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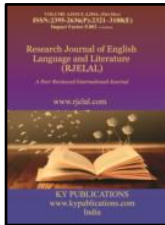
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## RESPONSIBILITIES IN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS: PERCEIVED BY EFL LEARNERS IN A BANGLADESHI SETTING

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### ABSTRACT

Language teaching and learning in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context is always a part of challenge where both teachers and learners need to be ready for controlling the situation. To make the classroom effective they are supposed to contribute according to the necessities. Teachers need to maintain the firm duties of their teaching activities properly, at the same time learners also require to, being the centre of the classroom, carry out some essential functions (of which they are always not informed or aware) to get the targeted success. This study attempts to find out the viewpoints of the learners, using group discussion activities among tertiary level students of Bangladesh Agricultural University, about their own responsibilities in the classroom with an aim to uncover their perceptions of learning responsibilities that may facilitate both teaching-learning accomplishments.

Key words: Learners; responsibilities; learning interest; attitude; behavior

### Introduction

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has evolved as the most prevailing approach in language teaching (Eveyik-Aydin, 2003, p. 1), honors the values of teachers and students equally to make the environment friendlier which needs to take into account in every classroom setting of EFL. To think through the eyes of only teachers is already an obsolete term where he works as an instructor. When the interaction between both the teacher and the learner will be equally portioned, a communicative classroom of a foreign context will be livelier and more fruitful. But the fact is that, learners of our context want their teachers, classroom everything communicative but they feel shy to take themselves out of the shell of silence and to ensure active participation through sharing their views related to the topics, teachers, classroom and

everything. For Senowarsito (2013, p. 87), 'the interaction in the classroom was still largely dominated by the teacher. The teachers dominated in giving instruction, giving explanation, showing appreciation, encouraging, motivating, and answering student's questions. The students mainly responded to teacher's instruction, questions and encouragement'.

Usually teachers of an EFL setting complete field related higher education and training before going to classes so, they carry good ideas about the roles and responsibilities of both parties but this is not the similar case with learners. Undoubtedly, it is also necessary for the learners to have some clear conceptions about their responsibilities in classroom. It is also helpful for the teachers to have ideas about learners' views on the functions of teachers and learners which they are carrying in

between themselves without sharing with others. May be, they can carry some important concepts of learning and teaching which can add important values in a language classroom. If these (their thinking/views) can be received at the starting part of the classes or courses, teachers may get some more ideas about their students' awareness regarding their responsibilities, learning strategies, interests, weakness or strength etc. which are nothing but supportive criteria for the language journey. Using this knowledge a teacher can also make language learners conscious of other liabilities if the environment demands. Basically, 'learning a second language is an important and challenging task that learners need to accomplish. Knowledge of the characteristics of a good language learner can help students increase their language learning efficiency. Also, it can help teachers to understand their students better in order to facilitate their students' learning' (Sudsard, 2013, p. 42). We must also keep in mind that, 'what students believe about learning and themselves as learners plays a key role in determining their success as learners. Research evidence is very clear on this issue. If a student believes that no matter what they do, they won't succeed in a course, even being in a course with a highly rated effective teacher does not change the effects of those beliefs' (Weimer, 2009).

#### **Review of Literature**

The field of English language teaching has evolved along with time, broadening its horizons to suit the requirements of the learner. Approaches have made a groundbreaking shift from merely learning the language to achieving natural competence in it (Rajasekar and Mangayarkarasi, 2017, p. 469). The emphasis in Communicative Language Teaching on the processes of communication, rather than mastery of language forms, leads to different roles for learners from those found in more traditional second language classrooms (Richard and Rodgers, 2001, p. 166). They are put into situations in which they must share responsibilities, make decisions, evaluate their own progress, develop individual preferences, and so on (Dubin and Olshtain, 1986, p. 31). Remarkable studies have been done to set the roles, characteristics or responsibilities of a language

learner under the names of '*good, effective or successful*' learner.

The learner can achieve interdependence by recognising responsibility for his own learning and by sharing that responsibility with other learners and the teachers. A further implication is that the learner must commit himself to undertake communicative and metacommunicative acts while working with other participants in the group, and while working upon activities and text (Breen and Candlin, 1980, p. 100).

Thus, the good learner may simply be the learner who has an open mind, the willingness to honestly try new learning strategies and is always learning how to learn (Sewell, 2003). Good language learners are also very active (i.e. they use strategies for taking charge of their own learning), show awareness of the learning process and their own personal learning styles and, above all, are flexible and appropriate in their use of learning strategies (Ellis, 1997, p. 77).

Good learners are curious – 'they wonder about all sorts of things, often about things way beyond their areas of expertise. They love the discovery part of learning. Finding out about something they didn't know satisfies them for the moment, but their curiosity is addictive' (Weimer, 2014).

Rubin & Thompson (1983, as cited by Nunan, 1991, p. 171) finds that, Good language learners of second language display some characteristics, which are as follows-

1. Good learners find their own way.
2. Good learners organise information about language.
3. Good learners are creative and experiment with language.
4. Good learners make their own opportunities, and find strategies for getting practice in using the language inside and outside the classroom.
5. Good learners learn to live with uncertainty and develop strategies for making sense of the target language without wanting to understand every word.
6. Good learners use mnemonics (rhymes, word associations, etc. to recall what has been learned).

7. Good learners make errors work.
8. Good learners use linguistic knowledge, including knowledge of their first language in mastering a second language.
9. Good learners let the context (extra-linguistics knowledge and knowledge of the world) help them in comprehension.
10. Good learners learn to make intelligent guesses.
11. Good learners learn chunks of language as wholes and formalised routines to help them perform 'beyond their competence'.
12. Good learners learn production technique (e.g. techniques for keeping a conversation going).
13. Good learners learn different styles of speech and writing and learn to vary their language according to the formality of the situation.

Griffiths (2010, p. 16) points out that 'although students may vary in a number of respects, those who succeed are motivated and they take charge of their own learning by means of strategies which suit their own individual characteristics, situations, and goals'.

#### Methodology

To conduct the study, data from 67 students of three batches were collected by Group Discussion activity. They were the students of different faculties of Bangladesh Agricultural University who were enrolled in a course on Advanced Communicative English offered by the Department of Languages (with small size classrooms of 20-30 students for each batch). Adult learners with the age range of 20-24 years were asked to participate in group discussions (group of 3 or 4), on the topic '*Responsibilities of the ...\* learners in an English language classroom to make it effective with a friendlier environment*' as a classroom activity. They were supposed to prepare their tasks for their group presentations before the class. Here, for sharing their true feelings participants had the full freedom as the teachers of the language lab always take care of the issue with importance. The participants submitted their written scripts (based on group discussion) to the teacher after their presentations where they had also the chance to share their very personal or group feelings regarding the subject matter in written form

(using different sheet) without mentioning names or ID numbers which they didn't like to disclose before all. After collecting the written documents of the learners, their feelings or views on the responsibilities of learners had been gathered and critically analyzed to use for this paper with an aim to collect a clear conception of students' thinking on their own functions in a language classroom that can be supportive for maintaining an effective teaching-learning environment.

(\*some words of the topic related to the mentioned one is intentionally left aside for other study)

#### Findings and Discussion

Adult language learners are goal oriented and direct their learning to fulfill particular needs or demands: to advance their studies, to progress up the career ladder, to follow business opportunities, to pass a driving test, to assist their children with homework, or simply to be successful users of the language. They usually require immediate value and relevance from their studies, and they often learn best when they are engaged in developing their own learning objectives (Smith and Strong, 2009, p.1). Keep in tune with this thought, some criteria of effective learning were provided to help learners share their concepts instantly as well as to support them for further proceeding with their own points. The aspects included- *learning interest, attitude towards the teacher and other students, behavior with the teacher and the learning partners* on which learners gave their contribution of personal thinking through group sharing. At the same time, they also added some more responsibilities which they thought are mostly important for a learners' role playing as an active participant in a language classroom.

##### a) Learning Interest

According to Zhao (2014, p. 308), 'interest is a kind of emotion arousal status, and it is a tendency that the people know things or love some activities. If a person focuses on a thing for a long time under a certain orientation, it means that this person becomes interested in such thing. ...With an interest, the people will be active to seek for the satisfactory knowledge and to understand the required approaches and methods. As long as the students become interested in learning, they will show

enthusiasm to the activities to participate in, and be active to learn and explore, improve the efficiency, and develop new abilities’.

Individual interests have a profound effect on cognitive functioning and performance (individuals interested in a task or activity have been shown to pay more attention, persist for longer periods of time, and acquire more and qualitatively different knowledge than individuals without such interest)... (Hidi, 1990, p. 554). Thus, if a learner does not have the interest and tendency in acquiring the target language to communicate with others, this learner will possess a negative attitude and will not be motivated and enthusiastic in language learning (Eshghinejad, 2016, p. 3)

Participants of this study gave their impressions on the above mentioned criterion in these ways:

*Every person is a student from birth till death* (Group 20).

100% interest and concentration on learning something new from the teachers are essential. Learning interest is the most important part of acquiring knowledge. Students should have interest for learning and not have interest only for having good marks or certificates. Learners need to attend classes with keen interest to learn the language in a standard way. If they are not interested about the subject, teacher will not be able to make them understand the topics or to teach them in right ways i.e. they need to be enthusiastic for learning more from the teacher and also require to grow their learning interest in such a way that drives the teacher to teach the language interestingly. At the same time, students are expected to make themselves prepared for asking questions in the class for better understanding of the subject but it should be nicely presented and they need to avoid unexpected questions. Complete the respective duties/activities given by the teachers in due time is very essential. While listening to the lecture, learners require being attentive and they should not use personal gadgets like mobile phones, note books without teacher’s consent during class time as well as make noise. They also need to attend the class regularly. Attending classes regularly is also a must.

The main theme of their concept is, ‘students must be enthusiastic (mentioned by Group 1 & 19), studious (Group 1), sincere (Group 2, 5 10, 11, 17 &19), attentive (Group 2, 3, 6, 10, 11, 14 &15), zealous (17), eager (Group 14) to learn which proves that they have curiosity about learning as well as thirst for knowledge’. Among all these the responsibility of being ‘attentive’ was mentioned highest times. It makes the idea clear that, more or less the learners were conscious about the fact that without upholding the responsibilities of learning interest they would not avail their targeted outcomes from the language class. This realization is always expected from any learner of any context of the world.

#### **b) Attitudes and Behaviors**

Positive attitude is important in entering into the new environment of learning a new language (Dehbozorgi, 2012, p. 45). Positive attitudes towards the acquisition process will reflect high personal motivation for learning the language, a feeling of self fulfillment and success and an overall enthusiasm about the language course (Dubin and Olshtain, 1986, p. 14). The fact is that, ‘Learners’ attitudes could incorporate in language learning because it may influence their performance in acquiring the target language. Students’ attitude, i.e. feelings, beliefs, likes, dislikes, needs, should be considered, since their attitudes influence language learning’ (Eshghinejad, 2016, p. 3) and ‘it is the student’s good or poor attitude that makes life easy or difficult in the foreign language classroom’ (Oroujlou and Vahedi, 2011, p. 997).

Behavior is a response, which an individual shows to his environment at different times. Behavior can be positive or negative, effective or ineffective, conscious or unconscious, overt or covert, and voluntary or involuntary (Mehdipour and Balaramulu, 2013, p. 1). Perhaps, if each member of the classroom structure, student and teacher, can learn effectively to reinforce appropriate behaviors in the other, enduring ideal learning conditions can be achieved and maintained (Sherman and Cormier, 1974, p. 19).

In Wagner and Ruch (2015, p. 3), ‘temperance strengths (e.g., prudence, self-regulation) should be helpful to regulate feelings,

thoughts, and behaviors in a way that matches the expectations and norms in the classroom (e.g., showing good conduct)'.

To the participants of the study, responsibilities concerning attitude towards the teacher and other students and behavior with the teacher and the learning partners had been observed in the following ways:

In a language classroom, *attitude means positive or negative reactions towards the teacher and students* (Group 4).

Learners should not ignore the teachers showing the same care attitude that can disturb his/her teaching process or make jokes about teacher's simple mistakes, which proves aggressive or offensive attitudes for arising odd situations. Simultaneously, they must not neglect other students showing boast. Showing respect to the teacher and not insulting weak students (2) with harsh comment or fun also need to maintain seriously.

*Politeness is the most important part of good behavior* (Group 2).

Student should be conscious so that teachers are not underestimated by their harsh/undesired remarks or approaches. They should not think themselves all or dominant persons rather it is very necessary to prove themselves as quiet (mentioned by Group 6), congenial (Group 11), trustworthy (Group 6 & 11), well mannered (Group 20), sober (Group 7), broad minded (Group 14) and well disciplined (Group 7) as the aspects of positive behavior.

It proves that 'good learners are- gentle (Group 10), polite (Group 5, 10 & 11), friendly (Group 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 15 & 18), respectful (Group 5, 14, 15 & 17), modest (Group 20) and obedient (Group 16) towards the teacher as well as are also able to maintain a good and friendly relationship with other partners of the class'.

Some of the participants of the study not only talked about the specific qualities of being polite, friendly etc., but also even by defining the term 'attitude' they showed their good sense of knowledge regarding the issue. The term 'friendly' was mentioned highest time.

Though in their discussion part there found some overlapping while talking about attitudes and behaviors, still they contributed their thinking very promptly. Not only they felt to be positive with their behavior like *congenial, trustworthy*, but also they felt the obligation to avoid the behaviors that show negativity like *haughtiness*. This is really appreciable as they showed their ideas on both a learner's 'dos and don'ts'.

Other aspects mentioned by the learners are as follows-

1. Learners need to be *co-operative* (Group 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 14, 15, 18 & 19) during group tasks with the classmates as well as for acquiring proper knowledge of language or for getting feedback from the teacher.
2. They need to be *understandable* to others.
3. They must *encourage others* and also give importance to other students' opinion.
4. Students should take the responsibility of *active participation* in classroom activities overcoming shyness or hesitation as participation in the class is very important for effective learning.
5. They require being *confident* for learning the language but need to *avoid over confidence* about their knowledge as it may have extreme harmful effects on their learning process.
6. Language learners should not be *disappointed* at any point, if this happens, they should fight back strongly against the situation.
7. Students must maintain *good personalities* (speaking, dress-up, mentality, moral character, truthfulness etc.)
8. Learners should perform healthy politics but *no politics in the class*.

Additional aspects illustrated by the learners undoubtedly prove that, through their group discussion they very wisely brought out the most important responsibilities they need to perform in a language classroom. Only three aspects were given to them for discussion with the freedom to include more according to their wishes and the tasks started very wonderfully here as they added the phrases like 'co-operative during group task, confident for learning, good personality with moral character, not being disappointed' to talk about other responsibilities.

Through this study, reflection of learners' insights on their responsibilities had been gathered. All these confirm that, time has already been out to judge learners as passive entities; now they are very conscious and active in their thinking. They need only the exposures to think as well as implement their thoughts and where the responsibilities go to teachers and educators to set the right place for them.

### Conclusion

The application of communicative language teaching (CLT) to English as a foreign language (EFL) context has recently been debated extensively. Although the CLT approach attempts to involve learners in more authentic and interactive learning tasks that promote both comprehensible input and learners' language output, teachers still find it difficult and challenging to adopt the approach and maximize the learning; especially in EFL classrooms (Koosha and Yakhabi, 2013). However, to minimize the difficulty, in any English classroom of foreign context, both the teachers and learners need to play specific functions. When the learners are aware of their responsibilities it is well understood that they are one step advanced that means they are well prepared for their language journey. Beside a teacher's role, if the learners also fulfill their responsibilities correctly and completely, the expected achievement of the class can easily be predicted. The study finds that learners of Bangladesh bear enough consciousness about the implication of their lively participations in classroom activities and also believe that if they are not cooperative (the most frequently described criterion), all endeavors of the teachers will fail automatically.

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