

Enhancing integrated English course teaching: A strategy for achieving international standards

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT		
<p>Keywords: Content Based Instruction, Speaking and writing skills, classroom language learning</p>	<p><i>Myriad of studies have shown that Content-Based Instruction (CBI) has become a widespread approach in EFL settings, particularly in developing students 'writing and speaking skills since these productive skills need more efforts and persistence. Some considerable strategies have been applied in adopting Content-Based Instruction (CBI) in today's language classrooms. Teachers may apply this approach by asking students to work in groups and ask them to discuss text on selected topics, activate their prior knowledge, and then report the results by restating what they have read in both written and oral performance. These activities could be extended by providing tasks demonstrating students 'lexical, syntactic, morphological and grammatical knowledge as well. In the workshop, presenters are going to demonstrate how content-based approaches may increase students' motivation, content-knowledge, and independent thinking as well. It is hoped that by applying these approaches, students may develop strategies for collecting, synthesizing, and interpreting new information as this promote students' autonomy as one of the significant principles to meet international standards of language learning.</i></p>		
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1. Introduction

The teaching of English has become more varied in today's classrooms to reach the international standard. Parents and teachers in Indonesia must develop many considerable strategies and media to help students enjoy English language learning at their level. However, some studies show that students commonly struggle to learn English as a foreign language. Some efforts were made to create learning strategies that positively influence students 'language proficiency. In recent years, content-based instruction has become increasingly popular to develop linguistic ability, allowing students to learn the language through its actual use in a particular topic. Using Content-based Instruction in teaching integrated courses will be very useful in helping students acquire good English proficiency.

According to Graves(2007), content-based instruction is 'a model of integrated skills approach to language teaching which integrates the learning of some specific subject-matter content with the learning of a second/ foreign language'.(as cited in Wei, 2009) Related to the

teaching of English-integrated courses to students at the university level, content-based instruction is implemented to help students reach good quality English. Integrated course was given to the students during their first semester at the university. This course aims to give the students background knowledge of English itself. Commonly, the students find it challenging to acquire the four language skills. They get confused about expressing their idea in spoken and written form, and they also lack the motivation to read the source from the reading text. Moreover, the environment does not support students' studying well. They always laugh at someone's mistakes, which burdens the other one to study well and causes the students to feel demotivated to study English. Those factors may contribute to the failure of English language learning in Indonesia.

2. Research Methodology

To change that paradigm, content-based instruction is one of the solutions to help students learn English better. I considered employing a content-based approach as an interesting teaching method of integrated English.

The content-based approach in academic writing emphasizes the development of strategies for information compilation, synthesis, interpretation, and evaluation, as well as the correlation between how information and existing experiences (Suppawan & Chuchart, 2010:88-89). Moreover, the content-based approach also aims to help improve the student's communication skills, critical thinking skills, and academic reading and writing capabilities more effectively.

The basis for a content-based approach to teaching writing skills is the concept of Second Language Acquisition (Krasen, 1985). The concept maintains that, to learn a language well, one must also learn the context in which language is conventionally used to simultaneously attain the language and the course. It focuses more on the "meaning" than the "format" of the language, as the ability to understand the language would motivate the learners to continue learning. The main purpose is for the students to communicate in the target language to understand the contents and subsequently improve their writing skills (Suppawan & Chu chart, 2010:88-89).

It is also in line with Shih 1986, who states that a content-based approach in teaching English-integrated courses is connected to the study of specific academic subject matter and is viewed as a means of promoting understanding of the content. Then, Krashen (1982:168) states that in content, the focus is on what is said more than on how it is said when preparing the students for writing and responding to writing. In this case, the lecturer can treat form, including organization, grammar, and mechanism.

Content-based instruction in teaching English can be a more effective means to develop the requisite skills because it deals with writing in a manner similar (or identical) to how writing is assigned, prepared for, and reacted to in actual academic courses. In this method, the implementation of teaching writing still follows the four stages of teaching writing: prewriting, writing the first draft, revising, and publishing (Shih, 1986).

In this approach, the contexts of the various contents are transformed into language-learning tools. The instructional activities revolve around writing from sources, integrating reading, listening, and content discussion (or speaking). Therefore, compared to the traditional approach, language is taught in isolation from the subject matter area or topics discussed in the text. Content-based instruction will be more intrinsically motivated because they focus more on relevant topics that meet their needs (Wei, 2009).

3. Findings

The implementation of content-based instruction

Concerning implementing content-based instruction in the language learning classroom, some teaching steps by using this strategy will be explained. This strategy of teaching can be implemented in all levels of education. First, the teacher must prepare all the teaching materials as the students' model. The material and the media for teaching should fit with the curriculum being taught to the students. In implementing content-based instruction, the teacher helps the students provide the material and compile the information related to the material being taught. Then, in the classrooms, the students are asked to gain many sources by reading articles, magazines, or books related to the selected topics discussed in the classroom. In the next step, after the students had read the sources, they tried to synthesize and interpret their reading results. By doing this activity, the students can improve their critical thinking by interpreting, analyzing, and synthesizing the content of the text. Furthermore, the student's speaking and listening abilities improved because they had a chance to practice and share their ideas in small group discussions, with sufficient knowledge to share. In this step, the teacher may ask students to retell and restate the ideas they read in spoken or written form.

In the next step of implementing a content-based approach, the teacher and the students can develop their knowledge of writing skills. Before asking students to write, teachers should build students' background knowledge by asking students' personal experiences related to the topic discussed. As Taguchi et al. (2004, as cited in Wei, 2009) argue, schemata, as students' pre-existing knowledge, play a significant role in constructing meaning from text. Then, by providing students with the selected reading materials, students have already got good examples of lexical, syntactic, morphological, and grammatical knowledge. Moreover, students also have knowledge of organization and mechanisms in writing. So, by mastering this knowledge, the student's self-confidence will increase, and they will easily compose their idea into a paragraph.

In implementing this strategy, the students may find a new English teaching and learning environment. The students may also get new experiences which help them compose their writing. In implementing a content-based approach in teaching English-integrated courses, the students have to practice reading the topics to explore the knowledge related to their writing. While the reading, writing, and discussion were implemented together, the students had to learn the organization, mechanism, and rules of grammar use. By having adequate knowledge of those linguistic skills, students can explore more considerable ideas in depth in their writing. Even in the discussion session, there may be some students who are reluctant to speak and tend to rely on others; by applying these activities, at least they still get helpful information from the discussion. The students still learn about the text's content related to their topic.

Other benefits of implementing content-based instruction are that it may change our minds that in teaching English skills, students not only learn the skills separately but also improve their skills simultaneously in reading, listening, and speaking integrated before they write. So, students may discuss, read, and listen to the topic before writing about it. Compared to the traditional teaching writing approach in the writing task, students should only write, without experiencing the integration of language skills.

This means that in writing class, students will not feel depressed because they should practice writing for the whole time. Moreover, students commonly get stuck on their ideas because they do not have adequate knowledge to write. The students also feel depressed because they should also give attention to the organization, mechanism, and grammatical rules based on the theory provided by the teacher. By implementing a content-based approach, the students feel free to write their paragraphs because they already have complete information and tangible examples of organization, mechanism, and grammatical rules.

Thus, it can be considered the teacher to use a content-based approach as an alternative way to improve the teaching of English because this strategy can make the students more engaged in writing, reading, listening, and speaking. When the students practice all the components of the language skill together, it will enable them to memorize the information they get in a longer time in the retention and recalling process than if the students only see it (Shih, 1986). Using this strategy in teaching language is more interesting, and it can motivate the students to understand the lesson longer and automatically. In addition, the content-based approach can give the meaning of the content related to the topic being discussed practically and also give the students more understanding of the vocabulary and grammar used.

4. Discussion

There are some issues and challenges in the implementation of content-based Instruction. Firstly, since content-based instruction focuses on teaching the subject matter and the language, teachers should have expertise in the particular sub-topics discussed in the text and the language itself. Therefore, Content-Based teachers should master both areas.

Secondly, to fulfill content-based language teaching purposes, teachers should prepare materials that contain the subject matter and the language tasks. Nowadays, some textbooks are designed for content-based teaching purposes by providing a complete integration of language skills within the selected topics using a theme-based model that contains the discussed topics and a variety of activities.

However, authentic materials are highly recommended in Content-Based Teaching since they are more attractive and meaningful than textbook-based materials. As Sutton (1998) points out, CBI often uses authentic materials to help students increase their motivation and give them more chances to explore their pre-existing knowledge. (As cited in Wei, 2009).

Therefore, good teachers should make extra efforts to prepare a range of text types taken from authentic materials such as magazines, newspapers, or audio-visual materials, such as radio or TV news, so that students will be more exposed to various genres. Lastly, since this kind of immersion teaching needs a variety of integrated activities, teachers should be creative in designing language tasks that combine the four language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and listening. Therefore, teachers may create a language comfort zone classroom by engaging students to be active in developing their learning strategies by allowing them to get involved in some activities such as reading, taking notes, discussing, summarizing, writing their opinions, and reporting (oral performances). However, teachers should provide clear instructions before giving the tasks and explain the 3 lesson phases: pre-, during, and post, so that students will be more engaged in the given instructional activities.

5. Conclusion

All in all, the implementation of a content-based approach in the teaching of language helps students in improving their language ability. The students find it easy to compose their paragraphs because they already know their topic sufficiently. They also get more chances to practice their oral language without tension. Furthermore, the students also get much knowledge about the discussed topic. Concerning writing skills, the students also get the advantage that their writing organization, mechanism, and grammatical rules were improved significantly because they had a good model through the text they read. In addition, these parts of writing did not distract them from their time to write. On the other hand, in implementing a content-based approach, the students not only get adequate knowledge related to the content of the text but also lexical, syntactical, morphological, and grammar knowledge. So, the purpose of language learning to reach the international standard can be achieved. Therefore, English language teachers in Indonesia should implement Content-based teaching as one of the potential pedagogical approaches. However, due to the merits of such a program, the government should promote professional training programs, especially for Content-Based Instructors, to increase their self-confidence in applying Content-Based Teaching strategies in their classrooms, particularly in designing the courses, improving the materials and the pedagogy.

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