



Entreciencias: diálogos en la Sociedad
del Conocimiento

E-ISSN: 2007-8064

entreciencias@enes.unam.mx

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de

México

México

Lara Herrera, Romero; Geoffrey Richter, Kenneth; Razo Colunga, Luis Omar; González
Espejel, Luis Daniel

Mexican Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching English through Content Based Instruction in
the State of Guanajuato Mexico: A Dual Perspective

Entreciencias: diálogos en la Sociedad del Conocimiento, vol. 4, núm. 9, abril-julio, 2016,
pp. 97-108

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

León, México

Available in: <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=457645340008>

- How to cite
- Complete issue
- More information about this article
- Journal's homepage in redalyc.org

redalyc.org

Scientific Information System

Network of Scientific Journals from Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal

Non-profit academic project, developed under the open access initiative



Mexican Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching English through Content Based Instruction in the State of Guanajuato Mexico: A Dual Perspective

Percepciones de profesores mexicanos de la enseñanza del inglés basada en contenidos del Estado de Guanajuato: Una perspectiva dual

Recibido: 3 de junio de 2015; aceptado: 5 de noviembre de 2015.

Romero Lara Herrera ^{1*}, Kenneth Geoffrey Richter ^{2}, Luis Omar Razo Colunga ^{3***},
Luis Daniel González Espejel ^{4 *}**

*UNAM-ENES Unidad León, **Universidad de Guanajuato, ***Universidad de La Salle

Resumen

Este artículo se centra en la percepción de profesores mexicanos de inglés sobre la enseñanza del idioma basada en contenidos. Los profesores, objeto de estudio, tienen una perspectiva dual: aprendieron el idioma inglés a través de contenido y ahora enseñan inglés aplicando el mismo método de enseñanza. Se utilizó una metodología con enfoque cualitativo; se aplicaron entrevistas semi-estructuradas a los participantes con el fin de entender sus experiencias y percepciones sobre el tema. Las entrevistas se centran en la percepción de los docentes en relación con la instrucción basada en contenidos y determinan si los participantes recomendarían o no el método. Los resultados sugieren que a pesar de haber aprendido inglés a través de contenidos, los participantes no lo recomendarían debido al contexto en el que se encuentran actualmente. Recomendaciones para futuras investigaciones son presentadas en las conclusiones.

Palabras clave: Instrucción Basada en Contenidos, percepciones de los docentes, perspectivas duales y creencias

Abstract

This article focuses on Mexican teachers' perception of teaching English through content-based pedagogy from a dual perspective. The teachers in this study learned English through content-based learning and are now teaching English using the same method. A qualitative approach was used in order to understand the participants lived experience through semi-structure interviews. The interviews focused on teachers' perception regarding Content-Based Instruction and determining whether the participant would recommend content-based teaching or not. The data suggested that despite participants having learned English through content they would not recommend it due to inappropriate context. Recommendations for further research are suggested.

Keywords: Content-Based Instruction, Teachers' perceptions, dual perspectives and beliefs

¹ He has been Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) for 16 years and had been involved in Content-Based Pedagogy for eight years. He holds a degree in English Language Teaching (ELT) from the University of Guanajuato in Mexico and a Master's Degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) from the University of Guadalajara in Mexico. He is currently an English Language professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico-National School of Higher Education (UNAM-ENES) Campus León. His current field of research is on Content-Based Pedagogy and teachers and learners perceptions of teaching and learning English. Email: romerolaraz40@hotmail.com, romero23@enes.unam.mx.

² He has been involved in education for more than twenty years, working as an instructor, teacher trainer, administrator, facilitator, and consultant in non-profit, corporate, and university settings. He has taught at the university level in the United States, Taiwan, China, Singapore, and Mexico. He holds a Bachelor's degree in comparative literature from the University of California (cum laude), a Master's degree in International Relations from California State University (summa cum laude), and a Master's Degree (summa cum laude) and Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics from the University of Memphis. He currently works as an Associate Professor at the University of Guanajuato in central Mexico. Email: ken.richter@gmail.com

³ He has been an English language teacher for 10 years. He has a degree in English Language Teaching (ELT) from the University of Guanajuato, Guanajuato Mexico, an Master's Degree in Education from the University of La Salle and a certificate in Communicative English by the Training Center for the Working Field (CE-CA-TI). He currently teaches English as a foreign language at the University of La Salle campus Salamanca. He is an official examiner with the Latin American Institute for Educational Communication (ILCE) and has been president of the English Academy at the National College of Technical Professional Education (CONALEP) during the last three years in the state of Guanajuato. Email: omarrazo@hotmail.com

⁴ He has a Bachelor's Degree in English Language Teaching (ELT) from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) Campus FES Acatlán and is currently pursuing a Master's Degree in Educational Technology at the Autonomous University of the State of Hidalgo. He has worked as an English language teacher since 2002 in which he has worked in various UNAM campuses. He was head of the Department of English ENES León from 2011-2015. He has published electronic teaching material and support units for the learning portal CUAED and English Media. He has given presentations at national and international conferences, and his research interests are working with technology applied to content and language teaching. Email: luis.gonzalez@cch.unam.mx

INTRODUCTION

Content-Based Instruction (CBI) is a pedagogical method on the rise, and one that is increasingly in the spotlight. Different forms of Content-Based Pedagogy⁵ are currently being adopted at a rapid pace by educational institutions throughout the world, and its significance is reflected by growing research interest in the subject (Brinton, Snow & Wesche, 2011; Cenoz, Genesse & Gorter, 2014; Corrales and Maloof, 2009; Crandall & Kaufman, 2002; Lin, 2015; Pérez-Cañado, 2012, 2013, 2014; Pérez Cañado & Ráez Padilla, 2014; Pessoa *et al.*, 2007; Ruiz de Zarobe & Cenoz, 2015; Stryker & Leave, 1997). However, despite the attention that Content-Based Instruction has received, relatively little research on the subject has been conducted in Mexico (Lara-Herrera, 2015; Nuñez Asomoza, 2015). It is the aim of this study to help fill this lacuna.

The current study focuses on a small group of Mexican teachers who learned English through CBI and who now use CBI to teach their own classes. The authors of this study posited that the different but complementary “dual perspectives” held by these instructors might afford them special insight into Content Based Instruction. Our aim was to understand these teachers’ perceptions of CBI in an effort to shed light on the approach’s suitability to the Mexican educational context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Content Based Instruction

Content-Based Pedagogy is distinguished by its focus on the concurrent learning of specific academic content and related language use skills (Brinton *et al.*, 2011; Cenoz, 2015; Cenoz, & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2015; Genesee & Lindholm-Leary, 2013; Tedick & Wesely, 2015). Its chief concern is “the integration of content learning with language teaching aims” (Brinton *et al.*, 2011: ix). Some CBI models prioritize language learning over content learning, other models prioritize mastery of content over language acquisition, and others seek to find a balance between

language and content (Brinton *et al.*, 2011). What these models all have in common, however, is that CBI focuses on *using* the target language instead of learning *about* the target language (Hernández, 2003).

History of CBI

The roots of CBI are often located in the Canadian immersion programs which were introduced in the late 1970’s (Cenoz & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2015; Cloud, Genesee, & Hamadan, 2000; Pérez-Cañado, 2012; Ruiz de Zarobe, 2008). Some scholars have suggested that the true origins of content-based teaching can be traced back much further (Brinton *et al.*, 2011; Mehisto, Marsh & Frigols, 2008; Tejada-Molina, Pérez & Luque-Argulló, 2005). For instance, St. Augustine emphasized the importance of learning content during the course of language acquisition (Brinton *et al.*, 2011). Within the Mexican context, it has been suggested that CBI was implemented during the Conquest: indigenous groups were captured and forced to learn the language of their new overlords while simultaneously having to make sense of new information and ways of thinking (Foster, 2007). The exclusive use of *español* was enforced by the Spanish in order to achieve colonialist goals, in particular the dissemination of Catholic doctrine and the introduction of new trades (Arriaga, 1978).

Strengths and Challenges

Advocates of CBI argue that the approach leads to student gains in both language ability and content mastery. Hernandez (2003), for example, highlights how CBI promotes L2 acquisition: “...for students learning in the language rather than about the language, effective communication is interactive, authentic, and meaningful, with ample opportunities to hear and respond in the target language [practice] and to get feedback ...” (p. 126). A number of studies have suggested that Content-Based Pedagogy also strengthens content learning (Brinton *et al.*, 2011; Cenoz, 2015; Cenoz, & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2015; Crandall, 1993; Genesee & Lindholm-Leary, 2013; Stoller, 2004; Tedick & Wesely, 2015).

CBI supporters believe that the approach’s effectiveness originates in the way the brain processes information (Field, 2003; May-Landy, 2000). According to cogniti-

⁵ In this research the term Content-Based Pedagogy refers to Content-Based Instruction (CBI), Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and any other pedagogical method and approach that focuses in teaching content through the means of a target language simultaneously.

ve research, the brain stores information in networks (Field, 2003); the more connections there are amongst these networks, and the stronger these connections are, the better information is learned and retained (Mugler & Landbeck, 2000). CBI is believed to build strong connections between content and language centers; from a theoretical perspective, learning content and language simultaneously should allow students to become better at both.

Practically speaking, achieving the approach's theoretical aims in the classroom implies the synchronization of numerous, interdependent constituents. Content knowledge, educational context, language use, pedagogic materials, student characteristics, and teacher competence (inter alia) must all be considered and somehow harmonized (Cenoz, 2015; Cenoz et al., 2014; Coyle, 2008; Pérez-Cañado, 2012). Disagreement in the literature about the effectiveness of CBI attests to the complexity of this task. While some studies have substantiated CBI's pedagogic utility (Boivin & Razali, 2013; Corrales and Maloof, 2009; Lafayette and Buscaglia 1985; Pessoa *et al.*, 2007), others have foregrounded potential complications (Cenoz *et al.*, 2014; Coyle, 2008; Doughty & Varela, 1998; Pérez-Cañado, 2012). It has been argued, for instance, that a significant problem with the approach has to do with finding teachers who are qualified in both language and content (Lara-Herrera, 2015). In some CBI classrooms, students are provided with both a language teacher and a content teacher, who work as partners (e.g., in certain "sheltered" models). But financial realities often make such schemes untenable. In situations in which it is only possible to employ a single teacher, hiring decisions often privilege language ability over content knowledge. In the schools we investigated, there has been a distinct tendency to "repurpose" language teachers as CBI instructors (no doubt in the belief that second language teachers can learn new content more readily than content teachers can learn new second languages). In such cases, instructors need to invest substantial amounts of time in order to become familiar with new areas of knowledge (Brown, 2004; Cenoz, 2015; Cenoz *et al.*, 2014). The problem of finding qualified CBI teachers is especially pronounced in Mexico, where many teachers lack a solid education in either second language teaching or in specific content areas.

Another potential problem stems from the fact that

Content-Based Pedagogy is not a unified, clearly articulated teaching model. It is, rather, an amorphous and changing set of theoretical and pedagogic propositions. There are, for instance, no universally accepted guidelines for how teachers should integrate language and content, or clear standards elucidating the degree to which the L2 should be used in the classroom (Cenoz *et al.*, 2014; Coyle, 2008; Doughty & Varela, 1998; Pérez-Cañado, 2012). CBI does not possess a "rule book" of best practices. There are, in fact, very few CBI books at all. Whereas English as a Second Language (ESL) materials are generally available, instructors must often devote considerable time to finding appropriate, useful information on content subjects. This can be especially difficult for Mexican teachers, who often do not have ready access to reliable information in English. Moreover, once discovered, such information usually requires substantial modification in order to render it suitable to the level of students' content and language abilities.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research

The findings of the current study are based on data elicited through qualitative research techniques. Qualitative research (QR) is a method which endeavors to understand persons, groups of individuals, research problems, and/or phenomenon (Labuschangne, 2003). QR is particularly effective in attaining data concerning the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of particular social groups (Mack, *et al.*, 2005). According to Labuschangne (2003),

Qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed data about a small number of people and cases. Qualitative data provides depth and detail through direct quotation and careful description of situations, events, interactions and observed behaviors. (p. 1)

A challenge for investigators working within a QR paradigm is that they must subdue their own conceptions of the world when interpreting data so that their personal beliefs do not taint participants' personal un-

derstandings of a given phenomenon and consequently contaminate data and findings. Wiersma (1995) explains this issue:

“[In QR] researchers do not impose their assumptions, limitations, and delimitations or definitions, or research designs upon emerging data. The researcher’s role is to record what he or she observes and/or collects from subjects ... ‘Reality’ exists as the subjects see it.” (pp. 211-212).

Interviews in Quantitative Research

In QR, interviews refer to the one-on-one discussions between the researcher and study participants which serve to cast light on the participants’ lived experiences (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). Spradly (1997) argues that, “the purpose of interviewing is to make cultural inferences thick descriptions of a given social world analyzed for cultural patterns and themes.” (p. 8). Because interviews give detail, depth, and explanatory power of students’ answers (Kvale, 1996), we considered interviews would assist us towards a better understanding of these particular participants’ perceptions of using CBI.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The current study relied on data collected through semi-structured interviews. The main line of questions used in the study were as follows:

- 1) Would you recommend teaching English through CBI?
- 2) What are some of the advantages that CBI offers?
- 3) What are some of the challenges posed by CBI?
- 4) How do students acquire a language through CBI?
- 5) Could you describe your overall experience using CBI?

These questions were asked of each of the participants involved in the present study. Extempore follow-up questions helped flesh out participant responses. In semi-structured interviews, research questions (particularly follow-up questions) are conceived and adapted “on the fly” as required by the shifting dynamics of a given discussion:

“ The order in which the various topics are dealt with and the wording of the questions are left to the interviewer’s discretion. Within each topic, the interviewer is free to conduct the conversation as he thinks fit, to ask the questions he deems appropriate in the words he considers best, to give explanation and ask for clarification if the answer is not clear, to prompt the respondent to elucidate further if necessary, and to establish his own style of conversation.” (Corbetta, 2003, p. 270).

Participant Backgrounds

In total, eight teachers agreed to participate in the current research. The participants included five males and three females. All the participants possess a near-native command of English.⁶ These teachers all learned English in the United States in CBI immersion programs and now use CBI in their own classroom. At the time they were interviewed, they had all been using CBI approaches for at least two years.

Research Sites

The data for our investigation was collected in two different schools in the state of Guanajuato, in central Mexico. The first was a public high school, the second a private secondary school.

The high school is a public institution which offers technical careers in the fields of informatics, electro-mechanic, and environmental conservation. As part of its regular curriculum, the school offers five levels of English. Students begin taking English when they commence their second semester and continue to study until the end of their sixth semester. The school does not require its teachers to follow any specific English language teaching method. However, five of the 20 English teachers working there have chosen to use pedagogic approaches based on CBI. These five teachers all agreed to participate in the current study.

The second research site was a private secondary school. This school’s English program consists of both regular English Language Teaching (ELT) classes and a

⁶ According to the Common European Framework of References (CEFR), a “near-native” command of English refers to a C1 or C2 level of English language proficiency.

CBI program focused on the areas of geography, world history, and Mexican history. The CBI program is based on an “adjunct” model in that content courses are supported with five hours of ELT classes every week. Three research participants work as CBI teachers at this secondary school.

FINDINGS, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION

Question 1: Would you recommend teaching English through CBI?

Data acquired from Question 1 (i.e., “Would you recommend teaching English through CBI?”) indicated that six of the eight (i.e., 75 percent) participants would recommend CBI to fellow teachers. However, this support was weak, tentative, and primarily focused on the narrow benefits of CBI as a way to increase vocabulary uptake. Participant 3’s (henceforth P3)⁷ response was typical:

P3: Yeah, I think it’s a great idea to implement it [CBI]. It is a good idea to link language and content because of the different vocabulary through curricular context that could be learned. In regular English classes you just do not see this type of language.

Other participant responses also foregrounded the importance of tying vocabulary to real contexts instead of having students learn lexis in isolation. For instance, P4 commented that language and content “... are connected and need each other.” P7 suggested that a greater amount of vocabulary could be learned when it was studied within real-world contexts. These conclusions harmonize with research that suggests that students who learn within a CBI framework acquire a deeper knowledge of second languages than traditional ELT students (Corrales & Maloof, 2009; Lafayette & Buscaglia, 1985).

Apart from vocabulary, however, support for CBI was heavily caveated (see below) or completely absent. P1 and P8, for instance, voiced a number of reasons that they would not recommend CBI to fellow teachers. P1 reflected on her own experiences as a student learning through CBI. In her view, academic subjects that are already challenging are made even more challenging

when learned in a foreign language. This is a common perspective. Lara-Herrera (2015), for instance, investigated 11 Mexican secondary school students enrolled in a CBI course about the history of Mexico. He found that the students were frustrated by the experience. As one participant noted, trying to learn both content and language simultaneously is a sure way to ensure that neither is learned adequately.

P1 also lamented the fact that she did not receive sufficient training in CBI before being asked to teach. A number of researchers have identified instructor training as crucially important to the success of content based programs (Pérez-Cañado, 2014; Pessoa et al., 2007; Tedick & Wesely, 2015). However, CBI training programs and training materials are so scarce as to be essentially non-existent in Mexico.

P8 identified a number of problems with Content Based Instruction, including a lack of support from school authorities, insufficient technological resources in the classroom, and no access to published material which might support CBI. Above all, P8 perceived an unbridgeable chasm between the pedagogically progressive tenets of CBI and the static traditionalism of the Mexican classroom. Pedagogic conservatism has been identified as one of the main weaknesses of the Mexican educational system (Davies, 2009). As Sulzar (2013) notes, in the majority of Mexican public educational institutions, “...the idea of less hegemonic learning environments remains mostly an alien concept” (p. 121).

Question 2: What are some advantages that CBI offers?

Study participants detailed a number of advantages offered by Content Based Instruction: (1) CBI enhances learning speed; (2) language acquisition is more natural; (3) learners become more fluent in the target language; (4) language is more meaningful; (5) vocabulary learning is richer and lexis is made more salient to the learners. These benefits are in-line with a number of studies that support the view that content based pedagogy fosters academic development (Brinton *et al.*, 2011; Cenoz, 2015; Cenoz, & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2015; Crandall, 1993; Genesee & Lindholm-Leary, 2013; Stoller, 2004; Tedick & Wesely, 2015).

However, upon further questioning, it became apparent that most participants had not seen these benefits

⁷ In order to protect their anonymity, participants have been assigned numbers which indicate the order in which they were interviewed. Therefore: Participant One = P1, Participant Two = P2, etc.

first-hand in their own classrooms. Instead, they saw these advantages conjecturally, as benefits that *should* spring from CBI. The only benefit that the participants had observed directly had to do with vocabulary. Enhanced vocabulary learning was identified as the most important benefit of CBI. Participants 1, 2, 3 and 7 highlighted the ways in which CBI promoted vocabulary gains among their students. For instance, P3 mentioned that by learning through content, students were able to expand their vocabulary about other cultures. P7 noted that – generally speaking -- as students begin to increase their vocabulary size, they are able to use more complex language and express themselves better.

The participants generally attributed their students' lexical improvements to the fact that CBI offers contact with the target language that is both wider and deeper than is possible in traditional ELT classrooms. P7 explained lexical gains more specifically, focusing on students' exposure to English-Spanish cognates:

P7: I think that one of the main advantages is that students learn a lot of new vocabulary that is related to the subject as well to other vocabulary that is similar in their first language ... What I mean is that there are many words that are said the same in the two languages; for example, in history students learn words such as ... concentration camps (*campos de concentración*), indulgences (*indulgencia*), the Crusades (*Las Cruzadas*) ... you know, important events that happened in history.

Mugford (2007) argues that cognates can help students to "...improve vocabulary recognition and production strategies... [as well as] encourage students to develop their own language learning strategies" (p. 140). In this case, P7's students apparently used cognates as a learning strategy for language acquisition, and thus accelerated their language learning.

Question 3: What are some of the challenges posed by CBI?

Participants offered a number of challenges that make CBI difficult to implement in their particular teaching contexts. These included (1) time constraints; (2) their

students' lack of English language proficiency; (3) student impatience with the slow pace of learning; (4) lack of student motivation; (5) student absenteeism; and (6) a pronounced lack of published materials for different content subjects.

P1's response regarding time constraints, for instance, is representative of participant perceptions:

P1: Well, in this school, the time might not be enough for students to learn the language and to obtain a good level I think. Probably students might need a little longer than two and a half semesters in order to have a good English level.

Both P4 and P7 mentioned that many students feel frustrated trying to learn through a foreign language, and that this frustration can often turn into a lack of motivation:

P7: I think one principle problem with CBI it is that sometimes you have to find information in internet that it is difficult to understand. On many occasions I have to investigate what means the word in English. So I think if it was difficult for me, then for students I think it is more difficult; that is why they are not motivated to learn [from this approach]. [*sic*]

One participant, P8, complained that CBI's focus on developing critical thinking skills and student autonomy conflicted with local cultural norms to such a degree that teaching became problematic:

P8: I think that one major disadvantage is that sometimes schools want you to change things in order to suit their beliefs. ... What I meant to say is that when I was teaching history I had to be careful because the book I used for this subject promoted students to arrive at their own conclusions through critical thinking but the school always practically ordered me to base historical events on religious beliefs. ... I remember when we were discussing Martin Luther, the school wanted me to say that he was wrong for rebelling against the Catholic religion which is something that I don't believe in...nor is it my responsibility to impose any type of religious beliefs in students, especially when the book is designed to

stimulate critical thinking and for students to draw their own conclusions.

One of the requirements of any teaching approach is that it fits within the norms and expectations of the sociocultural context in which it is employed. As Kumaravadivelu (2001) observes, “all pedagogy, like all politics, is local ... to ignore local exigencies is to ignore lived experiences” (p. 539). Quoting Coleman (1996), Kumaravadivelu argues that those pedagogies which disregard lived experience can ultimately prove to be “so disturbing for those affected by them -- so threatening to their belief systems -- that hostility is aroused and learning becomes impossible” (p. 539).

Question 4: How do students acquire a language through CBI?

The fourth question was asked in order to probe participant beliefs concerning the nature of language learning within a CBI model. The participants largely agreed that for language learning to be successful, it is necessary to have (1) teachers who are experts in both language and content; (2) suitable material which focuses on specific content in the target language; (3) students who are willing to work with CBI; (4) peer interaction (e.g., through projects and team work); (5) an environment which encourages participation in English; and (6) different types of input.

An important theme that emerged was that students require both a steady diet of varied input and opportunities to interact in the target language in order to build language and content knowledge and to develop learning skills. According to the participants, input methods may include audio recordings in the target language, such as radio broadcasts; music with lyrics provided; news programs, such as the BBC or CNN; videos, such as documentaries; and newspaper and magazine articles. Interaction, according to the participants, involves building a classroom environment that encourages communication, experimentation with the language, and abundant opportunities to practice.

The importance of input and interaction is generally assumed within most ESL classrooms and is supported by research. The idea that input is critical to language acquisition, for instance, has been a central tenet of ELT since

at least the time of the Reform movement in the 19th century, and was famously enshrined in Krashen’s Monitor Model (Krashen, 1987). Interaction is also widely viewed as a *sine qua non* of successful language learning, and is the foundational concept informing most communicative approaches. However, in Mexico, where traditional teaching methods (i.e., pedagogical approaches that are transmissional, teacher-centered, and forms-focused) continue to be the norm, many students and teachers are unaccustomed to authentic contact with the L2 or with the idea of meaningful interaction. CBI approaches, then, which require both input and interaction, are a radical departure from pedagogical conventions.

Another key finding concerns participants’ views on their own abilities to teach content. Participants unanimously agreed that CBI teachers must be equally expert at language and content, a view that is echoed in much of the literature (Boivin & Razali, 2013; Cenoz et al, 2014; Horwitz, 2005; Lancaster, 2012). However, the participants generally viewed themselves first and foremost as language teachers and saw content instruction outside the field of ESL as a challenge. It has been noted that, broadly speaking, EFL programs tend to privilege language teaching over content teaching. As Stoller (2002) notes, “many language programs endorse [content-based instruction] but only use course content as a vehicle for helping students master language skills” (p. 112). On the other hand, and again broadly speaking, immersion programs tend to privilege content learning over language acquisition. Cammarata and Tedick (2012) argue that “Research on immersion teaching has consistently shown that immersion teachers tend to focus on subject matter content at the expense of language teaching” (p. 251). Grabe (1997) states that immersion instructors “... become excited about interesting and appealing content and overlook the language exploitation aspects of instruction.” (p. 93). For CBI to be successful, there must be a balance between content and language (Boivin & Razali, 2013; Cenoz et al, 2014). Within the schools investigated in the current study, however, CBI programs clearly exist within an EFL paradigm. This fact creates another hurdle to the approach’s effective implementation.

Question 5: Could you describe your overall experience using CBI?



Although at the beginning of the interviews, 6 out of 8 participants reported that they would recommend CBI, by the end of the interviews, there was almost universal agreement that the approach does not fit the current realities of the Mexican educational context. Table 1 presents typical responses from each of the participants.

Table 1: Description of Overall Experience Using CBI in the Classroom

P1:	I didn't see any positive results; personally it was hard because I didn't have enough material to use. I think that the students didn't have interest in the class because at times it was boring for them because all we did in class was read. At the end I just went back to teaching normal ELT classes.
P2:	When people [students] do not have the willingness to do something, they just won't do it. And since they [students] think they don't need it [content in English] people [students] feel forced to learn.
P3:	Although I think it is a good method, most students did not think so and were unhappy; they lost interest quickly. This caused some students to not show up to class and when they did come to class they had a bad attitude. Some students dropped out because they could not handle it [CBI]. I tried to help them but I think that students don't appreciate the teachers' efforts of trying to help them out in class.
P4:	It was awful! Student had a hard time understanding because they had very little knowledge of the English language; even though, a few students had a translator [electronic translator] and this may have made it a bit easier for them to learn, they still had difficulties.
P5:	I have used content based teaching for the past four years and for some of my colleagues it works despite it being difficult for students. However, I think I catch students' attention more since they don't understand a lot of English.
P6:	For me CBI has not worked well, but I would be willing to readapt schools current program if given the opportunity. I think if we made some small changes it would work.
P7:	Like I say before, I think CBI is difficult to teach because at times you have look for things in the internet and they are a high level. So I think if it was difficult for me and for the students to understand. I think for this reason it is hard for students to learn.
P8:	If school authorities didn't meddle with my class and work method, there would be better results but I am constantly being scolded because students are working in teams and aren't seated in a tradition way and I don't have the support that they [school] promised me when I was hired. This is frustrating for me because I am not a content specialist my strength is English not history.

Source: own elaboration

Despite, 6 out of the eight participants saying that they would recommend CBI, at the end all of the eight participants described that applying CBI was a difficult process to manage in one way or another.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

The overall aim of our research was to discover whether the participants, who learned English through CBI and now teach English using the same approach, would recommend Content Based Learning to their professional peers.

The major finding of this research is that the study participants view CBI in largely negative terms. The participants were aware of CBI's theoretical benefits (i.e., the approach may, under certain conditions, enhance learning speed, encourage fluency, and make language more personally meaningful to students) and remarked on its ability to assist in vocabulary growth. However, overall, the respondents reported that CBI was not an appropriate pedagogical approach within the specific institutional and cultural contexts of their own schools. In particular, seven key obstacles to successful CBI implantation were identified.

- 1) Participants' complained about their **lack of training**. Research points to the importance of teacher education and training in making CBI effective (Pérez-Cañado, 2014; Pessoa et al., 2007; Tedick and Wesely, 2015). However, in the cases we examined, none of the participants had received any formal training in Content Based Instruction before being asked to begin their instruction.
- 2) The participants pointed out that their **lack of knowledge about content** made it difficult for them to use the target language appropriately or to plan their classes well. Teachers in the study remarked that some academic subjects are difficult even in Spanish; to teach these same subjects in English results in frustration for both students and teachers.
- 3) **The participants' poor language skills** was also highlighted. One participant explained that content

language in English was difficult even for her, the teacher.

- 4) Another participant expressed his frustration with the **lack of support he received from his educational institution**. Two of the eight participants blamed bad school “planning” or “meddling” as barriers to the success of CBI. There was general agreement that school administrators lacked sufficient knowledge about CBI.
- 5) Half of the participants stressed that their students were dissatisfied with and bored by CBI. **Frustration with the approach lead to a lack of motivation among students**. In some cases, student failure challenged their sense of self-worth. Participants reported that their students often made a conscious decision not to use new language or to reject CBI teaching methods as a way of asserting their own social identity (see Despagne, 2010; Moore, 1999; Violand-Sanchez, 1995). Many such students stopped attending class or dropped out of the program entirely. Bailey *et al.* (1999) states that one of the most common strategies used by adolescents who do not want to engage with academic material is avoidance, and absenteeism and dropping out are powerful forms of avoidance. Indeed, defeat in the face of CBI was not entirely limited to students. One participant explained that he eventually abandoned CBI due to lack of progress and student rejection of the approach. Ultimately, the program was abandoned at his school.
- 6) Participants also explained how for many of their students, the **content was not relevant**. Researchers warn of the negative effects of imposing unsuitable topics, themes or content on learners (Despagne, 2010; Silva, 1997; Smyth, 2006).
- 7) Participants also complained that **CBI requires too much time** in terms of preparation. One participant mentioned that CBI entails a constant process of adaption and re-adaption. Brinton *et al.* (2011) argues that successful CBI programs require ongoing adjustment and redesign. However, participants in the study reported feeling under pressure to meet educational goals and deadlines, and did not feel they have the luxury to fine-tune their CBI lessons.

Limitations and proposals for further research

The current research is, of course, limited by its small sample size; findings, while revealing, cannot be generalized beyond the present study and should be seen solely as a point of departure for further investigation.

While a great deal of research into content based pedagogy has been conducted (Boivin & Razali, 2013; Brinton, Snow & Wesche, 2011; Cenoz, 2015; Cenoz, Genesee & Gorter, 2014; Cenoz, & Ruiz de Zarobe, 2015; Cloud, Genesee, & Hamadan, 2000; Corrales and Maloof, 2009; Genesee & Lindholm-Leary, 2013; Hernández, 2003; Lafayette and Buscaglia 1985; Lancaster, 2012; Lara-Herrera, 2015; Lin, 2015; Mehisto, Marsh & Frigols, 2008; Pérez-Cañado, 2012, 2013, 2014; Pérez Cañado & Ráez Padilla, 2014; Pessoa *et al.*, 2007; Ruiz de Zarobe & Cenoz, 2015; Stoller, 2004; Tedick & Wesely, 2015; Tejada-Molina, Pérez & Luque-Argulló, 2005) more research continues to be necessary. It is still unclear, for instance, if content based approaches actually lead to better learning outcomes than traditional language and content practices. In Mexico, where so little research into CBI has been conducted, further investigations are particularly imperative. The Mexican government continues to look for ways to improve the country’s educational system, which currently lags behind other developed nations’. As policy makers search for a path forward, they require reliable information about what works and does not work within the Mexican context. As Lasagabaster (2008) points out, policy decisions should always be “... supported by empirical evidence. ... the more research data there is available, the more theoretically sound [any] decision will be.” (p 40). The current study has been an attempt to meaningful contribute to the growing pool of research data concerning Content-Based Pedagogy

REFERENCES

- Arriaga, P. W. (1978). Bilingual education in private elementary schools in Mexico. In C. Holcomb (Ed.), *English teaching in Mexico* (pp. 96-103). Mexico City, MX: Instituto Mexicano-Norteamericano de relaciones culturales.
- Bailey, P., Onwuegbuzie, A.J., & Daley, C. E. (1999). Foreign Language Anxiety And Learning Style. *Foreign Language Annals*, 32 (1), 63-76.

- Bernat, E. & Gvozdenko, I. (2005). Beliefs about language learning: Current knowledge, pedagogical implications, and new research directions. *TESL-EJ*, 9(1), 2-4.
- Boivin, N., & Razali, H. (2013). *Malaysian Journal of ELT Research*, 9(2), 1-18.
- Brinton, D. M., Snow, M. A., & Wesche, M. (2011). *Content based second language instruction*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Brown, C. L. (2004). Content based ESL curriculum and academic language proficiency. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 10(2). Retrieved from <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Brown-CBEC.html>
- Cammarata, L. & Tedick, D. J. (2012). Balancing content and language in Instruction: The experience of immersion teachers. *The Modern Language Journal*, 96, ii, 251-259. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4781.2012.01330.x 0026-7902/12/251-269
- Cenoz, J. (2015). Content-based instruction and content and language integrated learning: the same or different? *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 28(1), 8-24. doi:10.1080/07908318.2014.1000922
- Cenoz, J., Genesee, F., & Gorter, D. (2014). Critical analysis of CLIL: Taking stock and looking forward. *Applied Linguistics*, 35, 243-262. doi:10.1093/applin/amt011
- Cenoz, J., & Ruiz de Zarobe, Y. (2015). Learning through a second or additional language: content-based instruction and CLIL in the twenty-first century. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 28(1), 1-7. doi: 10.1080/07908318.2014.1000921
- Cloud, N., Genesee, F., & Hamayan, E. (2000). *Dual language instruction: A handbook for enriched education*. Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.
- Corbetta, P. (2003). *Social research theory, methods and techniques*. London, UK: Sage.
- Corrales, K., & Maloof, C. (2009). Evaluating the effects of CBI on an English for medical students program. *Latin American Journal of Content & Language Integrated Learning*, 2(1), 15-23.
- Coyle, D. (2008). CLIL-A pedagogical approach from the European perspective. In N. Van Dusen-Scholl and N.H. Hornberger (Eds): *Encyclopedia of Language and Education*. Springer, (pp. 97-111). Berlin: Springer.
- Crandall, J. (1993). Content-centered learning in the United States. In W. Grabe, C. Ferguson, R. B. Kaplan, G. R. Tucker, & H. G. Widdowson (Eds.), *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 13. *Issues in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 111-126). NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Crandall, J., & Kaufman, D. (2002). Content-based instruction in higher education settings: Evolving models for diverse contexts. In J. Crandall & D. Kaufman (Eds.), *Content-based instruction in higher education settings* (pp. 1-9). Alexandria, VA: TESOL.
- Cummins, J. (2001). The entry and exit fallacy in bilingual education. In C. Baker & N. H. Hornberger (Eds.), *An introductory reader to the writings of Jim Cummins* (pp. 110 -138). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Da Silva, M. (2005). Constructing the teaching process from inside out: How pre-service teachers make sense of their perceptions of the teaching of the four skills. *TESL-EJ*, 9(2), 1-19.
- Davies, P. (2009). Strategic Management of ELT in Public Educational Systems: Trying to Reduce Failure, Increase Success. *TESL-EJ*, 12(3), 1-22.
- Despaigne, C. (2010). The difficulties of learning English: Perceptions and attitude in Mexico. *Canadian and International Education*, 39(2), 55-74.
- Doughty, C. & Varela, E. (1998). Communicative focus on form. In C. Doughty & J. Williams (Eds.), *Focus on form in classroom second language acquisition* (pp. 114-138). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Field, J. (2003). *Psycholinguistics: A resource book for students*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Foster, L. V. (2007). *A brief history of Mexico*. New York, NY: Checkmark Books.
- Genesee, F., & Lindholm-Leary, K. (2013). Two case studies of content-based language education. *Journal of Immersion and Content-Based Language Education*, 1, 3-33. doi:10.1075/jicb.1.1.02gen
- Graddol, D. (2006). *English next: Why global English may mean the end of 'English as a foreign language'*. London: British Council.
- Hernández, A. (2003). Making content instruction accessible for English language learners. In G. Garcia (Ed.), *English learners: Reaching the highest level of English literacy* (pp. 125-149). Newark, DE: In-

- ternational Reading Association.
- Horwitz, E. (2005). Bilingual education: Conceptions and misconceptions. *GRETA. Revista para Profesores de Inglés*, 13(1&2), 23-27.
- Huberman, M. (1993). The model of the independent artisan in teachers' professional relations. In J. W. Little & M. W. McLaughlin (Eds.), *Teachers' work: individuals, colleagues, and context* (pp. 11-50). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Krashen, S. D. (1987). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. New York: Prentice Hall International.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2001). Toward a postmethod pedagogy. *TESOL Quarterly*, 35(4), 537-560.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Labuschagne, A. (2003). Qualitative research: Airy fairy or fundamental. *The Qualitative Report*, 8(1). Retrieved from: <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR8-1/labuschagne.html>.
- Lafayette, R. C., & Buscaglia, M. (1985). Students learn language via a civilization course: A comparison of second language classroom environments. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 18(3), 323-342.
- Lancaster, N. K. (2012). *Stakeholder perspectives on CLIL development in a monolingual context: The case of Jaén*. University of Jaén.
- Lara Herrera, R. (2015). Mexican secondary school students' perception of learning the history of Mexico in English. *PROFILE Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 17(1), 105-120. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15446/profile.v17n1.44739>.
- Lasagabaster, D. (2008). Foreign language competence in Content and Language Integrated courses. *The Open Applied Linguistics Journal 1*: 31-42.
- Lin, A. M. Y. (2015). Conceptualising the potential role of L1 in CLIL. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 28(1), 74-89. doi: 10.1080/07908318.2014.1000926
- Loveday, L. (1981). On the not-so-obvious: pragmatics in ELT. *ELT Journal*, 35(2), 122-126.
- Mack, N., Woodsong, C., MacQueen, K. M., Guest, G., & Namey, E. (2005). *Qualitative research methods: A data collector's field guide*. Durham, NC: Family Health International.
- May-Landy, L. (2000). Linking assessment to the content-based curriculum. In M. Pally (Ed.), *Sustained content teaching in academic ESL/EFL: A practical approach* (pp. 223-240). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Mehisto, P., Marsh, D & Frigols, M. J. (2008). *Uncovering CLIL. Content and language integrated learning in bilingual and multilingual education*. Oxford: MacMillan.
- Moore, D. (2007). Les représentations des langues et de leur apprentissage: itinéraires théoriques et trajets méthodologiques [Representations of language and learning: Theoretical and methodological route paths]. In D. Moore (Ed.), *Les représentations des langues et de leur apprentissage* (pp. 9-22). Le Mesnil-sur-l'Estrée, FR: Didier.
- Moore, L. C. (1999). Secondary language socialisation in a multilingual context: incongruence between community and classroom practice. *Acquisition et Interaction en Langues Etrangères*, 1, numéro spécial, 143-153.
- Mugford, G. (2008). Keeping a Critical Eye on "Lexical Friends": Cognates as Critical Pedagogy in Pre-Service Teacher Education. *PROFILE Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 9, 185-197.
- Núñez Asomoza, A. (2015). Students' perceptions of the impact of CLIL in a Mexican BA program. *PROFILE Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 17(2), 111-124. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15446/profile.v17n2.47065>.
- Pérez-Cañado, M. L. (2012). CLIL research in Europe: Past, present, and future. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 15, 315-341.
- (2013). Introduction. *Revista de Lenguas para Fines Específicos*, 19: 15-30.
- (2014). Teacher training needs for bilingual education: in-service teacher perceptions. *International Journal of CLIL Research*, 1, 1-30. doi:10.1080/13670050.2014.980778
- Pérez Cañado, M. L., & Ráez Padilla, J. (2014). Introduction and Overview. In D. Marsh, M. L. Pérez Cañado, & J. Ráez Padilla (Eds.), *CLIL in action: Voices in the classroom* (pp. 1-13). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Pessoa, S., Hendry, H., Donato, R., Tucker, G. R., & Lee, H. (2007). Content-based instruction in the fo-

- reign language classroom: A discourse perspective. *Foreign Language Annals*, 40(1), 102–121. doi:10.1111/j.1944-9720.2007.tb02856.x
- Ruiz de Zarobe, Y. (2008). CLIL and foreign language learning: A longitudinal study in the Basque Country. *International Journal of CLIL Research*, 1, 60–73.
- (2013). CLIL implementation: From policy-makers to individual initiatives. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 16, 231–243. doi:10.1080/13670050.2013.777383
- Ruiz de Zarobe, Y & Cenoz, J. (2015). Way forward in the twenty first century in content-based instruction: moving towards integration. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 28(1), 90-96. doi: 10.1080/07908318.2014.1000927
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. London, UK: Sage.
- Spradly, J. P. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Stoller, F. (2002). Promoting the acquisition of knowledge in a content based course. In J.Crandall & D. Kaufman (Eds.), *Content-based instruction in higher education settings* (pp. 109–123). Alexandria, VA: TESOL.
- (2004). Content-based instruction: Perspectives on curriculum planning. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 24, 261-283.
- Stoller, F. L. & Grabe, W. (1997). A Six-T's Approach to Content-Based Instruction. In: Snow and Brinton (Eds.) *The Content-Based Classroom*. New York: Longman.
- Stryker, S. B., & Leaver, B. L. (1997). Content-based instruction: From theory to practice. In S. B. Stryker & B. L. Leaver (Eds.), *Content-based instruction in foreign language education: Models and methods* (pp. 2-19). Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Sulzer, C. T. (2013). Unraveling learners' perception towards development of language proficiency under a learner-centered approach. *Innovación Educativa*, 13,(62), 121-134.
- Tedick, D., & Wesley, P. (2015). A review of research on content-based foreign/second language education in US K-12 contexts. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 28, 25–40.
- Tejada-Molina, G., Pérez Cañado, M. L. & Luque-Agulló, G. (2005). Current approaches and teaching methods. In N. McLaren, D. Madrid, & A. Bueno (Eds.), *TEFL in secondary education*, (pp.155-209). Granada: Universidad de Granada.
- Violand-Sanchez, E. (1995). Cognitive and learning styles of high school students: Implications for ESL curriculum development. In J. M. Reid (Ed.), *Learning styles in the ESL/EFL classroom* (pp. 158-168). Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.
- Wiersma, W. (1995). *Research methods in education: An introduction*. (6th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

We would like to thank the following scholars who provided us with their valuable expert advice in different aspects regarding this research project: Dr. María Luisa Pérez Cañado from the Department of English Philology at the University of Jaén (Spain); Dr. Adriana Martínez Martínez from the National Autonomous University of Mexico Campus León; Dr. Josefina C. Santana from the Panamerican University Guadalajara (Mexico); and Jessica Ramírez Magaña Graduate of the University of Guanajuato.