



REVIEW ARTICLE

Vol. 3. Issue.2.,2016 (April-June)

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

TEACHING SPEAKING AND WRITING SKILLS TO ENGINEERING STUDENTS USING
CONTENT BASED INSTRUCTION

PRATIVA RANI SAHA¹, S. KANCHANA²

^{1,2}Assistant Professor

Dept. of Humanities & Sciences

VNR Vignana Jyothi Institute of Engineering & Technology, Hyderabad



PRATIVA RANI SAHA



S. KANCHANA

ABSTRACT

Content-based instruction is a communicative approach to language teaching that is gaining a lot of importance in developing linguistic ability. Content based instruction is a teaching method that emphasizes on learning the concept rather than learning the language. This approach is significant as students learn as they experience the learning, i.e. learning by doing. The present paper aims in developing some materials which can be used in teaching Speaking and Writing Skills. It focuses on how these activities help in understanding the concept and applying them in real life situations. The activities can be developed by using Bloom's Taxonomy which emphasizes from remembering level to creating level. It promotes the higher level thinking orders. It focuses on promoting the level of creating their task through projects, presentations, discussions, conversations etc. A number of exercises can be developed to enhance their speaking and writing skills. We can usually use many textbooks that contain a wide range of reading followed by grammar and vocabulary exercises. We can also use information from internet and other mobile integrated applications. It is a holistic approach into language instruction that has become very popular.

Keywords: Integrated Teaching, Bloom's Taxonomy, Task Based Activities, Speaking & Writing etc.

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Content-Based Instruction (CBI) is “an approach to second language teaching in which teaching is organized around the content or information that students will acquire, rather than around a linguistic or other type of syllabus” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p.204). According to Krashen (1982), in content-based instruction, students can acquire the content area of the subject matter with comprehensible input, and simultaneously increase their language skills. Content-based instruction provides for cognitive engagement; tasks that are intrinsically interesting and cognitively engaging will lead to more and better opportunities for second language acquisition; this is particularly important when one considers the inherent complexity of adult

learning (Byrnes, 2000).

Content-based instruction emphasizes a connection to real life, real world skills (Curtain, 1995); in content-based instruction, students have more opportunities to use the content knowledge and expertise they bring to class i.e. their prior knowledge, background information of the topic which they use, their ability to express and relate it to the content and the learning that takes place at the end of the class. Content Based Instruction consists of theme-based & adjunct learning. Theme-based model includes certain themes or topics which students have to learn and understand. The teacher can develop activities from these themes or content. For example, if they are given to prepare a poster on causes and effects of school dropouts the students can develop the poster highlighting on the reasons of school dropouts and what its consequences are. While writing the points on this topic, they engage in a variety of activities such as analyzing the reasons, preparing the statistics, discussing the results of it, using pictures and by creating an impressive chart. In this kind of approach the students become familiar with the topic and its meaning. The second method is the adjunct model that integrates the enhancement of LSRW skills. This model rather emphasizes the importance of concurrently teaching the academic subject matter and foreign language skills (Brinton et al, 1989).

The second model is the adjunct model where we design activities to integrate the four skills and improve student's oral, aural and written skills along with creativity and thinking. To achieve the desired results we can design an activity where in order to foster listening skills, we use an audio clip and ask them to pay attention to what they listen and then ask them to put their answers on the paper. We can also ask them to write a paragraph on what they have listened to, relate their background knowledge and use the keywords that they have come across while listening to the audio. We can ask them to develop a paragraph and to discuss their answers with each other.

While developing a speaking activity, we can show them two or three pictures and ask to relate all the three and create a story and speak on it. While doing this activity in the lab, I have shown three pictures to the students and asked them to develop a story from that picture. They worked in a team of three and were given fifteen minutes to design and complete the activity. After fifteen minutes the teams came up with wonderful stories. The students were also asked to assess their peers stories based on the following rubrics such as creativity, organisation, clarity, transition and linking words. They were also given a word limit and were asked to write the story which they can refer later and rate it on their own and by their team members. Another Speaking activity consisted of using prompts. Here, the students were given some prompts. They were asked to develop a situation and do a role-play on it. For this activity also, they were given fifteen minutes and were divided into teams. They discussed, planned, and developed their ideas, points and turns and performed the role-plays. Again their peers were asked to give feedback. As classroom pattern of teaching is limited to grammar, reading & comprehension, using task based activities will definitely help them understand the concept better as they involve and learn. In other words, it integrates language learning through blending of stimulating content.

The purpose of communication is to accomplish a task, such as conveying a telephone message, obtaining information, or expressing an opinion. While designing activities for speaking we have to consider that they speak effectively and fluently. Keeping this in mind, we have to design activities to allow students to practice and speak the language they know in situations that they face in real life. While doing these activities, students must work together to develop a plan, solve a problem, make a decision, or complete a task. These activities can be done through role plays and discussions. In role plays, students are given various topics or may be also asked to decide a topic on their own. For example, if it's a survival situation then we can give them a situation and ask them to come up with different solutions to save themselves and their team members.

One such situation which I have given in the class was that they were travelling in a plane and their plane had a crash. They have different kinds of people with them in the plane. They are the survivals and now they have to plan to survive and move out safely from the accident place. Its summer and the place where the plane met with the accident is Thar Desert. They don't find anyone in that place for help and they have to approach the BSF people and the BSF camp is 80 kilometers away from the place of accident. So what would

they do to reach that place with the minimum items that they have? The items that they have are; a water bottle, a mirror, a red colored parachute, a pistol etc. I gave them a list of fifteen items and asked them to select any five out of the given items and reach safely to the BSF camp. They have to use language that is appropriate to the situation and to the characters. They were given twenty minutes to discuss, plan, organize their activity and then present it in a form of a role-play. They were also given marks for creativity and negotiation skills because they also have to handle difficult participants in their teams who are playing different roles of an atheist, a man with negative attitude, an egoist person etc. The students were able to complete the task very effectively deciding on different roles, preparing their dialogues and presenting it form of a role-play. They also received peer feedback after the task was done.

To teach them writing, we can develop materials so that the students read, understand and analyze the text and then write whatever they are asked for. While teaching them Cover Letter, I have given them a handout in which the order of the letter was jumbled; there were grammatical mistakes and errors with sentence formation. They were asked to read the letter, arrange it in order, identify the mistakes and correct them and lastly analyze and examine the letter focusing on what each paragraph contained the format and then write a letter on their own. The students were given thirty minutes to do the activity and were divided into team of four. They first arranged the order, corrected the mistakes and rewrote it. Then they identified what each paragraph contained, understood and wrote the format and finally wrote a cover letter for their resume responding to an advertisement. The activity helped them in understanding the letter, its parts, format, the order and what it contained. They presented their activity before the class and read the letter before the class after which the teacher gave inputs correcting them if any. Using of authentic materials help in designing the activities well. Newspaper clippings, classifieds and important headlines can help in designing and in making students creative to write about an event, story etc.

Benefits of CBI

Content based Instruction has many advantages. Here, the learners get exposed to a considerable amount of language through stimulating content. They are interested as they explore the content & are engaged in the activity of learning. CBI supports contextualized learning; learners are taught useful language and make connections with what they already know and relate to it. This enhances the practical usability for the learners. It helps students to develop study skills such as note taking, summarizing and extracting key information from texts. The complex information is delivered through real life examples so the learners grasp well & get motivated. In CBI information is repeated at right time & situation compelling the students to learn out of passion. CBI also fosters for flexibility & adaptability in the curriculum to suit students interest.

Content Based Information is a powerful innovation in acquiring & enhancing a language. In its best form, language lessons are blended with stimulating content. The focus here is on the subject matter than mere language learning process. It supports students' success by engaging them in challenging & informative activity and helps them learn complex skills. The students learn language automatically. Keeping the students motivated & interested in the language training is the profound advantage of CBI.

Challenges of CBI

It also has some disadvantages. Stryker and Leaver (1993) state that there may be a challenge for learners to participate in CBI courses. All the members may not take part actively in the activity. CBI can confuse learners and may give an impression that they are not actually learning language. Finding proper information sources and texts can be difficult.

Teaching through content-based is definitely a challenge faced by teachers as at times we don't know whether every student is able to follow, understand and learn. Considering this particular issue, we have to see that the slow learners also are able to understand and learn the concept. Content-based instruction is a whole world of approaches, methods, models and techniques. Designing these material, following an approach etc. are the important aspects to be considered. While designing these activities, we must have clear objectives the suits the need of the students.

Conclusion

Incorporating CBI into the curriculum is a way of providing a meaningful context for language instruction and learning with higher order thinking skills. At the same time, CBI offers a vehicle for reinforcing academic skills. Teaching and learning through content is fun and worthwhile for not only teachers but learners. Although it takes more time to plan and create materials for CBI, and issues such as learner readiness, teacher knowledge, and the balance between language and content should be taken into consideration, the results will be rewarding.

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