

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF CONTENT BASED INSTRUCTION (CBI) IN EFL  
SETTINGS AT BEGINNING LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT STAGES

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SAN JUAN DE PASTO, MAY 2013

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“Las ideas y conclusiones aportadas en el Trabajo de Grado son responsabilidad exclusiva de los autores”.

Artículo 1º del acuerdo N° 324 de octubre 11 de 1966, emanado del Honorable Concejo Directivo de la Universidad de Nariño.

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Jairo Ortiz Valencia  
Asesor

## Resumen

Como otro método y técnica Content Based Instruction (CBI) no ha sido una idea perfecta, pero ha mostrado ha mostrado nuevos conceptos; considerando la real naturaleza del lenguaje como un no se establece como o toma elementos aislados sino toma la enseñanza en conjunto con el fin de evitar el uso del lenguaje irreal. El aprendizaje del lenguaje es más que un conjunto de elementos solitarios y reglas gramaticales aprendidos de memoria involucra lo que realmente se hace con el lenguaje como lo aplicamos en un ambiente comunicativo y desde luego como es endeedado y aprendido

El siguiente documento tiene como propósito principal hacer una descripción y análisis de uno de los más revolucionarios y significantes métodos de enseñanza; Content Based Instruction (CBI). Tiene en cuenta la manera como puede ser aplicado la enseñanza del Inglés como lengua extranjera, mostrando sus principales características, ventajas y desventajas

Este análisis va a finalizar en la idea de enseñanza con el fin de utilizar el content based instruction en clases para estudiantes principiantes considerando lo que puede ser enseñada y la forma de hacerlo usando información que los estudiantes ya conocen y la manera como puede ser usada en un contexto real entonces los estudiantes pueden familiarizarse con el lenguaje el principio en de una mejor forma

### Abstract

As other approaches, methods and techniques, Content Based Instruction (CBI) has not been a perfect idea but, it has shown brand new concepts considering the real nature of language; a whole, not a set of isolated elements taught and practiced individually which may lead to learn unreal language. Language learning is more than a perfect command of every single grammar rule learned by heart, it involves what we really do with language, how we apply it in a communicative setting and of course the way it is taught and learned.

The following document has as main purpose to make a description and analysis of one of the most revolutionary and significant approaches language teaching; Content Based Instruction (CBI). It takes into account the way it could be applied in an EFL setting, showing its main characteristics, advantages and disadvantages.

This analysis is going to end up in a teaching idea in order to have a content based class regarding a regular beginners' English class, considering what can be taught and the way of doing it by using the information which students already know, and the way to use it in a real meaningful context so students can be familiarized with the language from the very beginning of the course in a better way.

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## Introduction

Through history there have been many approaches, methods, techniques in order to achieve a better teaching-learning process; Grammar Translation, Audio-lingual, Total Physical Response, Silent Way, Communicative Language Teaching, Suggestopedia and others. Each one of these ideas has been the result of research, practice and improvement of previous notions. All this evolution does not mean that previous thoughts should be forgotten, especially when some of them are still used today, not because of lack of new concepts but for their effectiveness on the context where they are still applied.

It is important to underline that not all learners need the language for the same purposes, they do not learn in the same way and at the same rate even under similar circumstances so, just a single idea may not be that effective when facing language teaching-learning processes.

At their time, each one of those approaches, methods and techniques assumed the way a language should be taught and learned, and set a new principle to consider. Among them, Content Based Instruction (CBI) appeared revolutionarily teaching language inside meaningful contexts, real contexts, using authentic material (books, articles, videos, recordings, etc.) so learners really started facing the target language as the tool for learning.

Regarding content it is normal to deduce that this could be a very useful method at advanced stages due to the required English level when facing authentic material but, when facing beginners in EFL settings things may be different due to the limitations offered by the setting itself.

## CHAPTER 1. RESEARCH PROBLEM

### Description

Content Based Instruction (CBI) as one of the most revolutionary methods in the language teaching/learning process, takes language and puts it into context considering that language learning is more likely to be successful when facing conditions that are similar to the ones that are experienced when learning the mother tongue. It also claims that language must not be seen as a set of elements which are studied in isolation and through the use of unreal sentences and situations, it must be done in continuous action, this way students can witness lively the way it works so they will have a better understanding instead of memorization.

Regarding this idea, it becomes complicated to face authentic material at beginners' stages due to the evident lack of vocabulary at that stage and if we consider an EFL setting, the lack of authentic material arises as one of the main limitations for a content based class. Fortunately, new technologies allow teachers and students to have unlimited access to this authentic information; unfortunately not everyone has that opportunity.

In order to face authentic material, it is imperative to have a look at the way English is taught nowadays, for example, textbooks offer a way in which language is divided into pieces and taught considering the level of difficulty of the structure in an isolated way so, students show acceptable performance comprehending but, not producing. Books also give predesigned material that does not consider students preferences, likes and dislikes so, their motivation may not be as high as expected because not all students enjoy the same things and it can be reflected in the obtained results.

### Research question

Is it possible to have an adequate content based class at English beginners' courses?

### Objectives

To highlight the main strengths and weaknesses which are found in CBI.

To find out possible strategies in order to overcome CBI weaknesses.

### Purpose of the study

Originally Content Based Instruction first appeared in the mid-1980s with the publication of Bernard Mohan's work, *Language and Content*. Mohan describes his work as an exploration into the ways in which the "learning of language and subject matter can be accomplished" (Mohan, 1986). Immersion programs applied this principle as a way of adapting foreign students to scholar systems so they can attend regular academic classes in L2 this way students learned target language and the required content.

What is intended in this paper is to analyze the possibilities of using a content based class in EFL settings at beginners' stage so students can have the opportunity of using the target language in a more realistic way inside the classroom in order to have a more practical language learning process beyond textbooks from the very beginning of students' contact with L2.

### Significance of the study

Content Based Instruction as a significant approach in language teaching does not work the same for all settings, especially if we talk about an English course in EFL settings where content is not as important as it could be. Regarding this context, English is normally taught through the use of textbooks but the real use of English is missing due to the lack of more realistic material and students end by learning in one specific context but when facing original performance they show an evident deficiency of L2.

At beginners' stages of learning, the use of a content based class would be complicated because of the evident absence of vocabulary and grammatical features thus; not only the comprehension of the taught feature, but also language learning would be delayed and that is why it is important to have a broad revision of Content Based Instruction (CBI) and how it could be adapted to the setting and its needs.

Considering what qualifies as content in content based classes, it is very common for it to be some kind of subject matter related to the students' academic curriculum. The second or foreign language can be consequently used as the medium of instruction. Nevertheless, this is not the only option available for, and regarding a setting such an English course, some authors suggest, that content ". . . needs not be academic; it can include any topic, theme, or non-language issue of interest or importance to the learners" (Genesee, 1994). This statement shows the flexibility of a content based class and the possibility of teaching at beginners' stages developing students' skills.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theories of Learning

Regarding theories of learning three viewpoints can be underlined; the first, and the most traditional is the structural view, in which language is a system of structurally related elements for the coding of meaning so, if a learner is able to master these elements it could be said that the language is mastered despite the fact that these elements are usually taught in isolation. The second view of language is the functional view, in which language is the vehicle for the expression of meaning, it does not mean that the structural elements of language should be left out carelessly, but as long as they work as a unit, the main purpose of the language is not the master of particular elements but the result of their interaction which is nothing but communication. The third view is the interactional view as it sees language as a vehicle for the realization of interpersonal relations and for the performance of social transactions between individuals, this way we have a language which not only allows people to communicate in L2 but also to study, to work and to perform everyday life in a target language.

It is known that a theory sets the principles that describe and rule the way in which a language is developed and learned. It also explains those principles regarding different viewpoints and as can be seen in all of them, they were rightfully applied and evaluated in several settings showing that learners learned although any possible weakness found, leading this way to the birth of new, effective and improved theories. There have been many theories trying to explain the way we learn things, all of them have been tested and have shown some validity, but as time passed these ideas were modified because there is not only one way to learn but also several ones, and all of them have set some principles of education that are still effective nowadays.

In order to get to Content Based Instruction (CBI) it is important to make a short background review, the way it influenced L2 learning, and how it has evolved to become what it is now.

### *Behaviorism*

Johnson (2004) sets: “Behaviorism undermined the role of mental processes and viewed learning as the ability to inductively discover patterns of rule-governed behavior from the examples provided to the learner by his or her environment”. In other words, the behaviorist theory, particularly as developed in the operant conditioning model of Skinner, considers all learning to be the establishment of habits as a result of reinforcement and reward (Wilga Rivers, 1968) so, we are not really talking about a learning process but a conditioning one, in which learners are just receptors of stimulus that create in them a pattern to be followed rather than learned.

Behaviorism is a theory that claims that a learner is basically a passive entity so, the only thing a learner does is to respond to determined external stimulus. From this point of view, we can assume that learning would be the same for everyone because while seen as passive entities, all learners would work in the same way when learning not only languages but also any other thing. Here, internal mechanisms and the role of emotions are not taken into account when facing the learning process.

When learning is taken as a behavior which is automatically acquired through stimulus and response methods, we talk about learning by mechanical repetition, for example, the way some learners memorize: they tend to repeat it several times until they finally get it, but it does not mean that the feature was learnt, it was just memorized thus, learning a language would be basically to acquire linguistic habits, leaving out the real practice of what was learnt.

Regarding the behaviorist, and as stated by Hubbard Jones and Thomson Wheeler, (1983) “a highly complex learning task may be learned by being dividing it into small habits, these habits form correct or incorrect responses, and then are rewarded or, punished, respectively”. If languages were a set of isolated parts it would be easier to teach but what we have is a set of interrelated elements that can't work in isolation, all of them are part of a complex system whose goal is communication.

Regarding Behaviorism, the best way to be applied has been through the use of reinforcement, positive or negative, this way what we want to teach is more likely to be learned by exposing learners to a determined reinforcement every time they show that the taught feature was correctly learned or memorized. If learners face a positive reinforcement they will know that they performed well so, the learned feature is immediately associated to the concept of rightness thanks to that reinforcement. Nowadays we can say behaviorism is still used when evaluating learners through the use of grades and marks, so we use the idea of a positive mark in order to get a determined response repeated and learned but that does not mean that things have been learned rather than just mechanically memorized and that can be seen when applying knowledge inside a context when learners do not know what to do with the learned features.

CBI shows its first strength considering that Behaviorism tends to explain learning as habit formation process, but there is no way to really prove that the language was really acquired, because a single test just can prove that the taught feature was just memorized instead of learnt. On the other hand, CBI considers that the information found in class should be used in order to get something else besides language itself in isolation, this way the lack of context that can be found in Behaviorist environments is modified regarding CBI. Students are able to memorize but, they do not know what to do with that information, so besides good

grades that can be obtained in a single test are not real evidence that there have been a learning process.

Instead of habit formation processes, having a look at language as a natural process should be a more helpful idea so when Krashen (1983) and his theory appeared, the conception of language as something that can be taken naturally was an adequate complement. Now there were two complementary conceptions regarding language learning, a natural process and a useful guide in order to correct and improve.

### *Krashen's Theory*

The Natural Approach as developed by Krashen and Terrell (1983) emphasized on the concept of Comprehensible Input, taking into account acquisition and learning. They argued that learning cannot lead to acquisition. The focus lies on meaning, rather than form (structure, grammar).

Although there is an evident difference regarding CBI because here, content was not taught through the use of the L2, this approach does include the real interaction inside the classroom so language became the tool of learning something that was really useful inside a context. Through the use of comprehensible input, the learning process was given a new viewpoint in which learners started to use language actively in real situations.

The Natural Approach was based upon Krashen's (1985) theories of second language acquisition; five hypotheses were set in order to have a clearer idea of this theory:

1. The Acquisition-Learning Distinction is the most essential of all the hypotheses in Krashen's theory and also the best known. It can be seen from two different viewpoints; The Acquired System which consists in a process that is very similar to the one that children face when acquiring first language, natural and spontaneous communication so, the most relevant feature here is the communicative act rather than the adequateness of the produced language.



It is clear when learning first language because all learners start making mistakes and only through practice they are able to use language in a better way, it is important to highlight that these mistakes are not an obstacle regarding communication. On the other hand we have The Learned System being the result of a conscious process. Here the language is acquired through regular instruction. This regular instruction has as function to establish rules and grammatical features in order to build up language knowledge.

2. The Monitor hypothesis sets a relationship between acquisition and learning. According to Krashen, the acquisition system is the initiator, while the learning system performs the role of the monitor. Here the purpose of the monitor is small, learners start learning language inside their own environments so, communication is the main objective, mistakes are commonly found, but when having instruction, the monitor helps to correct variations from typical speech and to give speech a more grammatically adequate appearance. Although beginners make some mistakes that do not stop the communicative act, the importance of having a well-ruled language helps in order to have a better understanding of the language itself regarding comprehension.

3. The Natural Order hypothesis suggests that the acquisition of grammatical structures has a natural order which is said to be predictable. In this case, some grammatical structures are more likely to be acquired early while others late. In some way this theory has some connection with behaviorist thoughts because in both we assume that all learners start from the very same starting point and under the same circumstances, affirmation which is not true because, all learners have different characteristics in their learning process, different talents and skills so, thinking of learners as a group of identical people is not adequate.

4. The Input hypothesis is more focused with acquisition, rather than learning. According to it, learners improve and progress along a natural order when receiving second

language input; this input should be one step beyond present level of learners. This is a principle which is more connected to existing education because as long as methods exist, there is a tendency of following them in a very strict way assuming that the method is an unbreakable rule that undoubtedly works.

5. The Affective Filter hypothesis sets that a number of affective variables play a helping role in second language acquisition, variables such as: motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. These factors create in learners a filter which facilitates or slows down the learning process, in other words, a learner with high levels of motivation, self-confidence, and a good self-image is more likely to learn, rather than a student with low motivation, low self-esteem, and anxiety. Unlike behaviorism, now the emotional factor is taken into account. Situations are not the same for everyone, and it has been proved that the most “irrelevant” situation may affect significantly our life, so everything that has to do with it, is affected as well.

### Teaching Methods

As theories arose, so did a wide variety of methods and techniques which also proposed innovative ideas in order to be applied inside the teaching-learning process. These methods were the reflection of previous theories as well. Two of them which have a very strong relationship will be mentioned here because they establish clear guidelines regarding interactive and communicative language learning processes.

Communicative Language Teaching and Content Based Instructions have shown their effectiveness through the years because they focused on what the main purpose of language learning really is; communication. They have evident differences but they both help to build up the forthcoming teaching proposal.

### *Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)*

During the 1980s and 1990s approaches emerged which concentrated on the fundamentally communicative functions of language. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has emerged as the standard in second language teaching. As a wide approach, there are several definitions and interpretations, but the interconnected characteristics offered by Brown (2001) become handy to get a useful overview of it:

1. Classroom goals are focused on all of the components (grammatical, discourse, functional, sociolinguistic, and strategic) of communicative competence. The idea of language learning goes beyond memorizing patterns; here the idea of communication is central due to the usefulness of the language in the real context and the way to get is through practice.

2. Language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes. Organizational language forms are not the central focus, but rather aspects of language that enable the learner to accomplish those purposes. When learners know what to do with everything that is taught in the classroom, learning gains a purpose as learners gain motivation as well.

3. Fluency and accuracy are seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques. At times, fluency may have to take on more importance than accuracy in order to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use. If speech is stopped every time mistakes happen the only thing we are doing is stopping learning. Allowing students to move freely leads them to gain self-confidence and motivation because once the goal of communication is got; reinforcement appears through improvement rather than punishment.

4. Students in a communicative class ultimately have to use the language, productively and receptively, in spontaneous contexts outside the classroom. Classroom tasks must

therefore equip students with the skills necessary for communication in those contexts.

Regarding EFL setting this is kind of hard due to the lack of L2 contexts outside the classroom

so, problem-solving tasks are the way of keep students engaged with the learning process.

Teachers can't be next to the students all day long but, thanks to interactive tools, students may find L2 contexts in which L2 is the main tool outside the classroom.

5. Students are given opportunities to focus on their own learning process through an understanding of their own styles of learning and through the development of appropriate strategies for autonomous learning. This does not mean that classes should be focused one day in one kind of learners and the next day on other and so on. Recognizing different kinds of learners instead of an obstacle should be seen as an opportunity to change the classical focus of the class to a wide range of alternatives.

6. The role of the teacher is that of facilitator and guide, not an all-knowing best owner of knowledge. Students are therefore encouraged to construct meaning through genuine linguistic interaction with others. As teachers we must feel free to open our minds to different kinds of teaching because we must learn as much as our students do, if not we are not communicating and the teaching act fades.

As it can be seen, communicative language teaching leads classes to a balance in which the teacher stops being the all mighty so learners are allowed to interact in order to get the knowledge and these interactions have a main stage in the class itself and everyday activities. These actions give learners self-confidence so they feel free to talk not only to the teacher but also to their peers, this way they produce spontaneous speech, develop independent thinking and learn.

Although the principle is very adequate it could be hard to find more challenging activities inside the classroom. CLT works well when language gain purpose but in EFL

setting this is not as easy as it sounds because the context is the main limitation regarding real use of L2. CBI makes its appearance and now the purpose of teaching languages is not only to teach language but also content.

### *Content Based Instruction (CBI)*

Content-Based Instruction (CBI) is “a significant approach in language education” (Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 1989). It is designed to provide second-language learners instruction in content and language. This way this approach changed the misconception of learning languages through lack of context, moving to more realistic English in which learners faced everyday challenges and tasks so they really applied everything that could be learned in order to succeed. Once these tasks were achieved it could be said that there was learning not only in terms of language but also content.

It is known that Content-Based Instruction is centered on the subject matter; nevertheless, the approach aims to develop both; language and academic skills (Richards & Rodgers 2001). As Richards and Rodgers point out, if the information sent through the content is interesting and useful, learners should acquire the language faster. In addition, the language acquisition process may be more efficient and the language learners more motivated. Unfortunately teachers tend to think that the things that worked with one group will do the same for everyone so, the class tends to be repetitive and predictable but, if we take into account students opinion it would be easier to create a great environment although the hard work required. Dörnyei (2001) supports this thesis by stating that “students will not be motivated to learn unless they regard the material they are taught as worth learning”, therefore, it may be advisable inside the Content-Based approach to include learners in the choice of topics and activities, it is important to remember that things we think are fine, may not be for

students, so giving them voice inside the classroom helps learners to have an active role regarding their own learning process.

There is a major difference between Communicative Language Teaching and Content-Based Instruction. While Communicative Language Teaching is a language-driven approach, focusing on the language itself, Content-Based Instruction is content-driven because Content-Based Instruction puts a strong emphasis on what to do with the taught features inside a meaningful context. As an innovation CBI has shown its effectiveness as it was the first time that learners faced problem-solving tasks through the use of what they had learned in the English class in a real way. In CBI settings, learners are exposed to a significant amount of language; they explore content and are also engaged in language-dependent activities so, language learning becomes automatic. Of course this sort of setting should not be carried out the same way for everyone. A full CBI teaching process calls for a confident English level, depending on what is wanted to be taught but it is also possible to adapt it to beginner courses. Studying language as an isolated set of elements that work together but far from real life, is an error because any language that is learned has as main characteristic to allow students to express themselves and the best way to do it is by talking about everything that surrounds them so, the use of challenging, language-dependent activities will encourage students to make greater efforts to understand not only what is taught regarding content and language but also to put it into practice in their own context. Content-Based Instruction emphasizes the importance of content in contrast to other approaches or methods which are just centered in the language itself. Richards and Rodgers (2001) pointed out, if the information delivered through the content is interesting and useful, students would be able to acquire the language faster. In addition, the language acquisition process may be more efficient and language learners more motivated.

*Active student involvement*

In order not to fall under the more general rubric of communicative language teaching (CLT), The CBI classroom is learner rather than teacher centered (Littlewood, 1981). In such classrooms, students learn through doing and are actively engaged in the learning process. They do not depend on the teacher to direct all learning or to be the source of all information.

Central to CBI is the belief that learning occurs not only through exposure to the teacher's input, but also through peer input and interactions. It was stated by Lee and Van Patten, (1995) that students assume active, social roles in the classroom that involve interactive learning, negotiation, information gathering and the construction of meaning so classes are not only a matter of dictation and isolated exercising, students are actively involved and in a CBI classroom activities should be directed towards that interaction in order to create those required spaces to allow students to practice and learn.

*Motivation and interest*

As it is supported by Grabe & Stoller (1997) motivation and interest become two main elements considering CBI with challenging, meaningful and realistic activities that support success and which help the student learn complex skills every day. Agreeing with this conception Alexander, Kulikowich, & Jetton, 1994: Krapp, Hidi, & Renninger (1992) pointed out that learners make greater connections between topics with learning material and can recall information better but only if they are really interested in the material they are learning.

If students feel intrinsically motivated they tend to achieve more, Krapp, Hidi and Renninger (1992) state that, "situational interest, triggered by environmental factors, may evoke or contribute to the development of long-lasting individual interests". So CBI, as an approach which is student centered, has as one of its goals to keep students interested and motivated by generating stimulating content instruction and materials. When facing language

learning it is common to think that everything works the same for everyone so, when it works it is not changed or improved leading this way to a repetitive way of teaching far from learning, but when everything that is learned becomes useful, students will really understand in different ways the way in which language works in the real world, beyond a single description supported on unreal dialogues which are distant from students' reality. The idea of learning implies that the focus of the process should be the learner; everything that surrounds him becomes then, an active source of information and the teacher is the one who must guide instead of control it.

Keeping students motivated and interested are two important factors underlying content-based instruction. Motivation and interest are crucial in supporting student success with challenging, informative activities that support success and which help the student learn complex skills (Grabe & Stoller, 1997). This in turn leads to a perception of success, of gaining positive attributes which will continue a circular learning pattern of success and interest. Krapp, Hidi and Renninger (1992) state that, "situational interest, triggered by environmental factors, may evoke or contribute to the development of long-lasting individual interests".

### *CBI Models*

As it has been clearly established by history itself, every single idea has had a previous one which originated it, so it has happened in learning theories, methods, etc. CBI has changed according to the situation so we can say that there is more than a unique CBI way of teaching. Among these principles three models arise; the sheltered model, the adjunct model and the theme-based model. These models have their origin in immersion programs which have as goal an adequate integration of immigrant students to regular classes in school.



### *The Sheltered Model*

The goal of teachers using sheltered CBI is to allow ESL students to study the same content material as regular L1 students. Two teachers can work together to give instruction in a specific subject; one of the teachers should be a content specialist and the other an ESL specialist, they may teach the class together or the class time may be divided between the two of them. This kind of team teaching requires teachers to work closely together to plan and evaluate classes. It has been used successfully at the bilingual University of Ottawa, where classes are taught in English and French (Briton, 1989). This model works well taking into account the content. When the idea is to teach content one of the main limitation showed here is that the English teachers are not always experts in the content area so they end by reading about content instead of teaching it because they do not understand it the way they should.

### *The Adjunct Model*

Adjunct classes are usually taught by ESL teachers. The aim of these classes is to prepare students for "conventional" classes where they will join L1 learners. Some adjunct classes are taught during the summer months before regular college classes begin, while others run concurrently with regular lessons. Here the work of the teacher is focused on the language itself so there is no need to use academic content in order to succeed. Here the teacher must prepare students to face a regular content class and this is an exercise that can be carried out using any kind of authentic material.

### *The Theme Based Model*

Theme based CBI is usually found in EFL contexts. Theme based CBI can be taught by an EFL teacher or team taught with a content specialist. The teacher can create a course of study designed to unlock and build their own students' interests and the content can be chosen from an enormous number of diverse topics. This is a model which can be applied in an EFL

setting like ours, here the starting point is to select what the content will be then, the materials should be chosen but it is important to remember that students should have participation here; otherwise the chosen content will not be able to wake students' interest. Teaching languages is not a matter of just teaching something in a linear way, and this is the point which has differentiated many of the ideas regarding language learning because these ideas tend to focus on one aspect leaving out others. Language learning involves four main skills which must be considered as a unit because weaknesses in one of them can be easily reflected on other.

### Language Learning Skills

Language skills as important as they are can be analyzed separately, even they can be prepared separately as well but inside a learning context there is no way to put one over the other as regards their importance.

There are four main skills in order to be exercised when learning languages, and regarding regular settings, all these skills should work as a unit inside language because it is not possible to learn a language by mastering just one isolated skill. Using the language does not reflect the ability to perform just a single action well; it requires from the learner a fluent use of a set of skills, which are part of a whole which is language, so communication would take place.

Reviewing these skills will give us a clear idea of the way in which a language class has changed from a monothematic one to a real language class in which all kinds of learning have place so, the wide range of activities and opportunities to develop different learning strategies will enlighten not only the students but also the teacher.

Depending on their nature, the four main skills can be classified as comprehension; reading and listening and production; writing and speaking skills.

### *Reading*

This is an important way of gaining information in language learning and a basic skill for learners. Reading establishes a greater support for learning languages, because when facing reading, students are given the opportunity to see language in action, in real setting so it is important to develop a good reading strategy in order to understand what is written. Krashen

(1985) also supported the promotion of reading as it provides students with significant amounts of input; the greater the amount of input students are exposed to, the greater their language development. Reading is a key component of learning a second language and it is important as a language does not consist exclusively of the spoken word. There are many benefits for example; the culture gained by reading in the target language. Through reading, students gain access to literature written in the target language, this literature shows the students what authentic materials in the target language look like as well as provides them with insight into the cultural beliefs and values.

Reading develops different competences in the language; the linguistic competence through the gain of knowledge and language features such as vocabulary and grammar, the sociolinguistic competence when students learn about different texts and structures in the target language and how those texts and structures are used in a particular culture and the strategic competence because students gain understanding into different linguistic learning strategies.

### *Writing*

It can be seen as the physical evidence of students' achievements as long as it can measure students' improvement. The use of adequate writing activities enhances learners to understand a text and to write; this way they also will encourage their ability to summarize and to use the language generously. Before engaging in a writing task, students need to know the

purpose of it and must be introduced to important language features and key vocabulary.

Writing is an integral and necessary skill when learning a second language as communication is not only performed orally. Writing is a way for students to practice language skills in a way that promotes noticing; as they write texts, they are forced to notice certain grammar and vocabulary structures.

### *Listening*

Listening is one of the means of language communication that is used most widely in people's daily lives. The exposure of learners to a considerable amount of listening activities is a good way of improving vocabulary. On the other hand, it also helps the learners improve their listening comprehension because this way, learners will have the opportunity of not only getting the main idea but also little important details that are found in every day's communication. Although teachers prepare students who do not have a complete control of the grammar or an extensive lexicon, can carry on in communication situations. In the case of listening, this means preparing students who can use listening strategies to maximize their comprehension, identify relevant and irrelevant information, and overcome word-by-word comprehension.

By raising students' awareness of listening as a skill that requires active engagement, and by clearly teaching listening strategies, teachers really help students develop both; the ability and the confidence to handle communication situations they may meet beyond classroom.

### *Speaking*

As a production skill, speaking is one of the most relevant ways of proving that the language has been learnt, so they can establish a conversation in real time and using everyday vocabulary. It means that there is an important communicative relationship between the

teacher and the students. Teachers arise as the main contact with the target language for the learner so; the communicative activity must be limitless in order to create greater confidence as speaker and listener look for the best way of communicating to each other.

## CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

### Methodology

This is a descriptive research paper; the main sources of information in order to do it were bibliographical sources.

One of the main purposes of the study was to highlight the main strengths and weaknesses regarding CBI as a method of language learning-teaching process, characteristics which were deduced considering different cases that were taken into account as bibliographical resource.

### Data analysis

Once the information was gathered, it was organized so the different sections of the paper could be created. This way, with well-organized information everything was read again in order to conclude and to get a result.

## CHAPTER 4. RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### Results

As it can be seen in its origins and in immersion programs where it has been commonly applied, CBI has had as main setting that one where English is spoken as mother tongue but, how can it be applied at early stages of the language learning process? Is it really necessary to wait until learners master the language itself to set CBI as the approach to be taken into account? What happens in EFL settings?

Nowadays books might be one of the main tools regarding language learning in universities, academies or school courses, but when students are asked to open a book they might not understand it at first (considering that all input found there is written in L2) so it would be shocking at first and, if they are addressed in English, the way students face their first contact with the target language would be upsetting and this might cause nothing but lack of motivation. When learners face their first language classes they are normally afraid because they do not know how to stand before it, especially beginners, because a beginner does not have enough knowledge and getting a flood of information as first contact with L2 might cause panic.

In order to have an adequate CBI environment students should be exposed to the target language as soon as possible but in EFL settings it should be done at a different rate, taking into account the level of the students, their necessities and also not making false assumptions based on a common reaction to something unknown. When considering CBI as the way of teaching language it is not necessary to become an expert in a content area, especially in EFL settings where language teachers are prepared to teach languages rather than content and also people are more focused in language learning instead of learning any kind of content.

One way to avoid this situation is to remember what Genesee (1994) states: “the content needs not be academic; it can include any topic, theme, or non-language issue of interest or importance to the learners" this way, learners might understand that the use of content in order to teach languages is a successful strategy in which language is appreciated in real context through the use of authentic material.

### CBI Strengths and Weaknesses

There might be many points of view regarding strengths in CBI, and it is well known that depending on the context where it is applied, these features might vary, because as it always happens inside the very classroom, contexts are as different as we are.

Among its main strengths it is important to mention:

1. The real use of language. Language stopped being just a group of distant grammatical units and became a whole with a purpose, in this case, content teaching. Learners started to know and understand L2 in action, within real life situations and through the use of authentic material which allow learners not only to learn a language but also content. This situation led students to achieve goals through the use of their own comprehension abilities by facing authentic situations taken from a wide variety of authentic sources, giving language authenticity.

2. CBI can make learning a language more interesting and motivating. Students can use the language to fulfill a real purpose, which can make students both more independent and confident. When learners see that everything they do has an achievable purpose they have more possibilities of assimilating content because they might understand in a clear way what they are doing instead of solving isolated exercises which enclose students inside learning by repetition but sometimes far from comprehension.



3. CBI is very popular among EAP (English for Academic Purposes) teachers as it helps students to develop valuable study skills such as note taking, summarizing and extracting key information from texts. When students face authentic material they will have to interpret instead of translate as they usually do, so real language comprehension skills will be required. If learners face isolated exercises in which there is no context, they might find several problems to understand a text because a text would be longer and more complete than a single completed sentence. It is hard to get to a full comprehension from the very beginning because of the learners' level but, content can be adapted and, starting from the least complicated exercise might help students to start developing their potential from early stages instead of waiting for higher levels to make students face authentic English.

4. Taking information from different sources, re-evaluating and restructuring that information can help students to develop very valuable thinking skills that can then be transferred to other subjects. Considering that content does not mean academic content, the language classes output must be carefully chosen, and never has to remain the same, even the most simple exercise in an adequate way shows how useful language learning might be, and not only inside the classroom. Language learning does not mean only learning an L2 for travelling, approving a test or fulfill a request, it also opens the door to a wide range of information that can be applied not only in the academic context but also in real life situations. Students can develop a much wider knowledge of the world through CBI which can feed back into improving and supporting their general educational needs.

5. The inclusion of group work within the framework given can also help students to develop their collaborative skills, which can have great social value. Language learning is a process which involves all participants inside the classroom as a unit which goes in the same direction, allowing the creation of an adequate environment for learning. Language learning is

not a process in which a participant learns a language once and then keeps it to himself/herself, language exists for communicating. CBI allows teacher to use a considerable amount of activities in order to enhance group work, peer evaluation, and different ways of allowing exchanges among learners and teacher.

#### Overcoming weaknesses

Along with these strengths, some weaknesses are also found, and as it was established before, there are also many points of view considering these weaknesses, as well as strategies to overcome them leaving out the context because weaknesses do not exist to stop but to overcome and to go on. The following part shows some of the main weaknesses that can be found in CBI and some personal ideas regarding their strengthening.

1. CBI might not be explicitly focused on language learning so; some students may feel confused or may even feel that they aren't improving their language skills. This situation is very common in EFL settings because it is not very common the use of content and every time students face that kind of material, they increase their anxiety levels and if they are not able to solve a task well, they might be likely to lose motivation and interest because of the false assumption of failure regarding language learning. In an EFL setting like ours we are used to measure language learning by taking into account how much grammar is learned rather than the use of that grammar inside a more realistic environment. Including some form of language focused exercises to help draw attention to linguistic features within the materials and consolidate any difficult vocabulary or grammar points. If we work using authentic material, it does not mean that everything must be reading and writing pointlessly, this material is the way to lead students inside the features we want to teach, all exercises to be done or to explain must be taken from there, otherwise they will not be related at all to the material and it will weaken the exercise.

2. The overuse of the students' native language during the lesson might be a problem, because the lesson isn't explicitly focused on language practice students find it much easier and quicker to use their mother tongue. It is important to know that people in the classroom do not have the same abilities understanding L2 that directly, and if this is forgotten, some learners might lose interest in the class because at the moment of getting lost they will have to stop working and they will not be able to understand neither the lesson nor the content. Also learners tend to be afraid of asking the teacher when they do not understand increasing this way that fear, situation which might be seen in the learners' production skills.

Try sharing a rationale with students and explain the benefits of using the target language rather than their mother tongue. The way to familiarize learners with language learning in a gentle way is by inviting them to participate; solving activities, asking questions and sharing their ideas, not by forcing them. Students should have access to all information required in order to help them to understand what is being taught, this information must be helpful and adapted to their level and characteristics so they can feel more confident with L2 information. L2 must be a tool to join not to divide.

3. It can be hard to find information sources and texts that lower levels can understand. Also the sharing of information in the target language may cause great difficulties. Inside the classroom not all students have the same level, the same abilities and the same necessities and of course they will not be able to perform in the same way. Regarding sources of information the situation is very similar, it is not so simple to get a "beginners text", or "intermediate text" in order to teach. Students find it difficult to go on when they try to read a text in L2 and do not understand it so; they might end up by losing interest.

A possible way around this at lower levels is either to use texts in the students' native language and then get them to use the target language for the sharing of information, or to

have texts in the target language, but allow the students to present the end product in their native language. These options should reduce the level of challenge and might increase the level on self-confidence. In this part it is important to take into account material selection, because this is the starting point when facing CBI. It must be remembered that students can participate in this selection, but teachers must analyze this material in order to prepare it in an adequate way. At early stages of learning not all students are going to be as confident as others, they must be given the opportunity of sometimes performing in mother tongue but, it is good to be careful of not allowing this situation being longer than required.

4. Some students may copy directly from the source texts they use to get their information and fulfill the goal. This is a common feature because it is very simple to associate one word in the question with one from the texts as it might happen in other subjects so, they simply copy the information that is required expecting to have answered well. When students face problems understanding they tend to associate elements this way some questions can be answered and some tasks can be solved but the learner did not learn at all in fact, is gaining confusion.

Task design is vital. Teachers should not take a reading and prepare just specific questions as the goal to be achieved. At early stages this may work in order to give learners some self-confidence but, little by little learners must face more challenging tasks that demand students evaluate the information in some way, to draw conclusions or actually to put it to some practical use. Having information sources that have conflicting information can also be helpful as students have to decide which information they agree with or most believe. All this information must lead to language and content learning and the way of checking this is by the application of students' abilities to produce language considering what they understand and think.

### Discussion

CBI has shown from its very beginnings the way how real life and language learning can meet inside the classroom. In the early days of language teaching, the use of authentic materials did not consider this so, although the use of authentic material was a good option, its lack of context considering the environment where taught, became a barrier because learners learned something that had a context for some people but not for them. It is important to underline that this material was first used for translation rather than interpretation so the understanding of it could be inadequate and far from its real meaning.

Although the real use of language, the main idea of CBI lies on teaching content and the possibility of teaching great amount of content in L2 at early stages might be difficult. Fortunately academic content is not the only content that can be taught in CBI so, depending on the level it is possible to teach something which may increase learners' interest and motivation, there is no perfect material, it is the way it is used that makes the difference.

Not all material will be useful, but if it is carefully chosen and worked the results might be better.

Evaluation has been seen as a weak point in CBI because language learning does not always mean content learning and vice versa. In a context where the content is strictly academic it is hard to know what and how to evaluate because there is the possibility of evaluating content and language separately but if they were taught together this evaluation should be carried out the same way. If learners have the opportunity of helping to select material, they would be able to understand and discuss about it in a better way because of their proximity to the topic, situation which lead to enhance interest and motivation. Authentic material offers a wide variety of possibilities in order to create different ways of evaluating far

from paper and pen evaluation. Problem solving, group tasks, discussions, presentations, etc. are examples of activities which can be used to perform assessment in CBI classes.

Evaluation, as it should be performed in any subject, must be progressive and constant. Learners should be exposed to a considerable amount of language through stimulating content, CBI supports contextualized learning; learners are taught useful language that is surrounded within relevant discourse situation which is not seen in traditional language teaching which divided English into small pieces of grammatical units. That way, students learned English the same way, by pieces so, their results showed the same fragmentation at the moment of producing language spontaneously.

There are different ways of applying CBI from early context. Teachers should take into account that not all learners are able to understand the same at the same rate so, the use of different activities starting with easy ones and going forward to more complex ones will lead to a better process which may lead to an adequate language learning. CBI contexts might demand the use of target language in order to perform inside the classroom but, it does not mean that teachers may use it to create a distance with the people who evidence difficulties. Mother tongue is a tool as well to help students to gain some self-confidence when the situation demands it. CBI is not an unbreakable rule, is way of teaching so, it must be flexible and innovative.

### Conclusions

Although CBI can be seen as an advanced level technique, there are some kinds of CBI that show that contextualizing it to early stages could be possible through being flexible and having a high level of motivation. Greater flexibility and adaptability in the curriculum can be set up regarding students' interest. When learners see that the learning process takes them into account, considering their interests, feelings, likes, dislikes and also actual facts that surround

them, they will feel closer to it and this change can be clearly reflected in their motivation towards the class and learners' results as well.

With CBI all four skills gain more attention in class unlike previous ideas which emphasized on one or two skills over the others. Language started to be seen as a whole and not as a set of isolated parts, this way the understanding of the language itself will be eased so, learners will be able to fully comprehend and produce in L2. Many learners showed ability to perform well in one skill but evidencing as well a gasp regarding others and that happened because if language is seen as a puzzle it will be difficult to be understood.

Performance abilities which were a synonym of advanced levels can be taken into account at early levels of language learning. When language is divided, exercises divide learning too because if single sentences are taken from nowhere, the lack of context is evident and this lack might lead students to misunderstand the task. If students are asked to work from authentic material the way they face it might be more complete because the material itself has a defined context which help students to understand an idea.

Complex information is delivered through real life context for the students to understand in a better way leading to intrinsic motivation. Every time a learner solve a task through the use of the learned features really puts language into practice and once a goal is achieved the learner could feel that the language was really useful for something else besides an unreal evaluative activity, they learned something witnessing how English worked.

Students facing known vocabulary (numbers) have the opportunity of practicing it in L2 in an easier way, so the teaching act can be focused on the practice as we learned mother tongue step by step, language learning is not a high speed process and the harder language is work, the better it will be learned. Through the endless practice our learners have the possibility of internalizing what is taught and if we also represent it using their

environment objects they will establish a better relationship with language. Although some exercising seems to be repetitive and non-challenging, it does not mean that is not a good exercise. Only through practice we are able to master something so, as teachers we must consider that our students do.

When giving importance to communication, the concept of error also changes. In the past, these inaccuracies were punished in order to reduce their occurrence (conditioning), and now mistakes are also punished through grades or concepts. In a real communicative environments errors are part of the everyday conversation as in the mother tongue so, the focus lies on meaning rather than form. If the students are able to communicate there is an achieved goal, if a mistake appears it is taken as a normal feature which is inevitable and helpful in order to understand and being understood.

It is impossible to have a perfect way of teaching languages, every single idea has shown effectiveness but never in an absolute way and CBI is not the exception. Strengths and weaknesses are just relative ideas because they are part of a whole idea which exists the way it is and even when correcting every aspect of it, there will be something missing. As teachers it is important to recognize that teaching languages is not an already written truth, it will always be a never-ending process in which all actors must have a part in order to get to the goal of learning.

CBI stands for two main concepts, motivation and interest, learners have got more responsibility in their own process and the teachers have lost the power which they were given in the past. Teachers and students have the opportunity of being an active part when selecting material and topics so, the class changes from a unidirectional one to a real interactive one. Although it looks like a very demanding concept, the results of allowing students to participate in their own learning process will definitely increase learners' motivation towards language



learning because they are now learning what they are really interested in, instead of studying a predesigned book that in many situations does not take into account learners' interests.

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