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## Teachers' Understanding and Practice of CLT in Bangladesh

Md. Monjurul Islam, M.A. in English

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### Abstract

Some of the pedagogical principles especially in Bangladesh that have informed foreign language teaching in the last decades need to be reconsidered. Some questions need to be addressed; such as to what extent is the CLT framework working in Bangladesh? What beliefs or concepts do teachers have of CLT? What is the role of teachers and students in the CLT classroom? The aim of this study was to investigate the extent to which such issues were part of the belief system of teachers in Bangladesh and what impact they had on actual classroom practice. The findings indicated that the majority of the respondents believed CLT is not working properly in Bangladesh. As a result, we should reconsider the practical implication of CLT in the classrooms. However, the pattern was more complex and variegated than this brief summary might suggest, especially when the teachers' beliefs were compared to their classroom practice.

### Introduction

In the present global world with its technological advancement, English is the major international language and use of English has been growing at a startling rate, in particular in the developing world. It is, therefore, natural to wonder how far English may have advanced in Bangladesh. However, considering the reality, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach had been introduced in Bangladesh since 1990s. But, most of the students of our country have failed to

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communicate in English even after passing the higher secondary level. What are the reasons behind their failure?

No doubt CLT implies new roles in the classroom for teachers and learners which have not been implemented. In learning and teaching, the teacher should be very careful about students' views and consider their learning experience in a positive light. Teachers should have knowledge of CLT principles before they can become competent to teach in the new framework. They are the ones who will present the new approach.

Thus, it is teacher's responsibility to motivate students and create positive attitude towards the language and be supportive and encouraging to the students rather than critical and destructive. When teachers are qualified or trained, only then Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) will be effective for the students. So, English teachers' understanding and attitude towards the CLT approach play an important role in developing the students' skills.

Therefore, it is essential to know the teachers' understanding regarding the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach as it is largely related to the students' communication skills. For this reason, this article focuses on teachers' understanding and practice of CLT in Higher Secondary Level of Bangladesh.

### **The Theoretical Basis of CLT**

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach to the foreign or second language teaching which emphasizes that the goal of language teaching is communicative competence. Thus, CLT is an "approach that aims to (a) make competence the goal of language teaching and (b) develop procedures for teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication" (Richards & Rodgers, 1986: 66).

However, the primary function of a language is for interaction and communication. Canale and Swain (1991:1) point out that CLT is "organized on the basis of communicative functions that given learners or groups of learners needs to know and emphasizes the ways in which particular grammatical forms may be used to express these functions appropriately". CLT views language as a functional system and emphasizes that language is a vehicle for the expression of functional meaning.

Noam Chomsky (1965) was the first to identify the term competence which he described as a mere linguistic system or abstract grammatical knowledge. Munby (1983:7), the supporter of Chomsky's view, pointed out that the competence is "the mastery of the abstract system of rules by which a person is able to understand and produce and any all of the well-formed sentences of his language". But, many sociolinguists argue that linguistic system alone is not enough for effective communication.

For this reason, Hymes (1979:19) puts forward the term competence which contains both knowledge and ability for language use with respect to four factors: "possibility, feasibility, appropriateness and accepted usage". Later on, some other sociolinguists

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supported Hymes' views and agreed with that "The speaker must know what to say, with whom, and when, and where" (Cooper, cited in Munby, 1983:17). Thus, Hymes' concept of communicative competence has the sociolinguistic component which Chomsky's definition lacks.

### **The Role of Teachers and Learners in CLT**

One of the basic assumptions of CLT is that students will be more motivated to study a foreign language since they will feel they are learning to do something useful with the language they study. Teachers give students an opportunity to express their individuality by having them share their ideas and opinions on a regular basis. This helps students "to integrate the foreign language with their own personality and thus to feel more emotionally secure with it" (Littlewood 1981:94).

Students are actively engaged in negotiating meaning in trying to make themselves understood even when their knowledge of the target language is incomplete. They learn to communicate by communicating. Since the teacher's role is less dominant in a teacher-centered method, students are seen as more responsible managers of their own learning (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). Larsen Freeman also says that in communicative language teaching the teacher is the initiator of the activities, but she/he does not always herself/himself interact with the students. Sometimes he/she is a co-communicator, but more often he/she establishes situations that prompt communication between and among the students. Students interact a great deal with one another. They do this in various configurations: pairs, triads, small groups, and whole group.

So, CLT emphasizes different roles for teachers and learners which are quite different from the traditional L2 classrooms. Thus, Cook (1991:140) states that "The teacher is no longer a dominant figure continuously controlling and guiding the students. Rather the teacher takes one step back and lets the students take over their activities, making up their own conversations in pairs and groups, learning language by doing". In the same way, the teacher can be a manager and organizer of classroom activities. "In this role, one of his/her major responsibilities is to establish situations likely to promote communication" (Larsen-Freeman, 1986:131), and "to organize the classroom as a setting for communication and communicative activities" (Richards and Rodgers, 1986:78).

### **CL T in Bangladesh**

Bangladesh is a monolingual country and English is considered as a foreign language (Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project, Module-1, 2006). Now over 24 million children learn English as a second or foreign language in primary and secondary schools in Bangladesh. Children start to learn English as a required subject in class 1 and continue learning it (if they do not drop out) until class 12, and later at the tertiary level. Officially, they are taught English communicatively using Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodology (NCTB, 2003). But the real situation is that, 'our students are very weak in English and as a result they can not apply English in their practical life successfully' (NCTB, 2003: 3). It was hoped that Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

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CLT would revitalize these ‘weak’ learners’ ability to learn English by ‘improving the standard of teaching and learning English at different levels of formal education’ (ibid.). Nearly a decade has passed since CLT was first introduced in the national curriculum. So, now it is an appropriate time to ascertain to what extent CLT is successful.

The CLT innovation was jointly funded by the British Department for International Development (DFID) and the Government of Bangladesh. The bilateral venture gave birth to the English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP Bangladesh) which had two specific objectives: 1) to produce CLT-based English textbooks for class 9–10 at the secondary level and class 11–12 at the higher secondary cycle, and 2) to train school teachers and empower them to teach communicative English (Paul, 2004; Hamid, 2005; NCTB, 2001, 2003; Rahman, 2007).

Since teachers were the real users of the new ELT model, their training was essential for shifting their orientation to CLT from the old grammar translation-based methodology. Teacher training was made a high priority on the grounds of teacher unpreparedness that the introduction of CLT was opposed from different quarters (Hamid, 2005). Since new CLT textbooks replaced old, non-CLT textbooks, and English teachers in some schools received CLT training for 13 days. Training courses aimed to provide them with an understanding of CLT and to make them understand the freedom they could exercise in using the textbook.

So, despite the CLT focus of the new textbooks, it can be argued that CLT is ignored, and texts generally are used like the old grammar-translation texts. Thus even though the introduction of CLT marked a significant shift in Bangladeshi ELT in theory, in reality there is little evidence to suggest that the policy brought about any significant changes in teaching practice at the school level, particularly in rural areas. Rahman (1999: 116-117), in one of the case studies to investigate teachers’ perception of the communicative approach to ELT, has said that “the teachers viewed grammar as the first priority for learning a language, something that the innovative approach did not emphasize. It was obvious that the teachers did not understand the underlying principles of the approach.” As a result the teachers did not welcome this change.

## **The Study**

The data for the study was collected from rural and urban higher secondary level teachers of Bangladesh. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected through questionnaires, for the collection of quantitative data; classroom observations and interviews for the collection of qualitative data. The qualitative data was useful because it enriched the study as a whole and, additionally, functioned as a way to crosscheck and validate the data collected through the questionnaires.

## **Setting and Participants**

Twenty-one higher secondary level teachers of Bangladesh in 8 different colleges in rural and urban areas participated in this study. Five teachers had 20 to 25 years teaching experience, and six teachers had 3 to 7 years teaching experience and three

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teachers had 3 months to 1 year teaching experience. Their professional preparations also varied. Seven teachers had CLT training (3 weeks in-service training course). The rest of the teachers taught English based on CLT method without having any kind of training. They completed their Master of Arts in English Literature and started teaching. Among them, twenty teachers out of twenty one answered questionnaires, fifteen participants out of twenty one attended interviews and eight teachers allowed classroom observations. In order to maintain the privacy of the search subject, the teachers are not going to be identified by name. They will instead be marked as teacher A, B, C and so forth. Their training experience is presented in table 3.1 along with the method of collecting information from them.

Participants, their training experience and participation in Data Collection

Name	years teaching	CLT training	Interview	Survey	Observation
A	25	No	Yes	Yes	No
B	24	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
C	14	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
D	7	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
E	6	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
F	4	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
G	3	No	Yes	Yes	No
H	20	No	No	Yes	No
J	12	No	No	Yes	Yes
K	5	No	No	Yes	No
L	5	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
M	3	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	2	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
O	1	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
P	1.5	No	Yes	Yes	No

Q	1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R	2	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
S	1.5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
T	2.5	Yes	Yes	No	No
U	0.6	No	No	Yes	No

### Instruments of Data Collection with Questionnaires, Observations and Interviews

The *Likert scale* (Likert, 1932) asks individuals to respond to a series of statements by indicating whether they ‘strongly agree’, ‘agree’, ‘slightly agree’, ‘disagree’, and ‘strongly disagree’ with each statement. ‘Strongly agree’ may be assigned a weight of 5 points, while ‘strongly disagree’ may get a score of 1. In the questionnaires, the *Likert scale* was followed (provided in Appendix A). These are used to elicit opinions rather than facts and are sometimes called ‘opinionaires’ (McDonough and McDonough, 1997).

Seliger and Shohamy (1989:162) point out that, “The main advantages of using observations for collecting data are that they allow the study of a phenomenon at close range with many of the contextual variables present, a feature which is very important in studying language behaviors”. However, this advantage may become a disadvantage when the closeness introduces biases which may affect the researcher’s objectivity. Thus, observations can also vary in their degree of explicitness.

Table 3.2 Classroom Observation Checklist

Time	Activities	Notes
	Is this a Communicative Language Teaching Class? (a) Yes (b) No (C) others	
	Is the class designed for CLT class? Explain. (a) Yes (b) No (c) others	
	Mark how teacher deals with the students. Is the relationship that of partnership? Gives examples. (a) manger (b) monitor (c) advisor (d) traditional	
	Does teacher follow any kind of interaction pattern? (a) group work (b) pair work (c) whole class teaching (d) traditional	
	Does teacher follow any kind of CLT activities on the basis of the class lesson? (a) Yes (b) No (c) others	

In addition, immediately following the observations, all notes were reviewed and expanded including further information and detail (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Spradley, 1979). However, twelve teachers requested not to be observed. At the end, 8 classrooms were observed to investigate the ability of teachers to incorporate the goals of CLT method in their classrooms at the higher secondary colleges in Bangladesh. . However, this procedure was difficult to use as teachers either did not agree or were too busy to meet and arrange a time for observation.

McDonough and McDonough (1997:181) view that, “Interviews may be used as the primary research tool, or alternatively in an ancillary role, perhaps as a checking mechanism to triangulate data gathered from other sources”. However, there are some disadvantages. Interviews can be costly, time-consuming, and often difficult to administer. Most commonly, interviews are divided into (a) structured, (b) semi-structured and (C) unstructured (McDonough, 1997). Of them, semi-structured interviews were used.

### Table 3.3 Interview questions

Topic: How teacher incorporate the CLT method in their Classroom

What do you understand by communicative language teaching?
CLT sets as its goals the teaching of communicative competence. What does term mean?
What difficulties might students and teachers face because of changes in their roles in using a communicative methodology?
Can you find examples of activities that provide mechanical, meaningful and communicative practice? What types of activities predominate?
What kinds of advantages and disadvantages do you encounter when you implement communicative language teaching in your classroom?
What kinds of activities do you ask your students to do in the classroom? Why?
What methods do you apply to teach English in the classroom? Why do you use those methods? What does happen in practice?
Do you face any problems regarding CLT? What are these?
Do you feel in-service training is essential for all the English language teacher?

### **The Theoretical Implication of CLT in Bangladesh**

The majority of the respondents viewed that they are eager to apply the CLT method in the language teaching class. The data analysis indicates that many respondents expressed that they want to create healthy interaction with the learner. They strongly believe that healthy interaction enhances the learning capability of the learners. Most of the teachers agree that CLT is important because they believe it helps a lot to motivate the whole class. When asked, “What do you understand by CLT?” a teacher replied:

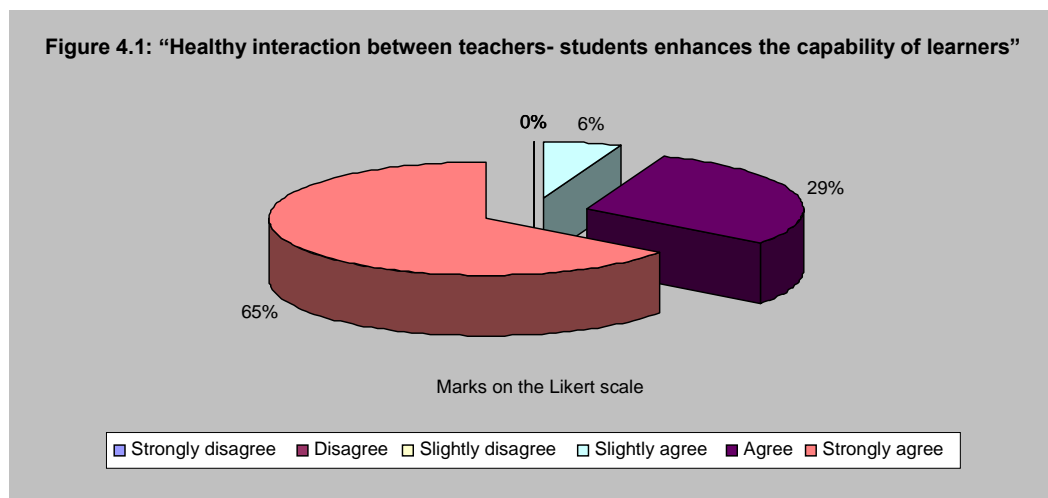
By this, I mean that students will learn how to use language for speaking, writing and understanding.

(Source of data: Interview with Teacher H)

In the same way, figure 4.1 shows the teachers’ response to teacher-students interaction:



Figure 4.1: “Healthy interaction between teachers- students enhances the capability of learners”



It can be seen that the majority of 65 percent of the respondents mentioned that they ‘strongly agreed’ with the belief that healthy interaction between teachers and students enhances the capability of learners while 29 percent of the respondents ‘agreed’ with this belief. Another 6 percent of the respondents revealed that they ‘slightly agreed’ with this belief. Both urban and rural teachers expressed identical view of interaction. No one (0%) believed that the healthy interaction is not necessary.

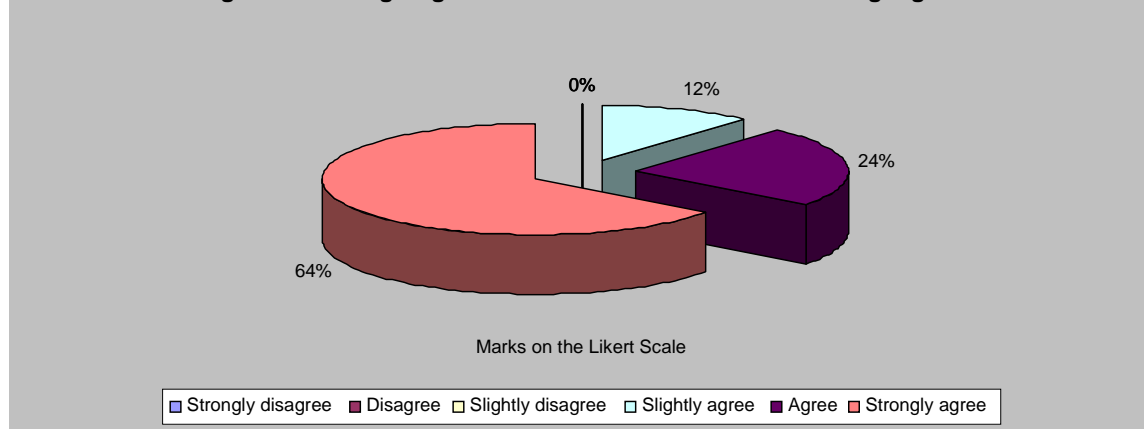
One interesting finding from the data is that all teachers agreed on the principle to create the healthy interaction between teachers and students in the classroom. But, they do not know how to make class interactive on the basis of the CLT approach. When asked, “Which methods do you like best to make class interactive?” one teacher replied that,

“A mixture of the traditional reading the text method and involving students to interact among themselves.”

(Source of data: Interview with Teacher J)

When asked which language L1 or L2, they would like to use making classes interactive. Figure 4.3 shows that a very large percentage of respondents--- 64 percentage --- strongly agreed that English should be the medium of instruction in English language classes while 24 percent of the respondents agreed with this belief. Another 12 percent of the respondents show slight agreement.

**Figure 4.2: Using English as a medium of instruction in language classes**



By using three data sources, it was learnt that the teachers in the study held four concepts about CLT. They believed that CLT (a) emphasized communication in the L2, (b) relied on speaking and listening skills, (c) involved little grammar teaching, and (d) used time-consuming activities.

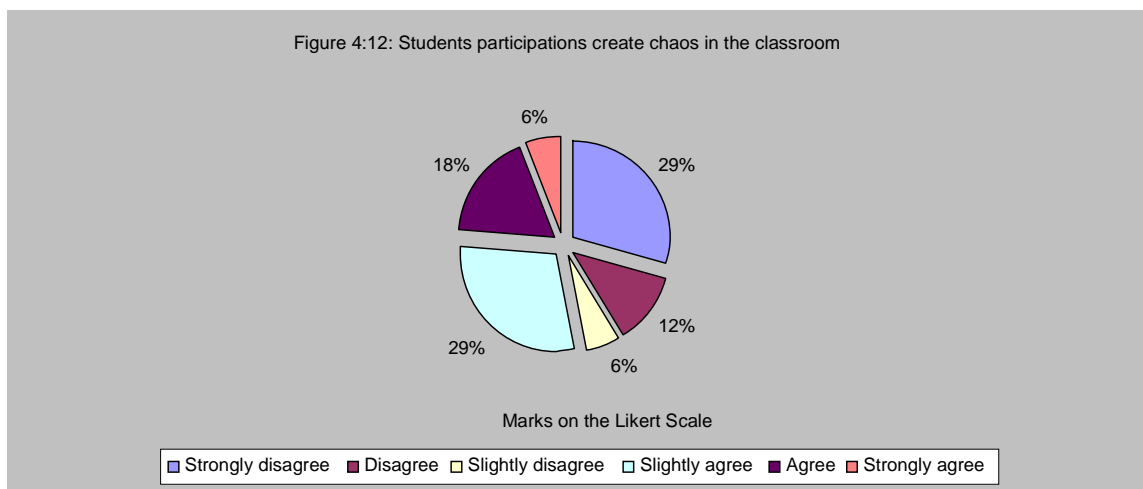
However, the interview data highlighted the fact that the teachers believed CLT was possible, even though it was still evolving and time-consuming. The observation data revealed the teachers' reluctance to implement either interactive or innovative practices, whereas the survey data showed that they had inclinations to use both CLT and traditional (form-focused, teacher-centered) teaching aspects.

Together, all three data sets uncovered the complexity teachers faced in defining their CLT knowledge, sharing their CLT practice, and realizing their CLT beliefs. Through this study it was learnt that practice and theory for these L2 teachers created tensions that not only challenged their conceptions but also affected their action in the learning environment.

### **The Role of Teachers and Students in the CLT Classrooms**

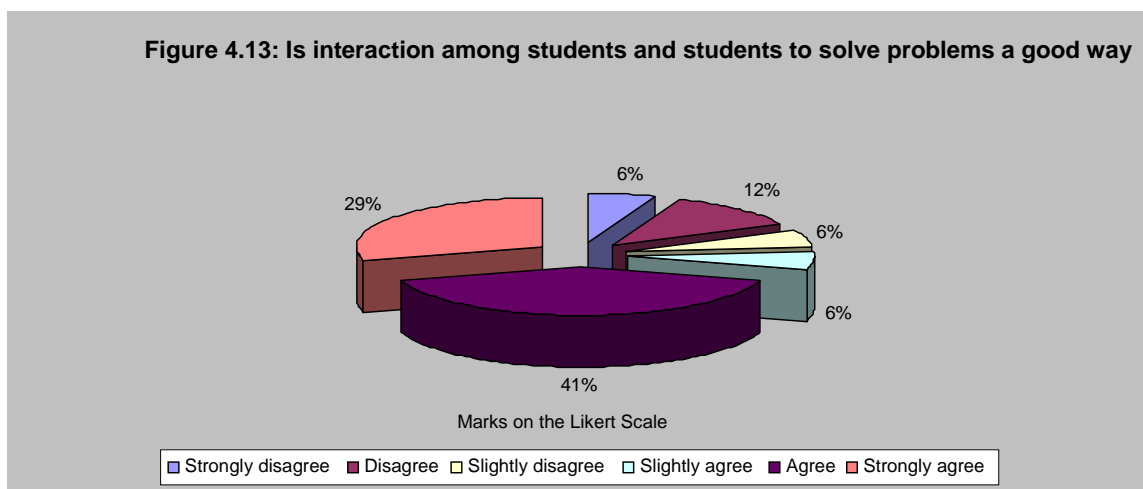
This section deals with the teachers' roles and students' participations in the CLT classrooms. The following figure 4.12 indicates that the respondents were divided in two ways. A small numbers, 29 percent of respondents think, that students' participations do not create chaos in the classroom. They quoted 'strongly disagreed' with the belief that students' participations may create chaos in the CLT classroom. On the other hand, the same percent of the respondents recorded that they 'slightly agreed' with the belief that students' participations may create chaos in the CLT classroom. However, 18 percent of respondents quoted 'agree' and 12 percent of respondents viewed 'strongly agree'.

Figure 4.12: Students participations create chaos in the classroom



In the same way, in terms of students’ participations in the CLT activities the figure 4.13 shows that the large numbers of respondents quoted that they agreed with that interaction among students help them to solve problems in a good way. 29 percent of the respondents ‘strongly agreed’ while 12 percent quoted ‘disagreed’.

Figure 4.13: Is interaction among students and students to solve problems a good way



When asked what kind of difficulties might students and teachers face because of changing roles, teachers replied in the following ways:

Both the group would need logistic and infrastructural support, which is not enough. we do not still possess a CLT environment

(Source of data: An interview with Teacher A)

Students feel shy and in spite of their capability they retrain from talking part, as their credit will be given to only written skill.

(Source of data: An interview with Teacher F)

The survey data indicates that many respondents expressed a marked preference for the negotiated role of teachers and students in English language class. But, the observation

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data provided evidence that no one played any kind of role which can be considered as manager, adviser or monitor. All teachers agreed that CLT involved in speaking and listening skills but in their classes they only emphasized reading, writing and grammar rules. In their classes, they retained the traditional dominating role of teacher

### **The Role of In-service Training in English Language Teaching**

As the teachers discussed various ideas about CLT, they were also asked how they had learned about CLT, and what their sources of learning were. Responses from the interviews showed that the teachers had learned about CLT from sources that included personal L2 learning, personal L2 teaching, teacher development programs, in-services and other teachers. Although the teachers learned about CLT through different sources, personal L2 learning and teaching experiences seemed to have had the greatest influences.

Teachers who attended a teacher's development course gained some ideas about CLT but did not seem to have thorough explanations of what CLT meant. The teachers who attended in-services training replied that they had difficulties finding the time necessary to implement the classroom activities that they learned there.

Yes in-services training are nice. I think most programs are giving us techniques to encourage students to use the language they know and encourage them to learn from each other. Yea, they are not teacher-oriented group-work and pair work-oriented and interaction. Yet, after coming back, I just don't have the time to plan all those things and sometime it is not possible because of time-consuming activities.

(Source of data: An interview with Teacher P)

Apart from this situation, the majority of the teachers did not get any kind of in-service training. They just heard it from other teachers. In particular, the majority of the teachers said that watching good and bad teachers and learning about their experiences was quite influential. One teacher felt that training was not necessary.

I think in-services training are not much necessary because it automatically come through the passage of time, through his/her experience, through facing the problem and finding suitable solution one after another

(Source of data: An interview with Teacher N)

The link between teaching and training is universally agreed on, and the data analysis confirms that this is the case among the teachers who participated in this study. They put a lot of emphasis on having in-service training because they want to know more about CLT. Curriculum designers should keep in mind that creating or designing a CLT syllabus is not the final goal, rather implementing and evaluating the syllabus should be the aim. So do so, teachers have to be prepared and equipped with the skills to "teach" the new syllabus.

The data analysis showed that the way that these teachers made sense of their L2 teaching and learning was based on their personal experiences; little came from any Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

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type of program or in-service training. Although all of them emphasized on the in-services training for developing the teaching capabilities, personal L2 learning and teaching experiences filtered through as the primary variables that nurtured their beliefs, knowledge, and practices in L2 teaching and learning.

In addition to training teachers, other stakeholders such as school administrators, parents and students should also be familiarised with the CLT approach. Unless principles understanding and the goals of CLT, they will not be able to extend the support that teachers need to implement CLT activities. Teachers need freedom and flexibility in covering the syllabus. They must be allowed to make classes interactive even if classes become noisy and boisterous. More importantly teachers need a lighter workload so that they have adequate time to prepare and teach the “time-consuming” CLT activities. It was encouraging to note that teachers are interested in CLT. This indicates that CLT will be effective once teachers learn how to incorporate the theory into reality.

### Conclusion

The three data sources revealed major aspects of these Higher Secondary colleges teachers’ understanding about CLT as well as challenges that provided tensions that affected those conceptions. The observation data showed reluctance on the part of teachers to promote CLT and indicated that many teachers avoided the few ideas of CLT that they held. The interview and survey data explained teaching practice and teachers’ beliefs.

Although most teachers reported using communicative activities such as role-play, games, survey, group work, and simulations, unfortunately, these things were rarely observed. Almost all teachers relied on traditional practices that are teacher-fronted involved drills like repetition, translation, explicit grammar presentation exercises from the textbook, and little of no L2 use or culture integration. In conclusion, the data shows that teachers are not guided by their beliefs or knowledge of CLT. There is a gap between the concepts or opinions expressed by the teachers and the teacher’s actual teaching practice.

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### Appendix A: Questionnaire CLT \_ in Bangladesh Questionnaire for teachers

**Please read each instruction and write your answers. This is not a test so there is no “right” or “wrong” answers and you do not even have to write your name on it. Just put a circle on the option you think is right for you. . Please do not leave out any of items. Thank you very much for your help!**

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
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1	2	3	4	5	6
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1. “Healthy interaction between teachers –students enhances the capability of learners”	1 2 3 4 5 6
2. “Discussion with classmates during class time for solving problems is a good way to learn”	1 2 3 4 5 6
3. “Students participation crates chaos in the class”	1 2 3 4 5 6
4. “English should be the medium of instruction in English language classes.”	1 2 3 4 5 6

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