

Social Work Undergraduates' Impressions of Content-based Language Teaching

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Abstract: The aim of this small scale research is to explore the efficacy and significance of content-based language teaching (CBLT) (also referred to as content-based instruction or CBI) in the learning of English as a foreign language in undergraduate curricula at Macao Polytechnic Institute (MPI). Specialized English language courses that involve professional content are known as English for specific purposes, with content-based language teaching being an example of such a specialized approach integrating the learning of language with the learning of some other content, which in the present study concerns the Social Work Degree offered at MPI. In order to ascertain the efficacy and viability of such a language learning methodology a survey was administered to two of the researcher's classes, that is, one Year 2 Day class and one Year 2 Evening class in the School of Public Administration. The study highlights the efficacy and viability that content-based language teaching offers the EFL teacher, as seen in the motivation and enthusiasm of the students for learning English as a result of integrating language acquisition methods with subject knowledge. Challenges to the achievement of English language competence in making use of content-based language teaching are addressed, including the need for the judicious and appropriate selection and presentation of relevant academic content to English language learners of varying proficiency in the target language. Implications and recommendations are made for English language teachers intending to use content-based language teaching in the achievement of their course aims.

Keywords: Language acquisition, TEFL, communicative language teaching, content-based language teaching

1. Introduction

How can English as a foreign language best be taught to undergraduate students of Social Work in Macao Polytechnic Institute?

This is a question that the researcher has grappled with over the last eight years while teaching English at Macao Polytechnic Institute. Macao itself, situated on the southern coast of the People's Republic of China, is a city state where English is treated as a foreign language and largely learned for professional purposes. The researcher's students are all local residents whose first language is Cantonese. English, the target language, is taught in Macao as a foreign language (TEFL) given that Macao is a region where English is not the dominant language and natural English language immersion situations are not plentiful.

Nevertheless, English is taught in local schools at both the Primary and Secondary levels,

with such language teaching being carried out in a traditional manner, that is, the language learners have studied English by being drilled in a structural/formal and skill-based approach in which the absorption of the rules of grammar takes precedence. In one clear sense this has worked well because globalization, as well as the increasing drive for enhancing one's educational status, has led to more and more international opportunities for using the language of English. However, by the time these students become undergraduates of specialist fields of study – such as a Degree in Social Work in the present study – there would seem to be little rationale or justification for such a mechanical approach to language learning. For the researcher's students in a TEFL environment like Macao, language requirements should dovetail more specifically to their course requirements.

The students themselves are offered a place in their programme of choice after passing an entrance exam and interview. The exam includes a General English assessment consisting of three parts: Grammar, Vocabulary, and Reading Comprehension, with each part containing 24 multiple choice questions. The questions in the Reading part are based on four reading passages of 250-500 words each. The pass mark is 50%, which corresponds approximately to level B1 (Threshold) on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and to Band 4 on the IELTS (International English Language Testing System).

Given then an EFL environment, and the educational experience of the students in Macao, *how* should the Social Work undergraduates be learning English and *what* content should they be learning? This is the question facing the researcher and the gap in the literature that needs bridging.

In an attempt to solve this research problem the researcher investigated the efficacy of the established language teaching method of *content-based language teaching* or CBLT in the teaching of English to students whose major area of studies is Social Work. Lightbown (2014, p. 3) defines content-based language teaching as “an approach to instruction in which students are taught academic content in a language they are still learning.”

In what follows, the research question will be presented followed by the rationale and theoretical framework for this study, which pivots upon content-based language teaching as a strong version of the Communicative approach to second language acquisition. This section will also approach the potential challenges in implementing a CBLT approach and how the researcher dealt with such challenges. The research and design of the study will then be explained, involving a small-scale survey questionnaire, after which the results and a discussion will be given. Finally, the conclusion points out the viability, efficacy and limitations of the present research.

1.1. Research Question

The introductory question of how TEFL can best be taught to undergraduate students of Social Work in Macao Polytechnic Institute was operationalized into the following research question: *To what extent did content-based language teaching assist the researcher's students of Social Work acquire English?*

The significance of this research question and subsequent investigation is that it hopes to identify an effective and therefore promising method for TEFL that also supports subject specialization and career professionalization.

2. Rationale

The theory and practice of language acquisition constitutes a vast field of academic endeavour, and an extensive body of research data exists on the nature and development of language learning and the methods for its enhancement. The theoretical framework that follows will focus on second-language acquisition and the learning methodology for second language learning – with an emphasis upon the Communicative language teaching approach – and an investigation of content-based instruction as a strong version of such an approach.

2.1. Second-language Acquisition

Language acquisition refers to the development of language in infants and children. Second language acquisition refers to the process by which a person learns a foreign language, that is, a language other than their mother tongue (Guasti, 2002). First languages are thus *acquired* naturally, passively and unconsciously, whereas second and further languages are *learned* artificially via active and conscious methods of instruction. The research presented here concerns second language acquisition and the method of content-based instruction to facilitate and expedite such acquisition at a tertiary level setting.

2.2. Second Language Learning Methodology

A plethora of second language learning methods have been employed over many years of language instruction, including a grammar-based approach involving *grammar translation*, an *audio-lingual approach* that grew out of the *Direct Method* and which emphasizes drilling and error correction, and the *Silent Way* that uses a cognitive and problem-solving approach (Brown, 2000). While every method has its advocates and detractors, a very popular and proven approach to ELT and TESL/TEFL is that of *Communicative language teaching* or CLT, also known as the *Communicative approach*. Communicative language teaching is an approach to language teaching that emphasizes communicative competence and interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of study (Krashen, 1981, 1982, 2003).

2.2.1. Content-based Instruction

Content-based language teaching, also known as *content-based instruction* (CBI) (Brinton et al., 1989), is a strong version of the Communicative approach whereby “language is acquired through communication” or, in other words, using English to learn it rather than simply learning to use English (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 131; Howatt, 1984).

This distinction in the Communicative approach introduces the idea of specialized language courses involving professional content – also known as *language for specific purposes* – with content-based instruction integrating “the learning of language with the learning of some other content.” (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 132). In Europe such an instructional approach is known as “content and language integrated learning”, or CLIL, where an additional language which is “not usually the first language of the learners involved, is used as a medium

in the teaching and learning of non-language content” (Marsh, 2002, p. 15).

In the case of the researcher’s students the “non-language content” refers to those subjects associated with a degree in Social Work (See Table 2 below). The upshot is that greater emphasis is placed on the acquisition of what Cummins (1994) has also termed “*cognitive academic language proficiency* (CALP) in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses” (Horn, 2011, p. 3).

Content-based instruction is supported by a growing body of research (Brinton et al., 1989; Chapple & Curtis, 2000; Coyle et al., 2010; Cummins, 1979; Eurydice, 2006; Evans et al., 2010; Gonzalez & St. Louis, 2002; Grabe & Stoller, 1997; Horn, 2011; Lightbown, 2014; Marsh, 2002; Owens, 2002; Rodgers, 2006). Brinton et al. (1989) have argued that CBI provides a meaningful context for language development because it builds upon students’ previous learning experiences and current needs and interests while also taking account of the eventual purpose for which students need the language. The purposefulness of CBI is also highlighted by Horn (2011, p. 8), who explains:

When language courses become a means for learning about the world we live in, rather than just learning about a language, students will better appreciate the relevance of English to their personal learning goals and their future objectives. As they progress in their learning, students will see that becoming more proficient in English enables them to learn more about the topics and fields that interest them most. This is the virtuous circle of increased motivation and improved learning that awaits future CBI teachers and their students.

Horn (2011, p. 3) also points out that a CBI approach “lends itself especially well to helping students develop academic language skills (Eurydice, 2006; Gonzalez & St. Louis, 2002; Owens, 2002; Rodgers, 2006)”, providing “increased contextualization for language learning in comparison to traditional grammar-based or communicative language teaching approaches, leading to comparatively greater gains in student language proficiency” (Brinton et al., 1989; Grabe & Stoller, 1997; cited in Horn, 2011, p. 3).

Grabe and Stoller (1997) have also presented evidence that CBI is given strong research support in second-language acquisition, in educational and cognitive psychology, and in programme outcomes, while further research by Chapple and Curtis (2000, p. 420) argues that by making use of material that is often intrinsically motivating for students, “CBI helps to enhance language development and retention.”

To summarize the main points of the CBI approach, Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011, p. 138) provide a useful outline of its principles, as follows:

1. Both the content and the language are targets for learning.
2. Teaching should build on students’ previous experience.
3. When learners perceive the relevance of their language use, they are motivated to learn. They know that it is a means to an end, rather than an end in itself.
4. Language is learned most effectively when it is used as a medium to convey content of interest to their students.

5. Vocabulary is easier to acquire when there are contextual clues to help convey meaning. It is important to integrate all the skills, as well as vocabulary and grammar in an authentic context.

2.3. Potential Challenges in Using CBI

Even though content-based instruction has proven to be effective in language acquisition, the researcher wishes to describe and explain four challenges that any teacher must deal with when implementing this approach:

1. Subject content knowledge.
2. The need for a mechanism of teaching and learning activities (TLAs) to implement and convey such content.
3. The integration of language instruction, such as grammar, with that content.
4. Assessment methods.

These four challenges will now be analyzed.

1. Teachers of CBI require a working knowledge of the subject content concerned and must “be able to work effectively with subject-area teachers.” (Horn, 2011, p. 7). In the researcher’s case he has both a strong interest in Social Work and has taught psychology and social psychology; he is also a qualified psychotherapist, child-centred play therapist and now trainee art therapist.

2. In the author’s teaching of English in the degree of Social Work, TLAs are used to integrate English language instruction with social work content. Such a skill relates to the craft of teaching and is of obvious practical importance in making both content and target language comprehensible to the learner. As Horn (2011, p. 4) points out, CBI teachers will have to “present academic content in a way that makes it accessible to learners of varying levels of target language proficiency...” (See TLAs below).

TLAs can be likened to interface skills, which Horn (2011, p. 6) argues involve the following two requirements:

- (i) Relevant syllabus design, and
- (ii) Materials development, which presupposes skills for adapting authentic materials to support learner comprehension (Evans, Hartshorn & Anderson, 2010) or even creating purpose-built materials (Swales, 2009).

2.3.1. Syllabus Design

The first step in integrating English language teaching with the curriculum of the Social Work Degree involved syllabus design, that is, the subject content of the syllabus must be sufficiently related to Social Work, and the language learning needs of the Social Work undergraduates.

In beginning the interface process, the CBI teacher must first refer to the teaching aims

of their respective subject in order to establish the relevant levels of competency and content.

In the Social Work Degree curriculum, English is a supporting subject in the first five semesters of an eight-semester Programme. Table 1 presents the aims the teaching aims for each Year of study.

Table 1. Year of Study and Corresponding Course Aims

Year of Study	Course Aims
1	This First Year Level course aims at improving students' English language skills within an academic framework at the Elementary Level to enable them to cope better with their other Social Work Studies subjects. All four macro-skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening, are covered in this course.
2	This Second Year Level course aims at improving students' English language skills within an academic framework at the Lower-intermediate Level to enable them to cope better with their other Social Work Studies subjects. Emphasis is placed on reading selected passages for academic/vocational purposes, and on students' acquisition of vocabulary related to the social work field of study.
3	This Third Year Level course aims at improving students' English language skills within an academic framework at the Intermediate Level to enable them to cope better with their other Social Work Studies subjects. Emphasis is placed on reading selected passages for academic/vocational purposes, and on students' acquisition of vocabulary related to the social work field of study.

Note that the aim for the Year 2 English course compared to the Year 1 course changes to a more specific goal, being tailored towards academic reading skills at the Pre-Intermediate level. Such a specific aim continues for English into Year 3.

The next step requires familiarity with the curriculum subjects that are studied at the same time as English. These subjects can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. The Social Work Curriculum

Year and Semester	Curriculum Subjects
1, 1	English I Information Technology Fundamentals Introduction to Social Work Introduction to Psychology Introduction to Sociology
1, 2	English II Advanced Computer Applications Foundation Skills for Social Workers (Counseling) Self Growth and Ego Development Social Work in Macao Context Social Statistics

2, 1	English III Human Behaviour and the Social Environment I Contemporary Social Problems Social Work Practice I: Individuals and Family Social Work Practice II: Groups Social Work Research Methods
2, 2	English IV Human Behaviour and the Social Environment II Health, Illness and Disability Social Work Practice III: Organization and Community Social Work and Law Social Welfare Policy
3, 1	English V Mental Disorders Social Psychology Social Work Administration Contemporary Social Work Theories Family and Social Work

The researcher analyzed and chose topics that he could teach and which were related to the curriculum subjects. The criteria for the selection of topics were relevancy to social work, psychology, counselling psychology, and social psychology, areas of knowledge that the researcher himself had studied and taught. In this way, the English teaching was building on and consolidating the students' knowledge base that was being acquired from the first year of social work studies (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

The following subjects and corresponding topics in Table 3 were selected by the researcher for their use in the teaching of English:

Table 3. Year of Study, Selected Curriculum Subjects and Linked Topics

Year and Semester	Selected Curriculum Subjects	Selected and Linked Topics
1, 1	Introduction to Social Work Introduction to Sociology Introduction to Psychology	Motivation, hopes, fears. Social groups. Inequality and gender. Perception.
1, 2	Foundation Skills for Social Workers (Counseling) Self Growth and Ego Development	Empathy. Defence Mechanisms. Counselling skills. Personal moral values.

2, 1	Human Behaviour and the Social Environment I	Love and Attachment.
	Contemporary Social Problems	Social challenges in Macao.
	Social Work Practice I: Individuals and Family	Romance, falling in love, and sex.
2, 2	Human Behaviour and the Social Environment II	Education: Learning, and Intelligence. The Pygmalion Effect.
	Health, Illness and Disability	Family and children's concerns: parents, studies, punishment, friends, home alone. The Placebo Effect.
3, 1	Mental Disorders	Abnormal Psychology and mental illnesses.
	Social Psychology	Youth, deviance and control. Stereotype Threat.
	Family and Social Work.	The Elderly, loneliness and death.

2.3.2. Materials Development

The next step in interfacing English language learning with social work content was materials selection and development, which involved three areas:

- (a) Language text.
- (b) Social work content.
- (c) Vocabulary.

(a) Based upon the course aims in Table 1, the selection of the language teaching text for learning English during the three years of English studies can be seen in Table 4. Such texts provide the teacher with the appropriate grammar structures to be learned for each proficiency level.

Table 4. English Language Texts for Each Year of Study

Year of Study	Text
1	<i>New Cutting Edge, Elementary</i> , 3 rd ed. Students Book. Cunningham, S. & Moor, P. (2012). Longman.

2	<i>New Cutting Edge, Pre-Intermediate</i> , 3 rd ed. Students Book. Cunningham, S. & Moor, P. (2012). Longman.
3	<i>New Cutting Edge, Intermediate</i> , 3 rd ed. Students Book. Cunningham, S. & Moor, P. (2012). Longman.

(b) Regarding text selection for subject major and topic content, the important conditions for the delivery of content-based instruction are authenticity (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011) and interest level, that is, the reading material provides the necessary motivation for learning (Krashen & Terrell, 1998).

Based on the consideration of authenticity, the researcher chose the following psychology-related texts for use across the three years of English language study:

- *Forty Studies That Changed Psychology: Explorations into the History of Psychological Research*. (5th ed.) (2005). R.R. Hock. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.
- *50 Great Myths of Popular Psychology: Shattering Widespread Misconceptions about Human Behaviour*. (2010). S.O. Lilienfeld, S.J. Lynn, J.Ruscio, & B.L. Beyerstein. UK: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- *30-Second Psychology: The 50 most thought-provoking psychology theories, each explained in half a minute*. Ed. C. Jarrett. (2011) UK: Ivy Press.
- *The Psychology Book: From Shamanism to Cutting-Edge Neuroscience, 250 Milestones in the History of Psychology*. (2014). W.E. Pickren. New York: Sterling.

(c) After the selection of both the language text and authentic subject content text books, the next material to be designed and compiled is vocabulary. Compiling and creating a list of relevant vocabulary requires a close examination of the Social Work Degree curriculum, such a compilation being divided into various levels of study. The researcher subsequently asked the subject teachers of the Social Work Programme to provide him with English vocabulary that they deemed relevant to their fields of expertise and which students should learn to be familiar with in their respective subjects. This vocabulary was then collated into lists for each of the first three years of studies during which English was to be taught.

2.3.2. Teaching and Learning Activities (TLAs)

Once a syllabus, texts, topics, and vocabulary are ready, the next requirement is the selection of a suitable mechanism of teaching and learning activities (TLAs) for language acquisition purposes in order to encourage students to act in ways most likely to achieve desired outcomes, that is, what the students have to learn (Biggs, 2003). Such activities create opportunities to teach both content and language by “scaffolding the language needed for the study of content.” (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 139).

The teaching and learning activities (TLAs) that were created by the researcher for his English language classes were as follows:

1. Small Talk
2. Social Work Vocabulary
3. Grammar exercises
4. Poetry Readings and poetry composition (acrostic poems)
5. Academic Readings in Psychology
6. Art Therapy and Drawing
7. Group Therapy and Support Group Work
8. Movies and BBC Documentaries.

3. The third challenge to be faced in implementing CBI is content-language interface skills, that is, those competencies and methods that can bridge a knowledge of ELT systems, such as grammar, with the academic content in the students' Social Work Degree subjects. Concerning the integration of content with language instruction, the following methods can be used:

(a) *Dictogloss* – A multiple-skills language teaching technique that uses dictation to teach grammatical structures. Learners form small groups and reconstruct a short target-language text by listening twice and noting down the main idea and key words and details.

(b) *The Language Experience Approach* – In this approach, students take turns dictating a story about their life experiences to the teacher who writes it down in the target language, after which each student then practices reading their story with the teacher's help (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 143). Personally significant text content is thus linked to meaning (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

(c) *Graphic Organizers* – Graphic organizers are visual displays, like diagrams, used by teachers to help students organize and remember new information, making use of words, symbols, and arrows to map knowledge. (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson 2011, p. 142). The rationale for these is that they facilitate recall of cognitively demanding content, while helping students to process the content material at a deeper level for further language use and practice (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

(d) *Journal Keeping for Specific Writing Skills*. (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011) – For journal keeping, students express their feelings about how and what they are learning, and indeed anything else the student wishes to communicate to the teacher (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). The teacher then reads it and writes a response without correcting it.

4. The fourth challenge is that of assessment. Biggs (2003) explains that assessment is of how well the outcomes have been attained at varying levels of acceptability, as reflected in the grading system. For English language purposes, students are assessed on their language ability according to the course aims (Listening, Speaking, and Writing) in coursework and final examinations and not on subject content, which is assessed in their Chinese-medium courses.

3. Research Design and Methodology

The present study is small in scale. It used a survey to ascertain Social Work students' reactions to the learning of English using content-based instruction.

3.1. Sampling and Design

Two classes of second year Social Work students were chosen for this small-scale research. These two classes consisted of one day and one evening class, comprising 27 and 20 students respectively. All of the students in each group were included in the study because the researcher was using a convenience sampling method and therefore no pre-screening criteria were used other than student enrollment in the class.

The students were informed of the aim of the study, participant consent was honoured and they were also made aware of their right of refusal. Confidentiality was also assured by not requiring names to be given on the questionnaires.

To answer the research question and collect data, a structured questionnaire (Appendix 1) was designed to ascertain the students' feelings and thoughts of the English teaching received, including their evaluation of the methodology used in delivering their English language instruction, namely content-based instruction.

As for the procedure, this instrument was distributed in class, and the students were asked to return them to the researcher at their earliest convenience. The total response rate was 74%.

3.2. Reliability and Validity

Reliability and consistency of measurement and data collection is a prerequisite of validity, and such trustworthiness of procedures is classified into internal and external reliability. Internal reliability or consistency of results across all items of a questionnaire was supported by that fact that the researcher himself was the person who carried out the data analysis, which ensured consistency; furthermore, disconfirming evidence was sought after. External reliability is seen when other researchers can replicate the measuring process, and this was provided for in the current research by delineating the procedure for administering the survey questionnaire.

To help ensure internal validity with respect to content, the questionnaires were peer reviewed by an experienced teaching colleague of the author and then pilot-tested on another class of the author's Social Work students. External validity in the present research depends upon the generalizability of the findings to populations, variables, and situations, which in the present limited and small-scale research applies only to Social Work undergraduates of one tertiary institution in Macao.

4. Results and Discussion

The responses of the Day and Evening classes can be seen in Appendices 2 and 3 respectively. On the basis of these results, some overall comments for each of the 10 questions in the research questionnaire will be presented and discussed here as they pertain to both classes, constituting responses from a total of 35 students (74%) out of a maximum of 47.

Question 1 attempted to ascertain how the undergraduates felt while studying English as part of their subject major of Social Work. All of the given comments except one were positive in nature and indicate that the students had a language acquisition experience that was positively received. The one comment on feeling worried is interesting: from what does such

a feeling arise? It could well be one student's concern with passing the final exam, although an anonymous response without a Focus group follow up means that the feeling remains an enigmatic one.

Question 2 asked how satisfied the students were with the English language teaching received. The fact that all of the respondents had favourable reactions to the language teaching and that nobody was either 'Mildly dissatisfied' or 'Quite dissatisfied' is very encouraging to the researcher in his efforts at combining English instruction with content-based learning.

Question 3 asked the students to rate their improvement in the English language skills of listening comprehension, reading comprehension, speaking, writing, and confidence in using English on a four-level scale from 'No improvement' through to 'Improved only a little', 'Improved quite a bit', and 'Improved a great deal'. This scale was also given a corresponding numerical rating from 1 to 4 and an average score computed for each language skill. (For example, in Appendix 2 under 'Listening Comprehension', five students said they had "improved only a little", 12 that they had "improved quite a bit", and 2 "improved a great deal". The calculation is thus: $(5 \times 2) + (12 \times 3) + (2 \times 4)$ divided by 19 (students) = 2.84 (rounded up to two decimal places)). This question attempted to account for the feelings and levels of satisfaction given in questions 1 and 2 respectively. Every student experienced some level of improvement in both the receptive (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and writing) skills of the English language, while the greatest effect of the researcher's use of CBI for English language teaching was in imparting a feeling of confidence to the students when using English.

Question 4 aimed to discover whether the students found any of the eight specified English teaching activities useful for learning *English* by analyzing further the reasons for the responses given in questions 1 to 3. Such an analysis also employed a four-level rating scale, this time from 'Not useful', 'Only a little', 'Quite a bit', and 'Very useful', with a corresponding numerical rating from 1 to 4 and an average score computed for each language skill (as for Question 3). The students perceived all of the English teaching activities favourably, with the majority of students judging the activities as either 'quite' or 'very' useful. Amongst these activities, two stood out, namely, Art therapy and Support Group work.

Question 5 attempted to ascertain whether the students found any of the eight specified English teaching activities useful for learning *Social Work*. This question involved the same four-level rating scale seen in Question 4, again with a corresponding numerical rating from 1 to 4 and an average score computed for each language skill. Although a greater range of responses can be seen in response to question 5, as with Question 4 the students gauged all of the English teaching activities favourably, this time in terms of their usefulness for learning more about Social Work, with the majority of students judging the activities as either 'quite' or 'very' useful. Amongst these activities, the same two stood out, namely, Art therapy and Support Group work.

Question 6 asked the students to specify the teaching activities they liked the most for learning *English* and the reasons for those choices. The aim of this question was to pinpoint those activities that were most appreciated and the reasons for that appreciation. The 'Support Group work' and 'Art Therapy' activities provided an ideal opportunity for group bonding and socialization, and it was this social experience that took precedence over language acquisition,

although it is quite clear that language was a very real means to an end, that is, interpersonal communication and social cohesiveness and solidarity.

Like that for the ‘Support Group work’, the reasons for liking ‘Art Therapy’ centred upon the opportunity for personal and social development, for language learning, and for personal enjoyment.

In contrast to Question 6, **Question 7** asked the students to specify the teaching activities they disliked the most for learning English together with the reasons for those choices. While not many students expressed dislikes of the English teaching activities, those that did chose the more traditional academic activities of grammar, vocabulary, and reading. The challenge for the researcher as teacher is to find ways to teach such knowledge and skills in ways that students find motivating, especially and pertinently from a content-based instruction perspective. In this regard, the suggested grammar teaching methods of dictogloss, the Language Experience Approach, graphic organizers, and journal keeping (see section 2.3 above) can be explored and utilized.

Question 8 asked the students for suggestions on how to improve the language teaching activities. The responses highlighted two areas, that is, language skill acquisition and the Support Group methodology. However, one significant obstacle to any improvements to the teaching of English is time constraints, with English as a supporting subject being given only four hours a week in the curriculum.

Question 9 asked the students for suggestions on additional activities to enhance English language acquisition and the language learning experience. Again enacting most of these suggestions requires time.

Question 10 asked for further comments on the students’ English language learning experience. These responses highlighted both the practical and affective benefits of CBI, indicating the usefulness of studying English via social work-related content in preparing the students for a career in social work by learning content and skills that can become relevant in their future posts. Overall the students clearly enjoyed the activity of learning English.

To summarize this section, the results of the small-scale questionnaire survey provide clear evidence that all of the students were feeling both positive and satisfied about the content-based approach to their English studies. Secondly, all of the students rated their receptive and productive skills in English as having improved. Thirdly, and most noticeably, the students had an increased feeling of confidence and self-efficacy in using the language. Fourthly, the present study has affirmed the enhanced effect of content-based instruction on student motivation to learn English due to the fact that the students perceive the relevance of language use and its content to their major area of study (as also discovered by Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

The tools for teaching content-based instruction were the teaching and learning activities provided by the lecturer, and of these activities the most highly prized by the students were the group therapy (Support groups) and art therapy. In other words, the most useful activities for learning about Social work were also the most effective for language learning.

5. Conclusion

This small-scale research attempted to answer the question of the extent to which content-based instruction – also known as content-based language teaching – can assist the researcher’s Social

Work students to acquire English as a foreign language. In content-based instruction, language teaching occurs for the sake of the content rather than for the sake of the language itself, that is, to let the content – the students’ interest in social work and related subjects – stimulate language learning.

Despite the limitation of sample size, content-based education has proved to be an effective and promising method for the teaching of English as a foreign language to Social Work students in Macao Polytechnic Institute and as a support for career professionalization. It is evident from the students’ responses that focused depth of language content and use in a social work context is highly appreciated as a supporting subject to the undergraduate students’ Degree specialisation, that is, “to access academic content” (Horn, 2011, p. 3).

Furthermore, in terms of the generalisability of the present findings to other FL curricula, additional research is required in order to investigate the applicability of CBI in the teaching of language in other Degree subject areas.

In addition, the investigation of the efficacy of the teaching and learning activities has revealed the popularity of the socially-oriented mechanism of group work, together with a creative activity such as drawing, testifying to the importance of tapping into the human need for social interaction and creativity, which is why Vygotsky’s (1978) *Sociocultural theory* of learning should be investigated and applied further as an effective theory to support language acquisition.

One immediate consequence of this insight regarding the efficacy of socially-oriented learning activities for the researcher’s teaching is to spend less time on individual activities, such as poetry, and to maximize the use of the support group methodology for learning – such as the art therapy activity – and to explore the use of a third teaching activity of play therapy, a therapeutic modality in which the researcher is personally qualified.

In instituting a content-based approach to language instruction, three challenges need to be faced by anyone interested in applying this methodology to their own teaching: the teacher, the students, and finding the most effective way of conveying the ‘systems’ knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Regarding the teacher, it is obvious that he or she must have a strong interest – and preferably some training – in the subject content in order to convey such material accurately via a foreign language. Secondly, regarding students, while Wesche (1993, p. 68) has written that “students who have the required initial second language proficiency ... and who choose to take such [CBI] courses are remarkably successful”, one has to ascertain whether the students have sufficient language proficiency at the outset in order to benefit from a content-based approach to language learning. Thirdly, teaching about systems knowledge in language learning requires a determined effort on the part of the teacher to make use of and develop dictoglosses, the language experience approach, graphic organizers and journal keeping.

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire on Content-Based Instruction

Please answer all of the questions below. Any research results will be non-identifiable.

1. How did you *feel* while studying English in this semester?

.....

2. Overall, how satisfied are you with the English language teaching you have received?

1	2	3	4
Quite dissatisfied	Mildly satisfied	Mostly satisfied	Very satisfied

3. Rate your improvement in the following **English language skills** by putting ticks (✓).

English skill	No improvement/ the same (=1)	Improved only a little (=2)	Improved quite a bit (=3)	Improved a great deal (=4)
1. Listening comprehension				
2. Reading comprehension				
3. Speaking (pronunciation and fluency)				
4. Writing (spellings, tenses, and punctuation)				
5. Confidence in using English.				

4. Have you found the English teaching activities *useful* for **learning English**? Answer by putting ticks (✓) in the following Table.

Teaching Activity	Not useful (=1)	Only a little (=2)	Quite a bit (=3)	Very useful (=4)
1. Small Talk				
2. Vocabulary				
3. English Usage and Grammar				
4. Poetry (reading/composition)				
5. Psychology Readings				
6. Art Therapy and Drawings				
7. Support Group Work				
8. Movies/BBC documentaries				

5. Have you found the English teaching activities *useful* for your **Social Work studies**? Answer by putting ticks (✓) in the following Table.

Teaching Activity	Not useful (=1)	Only a little (=2)	Quite a bit (=3)	Very useful (=4)
1. Small Talk				
2. Vocabulary				
3. English Usage and Grammar				
4. Poetry (reading/composition)				
5. Psychology Readings				
6. Art Therapy and Drawings				
7. Support Group Work				
8. Movies/BBC documentaries				

6. Which activity or activities did you *like* the most in your English subject? Why?

.....
.....

7. Which activity or activities did you *dislike* the most in your English subject? Why?

.....
.....

8. If you were to *improve* any of the teaching activities, what changes would you make?

.....
.....

9. If you were to *add* any further English teaching activities, what would you suggest?

.....
.....

10. Any other comments?

.....
.....

Thank you for your help.

Appendix 2: Year 2 Day Programme Questionnaire Response

Question	Responses					
1 How did you <i>feel</i> while studying English in this semester?	Joyful x5 Useful x4 Fun x3 Interesting/Interested x3 Comfortable x1 or very comfortable x1 Meaningful x1 So happy and warm x1 Great x1 Good x1 I enjoyed it and felt 'satisfied' x1 Worried x1					
2 Overall, how satisfied are you with the English language teaching you have received?	1 Quite dissatisfied 2 Mildly satisfied 3 Mostly satisfied x8 4 Very satisfied x10					
3 Rate your improvement in the following English language skills by putting ticks (✓) in the following Table.		No improvement/same (= 1)	Improved only a little (= 2)	Improved quite a bit (= 3)	Improved a great deal (= 4)	Average
	Listening com-prehension		5	12	2	2.84
	Reading com-prehension		9	8	2	2.63
	Speaking (pro-nunciation and fluency)		4	10	5	3.05
	Writing (spellings, tenses, punctuation)		6	13		2.68
	Confidence in using English		2	9	8	3.32
4 Have you found the English teaching activities <i>useful</i> to learning English? Answer by putting ticks (✓) in the following Table.		Not useful (= 1)	Only a little (= 2)	Quite a bit (= 3)	Very useful (= 4)	Average
	Small talk		3	9	7	3.21
	Vocabulary		2	11	6	3.21
	English Usage and Grammar		1	12	6	3.26
	Poetry		4	9	6	3.11
	Psychology readings		3	8	8	3.26
	Art therapy			2	17	3.90
	Support Group work			4	15	3.79
	Movies/BBC documentaries		6	10	3	2.84
5 Have you found the English teaching activities <i>useful</i> to your Social Work studies? Answer by putting ticks (✓) in the following Table.		Not useful (= 1)	Only a little (= 2)	Quite a bit (= 3)	Very useful (= 4)	Average
	Small talk		3	10	6	3.16
	Vocabulary		4	6	9	3.26
	English Usage and Grammar		6	10	3	2.84
	Poetry		4	7	8	3.21
	Psychology readings		1	7	11	3.53
	Art therapy				19	4.00
	Support Group work			2	17	3.90
	Movies/BBC documentaries		4	10	5	3.05

<p>6</p> <p>Which activity or activities did you <i>like</i> the most in your English subject? Why?</p>	<p><u>Support Group Work</u> x10: A chance to know others more deeply x4 Having the opportunity to listen and speak English x3 A “chance to communicate with others.” It’s a “chance to share my opinions.” We are sharing together x3 e.g. our drawings and ourselves and know more about Art Therapy. It makes me feel “confident.”</p> <p><u>Art Therapy</u> and Drawings x8: Understand others more x4. It let me “talk more English and know myself more.” x2 The therapy can let us learn more about ourself and others and make people open their heart. Know myself more x2 “I can enjoy it and release my pressure.” I can be “creative”.</p> <p><u>Psychology readings</u> x1:</p> <p><u>Movies/documentaries</u> x1: Helps me to think about many things related to “social information”.</p>
<p>7</p> <p>Which activity or activities did you <i>dislike</i> the most in your English subject? Why?</p>	<p><u>Grammar</u> x3: It was boring and difficult.</p> <p><u>Vocabulary</u> x3: Some professional words are “too hard to remember and study.” x2 Difficult.</p> <p><u>Reading</u> x3: “my reading ability is weak.” “Reading is boring.” The vocabulary is “difficult”.</p> <p><u>Poetry</u> x2: Because some vocabulary is “very difficult”. “I think it is so boring.”</p> <p><u>Movies</u> x2: “Easy to sleep.”</p>
<p>8</p> <p>If you were to <i>improve</i> any of the teaching activities, what changes would you make?</p>	<p>Make the vocabulary easier and more interesting to learn. Use sentences to make the vocabulary easy to understand. Upgrade the grammar level. Having an opportunity to ask questions about the vocabulary and grammar. Reading to improve pronunciation. More writing practice after learning a new topic, and to check knowledge and understanding. Have presentations. Have some competition. More movies/documentaries. More homework.</p>
<p>9</p> <p>If you were to <i>add</i> any further English teaching activities, what would you suggest?</p>	<p>Write one or two compositions per semester x2. Have a presentation in class x2. Role plays x2. Play therapy x2. Have a discussion in class. Some kind of competition.</p>
<p>10</p> <p>Any other comments?</p>	<p>Connecting English to SW subjects “helps us to know more.” You teach me a lot about the “therapy” and “social work”. Art therapy “is very useful” and makes it easier to learn English and one of the therapies. “Generally speaking, this subject was perfect. I liked it a lot, it is useful and interesting. Thank you for giving me this wonderful class time. Keep going!” “You let me know ... English is not serious, can become funny and normal thing. I can step by step go to understand. Can relax to talk and learn.” “Davis, you are one of the best English teacher of my life. As one of your students I feel very warm and hopeful because you help me ‘solve’ my problems and ‘let me feel I am one of the members in this class. Thank you so much!”</p>

Appendix 3: Year 2 Evening Programme Questionnaire Responses

Question	Responses					
1 How did you <i>feel</i> while studying English in this semester?	Happy x3 or Very happy x2 Interested x1, Interesting x2 and Very interesting x1 Good x2 Satisfied x2 Useful x2 Warm x1 Enjoyable x1 Comfortable x1 Pleasant x1					
2 Overall, how satisfied are you with the English language teaching you have received?	1 Quite dissatisfied 2 Mildly satisfied 3 Mostly satisfied x8 4 Very satisfied x10					
3 Rate your improvement in the following English language skills by putting ticks (✓) in the following Table.		No improvement/same (= 1)	Improved only a little (= 2)	Improved quite a bit (= 3)	Improved a great deal (= 4)	Average
	Listening com-prehension		3	8	5	3.13
	Reading com-prehension		2	10	4	3.13
	Speaking (pro-nunciation and fluency)			10	6	3.38
	Writing (spellings, tenses, punctuation)		4	9	3	2.94
	Confidence in using English		2	8	6	3.25
4 Have you found the English teaching activities <i>useful</i> to learning English? Answer by putting ticks (✓) in the following Table.		Not useful (= 1)	Only a little (= 2)	Quite a bit (= 3)	Very useful (= 4)	Average
	Small talk		2	8	6	3.25
	Vocabulary		2	6	8	3.38
	English Usage and Grammar		2	6	8	3.38
	Poetry		3	9	4	3.06
	Psychology readings		1	6	9	3.50
	Art therapy			3	13	3.81
	Support Group work		1	3	12	3.69
	Movies/BBC documentaries		3	5	8	3.31
5 Have you found the English teaching activities <i>useful</i> to your Social Work studies? Answer by putting ticks (✓) in the following Table.		Not useful (= 1)	Only a little (= 2)	Quite a bit (= 3)	Very useful (= 4)	Average
	Small talk	1	2	8	5	3.00
	Vocabulary		2	8	6	3.25
	English Usage and Grammar	2	2	7	5	2.81
	Poetry	1		11	4	3.13
	Psychology readings		1	7	8	3.44
	Art therapy			4	12	3.75
	Support Group work			6	10	3.63
	Movies/BBC documentaries		3	2	11	3.50

<p>6</p> <p>Which activity or activities did you <i>like</i> the most in your English subject? Why?</p>	<p>Support Group: x11 "I can 'understand others and myself." We can "share our feeling and support each other." I can "share my thinking" and also listen to others' "thinking". I can hear "interesting" stories. It gives me a lot of "power" and makes me "feel warm" and helps me "know about" my classmates. "I was relaxed to learn more English." It was relaxing and comfortable "to share our activities of life." It can "improve my oral English."</p> <p>Art therapy and Drawings: x9 "I was relaxed to learn more English." Sharing the pictures was "useful to learn English." It is "very useful skill for communication." It is "fun" and useful for working with children. I can "understand others and myself." It can "help me to understand myself." x2 "I didn't like drawing before, but Art Therapy can make me enjoy drawing".</p>
<p>7</p> <p>Which activity or activities did you <i>dislike</i> the most in your English subject? Why?</p>	<p>Vocabulary: x2 Use "more time to learn" and "understand" it.</p> <p>Psychology readings: x1 "I don't think it can improve my English".</p> <p>Poetry: x1 It is "difficult to check the vocabulary".</p>
<p>8</p> <p>If you were to <i>improve</i> any of the teaching activities, what changes would you make?</p>	<p>The Support Group can be used to "do more things". Make the Support Group last for a "longer time." x4 Make the whole class into one Support group. Extend the class time. Have "more time for drawing".</p>
<p>9</p> <p>If you were to <i>add</i> any further English teaching activities, what would you suggest?</p>	<p>Extend the Support Group time in order to have "more talk" x2 Organize an "English Corner". "More games" to "improve the communication between classmates." Give more information on the psychology readings. Listen to some English songs x2 Movie and discussion x2. Add a "cosplay" twice in one semester.</p>
<p>10</p> <p>Any other comments?</p>	<p>The method is "very useful" and the teacher can "encourage students to think more, and share their feelings and ideas, it is good". "Thank you Davis!! Your teaching make me feel warm, and it really can improve my English." "Thank you Davis ... I feel warm and happy in the class. You make me love learning. Thanks."</p>