# LEARNERS' PERCEPTION OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN THE ENGINEERING INSTITUTES IN PUNJAB

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Abstract-This article reports the views of 680 students from 34 engineering institutes affiliated to Punjab Technical University (PTU) in the state of Punjab, India. The research instrument used for the survey was a questionnaire consisting of 26 questions based on basic tenets of CLT including thematic categories like group work and pair work, importance of grammar, error correction and evaluation, teachers' role, learners' role and curriculum design. The questionnaire adapted from Karavas-Doukas (1996) composed of 5-point Likert-type open-ended items. The results obtained from the survey revealed that the engineering students in Punjab have a moderately high perception of the Communicative principles but they do have certain misconceptions about CLT which are primarily because of their lack of understanding and exposure to CLT. It is apparent from the study that only by orienting the students towards the communicative approach and its importance can we maximize their views and make CLT a successful endeavor for English language teaching at the engineering and technology institutes in the Indian contexts.

Index Terms- learners' perception, communicative language teaching (CLT), English language teaching (ELT), Engineering English

### I. INTRODUCTION

With the herald of globalization, English language has established itself as a global passport for professional success. Keeping in view the significant status of India in the current global market, it has become increasingly important for the technically skilled youth of India to be proficient in English communication. Thus, the role of English language teaching in the engineering and technology institutes has become all the more important. The English language teaching skills and strategies are to be developed keeping pace with the current demands of the global market. There is a strong need to pay more attention to the development of learners' competence in the communicative use of language and focus on a more effective and successful method for English language teaching. One such teaching method which has gained immense popularity in the recent past of language teaching is Communicative Language Teaching (henceforth CLT). The concept of CLT is not new to India but its effectiveness as an important tool for English language teaching needs to be reinforced.

Incorporating CLT into the English language classrooms is primarily dependent on the attitudes and conceptions of the concerned teachers and learners. Though a great deal of research has been conducted on the teachers' attitude towards CLT in the Asian contexts, researchers have given limited

attention to learners' perception of the CLT principles and activities especially in the field of technical education in India. According to Williams and Burden, "learners' perceptions and interpretations...have been found to have the greatest influenceon achievement" (as cited in Brown, 2009: 46). Reiterating the importance of students' perceptions, Little wood states, "if the kindof teaching that the teacher offers to the students creates opportunities for the kind of learning that the students feel is worthwhile and enjoyable, then the students will be more ready to engage with what is takingplace and learning will be more effective" (2010: 47).Certain misconceptions and misinterpretations of CLT among the learners are one of the main reasons for difficulties in implementing CLT in the ELT classrooms.For CLT to be implemented successfully, it is important to understand the learners' view-point as well. Since both learners and teachers are major stakeholders in CLT, learners' voices need to be heard before effective pedagogical decisions can be made. Thus, through this paper a sincere effort is made to understand the disparate attitudes of learners towards the CLT principles and their practical implementation in the engineering institutes in the state of Punjab.

### II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The subjects of this study were 680 students from 34 engineering institutes of Punjab. 20 students were randomly selected from each of the 34 institutes selected for the study. The instrument used for the survey was a questionnaire consisting of 26 questions based on the basic tenets of CLT including thematic categories like group work and pair work, importance of grammar, error correction and evaluation, teachers' role, learners' role and curriculum design. Out of the 26 statements. 13 are favorable (statements 1,5,7,10,11,13,15,17,18,19,23,25 and 26) and 13 are unfavorable (statements 2,3,4,6,8,9,12,14,16,20,21,22 and 24). The questionnaire adapted from Karavas-Doukas (1996) composed of 5-point Likert-type open-ended items. Since, the questionnaire consists of favorable and unfavorable statements, the coding of the data follows the given pattern:

The favorable items or statements which directly address or are consonant with the communicative language teaching principles were coded as:

'Strongly Agree' (SA) =5; 'Agree' (A) = 4; 'Undecided' (U) =3; 'Disagree' (D) =2 and

'Strongly Disagree' (SD) =1.

The unfavorable items or statements which are designed to cross check the teachers' view and address noncommunicative aspects were coded in the reverse manner as:

'Strongly Agree' (SA) =1; 'Agree' (A) = 2; 'Undecided' (U) =3; 'Disagree' (D) =4 and 'Strongly Disagree' (SD) =5.

III. FINDINGS AND DISSCUSSION The students' responses regarding their perception of different principles of communicative language teaching are given below in Table I which are analyzed and discussed thereafter.

As per Table I, statement 1 and 5 have received a high percentage of agreement with respectively 98.24 per cent and 91.92 per cent of the students preferring group-work and pairwork activities in their classrooms since they 'allow cooperative relationships to emerge and promote genuine interaction among students' and 'allow students to explore problems on their own and thus, give them some control over their own learning'. Thus, majority of the students understand the utility of group-work and pair-work in language classrooms and have a high perception of these activities. However, for unfavorable statements 2, 3, 4 and 6, the students didn't seem to be thoroughly agreeing.

TABL	ΕL

Scale		5	4	3	2	1		
Value		1*	2*	3*	4*	5*	- Total	Mean
Sr. No.	Statements	SA	А	U	D	SD		
1	Group work and pair work activities allow cooperative relationships to emerge and promote genuine interaction among students.	354 (52.0 6)	314 (46.1 8)	7 (1.03 )	4 (0.59 )	1 (0.15 )	680 (100)	4.49
2*	Group- work and pair-work activities take too long to organize and waste a lot of valuable teaching time.	19 (2.79)	156 (22.9 4)	31 (4.56 )	297 (43.6 8)	177 (26.0 3)	680 (100)	3.67
3*	Group work and pair work ruin the discipline and decorum of the class.	36 (5.29)	267 (39.2 6)	20 (2.94 )	320 (47.0 6)	37 (5.44 )	680 (100)	3.08
4*	Students do their best when taught as a whole class by their teacher.	125 (18.3 8)	278 (40.8 8)	26 (3.82 )	251 (36.9 1)	0	680 (100)	2.59
5	Group work and pair work activities allow students to explore problems on their own and thus, give them some control over their own learning.	321 (47.2 1)	304 (44.7 1)	2 (0.29 )	51 (7.5)	2 (0.29 )	680 (100)	4.31
6*	Small group work may occasionally be used to vary the routine, but it can never replace sound formal lecture system by the teacher.	234 (34.4 1)	316 (46.4 7)	20 (2.94 )	110 (16.1 8)	0	680 (100)	2.01
7	Grammar is best taught through communicative activities in the English class.	206 (30.2 9)	421 (61.9 1)	10 (1.47 )	43 (6.32 )	0	680 (100)	4.16
8*	Grammatical correctness is the most important criterion by which language performance should be judged.	163 (23.9 7)	387 (56.9 1)	13 (1.91 )	116 (17.0 6)	1 (0.15 )	680 (100)	2.13
9*	By mastering the rules of grammar, the students become fully capable of communicating effectively in the target language.	142 (20.8 8)	379 (55.7 4)	12 (1.76 )	125 (18.3 8)	22 (3.24 )	680 (100)	2.27
10	Grammar should be learned for communication not for learning forms of the language.	123 (18.0 9)	293 (43.0 9)	31 (4.56 )	196 (29.8 2)	37 (5.44 )	680 (100)	3.4
11	Students should correct each other's errors in pair or group.	282 (41.4 7)	311 (45.7 4)	8 (1.18)	79 (11.6 2)	0	680 (10 0)	4.17

# Table I (Contd.)

C. I.	Table I (Contd.)   5 4 3 2 1								
Scale Value				3*		1 5*			
Sr.	<b>a</b>			-	-		Total	Mean	
No.	Statements	SA	Α	U	D	SD			
1.0.1	Good evaluation is carried out when the focus of the	117	416	18	116	13	680		
12*	evaluation is on accuracy (grammatical correctness).	(17.2 1)	(61.1 8)	(2.65)	(17.0 6)	(1.91)	(10 0)	2.25	
	Evaluation of students' progress in language literacy	169	431				680		
13	should be carried out on the basis of their day to day	(24.8	(63.3	15	63 (9.26)	2 (0.29)	(10	4.03	
	classroom communicative performance (e.g. role play).	5)	8)	(2.21)	(9.20)	(0.29)	0)		
14*	The teacher should immediately correct all the grammatical errors students make. If errors are ignored,	426 (62.6	242 (35.5	2	10	0	680 (10	1.41	
14.	this will result in imperfect learning.	(02.0	(33.3	(0.29)	(1.47)	0	$(10 \\ 0)$	1.41	
	Since errors are normal (natural) part of learning, much	3	13	3	388	273	680		
15	correction is wasteful of time.	-	(1.91)	-	(57.0	(40.1	(10	1.65	
	Since, teachers have better knowledge about the	264	335	( )	6)	5)	0) 680		
16*	language; he/she is the sole provider of knowledge in	(38.8	(49.2	13	66	2	(10	1.83	
	the classroom.	2)	6)	(1.91)	(9.71)	(0.29)	0)		
15	The teacher as transmitter of knowledge is only one of	193	400	10	77	0	680		
17	the many different roles he/she must perform during the course of a lesson.	(28.3 8)	(58.8 2)	(1.47)	(11.3 2)	0	(10 0)	4.04	
		179		11	-	0	680		
18	The teacher should act as an independent participant within the learning-teaching group.	(26.3	340 (50)	11 (1.62)	142 (20.8)	8 (1.18)	(10	3.79	
		2)	(30)	(1.02)	(20.0)	(1.10)	0)		
	A textbook alone is not able to cater to all the needs and interests of the students. The teacher must	364	301				680		
19	supplement the textbook with other materials and tasks	(53.5	(44.2	4	9	2	(10	4.49	
	so as to satisfy the widely differing needs of the	3)	6)	(0.59)	(1.32)	(0.29)	0)		
	students.		302		293		680		
20*	It is impossible for the teacher to organize the teaching	40	(44.4	14	(43.0	31	(10	2.96	
	so as to suit the needs of all the students.	(5.88)	1)	(2.06)	9)	(4.56)	0)		
01*	Since the student comes to the language classroom	19	187	11	392	71	680	2.45	
21*	with little or no knowledge of the language, he/she should passively listen to the teacher in the class.	(2.79)	(27.5)	(1.62)	(57.6 5)	(10.4 4)	(10 0)	3.45	
	Training students to take responsibility for their own	21	244	12	379		680		
22*	learning is useless since learners are not used to such	21 (3.09)	(35.8	13 (1.91)	(55.7	23 (3.38)	(10	3.2	
	an approach. Students should interact primarily with each other	96	8) 447	(	4) 116	(0.00)	0) 680		
23	rather than with the teacher in English language	(14.1	(65.7	20	(17.0	1	(10	3.77	
	classroom.	2)	4)	(2.94)	6)	(0.15)	0)		
	Students' should not be allowed to participate in the		189	0.1	319	96	680		
24*	language syllabus design as they have no idea about the needs and requirements of the learners (students	55 (8.09)	(27.7	21 (3.09)	(46.9	(14.1	(10	3.31	
	themselves.)	(0.09)	9)	(3.09)	1)	2)	0)		
	English language syllabus should include activities that	275	394				680		
25	bring about the use of everyday or current situations	(40.4	(57.9	5	6	0	(10	4.38	
	such as news from TVs and radios, and articles from newspapers and magazines.	4)	4)	(0.74)	(0.88)		0)		
		168	456	12	44		680		
26	English language syllabus design should be learner- centered.	(24.7	(67.0		44 (6.47)	0	(10	4.1	
		1) 210.2	6) 340.3		93.69		0) 680		
	Average Frequency and Percentage for Favorable	3	540.5 8	10.62	(13.7	25.08	(10	3.91	
	Statements	(30.9	(50.0	(1.56)	8)	(3.69)	0)		
								22	

	2)	6)					
Average Frequency and Percentage for Unfavorable Statements	127.7 7 (18.7 9)	284.4 6 (41.8 3)	16.46 (2.42)		36.38 (5.35)		2.63
Average Frequency and Percentage for All Statements	123.3 1 (18.2 5)	273.1 9 (40.4 4)	13.54 (2)	189.0 8 (27.9 9)	76.42 (11.3 1)	680 (10 0)	3.27

Note:- Figures in parentheses show proportion of respective frequency to the Total. \* denotes unfavorable (negative) statements and respective scales values.

It has been observed that there do exist certain misconceptions among the students regarding group-work and pair-work activities. According to statement 2, 25.73 per cent of the students believe that 'group-work and pair-work activities take too long to organize and waste a lot of valuable teaching time' generating a mean value of 3.67, which indicates that a considerable number of students still believe that conducting group-work or pair-work activities is a timeconsuming process. Also nearly half of the students (44.55 per cent) responded that 'group-work and pair-work ruin the discipline and decorum of the class' according to the responses received for statement 3. In case of statement 4 i.e. 'students do their best when taught as a whole class by their teacher', 59.26 per cent of the students have shown their agreement with 18.38 per cent on the point of 'strongly agree' and 40.88 per cent on the point of 'agree'. Similarly, statement 6 has also received a very low mean value of 2.01 with 88.88 per cent of the students believing that 'small group-work may occasionally be used to vary the routine but it can never replace sound formal lecture system by the teacher'. Thus, it can be easily implied that though the students understand and acknowledge the utility of group-work and pair-work activities, yet its practical implementation faces some problems and it has been unable to replace the formal lecture system so far.

Statement 7, 8, 9 and 10 deal with students' perception of the importance of grammar with regard to the communicative principles. Where statements 7 and 10 are favorable, statements 8 and 9 are unfavorable. On analyzing statement 7, it has been observed that most of the students i.e. 92.2 per cent believe that 'grammar is best taught through communicative activities in the English class'. Only 6.32 per cent of the students disagree with this statement generating a high mean value of 4.16. Thus, most of the students have a favorable opinion for communicative activities as the best means to teach grammar. However statement 8, an unfavorable statement, has received 80.88 per cent of agreement; thus, denoting that majority of the students believe that 'grammatical correctness is the most important criterion by which language performance should be judged'. It clearly denotes that the students accord utmost importance to accuracy i.e. grammatical correctness. They believe that correct usage of grammar is the primary parameter to judge an individual's language competency. Similarly, the unfavorable statement 9 has also been disagreed by only 21.62 per cent of

the students. Thus, 76.62 per cent of the students believe that 'by mastering the rules of grammar, the students become fully capable of communicating effectively in the target language'. These results, again, point towards students' complete reliance on grammar as a tool to develop competency in the English language. However, students' responses for statement 10 make it emphatic that they are aware of the basic function of grammar teaching as 61.18 per cent of the students have shown their agreement to statement 10 i.e. 'grammar should be learned for communication and not for learning forms of the language'.

Statements 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 emphasize on error correction and evaluation, out of which statements11, 13 and 15 are favorable and statements 12 and 14 are unfavorable. According to the responses received for statement 11 (students should correct each other's errors in pair or group), 87.21 per cent of the students have registered their agreement, showing their belief in error correction through peers. Statements 12 and 13, based on students' evaluation are juxtaposed. On one hand, 78.39 per cent of the students feel that 'good evaluation is carried out when the focus of evaluation is on accuracy (grammatical correctness), as per the results obtained for statement 12. But on the other hand, a large number of students (88.23 per cent) have also responded in favor of evaluation on 'the basis of day to day classroom communicative performance'. These contradictory responses highlight students' dilemma as to what the focus of evaluation should be. Similarly, statements 14 and 15 are also contradictory; where 14 is an unfavorable statement and 15 is a favorable one. According to the students' responses on both the statements, almost all the students believe that error correction is not a wastage of time and errors must be immediately corrected. 98.24 per cent of the students have agreed to statement 14 i.e. 'the teacher should correct all the grammatical errors students make' and 97.21 per cent of the students have shown their disagreement to statement 15 i.e. 'since errors are normal (natural) part of learning, much correction is wasteful of time'; thereby, resulting into very low mean values of 1.41 and 1.65 respectively. Thus, students have a strong misconception that errors, if neglected, can result into habit formation and imperfect learning so these must be corrected by the teachers immediately.

So, it is very much evident from the results obtained from students' responses regarding their perception of error correction and evaluation that they maintain a strong belief in

error correction as an indispensable element in language learning. They are of the opinion that the teachers must rectify their students' errors as early as possible because if ignored these errors can result in flawed learning. They also endorse error correction through peers which can probably be due to the fear of their errors being highlighted by the teachers in front of the class. Though, most of the students have favored evaluation on the basis of day to day communicative performance; they do not deny the significance of grammatical correctness in evaluation. Thus, there seems to be lot of misconceptions floating among the students with regard to error correction and evaluation.

Statement 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20 are based on teachers' role in language classrooms out of which statements 17, 18 and 19 are favorable while statements 16 and 20 are unfavorable. According to statement 16, 88.08 per cent of the students believe that teacher is 'the sole provider of knowledge in the classroom': in a way, reinstating the teacher's age-old domination in the classroom. But, along with performing the above role, they expect much more from the teacher as 87.2 per cent of the students have registered their agreement (28.38 per cent on the scale value of 'strongly agree' and 58.82 on the scale value of 'agree') to statement 17 i.e. 'the teacher as transmitter of knowledge is only one of the many roles he/she must perform during the course of the lesson'. Thus, along with providing knowledge to the students, the teacher is supposed to be performing several other roles as well such as that of a guide, a facilitator, a moderator etc. Being an independent participant is also one of the suggested roles since 76.32 per cent of the students are of the opinion that 'the teacher should act as an independent participant within the learning-teaching group'; thereby generating a mean value of 3.79 in case of statement 18. Moreover, almost all the students believe that a textbook alone is insufficient to cater to their variegated needs with 97.59 per cent of the students (53.53 per cent on 'strongly agree' and 44.26 per cent on 'agree') agreeing to statement 19 i.e. 'a textbook alone is not able to cater to all the needs and interests of the students, the teacher must supplement the textbook with other material and task so as to satisfy the widely different needs of the students'. Statement 20 has received a mixed response with nearly half of the student (47.65 per cent) disagreeing that 'it is impossible for the teachers to organize the teaching so as to suit the needs of all the students', whereas another half of the student population (50.29 per cent) still believe that a teacher cannot organize the teaching so as to cater to the requirements of all kind of students. On analyzing the students' perception of the teachers' role in the language classroom, we find that the students have a high perception in case of favorable statements 17, 18 and 19; but, the unfavorable statements 16 and 20 have met some sort of disagreement from the students with a low mean value 1.83 and 2.96 for statements 16 and 20 respectively.

Statements 21, 22 and 23 emphasize on learners' role in the language classroom where statements 21 and 22 are unfavorable and 23 is a favorable statement. According to the responses received for statement 21, majority of the students (68.09 per cent) disagree that students should 'passively listen

to the teacher in the class', as they have little or no knowledge of the language; whereas 30.29 per cent of the students believe that they should be just passive recipients in the class. A mean value of 3.45 denotes students' mildly high perception of learners' role in the language classroom with regard to statement 21. Similarly, for statement 22 (training students to take responsibility for their own learning is useless since learners are not used to such an approach), 59.12 per cent of the students have registered their disagreement. Thus proving that majority of the students believe that students should be trained to take responsibility of their own learning. However a considerable number of students (38.97 per cent) are of the opinion that training students to take responsibility of their own learning is futile. With regard to statement 23, it has been observed that majority of the students have favored studentstudent interaction rather than student-teacher interaction where 79.86 per cent of the students (14.12 per cent on 'strongly agree' and 65.74 per cent on 'agree') have responded in agreement to 'student should interact primarily with each other rather than with the teacher in English language classroom'. Thus, it is clearly evident that students have a mildly high perception of learners' (students) role in the language classroom with regard to the principles of communicative language teaching. Though, majority of the students are in favor of active participation of students in the language classroom instead of being just passive recipients, there are still a considerable number of students who believe in the traditional role of students as passive listeners.

In the end of the students' questionnaire determining students' perception, we have statements 24, 25, and 26 that are based on syllabus design where 24 is an unfavorable statement but 25 and 26 are favorable. The students' responses to the statement 24 reveal that majority of the students (61.03 per cent) have shown their disagreement to the statement. But 35.88 per cent of the students still believe that 'students should not be allowed to participate in language syllabus design as they have no idea about the needs and requirements of the learners'. According to statement 25, almost all the students (98.38 per cent) have unanimously agreed to the inclusion of 'activities that bring about use of everyday situation such as news from TVs and radios; and articles from newspapers and magazines' in the 'English language syllabus'; resulting into a high mean value of 4.38. Also most of the students have registered their agreement to statement 26 'English language syllabus design should be learner centered' with 91.77 per cent of the students (24.71 per cent on 'strongly agree' and 67.06 per cent on 'agree') agreeing to this statement. Therefore, we can easily deduce that majority of the students have a high perception of the CLT principles with regard to English language syllabus design; however, some of the students feel that they have no role to play in the language syllabus design as they are not capable enough to analyze the students' requirements properly.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

Lot of innovations are being done from time to time in the field of English language teaching. Communicative language teaching is one such novel endeavor at the engineering

institutes affiliated to Punjab Technical University in Punjab. CLT has been widely accepted and implemented by the academicians, administrations and language teachers all over the world for second/foreign language teaching. But, in spite of its wide acceptance, it has been found that it is not finding its rightful place in the language classrooms. Since, CLT is a western concept, there are certain roadblocks in its successful implementation in the Indian contexts.Learners' disparate attitudes towards communicative language teachinginevitably act as a major deterrent in its practical application. Thus, through this paper an earnest endeavor has been made to understand the learners' feelings and beliefs about their language learning experiences with regard to the principles of communicative language teaching in order to review and possibly make the required changes in the teaching process.

The overall results from the students' responses on their perception of the CLT principles makes it quite evident that the students have a moderate perception of the communicative principles. The average mean value obtained from the students' responses on the entire questionnaire comes out to be 3.27. Though students are gradually getting attuned to the contemporary language classroom and its environment; yet, certain false notions are observed among the students which are acting as roadblocks in the effective implementation of CLT in the language classrooms. Some portion of learners tend to adhere to what might be called the 'traditional view' as is evident from the fact that the mean value of 38.46 percent of the results is less than 3. There seems to be certain misconceptions among the students with respect to some principles based on learner's role, error correction and assessments and importance of grammar in the communicative classroom. These misconceptions are due to lack of understanding and concept clarity about the principles of CLT and must be clarified in order to implement CLT effectively in the language classrooms.

Although, CLT has increased the teaching options available to language teachers, the real potential for them to practice CLT principles is tangible only if learners themselves are convinced of their values (Razmjoo and Riazi, 2000). Therefore, it is advisable that teachers and other concerned bodies ought to deliver sorts of orientations to the learners about CLT principles and their importance in order to maximize their views prior to trying to implement this approach to language teaching.

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