

## Tertiary Learners' Attitudes towards Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Bangladesh

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**Abstract:** *This study investigates the status of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) among the tertiary learners of Bangladesh by examining their beliefs, feelings, and attitudes towards it. The participants are from various departments of a public university where English is taught at least as a full credit course. To gather the data from them, questionnaires were used and interviews were taken. The analyses of both data types show that the students are highly interested in CLT methodology. Form-based instruction may no longer be effective enough in English teaching here where designing tasks to make them communicatively competent has become inevitable. The results also signify that the learners' need is to be given the prime priority in designing language curricula for them.*

**Keywords:** *Learners' attitudes, tertiary learners, Communicative Language Teaching*

### 1. Introduction

To make language teaching more effective, feasible and objective-oriented, different types of methods are used in EFL classes. In Bangladeshi mainstream institutions, English had been taught with the help of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) mostly, where there was no emphasis on speaking until 1990 (Hamid & Baldauf Jr., 2008; Farhad, 2013). Students from Grade 1 to Grade 12 and at the tertiary level study English as an obligatory course (Hamid & Baldauf Jr., 2008). Communicative language teaching (CLT) is considered a more operative and widespread methodology than all other methods to advance learners' communicative competence, nowadays. Hence, officially the students of Bangladesh, as Hamid and Baldauf Jr. (2008) see, "are taught English communicatively using Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodology". It emphasizes improving learner's aptitude to practise language correctly in context whereas most other methods focus on learner awareness of structural components (Savignone & Wang, 2003).

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That is why the teacher-centred view of language teaching has been replaced by the learner-centred view with the advent of CLT. Hymes (1971) was the proponent of the term “communicative competence” as a core concept in CLT, which refers to one’s capability to utilize language in a societal setting. In the CLT classroom situation, learning occurs in a small class through group and pair work. Instead of mastery of form, which is the goal in traditional methods, meaningful communication of L2 is the target in the CLT classroom situation. CLT incorporates a range of activities, grounded in the learners’ interaction with each other rather than distinctive learning endeavour (Richards & Rodgers, 2006).

Bangladesh is, in fact, a monolingual country. Nonetheless, English is coached here as a second language because of its adapting to the process of globalization. CLT has been adopted in Bangladesh since the 1990s to make a difference in teaching English (Sinha & Alam, 2009). Therefore, this methodology has been used in teaching and learning English in this country for almost twenty years (Rasheed, 2012). In actuality, still, the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is pursued (Akhter, 2010). As the teachers followed GTM for a long time, they are in a confused state while adapting CLT. Other than this, there are several restrictions both inside and outside the class which has made it problematic to implement CLT in the class. Among the several factors affecting the effectiveness of adopting CLT are the teacher and student feeling about this. Several studies have been done to explore teacher feelings of CLT. According to Tanaka & Ellis (2003), learner belief is one of the key elements affecting individual learner differences in second language learning. It influences learners’ behaviours and strategies to learn the language. This study investigates tertiary English Language learners’ perceptions of their classroom experiences and their views on language learning.

The research questions in this study are:

1. What are the beliefs of the learners about learning the English language at the tertiary level?
2. What are the views of the learners of their classroom experiences?
3. What are the attitudes of the learners’ to the practices in the classroom following CLT?

## 2. Literature Review

Much research was done on CLT in the past four decades. In the following, the researcher would like to discuss the theoretical overview of CLT and Bangladeshi contextual perspectives towards CLT.

### 2.1 Features of CLT

CLT was first initiated in England in 1970. To give special emphasis on communication, it was regarded as revolutionary (Ansarey, 2012). However, it is not a method of teaching a language with evidently distinct practices in the classroom. Rather it is characterized as a broad approach to teaching. Thus, it is outlined as a series of factors or principles (Tarannum, 2010). The popular features of CLT, as assigned by Nunan (1991), are:

- Importance of learning to communicate by means of communication in L2,
- Introducing “authentic texts”,
- The scope for learners to focus on both language and learning management processes,
- An improvement of the experiences of the learners as significant contributory factors to learning,
- An effort to relate learning language in the classroom with verbal activities beyond the classroom.

Richards and Rodgers (2001) were of the opinion that CLT started with a theory of language as communication, and its target is to advance the communicative competence of learners. They epitomized the communicative view of language as follows:

- ☒ Language is the means of expressing meaning.
- ☒ Communication is the first priority of a language.
- ☒ The formal features of a language give an idea of its functional and communicative application.
- ☒ Not only grammatical and formal features but also levels of functional and communicative meaning are the key components of language.

## **2.2 Classroom Practices in CLT**

The common classroom activities in CLT is communication-oriented. Here, the teacher makes lesson plans, selects and modifies materials and tasks, conduct the lessons, organises the learners' demeanor, etc. (Tarannum, 2010). The role of the teacher is to monitor and control the learners, check homework, providing cue and the like. He doesn't act as a dominator but as a facilitator. Harmer (2001) says, "In these situations, the teacher is no longer the giver of knowledge, the controller, and the authority, but rather a facilitator and a resource for the students to draw on." However, Tarannum (2010) sees the lack of teacher training in Bangladesh to adopt the method properly. For that reason, the teachers in this country still prefer teaching in traditional methods. As a result, the classroom becomes an uninspiring, unexciting and tiresome to the learners (Tarannum, 2010). On the other hand, the learners play the role of active participants in CLT. As per Breen and Candlin (qtd. in Richards & Rodgers, 2001), the roles of learners in CLT is connecting the self with the learning process. The learner contributes as much as he can and thereby, learning becomes interdependent. Apart from these, the techniques and materials used in CLT classes are "authentic material", "scrambled sentences", "language games", "picture strip story" and "role-play" (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

## **3. CLT in Bangladeshi Context**

The studies were done on the practice of CLT in different contexts by the researchers with the view that the contexts are essential to materialize any alternative approaches in Bangladeshi EFL context as, "In order for an implementation strategy to be effective, it is first necessary to identify those issues, which will facilitate or possibly inhibit change" (Karim, 2004). Several studies have suggested that there are often mismatches between teachers and learners (Savignone & Wang, 2003). To understand the mismatches for the curricular reform in the ESL in Bangladesh, a study was conducted by English in Action [EIA], (2011). Specifically, the survey was to explore the school level learners' and teachers' feelings of classroom practices. The survey showed that overall teacher talk was slightly more than the student talk in primary and secondary schools in the country. It was significantly better than the previous situation, the study also signifies. Karim et al. (2017) studied how teachers' beliefs are hindering the prospects of CLT

in Bangladesh. They identified that the teachers have misconceptions towards learning English, about what works best and about what principles are derived from approaches/methods. Another research was done by Tarannum (2010) to investigate the teachers' and learners' feelings of CLT. Karim (2004) studied teachers' perspectives towards CLT in post-secondary education in Bangladesh. He found that the instructors possess a very good insight into CLT, which negates the common conception towards them. In his research, Roy (2016) suggested that there are some challenges in applying CLT in Bangladesh including the mismatch between text and assessment, teachers' salary, their lack of appropriate pre-service and in-service guidance. Islam & Bari (2012) made a comparative study to examine the problems and challenges in employing CLT in Bangladesh and Thailand. This study found out that most of the problems are connected to classroom management which is much similar in both the countries. Besides, several studies were conducted to understand the teachers' perspective only. Nevertheless, investigating the learners' perspective at the tertiary level was due. The present study, hence, is on the tertiary learner's perspective concerning CLT.

**Methods:** To explore the learners' understandings and suggestions, a mixed method of data collection was followed. Thus, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. Rather than simply administering the questionnaires, this study incorporated both questionnaires and interviews.

**Instruments:** The data on students' feelings based on their past experiences and expectations were collected by means of questionnaires. Interviews were made of a few students to know their own understanding of a good learner and the strategies followed by them. Dörnyei (2007) says "The main data collection method in surveys is the use of questionnaires". The questionnaire used by Savignon and Wang (2003), to gather data regarding Taiwanese school learners' beliefs of CLT, was taken up and revised for the study.

The questionnaire containing 48 remarks were divided into three groups. Group 1 and Group 2 each consist of 10 remarks that are connected to the feeling of learners' experiences of the classroom. 4 remarks are connected to form-driven classroom practices and 5 remarks are connected to meaning-driven classroom practices. The 10th remark in both groups addresses attitudes to error correction by the teachers. The third group consists of 28 remarks concerning the understanding of learning English in general.

The first 10 remarks are like in essence to the 10 remarks in groups 1 and 2 of the questionnaire. Moreover, remarks 11 to 15 precisely talk about understanding of grammar-centred teaching; remarks 16 to 18 refer to understanding of meaning-based instruction; remarks 19 and 20 are connected to understanding of error correction; remarks 21 and 22 are involved with pronunciation; remarks 23, 24 and 27 address the importance of English; and remarks 25 and 26 are involved with learner feelings of the interrelationship between language learning ability and intelligence. Remark 28 concerns about learners' aspiration of speaking native-like.

Answers were scored on Likert scale from 1 to 5 as follows- 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree & 5 = strongly agree.

**Interviews:** Interviews of 10 students were taken in order to collect qualitative data to gain a deeper understanding. Interviews were taken regarding learning and teaching. Responses were hand-written notes

**Sampling:** A total of 30 participants answered the questionnaire intended to understand their outlooks and feelings of communicative language teaching. Apart from that as the subsections of the learners who completed questionnaires, 10 learners took part in interviews. Students from different batches and different majors who studied English language courses for at least once at the University of Dhaka were involved in this project to answer the questions. In selecting, it was made sure that all the participants are from the university level and from the University of Dhaka only. It is generally perceived in the country that the meritorious students from different regions get admitted to this university each year. Hence, the learners of this institution were selected so that the practice of teaching English using CLT in different regions and the learners' attitude towards them can be understood. Also, learners from different departments of the university were selected to understand the practice and the learners' attitude towards them can be identified.

**Method of Data Collection:** Each participant asked in the research and were informed about their rights to secure the ethical standards of the study. To secure their privacy, the names of the participants were not taken. The researcher selected 10 students randomly from different majors to take interviews. For questionnaire responses, he went to the English department and various student dormitories. All learners were well informed about the

questions. They were given as much time as needed to answer all the questions.

#### **Method of Data Analysis:**

The qualitative data collected via questionnaires were analysed using Microsoft Excel 2013. The questions required a Likert scale to be answered. Then the percentage of participants according to the specific responses was calculated. For the interview data, every interview was analysed and interpreted.

#### **4. Results and Discussion of Findings**

Items	Mean
<b>Form-connected</b>	
1) Grammar-focused English teaching	2.97 <sup>D</sup>
2) Bangla used most of the time	3.43 <sup>U</sup>
3) Explaining & practicing grammar	3.23 <sup>U</sup>
4) Seldom mouth opening	3.2 <sup>U</sup>
<b>Mean of the items 1-4</b>	<b>2.95<sup>D</sup></b>
<b>Error correction</b>	
5) Teacher corrected errors	2.3 <sup>D</sup>
<b>Communication-based</b>	
6) Communication-centred teaching	2.9 <sup>D</sup>
7) Activities connected to communication	3.2 <sup>U</sup>
8) Interaction-based with grammar when needed	3.5 <sup>A</sup>
9) Trial & Error	3.6 <sup>A</sup>
10) Atmosphere created for English	3.3 <sup>U</sup>
<b>Mean of the items 6-10</b>	<b>3.3<sup>U</sup></b>

SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, SA = strongly agree, A = agree, U = undecided

**Table 1: Feelings of Classroom Practices**

Table 1 shows the university learners' feelings of English classroom practices they underwent. The average of (2.95D) of the components 1- 4 shows that the classroom exercises are not properly form-based. Moreover, Bangla is used much but not excessively. Also, grammar explanation and practice are done many a time and students talk less in English. The teachers rarely correct errors in class (mean = 2.3D) and teaching is not communicative at all. Communication-based upon grammar and trial and error method is done as a part of communicative learning. The learners' view is neutral (mean = 3.3U) to decide whether the classrooms are communication-based.

Items	Mean
<b>Form-connected</b>	
1) Grammar-intended English teaching	3.1 <sup>U</sup>
2) Bangla used most of the time	2.6 <sup>D</sup>
3) Explaining & practicing grammar	2.5 <sup>D</sup>
4) Seldom mouth opening	2.1 <sup>D</sup>
<b>Mean of the items 1-4</b>	<b>2.58<sup>D</sup></b>
<b>Error correction</b>	
5) Teacher corrected errors	3.8 <sup>A</sup>
<b>Communication-based</b>	
6) Communication-centred teaching	4 <sup>A</sup>
7) Activities connected to communication	4.3 <sup>A</sup>
8) Interaction-based with grammar when needed	4.4 <sup>A</sup>
9) Trial & Error	4 <sup>A</sup>
10) Atmosphere created for English	4.4 <sup>A</sup>
<b>Mean of the items 6-10</b>	<b>4.22<sup>A</sup></b>

SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, SA = strongly agree, A = agree, U = undecided

### Table 2: Attitude towards Perceived Classroom Practices Discussion

Table 2 shows the university learners' attitude towards the English language



classroom practices they have gone through. The students' strong dislike for grammar-based instruction is expressed by the mean (2.58D). Though the learners reported they dislike speaking English seldom, the reality is something different. They prefer their teachers' correcting their errors (mean= 3.8A). Communicative based teaching and learning are highly preferable to them (mean= 4.22A).

Item	Mean
Grammar-based: 1-4 and 11-15	2.78 <sup>D</sup>
Communication-based: 5-9 and 16-18	3.36 <sup>U</sup>
Error correction: 10, 19, 20	3.50 <sup>A</sup>
Pronunciation 21, 22	4.12 <sup>A</sup>
Attitude toward English: 23, 24, 27	3.08 <sup>U</sup>

SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, SA = strongly agree, A = agree, U = undecided

**Table 3: Understanding of Learning English**

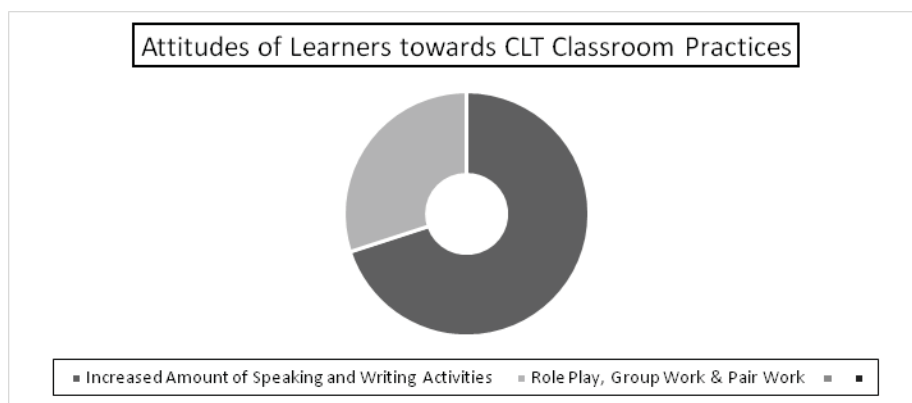
Table 3 displays the university learners' overall perspective of English. It shows that the learners prefer native-like pronunciations (mean = 4.12A). The error correction by the teacher is welcomed (mean = 3.50A) but the mean of learners' attitudes towards English (3.08U) are below the mark.

The following two questions were asked in interviews:

1. Please explain how you study English. What strategies, study skills do you use to practice four skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking), vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation)?
2. What classroom techniques should the teacher use in the class to improve the students' speaking, reading, writing & listening?

To answer the first question, one learner wrote, "I learn English by practicing vocabulary and speaking. I believe more and more practice is needed to achieve these." Another student was of a similar view who said that he learns by knowing many words and writing more and more. Therefore, it is under-

standable that though different learners have a different way of learning, to develop the four macro skills, they follow, more or less the same processes. The second question was to identify the learners' perspective of useful classroom techniques. To answer this question, one learner emphasizes group work, solving questions, error correction, using the pronunciation dictionaries and the like.



**Chart 1: Attitudes of Learners towards CLT Classroom Practices**

By analysing all the interviews as in Chart 1, it is found that 70% of them were in the opinion of an increased amount of speaking and writing activities to improve proficiency in English. 30% gave importance on role play, group work and pair work which bear the testimony that they prefer communicative approach rather than merely following the traditional GTM.

In this section, the answers to the research questions found in the study will be discussed. The first research question was to know what learners' beliefs are about studying the English language at the tertiary level in general. The findings suggest that learners' have a strong position of meaningful communication rather than learning forms following the Grammar-Translation Method. Their beliefs may be accelerated by the current recruitments in this age of globalization. Regarding error correction, learners' have an agreement that is nearly neutral in position. Concerning pronunciation, the learners found it imperative to be a good language learner. A student said, "I prefer to access myself in a good English-speaking situation. If I don't get it, I often see movies to practice good pronunciation." The second research

question was to know what the learners' views of their classroom experiences are. The data evidently suggests that teaching English at the tertiary level is meant to be communication-focused. To the learners', the current study examined, their classroom experiences were communication-based. Teachers use group work, pair work or role play. They enjoyed these as they testified. However, at the same time, they experienced grammar teaching which is basically done by teaching some specific forms. Errors were corrected in traditional processes. The students also viewed the presence of the trial and error method in learning. They were exposed to practice and thus make an error. Kelly (1980) suggests that the classroom environment influenced the learners a lot. As a result, both beliefs and classroom situations influence language feelings. In this study, the third research question was to know the learners' attitudes towards classroom practices in CLT. Learners' perspectives in this respect were highly appreciative. Learners like most when communicative activities were mostly done in the class. Learners also preferred their grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary to be corrected. They employed several techniques of their own to achieve proficiency to a successful extent.

## **5. Conclusion**

Among the other important aspects like aptitude and motivation, learners' attitudes, beliefs, and feelings have great importance on the classroom outcome. The findings of the study show that the learners maintain their strong beliefs regarding methodological interventions to learn English. These strong beliefs help them achieve a high level of positive attitude towards meaning and process-based approaches to learning English. Analyzing various connected elements the study highly suggests that learner need should be given the utmost priority while teaching English. It should also be taken into consideration that the students of Bangla-medium schools are experiencing CLT for a long time after its orientation. Consequently, being accustomed to the CLT circumstance, they develop the mindset that the more classroom techniques are CLT oriented, the more opportunities they will get to learn English.

This study had certain limitations. It covered only 30 participants from a single university. However, the finding suggests that the learners' beliefs and attitudes should be taken into great consideration. Finally, learners' beliefs are of very importance to help teachers develop the curriculum efficiently for better learning.

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