

Content-based Approach to Teach ESP: Challenges Faced by ESP Instructors at

Djillali Liabes University

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Abstract:

The content-based approach to teach English for specific purposes has been a subject for significant change and innovation in the last decade, with a rising emphasis on integrating language and content through teaching scientific and technical university branches in the English language. This paper examines the significance and challenges of applying CBI in ESP instruction in the Algerian context, taking Djillali Liabes University of Side –Bel- Abbes as a case study. The research was conducted with five ESP teachers from five different departments at Djilali Liabes University. The teachers were interviewed and observed. The results obtained revealed that the participants faced a number of challenges that prevent them from efficient implementation of content- based teaching of the English language in their specialized fields. The study suggests a number of recommendations and strategies that might lead to the adequate of teaching English through content at the tertiary education level.

Keywords: Content-based Approach, ESP instruction

Introduction

The implementation of the content-based Instruction of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in the Algerian university is undergoing a number of obstacles. These latter include first the limited mastery of the teaching methodologies specific to this branch of English language teaching. The second obstacle is the rigidity of the curriculum structures that put forward traditional language teaching approaches. In order to tackle these issues, it is crucial to define Competency Based Instruction as an instructional method that emphasizes teaching language skills through subject matter content relevant to students' academic disciplines or future

careers. The exploitation of theoretical frameworks as task-based learning and genre analysis can help instructors in developing effective CBI courses adapted to ESP contexts (Johnson, 2018). By adapting these frameworks to suit the Algerian university environment with localized examples and industry-specific content, instructors can improve students' language proficiency while preparing them for professional success.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) outlined a framework consisting of three distinct phases in the evolution of ESP. The second phase entails a heightened interest in the field of applied linguistics, resulting in a shift from perceiving language as the dominant force to viewing it as an instrument. Building upon this, the third phase emphasizes the need for a corresponding adjustment in language syllabus design to facilitate effective learning. In the specific context of developments in Algeria during the second phase, it was imperative for the existing general English program to transition into ESP. This transition would involve equipping students with knowledge about the specific purposes relevant to their future careers and providing them with the necessary language skills within these domains.

Dealing with the challenges related to implementing CBI in ESP at Algerian universities requires a collaborative endeavor to offer necessary resources, deliver professional development opportunities for educators, revise curricula to align with CBI principles, and promote student engagement through the integration of meaningful content. By acknowledging the importance of overcoming these barriers and embracing pertinent definitions and frameworks of CBI in ESP, Algerian universities can enhance English language instruction tailored to specific academic or professional objectives more effectively (Bouhafs & Bouacha, 2020). And the question is: What are the challenges that ESP instructors face in using the Content-based approach?

Review of Literature:

Content-Based Instruction (CBI) proposes an approach where students acquire the target language through the study of content. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), CBI involves organizing language instruction around the content or knowledge that students will acquire, rather than focusing solely on linguistic or syllabus-based instruction. The information that individuals learn or communicate through language is commonly known as content (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Brinton (2003) describes content-based instruction as the teaching of language through exposure to engaging and meaningful information for learners. Snow (2001) defines content as the use of subject matter for the purposes of teaching a second or foreign language. In an adult English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting, the subject matter can encompass topics or themes based on interest or necessity, or it can be specific to the subjects students are currently studying. It is an approach to teaching English for Specific Purposes that centers on employing authentic major content from a specific discipline or field of study (Hung & Hai, 2016).

Competency-based language teaching is also defined by Brinton et al., (1989) as the integration of content and language, which has been considered from a language and subject matter standpoint, with the form and sequencing of language based on the content source. Through this method, students can increase the skills that enable them to gain access to the increasing amount of specialized original information that is published in English, while providing them with many occasions for language production (Stoller, 2004).

In order to get a deeper understanding of the impact of Content-Based Language Teaching CBLT in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, it was crucial to carry out studies that search various approaches. These research endeavors are fundamental to offer recommendations concerning the implementation of CBLT in ESP courses. Harmer (2001) describes ESP as language study within particular academic and professional contexts. Content-Based Instruction CBI aims to improve students' language skills and their ability to effectively communicate in a specialized area by integrating language skills with subject-specific content. Therefore, ESP instructors provide priority to themes that are strongly correlated to real-life concerns and have the prospective to affect both students' lives and the lives of others. This can embrace themes that are directly associated to their respective disciplines (Paltridge & Starfield, 2016). Consequently, integrating inquiry-based learning as a primary standard for curriculum development becomes a planned approach to inspire students in their language acquisition journey (Cammarata, 2016; Bernaus et al., 2009; Clément et al., 1994). In essence, the utilization of specific subject matter in ESP teaching authorizes ESP practitioners to play a more important role in promoting the overall academic growth of their students. By learning a language through content, ESP learners not only promote self-awareness but also generate work that expresses adaptability and critical thinking skills (Filipović, 2018), such as conducting research that explores their skills to communicate efficiently in the English language.

The content -based approach to teach English for specific purposes only helps students in acquiring the essential language abilities. It also allows them to utilize these abilities in practical circumstances. It simply prepares them for their future professions in their respective fields. Through the integration of English for specific purposes in specific fields as technology industries into an optional course, such as "English reading for technology," this type of instruction can serve as an effective tool for incorporating content-based instruction in English for specific purposes (ESP) teaching. Through the utilization of authentic materials and task-based learning, students can enhance their vocabulary, listening, and reading comprehension skills as they actively engage with content that is relevant to their fields. Smith (2019) describes authentic materials as teaching sources that provide learners with real-life examples of language use, and help them promote the skills needed for professional communication in their specific domain. Moreover, when following content-based instruction in ESP teaching, instructors achieve positive outcomes especially with students' reading comprehension abilities

The main purposes for CBI are enabling learners to use the target language as the vehicle of knowledge acquisition, and language skills in a specific content area. CBI aims to provide learners with authentic and significant contexts for language in use, where they can connect with real-world subjects and tasks that are applicable in their academic or professional interests. CBI fosters the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaborative skills, in addition to language proficiency through immersing students in content settings.

In the CBI classroom, ESP teachers need to incorporate a communicative approach in order to facilitate effective language communication among ESP students. According to Littlewood (1981), the communicative approach in language teaching emphasizes the systematic focus on language abilities and structures. This approach is essential in ensuring that students remain motivated and interested throughout the language learning process, regardless of their existing language knowledge and linguistic abilities (Wang & Zhu, 2020). Therefore, it is expected that language instructors, when selecting or creating authentic communicative contexts, should actively encourage student participation in language activities, fostering an atmosphere of active learning. Consequently, language knowledge and abilities will be naturally acquired during the process of communication.

At the heart of CBI is the principle of authenticity, authentic materials enhance students' motivation and engagement in language learning Kim and Elder (2019) where the language materials and activities used in the classroom closely mirror the language used in the target domain or academic field. This contrasts with traditional language instruction, which often relies on contrived or simplified language samples. According to Graves (1991), teaching materials can be metaphorically likened to tools that can be disassembled into individual parts and subsequently reorganized to cater to the specific requirements, capabilities, and preferences of the students enrolled in the course. CBI also emphasizes the integration of language and content, where both are given equal importance and are taught in a seamless and interdependent manner. The implementation of CBI in the Algerian university context has presented both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, it has allowed for a more tailored and relevant English language curriculum, better aligned with the needs of Algerian students. Accordingly, the transition has required significant adjustments in teaching methodologies, learning resources, and faculty development, as educators adapt to the demands of this new paradigm.

A significant attention has been given to content-based instruction, particularly in the context of writing instruction. In this approach, students are encouraged to enhance their composition skills by writing papers on subjects that are closely related to the content they are studying. Shih (1986) proposed a classification that encompasses various types of content-based approaches.

- 1 Topic-centered courses where the four language skills are stressed.
- 2 Content-based academic writing

- 3 Content-centered ESP courses which are field- specific areas.
- 4 Multi- skill English for academic purposes courses, mostly at University.

When applying it to the Algerian context, the four types seem relevant when considering the different disciplines that were taught in other languages (French).

Research in the Algerian University Context (Benyelles2009, Ouarnik2023) showed that using CBI in ESP classes was effective in enhancing students' language skills and their understanding of subject-specific concepts.

The emergence of Content-Based Instruction (CBI) has been a driving force behind this shift in the Algerian university context. A significant foundation for supporting CBI is derived from research on second language acquisition, with a focus on the contributions of Krashen, Swain, and Cummins (1985) who have been particularly influential in this regard. CBI is an approach to language teaching that integrates the learning of a specific content area or academic subject with the development of language proficiency. Krashen's "Monitor Model" provides further support for CBI, suggesting that when students receive comprehensible input, the process of learning the target language becomes less challenging, leading to acquisition rather than mere learning (Krashen, 1982). He highlights various strategies for reducing the difficulty of language acquisition. By aligning the language curriculum with the learners' academic or professional needs, CBI aims to create a more meaningful and contextually relevant learning experience, ultimately enhancing the students' motivation and engagement.

The implementation of CBI in ESP instruction has been a gradual but deliberate process in Algerian universities. This shift has been driven by several factors, including:

- The growing identification of the importance of developing job-ready language skills among university graduates to meet the demands of the Algerian job market.
- The need to adjust ESP curricula to the specific language and communication requirements of various academic disciplines and professional fields.
- The need to generate a more learner-centered approach to language learning, where students actively connect with content that is directly appropriate to their academic or professional objectives.
- The impact of international trends and best practices in language education, which have highlighted the benefits of CBI in enhancing language proficiency and content knowledge.

As Algerian universities maintain embracing this transition to CBI in ESP instruction, it has become crucial to value the principles, objectives, and practical implementation of this approach, as well as the probable challenges and opportunities it presents in the distinctive context of the Algerian higher education system. The Algerian university is gradually embracing English as its primary foreign language, in response to the rising need for English among Algerian students and professionals across different disciplines. Algerian higher

education institutions have now accredited the importance of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses in promoting the quality of education by providing specialized language education to cater to the rising requirement for English proficiency among professionals from diverse backgrounds (Assassi ,2020) , as evidence by the growing number of universities offering ESP programs.

Another key challenge is the lack of efficient resources and infrastructure. Many Algerian universities lack current teaching services, up-to-date materials such as language laboratories, and access to authentic target-language content, which are essential for effective CBI implementation. The limited availability of trained ESP instructors who are knowledgeable in both content and language teaching methodologies also hinders the successful implementation of CBI.

Furthermore, the well -designed curriculum and assessment structures in Algerian tertiary education often prioritize content teaching over language improvement, making it challenging to incorporate content and language learning successfully. Overcoming institutional inactivity and credible stakeholders, including supervisors and policymakers, of the benefits of CBI can also be an important impediment.

Methodology

The researcher utilized mixed-method approach for gathering data. The method consisted of an interview crossed with an observational phase with 5 ESP instructors from five different departments at Djillali Liabes University of Sidi Bel Abbes (Economics, electrical engineering, civil engineering, computer science, and pharmacy). The instructors were also asked to provide reflections about their experience teaching English for Specific Purposes, and the obstacles they faced during their professional Journey.

Analysis and Discussion

After the transcription and analysis of the interviews, and a detailed reporting of the observational phase, the study led to the recognition of the following challenges faced by the ESP teachers at Djillali Liabes University.

1 Identifying Learners' Specific Language Needs

The absence of a needs analysis as an essential step in course design was obvious from the observation. Instructors solely depended on the information provided by their foundation. Saragih (2014) emphasized the significant role of needs analysis in creating instructional materials for English for Specific Purposes. Therefore, a rigorous needs analysis is essential for the successful implementation of Content-Based Instruction (CBI) at Djillali Liabes

University in Algeria. By identifying the specific language needs and learning preferences of ESP students, educators can develop adapted curricula and lesson plans. This process entails collecting data from various sources like surveys, interviews, and observations to understand the learners' academic and professional objectives, language proficiency levels, and linguistic challenges in their fields of study. It includes the ability to comprehend technical terminology, communicate efficiently in academic and professional contexts, write coherent reports and research papers, and participate in discipline-specific discussions and presentations Bouhafs & Bouacha (2020). Addressing these needs ensures that CBI in ESP delivers language instruction that is directly relevant to the learners' academic pursuits and future career goals.

2 Designing CBI Curricula and Lesson Plans

Teachers reported that their first struggle was designing effective Content-Based Instruction (CBI) curricula and lesson plans. And this is directly tied to the absence of the needs analysis. Instructors at this stage need to design curricula that directly meet the specific language and content needs of the learners. These plans need to adhere to the extensive educational objectives of the institution (Dudley, 2017). The process begins with a systematic needs analysis to categorize the learners' language proficiency levels, academic or professional backgrounds, and specific language and content requirements. This information outlines the basis for curriculum and lesson plan structure, ensuring a learner-centered approach that addresses the unique needs of the ESP student (Chen & Lin, 2019). When planning CBI curricula, instructors must carefully select applicable and appealing content; that ensures a faultless integration of language and subject-matter objectives. In this context, authentic materials, such as academic textbooks, journal articles, or industry-specific resources, are of a great significance for a curriculum that is both linguistically and academically challenging.

When designing the lesson plans teachers need to draw a balance between Content and language activities. This will allow learners to develop their linguistic and subject-matter skills. Accordingly, reading comprehension activities, academic writing, and presentations might constitute be of great use. At this stage, teachers of both content and language and professionals of the field need to collaborate thoroughly to guarantee both content relevance and language accuracy (Bouhafs & Bouacha, 2020). This process is described as the ESP approach that helps to bridge the gap between learners' language specific needs and professional needs.

3 The Role of the ESP Instructor in CBI

Teachers in this context demonstrated a very modest involvement. Unlike traditional language teaching approaches, the CBI must go beyond simply imparting grammatical structures and vocabulary (Dudley, 2017). Our teachers' role was unfortunately reduced to presenting a number of grammatical and providing a new vocabulary repertoire. In fact their role goes beyond this. They need to be more immersed in the specific academic or professional domains of their learners. The CBI instructor takes on the role of a facilitator, guiding students to

engage with authentic content and materials relevant to their field of study or future careers. They must carefully select, adapt, and sequence the content to ensure it aligns with the learners' language proficiency levels and their evolving needs..

Teachers at this level of instruction need to demonstrate very high standards when designing learning activities that encourage critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaborative (skills Chen & Lin, 2019). Instructors here must provide adequate opportunities for students to practice the target language within the authentic context, discipline-specific tasks and scenarios. This entails a high level of creativity, flexibility, and motivation to permanently improve and revise the curriculum based on student feedback and rising needs. Mostly, the CBI instructors must hold strong interpersonal and communication skills. They must be able to create strong and flexible relationships with their students, understand their unique learning styles and preferences, consider their different learning styles, and provide personalized support and supervision (Johnson, 2018).

Conclusion and Recommendations:

Through the implementation of an inclusive and multifaceted expert evaluation of the teaching English for Specific Purpose, Algerian universities can expand valuable insights, identify areas for enhancement, and ensure the long-term success of CBI in enhancing the language and content proficiency of ESP learners. Subsequently, evaluating the effectiveness of Content-Based Instruction (CBI) in Algerian English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classrooms is a key component to guarantee the successful implementation and continuous improvement of this academic approach. For this sake, we need to consider a number of aspects, including learner outcomes, instructor perceptions, and institutional support. Here we can suggest a number of tips that may help to efficiently implement this approach

Scaffolding Instruction:

An effective implementation of content based instruction in the ESP class involves scaffolding instruction, where the teacher gradually increases the difficulty of the content and language demands as they demonstrates a higher level of autonomy. This can be completed by starting with a comprehensible input as Krashen (1982) suggests. Progressively, we will discover more challenging students with more advanced material. Also, Providing clear models, step-by-step guidance, and opportunities for guided practice can assist students extend the necessary content knowledge and language skills to succeed.

Authentic Materials:

Material in language teaching is a core element. Therefore, the integration of authentic materials, such as journal articles, technical manuals, or industry reports, can augment the relevance and engagement of CBI. These teaching materials make students face the real-world language and discourse patterns they will meet in their academic or professional domains. Through a methodical selection and adaptation of these materials, teachers can enhance the

students' proficiency levels, and ensure that both content and language are appropriately challenging.

Cooperative Learning:

In an ESP context, the cooperative learning is a promoting supportive approach for an efficient implementation of CBI. Teamwork in this context can foster language development and content comprehension. Group discussions, problem-solving tasks, and project-based learning are activities that can help learners engage with challenging materials. They can consequently negotiate meaning and communicate in the target language.

Multimodal Instruction:

The integration of multimodal instruction is very essential in language teaching. Through the combination of different modes of presentation, teachers consider the various learning styles of their students (e.g., visual, auditory, kinesthetic), and can enhance content comprehension and language learning. This multimodal teaching can be applied through the use of visuals, such as diagrams, graphs, or videos, which can help students better understand complex concepts, and listening activities and practical presentations that can reinforce language and content learning.

Assessing Learner Outcomes:

For a successful implementation of the CBI approach, we need to evaluate the impact of CBI on students' language proficiency, content knowledge, and overall academic performance. Here, we can opt for a combination of standardized language assessments, subject-specific tests, and holistic evaluations of learners' work and presentations.

Analyzing Instructor Experience

Another key component for successful CBI implementation is the collection of feedback from ESP instructors who have experienced the approach. This step helps to the understanding of the challenges, successes, and best practices faced by those teachers. Through Instruments such as Interviews, focus groups, and surveys teachers can provide valuable insights into their perspectives on the efficacy of CBI, training and support, and the pedagogical adjustment needed to optimize the approach.

Evaluating Institutional Support:

In order to ensure the success of CBI implementation we need to consider the level of institutional support, including the availability of resources, and professional development opportunities for instructors. Instructors also need to align the CBI approach with the general educational objectives, and make them cope with policies of Algerian universities. At this level, we need a comprehensive evaluation of our institution's commitment, and facilitation of CBI initiatives.

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