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College of Education
Department of English



Learning English through Content- Based Approach

Research Project

Submitted to Department of English Language in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of B.A. in English Language

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Supervised by:

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Certification

I certify that this study was prepared by student (Hemin Nabaz Sdeeq) under my supervision at College of Education/ Salahaddin University-Erbil in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor in English Language.

Signature of Supervisor:

Dr. Nazenin Shekh Muhammad

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Then, I would like to express the deepest appreciation and grateful to my research supervisor, "Dr. Nazenin Shekh Muhammad", who guided me so much during the process of writing this research. Her assistances made this process easier and more fantastic, God reward her.

I am also thankful to the participants and my colleagues who helped me during collecting the data, especially to my dears (Mr. Muhannad Abdulwahab and Mr. Ahmed Rashid) who shared the questionnaire to lots of English students. All the best to them.

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Furthermore, a million thanks to my department (College of Education/ Department of English/ University of Salahaddin) for everything. I highly proud and glad I was a student there for four years.

Finally, I hope this product can be beneficial for readers, English learners and teachers.

Abstract

This research paper which is entitled "Learning English through Content-Based Approach (CBA)" aims to find out the role of content-based approach (CBA) on learners during learning English. This study is divided into the following basic three sections: section one is an introduction which provides a general background and information about CBA. Section two is a literature review which gives enough information about the effects and role of CBA on English students. Section three is methodology which contains a questionnaire including 12 items participated in by 43 English students as well as the analysis of the data. Fortunately, the results of the questionnaire are extremely positive, as most of the participants considered CBA a beneficial, encouraging and effective method for learning English. Finally, the conclusion synthesizes the findings of the study, followed by references and appendices.

Key Terms: learning English, content-based approach

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Section One

Introduction

0.1. Introduction

English language has been commonly supposed as an active global language in the world. Fortunately, there are various strategies to learn this international language. For example, in recent years content-based approach (CBA) has become an effective method of teaching in academic circles. Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 204) defined content-based approach as “a second language teaching which is organized around the content or information which learners will obtain, rather than around linguistic or type of curriculum”. In addition, Kemp and Dance-Schissel (2022) mentioned that CBA is a teaching method which students study language through specific meaningful content; The focus of this approach is on the content or the subject matter. Ewert (2014) supports CBA as cited in Burgoyne (2015), he affirms that studying a content enables students to make connections to their prior information, which is known to be a gainful and effective method.

Moreover, CBA makes a positive atmosphere in the class because learners learn English in a fun and efficient way. For instance, in the process of learning English through reading articles about animals, students will get two important things; 1) they will learn more information about animals. 2) their linguistic abilities will develop (Farani, 2012, p. 67). Furthermore, learning the target language via these topics that are interesting to the students; raise observing, motivation, and engagement. It guides learners to improve their language competences in a different context instead of routinely memorizing vocabulary. During the lesson they learn about something, which can be anything that interests them such as a health topic, a historical subject, sport news, animal stories or learning a new skill (Kemp and Dance-Schissel, 2022). Therefore, students are not studying language as an isolated unit or depending on a course on different skills, but instead are learning a language by means of specific meaningful content by making a balance between all four skills.

1.1. The Problem

According to Peachey (2003, p. 2), this approach faces some challenges. For example, students may feel confused about how they improve their linguistic skills

because CBA isn't specifically focused on language learning, learners are more probably to use their first language rather than target language, sometimes it is difficult for teachers to find suitable sources for elementary or lower level students and some learners may copy directly from the source texts they use to answer the questions or discuss topics. However, CBA aims to help students to be able to draw conclusions and analyse the subject matter by their own words.

1.2. The Aim

The current research aims to introduce content-based approach to create an interesting and efficient environment of learning, to give up on rotely memorizing vocabulary and to encourage learners to be independent and confident.

1.3. Research Questions

1. Does introducing CBA create an interesting and efficient environment of learning?
2. Does familiarizing CBA motivate students to give up on rotely memorizing vocabulary and encourage them to be independent and confident?

1.4. The Significance

The current research offers several benefits such as: the process of learning English can be more enjoyable and effective. Thus, learners' motivation in learning English will be developed through CBA. Also, students can improve their academic abilities and develop their language skills through comprehension of the subject content. Furthermore, it assists and encourages working in group, which can help them to develop their communication capacity.

Section Two

Literature Review

2.0. Preliminary

Section two consists of advantages & disadvantages of CBA, the principles of CBA, the strategies of CBA in teaching English, the relation between CBA and learning English and the effects of CBA on students' learning English performance.

2.1. Advantages & Disadvantages of Content-Based Approach

Rhalmi (2009) offers the following advantages and disadvantages of content-based approach that we have to consider.

Advantages of CBA:

1. CBA leads students to learn English in a meaningful context by focusing on real-world topics that interest them. This method offers students an authentic language experience that is more attractive and meaningful than learning English in isolation.
2. By using interesting subject matter, learning process becomes absolutely more enjoyable, effective and motivating.
3. CBA provides learners a wide range of educational information through various topics.
4. Students can improve their study abilities such as note-taking, summarizing, paraphrasing and taking out key information from the texts.
5. Developing teamwork and social skills through group work.
6. It supports teaching language via meaningful and authentic tasks.

Disadvantages of CBA:

1. CBA perhaps confuse the learners and provide them the feeling that they aren't improving their language skills, because it isn't explicitly focused on language learning.
2. Students are most likely to use their native language rather than English.

3. Sometimes, teachers face problem while finding suitable topics for beginner or lower-level students.
4. CBA may not be suitable for the learners who want to learn a specific aspect of language such as political language or academic writing. In such situations, more than one focused strategy might be required.
5. CBA maybe become repetitious and tedious for learners, especially if the course material is not multifarious enough. This makes an uninteresting environment of learning and disengagement.
6. CBA might emphasize the subject matter rather than linguistic abilities such as grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. Accordingly, learners may not improve a strong foundation in the language.
7. The success of CBA mainly depends on the teacher's capacity to choose suitable sources and design effecient language instruction activities. Hence, the quality of CBA can change depending on the teacher's efficiency.

2.2. The Principles of Content-Based Approach

According to Brinton (2001) cited in Nunan (2003, pp. 205-209) CBA has the following principles:

- 1. Selecting Suitable Content:** The topics should be choosen according to the learners' levels, interests and academic purposes.
- 2. Integrating Skills:** Instead of treating with language skills in isolation, students engage with language within meaningful contents of academic subjects or real life topics by covering all four language skills (reading, listening, speaking and writing) as well as grammar and vocabulary.
- 3. Promoting Critical Thinking:** CBA encourages students to think critically about the subject matter and engage in higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation and synthesis. This helps students deepen their understanding of both the content and the language.
- 4. Engaging Learner Actively:** One of the main characteristics of CBA classroom is that it is student-centered, not teacher-centered; Students do not depend on the teacher to control all learning process or to be the source of all information, instead that they take a more active role in the class. The philosophy of CBA is that learning takes place not only through exposure to the teacher's input, but also through peer input and interaction of the learners. As a result, students show an active role in the classroom

that involve productive learning, negotiation, information obtaining and co-producing of meaning.

5. Emphasizing on Language Aspects Conspicuously: The aim of CBA is to familiarize learners to authentic input with the goal of their being able to use language for communicative purposes. Furthermore, CBA diverges from some other teaching methods by incorporating tasks designed to develop awareness of language features present in authentic texts.

2.3. The Strategies of Content-Based Approach in Teaching English

The strategies of CBA in teaching English can be divided into the following ones:

- 1. Using Authentic Materials:** Authentic materials such as textbooks, articles, academic journals, audios and videos, are used to guide students towards language use. This helps students to develop their language skills (Chambers, 1999).
- 2. Providing Language Support:** Teachers provide language support in the form of vocabulary instruction, language scaffolding and comprehension strategies to help learners understand the content or the topic easily (Nation & Snowling, 2004).
- 3. Encouraging Collaboration:** Collaborative activities such as group projects, debates, or problem-solving tasks, are incorporated into the curriculum to motivate interaction and communication among students (Nunan, 1988).
- 4. Assessing Language and Content:** Assessment tasks evaluate students' language proficiency and their understanding of the content. These assessments may include presentations, essays, projects, or exams that assess both language skills and content knowledge (Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 1989).
- 5. Facilitating Meaningful Connections:** Teachers help learners make meaningful connections between language learning and content knowledge as well as highlighting the relevance of language skills in academic and real world contexts (Grabe & Stoller, 1997).

2.4. The Relation between Content Based-Approach and Learning English

According to Krashen (1984) cited in Hernandez (2012, p. 32), “second language acquisition or learning takes place when the learner acquires comprehensible input, not when the learner is memorizing vocabulary or completing

language activities”. Fortunately, CBA achieves this goal because through studying a content, the input becomes more comprehensible and meaningful for learners. As well as, students in CBA classes have lots of opportunity to interact and negotiate with the subject matter that they are learning in order to communicate with a peer and practice the information gained easily (Hernandez, 2012, pp. 32-33).

Besides, “According to CBA, using language requires integrating a combination of skills. In CBA classes the role of students are student-centered; they are widely integrated in activities that connect the skills, because this is how the skills are commonly integrated in the real world. As a result, learners may read and take notes, listen and write a summary, or reply orally to things they have read or written. Additionally, grammar is considered a component of other skills in CBA rather than as an isolated entity of language. They aim to involve information, language proficiency and thinking abilities” (Richards and Rodgers, 2001, p. 208).

2.5. The Effects of Content Based-Approach on Students' Learning English Performance

The effects of CBA on students' learning English performance are generally positive, as it provides a more delightful and engaging learning experience. Farani (2012, p. 67) notes that CBA has a great impact to develop students' motivation in learning English; This method makes a positive environment of learning because the learners learn English in an interesting and effective way. As well as, Richards and Rodgers (2001, pp. 206, 208) state that CBA increases the level of expertise in English, makes a positive attitude about the language, improves language skills, offers knowledge through the content taught and develops engagement and participation in language learning activities.

Furthermore, Burgoyne (2015) mentions that while differentiating between CBA and other prior used methods of teaching, Stryker and Leaver (1997, p. 3) claim that “content-based approach (CBA) motivates students to learn a new language by playing real pieces—actually using that language, from the very first class, as a real and efficient means of communication. In addition, the philosophy of CBA emphasizes on encouraging students to become independent learners and continue the learning journey on the far side of the classroom”. Thus, the effects of CBA on students' learning English performance are widely beneficial, encouraging and constructive.

Section Three

Methodology

3.1. Participants

The participants consisted of 43 English language students from both the Colleges of Education and Basic Education at Salahaddin University from the second to fourth stages. Of these, 38 students were from College of Education and 5 ones were from Basic Education.

3.2. Instrument

The questionnaire instrument used which was designed through using Richards and Rodgers (2001, pp. 206, 208) and Rhalmi (2009) by connecting with the purposes of the study. It contains 12 items, including a mix of close and open questions such as multiple-choices, checkboxes and a short answer-question.

3.3. The Results & Data Analysis

The following tables are the results of the participants' responses of the questionnaire about the role of content-based approach (CBA) on learners during learning English. as well as, under each table there's an interpretational explanation about the results of the table itself.

Table 1: A preliminary background of the participants about CBA

Nos.	Items	Yes	No
1.	Have you heard the concept of content-based approach (CBA) before?	21 (48.8%)	22 (51.2%)
2.	Have you ever participated in a content-based approach (CBA) program?	22 (51.2%)	21 (48.8%)

The results of the two above items show that nearly half of the participants are familiar with CBA and have an experience with this method. Nevertheless, the other half are not familiar with it (but it is worth noting that before I asked them to answer the questions of the questionnaire, I explained what is CBA for them, so they got an idea. As well as, I told my colleagues the method that the our teacher of

"conversation" curriculum taught last year, was CBA; it indicates we have participated in a CBA program and we have an experience with it).

Table 2: The participants' opinions about role of CBA on learners during learning English

Nos.	Items	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
3.	I believe through using interesting contents or topics, learning process becomes more enjoyable, effective and motivating.	28 (65.1%)	13 (30.2%)	2 (4.7%)
4.	I think students can improve their academic abilities and develop their language skills through studying exciting meaningful topics.	34 (79.1%)	8 (18.6%)	1 (2.3%)
5.	I think CBA is more enjoyable and effective than traditional language learning methods.	22 (51.2%)	21 (48.8%)	0 (0%)
6.	CBA develops engagement and participation in language learning activities in the class.	23 (53.5%)	19 (44.2%)	1 (2.3%)
7.	CBA improves learners' social skills through group working.	21 (48.8%)	20 (46.5%)	2 (4.7%)
8.	The role of the students in CBA classes is student-centered.	18 (41.9%)	24 (55.8%)	1 (2.3%)

The sequels of this table indicate most of the participants believe that content-based approach (CBA) has many positive impacts on students during learning English and they affirm the advantages and gainful effects of this method that they have mentioned in this table and in the previous sections.

Table 3: Focusing on language learning or content acquisition or making a balance between both of them?

No.	Item	Yes (for language learning)	Yes (for content acquisition)	No (balanced focus is preferred)
9.	Would you prefer CBA to focus more on language learning or content acquisition?	25 (58.1%)	12 (27.9%)	6 (14%)

The inferences of this one point out most of participants prefer focusing on language learning rather than content acquisition, some of them prefer content acquisition and a few of them think balanced focus is needed between of them. In my point of view, making a balance has a better outcome because the learners can develop their language skills during studying the content and obtain an information about the content simultaneously. In this situation, the students kill two birds with one stone.

Table 4: Favourite topic of the participants

No.	Item	Literary	Educational	Sports	Religious	Historical	Technological
10.	What specific content or topic are you interested in language learning through CBA? (Check all that apply)	8 (18.6%)	23 (53.5%)	14 (32.6%)	10 (23.3%)	9 (20.9%)	12 (27.9%)

The results show that educational topic is the top interested one of participants for improving language skills through CBA.

Table 5: Types of materials or sources that they preferred for CBA

No.	Item	Textbooks	Articles	Videos	Podcasts	Interactive online platforms
11.	What types of materials or sources do you prefer for CBA? (Check all that apply)	17 (39.5%)	7 (16.3%)	30 (69.8%)	7 (16.3%)	5 (11.6%)

According to the sequels, most of them think videos and textbooks particularly videos are the most effective sources that the developers of CBA programs or teachers can use in CBA classes.

Final item: A short answer-question

12. Would you recommend CBA to others interested in language learning? Why or why not?

Most of the participants recommended CBA to language learners and considered it a beneficial, enjoyable and efficient method for developing language skills, especially for speaking skill.

The following are some of the participants' quotations who recommended CBA for language learning:

- "I consider CBA as an effective method of language learning through interesting topics, as it makes a student-centered class and guides learners to improve speaking skill; so it is a communicative method of teaching in the class. Therefore, I highly recommend CBA to be used in the educational and language learning communities for the sake of producing better speakers and the "real conversations" amongst the learners".
- "Definitely, content-based instruction (CBA) is a great method for language learning. It focuses on using interesting and relevant content to improve language skills. Additionally, it's engaging and practical".
- "I would absolutely recommend CBA for language learning. It's a fantastic method that focuses on immersing yourself in the target language as well as It's a fun and effective way to improve your language skills".

- “Yes of course, I would recommend it because it’s more interesting and useful than the traditional ways of learning and students will learn more”.
- “Yes definitely, in my opinion, if you study the topics that you interested in, you can learn the language faster”.
- “Surely, I recommend CBA to every students because it makes learning easier and more delightful, and it avoids the learning process from restricted topics”.
- “Absolutely, I recommend CBA for learners because it’s useful for improving speaking skill, as well as polishing comprehension and thinking ability”.
- “Yes certainly, because I don't think there is a better way than this strategy of learning”.

Conclusion

Eventually, this research paper leads the following points:

1. Content-based approach (CBA) is a fantastic, delightful, motivating and effective method of language learning.
2. Learning English through CBA is definitely a right choice.
3. CBA creates another world of learning for students.
4. An exciting, interactive and productive environment of learning can be produced by means of CBA.
5. As a result of studying interesting contents or topics, learning process becomes more enjoyable, engaging and efficient.
6. CBA enables learners to achieve two aims at once: a) improving language skills during studying the content. b) gaining an information from the content.
7. CBA produces confident and autonomous learners.
8. Students' motivation in learning English will be developed via CBA.
9. However, CBA has a few problems or disadvantages but it doesn't have too much negative effect.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Content-Based Approach (CBA) Classrooms



Appendix B

Table 1: A preliminary background of the participants about CBA

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Final item: A short answer-question

12. Would you recommend CBA to others interested in language learning? Why or why not?