

## Secondary Level Students' Attitudes toward Communicative Language Teaching in Bangladesh

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**Abstract:** This paper discusses the attitudes students have towards Communicative Language Teaching after their primary education. Although research of a similar nature has been done, the present research complements others by following 97 students in the school level studies, and it provides another avenue for examining the language situation in Bangladesh. The findings suggested that students were generally comfortable with the language environments and courses offered in secondary settings; they agreed that learning English through CLT method is important in the computer era. The respondents in the present study, who had just obtained their first degree (Primary Education), reported that group work activities are essential for communication and in promoting genuine interaction among students and by mastering the rules of grammar, students become fully capable of communicating with a non-native speaker. The respondents also reported that most of the students acquire their English knowledge for communication with others effectively when CLT is used in their classes through text book which helped them obtain the language needed for career and personal growth. They realized how important it is to possess a positive attitude towards the use of CLT for learning English.

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### 1. Introduction

It is true that, English Language (used in classroom), the language of English news, business communication (specially out of the country), information, opportunity (getting good jobs), employment, power and prestige in Bangladesh, has become the synonym of all progress in the recent years. Notwithstanding the fact that today it enjoys the status of a big business in the wake of globalization, teaching and learning of it in educational institutions in our country is rather inadequate and unproductive. The situation is worse in rural areas where most of the students observe English as a terrifying subject as they register failure therein and thereof. Today, a majority of students (after passing their secondary level education) enter the college and receive education with the notion that they are learning, not for knowledge but for employment. Moreover, the first requirement for good salaried job is to be well versed in English. While the urban students get authentic power to enter into the position both from at home and at college, the rural students would not be the same because of their aversion and build an antagonistic attitude towards the English language. The result is that they lack in even the basic functional knowledge of English. Though English has got central place in Educational Institutions in Bangladesh and it is learned for practical utility these days but the standard of English language in this country specially in the rural areas is deplorable. Of late, Secondary level teachers of English in Bangladesh have become

painfully aware that most students in the school easily manage to pass the examination without making much effort to either pick up the language or to learn the appreciation of literature. Most of the students attend classes because they have to complete the minimum requirement of lectures so that they can appear in the examination. The situation is worse in rural areas where most of the students are lacked of getting perfect idea about English through the teachers (lack of well trained teachers and deficiency of proper books). Therefore 'creativity' is lost somewhere. Before 1971, the study of English was used in all level educational institutions in Bangladesh where a number of English language teaching methods are used like Translation method, Grammar-translation method, Direct method, Audio-lingual method, Humanistic Teaching Approaches, Principled Eclecticism and Task-based teaching. But now, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been added with these methods and gives a new dimension in the field of language learning and teaching alike both in school and college level education in Bangladesh. In fact, communication is now seen as the fundamental reason for learning a language and for many young EFL teachers, communicative teaching has become the only teaching method that they have experienced. As, CLT not only a procedure but also an overall plan for the presentation of language materials, in recent decades, teachers of English have been encouraged to implement CLT to help developing students' abilities to use English appropriately in context. CLT

advocates teaching practices that develop communicative competence in authentic contexts (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). To improve students' abilities to use English in real contexts, CLT has been adopted in the settings of English as Foreign Language (EFL) colleges (Littlewood, 2007). It is clear that students' attitudes are important in their decision to implement CLT. The reason for the mismatch between CLT theory and practice may be teachers' attitudes (Karavas-Doukas, 1995). Since teachers' attitudes reveal teachers' thinking about teaching language, the investigation of teachers' attitude serves as a starting point to identify the possible contradictions between teachers' beliefs and CLT principles. It is always seen that teachers' attitudes are highly signified than students' attitudes specially for implementing language teaching method or methods. So, it is important to investigate the secondary (both junior and high schools) level students' attitudes towards CLT in Bangladesh.

## 2. Background

Communicative Language Teaching is a method of teaching by which second and foreign languages are learnt and taught alike without any obstacle. The origins of it are to be found in the changes of the British language teaching tradition dating from the late 1960s. Wilkins (1972) in his book titled "Notional Syllabus" played a significant role for the development of CLT and its greater application between the teachers and learners simultaneously. One of the most characteristic features of CLT is that it pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language and describes spoken and written discourse. The goal of CLT is to develop communicative competence. It means what a speaker needs to know in order to be communicatively competent in a speech community which adjacent with a number of functions such as, instrumental, regulatory, inter-actional, personal, and heuristic, imaginative and representational. Though this method was started in England in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century but it was introduced for teaching English at secondary education in Bangladesh in 2001 and is being continued till today. The above mentioned methods are used in many countries of the world in different situations even in Bangladeshi teaching programs like secondary, higher-secondary and advanced level educations. Among the above mentioned methods the grammar translation method is being used in Bangladesh before 1971 to till today at all stages of educational program including higher-secondary level education. But at present Communicative language teaching has been included with it through it's full prestige and this method is developed by English Language Teaching

Improvement Project (ELTIP). The purpose of using this method in Bangladesh was to update the English language teaching at the Secondary education in Bangladesh meaningfully. ELTIP started working since July 1997. The project is sponsored by the ministry of education. This project has been working to promote teaching learning of English in the Secondary level education in Bangladesh and introduced the communicative language teaching approach in the English curriculum of the country for the first time. It's now necessary to assess the suitability of CLT in context to Bangladesh through the secondary level students' attitudes towards CLT for learning English through their text books in classroom and out of their classroom.

## 3. Literature Review

According to Hymes (1972), competence should be viewed as "the overall underlying knowledge and ability for language which the speaker-listener possesses" (p. 13). That is, the concept of communicative competence involves knowledge of the language and the ability to use the knowledge in context. Communicative competence is a complex notion that involves linguistic as well as sociocultural sectors. From proposed definitions, it can be concluded that communicative competence consists of knowledge of linguistic rules, appropriate language usage in different situations, connection of utterances in a discourse, and strategies to cope with for the use of language.

Karavas-Doukas (1996) suggests that the mismatch between the beliefs and practices may contribute to the neglect of examining teachers' attitudes before implementing any new approach. That is, only promoting the approach and trying to convince the teachers of the effectiveness of CLT does not successfully change the teachers' existing beliefs about language learning and teaching.

Razmjoo and Riaz (2006), Similarly, in their study would like to express that the teachers as a whole expressed positive attitudes toward the five principles of CLT. The teachers held strong views about CLT in the areas of grammar role and teacher role.

Karim's (2004) survey study examined university-level EFL teacher's attitudes toward CLT in Bangladesh. The findings showed that most teachers displayed positive attitudes toward the basic principles of CLT. He also interested to disclose, the teachers were aware of the features of CLT and their perceptions of CLT corresponded with their reported CLT practice.

Hawkey (2006), In Italy, applied both survey and face-to-face interviews to investigate whether teachers agreed with the advantages of the

communicative approach in language teaching. The teachers stated positive views about CLT such as “CLT improving learner motivation and interest”, and “CLT improving communicative skills” (p. 247). Through his research it is known that, teachers’ interviews suggested that the teachers were motivated to use pair-work activities to meet the learners’ communicative needs.

Liao (2003) investigated high school English teachers’ attitudes toward CLT in China. The first-phase survey study reported most Chinese teachers are supportive of the implementation of CLT. The findings indicated that among 302 participants, 94% responded favorably toward CLT and were willing to practice it. In the second-phase interview study, four interviewees were selected from survey participants who displayed favorable attitudes toward CLT. The teachers expressed their agreement with CLT such as, “the teacher should take into account the students’ need”, and “the aim of the class is to enable students to communicate easily in real life situations” (p. 125).

Chang’s (2000) survey study in Taiwan investigated 110 high school English teachers’ attitudes toward CLT and their practice of CLT. The results showed that Taiwanese high school English teachers hold positive attitudes toward CLT. Moreover, the teachers who hold positive attitudes toward CLT tend to use more communicative activities in their classroom practice.

Li’s (2004) study of Chinese teachers’ opinions at a tertiary level indicated that the teachers thought that learners must be given feedback when they produce L2 to modify their production. Since the students already knew how to negotiate meaning in their first language, what they needed to learn were words in order to use them in L2.

The interview data in Carless’s (2004) study revealed that some students used the simplest linguistic forms to complete the tasks.

Burnaby and Sun (1989) reported that Chinese college students learn the knowledge of English for future jobs in China, such as reading technical articles or translation of documents.

This view is confirmed by Tsai’s (2007) study. Taiwanese teachers also thought that EFL students have no immediate need to communicate in English. On the other hand, they need grammar and reading skills in order to learn content knowledge.

Widdowson (1999) says that “learners do not very readily infer knowledge of the language system from their communicative activities.” “Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) values, among other things, learner-centeredness, which is, giving the learners more responsibility and involvement in the learning process. This is often achieved through discovery learning activities and

through group work as opposed to the traditional teacher-fronted lesson. CLT also takes a relatively relaxed attitude towards accuracy in the belief that meaning takes precedence over form. Finally, CLT has inherited the humanist view that language is an expression of personal meaning, rather than an expression of a common culture. Such notions, it is argued, derive from very Western beliefs about education and language. Its critics argue that CLT is an inappropriate methodology in those cultural contexts where the teacher is regarded as a fount of wisdom, and where accuracy is valued more highly than fluency” (Thornbury, S., 2003).

The Communicative Approach has come under attack from teachers for being prejudiced in favor of native-speaker teachers by demanding a relatively uncontrolled range of language use on the part of the student, and thus expecting the teacher to be able to respond to any and every language problem which may come up. In promoting a methodology which is based around group and pair work, with teacher intervention kept to a minimum during, say, a role-play, the Communicative Approach may also offend against educational traditions which it aimed to supplant. The Communicative Approach has sometimes been seen as having eroded the explicit teaching of grammar with a consequent loss among students in accuracy in the pursuit of fluency” (Harmer J., 2003).

#### 4. Statement of the Problem

The present research was designed to investigate the secondary level (school) students’ attitudes towards CLT method which is specially used at secondary / school level education in Bangladesh that contributes a major factor in Bangladeshi education.

#### 5. Objectives

The objectives of the study were implemented through following specific questions:

- (i) How the CLT method is evaluated through the attitudes of the secondary level students in English language teaching at the school (junior and high section) level education in Bangladesh?
- (ii) What are the characteristics of the CLT method?
- (iii) How the CLT method can be used in pragmatically, specially in school level education in Bangladesh?

#### 6. Significance of the Study

This study has great importance for both the students and teachers alike. Specially the students

of the schools, colleges and even in advance level (University) education would be able to know the perfect idea about CLT which play a vital role in the field of learning and teaching practices equally. As this study has collected a lot of information about the method, the effectiveness and appropriateness of the method will be made meaningful. Furthermore, the study will guide the English teachers in exploring proper techniques of teaching through CLT. The significance of the study will also be for the planners and education managers in policy formulation or revision of teacher education programs at secondary, higher secondary and even in advance level education in the country. The students of secondary level education in Bangladesh will not draw back from the minimum requirements which are needed for them getting standard marks. It will also help in-service teacher education institution to award or offer relevant in service i.e. training programs. In addition, the students, teachers and general people of the country will be able to use this method in the classroom and out of the classroom frequently. It will also help the people (who are not actually the students) who are interested in CLT for communicating with the foreigners along with getting good jobs.

### 7. Characteristics of CLT

CLT has been popular and widespread in second and foreign language teaching. It highlights a radical change of the traditional structured teaching methods which have lived through history. Contrary to the teacher-centered approach, in which teachers are regarded as knowledge givers and learners as receivers, CLT reflects a more social relationship between the teacher and learner. The learner-centered approach gives students a sense of “ownership” of their learning and enhances their motivation (Brown, 1994). CLT emphasizes the process of communication and leads learners to different roles from the traditional approach. The role of the learner is negotiator between the self, the learning process, and the object of learning. Learners are actively engaged in negotiating meaning by trying to make themselves understood and in understanding others within the classroom procedures and activities. In this way, they contribute as well as gain in an interdependent way (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). According to Rodgers (2001), there are four characteristics of the communicative view of language as:

- (i) Language is a system for the expression of meaning,
- (ii) The primary function of language is to allow interaction and communication,

- (iii) The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses,
- (iv) The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of function and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse.

However, CLT does not exclude grammar. CLT suggests that grammatical structure might be better understood “within various functional categories” (Brown, 2007, p. 242). In CLT classes, both accuracy and fluency should be taken into consideration in language teaching, but the aim is to build fluency. However, fluency should not be built at the expense of clear communication (Brown, 2007). During fluency-based activities, errors are considered natural and tolerable (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

### 8. Conceptual Framework of Attitudes

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) propose a conceptual framework of attitude construct which consists of four categories: cognition, affect, conation, and behavior. In the framework, attitudes are a function of beliefs. In other words, beliefs have causal effects on attitudes. Typically, a person learns a number of beliefs about an object by direct observation or information from outside sources. People hold a set of beliefs about the object, and these beliefs serve as the basis that determines their attitudes. In the framework, attitudes are viewed to have influence on behavior. Specifically, a person’s attitude toward an object affects the person’s intentions to perform behaviors relating to that object (ibid). However, the relation between attitude and behavior depends on particular conditions. That is, when the person thinks he/she has more resources and fewer obstacles, he/she is more likely to perform the behavior according to his/her intentions. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) indicate that behavior can be determined by intentions; intentions are the results of overall attitude, and attitudes are a function of salient beliefs. However, these causal effects not only work in one direction. Performance can provide new information that changes beliefs, attitudes and intentions.

### 9. Definition of Attitudes

The term ‘attitudes’ as defined by Sarnoff (1970), deals with a disposition to react favourably or unfavourably to a class of objects. Eagly and Chaiken (1989) expand on this idea by stating that attitude is an outcome of the categorization process, this process being influenced by the social environment. Attitudes can be classed as items of social knowledge that are continually formed, strengthened and modified. They

can therefore be defined as mediated reactions that have been strongly influenced by social context (Long & Russell, 1999). Attitudes are a means of adjusting to and making changes in one's social environment.

Baker (1988) outlines the main features as:

1. Attitudes are cognitive and affective.
2. Attitudes are dimensional, in that they vary in degree of favourability / unfavourability.
3. Attitudes incline a person to act in a certain way.
4. Attitudes are learnt.
5. Attitudes often persist, however they can be modified by experience.

### 10. Nature of Language Attitude

Language attitude varies in nature. People show attitudes of different nature such as attitude to the variation of language; attitude to minority language and dominant language; attitude to foreign and second language; attitude to a specific language etc. Whatever the nature of attitude, it has two components: instrumental and integrative (Baker, 1992). Instrumental attitude refers to showing attitude to a particular language for self-achievement and recognition. People favour a particular language when they find that the language is a tool to achieve high status, economic advantage, basic security and survival and matters related to self-orientation. Integrative attitude, on the other hand, concerns someone's attachment with a particular speech community. People show such attitude in order to be identified as a member of the desired community. However, instrumental and integrative orientation to language attitude are not necessarily opposite and alternatives rather complementary to each other.

A person may be motivated in different strengths by both orientations (Baker, 1992). The present study assumes that attitude of the students (secondary/school level) in Bangladesh towards English (especially CLT) is instrumental in orientation. It expects that people in Bangladesh show favourable attitude to English and learn and use

it for individual development and survival in this era of globalization. This study, thus, aims to investigate attitudes of the secondary level students towards CLT.

### 11. Methodology

In order to know the secondary level students' attitude towards the CLT method, a survey was conducted on 97 secondary level students (school) through the questionnaire survey where all of the students were different school levels (both from junior and high schools). As this research is descriptive and non- experimental, the research was based on primary data through questionnaire. The questionnaires, all the questionnaires in the study were originally in English, were printed and sent to the respondents by the author. The survey evaluates their opinions. It also requests for their personal comments, both positive and negative. The results of the survey were made percentage and presented in figure to represent the attitudes of the students' about this method.

### 12. Questionnaire

A questionnaire is made for getting the authentic data from the respondents which will help the research to be perfect or not, including twelve questions where all the questions were structured. These questions were prepared through English language.

### 13. Data Analysis

Data collected were tabulated, analyzed and interpreted and presented in Table: 1 where Percentage was calculated by using statistical technique for analysis and the data obtained was tabulated in term of frequency. Side by side a chart is drawn on the basis of the highest percentages through the respondents' opinion by questionnaire. The short terms which are used in the chart are described below:

SA = Strongly Agreed  
 A = Agreed  
 UNC = Uncertain  
 DA = Disagreed  
 SDA = Strongly Disagreed



**Table 1**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>SD</b>
1. Do you think that the learners with little or no knowledge of the language, can not communicate with others effectively?*	34 35.5%	22 22.68%	11 11.34%	14 14.43%	16 16.49%
2. Are you agree that CLT learners are to take responsibility for their own learning without the help of others?*	18 18.56%	15 15.46%	12 12.37%	21 21.65%	31 31.96%
3. Do you think that the students should become effective communicators in the foreign language only for communication?	29 29.89%	24 24.74%	15 15.46%	17 17.53%	12 12.37%
4. Is CLT the most important factor by which language Performance should be judged?*	35 36.08%	25 25.77%	6 6.19%	16 16.49%	15 15.46%
5. Do you think group work activities are essential for communication and in promoting genuine interaction among students?*	31 31.96%	26 26.80%	5 5.15%	20 20.62%	15 15.46%
6. Do you think that a textbook alone is not able to cater to all the needs and interests of the students?	29 29.89%	27 27.84%	4 4.12%	24 24.74%	13 13.40%
7. Do you think that the students do their best when CLT is taught in their class by the teacher?	32 32.99%	26 26.80%	9 9.28%	18 18.56%	12 12.37%
8. Do you think that it is very difficult for the teachers to monitor the students' performance and prevent them from using their mother tongue?	21 21.65%	24 24.74%	8 8.25%	27 27.84%	17 17.52%
9. Do you think that teachers are the authentic factor for performing CLT in the course of a lesson?	27 27.84%	22 22.68%	7 7.22%	24 24.74%	17 17.52%
10. Do you think that by mastering the rules of grammar, students become fully capable of communicating with a non-native speaker?*	20 20.62%	25 25.77%	8 8.25%	29 29.89%	15 15.46%
11. Do you think that most of the students acquire their English knowledge for communication with others effectively when CLT is used in their classes through text book?*	33 34.02%	32 32.99%	5 5.15%	14 14.43%	13 13.40%
12. Do you think that the role of the teacher in the language classroom is to impart knowledge through activities such as explanation, writing, and example?	30 30.93%	22 22.68%	11 11.34%	21 21.65%	13 13.40%

**Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Opinions toward the English (N = 97)****14. Findings**

Following findings were drawn on the basis of question analysis of the questionnaire:

1. Majority of 35.5% respondents strongly agreed with the statement that the learners with little or no knowledge of the language can not communicate with others effectively at the Secondary education in Bangladesh which has been expressed through their strong agreement with the statement.
2. Majority of 31.96% respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that CLT learners are to take responsibility for their own learning without the help of others which has been expressed through their strongly disagreement with the statement.
3. Majority of 29.89% respondents strongly agreed with the statement that the students should become effective communicators in the foreign language only

for communication which has been expressed through their strong agreement with the statement.

4. Majority of 36.08% respondents strongly agreed with the statement that CLT is the most important factor by which language Performance should be judged which has been expressed through their strong agreement with the statement.

5. Majority of 31.96% respondents strongly agreed with the statement that group work activities are essential for communication and in promoting genuine interaction among students which has been expressed through their strong agreement with the statement.

6. Majority of 29.89% respondents strongly agreed with the statement that a textbook alone is not able to cater to all the needs and interests of the students which have been expressed through their strong agreement with the statement.

7. Majority of 32.99% respondents strongly agreed with the statement that the students do their best when CLT is taught in their class by the teacher at the Secondary education which has been expressed through their strong agreement with the statement.

8. Majority of 27.84% respondents disagreed with the statement that it is very difficult for the teachers to monitor the students' performance and prevent them from using their mother tongue at the Secondary education which has been expressed through their disagreement with the statement.

9. Majority of 27.84% respondents strongly agreed with the statement that teachers are the authentic factor for performing CLT in the course of a lesson at the Secondary education which has been expressed through their strong agreement with the statement.

10. Majority of 29.89% respondents disagreed with the statement that by mastering the rules of grammar, students become fully capable of communicating with a non-native speaker at the Secondary education which has been expressed through their disagreement with the statement.

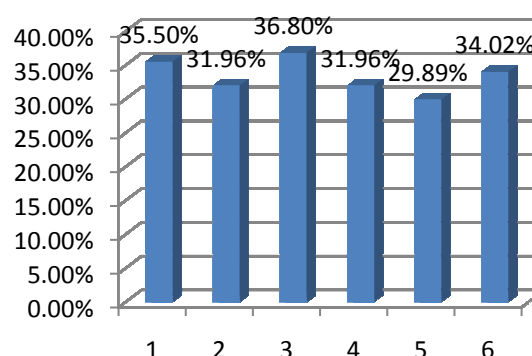
11. Majority of 34.02% respondents strongly agreed with the statement that most of the students acquire their English knowledge for communication with others effectively when CLT is used in their classes through text book which has been expressed through their strong agreement with the statement.

12. Majority of 30.93% respondents strongly agreed with the statement that the role of the teacher in the language classroom is to impart knowledge through activities such as explanation, writing, and example at the Secondary education which has been expressed through their strong agreement with the statement.

## 15. Results and discussion

Out of the 97 respondents (Students) who participated in the study through questionnaire survey, 34 of them think that the learners with little or no knowledge of the language, can not communicate with others effectively, 31 respondents are strongly disinterested saying that CLT learners are to take responsibility for their own learning without the help of others. Where 29 students are very much interested would like to say that that the students should become effective communicators in the foreign language only for communication. Moreover, 35 students strongly agreed with the statement that CLT is the most important factor by which language Performance should be judged. Where 31 students strongly agreed that work activities are essential for communication and in promoting genuine interaction among students and 29 students think that think that a textbook alone is not able to cater to all the needs and interests of the students. They (32 students) also think that the

students do their best when CLT is taught in their class by the teacher. Where 29 students are disinterested thinking that by mastering the rules of grammar, students become fully capable of communicating with a non-native speaker. Side by side 33 students as respondents strongly agreed that most of the students acquire their English knowledge for communication with others effectively when CLT is used in their classes through text book.



## 16. Conclusion

On the basis of the results and discussion, it can be said that the need for learning and teaching better English CLT has become crucial in the information and computer age. For this, the teachers must make the learners realize the importance of communication skills (in English) in today's world. CLT, being a English language teaching method, a pre-requisite for success and advancement for this purpose. Obviously, when communicative competence is the essential requirement in the global scenario today, CLT becomes the best approach to be followed. This study was motivated to investigate Bangladeshi school level students' attitudes towards CLT method and their thinking and experiences regarding CLT practice. The findings reveal that students hold a favorable attitude towards CLT which has been expressed with their statement (on the basis of six star marked questions among twelve questions) that the learners with little or no knowledge of the language, can not communicate with others effectively and CLT learners are to take responsibility for their own learning without the help of others though CLT the most important factor by which language Performance should be judged. They also think group work activities are essential for communication and in promoting genuine interaction among students which can be implemented by mastering the rules of grammar that encourage the students becoming fully capable of communicating with a non-native speaker. Moreover, the respondents (school going students at secondary level education)

think that most of the students acquire their English knowledge for communication with others effectively when CLT is used in their classes through text books.

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