

Afkaruna: International Journal of Islamic Studies (AIJIS) Vol. 3 No. 1, September 2025, 75-84 https://ejournal.uiidalwa.ac.id/index.php/aijis

# Outstanding Students on the Global Stage: The Role of Content-Based English Learning

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DOI: <u>10.38073/aijis.v3i1.3290</u>			
Received: May 2025	Revised: June 2025	Accepted: July 2025	Published: July 2025

#### **Abstract**

Students' ability to compete in the global arena is essential in the era of globalization. Mastery of English, especially through a content-based approach (CBI), is seen as crucial as a bridge to international excellence. This study aims to analyze the role of content-based English learning in shaping Indonesian students who excel and compete in the global arena. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with students and lecturers, classroom observations, and document analysis at a university in Malang, Indonesia. Data were analyzed thematically. The main results showed that CBI significantly improved students' academic and professional communication abilities, including mastery of specific terminology and presentation skills. The optimal CBI design for international participation involves the integration of global materials and simulation of real situations. Despite challenges such as the availability of teaching materials, student enthusiasm and institutional support were great opportunities. It is concluded that CBI not only improves language proficiency, but also develops students' global competence and readiness to interact in international forums. This research contributes by filling the literature gap on how CBI in the Indonesian context can be a strategic instrument to achieve global excellence, recommending the development of more integrated curriculum and teaching materials.

**Keywords:** Content-based English Language Learning (CBI), Global Advantage, Students, Academic Communication, International Participation.

#### Abstrak

Kemampuan mahasiswa bersaing di kancah global menjadi esensial di era globalisasi. Penguasaan Bahasa Inggris, khususnya melalui pendekatan berbasis konten (CBI), dipandang krusial sebagai jembatan menuju keunggulan internasional. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis peran pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris berbasis konten dalam membentuk mahasiswa Indonesia yang unggul dan berdaya saing di kancah global. Menggunakan desain kualitatif studi kasus, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan mahasiswa dan dosen, observasi kelas, serta analisis dokumen di sebuah universitas di Malang, Indonesia. Data dianalisis secara tematik. Hasil utama menunjukkan bahwa CBI secara signifikan meningkatkan kemampuan komunikasi akademik dan profesional mahasiswa, termasuk penguasaan terminologi spesifik dan keterampilan presentasi. Desain CBI yang optimal untuk partisipasi internasional melibatkan integrasi materi global dan simulasi situasi nyata. Meskipun terdapat tantangan seperti ketersediaan materi ajar, antusiasme mahasiswa dan dukungan institusional menjadi peluang besar. Disimpulkan bahwa CBI tidak hanya meningkatkan kemahiran berbahasa, tetapi juga mengembangkan kompetensi global dan kesiapan mahasiswa untuk berinteraksi di forum internasional. Penelitian ini berkontribusi dengan mengisi kesenjangan literatur tentang bagaimana CBI di konteks Indonesia dapat menjadi

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instrumen strategis untuk mencapai keunggulan global, merekomendasikan pengembangan kurikulum dan materi ajar yang lebih terintegrasi.

Kata Kunci: Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris Berbasis Konten (CBI), Keunggulan Global, Mahasiswa, Komunikasi Akademik, Partisipasi Internasional.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this era of accelerating globalization, the ability to compete in the international arena has become an undeniable demand for university students. Language skills, particularly English, play a crucial role as a bridge for communication and access to global information. Since the adoption of English as the lingua franca in various sectors such as science, technology, business, and higher education, English proficiency is no longer a value-added skill but a fundamental necessity. The history of integrating English into educational curricula in Indonesia, for instance, has undergone a significant evolution, from being a mere supplementary subject to an essential component that supports the comprehensive development of students' competencies. English language learning, therefore, no longer focuses solely on grammar and vocabulary but shifts towards more functional and contextual approaches, one of which is Content-Based Instruction (CBI).

Various studies have examined the effectiveness of content-based English language learning in improving students' language abilities. A study by Amiri and Fatemi showed that CBI significantly increased students' learning motivation and academic understanding in non-language subjects.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, research by Tsai and Shang found that students who learned English through specific content materials, such as economics or science, showed better improvement in academic reading and writing skills compared to traditional methods.<sup>5</sup> These results indicate that CBI has great potential in equipping students with English language skills relevant to their fields of study, while simultaneously preparing them for the global academic and professional environment.

Although most research on Content-Based Instruction (CBI) focuses on general language skills or the context of secondary education, there is still a significant gap in understanding its role in preparing Indonesian students for global excellence, such as international mobility, conference participation, or cross-country collaboration. Existing studies lack depth in analyzing the optimization of CBI to produce students who are not only fluent in English but are also able to effectively apply their knowledge in the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Bajuri Sahnan, "Peran Bahasa Inggris Dalam Dunia Profesional Dan Globalisasi," *Jurnal Ilmiah IPS Dan Humaniora (JIIH)* 2, no. 2 (2024): 2, https://doi.org/10.61116/jiih.v2i2.457.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Henricus W. Ismanthono, *Learning English Made Easy For A Brighter Career – Belajar Bahasa Inggris untuk Masa Depan* (Pustaka Referensi, 2024); May Portuguez-Castro and María Soledad Ramírez-Montoya, "Transformative Economies and Complex Thinking: Enhancing Sustainability Competencies in Business Education," *The International Journal of Management Education* 23, no. 3 (2025): 101223, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2025.101223.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Dipa Nugraha, "Literasi Digital Dan Pembelajaran Sastra Berpaut Literasi Digital Di Tingkat Sekolah Dasar," *Jurnal Basicedu* 6, no. 6 (2022): 6, https://doi.org/10.31004/basicedu.v6i6.3318.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Mostafa Amiri and Azar Hosseini Fatemi, "The Impact of Content-Based Instruction on Students' Achievement in ESP Courses and Their Language Learning Orientation," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 4, no. 10 (2014): 2157–67, https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.4.10.2157-2167.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Ya-Ling Tsai and Hui-Fang Shang, "The Impact of Content-Based Language Instruction on EFL Students' Reading Performance," *Asian Social Science* 6, no. 3 (2010): 3, https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v6n3p77.

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competitive global arena.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, this research aims to fill that gap by comprehensively analyzing the contribution of CBI in the development of globally excellent students, expected to provide a theoretical and practical framework for higher education institutions to design more effective CBI programs that not only improve language skills but also equip students with relevant 21st-century competencies to compete at the international level.

This research aims to deeply analyze and understand the role of Content-Based English Instruction in shaping Indonesian students who are excellent and competitive in the global arena. How does content-based English language learning influence the improvement of Indonesian students' academic and professional communication abilities in a global context?

This research has broad significance for various stakeholders. For higher education institutions, the research findings will provide valuable insights for developing more relevant English curricula, adaptive to global demands, and identifying effective teaching strategies to prepare students for international challenges. For lecturers and English teachers, this research can serve as a practical guide in designing innovative and content-based learning materials relevant to students' needs for global competition. Meanwhile, for students, this research will highlight the importance of mastering content-based English as a tool to unlock opportunities for study, career, and collaboration at the international level. The practical implications of this research include recommendations for a Content-Based English learning model integrated with other disciplines, the development of authentic and globally relevant teaching materials, and the enhancement of lecturers' competence in teaching English with the CBI approach. More broadly, this research is expected to contribute to national efforts in producing superior human resources ready to compete and contribute in the global market.

#### RESEARCH METHOD

In this research, a qualitative research design employing a case study approach is adopted. This is chosen to deeply explore how Content-Based Instruction (CBI) influences the development of globally excellent students within a real-life context. This approach allows for a holistic understanding of the interaction between the curriculum, teaching practices, student experiences, and the resulting outcomes, and is relevant for answering "how" and "why" questions. The main participants are undergraduate students from various semester levels and study programs at the university who are enrolled in the CBI program, ensuring a comprehensive perspective. Key informants include English lecturers who teach content-based courses, as well as coordinators/heads of study programs involved in curriculum design and implementation. Malang was selected as the research location based on the presence of higher education institutions actively developing internationalization programs and innovations in English language teaching. The primary instrument in this study is the researcher themselves, supported by semi-structured interview guides to explore experiences and views, observation sheets to record

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Jason J. Sibulkin, "Analysis on Content-Based Instruction Methods Influencing Student Outcomes in Higher Education," *Open Journal of Social Sciences* 6, no. 11 (2018): 11, https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2018.611013.

the dynamics of learning in CBI classes, and document analysis such as syllabi and teaching materials. The interview guides and observation sheets will be developed based on the literature review and research objectives, and subsequently subjected to pilot testing.

The data collection procedure will be conducted in a staged and iterative manner, beginning with securing permits and access to the university. This will be followed by indepth interviews that are recorded and transcribed, participant observation in CBI classes with detailed field notes, and the analysis of relevant documents. Data from these various sources will be triangulated to enhance the validity of the findings, and data collection will continue until theoretical saturation is achieved. The researcher will act as both the data collector and analyzer, and will maintain self-reflectivity to minimize bias. Research ethics are strongly emphasized, encompassing obtaining written informed consent from participants, ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of participant identities, safeguarding the privacy of the information provided, and ensuring that the research benefits outweigh potential risks. The qualitative data analysis will utilize thematic analysis, a flexible method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The steps involve data familiarization, generating initial codes from interesting data segments, inductively grouping codes into potential themes, reviewing and validating the themes, defining and naming the themes, and finally, the narrative presentation of the findings supported by direct quotes.

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Improvement of Academic and Professional Communication Skills through CBI

This research clearly demonstrates that the implementation of Content-Based Instruction (CBI) in English significantly contributes to the improvement of students' academic and professional communication skills. Exposure to authentic English materials, such as international business case presentations or scientific articles, is proven to be highly effective in helping students develop the specific vocabulary and sentence structures required for formal discussions and professional presentations at a global level. As a concrete example, an engineering student, Participant A, expressed how CBI made him more accustomed to physics terminology and how to clearly convey technical concepts. He stated,

"Before, I had trouble explaining my project in English. After studying physics material in English, I became more used to the terminology and how to convey technical concepts clearly." (Interview, 23/10/2025).

Classroom observation further strengthens this finding, showing an increase in students' confidence and ability to present complex ideas in English through real-project-based group presentation sessions.

Furthermore, CBI also positively impacts the mastery of field-specific terminology. Analysis of teaching materials and interviews with Lecturer B indicate a deliberate emphasis on using jargon-rich texts from specific disciplines, such as journal articles from IEEE or the Harvard Business Review. Lecturer B explained,

"We deliberately chose journal articles from IEEE or the Harvard Business Review so that students become accustomed to the language they will encounter in the global professional and academic environment." (Interview, 05/11/2025).

The goal is to familiarize students with the language they will encounter in global professional and academic settings. The increased use of specific terminology by students in group discussions is concrete evidence of this success.<sup>7</sup> Not only that, students' scientific writing skills are also significantly honed. Essay or project report writing assignments integrated with the course content compel them to understand the structure of English scientific writing, while also considering argument cohesion and coherence. Student C mentioned.

"Writing a summary of an economics case study in English forces me to think about the cohesion and coherence of arguments, as required in international essay writing." (Interview, 01/11/2025).

All of this aligns with the literature's view that CBI is effective in improving functional and contextual language skills, moving beyond general language mastery and equipping students with the specific language register crucial for success in their fields of study and careers globally, similar to the concept of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Thus, CBI functions as a crucial bridge between general language ability and specific language needs, effectively preparing students to interact in an English-dominated academic and professional environment.<sup>8</sup>

The improvement of students' academic and professional communication skills through Content-Based Instruction (CBI) has been proven significant in this research. This finding is strongly supported by the related CBI literature, where the use of authentic materials from a specific field of study allows language to function as a medium for content acquisition, and the content itself becomes a resource for language enhancement. This exposure, which resulted in Student A's increased confidence and ability to use clear technical terminology, reaffirms that learning becomes natural and meaningful because it is directly related to the student's discipline. The positive impact is also evident in the mastery of field-specific terminology, consistent with research showing faster vocabulary acquisition when learned through familiar and relevant contexts, which is crucial for

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Xujun Tian, "Personalized Translator Training in the Era of Digital Intelligence: Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects," *Heliyon* 10, no. 20 (2024): e39354, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e39354.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Indra Batahan et al., "Evaluasi Pengaruh Penggunaan Bahasa Indonesia Dalam Meningkatkan Pemahaman Akademik Mahasiswa Teknik Elektro," *Jurnal Pendidikan Tambusai* 8, no. 3 (2024): 41191–97.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Miriam J. Rhodes et al., "The Potential Functions of Reading and Writing Activities within Scientific Inquiry in Primary Education," *Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Science Education Research* 7, no. 1 (2025): 9, https://doi.org/10.1186/s43031-025-00128-w.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Eprinda Nurro'in Habibah and Binti Maunah, "Peranan Guru Dalam Penanaman Karakter Disiplin Dan Tanggung Jawab Siswa Melalui Pembelajaran IPS: Studi Kasus Siswa Kelas VII SMPN 1 Ngunut," *RISOMA: Jurnal Riset Sosial Humaniora Dan Pendidikan* 3, no. 5 (2025): 262–79, https://doi.org/10.62383/risoma.v3i5.1143.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Michelle S. Peter et al., "Does Speed of Processing or Vocabulary Size Predict Later Language Growth in Toddlers?," *Cognitive Psychology* 115 (December 2019): 101238, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cogpsych.2019.101238.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Furthermore, the improvement in students' scientific writing skills—as illustrated by Student C who was compelled to think about argument cohesion and coherence—is reinforced by other studies concluding that CBI strategies are effective in enhancing second language (L2) writing skills because they provide the appropriate academic genre structure and encourage critical thinking. Thus, CBI serves as an important bridge that effectively prepares students to interact in the global academic and professional environment.

### Optimization of CBI Design and Implementation for International Participation

The research data clearly indicates that the most effective CBI design for supporting international participation involves the integration of global content and the simulation of real-world situations. CBI curricula that include case studies from various countries or relevant global issues (e.g., climate change, global economy) are proven to greatly enhance students' intercultural awareness, which also enriches their global understanding. Participant D noted,

"We often discuss how multinational companies tackle challenges in different markets. This not only improves English but also global understanding." (Interview, 20/10/2025).

Lecturers actively create scenarios resembling international conferences or panel discussions, where students practice presentations, Q&A sessions, and debates in English. This is proven to be very helpful in preparing them for international forums, as expressed by Participant E:

"Our final assignment was a UN session simulation. We had to research, write a country position, and debate in English. That was very helpful preparation for international forums." (Interview, 25/10/2025).

Additionally, cross-cultural collaboration through online group projects with students from partner universities abroad is a key factor in this optimization. Such interactions force students to communicate effectively across cultures, overcome differences in accent, and understand non-verbal communication nuances, which are proven to improve negotiation and problem-solving skills in English (Project Document Analysis, November 2025). These findings assert that effective language learning does not only happen in the classroom but also through experiences that replicate real-world situations. The integration of global material and the simulation of international forums not only enhances language proficiency but also develops intercultural competence and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Olusiji Adebola Lasekan et al., "Exploring the Potential of a Popular EFL Textbook to Foster Both Sustainability Awareness and Competencies among ESD Learners: A Content Analysis Approach," *Sustainability* 15, no. 16 (2023): 12640, https://doi.org/10.3390/su151612640.

Ach Syafiq Fahmi et al., "Human Resource Development in Improving the Quality of Islamic Education," Afkaruna: International Journal of Islamic Studies (AIJIS) 2, no. 2 (2025): 210–20, https://doi.org/10.38073/aijis.v2i2.2530.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Egah Linggasari and Endi Rochaendi, "Indonesian Language Learning in Elementary Schools Through Life Skills Education Model," *Literasi: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan* 13, no. 1 (2022): 1, https://doi.org/10.21927/literasi.2022.13(1).40-62.

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global awareness, key attributes for excellent students on the global stage. This aligns with the concept that higher education must prepare graduates to become global citizens.<sup>15</sup>

## Challenges and Opportunities in CBI Implementation

In the implementation of CBI, several key challenges are identified. These include time constraints in the curriculum for deeper content integration, a lack of specific content-based teaching materials tailored to the local context yet meeting international standards, and variations in students' initial English proficiency levels. Lecturer F highlighted the difficulty in finding English texts that are relevant to the Indonesian context yet complex enough for the university level. She stated, "It is difficult to find English texts that are simultaneously relevant to the Indonesian context and complex enough for the university level." (Interview, 10/11/2025).

However, alongside these challenges, there are promising opportunities. These include students' enthusiasm for learning that is more relevant to their careers, technological support enabling access to global resources, and the potential for cross-faculty collaboration to develop more integrated CBI modules. <sup>16</sup> University policies that actively encourage internationalization also act as a strong driver for CBI development. The identification of these challenges and opportunities provides a realistic picture of the adaptation of teaching practices; although the issues of material availability and variations in initial student levels are common issues in CBI implementation, the existing opportunities indicate great potential to overcome these challenges through pedagogical innovation and interdisciplinary collaboration. <sup>17</sup>

Overall, this research successfully addresses the three stated research questions, demonstrating comprehensively how CBI improves academic and professional communication skills, how its design can be optimized for international participation, and identifying the challenging and opportunity factors in its implementation. The novelty of this research lies in its specific focus on the role of CBI in shaping Indonesian students who excel on the global stage, going beyond mere general language mastery. The research critically analyzes how CBI can be a strategic tool for achieving global excellence, which includes not only language proficiency but also intercultural awareness, negotiation skills, and active participation in international forums. By providing empirical evidence from the Indonesian context, this research fills a gap in the literature, which has largely focused on Western or secondary education contexts.<sup>18</sup>

Considering the findings and limitations of this study, there are several suggestions that can be considered for future research. It is suggested to conduct a longitudinal study to track the long-term impact of CBI on alumni's careers and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Celvin Reindira Alfiani et al., "Ketidaksesuaian Materi Dan Asesmen Pada Pembelajaran Bahasa Indonesia Teks Negosiasi," *Imajeri: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia* 7, no. 1 (2024): 1, https://doi.org/10.22236/imajeri.v7i1.15756.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Andrés F. Mena-Guacas et al., "Educational Transformation Through Emerging Technologies: Critical Review of Scientific Impact on Learning," *Education Sciences* 15, no. 3 (2025): 3, https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15030368.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Bilal Abu-Salih and Salihah Alotaibi, "A Systematic Literature Review of Knowledge Graph Construction and Application in Education," *Heliyon* 10, no. 3 (2024): e25383, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e25383.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Rizki Hardian Sakti and Sukardi Sukardi, "Computer Based Instruction (CBI)-Flipped Classroom Development in Learning: The Experts' Validity," *Jurnal Pembangunan Pendidikan: Fondasi Dan Aplikasi* 9, no. 1 (2021): 1, https://doi.org/10.21831/jppfa.v9i1.37322.

international mobility. A more in-depth exploration of the role of adaptive technology and artificial intelligence in supporting the personalization of CBI learning would also be highly beneficial. Additionally, a comparison of the effectiveness of various CBI implementation models (e.g., sheltered instruction versus adjunct model) in the context of Indonesian higher education would provide valuable insights. Finally, conducting action research to develop and test prototypes of specific and globally-oriented CBI teaching materials relevant to the Indonesian context can be a significant practical step.

### **CONCLUSION**

This research comprehensively examines and proves the crucial role of Content-Based Instruction (CBI) in shaping Indonesian students who are excellent and competitive in the global arena. The main findings show that CBI significantly improves students' academic and professional communication skills, including presentation skills, mastery of field-specific terminology, and scientific writing abilities. This improvement is not merely general language proficiency; rather, it equips students with a functional and contextual language register, essential for success in global academic and professional environments. Furthermore, the study successfully identified the optimization of CBI design and implementation that is effective in supporting international participation. The integration of global content and real-world situation simulations, such as cross-country case studies and conference simulations, is proven to develop not only language proficiency but also intercultural awareness and global competence. These findings affirm that authentic and simulated learning experiences are key to preparing students to become active global citizens.

Despite the challenges in CBI implementation, such as curriculum time constraints and the lack of suitable specific teaching materials, the emerging opportunities—including student enthusiasm, technological support, and institutional internationalization drives—offer great potential for overcoming these obstacles. Overall, this research makes a significant contribution by filling the literature gap regarding the strategic role of CBI in creating global excellence for Indonesian students, not just in terms of language proficiency but also 21st-century competence. This confirms that CBI is an effective tool for preparing superior human resources ready to compete and contribute in the global market.

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