

## **Using the CBI Method in Teaching English in an Indonesian University**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This action research project aimed to investigate an ESL teacher's strategy of using the content-based instruction (CBI) method to increase student interaction in an English class and to examine the students' reactions to this approach. Based on the teacher's self-critical reflection, classroom teaching observations were conducted. At the end of the semester a questionnaire was given to students to obtain their response to this method. The findings suggested that the information gap was one factor which supported the initiation response and feedback (IRF) structure used by the teacher to trigger interaction in the classroom. Video footage also provided evidence that the majority of the students were willing to make an effort to interact in English, and the survey analysis showed positive responses from the students. In spite of the positive outcomes, the teacher's lack of skills in code-switching between the students' first language (L1) and the target language (L2) and selecting CBI learning materials relevant to industry are issues for consideration in further research and practice.

*Keywords:* CBI, student interaction, IRF structure

### **INTRODUCTION**

Globalisation has accelerated the use of English as a communication tool in many international contexts (Jenkins, 2003).

English is perceived as a communicative skill that should be mastered by graduates of higher education to improve their global competitive skills. Thus a foreign language, English, has been included in the curriculum for higher education in Indonesia (Dikti, 2012).

However, the status of English as a foreign language (EFL) in this context affects the ability of Indonesian people in general and students, in particular, to master

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it. As the English language is not commonly used in this country, exposure to the language is limited and, hence, this in itself, is inadequate to cater for this additional language learning. This fact contributes to the poor English proficiency among many university students in this context (Mappiasse & Johari Bin Sihes, 2014). In spite of the fact that the English language is a compulsory subject at high schools, several scholars (Nur, 2004; Renandya, 2004) consider that English teaching is unsuccessful in this context. Many students experience anxiety at the thought of having to communicate in English (Padmadewi, 1998) and some are reluctant to speak the language to avoid making mistakes (Tutyandari, 2005). The students at the State Polytechnic of Pontianak (POLNEP), in particular, students of the Department of Oceanography and Fisheries (IKP), where this study was conducted, had a similar problem. They had limited English proficiency and low levels of motivation and engagement in the English learning and teaching process.

Despite this poor English language proficiency among the students, POLNEP has set a goal of producing graduates who can compete at international level, a vision and mission to be achieved by 2020 (Politeknik Negeri Pontianak, 2009). This is expected to produce students who are able to communicate in English in their field of work. So the development of English language skills is a high priority in the curriculum. Based on Simbolon and Restall's (2014) reflective study on the

content-based instruction (CBI) method, this action research project was considered to be important to conduct, particularly in an English class of IKP at POLNEP.

### **CONTENT-BASED INSTRUCTION (CBI) METHOD**

The CBI method is an approach to language teaching that engages core topics and skills of certain courses, but still focuses on working on the knowledge of the language (Stryker, 1997; Stoller, 2008). This means that the teaching and learning materials of the subject matter, such as *Introduction to Fisheries and Biology*, become meaningful input (Krashen, 1987) for students who are additional language learners (ESL/EFL). Lankshear (2003) posited the view that in CBI classes student activities, including reading, became one of the primary means of learning. In this sense, exploring the themes and topics and dealing with the technical vocabulary relating to their study (Stryker, 1997) can function as learning activities in the classroom for students.

Lin (2015) argued for the importance of the use of students' first language (L1, or Indonesian in this context) in the target language (L2, which refers to English language in this study) learning environment because this strategy can support the students' learning. She further proposed several approaches for a systematic use of L1 in the target language (L2) instruction including the use of L1 in key terms delivery and explaining the academic content (Lin, 2015). For example, when teaching the topic of types of water,

the teacher could use L1 in defining the subject by referring to the names for water that are available in their own regional context.

In content-based language teaching, task-based learning (TBL) plays a significant role (Murphy, 2003; Willis, 2001). The teacher sets exercises and tasks (Davison, 1989) which are closely related to the students' real work. This is crucial to CBI instruction, for these relevant-to-work field tasks result in meaning-focused communication (Ellis, 2003). For an activity to be classed as TBL it must meet certain criteria, including having a work plan, involving a primary focus on meaning, reflecting a real-world process of language use and having a clearly defined communication outcome. To achieve these characteristics, task design is consequently quite challenging. However, in meeting these criteria, a TBL approach can strengthen the achievement of the learning goal when used in conjunction with a CBI approach in the classroom.

### *Student Interaction*

Allwright and Bailey (1991) and Moquel (2004) stated that interaction was a sign of student participation. Even quiet students could be considered to be participating through their attention to the learning process (Allwright & Bailey, 1991). In the classroom, interactions are predominantly prompted by meaning negotiation through information gaps (Swain, 1998; Chaudron, 1988). Rather than working individually, students can be involved in a number

of interactions to help solve problems, where negotiation of meaning might occur. These interactions include teacher-student interaction, student-student interaction and classroom interaction. Teacher-student interaction is performed mostly in the form of questioning. Citing Lynch's description of display questions, David (2007) stated that these questions referred to questions to which the teacher knew the answer. This particular purpose can be achieved through the Initiation-Respond-Feedback (IRF) structure (Hall, 2009). With this structure, the teacher purposely asked the students questions, expecting responses from students so as to provide feedback. Furthermore, teacher-student interaction could be used to provide a model for the learners. In this sense, teacher-student interaction could be presented in a role play.

In spite of the students' different levels of language competence, Howarth (2006) suggested that student-student interaction was required to boost the practice time, encourage collaboration, provide socialisation and stimulate students' motivation. The interaction can be in the form of a role-play or group discussion. The student-student interaction also gave the teacher the opportunity to take a step back and observe the students from the sidelines, thereby further pinpointing the individual student's needs.

Finally, another type of student interaction is classroom interaction, which potentially involves all students in the classroom. It is usually in the form of a discussion, report or concluding an ongoing

lesson. Within an ESL/EFL classroom, interaction can be prompted by meaning negotiation, which can be stimulated in these types of student interaction.

Within the CBI teaching method, student interaction can be stimulated. As the language materials are the subject matter the students study, this can contribute to students' interest in the interaction. In this case, the teacher's questioning (Moquel, 2004) about ideas related to the content can stimulate students' responses, hence leading to student participation (Allwright & Bailey, 1991). For example, after reading one topic of the subject matter, the teacher may ask students to identify the new technical vocabulary. This particular gap of information can be used to stimulate student meta-talk, and consequently, student interaction. Besides this, asking challenging questions can initiate student noticing (Swain, 1998), with which students might capture the learning objectives. For example, when reading a simple passage of 'fish processing procedure', the teacher could ask the students the features of the procedure genre. In this way, the learners might identify such terminology as 'first', 'then' and 'after that', which are necessary to express such a procedure.

By enhancing the level of student interaction in the classroom through TBL and CBI approaches, the teacher's role becomes more a process of facilitating than of teaching (Tudor, 1993). Instead of being the knower, the teacher is considered to be a learning counsellor, who facilitates the students' learning. Thus, a needs analysis

(Chaudron, 2005) is undertaken; after that, the learning outcomes can be set. In this case, a topic about fish processing was used as the focus of the language classroom materials. Finally, the teacher chooses the appropriate instruction to be used in the classroom teaching. Here, students with a specific purpose (to obtain expertise in fish processing) can be professionally judged (Tudor, 1993) to comply with the CBI approach.

The CBI method has been used in many contexts (Stoller, 2008) and its utility has been demonstrated in numerous studies (Stryker, 1997). In Asian contexts, Nguyen's (2011) study provided evidence that this approach improved motivation and engagement and developed student interaction during the process of learning English at the Vietnamese College of Finance Customs. Lo's (2013) study, which included the IRF structure (Hall, 2009), showed that the CBI method contributed to the development of the students' use of the language in English-medium schools in Hong Kong. In a very different setting, an empirical study conducted by de Zarobe and Catalan (2009) in Spain focused on vocabulary and found that CBI students outperformed non-CBI school students.

In summary, there is considerable evidence that the CBI approach, in conjunction with TBL, has the potential to develop student interaction in the learning and teaching process. This action research study's objective was to improve student interaction by posing the following research questions:

- a. How does the English teacher use the CBI approach in order to develop student interactions?
- b. What are the students' responses to this particular teaching method?

## RESEARCH METHOD

Denscombe (2003) and Fraenkel (2009) state that action research is conducted for the purpose of solving a problem and informing local practice. This particular study derived from the critical reflection of the classroom teacher that students tended to be reluctant to participate in classroom interaction. The teacher's reading suggested that learning topics irrelevant to real life might hinder student participation and produce a lack of engagement from the teacher, which can also contribute to the absence of student interaction in classroom learning. Thus, the action research aimed to improve the teaching practice and the situation of the practice (Carr, 1986).

### *Participants*

The study was carried out in one workshop room in the Language Centre of the University. The participants for the study included the students who were enrolled in the Department of Oceanography and Fisheries (IKP), in two different study programmes, Fish Processing Technology (TPHI) and Fish Catching Technology (TPI). There were 46 students – two classrooms of 34 TPHIs and one classroom of 12 TPIs.

### *Data Collection*

As one of the objectives of the study was to examine how one English lecturer used CBI to develop student interaction, classroom observation was conducted. Even though the teacher's strategies can be elicited through an interview or self-narration, Fraenkel (2009) argued observation offered a more accurate indication of the teaching process. A video camera was used to capture the learning and teaching activities in the three CBI classrooms.

In order to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings (Fraenkel, 2009), data triangulation was established by generating three types of data. Besides the video recording, a questionnaire was administered to the students at the end of the course. The rationale for this method was to describe the students (Fraenkel, 2009) from this particular field of study and examine their thoughts on the CBI teaching method. Additionally, Fraenkel (2009) further suggested that closed, fixed response questionnaires were a simple and efficient way to collect and analyse data. Another type of data was the teacher's critical self-reflection (Brookfield, 1995), presented in the teacher's teaching journal. This particular source of data was augmented with data obtained via video recording and a questionnaire.

The duration of the study was approximately four months (14 class meetings). The class observation commenced at the beginning of the semester of study. The survey was administered on the day of the final examination.

The researcher developed the questions of the questionnaire, which was presented in the students' L1. Even though not in a straight line, the survey included positive, neutral and negative questions (Oppenheim, 1992). Two pairs of straight line questions were Questions 2 and 6 and Questions 5 and 7. Question 1 was considered to be neutral as its purpose was to describe the students' view on the English language. Questions 3 and 4 were deemed to be essential to include as suggested by some scholars (Stryker, 1997; Stoller, 2008) that with the familiarity of discipline, students learn, as this could enhance their engagement with the learning process. The last question was the concluding point of the students' perception of the CBI teaching method.

The teacher used a theme-based CBI approach (Stryker, 1997; Lankshear, 2003) to plan the lessons. The topics ranged from the types of water to types of fish, which were taken from Internet resources.

In summary, the procedure of inquiry included conducting a literature review, implementing the CBI classroom teaching, distributing questionnaires, analysing data and preparing a report on the study.

#### *Data Analysis*

Video recording data, together with the teacher's teaching journal were analysed using a coding scheme (Fraenkel, 2009; Saldana, 2009), where a set of categories were used to record the frequency of students' interactions. Structural coding (Saldana, 2009) was used to index each stage of the classroom teacher's teaching

sessions in relation to her teaching practice using the CBI method. In this study the student-student interaction and teacher-student interaction were the main focus of the examination. A Likert scale (Brace, 2008) was used in the questionnaire to capture the trends in student assessment of the CBI method.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

As mentioned in the earlier section, this study focused on examining two types of student interaction, namely teacher-student and student-student.

### *Teacher-Student Interaction*

At the beginning of the course the classroom teacher used the IRF structure to stimulate student interaction. Realising the students' limited English vocabulary, the lecturer asked the students to prepare any question they were willing to ask her, and in return the students were requested to be ready with an answer when the lecturer asked the question back to the student. The technique was designed to enable the students to do some preparation. This was used at the beginning of every lesson activity, so the lecturer could give some feedback. The following extract of a conversation illustrates this teaching strategy.

Student 1 : What your blood type? (Heard as "blud tip")

Lecturer : Hmm

Student 1 : What your blood type? (Heard as "blud tip")

Lecturer : Blood? (Heard as "blad")

Student 1: Blood (Heard as “blad”), hmm  
Lecturer : Blood type (Heard as “blad taip”) My blood type is O (Heard as “blad taip”).  
Why do you ask that?  
Student 1: In the PMI (Blood donor organisation) ask the question in English so I can  
Lecturer : I see, you’re giving your...  
Student 1: People need from the university so I like to join to give blood  
Lecturer : And you, what is your blood type?  
Student 1: A  
Lecturer : Hmm, rare, ya? Jarang (Indonesian).

In this conversation, first of all, the teacher took the initiative (in Hall’s [2009] IRF structure) by establishing a classroom rule that at the beginning of each class, each student had to prepare a question for her. In this way, the student was also expected to be ready with some supporting vocabulary such as ‘need’, ‘join in’, and ‘give’. With his utterance of ‘People need from the university so I like to join to give blood’ he meant to express the idea of ‘People need blood donors so from the University I like to join the PMI in order to donate my blood’. Also, as seen in the above dialogue, the lecturer’s feedback was based on the student’s pronunciation. Student 1 seemed to notice (Swain, 1998) this feedback by repeating the word ‘blood’ with a more appropriate pronunciation. By allowing the student to prepare the question before the class started, this enabled the teacher-student interaction to take place.

Furthermore, the teacher selected the learning materials, which were closely relevant to student study. For example, the topic of ‘a fish processing procedure’ was considered to be familiar with the students of this particular department (IKP). The topic was also a TBL activity (Ellis, 2003), which might enable the students to think about real-life situations for the focus of their study. Hence, students’ interest was likely to be more intrinsic. The following extract demonstrates this approach:

Lecturer : There are ten, ada sepuluh (ten) numbers. For example, kalau saya bilang (If I say) misalnya (For example) a teaspoonful sugar. Ini ada disini atau disini? (Is this here or here?) Where? Units of ingredients over here (showing the column)  
Students : Units, units, one (pointing to column)  
Lecturer : A unit or satuan  
.....  
Lecturer : OK, for example, a teaspoonful of sugar, kamu tidak perlu tulis (you don’t need to write), just guess  
Student 8: Dengar (Listening only)  
Lecturer : Number one a teaspoonful of sugar, masuk ke sini, one (It belongs to this)  
Number two, stir, oh diaduk (stir) jadi dua (so two)  
So the number  
Students : Oh, oh, ok  
Student 5: Oh, all right

This particular conversation extract was part of the instructions when the teacher was explaining “the elements of writing a procedural text”. Student participation in the learning process was shown through giving responses to the teacher’s questions when describing the activity and at the end of the explanation, by demonstrating their understanding of the instructions. To a surprising response, student 5 confidently expressed his own understanding individually by trying “all right”.

Finally, the teacher’s use of L1 contributed to the learning process of vocabulary acquisition and understanding. It was essential to code-switch between L2 and L1, in particular when delivering a key message so that the students could be still engaged in the learning and teaching process.

#### *Student-Student Interaction*

This particular interaction between students was mostly shown in learning activities arranged by the teacher. A role play was one of them. This particular task allowed students to negotiate meaning (Chaudron, 1988; Swain, 1998):

Student 6: Do you have pet at home?

Student 7: I have just cat

Student 6: What kind of cat do you have?

Student 7: A funny and furry

Student 6: What do you think about cat?

Student 7: Itu apa? (What does it mean?)

Student 6: Kenapa? (Why)

Student 7: They are very funny and cute

The above conversation extract was one of the learning activities where the students were asked to perform a role play of a conversation. Student 6 was given a topic about pets. It was based on the students’ chosen topics. The students seemed to understand the context which they were discussing. When Student 7 did not know what her speaking partner was asking, she asked for her friend’s help by using the Indonesian language. Interestingly, Student 6 gave her a clue using Indonesian but not exactly the same question as she had asked in English. It seemed she understood which word would help her classmate obtain a reference. Of course, they had prepared this before the performance. In this way, meaning negotiation (Chaudron, 1988; Swain, 1998) occurred to maintain a mutual understanding (De Branden, 1997).

This particular extract also shows the benefit of the information gap in contributing to student interaction. The question display (David, 2007) had facilitated the information gap between speakers: teacher-student and student-student interaction.

#### *Students’ Response to the CBI Teaching Method*

Table 1 shows the responses of the students to the CBI teaching method. Forty-six students were included in the action research and 42 returned the questionnaires. As indicated in Table 1, there were eight questions in the questionnaire, which asked for the students’ opinions about the CBI method. Out of the eight questions, two



questions were phrased unfavourably (6 and 7). While a balanced scale is normally recommended, Brace (2008) holds that an unbalanced scale can be justified. In

this research, learners were asked their impression of the new learning approach and to make a judgement of any advantages gained from the CBI method.

TABLE 1  
Students' Responses

No	Statement	Strongly Agree/SA	Agree/A	Doubt/D	Disagree/DA	Strongly Disagree/SDA
1	I like English.	14	23	4	1	-
2	The CBI method is an interesting way to learn English.	14	27	1	-	-
3	The CBI method stimulates me to engage in English class.	5	32	3	1	1
4	I am familiar with materials in English using the CBI method.	6	21	8	6	1
5	There are many benefits I gain from an English course that uses the CBI method.	14	26	2	-	-
6	The CBI method classroom is boring.	1	-	6	24	11
7	English learning using the CBI method does not benefit my English skills.	1	2	1	26	12
8	The CBI method is the best for English learning.	18	19	-	3	2

TABLE 2  
Average Score of Students' Responses

No	Statement	SA x 5	A x 4	D x 3	DA x 2	SDA x 1	Total Score	Average
1.	I like English.	70	92	12	2	0	176	4.2
2.	The CBI method is an interesting way to learn English.	70	108	3	0	0	181	4.3
3.	The CBI method stimulates me to engage in English class.	25		9	2	1	165	3.9
4.	I am familiar with materials in English using the CBI method.	30	84	24	12	1	151	3.6
5.	There are many benefits I gain from the English course using the CBI method.	70	104	6	0	0	180	4.3
6.	The CBI method classroom is boring.	5	0	18	48	11	82	2.0
7.	English learning with the CBI method does not benefit my English skills.	5	8	3	52	12	80	1.9
8.	The CBI method is the best for English learning.	90	76	9	4	0	179	4.3

In Table 1, the first thing to note is that more than 75% of the students agreed that the CBI method had stimulated them to engage in the English class. Crucially, this figure implies that, with a background of low motivation, this particular teaching method could motivate the students to participate in an English classroom. Secondly, there was only one student who strongly disagreed for Questions 3 and 4 about increased engagement in the CBI classroom and the familiarity of the CBI materials, but none disagreed with Statement 5 on the benefits they gained from the CBI method. The answers to Questions 6 and 7 in Table 1 show that the majority of the students disagreed with the unfavourable questions.

Table 2 provides a summary of the students' averaged reactions toward the CBI method. As can be seen in Table 2, the favourable questions outscored the unfavourable ones. Questions 2 and 8, which asked about the interest and value of the CBI method, attained the highest scores, 4.3, as did Question 5, which asked about the positive outcomes of the method. Students' liking of English obtained a score of 4.2. Furthermore, this particular question was the only one that reflected students' awareness of their answer, as no student ticked the 'Doubt' option. Conversely, unfavourable questions (6 and 7) had the lowest scores of 2.0 and 1.9, respectively.

Besides the questionnaires, students' reactions were evidenced through their participation (Allwright & Bailey, 1991) during the learning process.

This engagement was realised through answering the lecturer's questions and asking questions of the lecturer.

In the lecturer's teaching journal, several concerns were seen with regard to the skills necessary for practising CBI. First, L1 use in the classroom was considered to be less effective, as evident in the following extract:

Lecturer : There are ten, ada sepuluh (there are ten) numbers. For example, kalau saya bilang (If I say) misalnya a teaspoonful sugar. Ini ada disini atau disini? (Is this here or here?) Where? Units of ingredients over here (showing the column)

Students : Units, units, one (referring to column)

Lecturer : A unit or satuan

.....

Lecturer : Ok for example, a teaspoonful of sugar, kamu tidak perlu tulis (you don't need to write), just guess

Reflecting on Lin's (2015) proposal for a systematic use of L1 in the target language instruction, the teacher should have code-switched the languages during the delivery of the key terms. For example, instead of translating the word "ten" into "sepuluh", she should have translated the words 'ingredients' and 'teaspoonful'.

Another issue concerning the teacher's teaching skills was providing CBI learning materials. The topics, taken from internet resources, were usually general issues without focusing on specific required skills

that can equip the students in their field of work. Presenting authentic materials, which include the necessary skills, such as manuals or work instruction booklets from industries (Simbolon & Restall, 2014), is important because the students are likely to work in the field after completing their study.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

From these results, several points can be concluded. First of all, student interaction could be increased through the use of the information gap created by the lecturer through her teaching strategy (requesting students to prepare a question). The negotiation of meaning (through a role-play activity) seemed to be one of the factors contributing to the student interaction. Moreover, the teacher's questioning using the IRF structure in this study contributed to triggering student interaction. This technique can become a constructive strategy for the English teacher to stimulate student interaction. In addition, the use of L1 and English interchangeably also seemed to help in the acquisition of vocabulary, enabling students to accelerate their language acquisition. Finally, English teaching using this CBI method received a positive response from the students in this study, which was supported by their increased interaction in this English class, as shown in the video footage. This positive reaction could be examined

further regarding the aspects the students found to be positive in CBI learning. In this way, more effective strategies using the CBI can be examined.

However, there were limitations apparent in this research. The learning materials were adopted from websites containing general ideas about the courses. The relevance of these learning materials with the skills required in the work field had no empirical evidence. Furthermore, the strategies of L1 use need to be examined for their effectiveness in supporting the students' learning. These limitations were due to the teacher's lack of CBI teaching skills, in particular in code-switching between the languages.

In spite of these limitations, this study suggests, firstly, that in IKP the use of the CBI method for English teaching, especially to increase student interaction, proved to be highly effective. Then, in developing the English course curriculum, real-life materials from the workplace should be included with texts from manuals or job descriptions from industry or the stakeholders. Thus, the collaboration between the language and content teachers is considered to be important, particularly in sharing the information about these learning materials. This particular suggestion implies the importance of the institution's role in providing support to the English course and lecturers. Also, studies focusing on students' improved vocabulary are recommended for further study.

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