

## Students' Attitude Towards English Language Learning at Secondary Level Education: Bangladeshi Context

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**Abstract:** This paper demonstrates the students' attitude towards English language learning at secondary level education. The present study is implemented by following 57 students in the secondary level education in Bangladesh. The findings suggested that students were not generally comfortable with the language environments and courses offered in secondary settings; they agreed that learning English is important for them. The respondents in the present study, who had just obtained their primary education, reported that the syllabus in secondary level (school) helped them obtaining the language needed for career and personal growth. The findings of the study also showed a positive attitude towards the learning of English at the secondary level education in Bangladesh.

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### 1. Introduction

The issue of English language learning is a very important phenomenon for the Bangladeshi students like non natives (Whose native language is not English) where the students of secondary level education in Bangladesh is not far from that purposes. Though English language is taught in the different stages (From the primary level to tertiary level education) of the educational institution in Bangladesh for different purposes, the students of Bangladesh especially at secondary level students can not reach their goal. So, there has been a mismatch between English language learning and the students of Bangladesh. But what constrains the mismatch of English language learning? A host of variables come into play an important role in determining the issue, which may vary from one context to another. It may be difficult to make a complete list of the variables, however, some of them are lack of proficiency of the teacher, attitudes of the students, socio-cultural background, and in particular, language learning (As it is not mother language) policy itself.

No doubt Bangladesh is a multilingual as well as multicultural country. But it is expected that students in Bangladesh from primary level to tertiary level will learn English language equally in different domains for different purposes. What are the authentic problems in English language learning of the Bangladeshi students that constitute the main objective of this paper.

### 2. Background of the study

The history of English may be divided into three periods: Old English from about 700 to 1100 AD, Middle English from 1100 to 1500 AD, and Modern English from 1500 to the present

(Thirumalai, 2002). Though the history of English is back dated, it is introduced in the Indian subcontinent long time after which became the dominant language of communication among the educated classes after the famous Minute of Lord Macaulay in 1833. As English is an international language, spoken in many countries both as a native and as a second or foreign language, it is taught in the primary level to tertiary level educational institutions in almost every country on this earth. It is a living and vibrant language spoken by over 300 million people as their native language. Millions more speak it as an additional language. There can be no denying the fact that English is learned everywhere, where Bangladesh is not beyond of them, because people have found out that knowledge of English is a passport for better career, better pay, advanced knowledge, and for communication with the entire world. English is also learned for the literature it possesses, and for the variety and rich experience it provides. In this computer age, English is bound to expand its domains of use everywhere. Everyone wants to appropriate English as their own. Where in Bangladesh, On 19 January 1989, English language was introduced as a compulsory language from primary level education to college level education with students having to qualify in both English and Bengali in the board examinations. Moreover, at the tertiary level, in addition to the regular courses, English language was introduced as a compulsory subject in many disciplines.

### 3. Brief Review of the previous Researches

Kobayashi et al. (1992) conducted a survey of 549 freshmen and sophomores to assess their high school learning experiences and attitudes towards

English. There was found to be an overall interest in the study of English, with 73% of students wanting to be able to speak the language and 83% to use it to learn about other cultures. A further 87% saw English as being important in their future career choice. However, approximately 85% of the students indicated that their high school English course had failed to improve their communicative competence. When asked if they had been interested in studying English in high school 60.2% of the students responded positively. Students were also questioned to determine if university entrance examinations had in some way facilitated their ability to speak English, and 85.4% of the subjects responded negatively to this statement.

Lanara (1999), similarly, in a study of 90 first-year English major university students, found that there was a negative response to their high school English language classes. Students expressed the view that they had not learned anything of value in high school due to poor teaching methods, which were characterized by monotonous grammar-translation drill practice.

Christensen (1989) reinforced these findings in her study of first year university students, with many subjects indicating they had a negative impression of high school English classes. When questioned regarding weak aspects of high school English, grammar was the most frequently mentioned. Students pointed out that little time was allocated to spoken English, with heavy stress being placed instead on university entrance examination preparation.

In one article by Hatori (1977) the primary reasons why junior high school students hate English and the time period in which they develop this particular attitude was examined. The study was conducted over a 16-month time frame with the subjects being surveyed on three occasions, in May and October of first year and in September the following year. When first questioned, the majority of students indicated that English was not a difficult subject. However, when surveyed for the second time 33% of the students felt it was. When questioned in second year the percentage had risen to 62%. When asked to indicate when English became difficult 49% of the students responded with the third semester of first year, whilst 42% of the students indicated it was in the first semester of second year. Hatori claims there are five major reasons for this change in students' attitudes in junior high school. They include: (a) students not understanding information in class and being unable to make a connection between new material and that which has already been covered; (b) students not liking their English teacher; (c) instructors teaching English as a subject and not

as a language for communication; (d) the structure of the Japanese education system in which students are required to cover a considerable amount of work, with teachers lacking the time to review material with students who don't understand; and (5) Japanese students tend to underestimate their English ability.

In a similar study of third year junior high school students (Matsuhata, 1970), it was discovered that 26.3% of students liked English, 38.4% disliked the subject and 35.4% were undecided. Of the students who indicated that they enjoyed studying English the majority felt that they had begun to like the subject from first semester in first year, this coinciding with the commencement of English study. Of the students who didn't like English, the majority suggested that they had begun to dislike English from first semester in second year. The major reasons for beginning to like English, in order of preference included (a) I liked the teacher; (b) I was interested in learning a foreign language; (c) I could understand the lesson; (d) I achieved good test results; and (e) I wanted to do well in a new school subject. Of the main reasons listed for beginning to dislike English, in order of preference, the following were the five most common responses; (a) English class was difficult and I couldn't understand; (b) I didn't like the teacher; (c) I didn't study hard; (d) the teacher changed and their English pronunciation and teaching style was different; and (e) I didn't like having to remember vocabulary.

Although these surveys examined the high school experiences of subjects, they did so after the students had entered university and had been subjected to a different learning environment. Apart from the above-mentioned studies, there has been little research conducted to address differences which may exist in secondary level students in their attitudes towards English. Of those studies that do exist, many have been carried out by different researchers, with no equivalent articles in the English language available, especially in Bangladesh.

The general focus of these research papers however, has centered on the attitudes of either junior high school students or senior high school students, with few comparisons being made between the two groups. But the present research paper focuses on the secondary level students' attitude towards English language learning for Bangladeshi context.

#### **4. Definition of Attitudes**

Sarnoff (1970) defines the term 'attitudes' as 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.

### 5. Rationale for the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate any differences which exist among the secondary level students towards the study of English. Specifically, the following research questions were addressed:

1. Do secondary level students place more emphasis on the study of English for their examination?
2. Are secondary level students more likely to indicate they will discontinue studying English after completing their course?
3. Do secondary level students place less value on the development of English communication skills due to the structure of university entrance examinations than their recent course?
4. Are secondary level students more enthusiastic about studying English?
5. Are there any attitudinal differences among the subject line of English at secondary level education?
6. Apart from examinations, what reasons do students cite for the study of English?

### 6. A Brief Overview of English: Bangladeshi context

Though English language is taught in the different stages of the educational institutions in Bangladesh for different purposes, the role of English in Bangladesh is purely functional as English is used as an international link language where this "English language is introduced through different methods like Grammar-Translation (First introduced in Germany especially in Prussia, But this method was immigrated for teaching language in Bangladesh during colonial period which is being used till today.), Direct method (alternatively called "The Natural Method. This method was introduced in Bangladesh by the hands of the Ministry of Education), Audio-lingual (It was originated in America at the time of World War II), Natural Approach and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Though this CLT method was started in England in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century but it was introduced for teaching English at secondary level education in Bangladesh in 2001 and is being continued till today" (Mondal, 2012). It is true that a

number of methods have been used for learning and teaching English in Bangladesh but Grammar-Translation method and Communicative Language Teaching are used in Bangladesh alike where CLT gains more application for Bangladeshi context (Mondal 2011). English language is not used as an interpersonal and inter-institutional communication in Bangladesh. But English has been used for years and for different purposes and gradually it is becoming part of the socio-cultural system. As the use of English language is increasing day by day in different forms, there is significant evidence of use of English along with Bengali. As Bangladesh after birth as an independent country, has evaluated 'Bengali more everywhere' the learning of English language affected and limited more naturally. Though English language was introduced as a compulsory language from primary level education to college level education with students having to qualify in both English and Bengali in the board examinations in Bangladesh alike, because of faulty language policies since 1972, English was set back and English language education suffered tremendously, leaving a vacuum which is yet to be filled. Interestingly, instead of having different political ideologies on the concept of nationalism, all the leaders of subsequent governments of the country, since independence, stress on shedding the so-called dominance of 'imperial English', and assigning new roles to Mother Tongue (Bengali) in public life. But English has continued to be an important part of the communication system, especially of urban educated Bangladeshis. While the government continually tried to establish Bengali everywhere, the space and the role of English, though not defined, could not be ignored due to strong presence of English as the language of international correspondence.

### 7. Methodology

This is a descriptive and non-experimental study. The data were collected through a questionnaire survey administered to a sample of sixty eight students as respondents from school level education in Bangladesh. The respondents were not recognized as per gender (male and female) equally. Rather, the respondents were randomly selected from different schools. The questionnaire was prepared through English language including ten questions and administered by the researcher himself. The purpose and different terms of the questionnaire were explained before the distribution. After then, the questionnaires were distributed into the respondents (The school level students). Upon the completion of data collection, these were analyzed using SPSS. On the basis of the findings, a perfect figure is drawn.

## 8. Data Analysis

Data collected were tabulated, analyzed and interpreted and presented in Figure 1. Percentage was calculated by using statistical technique for analysis. The short terms which are used in the chart are described below:

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

**Figure 1**

Questions	SA	A	U	D	SD
1. Do you think your current text book of English is apt?	16 28%	10 17.5%	5 8.8%	7 12.3%	19 33.3%
2. Should your English book be changed?	27 47.4%	9 15.8%	6 10.5%	11 19.3%	7 12.3%
3. Is grammar-translation method apt for learning English?*	23 40.4%	11 19.3%	3 5.3%	7 12.3%	13 22.8%
4. Is communicative language teaching apt for English learning?*	19 33.3%	14 24.6%	4 7%	8 14%	12 21%
5. Is reading helpful for English learning?*	17 29.8%	13 22.8%	6 10.5%	11 19.3%	10 17.5%
6. Is speaking helpful for English learning?*	18 31.6%	15 26.3%	2 3.5%	9 15.8%	13 22.8%
7. Is writing helpful for English learning?*	12 21%	13 22.8%	4 7%	17 29.8%	11 19.3%
8. Is listening helpful for learning English?*	21 36.8%	7 12.3%	7 12.3%	12 21%	10 17.5%
9. Is English newspaper helpful for this?*	22 38.6%	9 15.8%	0 0%	14 24.6%	12 21%
10. Is English movie needed for learning English?*	16 28%	15 26.3%	6 10.5%	8 14%	12 21%

### Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Opinions toward the English (N = 57)

## 9. Findings

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

1. Majority of 33.3 % respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that their current text book of English is apt used in teaching English at the Higher Secondary education in Bangladesh which has been expressed through their agreement with the statement.

2. Majority of 47.4 % respondents strongly agreed with the statement that their text book should be changed which has been expressed through their strong agreement with the statement.

3. Majority of 40.4 % respondents strongly agreed with the statement that grammar-translation method is essential for learning English which has been expressed through their strong agreement with the statement.

4. Majority of 33.3 % respondents strongly agreed with the statement that communicative language teaching is helpful for learning English which has been expressed through their strong agreement with the statement.

5. Majority of 29.8 % respondents strongly agreed with the statement that reading is helpful for learning English which has been expressed through their statement.

6. Majority of 31.6 % respondents strongly agreed with the statement that speaking is helpful for learning English which has been expressed through their strongly agreement with the statement.

7. Majority of 29.8 % respondents disagreed with the statement that writing is helpful for learning English at the Higher Secondary education which has been expressed through their strongly disagreement with the statement.

8. Majority of 36.8 % respondents strongly agreed with the statement that listening is helpful for learning English at the Higher Secondary education which has been expressed through their strong agreement with the statement.

9. Majority of 38.6 % respondents strongly agreed with the statement that English newspaper is helpful for learning English which has been expressed through their strong disagreement with the statement.

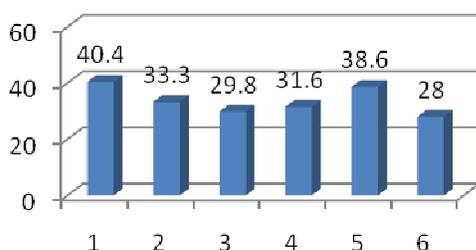
10. Majority of 28 % respondents strongly agreed with the statement that English movie is helpful for learning English which has been expressed through their strong agreement with the statement.

## 10. Results and Discussions

The result is drawn up through data analysis and findings of the research. When designing the attitudes of the school level students towards English, the present research could address the focal evaluation questions, so it designed corresponding questions to obtain information about that theme desired. The questions the study implemented were highly structured and the students'

answers and responses to the questions helped to continue the research effectively. When analyzing the data, it also obtained a clearer picture of the implementation status of the current research.

On the basis of the results and discussions (where ten questions are structured) a chart can be drawn in the following way through taking the highest percentages of star (\*) marked questions-



### 11. Conclusion

Bangladeshi students learn English from different sources. As they learn English from different sources, their attitudes are not the same towards English language. Majority of the respondents realized the necessity of learning English in this computer era and they reported their strong positive attitude towards English. They were of the opinion that those who speak English create good impression and get advantages in seeking good jobs. They felt that their current text book of English is not appropriate and it should be changed partially for learning English well. They also felt that English language teaching methods like grammar-translation and communicative language teaching should be used at college level education in Bangladesh. Side by side four skills like reading, writing, speaking and listening are more helpful for this purpose. As a whole they wanted an increase use of English in education where English newspaper and English movie play a vital role for learning English at this stage.

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