning activities that are appropriate for young learners, although they provide limited opportunities for interdisciplinary learning and cognitive engagement.

Another finding is that, although the lesson is suitable for early-phase learners, its cognitive demands remain primarily at the lower-order level (e.g., remembering, repeating, matching). Opportunities to extend thinking through classification, reasoning, or problem-solving were not evident. This is in line with Puspitasari, Anugerahwati, and Rachmajanti's (2016) and Safitri et al. (2024) who noted the lack of higher-order thinking in many Indonesian CLIL applications. The lesson could be strengthened by embedding activities that stimulate prediction, comparison, or group decision-making (Mehisto et al., 2008). This finding further suggests that lesson planning remains focused on language practice rather than cognitive challenge, reflecting teachers' efforts to strengthen learners' basic language proficiency before introducing more cognitively demanding activities.

Building on these findings, integrating translanguaging and scaffolding (Ellison, 2019; Setyaningrum et al., 2022), while also focusing on teachers' dual competencies (Puspitasari et al., 2016) and students' needs analysis for the materials (Khoiriyah & Mafruudloh, 2025) could bridge the gap between current practices and formal CLIL implementation.

This analysis confirms that while the lesson is not formally CLIL-based, it organically integrates several CLIL principles, particularly communication and culture. It supports the earlier interview findings, where teachers implicitly employed CLIL-informed strategies without formally labeling them as such. This

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document further validates the potential for Islamic schools to transition toward intentional CLIL practice with proper training and curricular support (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2009; Mehisto et al., 2008).

Teachers express interest in CLIL once its principles are explained. They acknowledge that linking content and language can enhance student motivation and participation, similar to the outcomes observed in Setyaningrum et al. (2025). However, they also report feeling underprepared, particularly regarding the design of content-language objectives and the balance between Islamic values and general content instruction. Given these insights, embedding soft CLIL in Indonesian Islamic schools may require integrating pluriliteracies approaches, particularly to connect Islamic values with English and content learning (Coyle & Meyer, 2023; Khoiriyah, 2021). This indicates that teachers' positive attitudes toward CLIL are not yet supported by sufficient pedagogical preparation, highlighting professional development as an important factor for future implementation.

The school principal supports innovation and has encouraged teachers to try new methods, aligning with institutional strategies described by Setyaningrum et al. (2025). Nonetheless, structural limitations such as limited training opportunities, rigid schedules, and a lack of CLIL-specific resources present obstacles. These findings confirm the need for capacity building, as advocated in previous research (Puspitasari et al., 2016; Khoiriyah, 2021). Taken together, these findings suggest that successful CLIL implementation requires both teacher readiness and sustained institutional support, as neither factor alone appears sufficient to promote systematic implementation.

In summary, this study provides tentative evidence that soft CLIL practices can emerge in the participating Islamic primary school when teachers and school leaders are responsive to both global educational practices and local cultural values. Although challenges persist in terms of cognitive depth, planning, and teacher preparation, the findings indicate that CLIL principles were reflected in teachers' efforts to make English learning contextual, communicative, and meaningful. With continued professional development and institutional support, these practices have the potential to evolve into a more systematic and culturally responsive model of CLIL within similar educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that while CLIL is not formally implemented in this Islamic primary school, elements of soft CLIL are emerging through teachers' integration of contextual content, communicative activities, and Islamic cultural values into English instruction. However, challenges remain in promoting cognitive engagement and cross-subject integration due to teachers' limited familiarity with CLIL pedagogy, restricted instructional time, and the absence of formal curriculum integration. This study contributes to the literature on CLIL in the Indonesian TEYL context by providing empirical evidence that soft CLIL principles can emerge naturally in an Islamic primary school despite the absence of formal CLIL implementation. The findings also extend current understanding of how soft CLIL can emerge in Indonesian EFL primary

classrooms and provide practical implications for teacher professional development and future implementation in similar educational contexts.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. It was conducted in a single Islamic primary school with two English teachers and one school principal and relied primarily on interviews and document analysis. Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to other school contexts or represent broader CLIL practices in Indonesia. Future research should expand classroom observations and include a wider range of school contexts to further examine the potential of CLIL in Islamic primary education.

AUTHOR STATEMENTS

This study was prepared through the collaborative efforts of both authors. **Rabbania Zaikalina** was responsible for the conceptualization, methodology, data collection, analysis, and drafting the manuscript. **Muhammad Amin** contributed through critical review, supervision, and refinement of the manuscript during the writing and revision stages. Both authors approved the final version of the manuscript.

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