Building Evidence on Bilingual Education (CLIL)

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Language Diversity in Australian Schools

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Linguistic diversity is the norm, but developmental inequities remain

2+ in 5

students speak a language other than English at home

224

different language backgrounds

27.4%

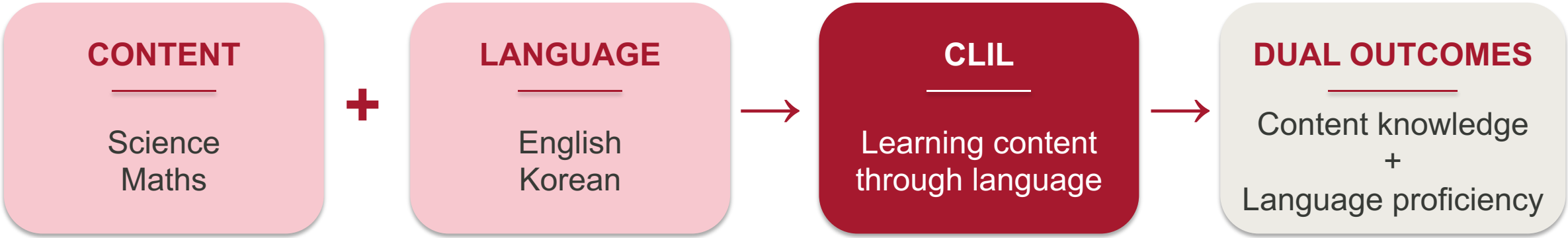
developmentally vulnerable 1+ domains first full year of school

THE EDUCATIONAL IMPERATIVE:

Evaluate approaches that **leverage** (*rather than marginalise*) multilingual learners' linguistic resources

What is CLIL?

Content and Language Integrated Learning



CLIL is flexible, but intentional

An "umbrella" term

Approaches vary across educational and sociocultural contexts.[1]

No fixed language allocation

There is no mandated minimum time in the target language(s).[2]

Planned integration – not spontaneous code-switching

Languages are intentionally integrated into teaching.[3]

1. Cenoz et al. (2013) | 2. Fielding & Harbon (2020) | 3. Cenoz & Gorter (2021) | Marsh (1994) | Coyle, Hood & Marsh (2010)

Pedagogical Translanguaging in CLIL

Heritage language as a resource for learning and making knowledge visible

TRANSLANGUAGING

Home Language as a Resource

- Activates content knowledge through heritage language
- Supports additive bilingualism

García & Li (2015)

PEDAGOGY

Language & Content Scaffolding

- Adopted in Europe
- Scaffolds development of academic concepts and languages

Nikula & Moore (2019) | Cenoz & Gorter (2021)

ASSESSMENT

Demonstrate Knowledge

- Allows functional assessment in home languages
- Distinguishes conceptual knowledge from target-language limitations

Robinson-Jones et al. (2026)

CLIL in Australia

Growing provision across the Country

DOCUMENTED PROVISION

17

public schools

11	6
VIC	NSW

Fielding & Harbon (2014)

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

1 Growing interest

CLIL is being implemented in public schools across Australia

2 Diverse contexts

Programs vary in languages, year levels and subject areas

3 Foundation for research

Existing provision creates opportunities to strengthen the Australian evidence base

Growth in provision has outpaced the Australian evidence base

CLIL in Australia

Promising findings, but key questions remain

1 NAPLAN outcomes

Year 3 and 5 CLIL students outperformed mainstream peers across assessed literacy measures

Fielding & Harbon (2022)

2 Learner confidence mixed

Victorian CLIL trial:
↑ Overall confidence
↓ Listening confidence

Cross & Gearon (2013)

THE EVIDENCE GAP

- No published Australian evidence on early language and literacy **development** in the first years of school (NAPLAN: narrow, limited skills)
- Cognitive load in young learners' CLIL experiences remains underexplored

Early Language and Literacy Outcomes

Limited evidence for CLIL with young bilingual learners

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Promising evidence, but uneven

Most CLIL evidence comes from older learners. K–1 evidence remains limited across key language and literacy domains.

EARLY-YEARS EVIDENCE GAP

01	**Phonological awareness**	MIXED	Often a bilingual advantage, but task and language pair dependent. CLIL-specific early-years evidence is largely missing.
02	**Phonics**	INSUFFICIENT	Insufficient CLIL evidence for K–1 phonics and decoding outcomes.
03	**Vocabulary**	PROMISING	CLIL can support L2 vocabulary, but evidence is mainly from older students. Generalisation to K–1 remains unclear.
04	**Syntax and grammar**	SELECTIVE	CLIL with older students suggest selective gains, such as complex sentences, but not inflectional morphology. Early advantages may fade over time.
05	**Narrative**	SMALL / UNCLEAR	Limited CLIL evidence with young students. Evidence suggests a broadly similar narrative macrostructure across languages.

Medeiros et al. (2020) | Bialystok et al. (2003) | Haman et al. (2017) | Marinova-Todd et al. (2010) | Lo & Murphy (2010) | Baten et al. (2020) | Adrián & Mangado (2015) | Unanue & Mayo (2025) | Martínez-Adrián & Nieva-Marroquín (2023) | Gagarina & Bohnacker (2022) | Manterola et al. (2013) | Fichman et al. (2022)

Our Study

First Australian Evidence of CLIL in the Early Years (K & Year 1)

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Emerging Language & Literacy

- Perspective cohort Terms 1 & 4 – to capture program effect
- Monolingual vs. Korean-English bilingual classes

Classroom Interactions

- Conversational analysis of classroom recordings Term 3
- Korean-English bilingual classes

Stakeholders Attitudes & Beliefs

- Focus group interviews with teachers and parents
- Korean-English bilingual classes

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Emerging Language and Literacy Assessment

Two data-collection sessions: Term 1 baseline and Term 4 follow-up

ENGLISH-MEDIUM ASSESSMENT

SPEECH AND READING

- Phonological awareness
- Phonics

LANGUAGE STRUCTURE

- Syntax and grammar

TRANSLANGUAGING ASSESSMENT

VOCABULARY

- Expressive vocabulary

NARRATIVE SKILLS

- Comprehension
- Production (story retelling)

DEVELOPMENTALMEASURES Executive function and attention

Participant Profile

Balanced year groups and broad language diversity

SAMPLE COMPOSITION

Kindergarten — **34 children**

18 CLIL	16 mainstream

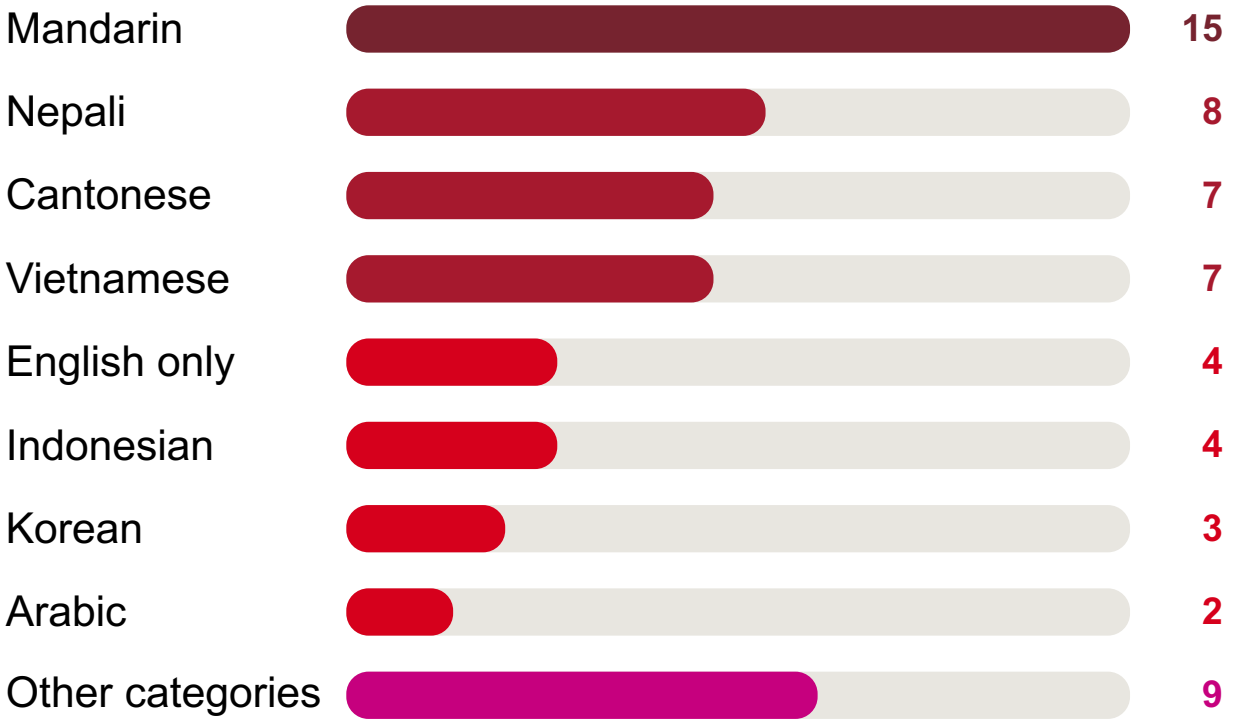
Year 1 — **25 children**

17 CLIL	8 mainstream

Sample: 59 children | CLIL: 35 | Mainstream: 24

HOME LANGUAGES

59 children 17 languages



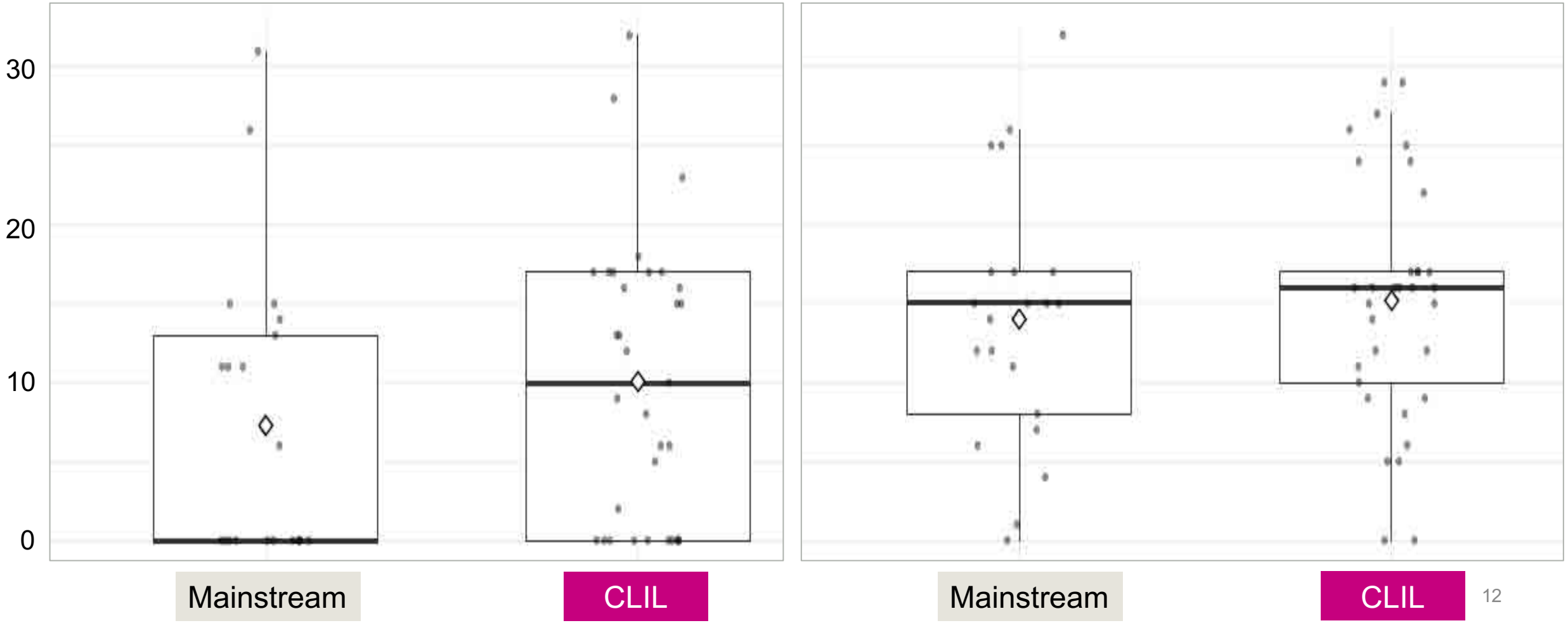
Other 1-child categories: Bengali; Bengali/Russian; Gujarati; Malaysian; Mandarin (Malay); Mongolian; Samoan; Sumbawa/Indonesian; Thai

Phonological Awareness

Similar development across programs

TERM 1 | BASELINE

TERM 4 | FOLLOW-UP

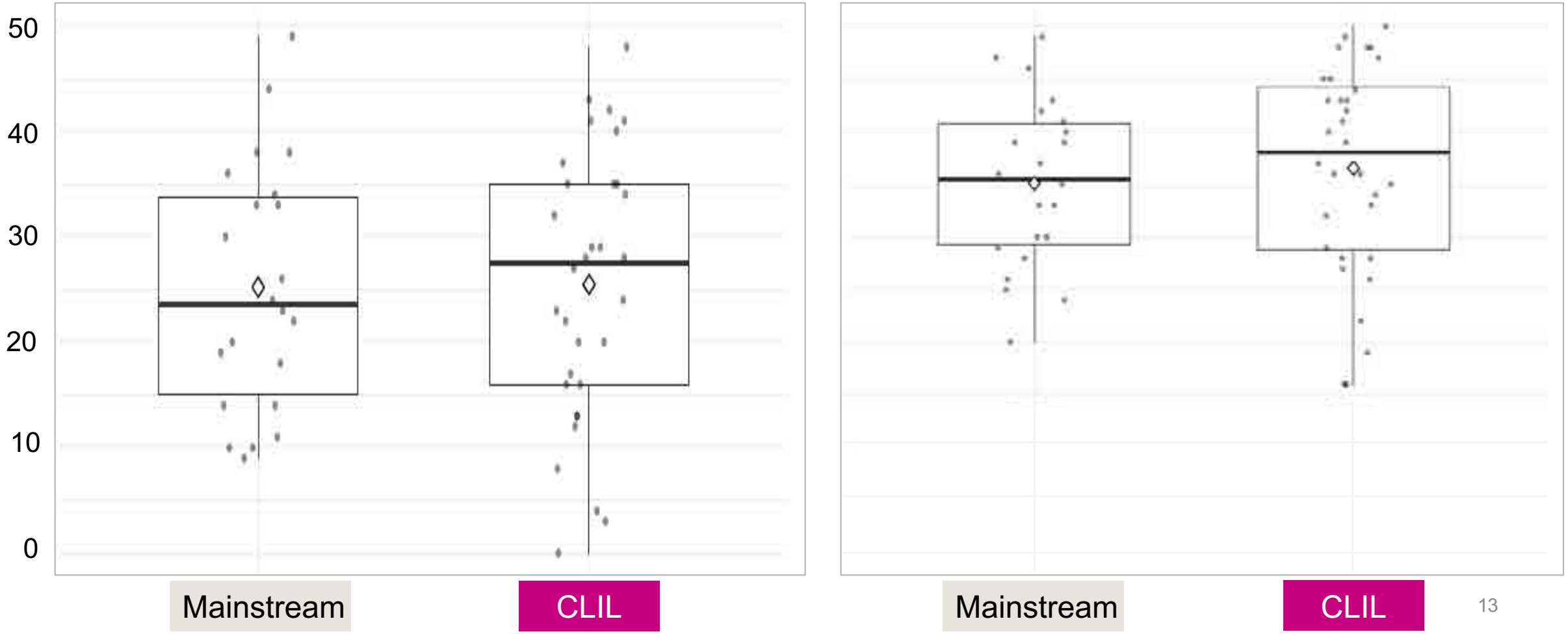


Phonics

Similar development across programs

TERM 1 | BASELINE

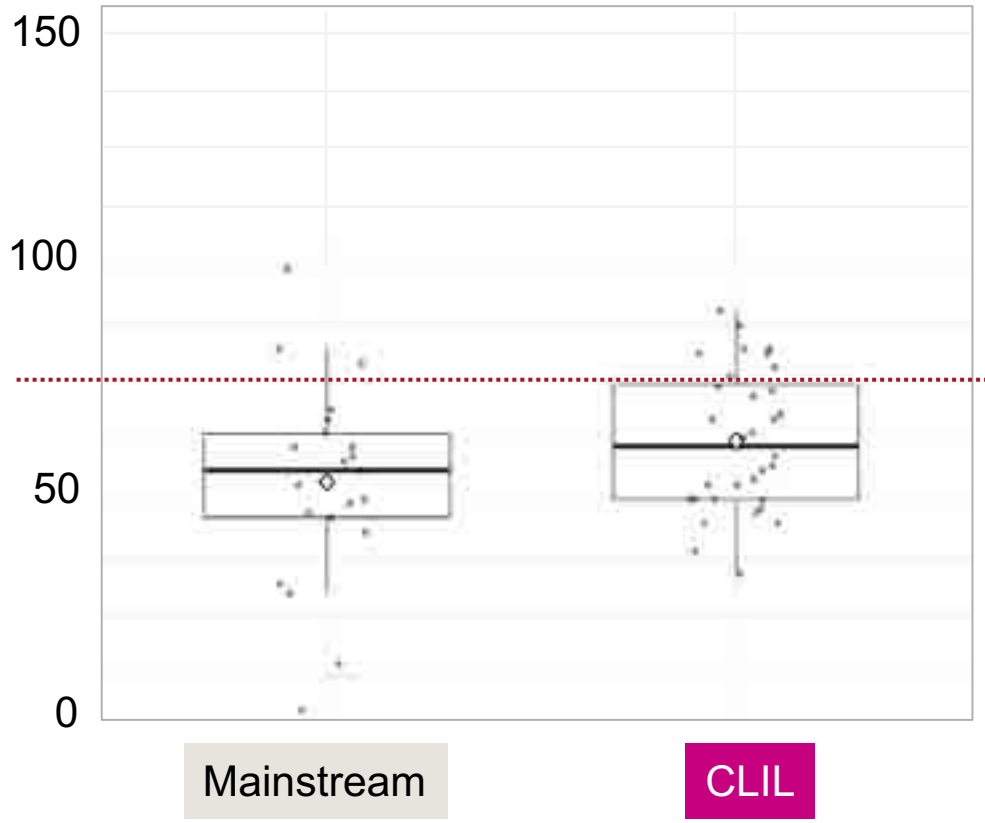
TERM 4 | FOLLOW-UP



Vocabulary (Expressive)

Similar development across programs

TERM 1 | BASELINE



TERM 4 | FOLLOW-UP

Few children responded in dual languages; Most Kindy children were below the monolingual norm (85-100)

Syntax & Grammar

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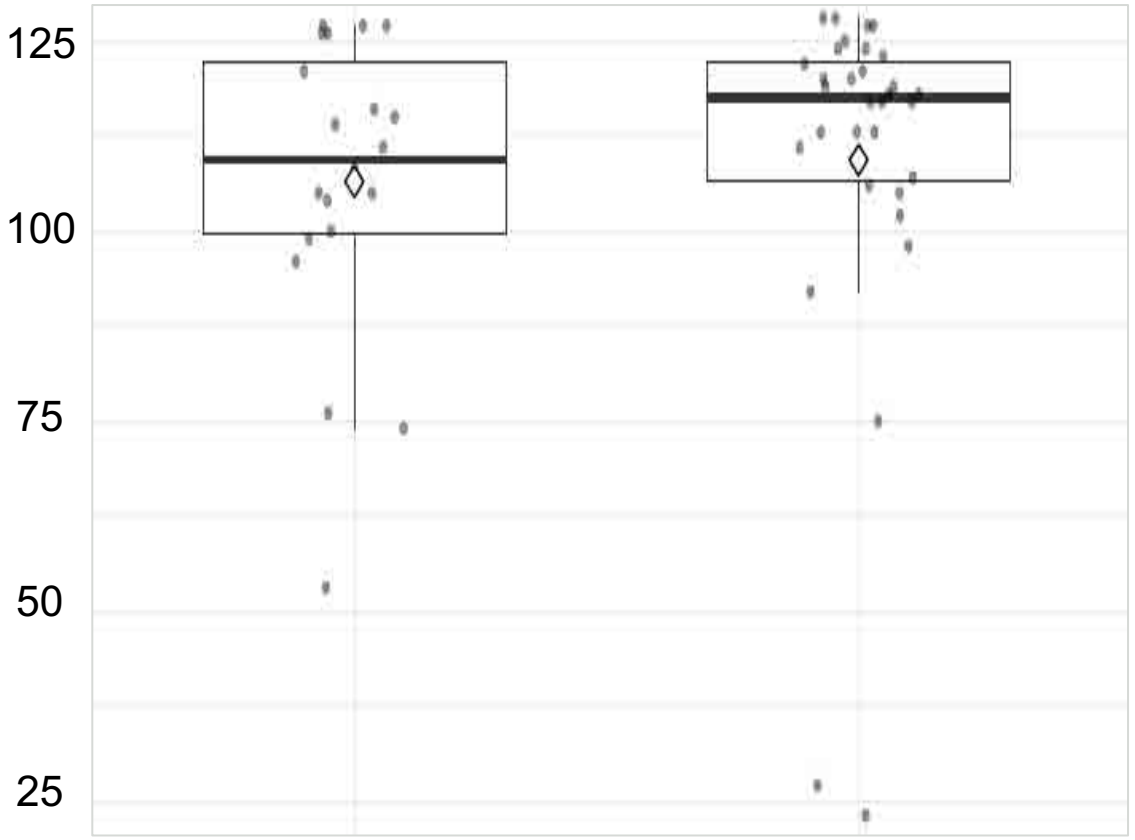
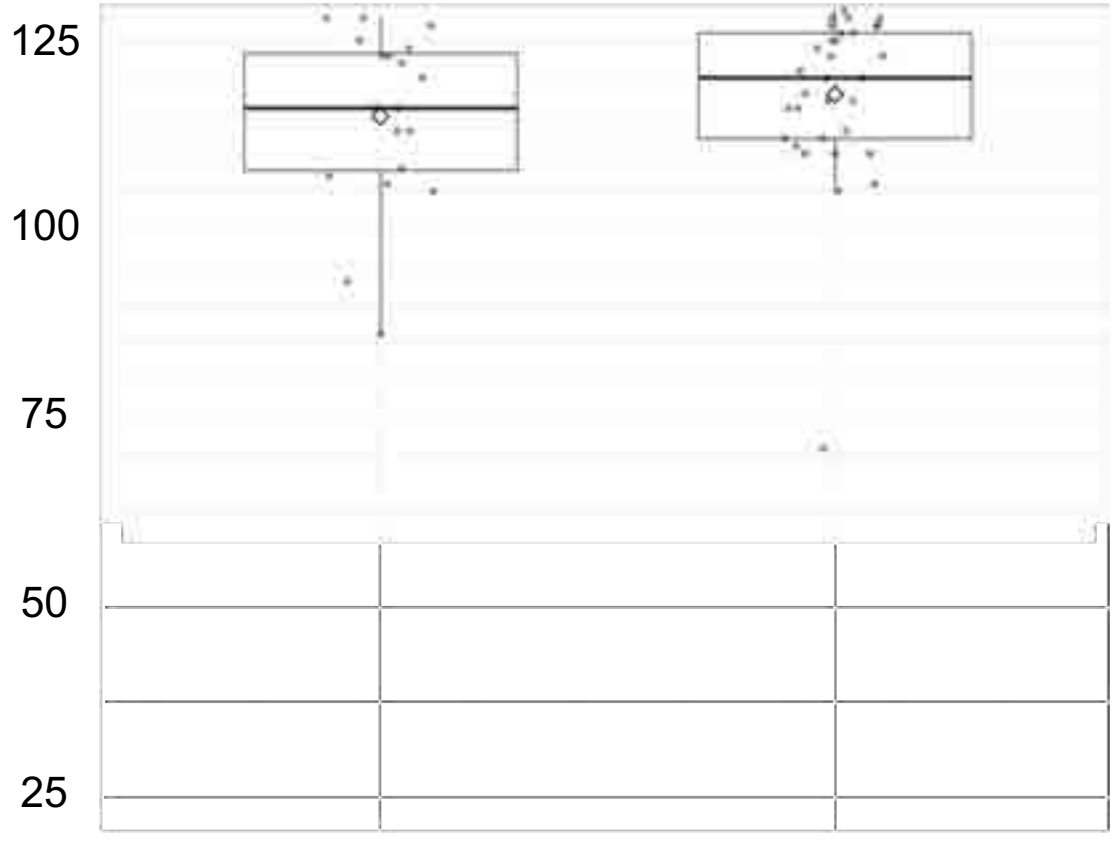
Similar development across programs

TERM 1 | BASELINE



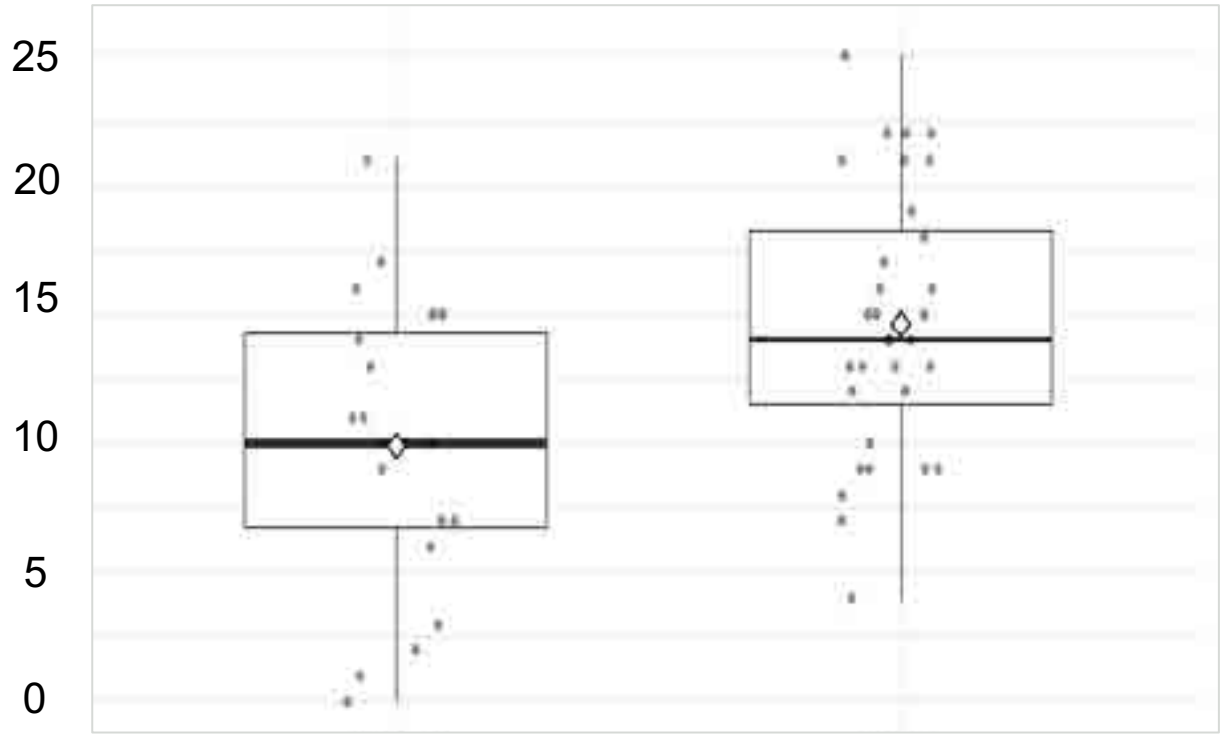
TERM 4 | FOLLOW-UP



Narrative Comprehension

Similar development across programs

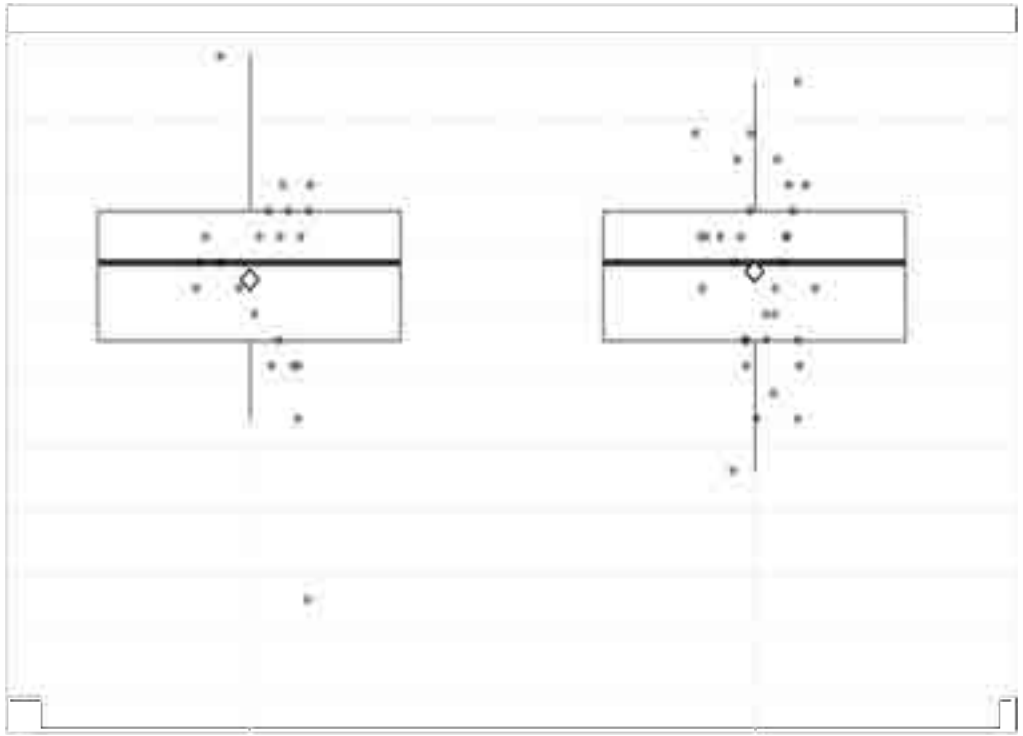
TERM 1 | BASELINE



Mainstream

CLIL

TERM 4 | FOLLOW-UP



Mainstream

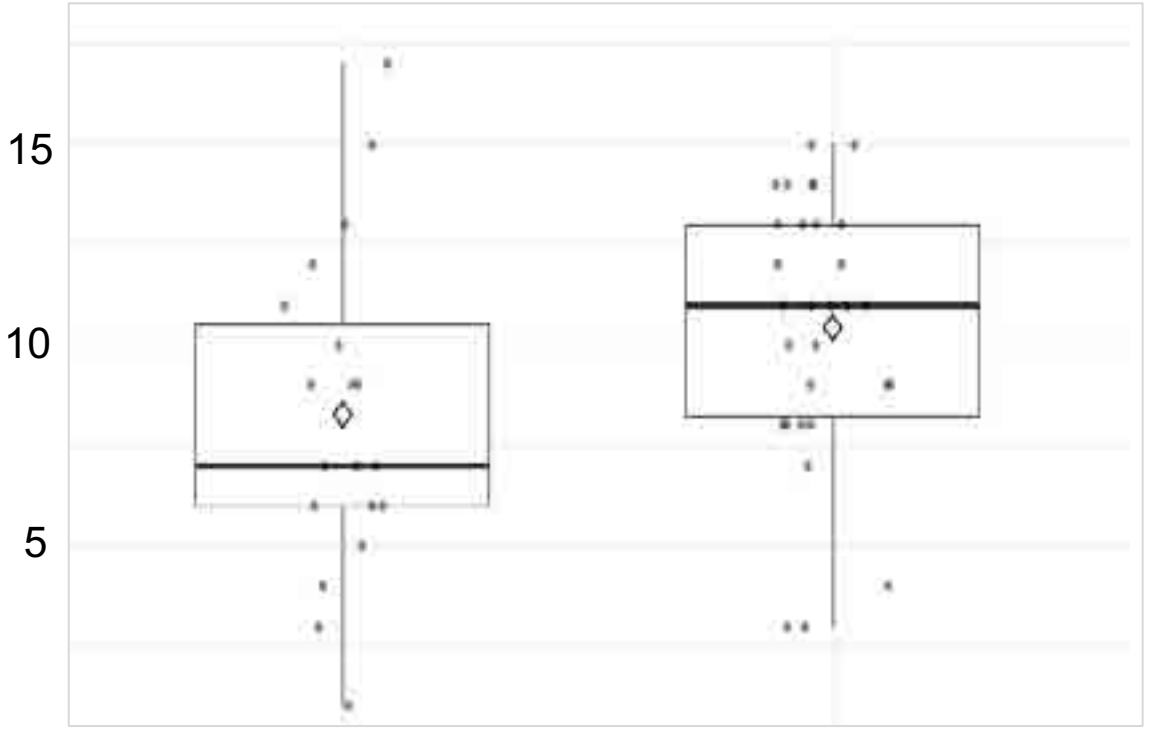
CLIL

Possible self-selection bias in the CLIL program

Narrative Production

Macro structure – Similar development across programs

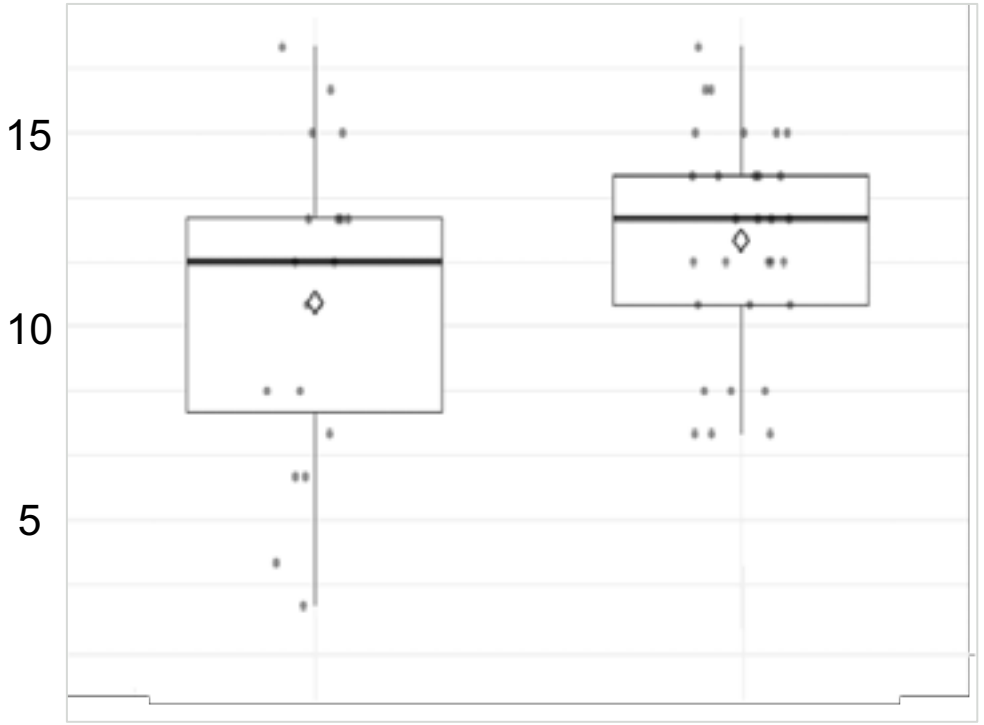
TERM 1 | BASELINE



Mainstream

CLIL

TERM 4 | FOLLOW-UP



Mainstream

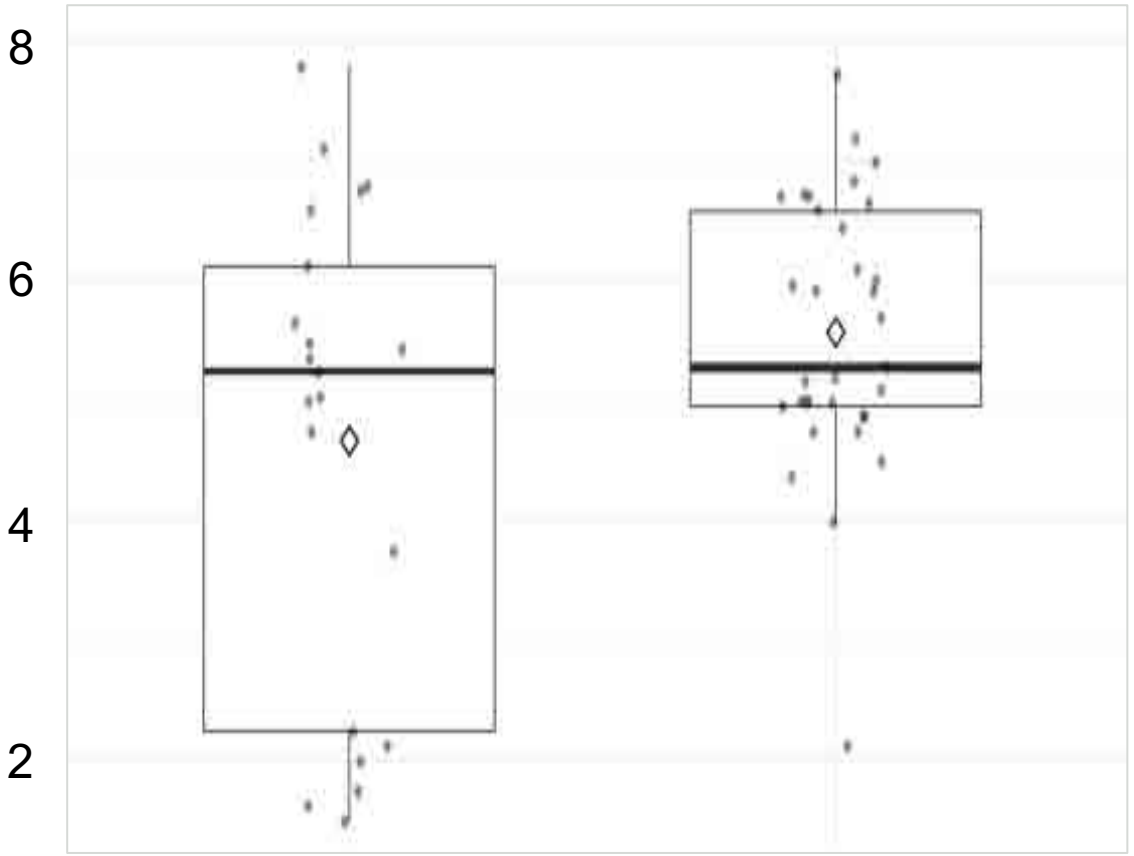
CLIL

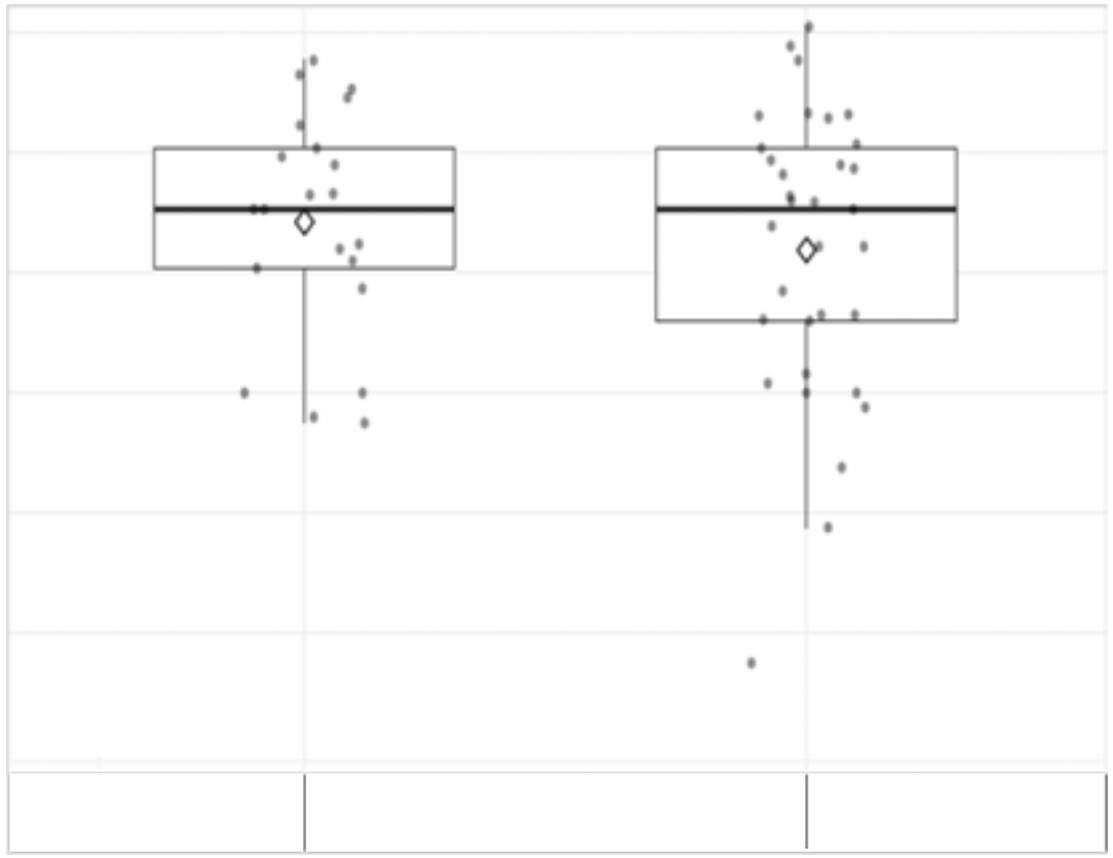
Cognitive – Executive Function & Attention

Similar development across programs; all at age expected performance

TERM 1 | BASELINE

TERM 4 | FOLLOW-UP





Mainstream

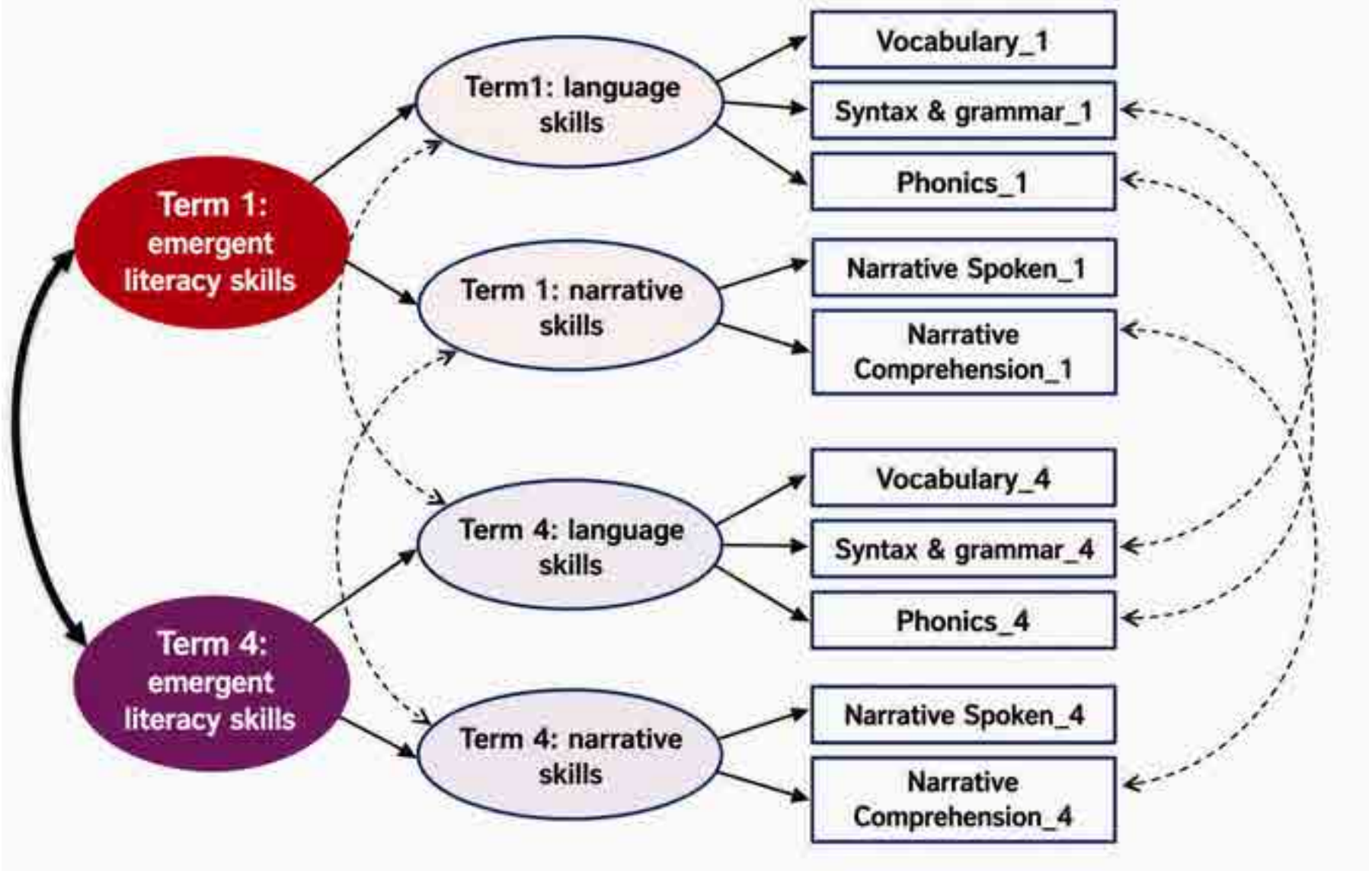
CLIL

Mainstream

CLIL

Model Structure

Model identified language & narrative skills



Language & Literacy Gains Across Programs

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No evidence of increased challenges in CLIL program

Findings

Comparable gains

CLIL & mainstream students showed comparable growth in language and literacy (even through a foreign language)

Cognitive control

Did not predict growth in language or narrative skills.

Cognitive load

No evidence of increased cognitive load in CLIL programs.

Limitations

COVID-19

Cohort impacted by COVID19

Single-school sample

One school limits generalisability
Has 90%+ CALD students

Some caution is needed when generalization findings

Need replication across multiple schools

Australian Government
Department of Home Affairs

OFFICE FOR MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS

MACQUARIE University

Launching a new initiative!

We are excited to announce that we have received funding from the *Department of Home Affairs' Community Language Schools Grants Program* to develop and evaluate a bilingual English-Chinese language program that integrates language and content learning.

Australia faces a critical shortage of Asian language skills, with less than 1% of students in NSW studying Chinese at the HSC level.

Working with our community language school partners, we will co-design a program that reimagines language learning to both engage student interest and align with the K-10 school curriculum.

Acknowledgement: Background image generated with Microsoft Copilot.

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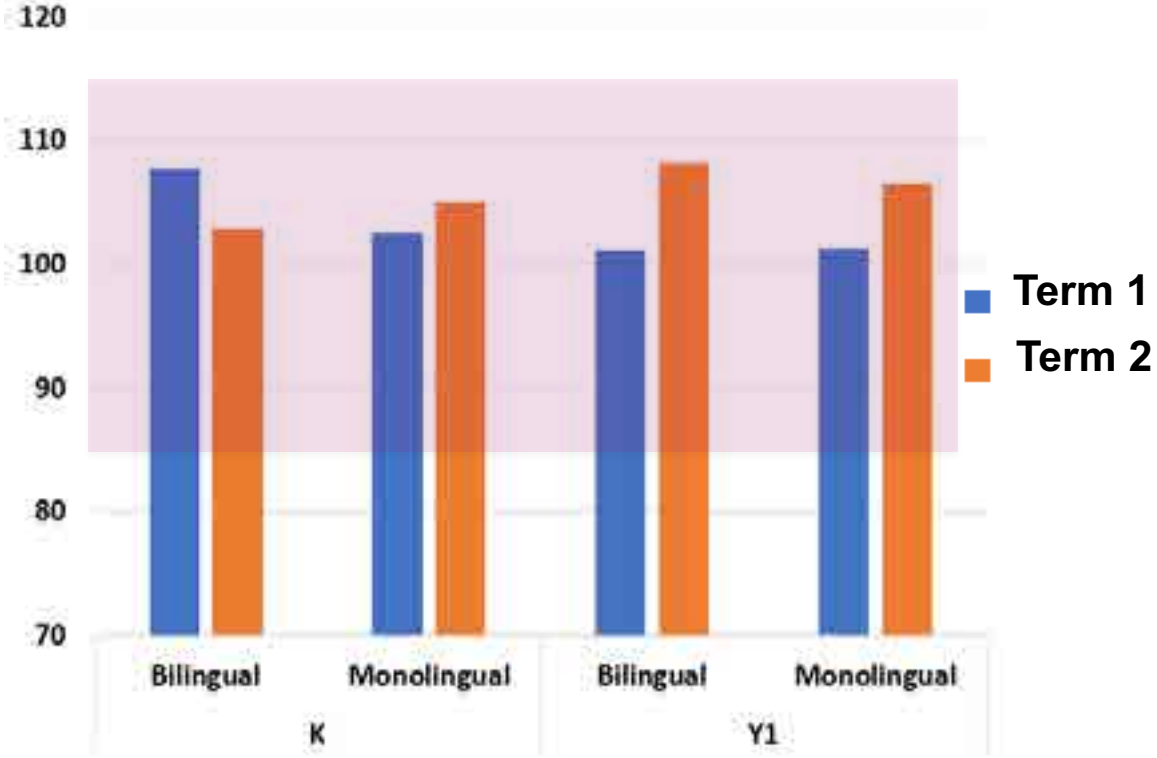
Thank You

Acknowledgement

This project is supported by the NSW Department of Education Strategic Research Funding: Building the Evidence Base

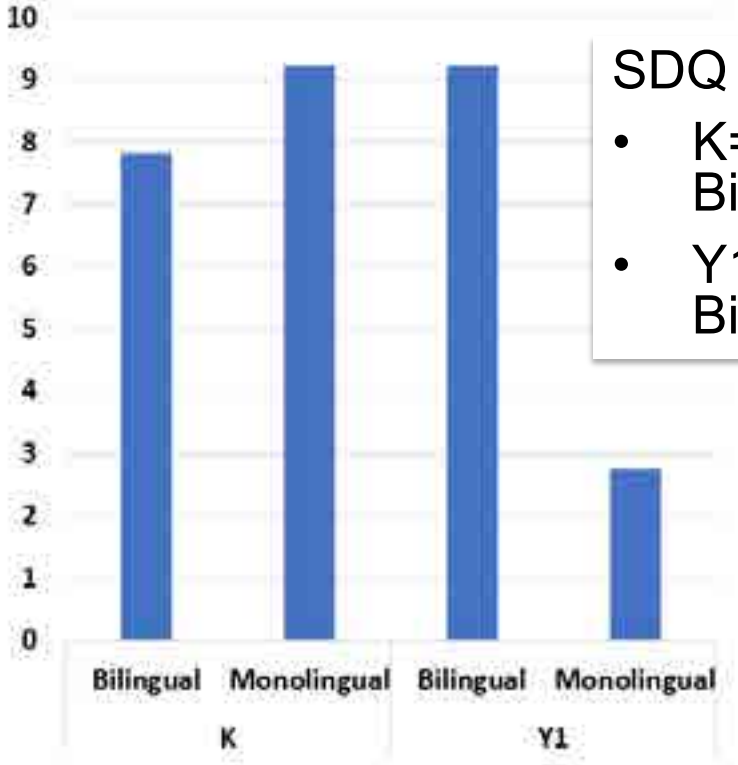
Cognition & Social/Emotional Development

Executive Function & Attention



- Similar development across programs
- All children performing in expected range

Social/Emotional (SDQ)



SDQ = 33 children

- K=20, Biling=11
- Y1=13, Biling=9

- All in typical range – across programs

Different from Traditional CLIL

Traditional CLIL programs:

- Developed for children with language pairs that match the program

  e.g., Korean-English program for Korean-English speaking children

- Leverage heritage language to scaffold English through shared semantic/content knowledge

Unique educational context

- Korean-English program is open to all children
- Korean = L3 and English = L2 for most children
- Learning a new language AND matching monolingual programs on language and literacy outcomes!
- Plus, social and cultural benefits!