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Current Practice of Student-Centred Classrooms for Learning English at Tertiary Colleges in Bangladesh: Issues and Solutions

Md. Robiul Islam [α] & Ashim Kumar Paul [σ]

Abstract- In an increasingly interconnected and globalized world, there is no alternative to attaining communicative competence in English as it is the primary language used in international affairs. On the other hand, the traditional teacher-centred learning cannot ensure the best student-learning outcome for learning English and therefore, many educationists recommend the introduction of the student-centred learning in the classrooms. Hence, this paper delves into the current practice of student-centred classrooms for learning English at tertiary level colleges in Bangladesh. It also seeks to address the challenges of student-centred classroom for learning English at tertiary colleges in Bangladesh and endeavours to find the solutions to the challenges. For this purpose, twelve (12) teachers has been chosen from four (04) tertiary colleges of Pabna district of Bangladesh. A questionnaire and an interview schedule, containing of both close-ended and open-ended type questions, were used to collect the data. The findings of this study show that 'lecture method' is predominantly followed in the tertiary colleges of Bangladesh while very few number of teachers try to practice 'student- centered learnning methods' in the classroom. Among teaching aids, 'whiteboard & marker' and books are mostly used. The study shows that teachers are facing many problems in the classroom in teaching-learning activities. Based on the findings of the study, some recommendations have been made in order to overcome the challenges and problems with regard to ensure student-centred classroom for learning English efficiently.

Keywords: student-centred classroom, learning english, tertiary colleges in bangladesh, teaching aids, challenges, and solutions.

I. Introduction

With the unprecedented flow of information and communication technology, English language as a lingua franca has been enjoying the major position in higher education system and research over the last decades for its global needs and acknowledgement (Balan, 2011). English widely used as a means of instruction in higher education is a significant educational trend (Graddol, 2000). It grows into a corridor to logging on to all fields of knowledge and academic research sources across the world and a best tool for foreign language learning and teaching (AL-Khalil, 2015). Besides, communication skills in English have been identified as indispensable workplace tools for success in business (Hynes & Bhatia, 1996). Managers spend the numerous hours communicating with others (Krizan, Merrier and Jones, 2002), devote their time to writing correspondence and reports (Ober, 2001), and develop their competence to earn higher salaries if they have strong writing skills (Fisher, 1999). In addition, English is one of the most important employability skills (Clement & Murugavel, 2015). In the present global market, employers look for the candidates having good English language skills for success and advancement in many fields of employment in today's world (Richards, 2005) and hence, high proficiency in spoken and written English is regarded as the principal prerequisite qualification (Rao, 2015). Thus, proficiency in English language plays a pivotal role in the job sector (Casale & Posel, 2011).

In Bangladesh, English is taught as the compulsory subject in primary, secondary to higher secondary education of the Bangla-medium schools. In other words, students study English for twelve years before entering into higher education arena. Besides, students at degree (pass course) and honours programmes in the tertiary level colleges affiliated with National University learn English as a compulsory course for one year in their undergraduate studies in order to enhance their communicative skills. Moreover, students of BBA programmes under National University also study Business Communication course (www.nu.ac.bd). Nevertheless, in spite of taking relentless efforts and a good number of projects by the government of Bangladesh and educationists for the improvement of English language learning condition as well as having preparations by the students, the scenario of communicative competence in English is still bleak.Khan (2012) states that the old classroom model simply does not meet our changing needs. It's a basically passive way of learning, while the world needs more active processing of information. Moreover, the learners are rarely asked to get engaged in communicative exercise in the traditional classroom (Farooqui, 2014). In addition, students do not feel easy to be more active in classroom exercise and they do not like to take liability for their own study (Chaudhury, 2011). Furthermore, communication is only fixed among

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the more progressive students in the classroom and most of the teachers cannot communicate with each student in the large classroom (Mamun et al, 2011). Even, they are not well-trained about classroom management issues.

On the contrary, 'student-centred classroom' follows instructional methods and classroom cultures that take individual student and their interests, needs, and experiences into consideration when teaching and testing for understanding (Fox & Hoffman, 2011). More specifically speaking, in a student- centered classroom, students neither hinge on their teachers all along nor look for guidelines, approval, correction, advice, or praise. Even they don't snub each other, but communicate with each other (Jones, 2007). So, the role of student-centred classroom is very crucial in making the learners autonomous (Alonazi, 2017). In this regard, like other developing countries, there is an increasing demand of student- centred classroom for learning English in Bangladesh, thanks to its multidimensional opportunities.

Therefore, this study addresses the current practices in student-centred classrooms for learning English at tertiary level colleges in Bangladesh, attempts to unveil the challenges of a student-centred classroom and endeavours to supply some remedial measures to overcome the impediments as well as implement effective student-centred classroom.

a) Background of the Study

In today's technology-driven world, learning English language is undoubtedly necessary (Graddol, 1997) since English is widely spoken and written by some 380 million native speakers worldwide (Injeeli, 2013). Given the unbound importance of achieving communicative competence in English language, the government of Bangladesh has prioritised in ensuring the English language skills amongst the students from primary to higher secondary level. One of the overarching goals of making English language a compulsory part of the curriculum is to enable Bangladesh to take an active and potent role in the global marketplace and the people of Bangladesh to become global citizens (Rasheed, 2012). Accordingly, measures like Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method have been included into national curricula by National Curriculum and Textbook Board (Roshid, 2009). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) refers to the teaching of communicative competence including the use of language for a range of different purposes and functions, production of and understanding different types of texts and continuance of communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge (Richards, 2005). But until now, the outcome is not optimistic (Mamun et al, 2011). On the other hand, the traditional teacher–centred learning focuses on the teacher transmitting knowledge, from the expert to the novice (Harden and Crosby, 2000). In this approach, the learners merely master limited sets of knowledge, e.g., by memorizing content or applying rehearsed formulae, without addressing actual process skills as needed in professional practice (Schön, 2017). In fact, teacher-centered learning environment does by definition neither facilitate nor empower a learner's autonomous study skills and subsequently lifelong learning skills (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Since language acquisition could not take place through habit formation but through some innate capacity that humans possess (Chomsky, 1959), student-centred classroom stands supreme in learning English language more efficiently in this regard. In the student-centred classroom, the focus of instruction is shifted from the teacher to the student by placing the responsibility of learning in the hands of the students allowing them actively involved in the learning process rather than as passive imitators of controlled language input (Barr and Tagg, 1995). Thus, it is deemed that in a student-centred classroom, students will become committed to improving their English language and more importantly, different learning styles can be accommodated and students can help each other to develop their skills (Jones, 2007). Therefore, this study looks to address the challenges of student-centred classroom and realizes a way of solutions.

b) Research Objectives

Student-centred classroom is a kind of issue which abundantly influences the student learning outcome (Jones, 2007). However, the objective of the study is to find out the current practices, challenges and solutions of student- centred classroom at tertiary level colleges through the case study of four colleges in Pabna, Bangladesh. With this determination, firstly, the article inspects the current practices of student- centred classroom in the colleges. Secondly, it finds out the challenges of student- centred classroom management. Finally, the study investigates a way of solution to ensure the best practice of student-centred classroom at tertiary level colleges in Bangladesh.

c) Research Questions

The study aims to investigate the challenges of student-centred classroom for learning English at tertiary colleges in Bangladesh. The first research question aims to discover the current practice of student-centred classroom for learning English at tertiary colleges in Bangladesh. However, the study explores the following questions:

1. What are the current practice of student- centred classroom for learning English at tertiary colleges in Bangladesh?
2. Is there any challenge of student-centred classroom for learning English at tertiary colleges in Bangladesh?

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3. How can the best practice of student-centred classroom be ensured at tertiary level colleges in Bangladesh?

d) Significance of the Study

The information pertaining to the benefit of a student-centred classroom for learning English at tertiary level colleges in Bangladesh is not widely available in the academic arena and is limited. Thus, this study is significant in terms of its practical contributions to the existing research knowledge. It clearly portrays the current practices in the student-centred classrooms for learning English at tertiary level colleges in Bangladesh. Besides, the relevance of student-centred classroom for learning English has been depicted. Additionally, the challenges of a student- centred classroom have been focused in this study. More importantly, the study also recommends some measures to prevail over the hindrances to ensure effective student- centred classroom. In fact, the results of the study will be of great benefit to the teachers provided with some pragmatic strategies and principles so that they can help students achieve and develop the communicative skills required for facing the challenges of the millennium as well as lifelong learning as well as of great benefit to the Government and the interested people to know about the current practices of teaching-learning methods in the tertiary colleges of Bangladesh.

II. Review of Literature

This chapter presents a review of related literature on the key aspects of student-centred classroom, its relevance and importance, role of the teachers and challenges of student-centred classroom.

There are two broad orientations in teaching method such as the teacher-centred and the student-centred (Kember, 1997). Student-centred learning focuses four key tenets - learning is personalized, learning happens anytime and anywhere, learning is competency based and students take ownership (Glowa, & Goodell, 2016). Additionally, student-centred instruction is highly connected with classroom cultures and management. A student-centred classroom has many characteristics related with it which differentiates it from the teacher-centred classrooms (Saxena, 2013). She also states that the main features of student-centred classrooms are student-centric, active learning, digital equipment, adjustable learning, pleasant climate, mutual respect, students' devotion to law and order, students' ownership, performance-based assessments and collaborative learning.

Many educators have defined student-centred classroom in various ways. A student-centred classroom is a place where we think about the needs of the students, as a group and as individual, and motivate them to take part in the learning process all the time (Jones, 2007). In a student-centred classroom, students do not always depend on their teacher for instructions, correction, advice and praise (Jones, 2007). While students work in a group, the teacher gives advice and encouragement. When the work is finished, the teacher gives feedback, makes corrections, offers suggestions, and answers questions. Thus, students get flavour of participatory learning. Jones (2007) also states that students might work alone in pairs or in groups, might prepare ideas or make notes before a discussion, do a listening task, do a short-written assignment, or do grammar or vocabulary exercises at different times. However, the learner-centred approach gives more importance on fundamentally comprehensive as well as multidimensional skills such as constructive thoughts, analytical abilities, and self-reliant knowledge acquisition (Blackie et al, 2010). On the other hand, Attard et al (2010) opine that the learner-autonomy facilitates learning featuring a number of elemental characteristics such as active responsibility for learning, proactive management of learning experience, independent knowledge construction and teachers as facilitators. They also add that a shared organizational, truth-seeking and academic move and dedicated academicians are required for a winning self-autonomous learning system. They assert that to achieve success in self-directed learning, teachers' adequate knowledge of their own field, their ability and motivation to deliver various knowledge approaches and impart knowledge to the learners are essential. However, most English teachers of Bangladeshi colleges are still unknown about student-centred learning theories and practices (Karim, 2018).

The success of student-centred classroom is closely related with its management. Richards & Rodgers (2001) state that classroom management refers to the ways in which student behaviour, movement, and interaction during a lesson are organized and controlled by the teacher to enable teaching to take place most effectively. Besides, Scrivener (2011) defines classroom management as a collaboration of decisions and actions where the actions are those which are done in the classroom and decisions refers to how and when the actions are to be done, whether to be done or not and if done who will do that etc. Therefore, organization and seating arrangement are big concerns for classroom management. However, the seating arrangement depends on the number of students, the size of the class, the type of desired activities and the available resources including the furniture (Hue & Li, 2008). They also say that a good seating arrangement is one which facilitates specific learning tasks and activities and communicates a teacher's beliefs about learning and teaching. Moreover, changing seating arrangements can help students interact with different people

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(Scrivener, 2011). He suggests, "Circles, squares and horseshoes rather than parallel rows" to increase student interaction. In a circle or horseshoe, learners can make eye contact with everyone else in the group and thus interact much more naturally. He again states that students who are weaker have least chance of hiding themselves and students who are stronger have less chance to dominate in the class in this seating arrangement, which shows a much greater sense of equality. However, it is found that seating arrangement at tertiary colleges in Bangladesh is not suitable for group work and pair work (Karim, 2018).

Teacher's position in the classroom is a vital factor of managing it. Teachers sometimes need to change his/her place to communicate with all the students in the class. To do that, it needs some free space in the classroom. Hue & Li (2008) state that leaving sufficient space in the classroom is very important to give teachers easy and efficient access to different groups of students. However, it is observed that most language classrooms at tertiary level colleges in Bangladesh do not have sufficient space so that teachers can move freely. In addition, Wong et al, (1991) say that classroom management involves all the things that a teacher does to organize students, time, space, and materials so that instruction of content and student learning can take place. Besides, Victor (2005) opines that in order to ensure personality development with morality, to progress personal habits, learning as well as to communicate with the people, there is no alternative to discipline. However, it is observed that the following issues mentioned are not optimistic at tertiary level colleges in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh will have to go a long way to meet the challenges of 21st century education system. Though many educators are trying to find out some creative plan to execute CLT successfully, the overall scenario of English language teaching (ELT) in Bangladesh is not satisfactory (Mamun et al, 2011). The education system here is wholly exam-oriented (Chaudhury, 2011). Students are mostly interested in solving, practicing and memorizing the examination-style, model test questions and student's main objective is to obtain a good grade, not to learn English for communication (Chaudhury, 2011). However, the communicative approach cannot prove to be successful as a result of the teachers' inadequate proficiency in English (Nunan, 2003). Again, the teachers of Bangladesh still teach following the traditional language teaching method and students are rarely asked to get involved in communicative activities (Farooqui, 2014). Similarly, Chaudhury (2011) says that learners feel uneasy about being more active in class and taking responsibility for their own learning as the concept of 'learner autonomy' contradicts the established, traditional role of Bangladeshi students. Moreover, in order to inspire the students' creativity as well as to teach English more effectively, the novelty of the teachers is a must (Vethamani & McRae,1999). Moreover, most of the classes in Bangladeshi colleges are large. A large class is one whose size daunts the teachers and which he or she feels obliged to dominate in order to maintain control (Cross, 1995). Nunan (1993) states, "Communication is established only with those who remain in the 'action zone' i.e. the area where more active students sit together in the class".

It is observed that very few teachers teaching at honours and masters level at tertiary colleges in Bangladesh have research experiences, higher training and publications. Furthermore, textbooks are generally the only teaching and learning guide for the teachers and students (Mamun et al, 2011). He also states that most of the classes are large in size where teachers teach English only by giving lectures and students seem very passive in the classroom. Again, most often teachers fail to communicate with every student in the classroom. The teachers follow one-way pedagogy where many students remain unnoticed of their problems (Mamun et al, 2011). Seating arrangements of most classes are not proper for language class. It also does not have adequate space to move. Therefore, the students remain seated at a fixed place. Thus, students cannot communicate with others or work in groups. Most of the language classrooms do not have any sound system, multimedia projector and internet facility, which are a common need for student-centred classrooms (Karim, 2018).

III. Methodology

The study is descriptive in nature based on both quantitative and qualitative strategies. Data and evidence have been gathered from a range of sources. Both primary and secondary sources were chosen for necessary data. The study was conducted at the English department of tertiary colleges at Pabna district of Bangladesh. Four colleges were chosen for the study. They were: i) Ishwardi Government College, Pabna, ii) Government Edward College, Pabna, iii) Government Bulbul College, Pabna, and iv) Pabna Government Women's College. Random sampling procedure was used to collect the data. Three (03) teachers were selected from the English department of each college. Thus the sample was comprised of twelve (12) teachers. In order to collect the data 'Structured Interview' for the teachers was used. A combination of close-ended and open-ended type items were included in the instrument. The instrument was consistent with the aims and objectives of the study. The data and evidence obtained from interview were presented and analyzed in both quantitative and narrative form. Moreover, while conducting this study, we try to sustain all the ethical consent very strictly. We properly maintain the acknowledgement of others' work.

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Finally, there is no ambiguity at any stage of the work.

IV. Findings and Discussion

a) Findings

This part of the study analyzes the three research questions. However, many challenging truths have been found in the responses of the teachers' interview through questionnaire. Teachers are generally asked grounded on five (5) questions. Responses of 12 teachers from four different government colleges of Pabna district are not all same. There are resemblances as well as alterations in their replies.

Table 1: Practice of Student-centred learning method in classroom

Teachers' Practice of Student-centred learning method in classroom	
Yes	25%
No	75%

The first question is set to find out whether teachers follow the student-centred learning method in classroom for learning English. Among 12 teachers, 9(75%) teachers opine that they do not practice the student-centred learning method in the classroom. Only three (25%) teachers said, they try to practice student-centred learning method in the classroom.

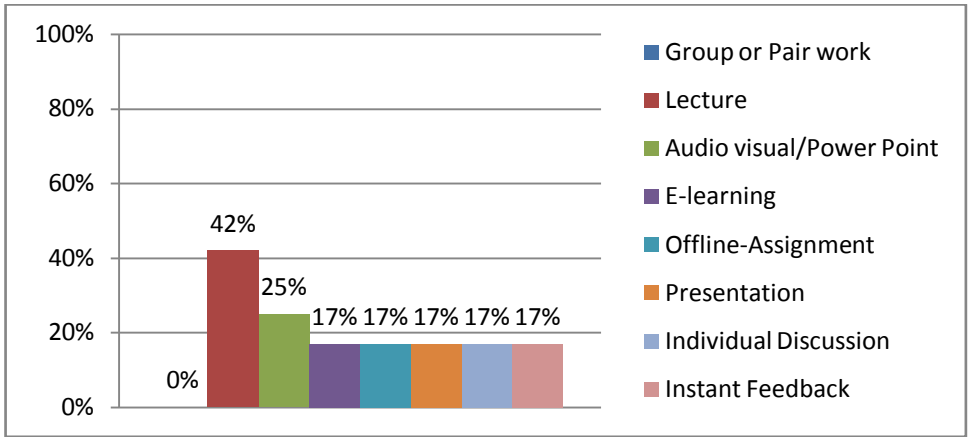


Figure 1: Practice of Student-centred learning method

The second question is asked to find out what type of teaching-learning methods they practice in the classroom. In response, all of the teachers (100%) cannot use group or pair work due to large classroom size. Five (42%) teachers inform that they follow lecture method while conducting their classes. Three (25%) teachers use audio visual/power point techniques in the teaching-learning activities. Two (17%) teachers practice E-learning, presentation, offline-assignment, individual discussion and instant feedback methods in teaching-learning activities.

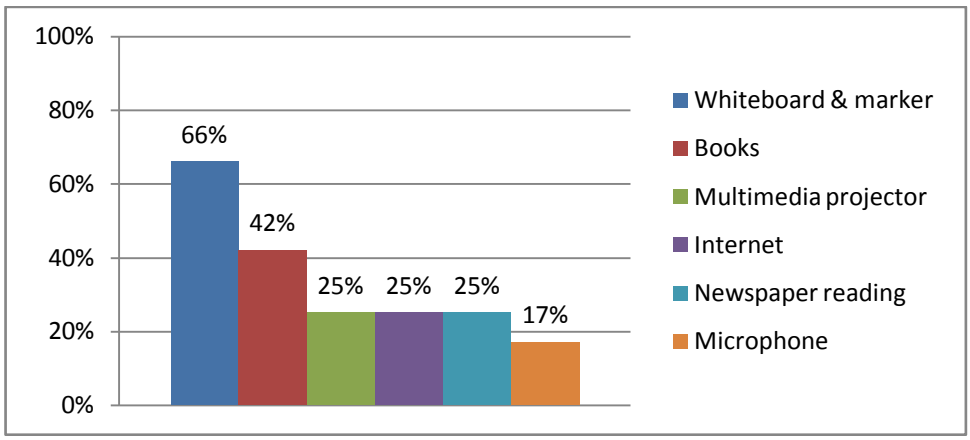


Figure 2: Use of Teaching Aids

The third question is set to know teachers' responses about their used teaching aids. It is found that 66% of the total teachers use whiteboard & marker in the classroom whereas five (42%) teachers books as teaching aid. Only 3 (25%) teachers use multimedia projector, internet and newspaper reading in the teaching-learning activities and two (17%) respondents inform that they use microphone as teaching aid. In fact, all the teacher use teaching aids while conducting classes.

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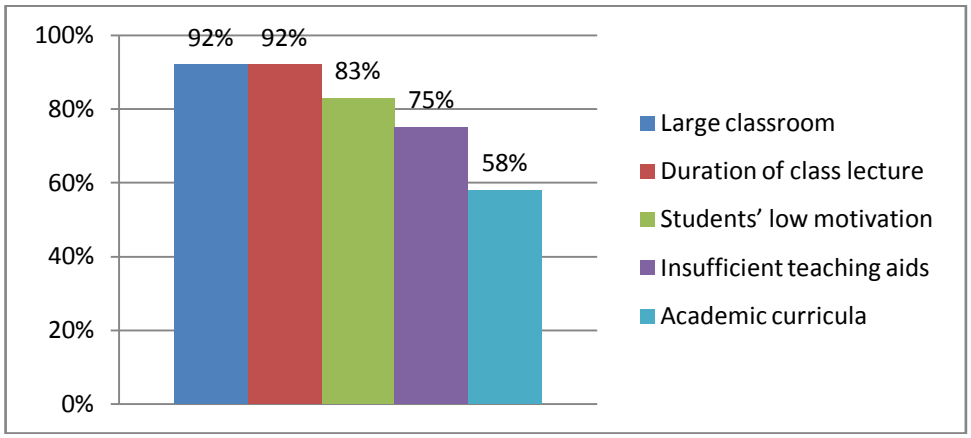


Figure 3: Challenges to ensure effective student learning outcome

The fourth question is asked to know what type of challenges and problems the teachers face in teaching-learning activities. Most of them (92%) opine that large classroom size and insufficient duration of class lecture hinder the language teaching-learning activities. Again, 10 (83%) teachers share that students' low motivation and lack of uniformity of students' knowledge level impede the way of learning four skills of English language. Moreover, 75% of the total respondents consider insufficient teaching aids as the challenge of teaching-learning activities. Besides, around 58% of the respondents think that academic curricula are not up-to-the-minute for learning English efficiently.

The fifth question is set to find out what steps, according to the teachers, should be taken to overcome the challenges in the way of effective student learning outcome. They reply that enrolment of students in higher education should be justified so that class size cannot be large. Besides, quality students should get admitted and accordingly, intake should be up to the mark. However, Government and National University of Bangladesh should take proper steps in arranging trainings of teachers on pedagogical issues and computer literacy and should give fund to colleges so that they can solve the existing problems regarding seating arrangement, teaching aids for the classrooms. Moreover, the academic curricula should be up-to-date for effective student learning outcome with regard to communicative competence.

b) Critical Discussions

The current study aims to investigate the current practice of student-centred classrooms for learning English at tertiary colleges in Bangladesh. It also tries to explore the challenges and solution of implementing student-centred classroom. In this regard, a series of survey on teachers' perception and practice regarding student-centred classrooms have been done. This study found that teachers of tertiary colleges in Bangladesh have a mix of beliefs and practice regarding student-centred classrooms.

In general, in a student-centred classroom, the role of language teachers is to guide and facilitate students to promote their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. Besides, students take responsibility for their own attitude and learning. In addition, students, who have no confidence in themselves, need to be shown how to initiate the activity. Hence, the effective way to give support to the learners is advising them to work together. Pairs and groups might be arranged for various types of actions. Moreover, training should be given to students on using a learner-centred classroom.

However, from the study, it is clearly evident that teachers do not have enough training on student-centred learning and communicative language teaching method. So, their roles and responsibilities in the classroom are not clear to them. On the other hand, the teachers are most concerned with traditional teaching method and classroom management rather than promoting and emphasizing learner-autonomy, cooperative learning and critical thinking skills albeit the lack of materials, environment and motivation required for both teachers and students stand out as one of the important issues for the successful implementation of student-centred classroom at the tertiary colleges of Bangladesh. This finding makes sense because teachers are concerned with facilitating their classrooms, emphasizing on creating a positive learning environment as their primary responsibility. Interestingly, cooperation and differentiation seemed to be the least of teachers' concerns even though these topics are highly recommended in the literature. Also, promoting critical thinking seemed to be forgotten, despite making students think or reflect is a prerequisite for promoting student-centred classroom. Besides, most of the teachers are found reluctant in using modern and technological tools in the classroom thanks to their lack of technological literacy while Muir-Herzig (2004) states that teaching and learning via technology engage learners in active situations of critical thinking to solve problems, share ideas with others and reflect what they have known. Classes which use technology shift from

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teacher-centered to student-centered classes. Hence, the knowledge and usage of technology into teaching-learning activities by the teachers is imperative to foster student-centered learning. The study also illustrates that tertiary colleges face many challenges such as: providing directives, arranging group works, defining a new concept, seeking for answers, weak language background of the students, drilling with new words, working with faster and slower learners, lecture time, inadequate resources, practicing language skills, giving comments etc.

V. Recommendations and Conclusion

a) *Recommendations*

In the 21st century education, to equip students with the necessary skills, capabilities, and creativity essential for effective learning outcome as well as learning English efficiently, the teacher- centred teaching-learning process must be replaced by a more learner-centered teaching-learning process. The findings of this study reveal the current practices of teaching-learning methods in tertiary colleges of Bangladesh. It has been seen that teachers at tertiary colleges are more interested in traditional teaching method than student- centred learning method. From the study it is also found that teachers of tertiary colleges of Bangladesh have been facing many challenges and problems in the classroom in teaching-learning activities. So it is high time for concerned authorities to take necessary steps in this regard. Based upon the findings of the study the following recommendations are offered:

- Tertiary colleges should shift the practice of teacher-centered method to student- centred learning methodology in the classroom.
- Participative type of exercises such as group work, pair work, poster writing and presentation etc. should be prioritized in classroom teaching-learning activities.
- Tertiary colleges should also be equipped with more modern teaching aids and support facilities.
- Pragmatic steps should be taken to solve the problems regarding teaching materials such as multimedia projector, sound system, internet connection, heating-cooling machine, moving chair etc.
- Teachers should perform various supportive activities for improving learners' communicative competence.
- Large classes should be cut into smaller sections. Again, enrolment of students in higher education should be justified so that class size cannot be large.
- Time allocation should be expended more on the students' objective-based activities for developing communicative competence rather than mere lecturing.
- The classrooms need to have a suitable seating arrangement and modern technological equipments.
- The students need to be more interdependent, more accountable, more eager to meet with each other, more careful in communication, and more engaged in processing group products.
- Teachers and students should be provided proper training on the use of technology in imparting as well as learning English language efficiently in the classroom.

b) *Conclusion*

In conclusion, it can be said that the practices of the old classroom are not very effective for the 21st century needs. Hence, student-centred classroom is necessary to implement as it plays a pivotal role in ensuring effective student outcome where students can develop their communicative, higher order thinking, collaborative skills and coping with using technology needed in the workplace. Although it is observed that student-centred learning is far from the reality at tertiary colleges in Bangladesh, pragmatic steps should be initiated to implement student-centred classroom especially for attaining and developing communicative competence in English. In this regard, factors responsible for creating challenges in teaching and learning climate at tertiary colleges in Bangladesh should carefully be addressed. While student autonomy should be ensured for better student- learning outcome, teachers' training and awareness about teaching methods and ideas should also be enhanced in order to effectuate the student-centred classroom for ensuring communicative competence in English efficiently.

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