

# AROUSING STUDENTS' INTEREST IN EFL CONTEXT THROUGH CONTENT-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING

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**Abstract:** This proposed paper focuses on content-based teaching to stimulate students' interest, which plays a key role in teaching/ learning a foreign language like English. The use of available technology, the Internet, helps to access a large amount of up-to-date materials free of charge. Thus, students become more interested in language learning and would likely to perform or share their parts as language learners since more enthusiasm is created because of interesting contents of authentic texts. This paper is written based on different sources of articles depicting the background theories and role of content-based language teaching. In this respect, the teacher acts as a moderator/manager to keep the teaching/ learning process in action. Upon applying the proposed method, learning English becomes more enjoyable and meaningful. Likewise, students' language skills are fostered and their word-powers are reinforced to a satisfactory extent.

**Keywords:** content-based teaching, authentic texts, interest, using technology

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language like English is quite demanding. In most EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts, it is quite challenging for learners to be the proficient users of it. In Myanmar's Education system, English is taught since the very beginning of the primary education, but most learners are not confident users of it due to many reasons and challenges. Most Myanmar students are quite familiar with traditional method of teaching a foreign language which is mostly teacher-centered one. Since "Interest" plays a key role in almost every area, it is essential to arouse students' interest in learning a foreign language. Thus, in this paper, an adapted method of teaching which puts more emphasis on contents is presented.

According to McCroskey & Richmond (1991), students may have developed negative attitudes towards learning if they are deprived of motivation to insert more effort in it. Thus, interest and motivation are of primary importance in training students to be active in real language classroom situations. Information that has a greater number of connections to related information promotes better learning (it is more likely that content will have a greater number of connections to other information) (Anderson, 1990).

This paper is meant to provide EFL teachers with a suggestive techniques and strategies to evoke students' curiosity in learning English through content-based teaching approach.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

- To share knowledge on one of the teaching practices based on contents.
- To stimulate students interest through the use of authentic materials.

## 3. BACKGROUND

In this IT-era, the field of language teaching has inevitably undergone various changes and incorporated with new technologies. Content-based Language Teaching (CBLT) has grown enormously in recent years. New trends in language teaching and learning have been shifted to promote communicative competence instead of being competent in grammatical rules, word-power, reading, writing, or listening in isolation. Currently, Content-based Language Teaching promotes real practice in the target language and offers different contexts for language study.

## 4. CONTENT-BASED INSTRUCTION

Content-based instruction or content-based language teaching is one of the teaching methods, which is concerned with both subject content and language. It was originally associated with immersion education in Canada (Grabe and Stoller, 1997, pg -6), but become increasingly associated with EFL/ ESL teaching in late 1980s. This interest has now spread to EFL classrooms around the world where teachers are discovering that their students like CBI and are excited to learn English this way.

The purpose of teaching is not to assist learners in obtaining scheduled targets but to provide them with the context and conditions where language acquisition can take place. The focus of a CBI lesson is on the topic or subject matter. During the lesson students are encouraged to focus on learning about something. This could be anything that interests them from a serious science subject to their favourite pop star or even a topical news story or film. They learn about this subject using the language they are trying to learn, rather than their native language, as a tool for developing knowledge and so they develop their linguistic ability in the target language. This is thought to be a more natural way of developing language ability and one that

corresponds more to the way the first language is initially learned.

According to Davies (2003), there are three models in usage – namely; (i)“A sheltered model” where a content specialist and ESL specialist work together, (ii)“An adjunct model” where ESL teachers prepare classes to acclimatize students to classes with L1 learners, and (iii)“A theme-based” model where a teacher teaches on his or her own to unlock and build upon the students’ own interests.

All three have both potential advantages and disadvantages for students and teachers alike.

## **5. ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF CONTENT-BASED TEACHING**

Like other approaches, content-based language teaching has both advantages and disadvantages like:

### **Advantages of CBI**

- The content adds to student interest in the subject.
- It helps students enrich their scope of knowledge.
- It is beneficial when teaching ESP classes (English for Specific Purposes).
- It can be effective to incorporate group work.

### **Disadvantages of CBI**

- Students may feel confused since CBI’s main focus isn’t on language learning.
- Difficulties with a topic may lead to large amounts of mother tongue interference.
- Students may copy straight from the original texts without attempting any further evaluation.

## **6. IMPORTANCE OF MOTIVATION IN LANGUAGE CLASSES**

A lot of factors contribute to success in language learning. However, one of the most important factors is the learner’s motivation to learn the language in order to be able to use it in real-life situations. Research and experience show that learners with strong motivation can achieve a lot regardless of circumstances. It is natural that not all the learners in the classroom have the same type and level of motivation- some learners may have a very strong motivation to learn the language, while others may have a weaker motivation, and yet others may have no motivation at all. It is motivation that is essential in language learning; one of the challenging tasks of the teacher is to evoke, sustain and enhance learner’s motivation.

## **7. LEARNERS’ PROFILE**

Learners are second and third year students, specializing in Computer Science and Computer technology at the University of Computer Studies, Mandalay. They have been learning English more than a decade and are quite familiar with Grammar Translation method and rote learning.

The level of English of the students ranges from Upper Intermediate to Advanced and likewise their interest and motivation level differs, too. However, there are a few other students who are primarily interested in learning English whatever method is employed. In such a situation, the teacher has to stick to the curriculum and thus the classroom situation is sometimes boring and can’t engage all students to learn the target language. Normally, both the target language and mother tongue are used while giving lectures and explanation and thus students have limited exposure to the foreign language.

## **8. APPLYING CONTENT-BASED TEACHING**

With the previously stated background and those practical steps in mind, some sample content-based activities are presented.

These activities are occasionally practised in three different language classes of University of Computer Studies, Mandalay (Myanmar). They are Third Year Course (B.C.Sc) with fifty students, Third Year Course (B.C.Tech) with twenty students and Second Year Course (B.C.Sc) with fifty nine students respectively. In this case, the Internet is used as a teaching resource to find the necessary supplementary materials as it is abundant with a variety of texts. Moreover, at our university (UCSM) every classroom is equipped with basic facilities to have easy and quick access to the Internet. Normally, the author would like to browse through “<http://www.rdasia.com/>”to look for the topics of interest to teach students.

Once a suitable article or a piece of written text, which might be in accord with the current issue such as environmental or health related topic, is found, it is adapted and applied for teaching purposes. Sometimes, such texts are employed to teach students some environmental issues like “Ways to beat plastic bags” as well as up-to-date usages of language used in authentic materials. By choosing such kinds of topic, students are automatically informed of the issues concerned with environment, health and other topics of interest. Simultaneously, awareness-raising activities on particular topics are accomplished. If the students are bored with the current topic, they are asked to read other things like jokes or other topic of individual interest.

## 9. FINDINGS

Thanks to the adaptive teaching practice as mentioned above which is based on interesting contents, students are more motivated and enthusiastic towards language learning. A set of questionnaires is used to find out students views and comments and a satisfactory result is obtained. A total of eighty students answered the questionnaires. They have been learning English more than a decade as a school subject and their interest of learning differs from each other. Majority of students (85%) prefer the CBI and they say this method can generate their interest and they are motivated more compared to the traditional method of teaching. Concerned with the question: "Which method of teaching do you prefer: Content-based teaching (CBI) or the traditional Teacher-centered method? Why?"

Some of their personal opinions on content-based teaching are as follows:

According some students who have positive views:

(1)CBI can motivate students to learn more than traditional method (about 50%).

(2) Students would like to do discussion with their friends, and knowledge sharing. CBI gives them the above things. So, it is preferred more than the other methods.

(3)Yes, students will be able to communicate with each other by speaking in English.

(4)CBI is more comfortable than the traditional method.

(5)It can improve one's language skills more.

(6)CBI is interesting and motivating.

(7)Students can improve their social and language skills.

(8)CBI is more comfortable than the traditional method. It is exciting to learn via content-based teaching.

(9)The lesson topics teach students both language and knowledge.

(10)One of the students thinks that CBI method is more suitable. Most students didn't have extra knowledge and fun. It is so boring. Students were taught English for exam. By using CBI, it is sure that students will have fun at least. Desire to learn is important in learning. If one is not happy, they may not be interested in it. Students can see the main meaning of subject thanks to CBI.

On the other hand, very few students have negative views like:

(1)One student says that learning English is enjoyable and very interesting. But sometimes, it's boring to study English as it is sometimes two -hour long.

(2)According to a third year student:

No method since neither of them is attractive.

(3)Sometimes enjoyable, sometimes boring.

Therefore, it becomes clear that most students become more interested to learn English and this is helpful to achieve the targeted goals. It can be seen that the teaching/ learning situations of the EFL context become more realistic despite minor difficulties like classroom setting which is not easy to change. Prior to employing task-based activities as mentioned above, students were really reluctant to participate in classroom activities and do the writing task. Using the above mentioned task-based language teaching methods and strategies lead to a more lively and interactive (EFL) language classroom. The students gain sense of achievement and the level of interest is at a peak.

The attached activities are sample materials designed using the authentic as well as up- to-date materials. Yet, whatever the materials, the same three stages (pre-teaching, while-teaching and post-teaching) can be followed with varied tasks. What have stated are the common processes the author follows when employing a content-based teaching. The same material can be used for all three different classes to assign a writing task but the methods and techniques employed are adapted in accord with the level of students and the real classroom situations for creating a fruitful teaching/ learning situations. The main difficulty is students' frequent use of mother tongue and the teacher has to use both mother tongue and English alternatively for the sake of students whose proficiency level in English is not very good. However, it is "Motivation" that stands at a key role to overcome the challenges eventually.

## 10. CONCLUSION

Content-based teaching has remained a potentially productive approach for a number of ESL/EFL teachers. In fact, the benefits of content-based teaching of EFL are numerous as it can generate students' interest through employing challenging contents conveyed in a particular piece of material or writing. In essence, by employing content-based teaching together with the authentic materials, language learning process in EFL context becomes more worth-while, stimulating and rewarding even though it is both challenging and demanding for the teacher and the students.

## 11. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## APPENDIX

### SAMPLE CONTENT-BASED ACTIVITY

“6 Ways to Give Plastic Use The Flick”(downloaded from <http://www.rdasia.com/>)

### SAMPLE LESSON PLAN

Teacher: Daw Yin Yin Kyi	Class: Third Year (C.S)	Date:18/7/18	No of Ss: 50
Lesson Topic: “6 Ways to Give Plastic Use The Flick”			
Lesson objectives: By the end of the lesson, students would be able to -----			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ know some ways of reducing the amount of plastic use</li> <li>➤ gain some insights into environmental issues concerned with plastic bags</li> <li>➤ enrich word power</li> <li>➤ write an essay based on the article mentioned or other related articles</li> </ul>			
Skills covered	Reading Skills- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ finding main ideas</li> <li>➤ guessing meaning from context</li> <li>➤ checking pronunciation of new words</li> </ul> Writing Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ making new sentences</li> <li>➤ writing an essay</li> </ul>		
Level of students	Upper-intermediate		
Duration	Two periods (55 minutes×2)		
Materials / Resources / Supplies / etc.	Worksheets, A projector, A computer with Internet access, Whiteboard & marker		
Lesson Stages	Three stages		
Pre-teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Brainstorming (group activity)</li> <li>➤ Eliciting (group activity)</li> <li>➤ Discussion (group activity)</li> </ul>		
While-teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Silent reading to grasp what the writer means</li> <li>➤ Guessing meaning of unfamiliar words from context</li> <li>➤ Teacher’s explanation using both mother tongue and target language (English)</li> <li>➤ Discussion on special usages like idioms and collocations.</li> <li>➤ Checking students understanding through oral questions.</li> <li>➤ Doing exercises like matching, gap-filling and multiple choice.</li> </ul>		
Post-teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Giving feedback</li> <li>➤ Doing peer correction</li> <li>➤ Asking students to make about five questions based on the given article and find answer by themselves.</li> <li>➤ Ask students to write an essay concerned with plastic bags (group activity)</li> </ul>		
Follow-up	Feedback Assessment		

### 1. PRE-TEACHING ACTIVITY

The students are asked to discuss on the advantages and disadvantages of plastic bags and this task is done in groups for about ten minutes.



Figure 1. Brainstorming section

### 2. WHILE-TEACHING ACTIVITY



Figure 3. Group activity for discussion

At this stage, students are encouraged to do group discussion to get more ideas and for better cooperation among them.

### 3. POST-TEACHING ACTIVITIES

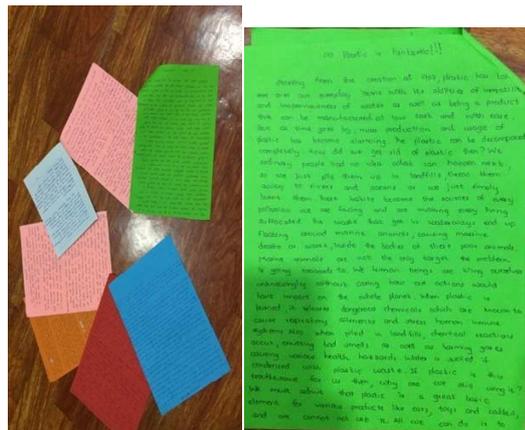


Figure 4. Post reading task – writing an essay

At the final stage, students have to do a variety of assigned tasks. One of the sample tasks can be seen in figure 4.

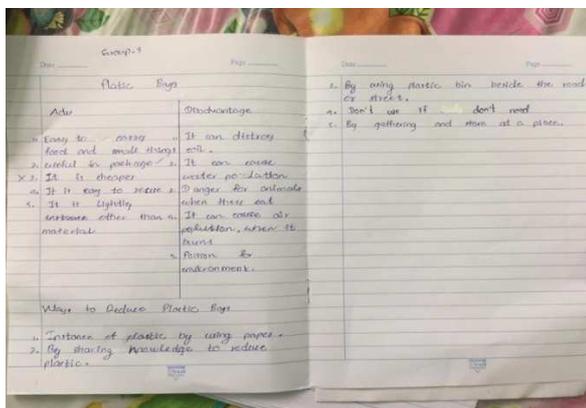
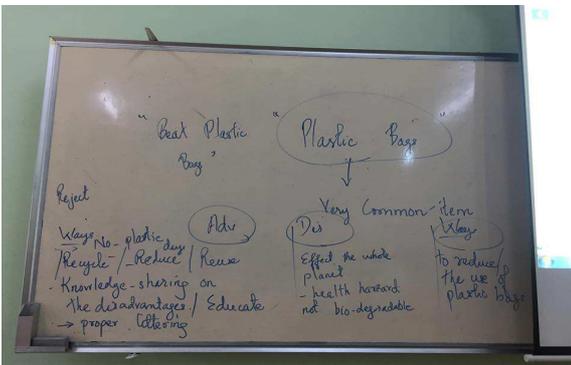


Figure 2. Eliciting