

## A Pragmatic Data Based Evaluation of CLT in the EFL Curricula at Higher Secondary Level in Bangladesh

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### ABSTRACT

This paper evaluates the scope and relative unfeasibility of communicative language teaching (CLT) that was introduced at higher secondary level in Bangladesh to innovate English language teaching (ELT) by replacing grammar translation method (GTM). To substantiate the evaluation, a survey intended to determine the feasibility and relative drawbacks of CLT was made. A total of 100 teachers and 100 students participated in the survey of 10 different colleges of Dhaka and Khulna metropolitan cities of Bangladesh and two different questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from randomly selected teachers and students. The study reveals that most of the EFL students in Bangladesh could not succeed in learning English language through CLT in spite of studying it for twelve years at their secondary and higher secondary levels. The paper also examines multifaceted problems affecting English language teaching and learning through CLT such as most of the classrooms of Bengali medium colleges are not well-furnished with modern language teaching equipment, lack of training and teaching materials, student's lack of background knowledge, motivation etc. Therefore, the real outcome of CLT in Bangladesh could not meet the initial dream and promise with which it was introduced and eventually became inappropriate and ineffective. This article critically evaluates CLT focusing on multiple barriers and factors instrumental for the failure of the approach at higher secondary level in Bangladesh. Finally, the study concludes with several recommendations to promote English language teaching at higher secondary level in Bangladesh.

**Key words:** EFL Students in Bangladesh, Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Grammar Translation Method (GTM), Curriculum

### INTRODUCTION

Before the introduction of CLT, English proficiency of a student was tested in terms of his knowledge in grammar, translations, and writing question-answer etc. at higher secondary level in Bangladesh. As this system could not bring fruitful results to improve English language proficiency of EFL students for ages, it was required to reform the curriculum, methodology, course materials, and testing and evaluation procedures to enhance the development of English language learning and teaching in the country. To ensure English language proficiency, the ministry of education (MoE) replaced traditional GTM and introduced CLT theories and practices in the curricula for EFL students at secondary and higher secondary levels in Bangladesh in the mid-nineties with lot of promises and expectation. However, after a decade and more, it has been found that this new method too could not succeed due to a number of factors.

The analysis of recent literature shows that the appropriateness and promotion of CLT for EFL students in non-native context have been critically questioned (Khan & Wette, 2013). Bangladesh is a monolingual country of 160 million

people and of the total population, 98% people use Bangla as their first language. This predominately-monolingual identity of the nation is emphasized in its nationalist discourses (Rahman et al., 2019). Hence, it is quite challenging to practice CLT exclusively in language teaching classrooms as both students and teachers are highly interested in using Bangla as their medium of communication, and the overuse of their own language means that they will have less chance to learn English (Harmer, 1998). On the other hand, the interference of the learner's first language ( $L_1$ ) in the learning and teaching process of English as a foreign language plays a negative role in some crucial aspects of the target language i.e. pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar etc. are affected by the learner's first language ( $L_1$ ). Having a psychological point of view, Ellis, (1985) says that there is never a peaceful co-existence between two language systems in the learner, but rather constant warfare, and that warfare is not limited to the moment of cognition, but continues during the period of storing newly learnt ideas in memory.

The past research also finds various other problems of CLT that cause its failure in Bangladeshi context. For example, the

conflict or difference between the learner's culture and the target language-culture, lack of physical infrastructure and logistics required in the classroom for CLT, lack of teacher training, appropriate testing system and so on.

Compared with other methods and approaches, CLT activities are more difficult to design, and implement, and hence it imposes greater burden on EFL teachers. Not only the implementation, but also the assessment of this method seems to be difficult for EFL teachers who are usually used to clear-cut assessment procedures (Rahman & Karim, 2015).

In spite of having worldwide acceptance of CLT, however, the question arises here as to the effectiveness and suitability of CLT for EFL learners in the context of Bangladesh (Ali and Walker, 2014; Hamid & Baldauf, 2008). Keeping an eye to the problems, numerous initiatives have been taken in recent years to make CLT a success but the performance so far is not at all satisfactory. This paper examines the existing status of CLT in the curricula and its problems and limitations during the past years, which gradually turn it into a relative failure at higher secondary level (HSC) in Bangladesh.

### Research Objective

The objective of this study is to investigate the initial goal and outcome of CLT, and factors behind its ineffectiveness and failure at higher secondary level in Bangladesh.

### Research Questions

This paper addresses and analyzes the following key questions:

- What was the initial goal of CLT in EFL curricula at HSC level in Bangladesh?
- What are the major problems of CLT in Bangladesh?
- Is CLT a relative failure in Bangladesh?

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The ministry of Education ( MoE) adopted CLT theories and practices at secondary and higher secondary levels ( from grade six to grade 12 ) in Bangladesh in 2001 with a view to reforming the curriculum, methodology, textbook, and testing and evaluation procedures to ensure the development of English language learning and teaching in the country (Rahman et al. 2019).

The primary aim was to choose CLT theories by replacing long established GTM that has been in the curricula for more than 65 years to prioritize communicative competence of English language. According to Karim et al. (as cited in Rahman et al. 2019), the reform was implemented by the English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP) with the support of MoE and British Council. The expectation was that by the end of grade 12, all students irrespectively would be able to master four-skills of English and therefore would be able to communicate in English accurately and fluently. Another justification was that since the GTM was based on practicing grammar and translation, both teachers and students developed a tendency of grammar based teaching and learning system in the classroom

that typically put the students in a very difficult and perplexing situation. Despite its beginning with lots of promises, CLT has not effectively been implemented as intended in the curriculum (Ali & Walker, 2014; Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014; Hamid & Baldauf, 2008; Rahman and Pandian, 2018a, 2018b cited in Rahman et al. 2019). There are multiple factors and issues in reality that have been affecting the implementation of CLT in Bangladesh. In Bangladeshi context, Barman, Sultana & Basu (as cited in Rahman, 2015) consider eight factors which were identified as constraints in implementing CLT: 1) Inefficiency of ELT practitioners, 2) Economic constraints, 3) Administrative set-up, 4) Infrastructural limitations, 5) Cultural conflicts, 6) Seating arrangement in the classrooms 7) Class size in language teaching and learning and 8) Testing. Roy (2016) on the other hand, has identified five overarching problems to successful implementation of CLT in Bangladesh. They are 1) Large classrooms 2) Mismatch between curriculum and assessment 3) Lack of pre-service and in-service training 4) Cultural appropriateness 5) Poor salary and socio-economic condition.

Bangladesh follows top-down system for curriculum development and implementation (Rahman, Pandian & Kaur, 2018a) that allows teachers much less scope to share their views in implementing the curricula (Ali & Walker, 2014). From this short review, it is evident that CLT has been facing multiple problems to be successful in Bangladesh and eventually becoming ineffective. This paper focuses on the root causes affecting the implementation of CLT and the limitation of CLT itself to be successful in the context of Bangladesh.

### The Grammar Translation Method (GMT)

This method is very widely used. According to Chastain (1988), the grammar translation method is also called the classical method because it was first used in the teaching of the classical Latin and Greek. The purpose of this method is to make the students familiar with grammar of their native language through the study of the grammar of the target language, and in the process make them capable of reading and writing both the target language and their first language simultaneously.

The role of the teacher in this method is very authoritative and that of the students is very passive in the classroom. The students do whatever their teacher instructs in their classrooms. Students are taught to translate materials from one language into another. For this matter, vocabulary and grammar, reading and writing are emphasized and this method gives much less attention to pronunciation and listening (Larsen-Freeman, 2004).

The language that is used in the classroom as a medium of communication is mostly the student's native language. The students are asked to translate the written text from native language into the target language or vice versa (Larsen-Freeman, 2004).

### Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

The communicative language teaching (CLT), a recent approach in teaching a foreign language, started in the late 1960s

as a reaction to Situational Language Teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). The functional approach of language teaching by Wilkins was used as a basis to develop communicative syllabi for language teaching (Wilkins, 1972). It was introduced for multiple reasons in reaction to previous theories and practices. According to previous methods, students learn the rules of linguistics usages, but cannot use the target language (Widdowson, 1978). Along with syntactical knowledge, communicative competence is required for students to perform certain function such as promising, inviting and declining invitations within a social context. The main aim of CLT is meaningful communication in real life situation (Larsen-Freeman, 2004). CLT has a rich theoretical base and the following few characteristics of this method are significantly noticeable.

- a) Language is a system for expression of meaning.
- b) The primary function of language is to follow interaction and communication.
- c) The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses.
- d) The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse.

The goal of CLT is to enable students to communicate in the target language and to do this students need the knowledge of the linguistics forms, meaning and functions. Communication is a process, and through this process, a student can learn the target language successfully. The role of a teacher in this method is that of an adviser who facilitates communications in the classroom. Here students are communicators and the teachers might be a co-communicator engaging in the communicative activity along with students (Littlewoods, 1981). On the other hand, the students are actively engaged in negotiating meaning and understanding others regardless of their knowledge and level of proficiency of the target language.

In CLT, the target language should not only be used during communicative activities but also for explaining the activities to the students or in assigning homework. The students learn from these classroom management exchanges and realize that the target language is a vehicle for communication, not just an object to be studied. The role of student's native language is not active and important rather the role of target language in the classroom is very important.

Unlike grammatical approach, CLT assume that language consists of a finite set of rules that can be learned one by one, in an additive fashion (Nunan, 1988 as cited in Yoon). CLT prioritizes communication to potentially understand the rules as opposed to learning a set of rules to communicate.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Quantitative research approach has been used as the main technique to collect data whereas descriptive statistics have been used to analyze collected data. For secondary sources of data, books, journal and different online resources are used.

## Target area

Dhaka and Khulna regions were targeted for the study and 10 different colleges came under the survey. Of the total colleges five colleges are chosen from Dhaka city and rest of the five colleges are chosen from Khulna city for collecting data. The colleges of Dhaka city are Dhaka Commerce College, Dhaka City College, Dhaka Residential Model College, SOS Hermann Mainer College, Govt. Science College and those of Khulna include Govt. Girls College, Azam Khan Commerce College, Khulna Public College, Khulna City College and Pioneer College. The study surveyed the teachers and students of eleven and twelve grades of the above different colleges in Dhaka and Khulna, Bangladesh.

## Participants of the Study

A total of 100 teachers and 100 students participated in the survey and expressed their opinion by completing questionnaires designed for both teachers and students. The ages of the teachers ranged from 25 to 55 years whereas the students were 18 and 19 years old. The teachers who participated in this study and completed the questionnaires are affiliated to English department of different government and private colleges and students came from different sections of the same colleges (Tables 1 and 2).

**Table 1.** Participant's demographic characteristics (Teachers)

Participant's individual characteristics		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	82	82
	Female	18	18
Age (Years)	25 – 40	85	85
	40 – 55	15	15
Faculty / Department	English	100	100
Education	MA	100	100

**Table 2.** Participant's demographic characteristics (Students)

Participant's individual characteristics		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	62	62
	Female	38	18
Age (Years)	18 – 19	100	100
Background / Division	Science	65	65
	Commerce	35	35
Level	Grade 11 & 12 (Intermediate)	100	100

## Data Collection

Data were collected by administering two different written questionnaires designed for both teachers and students of

higher secondary level respectively. The questionnaires were prepared based on the analysis of literature of CLT and its intended goal, outcome and appropriateness in the context of Bangladesh. In both questionnaires, only yes or no options were given and participants were requested to circle the best option according to his knowledge of it. A representative on behalf of the authors, an English teaching professional working at higher secondary level in Bangladesh was assigned to process data for the survey. A soft copy of questionnaires was sent to the representative who visited the aforementioned colleges and collected data from both teachers and students.

**Data Entry and Analysis**

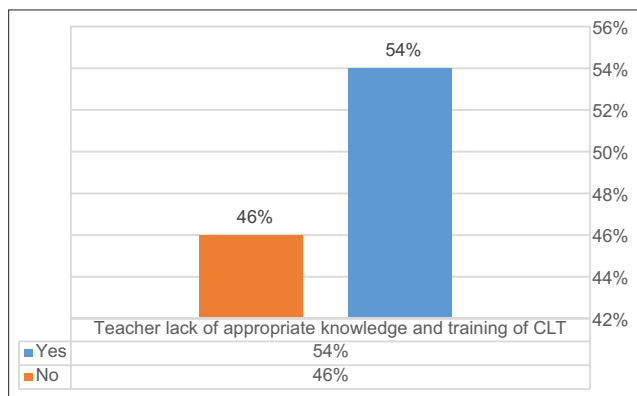
After collecting the completed questionnaires by the respondents, the data was categorized and thoroughly revised. Descriptive statistics are employed in the study and SPSS version 21 software is used to analyze the data especially to find out frequency, percentage etc. Finally, the results have been presented through visual tables and charts with a short analysis.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The study emphasized on getting straightforward information from both teachers and their students to have a comprehensive idea of CLT at HSC level in Bangladesh. Therefore, the analysis of data has been presented separately in order to find out their respective notion of CLT in the current scenario.

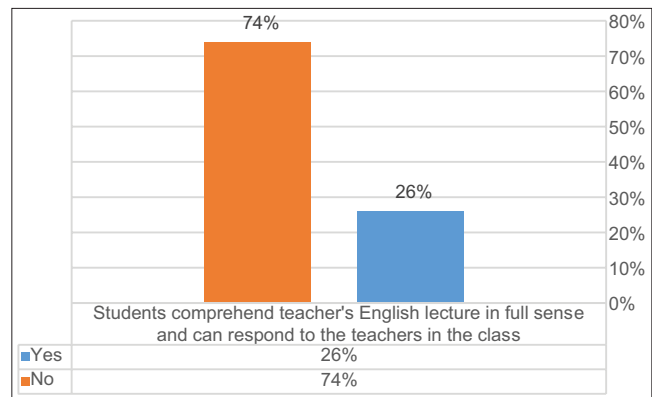
**Teacher Responses Statistics**

The findings of the study show that the participatory teachers of different colleges are forthright about their opinions. Every teacher has given his opinion very sincerely and professionally. The results of six variables in teacher questionnaire are shown below:



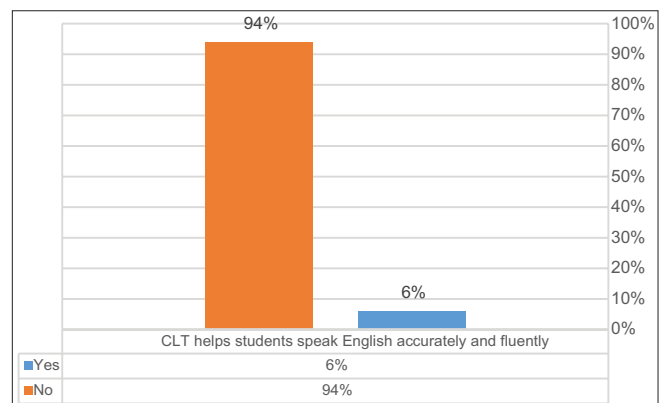
**Figure 1.** Teacher's lack of appropriate training of CLT theories and practices

Figure 1 shows that 54% teachers agree they do not have proper professional training required to implement CLT theories and practices. This is one of the most important barriers in implementing CLT successfully in Bangladesh.



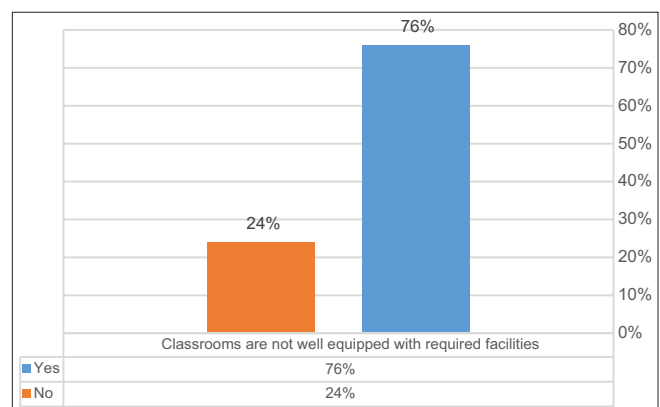
**Figure 2.** Students comprehend teacher's English lecture in full sense and can respond to the teachers in the class

The results as shown in Figure 2 also indicate that 74% teachers think their students do not understand their lectures in English and cannot comprehend it fully. Only 26% students are communicative, can understand the instruction in English and are able to respond to the teachers properly.



**Figure 3.** CLT helps students speak English accurately and fluently

On the other hand, 94% teachers (Figure 3) think that in Bangladeshi context CLT does not help the students speak English fluently whereas only 6% teachers entertain the idea positively.



**Figure 4.** Classrooms are not well equipped with required facilities

Again Figure 4 shows 76% teachers think that classrooms are not well equipped with required logistics and are not suitable for practicing CLT theories. This problem is prevailing in most of the institutions across the country especially in rural areas due to economic constraint.

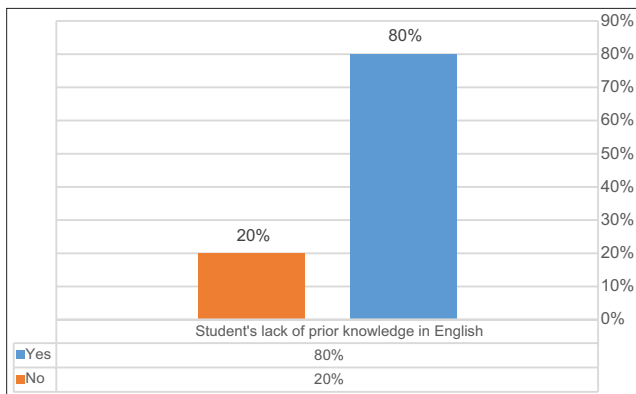


Figure 5. Student's lack of prior knowledge in English

The teachers also responded (Figure 5) about the level of proficiency of the students in English. 80% teachers consider that the level of the students is miserably poor and they do not have prior knowledge in English.

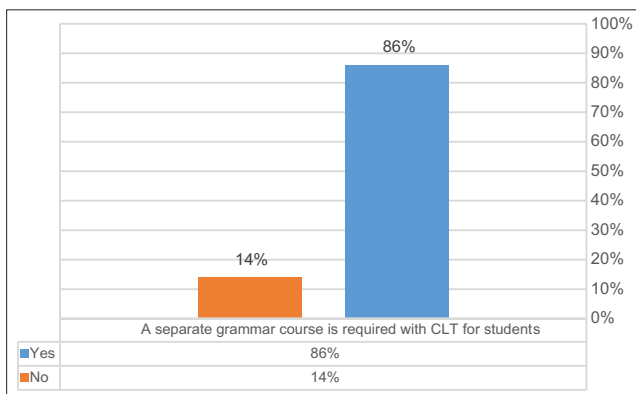


Figure 6. A separate grammar course is required with CLT for students

Teaching (Figure 6) grammar is also important along with CLT since grammar is ignored in this approach. 86% teachers recommend that grammar should be taught along with CLT to improve linguistics competence.

**Student Responses Statistics**

The students were also specific and accurate in responding each variable designed for them that helped us get an idea about CLT practices at higher secondary level from student

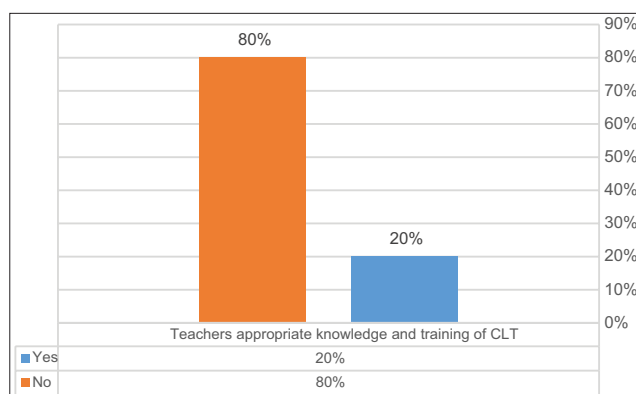


Figure 7. Teachers appropriate training of CLT theories and practices

perspective. The analysis of the student data has been presented in the following diagrams with a short description.

Figure 7 shows 80 % students think that their teachers do not have proper professional training about CLT, which is a prerequisite for the successful implementation of CLT in Bangladesh.

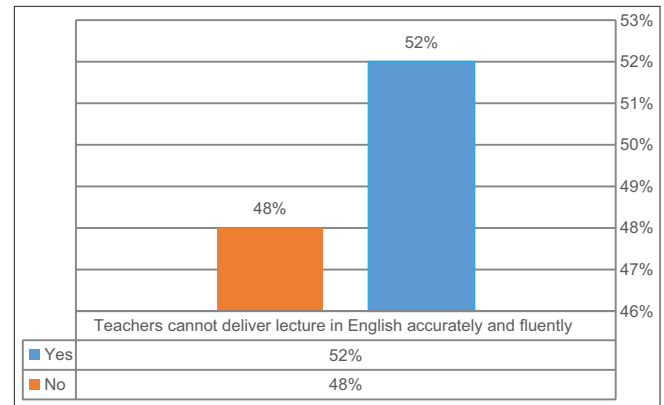


Figure 8. Teachers cannot deliver lecture in English accurately and fluently

52% of the students (Figure 8) hold the view that teachers cannot properly instruct students in English. It means that the instructors at HSC level are not academically sound to implement CLT theories and practices.

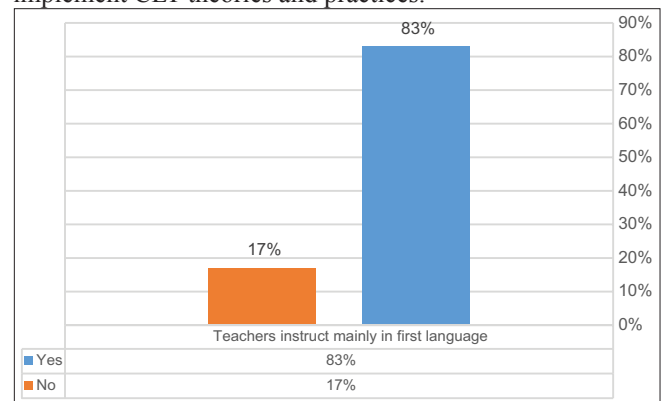


Figure 9. Teachers instruct mainly in first language

83% teachers deliver their lectures in the first language (Figure 9). Using first language in teaching a foreign language might decrease the rate of success in learning the target language and CLT does not advocate it.

**Little Scope to Learn Grammar Properly**

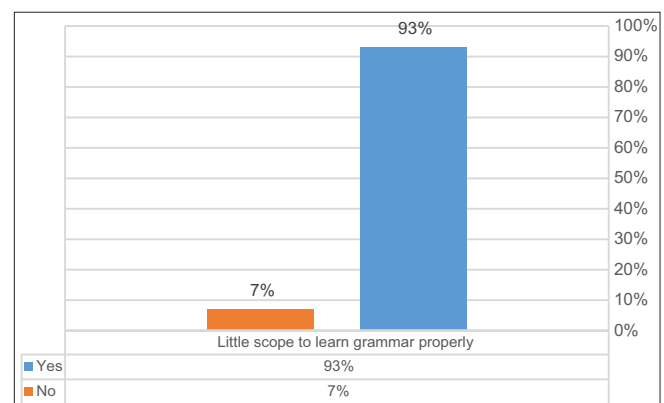
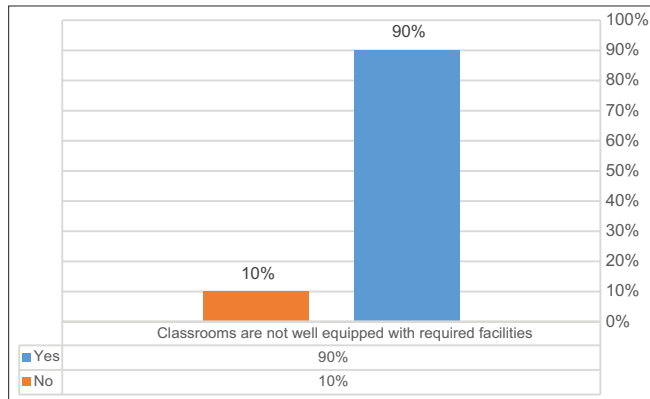


Figure 10. Little scope to learn grammar properly

Since the syllabus is based on communicative competence and grammar is given less importance, 93% students (Figure 10) think they have very poor knowledge about grammar and internalized rules. This results in a gap between competence and performance.

### Classroom are not well equipped with required facilities



**Figure 11.** Classrooms are not well equipped with required facilities

Along with the teachers, the students also echoed the same thoughts regarding classroom size and facilities. They also think that (90%) classrooms (Figure 11) are not well- equipped with all required teaching and learning aids and therefore inappropriate for an ideal classroom of CLT.

The findings show that CLT at higher secondary level in Bangladesh has been facing various types of problems since its implementation and after several years, it has turned into a relative failure instead of achieving its goal. The respondents have termed the factors from their own experience, which have been tremendously affecting CLT to be successful in Bangladesh. The study finds that (from both teachers and students) most of the teachers are not well trained about the implementation of CLT theories and practices. The student participants also admit that more than half of the teachers are not academically sound for CLT and cannot teach students in the target language. The findings also point out most of the teachers think that majority of the students don't have basic English knowledge to comprehend, communicate and respond in English classes which compel them to switch into the first language. Therefore, CLT could not help students enhance speaking skill in the classroom situation. Both teachers and students agree that classroom facilities could not meet minimum requirements of CLT due to socio-economic condition of Bangladesh. Most of the participants (both students and teachers) agreed that through CLT students could not master grammatical competence; they need a separate grammar course along with CLT. Although, CLT in EFL curricula at HSC level in Bangladesh was prescribed with a lots of promises to develop English Language teaching, but it has become unproductive and a relative failure due to the aforementioned problems.

### CONCLUSION

CLT is beset with a number of problems in Bangladeshi context. To implement CLT theories and practices, a favorable socio-cultural condition is a prerequisite since CLT mainly advocates reciprocal teaching strategies. In Bangladesh, there is a cultural mindset of hierarchy and teachers are not able to break this taboo for a suitable classroom required for CLT. In teaching students, teachers generally follow the traditional lecture mode technique, which is rather imposing than pleasing. Students are not encouraged to be interactive and reciprocal in the classroom because of which language learning becomes ineffective and unproductive.

The findings of the study ascertain that CLT itself cannot improve student's English language skill or ability in Bangladesh since it prioritizes only basic communication. Linguistic competence cannot be acquired over night by a single method in Bangladeshi perspective where a vast majority of Higher Secondary students lacks the primary basics of English language. The learners at this level in Bangladesh face an uphill task to master the language by this approach, which eventually lead to their loss of confidence and passion for the English language itself. The study fairly reflects that CLT remains a relative failure and nonfunctional in Bangladesh at Higher Secondary level because of the various problems mentioned above.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

It is to be admitted on all hands that CLT is not reasonably successful and could not meet the intended goal at higher secondary level in Bangladesh. To make this method workable and effective we should take some initiatives. First, teacher education and professional training are required to be included in the curricula along with CLT theories and practices. Secondly, English teaching classrooms should be furnished with modern language equipment. Third, grammar should be taught along with communicative language method as a separate course in the classroom. Fourth, the size of the classrooms and the number of students in them must be well proportioned to make the class interactive. Fifth, to ensure smooth communication, students should be categorized into different groups according to their merits (a placement test can be taken for the same). Sixth, the medium of instruction should be English. The teacher should motivate the students to stop the undue interference of the native language in the learning process and make it clear to them that all sorts of communication in the classrooms will be in the target language i.e., in English. Last but not the least; the learners should be psychologically boosted to overcome their fear and inertia instilled deeply in their subconscious mind concerning the foreign language in diverse situations arising out of their daily lives.

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