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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## DOES IRANIAN CONTENT BASED ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION IMPROVE HIGH SCHOOLS STUDENTS' PROFICIENCIES MORE THAN THE CONVENTIONAL?

\*Mitra Asadi<sup>1</sup>, \*Iraj Noroozi<sup>2</sup>, Roya Asadi<sup>3</sup>, Shokoofeh Asadi<sup>4</sup>, and Ahmad Mardani<sup>5</sup>

1. M.A. and Researcher, Department of Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Roudehen Branch, Islamic Azad University, Roudehen, Iran.
2. Ph.D. holder in TEFL and the faculty member of Islamic Azad University, Varamin – Pishva branch.
3. PhD. of Artificial Intelligence - Neural Network, Department of Artificial Intelligence, Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
4. Department of Agricultural Management Engineering, Faculty of Ebne-Sina, University of Science and Research Branch, Tehran, Iran.
5. Assistant Professor of Medical Parasitology, Iranian Blood Transfusion Research Center, High Institute for Research and Education in Transfusion Medicine, IBTO, next to Milad Tower, Tehran, Iran.

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#### \*Corresponding Authors

\* Iraj Noroozi

\* Mitra Asadi

PhD. Candidate and Researcher,  
Iranian Blood Transfusion Research  
Center, High Institute for Research  
and Education in Transfusion  
Medicine, IBTO, next to Milad  
Tower, Tehran, Iran,  
[m.asadi@ibto.ir](mailto:m.asadi@ibto.ir).

### Abstract

Conventional and modern instruction techniques have been introduced in the past decades to improve the learners' performance in academic and professional environments. Content-Based Instruction is powerful, a significant approach, and with a lot of experimental evidences in language education. But, as a crucial point to achieve excellent results, it needs some facilities, qualifications and cooperation. There is a long time this approach has been implemented in IRAN. No research has been conducted in related high –schools; while, continuous research to reflect the quality of the recent courses to manage next curriculum is of its' necessities. To evaluate the effect of content based English language instruction in the current situation, this study was conducted. The participants were 81 out of 90 available high school students in primary/ placement test; and in the main study, from 297 available high school boy students 206 had the criteria and participated in the study. KR-21 reliability, paired-samples t-test and Mann-Whitney test in SPSS statistics 22.0 software and quasi-experimental design were used. From the results concluded that there is a positive effect on the students' proficiencies- who were under CBI. But, it is not better than or even equal to the students' proficiencies- who were under conventional instruction.

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### Introduction:-

There are a number of methods in language teaching. Each one trying- all in the hope that- to create a significant improvement more than before or more than other current methods [10]. To find the best status in direction, technique and strategy for language learning and teaching, numerous researches have been conducted and theories have been produced [11, 9]. Content-based instruction (CBI) courses are new world known [3]. They're attractive [9].

Comparing different methods of teaching English in non-English-speaking countries for professional communities at tertiary schools, three common features are discussed: content-based instruction (CBI), content and language integrated learning (CLIL) and immersion [13]. The feature in the most important aspect of these- all- is the integration of language with non-linguistic disciplines of the content matter [13]. This combination is not new (11). Content-based instruction and content and language integrated learning are practically the same, but CLIL has broader scope [13]. The European name of CBI is CLIL. In the last decade, there has been a major interest in content-based instruction (CBI) and content and language integrated learning (CLIL) [3]. Content- based means a natural synchronic approach to learning of foreign language which underlines the use of language for explaining, stating, and discussing the meaning [3]. Integration of teaching both language and content is assumed an excellent process for progress in foreign language learning. Content- based language teaching is a type of bilingual education. It is subject-teaching, too [3]. It may be named as cross- curricular language learning or language across the curriculum [3]. More experiential approach, closer to content based movement [3]. Overall, CBI is concurrent teaching the required language for learning in school and promotion in thinking skills [3].

Documents and references of researchers and theorists claim that there are roots and connections of content based instruction in other approaches, methods and teaching movements. However, these models and patterns are different in some aspects, for example: The naturalistic/ second language acquisition theory of Krashen, intra-lingual strategies of Stern, the experimental approach in language teaching of Stern, the global and implicit dimension in language teaching of Stern, the direct method of Gouin and Marcel, natural methods in language teaching of Montaigne, Comenius, Sauveur and Berlitz, the natural approach of Terrell, and of Krashen and Terrell, the communicative approach of Widdowson, of Brumfit and Johnson, of Richard and Schmidt, of Littlewood, and of Sanchez Perez, the language across the curriculum movement of DES, language for specific purpose of Hutchinson and Waters, bilingual education programs of Lambert and Tucker, of Genesse, and of Haffan, the cognitive academic learning approach (CALLA), and the whole language theory of Newman, and of Freeman and Freeman [11].

CBI can promote: learner linguistic confidence and competence, learner and teacher prospects, learner's skills in risk management and problem solving, skills of grammatical awareness and vocabulary learning, motivation and encouragement for independence of student, first language literacy, learner's self-motivation to learn through more than in the language, study skills in learning, like concentration, producing positive views and gender threads in motivation, and entering cultural affairs in the curriculum [13].

All these notions will be inevitable and imminent if necessary qualifications and requirements exist [8]. These achievements are if the implementation of whole the program is committed to whole of CBI rationale, in foundation and practice; in other words, if all the conditions are provided [9]. The conditions include: appropriate CBI model for context and clientele involved, goals and objectives seriously taken into consideration, authentic materials readily available, school libraries in support of CBI programs, students ready – in cognitive, linguistic, and emotion, and instructors highly target language proficient, strongly understand and dedicate to CBI principles, wishing to defend the content, provide students a variety of activities, and maintain the low-anxiety environment for acquisition [8]. A content based instruction course, which is accountable, needs more efforts [1].

CBI approaches are increasingly applied in private or semi-private schools for intermediate level; this is while - comparing to their counterparts in its worldwide application - it is not obvious whether this method is successful [3]. On the other side, researches declare CBI is one of the best and the most effective approach, if the necessary conditions are prepared [3]. Checking, the process to find necessary revising and reconstruction steps are undoubted and unforgettable, to ensure of presence of the necessities or to prepare them. It is important to assess, investigate and compare the employment effectiveness of “content-based instruction” versus conventional or other approaches in instruction and improvement in L2 / EFL learner's proficiency, to develop a wider scope. If not, this may cause increasing costs and consequences.

Having attractive appearance, there is increasing demands for this educational method. Recently, content based instruction is used as a nationwide method in Iranian private or semi-private high schools. After a while implementation of this process, no assessment has performed, no estimation has been done to evaluate, thus to ensure that everything is authentic. Knowledge about the current situation promises the good futures, ensures of presence of necessities and helps to know the revising and reconstruction steps. According to searches in different forms and sources, related studies on evaluating the effectiveness of the Content-Based Foreign language instruction

in related Iranian high schools have not ever performed. Content-based language instruction is supported if detailed analysis of research determines the criteria [9]. Thus, the ultimate aim of this study is to help to evaluate the effect of content based instruction on students' proficiencies.

The study aimed to answer if the current Iranian courses of Content-based English language instruction had positive effect on the students' proficiencies.

Other research question was if there is any significant difference between students' language proficiency when they are taught through the content based approach and conventional approach; in other words, if Content Based Instruction is able to replace the Conventional.

### **Material and Methods:-**

This study was quasi-experimental (single arm non randomized trial).

First, all of the 81 students of an English language institution in the age of 13 to 15 years old were engaged in the placement test. Through the placement test, we found out the level of this range students' English language proficiency in IRAN. Then, with Cambridge standard tests of this extracted level in two different forms for pretest and posttest; the researchers of this study assessed the changes in the English language knowledge of the students of two CBI executor schools before and after applying the Content based English language instruction. Also, researchers compared the CBI group students in front of the students under conventional instruction according to their proficiency test results. To see the impact of CBI, all the students had to participate in both pretest and posttest. All of 297 students- as available subjects- of these two schools were engaged in this study. But, not having the names or the scores of some students in one of pretest or posttest; finally, 206 students participated in statistical calculations of this study.

Cambridge Standard tests - an internationally accepted, broad spectrum, with the background of global researches, reliable- Cambridge English Language Assessment, 2014- were used to assess and differentiate students' English proficiency levels. These tests for the kids are in 3levels: YLE, KET, and PET. YLE test series are for children aged 7 to 12years old, on the basis of fun and children motivating. KET- "The KEY to essential English" tests- is the first level of Cambridge exams for adults, in preliminary, basic and everyday necessary English usage. This test is in 9 parts and 56 questions in elementary level of difficulty. KET is a basic level qualification. It shows if students can use English to communicate in simple situations. Also, it shows if students have made a good start in learning English. KET was determined as the best level for the proficiency test to distinguish between these students' English language proficiencies in statistical analysis [5, 6, 7]. PET is in level of mastering the basics of the language, conversation about ordinary topics, from work, hobby, school, experiences, dreams, aspirations, goals, plans, beliefs and personal interests, easily communication tongue in travel and so on- coherent, concise and easy to talk [5, 6, 7].

It was expected that PET was the level of English proficiency students. But, to ensure the appropriate test level for the students in this age group in Tehran, from all 81 students in the age of 13 to 15 years old- of a free agency of English language training in Tehran- an English language placement test was taken. The extracted level of English language proficiency test- in two forms of words and sentences, to avoid the bias due to the test- was used to compare the students under content-based English language instruction with themselves before this training, and in front of the students under conventional instruction.

Reports derived from the results of previous studies show that after compliance with the requirements in terms of gender, economic status, physical ability, racial and ethnics, age, English learning history, school-characteristics: size, poverty, racial compound, density of students, and geography; then, proficiency measurement in academic English language will prospect the current level of students' linguistic knowledge. The results of these projects showed that written English language literacy measurements in reading and writing are stronger than that in English oral (listening and speaking) proficiency [12]. More than this, reading and writing tests save time and expenses; thus, this study researchers chose reading and writing version of the tests.

The data were analyzed in SPSS 22.0 statistic software. A Mann-Whitney test was run to compare two groups' means on the pretest in order to homogenize them, because the data did not enjoy a normal distribution; and, was run to compare two groups' means on the posttest in order to probe the main research question. KR-21 reliability was computed for the pretest, posttest and primary data. Paired-samples t-test was run to compare the experimental

group's means on the pretest and posttest, also separately the conventional group's. The researchers considered ( $p < 0.05$ ) significant.

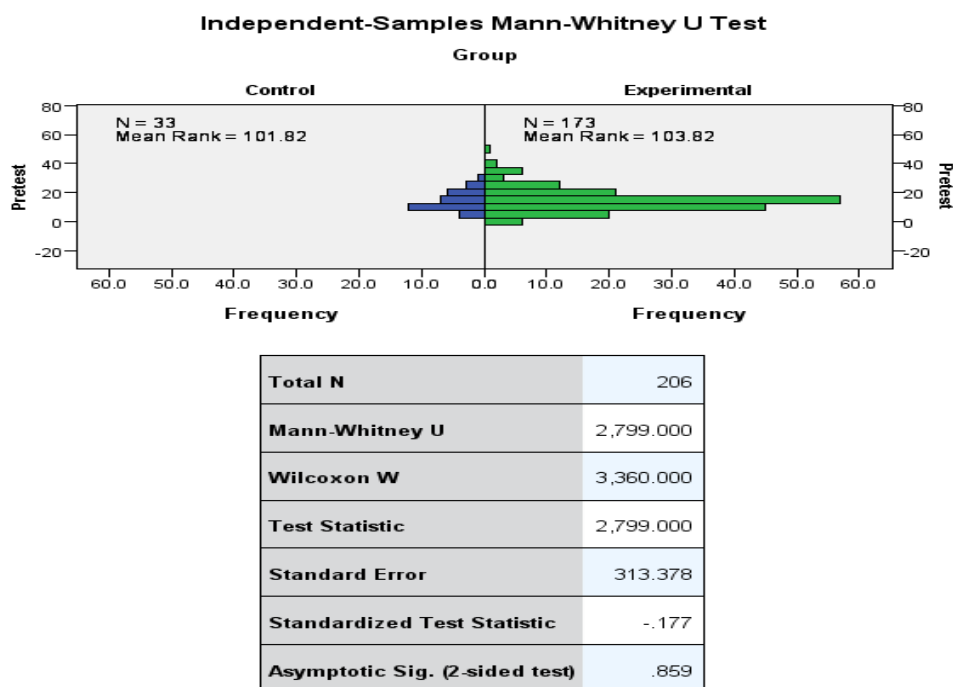
## Results and Discussion:-

The Primary/ placement test on 81 students (others- out of the main research groups- in the same age and characteristics) revealed that elementary level or KET is the level of these teenagers in 13 to 15 years old in IRAN.

### Pretest of Language Proficiency:-

Based on the results displayed in Table 1 ( $Z = -.17$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), it can be concluded that there was not any significant difference between mean ranks (MR) of the content-based (experimental) ( $MR = 103.82$ ) and conventional (control) ( $MR = 101.82$ ) groups. Thus it can be claimed that they were homogenous in terms of their language proficiency prior to the main study- administration of the treatment.

**Table 1:- Mann-Whitney Test; Pretest of Language Proficiency by Groups**



**Legend** = Mann-Whitney was used to compare two pre-tests of two groups. There was no significant difference between mean scores. They were homogenous.

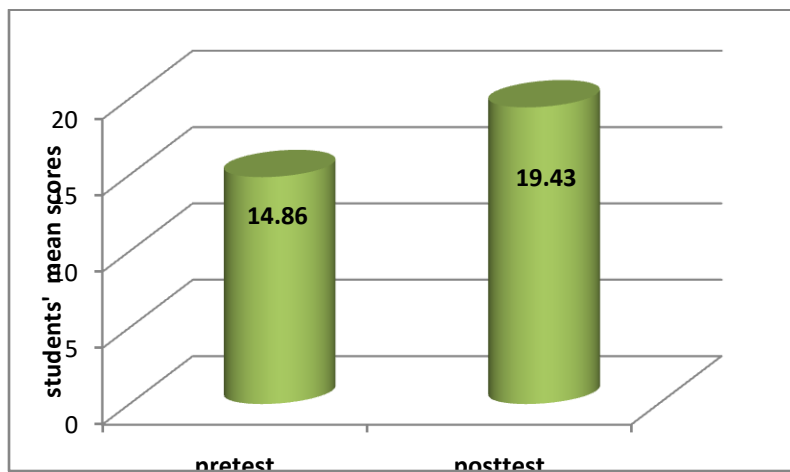
The results of the paired-samples t-test with ( $p = 0.00$ ) indicate that the experimental group had a significantly higher mean on the posttest (Table 2, Table 3, and Figure1). This means, to answer the first research question, it can be claimed that the content based instruction was suitable and had positive results.

**Table 2:- Descriptive Statistics; Pretest and Posttest (Experimental Group)**

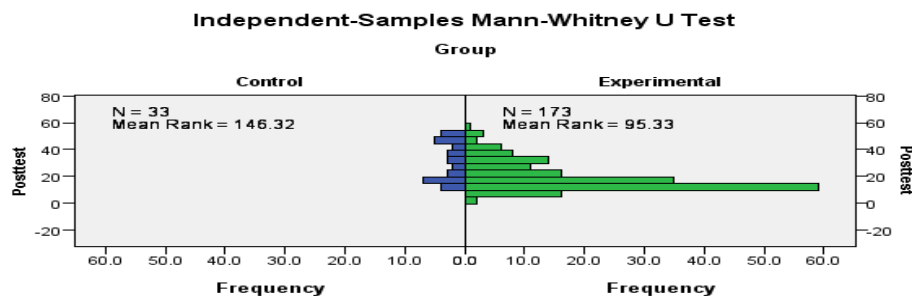
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	Posttest	19.43	173	11.076	0.842
	Pretest	14.86	173	8.112	0.617

**Table 3:** - Paired-Samples t-test; Pretest and Posttest (Experimental Group)

Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
			Lower	Upper			
4.572	8.723	0.663	3.263	5.881	6.894	172	0.000

**Fig.1:-** Posttest and Pretest of Achievement (Experimental Group). Total score of each test was 60.

To answer second study question; based on the results displayed in Table 4 ( $Z = 4.50$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), there was a significant difference between mean ranks of experimental ( $MR = 95.33$ ) and control ( $MR = 146.32$ ) groups. It can be concluded that the conventional group had a significantly better performance on the posttest.

**Table 4:-** Mann-Whitney Test; Posttest of Language Proficiency by Groups

<b>Total N</b>	206
<b>Mann-Whitney U</b>	4,267.500
<b>Wilcoxon W</b>	4,828.500
<b>Test Statistic</b>	4,267.500
<b>Standard Error</b>	313.498
<b>Standardized Test Statistic</b>	4.507
<b>Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)</b>	.000

**Legend** = Comparing language abilities of two groups in post-test was done with Mann-Whitney test. There was significant difference between two groups. The conventional group had found more proficiency.

To probe both of the research questions, the data were analyzed through the non-parametric tests of Mann-Whitney; because the students' scores on the pretest and posttest of language proficiency did not enjoy a normal distribution. As displayed in Table 5, the ratios of skewness and kurtosis were higher than  $\pm 1.96$ .

**Table 5:** -Descriptive Statistics; Testing Normality Assumption

Group		N	Skewness			Kurtosis		
		Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio	Statistic	Std. Error	Ratio
Experimental	Pretest	173	1.239	0.185	6.70	2.698	0.367	7.35
	Posttest	173	1.228	0.185	6.64	1.043	0.367	2.84
Control	Pretest	33	0.596	0.409	1.45	-0.402	0.798	-0.50
	Posttest	33	0.158	0.409	0.38	-1.500	0.798	-1.88

This study reflected the good overall situation of quality and quantity of English learning of the schools as CBI executors. The design of education contains of four aspects. First one is knowledge, including input, output, content and topic. Second one is instructional, consisting technologies, methods, programs, materials and educational environments concluding schedule and time. Third aspect consists of learner characteristics, containing ages, proficiency and development stages. Finally, the fourth aspect of educational design is administrative aspect which is the selected instructional model. In a study on education design, each one of these aspects may influence on the results [1]. The content based instruction was suitable and had positive results. But, the conventional group had a significantly better performance on the posttest. Further investigations to separate and identify the type and level of influence of each factor, in addition to necessary continuous general research of these courses are required.

The study showed the current courses of Content-based English language instruction in Iranian high schools had positive effect on the students' proficiencies. But, this positive effect is not more than even equal to the Conventional. These courses of Content-based English language instruction in Iran could not be able to replace the conventional.

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