Implementing Content-Based Instruction in Online ESP Course within the System of Professional Training of Future Officers

Liudmyla Kusiak[1], Oleksandr Didenko[2], Oleh Pavlenko[3], Yulia Romanyshyn[4], Victoriia Kramarenko[5], Anzhela Petrash[6], Oleksandr Danylenko[7], Natalia Benkovska[8]

[1] Lecturer of the Foreign Languages Department at Bohdan Khmelnytskyi National Academy of the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine

[2] Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, Professor, Deputy Head of the Scientific and Organizational Department at Bohdan Khmelnytskyi National Academy of the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine

[3] PhD in Pedagogy, Head of the Combined Military Disciplines Department, Military Institute of telecommunications and informatisation named after the Heroes of Kruty.

[4] Head of the Department of Record Management and Information Activities, Associate Professor at Ivano-Frankivsk National Technical University of Oil and Gas

[5] PhD in Pedagogy, Associate Professor at the Department of Navigation and Ship Management, Danube Institute of the National University of Odesa Maritime Academy

[6] Lecturer of the Foreign Languages Department at Bohdan Khmelnytskyi National Academy of the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine

[7] Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, Associate Professor, Head of the Navigation and Ship Handling Department, Danube Institute of National University, Odesa Maritime Academy

[8] Natalia Benkovska, PhD in Pedagogy, Associate Professor, Head of the Department of Language Training, Naval Institute of National University of Odesa Maritime Academy

Correspondence: Liudmyla Kusiak, Lecturer of the Foreign Languages Department at Bohdan Khmelnytskyi National Academy of the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine, Khmelnytskyi, Ukraine. E-mail: kusiakliuda777@gmail.com

Abstract

The article examines the capabilities of content-based instruction (CBI) within the system of professional training of future officers of the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine, specifically within the online English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course. The authors argue that nowadays, due to the quarantine restrictions and ongoing war initiated by Russia, it is crucial to enhance the border guards' foreign language competence through a distance learning system. The study showed positive results in applying the CBI strategy to deliver an ESP course. This approach contributes immensely to developing context-appropriate language competence, boosts motivation-driven engagement, and increases retention and long-term academic success rates. The course content includes such topics as intercultural communication, illicit trafficking of radiological and nuclear materials, human trafficking, and fundamental rights. To deliver the content of the CBI course, the authors had to consider its online format and work out such learning activities as reading and listening to authentic job-related content, completing online interactive activities, and engaging in case-studying and problem-solving activities. The course results showed a considerable improvement in learners' ability to effectively communicate in English within the professional border guard context, use the foreign language to build knowledge and skills around human values, recognise, analyse, and solve various border-related incidents involving topics covered in the course. The effectiveness of the online ESP course studied based on CBI has shown that implementing this approach in online education deserves recognition and acceptance.

Keywords: border guard officers, content-based instruction, English for specific purposes, online learning, professional training, management, system

1. Introduction

The outburst of the COVID-2019 pandemic, followed by the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, has increased the need to foster and develop fresh and innovative approaches to education. Distance learning (DL) or e-learning has become an indispensable part of each educational institution, not only in Ukraine but also worldwide. For instance, in the USA, over 9.4 million students, or 61 per cent of all undergraduate students, were enrolled in at least one distance education course in fall 2021 (NCES, 2015). Today, many educational institutions worldwide offer tens of thousands of online courses in various fields of knowledge to any student staying in the most remote part of Earth with access to the Internet. On the other hand, due to the constant shelling of Ukrainian cities, resulting in the disruption of the educational processes and shuttling between the shelter and the classroom, providing students with the tools necessary to meet their academic needs and encourage professional development is crucial. One of these instruments is the development of online language

courses that can be easily accessed on smartphones almost anywhere at a convenient time.

Numerous online courses designed within the Bohdan Khmelnytskyi National Academy of the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine (NASBGS) aim to improve the knowledge and skills of future border guards to effectively and efficiently perform designated tasks on the border. Among the competencies attained at the academy, foreign language competence has gained significant focus. This urge has been driven by numerous factors, with North Atlantic and European integration playing a pivotal role. As part of these processes, the President and the Parliament (Parliament of Ukraine, 2024) obliged civil servants, law enforcement and military personnel to achieve a certain level of English language proficiency. These new challenges initiated some significant changes in the educational system of Ukraine, shifting emphasis on lifelong learning and digitalisation of learning processes (Parliament of Ukraine, 2024).

Taking into account the Euro-Atlantic vector of the development of the Ukrainian Armed Forces along with other agencies of the Defence and Security Sector of Ukraine, all military personnel, including border guards, should be prepared to participate in Joint NATO military exercises and peacekeeping missions, as well as to interact with military experts and facilitators from NATO countries while undergoing combat training both in Ukraine and abroad. All those demands presuppose a certain level of English language aptitude that has to be achieved by the officers and their subordinates. On the other hand, in the course of their duties, border guards communicate with foreigners to welcome them into the country, ask questions, give instructions or even determine their valid reasons for crossing the border to prevent any security threat posed by separate offenders and organised crime. In this regard, English proficiency will optimise the border guard authorities' overall performance and contribute to the collaborative and less intense interaction between officers and border crossers.

In order to accomplish this task, the leadership of the NASBGS paid particular attention to strengthening and promoting foreign language training for future border guard officers and those now stationed at the border. Taking into account the ongoing military aggression against Ukraine, the decision was made to take advantage of the benefits of distance learning. The authors of this article are resolving a research task to find the most effective methodological approaches for shaping the foreign language competence of the cadets and officers of the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine (SBGS).

Therefore, this research aims to describe the design of an online ESP course to develop the foreign language competence of the SBGS personnel utilising the Content-Based Instruction approach and reveal the professionally oriented peculiarities of the course content. The study seeks to fulfil the following tasks:

research the best learning paradigm for the system of professional language training of future officers in wartime conditions;

outline the advantages of the ESP methodology in the system of distance learning of future officers;

describe the procedure of the needs analysis conducted within the border guard population;

explore the Content-Based Instruction strategy, its advantages and shortcomings in achieving the learning outcomes of the course;

describe the course structural framework and define modern learning activities used to ensure the effectiveness of the course;

analyse the course effectiveness and learning outcomes achieved.

2. Literature Review

Online education has been scrutinised by numerous scientists and scholars worldwide. It has been recognised as a new form of pedagogy for learning (Seok, 2008; Lytvyn et al., 2020). E-learning has gained different forms: asynchronous, synchronous or a mixture of both; however, delivery costs for e-learning are considerably lower than those for classroom facilities, instructor time, participants' travel, and job time lost to attend classroom sessions. (Ghirardini, 2011). On the other hand, the findings of Martins Spridzāns and Jans Pavlovičs emphasise that a successful web-based learning course requires that instructors have an in-depth understanding of the e-environment both from IT and pedagogical perspective, whereas students should attain some prior knowledge of course requirements and basics of navigating the chosen e-learning system (Spridzāns et al., 2016). Apart from Martins Spridzāns and Jans Pavlovičs, who thoroughly investigated the peculiarities of developing an ESP course for border guards in Latvia, the effectiveness of another English language course designed for border guards serving on the EU external border was carefully studied by Marina Žukova and Inta Madžule (Žukova et al., 2018), who have highlighted the necessity to abide by the established requirements regarding the careful selection of the content and the participants of a self-paced online course (Borszéki, 2021; Islamova, 2023). Although scientists mainly agree that the educators are to design their courses themselves, Judit Borszéki justified that the development process of the digital course can be conducted by non-language specialists, i.e. domain experts (Borszéki, 2021).

Concurrently, numerous Ukrainian researchers studied various aspects of developing and implementing distance learning courses designed to train personnel of the SBGS, integrating and implementing information and communication technology (ICT) into NASBGS training programs. Thus, Oleksandr Didenko, Andrii Balendr, Oksana Komarnytska, and Ivan Katerynchuk with co-authors tested the effectiveness of electronic educational resources (Didenko et al., 2023; Katerynchuk et al., 2016) and investigated the development of the communicative component by implementing ICT tools; introducing mobile learning (smartphones, tablets) (Farion et al., 2022), virtual and mixed reality technology into the educational process of the border guard academy (Balendr et al., 2023). Among other methodologies used in foreign language training, Nadiia Moroz highlights tasked-based instruction (TBI) as an effective tool to integrate students into the learning environment by learning through self-discovery, assessing their weaknesses and strengths, and "by improving

their ability to use their current language skills in a flexible, confident way to perform a wide range of tasks" (Moroz, 2020).

To understand the key differences and peculiarities of task-based instruction versus content-based instruction, we turn to the investigation conducted by Jack C. Richards. In his paper, the author views TBI as a methodology developing from a focus on classroom processes, whereas CBI is regarded "as the framework for a unit of work, as the guiding principle for an entire course, as a course that prepares students for mainstreaming, as the rationale for the use of English as a medium to teaching some school subjects in an EFL setting" (Richards, 2005). This methodology is also favoured by William Grabe and Fredricka L. Stoller, who offered their own seven strong rationales for CBI (Grabe et al., 1997). Yoon (Christina) Heo sees CBI as a practical approach to teaching English as a second language, allowing students to develop their language skills and gain access to new concepts through meaningful content (Heo, 2006). More recent findings show that students are more eager to be involved in language teaching through CBI as it is closely related to the students' needs and instructional settings (Nurpasari et al., 2022). Texts and tasks used in CBI are based on authentic material and are taken from real life. This approach encourages students' involvement and promotes the learning of the target language's culture (Nurpasari et al., 2022). The findings of Sariani et al. showed positive outcomes of implementing CBI on the EFL's writing since it has proved to advance writing skills, increase creativity in designing the brochure, and enhance the interaction with the lecturer through the use of technology (Sariani et al., 2022). Simultaneously, some scholars raise concerns about challenges that educators may encounter in the world language classroom, distinguishing the challenge of matching content and cognitive demands with students' grade level as the major one (Spenader et al., 2020).

In summary, English learning methodology has been scrutinised carefully not only in general academic discourse but also in specific border guard scientific environments. However, our survey has shown that the peculiarities of designing and implementing electronic ESP courses relying on the CBI approach have not been covered yet. This article presents a grounded attempt to reveal the development and implementation of a CBI ESP course in the framework of border guards training in Ukraine.

3. Methods

One of the main stages of designing an e-learning ESP course was to conduct a thorough analysis of the students' needs and gaps. The needs analysis survey conducted within the course development process helped us determine the strengths and weaknesses of our students, the methods necessary to gain the result and, more importantly, establish the areas our students lacked.

To achieve the aim of the paper and solve the designated tasks, the authors have used the following research methods: analysis of pedagogical, psychological, methodological literature, and normative legal acts, as well as comparison and extrapolation were used to clarify the current state of using content-based instruction to design an ESP e-course whereas synthesis and abstraction were used to define the content of our ESP course and formulate conclusions.

4. Findings

4.1 Background for the Conceptual Bases of the Course

Modern professional training of border guards faces the urgent problem of creating specialised educational resources and training platforms to improve the qualification level of personnel. The introduction of innovative technology into the educational processes of the NASBGS contributes immensely to the overall academic progress of future officers, allowing them to catch up with the information and knowledge they missed due to field training, military practice at the border, as well as air raid alerts disrupting learning process, classes and academic settings. The effectiveness of modern Learning Management Systems (LMS) and other virtual training platforms in border guards' professional training systems has been scrutinised by national and international experts. The objective of our study was not to go deep into the specifications and capabilities of technological means and resources but rather to come up with a feasible and valuable educational product for our target audience which would allow them to study at their own pace within the designated time frame. Additionally, bearing in mind the overall situation in the country (air raid sirens, power outages, shelling) and specific learning conditions at a military educational institution, it was necessary to ensure 24/7 access to the course content. This goal was achieved by designing and launching the course on Moodle LMS.

4.2 Needs Analysis of the Modern Border Guard-Specific Context

One of the study's most challenging and essential steps was to conduct the initial stage of designing a course, i.e., a needs analysis (Fig. 1). This survey aimed to determine what students need to learn and the simplest and fastest way to teach this.

Figure 1. Sample Needs Analysis Questionnaire

The needs analysis performed within our course was built upon the survey of experience, language requirements, and functional deficiencies of the cadets studying at the border guard academy, officers currently serving at the border guard units, and those who graduated several years ago and could specify what aspects of their professional foreign language competence they considered to be developed insufficiently. Subsequently, the following topics were recognised as essential for border guard officers in professional, real-world contexts (Table 1).

Table 1. Professional foreign language context of border guard officers' service activity

Professional functions of border guards requiring foreign language competence	Foreign language communicative context
1. Professional communication with colleagues and counterparts	– give and understand basic autobiographical information: introduce oneself and others; talk about rank, position, nationality and service duties; – use proper language to ensure respectful and effective communication, observance of human rights and freedoms
2. Verification of travellers' documents	– read and understand such travel documents as passports, visas, immigration cards, passenger and crew lists, driver's licenses, and other supporting documents.
3. Questioning of a traveller	– ask simple questions regarding a foreigner's personal data during a border crossing, i.e., citizenship, place of residence, information on the time, place, and reasons for entry/transit/stay, relationship with individuals travelling in a group, security issues; – explain why a person is refused entry and the return procedure; – discuss passport problems with foreign embassies.
4. Giving advice and recommendations to travellers	– provide explanations and handle travellers' problems regarding passports, visas, baggage loss, car rental problems; – give orders in unusual situations such as using force, emergencies, and apprehending irregular migrants.
5. Conducting a vehicle (train/ vessel/ aircraft) search	– give instructions to travellers and crew members during a search; – use basic technical terms while conducting a search (parts of the vehicle, vessel, train, etc.); – read cargo labels, examine cargo and ask questions about that cargo. – be able to identify smuggled goods (drugs, weapons, hazardous materials) during the interview at the border crossing point and act accordingly using established protocols to give orders and instructions in English.
6. Debriefing and interviewing of irregular migrants	– explain the reason for detention, the routine procedures, rights, responsibilities, and daily schedule in temporary holding facilities and migrant accommodation centres; – give irregular migrants instructions and directions during personal searches, medical examinations, application form filling for those claiming refugee status, and other routine processes; – identify and interview potential victims of human trafficking and human smuggling and act accordingly using established protocols; – ask questions and understand responses related to biographical information, medical and health conditions, and the background of the violation (how, who assisted, transportation, terrain, route).
7. Interaction with international counterparts	– explain the Ukrainian SBGS structure, roles and responsibilities; – make phone calls to international counterparts on professional issues, i.e., requests and

		inquiries about travellers, their documents, transportation, etc.; – search for and understand basic information on the Internet and in international databases; read and understand professional terms and basic abbreviations for international border patrol and law enforcement agencies.
8.	Participating in joint exercises and training	– understand basic commands, instructions, and directions; name equipment used by BGs (uniform, weapons, transportation, etc.); – use the radio to communicate, give warnings, explain violations, etc..

4.3 Course Structural Framework

Nevertheless, while the current curriculum was still valuable, new global issues in the past decade challenged border guards and required higher-level English language skills. The proliferation of illicit materials, human trafficking, migration, and culture clashes were potential phenomena at border crossings. Border guards needed not only language skills but also knowledge of these topics to communicate effectively.

In order to address these challenges, NASBGS, with the support of its US partner law-enforcement educational institution and the Embassy of Ukraine in the USA, has tailored and implemented a project aimed at enhancing the English language competence of Ukrainian border guards. The partner institution revised a 400-hour English language skills curriculum for the State Border Guards Service of Ukraine personnel. The project included revamping the existing framework with the intention of modernising the content, including critical topic areas that have become increasingly relevant in the SBGS in recent years. The content areas and baseline values incorporated into the SBGS curriculum in this program were relevant to European Union priorities and thematic areas of human rights and gender equality efforts with a particular focus on vulnerable groups, strengthening democratic culture and tolerance, and anti-corruption.

Project deliverables included a revised curriculum frame, unit plans, and sample lesson plans for each unit with accompanying materials and content resources. The structure of the course comprised four separate professionally oriented units consisting of several lessons at both Level 1 (STANAG 0+) and Level 2 (STANAG 1-1+):

- Intercultural Communication for Border Guards;
- Illicit Trafficking of Radiological and Nuclear Materials;
- Human Trafficking and Human Smuggling;
- Fundamental Rights.

The priority selection of unit topics was based on the needs assessment survey completed with current, former, and future students and instructors in the SBGS English program, along with consultation from experts from the border protection sphere. SBGS and survey participants identified these topics as gaps in the current curriculum. The goals of the new curriculum topics were to help raise awareness among SBGS border guards about these advanced issues, provide them with vocabulary for discussing them, and engage them in communicating effectively about them in real-world scenarios at the border.

The curriculum topics that were developed in the first phase of the study included units on fundamental human rights, intercultural communication, and human trafficking and human smuggling. These were all related to human rights and gender equality, as well as vulnerable groups of people. Tolerance is developed through the theme of intercultural communication, in which border guard students learn to take different perspectives in order to understand others' experiences and points of view. Through more reflective responses to people migrating through a border crossing, students learn language forms that are more balanced and express democratic norms rather than authoritarian norms. Through studying the concept of "power" in intercultural communication, students learn how their power as border guards plays a crucial role in communication and how communication influences the dynamics of power between groups and individuals.

4.4 Content-Based Instruction Methodology

The research has also demonstrated a need in the SBGS English program for a more "up-to-date" teaching methodology, which was identified as Content-Based Instruction. This teaching methodology allowed us to integrate language learning with content relevant to the learners' profession or interest. This approach differed from traditional language teaching, as it provided opportunities in the classroom for learners to use the language in context – that is, real-world scenario situations that border guards actually encountered. Thus, we managed to teach our students to learn and communicate the subject matter (in our case, it was limited by the specific topics) in English. By implementing these strategies, we raised awareness among border guards about the subject matter, provided students with a vocabulary for discussing these issues, and engaged them in communicating effectively about them in real-world scenarios at the border. The CBI teaching methodology turned foreign language training into a meaningful and enjoyable process closely related to the professional domain of the learners. Thus, the development of SBGS advanced topics in CBI was intended to fill gaps in the current curriculum.

4.5 Course Methodology Overview: Implemented Forms, Methods and Learning Activities

The course was completely asynchronous and involved independent, self-paced learning using online educational materials. The learning process was guided by professional educators who assisted the students in case of any challenges. The instructors performed the role of mediators, not the sources of information. CBI-based ESP training methods and learning activities tailored within the course included:

    1. Reading of authentic texts (articles, abstracts, blogs containing domain-specific vocabulary and dealing with real-life incidents

and situations) (Fig. 2);

2. Listening activities (both audio and video instructional materials relevant to the learners' area of interest, which were deliberately selected and/or tailored to improve listening comprehension skills and introduce possible domain-specific cases) (Fig. 3);

3. Interactive quizzes and exercises designed to reinforce knowledge of professional terminology, specific grammar and language usage issues (activities like crosswords, puzzles, matching, gap filling, mind mapping, listing, putting in the correct order, etc.) (Fig. 4);

4. Role-playing, case-studying, and problem-solving activities offered students a comprehensive insight into potential scenarios corresponding to their professional context and allowed them to master foreign language skills in simulated workplace situations (Fig. 5).

Figure 2. Reading Comprehension Exercises (True/False Activities)

Figure 3. Listening for Comprehension Activities

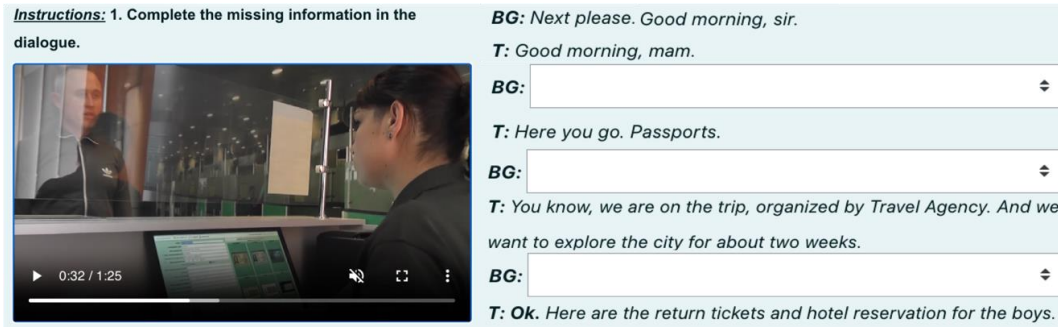Figure 4. Vocabulary Practice Methods

Figure 5. Case-Studying and Problem-Solving Activities

In the CBI classroom, the language itself was not the only target. The language being learned and used was taught within the context of the content. For this reason, there was a significant focus on vocabulary building, as each topic had its own set of terms and language style. The vocabulary focus was challenging for students in Level 1; however, once terms were mastered, they were able to begin using the language at a higher level than they would in a non-CBI classroom. Through CBI content learning, border guards also developed baseline values of equality, tolerance, and fairness, which they enacted and practised in scenario-based language activities as the border guards' ability to protect, police, and safeguard while respecting the rights and freedoms of border crossers have been relevant to the mission and activities of the SBGS.

The desired outcome from taking this course was not only to develop learners' ability to effectively communicate in English within the professional context but also to use English to engage diplomatically, with tolerance and awareness of cultural differences, in order to fulfil SBGS's mission of protecting borders while honouring the rule of law and showing "respect for and observance of human and citizens' rights and freedoms." Through CBI, students were capable of building knowledge and skills around values at the core of human rights, equality, democracy, and tolerance through advanced topics.

4.6 Analysis of the Learning Outcomes Achieved

The attainment of the course objectives was evaluated through comprehensive tests at the end of each unit, final performative assessments and questionnaire surveys comprising self-assessment and student feedback. The final performative test conducted at the end of the course showed that the learners were able to acquire the skills necessary to understand and use a wide range of professional vocabulary while dealing with operational reports, official correspondence, travel documents and other supplementary travelling documents of border crossers etc. (more than 83% of recipients). At the same time, almost half of the recipients encountered difficulties in real-life communication, as the distance self-paced course format did not meet their need to upgrade their speaking skills (more than 57% of recipients). The survey data on various aspects of learners' skills improvement are as follows.

Table 2. Achievement Rate of Learning Effects of ESP CBI online course

Learning effects	Description	Achievement Rate (%)
Improvement of specific English terminology and sentence patterns	Learning of border-related vocabulary and the improvement of analytical skills in dealing with complex information chunks	83,1%
Improvement in receptive skills (listening and reading)	Improvement of understanding, focusing, interpreting, and remembering spoken and written information, distinguishing and identifying the main ideas and specific pieces of information	80,2%
Improvement in productive skills (writing and speaking)	Enhanced accuracy and fluency in spoken and written English (ability to organise ideas coherently and cohesively using correct grammar, vocabulary, and syntax)	57,1%
Refinement of specific border-related knowledge and context	Learning of border guarding and other specific activities requiring foreign language knowledge and techniques necessary to resolve professional incidents	79,8%

5. Discussion

Scientific discussions regarding the requirements and characteristics of an ESP course emphasise that it has to meet specific learners' needs, use proper methodology and focus on the appropriate language for various activities (grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse, and genre) (Dudley-Evans, 1998) since all decision as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning (Hutchinson et al., 1987). Therefore, needs analysis is fairly considered the most important stage in the course development process. It involves the assessment of the current situation and the desired outcome (Long, 2005), analysis of learners' gaps, wants, means, subjective means, academic context, discourse analysis, etc. (Flowerdew, 2013). Another approach suggested by Marjatta Huhta (Huhta et al., 2013) focuses on a regular student's needs and gaps while designing an ESP course rather than relying on a "top-down" model of course development. All in all, modern scientists and scholars emphasise that we should move away from conventional approaches to designing ESP courses and rely on more effective models based on the needs of those for whom the course is supposed to be designed.

With that in mind, we decided to investigate the existing instructional strategies to identify the one that is the most appropriate for the target

audience's needs. The main focus of that comparative analysis was CBI (Content-Based Instruction), TBI (Task-Based Instruction), and CLT (Communicative Language Teaching).

The history of TBI dates back to the 1980s when it was first used at some elementary and secondary schools in India (Ellis, 1997). This approach is based on tasks or communicative exercises that allow learners to use whatever language they know to convey their meaning. Thus, the main focus is on communicative activities rather than the language itself. This idea was shared and later on developed by numerous researchers such as P. Skehan (1996), J. Willis (1996), and D. Nunan (2004). The latter proposed a "rehearsal rationale theory" to back up the TBI approach, indicating that the activities (i.e., tasks) "provide learners with the language they will actually use in the real world" (Nunan, 1991). Another viewpoint on TBI is that "tasks work better than form-focused activities in activating the learners' cognitive processes" (Richards et al., 2001). J. Willis (1996) indicates that TBI offers the "best insights from communicative language teaching with an organized focus on language form." At the time, critics of TBI showcased results showing that students generally perform poorly on grammatical tests and may tend to constantly repeat the same grammatical, vocabulary, or pronunciation mistakes despite correction and exposure to the correct forms (Seedhouse, 1999). Another issue highlighted with TBI is that "learners can often complete a task without using accurate language, or perhaps any language at all in extreme cases, relying on gestures alone" (Choo et al., 2012).

Another widely used teaching methodology, especially in ESL (English as a Second Language) classes, is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The CLT approach encourages "learners to develop their communicative competence by using the language in meaningful and real-life situations" (Zhang, 2023). Similar to TBI approach, it emphasises that fluency is more important than accuracy. A very profound analysis of the "merits and demerits" of CLT was provided by L. Qasserras. According to his research, he points out enhanced communicative competence and language proficiency, learner autonomy and motivation, cultural competence, as well as critical thinking and problem-solving skills as the main advantages of the CLT approach. However, the cons of this strategy are considered to be neglect of explicit grammar and vocabulary instruction, limited preparation for formal writing and standardised exams, and, more importantly, prioritisation of fluency over accuracy (Qasserras, 2023).

Research shows that language learners achieve higher proficiency levels through CBI than through traditional language teaching approaches. Research-based outcomes using CBI teaching methodology include context-appropriate language competency, increased motivation and interest levels, greater opportunities for employment, better long-term academic success rates, better scores in language proficiency tests, better retention rates, better overall academic success (Grabe et al., 1997), (Spenader et al., 2020).

Moreover, CBI classrooms are student-centred (Villalobos, 2013). Language learning takes place within the trainees, not the teacher. In other words, classroom activities involve students exploring and discovering language with guidance from the teacher rather than the teacher imparting the knowledge. It is a collaborative social process. Student-centred also means that learning is the responsibility of the student with the teacher's help. CBI trains language learners to have "communicative competence" (Stryker et al., 1997). The CBI classroom's goal is to develop trainees' ability to use English effectively and appropriately, depending on the context. CBI helps students to choose appropriate forms for each context. CBI classrooms are interactive, involving groups of learners working together on projects and tasks. Interactivity provides trainees with many opportunities for language production – speaking and writing in English. Key to CBI is the use of real-world sources of content, such as professional materials, media, research, and documents. CBI does not use textbooks and other materials designed specifically for language learning. In order to interact with the real language that English speakers use, lesson plans and materials are not "pre-packaged" but developed based on the particular needs of trainees. The content in the CBI classroom is relevant to learners and their professional needs.

Our viewpoint corresponds largely to William Grabe's and Fredricka L. Stollers, who say that "in content-based classrooms, students have many opportunities to attend to language, to use language, and to negotiate content through language in natural discourse contexts". They also stress that CBI adds to contextualised learning, gives increased opportunities in terms of learning, boosts motivation, and allows greater flexibility and adaptability (Grabe et al., 1997). The idea of adding meaningful content based on authentic, job-related material into the class has been supported by many other scholars (Richards, 2005; Heo, 2006; Nurpasari et al., 2022; Sariani et al., 2022) as they view CBI as "learning about something rather than learning about language" methodology (Heo, 2006).

On the other hand, a common risk with CBI is learners' misunderstanding and rejection of the theory – whether they be teacher trainees or students in academic and professional classrooms. Even seasoned language instructors often see language and content as separate and have difficulty envisioning how language is learned through content (Martel, 2018). Student learners in CBI classrooms typically have previously learned language through traditional methods, which focus on language form, usually outside of the context of content. Therefore, these students have less command of the language, lower retention rates, and less relevant knowledge of the language. Although CBI has different outcomes – such as critical thinking in the language, higher retention rates, and relevant language knowledge – students have difficulty noticing their progress and believe they are only learning content when, in fact, they have absorbed the language in a different, unfamiliar, but more competent way.

Different language proficiency levels among participants are another risk. Although needs assessments attempt to identify the language levels ahead of the course, providing time for grouping or adjusting (Spenader et al., 2020), oftentimes, CBI instructors are faced with students who are too low for the given content and/or students with mixed proficiencies. In the first case, we modified the course to adapt to the needs of lower-level learners, shifting it from content-driven to language-driven to provide the language skills needed for the lower levels. Consequently, expectations are adjusted regarding the content the lower-level learners absorb. In the second case, instructors must

plan further lessons to differentiate instruction for the mixed groups.

Overall, the study shows that among numerous teaching methodologies, Content-Based Instruction has been proven effective in designing and subsequently delivering foreign language courses, particularly ESP courses. While most researchers investigated CBI within the framework of offline or classroom learning, the authors aimed to study the process of designing, developing and implementing an online ESP course built on CBI strategies. Summative assessment performed at the final stage justified the course instructional techniques, which enabled our students to express their opinions and ideas in English and behave correspondingly in situations related to border guard officers' activities: fighting various threats to border security (illegal migration, smuggling, drugs, international terrorism); communicating and cooperating with national and international colleagues; dealing with people crossing the border (conducting interviews; providing assistance; taking coercive measures and ensuring administrative proceedings, etc.).

Having compared all three instructional strategies (CBI, TBI, and CLT), we have concluded that TBI and CTL are unsuitable for our purposes as they assume direct interaction between the participants of a learning process since they study while communicating. Therefore, considering both the in-service and online format of the training course in question, focus on course content was set to be the most effective strategy to compensate for the learners' language deficiency in a certain professional area. The results of the comparative analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Commonalities and differences between CBI, TBI, and CLT

	CBI	TBI	CLT
1. Learners-oriented approach	X	X	X
2. ESP profession-oriented context	X	X	
3. Dual focus on mastering the subject matter and improving language proficiency	X		
4. Comprises authentic materials and real-life contexts	X	X	
5. Enhanced motivation and interest levels of students and personnel working in the field	X	X	X
6. Potential for incorporating into an online, self-paced learning environment	X		

Source: authors' own elaboration

6. Conclusion

The theoretical analysis of scientific recourses, as well as the comparative analysis of the three most prominent instructional strategies (Content-Based Instruction, Task-Based Instruction, and Communicative Language Teaching), showed that CBI is one of the most meaningful and significant approaches to language teaching, especially in online ESP environment. This pedagogical strategy gives an enormous advantage in matching the learners' needs with the content relevant to their professional sphere, promotes language acquisition, and encourages learners' participation. CBI allows learners to use the language to deal with realist issues, develop critical thinking skills and better understand a specific field while reading and analysing authentic texts and reports. With the CBI approach, our students could dive into the specific border-related environment to deal with their routine and suddenly emerging issues through English. This strategy boosted their overall motivation and interest in learning a foreign language as they applied the attained skills and projected them on real-world contexts: dealing with different types of border crossers (regular foreigners, criminals, illegal migrants, vulnerable people, victims of human trafficking etc.) as well as acting in various situations at the border and at border crossing points.

In this way, we raised awareness of learners' strengths and weaknesses to envisage their needs, our capabilities to meet those needs and finally to work out a result-oriented strategy. Our needs analysis survey helped us to identify the following topics as gaps: intercultural communication for border guards, illicit trafficking of radiological and nuclear materials, human trafficking and human smuggling, and fundamental rights. These topics constituted the basis for building up a meaningful and effective set of learning activities that would eventually enlarge students' professional vocabulary to address real-world scenarios at the border. Each topic is designed coherently with a gentle lead-in at the beginning and a number of subsequent tasks for introducing and practising topical vocabulary. Words and collocations are introduced within a context and are trained extensively throughout the whole topic in various realistic situations. The gist of each topic is a listening activity involving real-life incidents occurring at the border; the task aims to illustrate why and how things are evolving in reality.

Given the asynchronous nature of the course, it was important to select those teaching methodologies that would match the specific border-related content and institutional setting. The preference was given largely to reading authentic articles, abstracts, and blogs; listening to job-related audio and video content; working on interactive quizzes and exercises like crosswords, puzzles, matching, gap filling, mind mapping, listing, putting in the right order, etc.; as well as engaging in case-studying and problem-solving activities.

To sum up, the effectiveness of our online ESP course based on CBI has shown that implementing this approach in online education truly deserves recognition and acceptance. Although we view this course as an additional educational tool for our border guard cadets to enhance their language proficiency level, it can also be incorporated into in-service training course programs to train the personnel of the whole border guard agency of Ukraine while remaining on duty. This course is also applicable to the personnel of law enforcement and military institutions who perform tasks similar to those entrusted to the SBGSU, namely the National Police, Security Service of Ukraine, and Armed Forces, as well as European educational institutions responsible for the training of border and coast guard officers and staff.

Future research could focus more on investigating the possibility of incorporating AI-based tools into the existing or new distance learning ESP courses to shape and develop border guards' professional communicative skills necessary to perform their professional duties under various conditions of operational and service activity and, more importantly, to improve the quality of the training process of future border guard officers by developing and using modern information and communication technologies.

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