

Review

An Argumentative Essay on the Primary Focus of ELT Syllabus

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Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) plays an increasingly important role in language education, both as a feature of foreign language teaching and learning, and as an element of bilingual and plurilingual education. As learners develop their language competences, they are able to deal with evermore complex topics, so teaching material needs to offer learners interesting and challenging subject matter. One way to do this is through CLIL where language and subject teachers work together; language teachers acquire subject knowledge and subject teachers acquire expertise in combining language development with teaching the content effectively. Recent developments in CLIL have focused more specifically on academic illiteracies as well as on the use of CLIL approaches in the teaching of the language of schooling/majority language. So, this paper intended to examine the argument on the focus of language syllabus to be content or language.

Key Words: Language Syllabus, Content, Language, and CAIL

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INTRODUCTION

Today, English is used as the global language among people all over the world who have a different first language. As English becomes more common, it has begun to be widely taught and learnt. Hence, many people are interested in English, and English language teaching (ELT) has become so popular and important.

English language teaching requires a specialized knowledge base, obtained through both academic study and practical experience. The professional knowledge base of teachers is known as content knowledge. Content knowledge refers to what teachers need to know about what they teach and constitutes knowledge that would not be shared with teachers of other subject areas. Content knowledge can be thought of as constituting the 'theoretical foundations' of ESL/ ELT, in comparison with the practical, teaching-skills aspects of teaching, which

were discussed above. Content knowledge, however, is of many different kinds. One important distinction is between disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge.

So, to teach the English language in effective and efficient syllabus should be need. In doing so the syllabus designing is the basic thing for teaching English language. Teaching materials play a central role in teaching and learning and as Garton and Graves (2014, p.11) assert: "Materials are fundamental to language learning and teaching but materials cannot be viewed independently of their users." This assertion presents two important characteristics of teaching materials that imply their relevance in teacher education; they are a fundamental part of language learning and teaching and they are dependent on their users (both teachers and learners). Material design should consider and try to harmonize situated possibilities with learners'

needs and wants. ELT syllabus designing process whether analytical or synthetic approach, in relation to this the designer need to be focus on the content and language. Gatbonton and Gu (1994) states that in designing the ELT syllabus there are different main problems among this they stated *Language and content*: How should each course handle the relationship between language and content (Mohan, 1986)? Should the course emphasize language, content, or both?. Thus, these two things are debatable in designing the syllabus.

Generally, the focus of this paper is about the focus of language syllabus needed to be focused in both the language and the content in parallel way. To substantiating this argument I tried to support it different empirical and theoretical evidences.

In this paper I will argue the on the following basic questions:

1. Do you think that **language or content** to be primarily focused in the design of ELT syllabus?
2. How do you compare your position with task based design? Justify your argument substantiating with the current trend of English for specific purpose (ESP) syllabus or material design. Theoretical, empirical and authoritative evidences would strengthen your argument.

The Primary Focus of the ELT Syllabus

The content and the language are the pillar for designing the ELT syllabus. Thus these two things are debatable in their priority. I support the English language teaching syllabus should be primarily focus both on content and the language itself. These two things are inseparable. Even though the primary goal of the English language teaching is teaching the language skills, teaching this skills in authentic and different contexts content to be thought are crucial for language acquisition and learning. In relation to my view, Krashen's (1985) comprehensible input theory explained that, the first idea of the integration of language and content provides more meaningful learning environment which is supported by his well-known comprehensible input theory is the central discussion point in the content based syllabus models since this model appeared as a rejection to the focus on form in language learning. CLIL as an instructional approach that fosters content knowledge through language involves careful planning according to the different contexts and current times.

According to Krashen's (1985) theory, a second language is most successfully acquired when the conditions are similar to first language acquisition or more clearly, when the focus of instruction is on meaning rather than on form. Krashen explains this theory as $i + 1$ that is,

humans "progress along the natural order by understanding input that contains structures at our next stage" (p.2). Krashen's (1985) comprehensible input theory and the comprehensible output theory suggested by Cummins and Swain (1986) emphasized the fact that the integration of language and content provided a more meaningful environment since the focus was on meaning not on form. Furthermore, Krashen (1981) claims that the single most important pedagogical principle is to maximize 'comprehensible' input; we learn, he believes, when we are trying to understand and when what we are hearing does not stretch our powers of comprehension too far. In broad terms, content can be important in two ways: one is related to the goals of language teaching, and the other to psychological factors in the learner's mind in the same way language is important since the goal is to teach the language.

Likely, Content based syllabus is based on the premises that people learn languages more successfully when they engage in meaningful activities (Curtain, 1995) and when the information they are acquiring is seen as interesting, useful, and leading to a desired objective (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). In relation to these contents language is the tool to teach it effectively but in ELT the focus is to teach the language skills so at the same time contents is a tool to teach the skills.

Another constructive evidence which support my ideas is, National curriculum in England: English programmes of study - GOV.UK(2014) explained that the overarching aim for English in the national curriculum is to promote high standards of language and literacy by equipping pupils with a strong command of the spoken and written language, and to develop their love of literature through widespread reading for enjoyment. The national curriculum for English aims to ensure that all pupils acquire the language, so the content and the language should primarily focused in designing the syllabus. When schools build intentional collaboration among language specialists and content specialists, they foster targeted professional development that is embedded in the daily work of teachers and aligned with existing administrative structures. To integrate language and content, learning communities can use tools such as the Critical Friends Groups protocols to support collaborative inquiry Integrating Language and Content and embedded professional learning.

In addition to the above reasons, if the syllabus is designed on both the content and language it helps to advocate CLIL (content and language integrated learning) which is more advantageous language education and this question is asked by Marsh, Marsland & Stenberg (2001:17) in their book *Integrating Competencies for Working Life* and their answer is a list of five key reasons for introducing CLIL in an academic or professional curriculum. According to them these reasons involve the development of pragmatic knowledge and

skills, interpersonal skills, intercultural communication, quality of learning and teaching in the content field, employability and multi-perspectives, i.e. to be able to look at one's own academic subject from different perspectives). Marsh, Marsland, and Hornberger (2001) further explain that, in CLIL, learning outcomes tend to focus on achieving higher levels of awareness and skill in using language in real-life situations, alongside the learning of subject matter. This approach can be viewed as being neither language learning, nor subject learning, but rather an amalgam of both. (p. 233). So, these advantages push the ELT curriculum designer need to focus on both the content and the linguistic input of the syllabus.

Another crucial evidence for my argument, it is useful to consider established rationales for integration as well as problems inherent in framing a language/content dichotomy. In describing classroom practice, it is beyond the scope of this volume to provide an in-depth review of theoretical or research foundations for the integration of language and content, but several resources are available to readers interested in more extensive discussion of this topic (Mohan, Leung, & Davison, 2001, as cited in Sherris, 2008).). Similarly, Teachers and researchers have recognized that teaching language and content together is an effective way of developing English language proficiency (Brinton et al., 1989; Genesee, 1994; Grabe & Stoller, 1997 as cited in Nordmeyer, n.d). This indicates that, the integration of content and language help to acquire the language effectively and students need to be learning in real life situation.

Systemic Functional Linguistics is based upon the premise that language is a resource for making meaning and thus provides a principled account of how forms and meanings (i.e. language and content) are related in discourse. Recognizing "the central role of language in education, not only as a subject in the curriculum, but also as the medium in which the learning and teaching of all subjects is actually carried out" (Wells 1997), studies in language education have advocated the integration of language and content learning. Rationales behind the advocacy of such integration have been well articulated in the literature on content-based language learning (Snow and Brinton 1997; Stryker and Leaver 1997 as cited in Nordmeyer, n.d), as well as by researchers arguing for increased attention to language across the curriculum (Acherman 1993; Applebee 1981; Emig 1977; Gere 1985; Martin 1992; Wells 1999 as cited in Early, Thew, & Wakefield, 1986). Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has become the umbrella term describing both learning another (content) subject such as physics, geography, medicine or law through the medium of a foreign language and learning a foreign language by studying a content-based subject. The basis of CLIL is that content subjects are taught and learnt in a language which is not the mother tongue of the learners.

Knowledge of the language becomes the means of learning content. Language is integrated into the broad curriculum. Learning is improved through increased motivation and the study of natural language seen in context. When learners are interested in a topic they are motivated to acquire language to communicate.

As a result, CLIL is also an instructional approach:

Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) refers to any dual-focused educational context in which an additional language, thus not usually the first language of the learners involved, is used as a medium in the teaching and learning of non-language content. It is dual-focused because whereas attention may be predominantly on either subject-specific content or language, both are always accommodated. (Marsh, 2003 as cited in Rodriguez, 2012)

So, the above explanation indicates if the content and language in the designing of the ELT syllabus it may have different benefits like: introduce the wider cultural context, prepare for internationalization, access international certification and enhance the school profile, improve overall and specific language competence, prepare for future studies and or working life, develop multilingual interests and attitudes, diversify methods & forms of classroom teaching and learning, and increase learner motivation.

Graddol (2006) observes that integrating language and content alters "the working relationship within schools, and requires a cultural change of a kind which is often difficult to bring about within educational institutions" (p. 86). From a socio-cultural point of view, the language used in a particular subject area has to be acquired through engaging in activities in that discipline.

Generally speaking a language teaching syllabus involves the integration of subject matter (what to talk about) and linguistic matter (how to talk about it); that is, the actual matter that makes up teaching. Choices of syllabi can range from the more or less purely linguistic, where the content of instruction is the grammatical and lexical forms of the language, to the purely semantic or informational, where the content of instruction is some skill or information and only incidentally the form of the language. To design a syllabus is to decide what gets taught and in what order.

Content and Language Focused Syllabus Vs. Task Based Syllabus

Form the beginning I argue that the primary focus the

ELT syllabus should be on content and the language. Another reason for saying this is that TBLT. In task based teaching the focuses is on the tasks so these tasks are design from the contents and the linguistic input of the syllabus.

I believe that task-based learning gives the teachers the opportunity to help learners develop their language abilities naturally through communication and interaction with others. Similarly, Townsend-Cartwright (2014) explained that task-based approaches offer numerous benefits in a wide variety of teaching contexts. It is vital that teachers have thorough knowledge of their own specific teaching context, as well as an understanding of the beliefs and assumptions about the nature of language and language learning inherent in a particular syllabus when choosing which type of syllabus to adopt. Only by making principled decisions based on these factors, using needs analysis and carefully considering the demands of the institution and social expectations can we best facilitate language learning.

Breen (1987) asks four main questions regarding task, for which he provides answers:

(i) WHY is the task being undertaken? (to practice the use of a rule, to deduce main ideas from a text, to share information, or to solve a particular problem, etc.); (ii) WHAT is the content of the task?(linguistic rules, functions of language, specialist subject-matter, everyday general knowledge, or practical skills and abilities for communicating or studying, etc.); (iii) HOW is the task to be done?(through recalling and transferring previously-learned information or skills, by a problem solving-process, by analyzing data, or through the use of particular skills, etc.); (iv) WHERE is the task to be done?(in pairs or groups in classroom; in a class with direct teacher guidance; individually with self-access resources, such as a computer; outside a classroom in the wider community; or as homework, etc.) (Breen 1987: 25)

From the above explanation we can understand that how the language and the content of the syllabus is basic for designing ELT syllabus in TBLT because task are used to teaching the language rule, skills and the above question will answered by the content of the task designs are arise from the contents of the syllabus and where the task are applying to mean that the context in which the syllabus is applying so the primary focus should be on the content and the language. the above three are crucial in the what (the content), the how (the language theory and methodologies), why, where, when, who (the need analysis) so from this we can deduce that in ELT syllabus design the language and the content are in separable

both are important in doing the syllabus so, integrating both the content and the language in ELT syllabus help to designing contextual and meaningful task and apply effective ask base language teaching

Among the recent innovations in the field of second language teaching, task-based language teaching is probably the most promising and productive one, the one which has drawn much attention from both second language teaching profession and second language researchers. Whatever it is effective there are different approaches which are emerged due to the failures of them so, a syllabus should be open and negotiable and they should be "retrospective records rather than prospective plans" (Candlin, 1984 p. 35as cited in Gatbonton and Gu , 1994).

As represented by researchers such as Long and Crookes (1992)the syllabus does have predetermined content. They added that, it is organized around the tasks which are derived from real-life tasks for pedagogical purposes and sequenced according to the complexity of the tasks. So, the content and the linguistic input drive to the TBLT effectively.

Advocates of task-based language teaching claim that such a teaching approach is "compatible with current SLA theory." (Long & Crookes, 1992.p. 43). It has also been claimed that many studies have produced evidence which is in support of the effectiveness of this approach, specifically the use of tasks, in facilitating SLA. However, compared to the discussion of the practical aspects involved in this teaching approach, such as the designing of a task based syllabus and task derivation and sequencing, little has been done to explain the general question of how the use of tasks can better promote SLA than other teaching approaches, or, in the cases of the empirical studies, the results which are interpreted to support such claims, in terms of current SLA theory.

Generally, the content and the language are primarily focused to lead effective task based syllabus since is based on the premises that people learn languages more successfully when they engage in meaningful activities and when the information they are acquiring is seen as interesting, useful, and leading to a desired objective (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). Through integrated content and language instruction, second language learners develop the ability to generate thoughtful spoken and written discourse about concepts in a content area, and they develop proficiency in understanding and producing the types of texts specific to that area. Students also develop the ability to carry out other content related tasks, such as lab experiments, creative mathematical calculations, and historical inquiry

Content and Language Focused Syllabus in ESP

Another point which makes my argument supports the

integration of content and language is the ESP. In current teaching learning process of ELT the approach tend to become ESP since it is fit with the students' interest and the profession as well. Content-and-language integrated learning was introduced in ESP at the end of the 20th century. So, on basic reason for designing ELT syllabus should focus on the content and language is the case of ESP. in designing ESP syllabus the content of the syllabus is fundamental at the same theme the language is crucial. Lili (2015) stated that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is a significant movement in language education. It provides more opportunities for English language researchers and practitioners to explore the curriculum, course design and implementation of ESP education. Now we are living in a world where more and more people are using English in a growing number of occupational contexts. As a result, ELT professionals and institutions are increasingly are required to design and deliver ESP courses tailored to specific professional and academic activities. So, to design the ESP syllabus two things are crucial: content and language. In ESP content is crucial at the same time since the goal is to teach the language skills the linguistic input is another thing.

Fălăuș (2016) on his study stated that the emphasis on learners' wants and interests, and learning autonomy does not diminish the role of the teachers; on the contrary they need to subject themselves to a continuous process of adaptation and evaluation in order to meet the requirements imposed by the subject they are teaching. They need to design courses keeping in mind the nature of the particular target and learning situations they are to deal with, at the same time juggling professionally with the requirements imposed by working with large heterogeneous classes. So, this indicates that how the content and the language plays a significant role in designing the syllabus.

From the beginning the reason why I am saying the primary focus of English language teaching syllabus should be focus both is that in case of ESP. As Dudley-Evans and St John attempted to classify the events and actions, which typify ESP into 3 stable, absolute characteristics and 5 variable characteristics. The absolute characteristics are: ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learners, makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves and is centered on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre (Dudley-Evans & St John 1998:4-5). So, from this perspective we can understand that ELT syllabus for ESP needs to be focused on the needs, methodology and language aspects. This thing will also drive from the content and the linguistic input.

This explanation indicates that how ESP integrates both content and the language. To support this idea I can take one example, in Ethiopian case Law and medicine students are take two course English for lawyers and

English for medicine, the focused is to teach the students English language but to teach it the content is designed and graded based on the filed need this also motivate the students to learn it since it is fit with their need.

The syllabus must be content-rich and useful to the students stretching their area knowledge in its own right. This does not mean that the texts used always need to be complicated: rather, they need to be balanced, providing not only plenty of language points and key words and expressions for general English, but also specialized terminology for the aviation industry. But in doing so, the key skills needed to function in a language in a professional engineering context include grammar, pronunciation, listening, speaking and technical writing. This part of the course is intended to consolidate students' awareness and mastery of English structure and grammar, with a special focus on pronunciation, stress and intonation. To develop and improve their spoken language skills, students are encouraged to participate in conversations on various subjects related to everyday life, both in classroom discussion and in formal debates, using vocabulary from aeronautical engineering. To improve their technical writing skills, students are taught both formal and informal expressions and ways of communicating (Lili, 2015; Fălăuș, 2016). Thus, this tends to become the syllabus should be primarily focused on both the content and the language.

As Richards and Rodgers at length in defining the syllabus:

All methods of language teaching involve the use of the target language. All methods involve decisions concerning the selection of content that is to be used in the teaching program. Content concerns involve both subject matter and linguistic matter. In straightforward terms one makes decisions as to what to talk about (subject matter and how to talk about it (linguistic matter). ESP[English for special purposes] and immersion courses, for example; are necessarily subject-matter focused. Structurally; based courses are necessarily linguistically focused. Methods typically differ in what they see as the relevant language and subject matter around which language instruction should be organized and the principles they make use of in structuring and sequencing content units within a course.(1982; p. 157)

A language teaching syllabus, then, is the linguistic and subject matters that make up the teaching. Choices range from more 1o1 less purely linguistic syllabi, where the content of instruction is the grammatical and lexical forms of the language, to the purely semantic or informational, where the content of instruction is some kill

or information and: only incidentally the: form of the language. Supporting my argument Tzoannopouloua (2015) explained that Although Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), with its dual focus on both content and language, emerged almost thirty years after the advent of ESP, both movements are driven by common factors, including the omnipresence of English as the international language of communication and the demands of world economy. Indeed, some researchers have pointed out the common characteristics shared by both approaches

ESP, the study of a particular aspect of language so as to be able to accomplish certain tasks, is an attempt to mimic the native speaker's way of learning so as to maximize learning resources. In the intensive, accelerated and subject specific learning contexts of ESP courses, trainees can increase their learning speed, efficiency and effectiveness (Fălăuș, 2016). Teaching English language for specific purposes ESP has become a crucial issue in research and among educators of languages and researchers. Students from different fields need to learn the English language to serve their purposes and fulfill their needs. It may be true that all of the students in these specific fields share the same general purpose, which is that they all nearly do not necessarily want to be proficient in English language, though they really wish. Therefore, a course designed for the students of computer science might not suit the students of dentistry. On the basis of this, we need to design our syllabuses carefully, cautiously and creatively. Hence, this leads the ELT curriculum designer need to focus on content to satisfy the students need.

CONCLUSION

In generally, my conclusion ends up with the side of the ELT syllabus should be primarily focused on both on the content and the language. There is no prioritization on the content in the design of ELT syllabus. Both things are crucial, especially in case of ESP. In addition to this, the task based syllabus also advocate that the integration of the two things that is the language and content.

Talking about content is key to unlocking the door to academic literacy for many first and second language learners in the same way the language is the tool to derive the this content which are basic to develop the language skills. With its integration of content and language, CLIL can offer an authenticity of purpose unlike that of any communicative classroom, provides learners with a richer, more naturalistic environment that reinforces language acquisition and learning, and thus leads to greater proficiency in learners of all abilities CLIL also regenerates content teaching by fostering cognitive development and flexibility in the learner through its constructivist approach (Krashen, 1985, Lightbown and

Spada 2006, Coyle et al 2010, Dalton-Puffer 2008 as cited in Banegas,2014). Finally, CLIL can also lead to greater intercultural understanding and prepares pupils better for internationalization. In essence, CLIL claims to be a dynamic unit that is bigger than its two parts, providing an education that goes beyond subject and content learning (Coyle et al. 2010).

Bernard Mohan on the integration of language and content in teaching (Mohan, 1986), is a heuristic that provides a springboard for organizing pedagogic tasks that can help teachers bring language development into content teaching. It revolves around the concept of activity. Mohan distinguishes activity from the simpler notion of topic, suggesting that whereas a topic is anything that can be talked about, an activity is "a combination of action and theoretical understanding" (Mohan, 1986, p. 42. as cited in Tammy and Soule (2011), which thus brings both doing (action) and knowing (theoretical understanding which guides the action) into the forefront. Students learn the content while doing the tasks and also learn how to talk about the content critically, with scaffolding by the teacher. Such subject-based literacy development is essential for students to succeed academically and professionally (Gibbons, 2009as cited in Tammy and Soule, 2011).

Generally, a language teaching syllabus, then, is the linguistic and subject matter that makes up the teaching. In ELT the integration of language and content is that moving from the practical to the theoretical is the direction most desirable for teaching and learning. Is this direction best for all learners, or do some learn better when they begin from a theoretical base? The level of maturity of the learner, individual learning strategies, and previous learning experience may play important roles in optimal sequencing. One would want to be fully persuaded in favor of the "practical first" position before making an extensive investment of resources in developing appropriate teaching materials.

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