

# Students' Attitudes toward Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Courses in Urmia University of Medical Sciences (UMSU)

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## Abstract

**Background & Aims:** Methodology as a critical factor plays a significant role in achieving the acceptable results in educational fields, particularly in the process of language teaching and learning in applied linguistics. Analyzing the teaching methodology from different perspectives such as satisfaction is also important. Accordingly, the purpose of present paper is to evaluate the satisfaction level the students of medicine about GTM and CLT methods in UMSU.

**Materials & Methods:** To this end, a designed questionnaire was used among 35 students of medicine (17 males and 18 females) as a convenience sample ranging from 19 to 22 years to assess their beliefs about GTM and CLT. The quantitative and descriptive statistical methods were used to evaluate the students' satisfactions level toward GTM and CLT. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software, version 17. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test was applied to evaluate the normal distribution of data in different variables ( $p > 0.05$ ). In order to compare the mean scores of two methods, a paired t-test was used, respectively.

**Results:** The findings indicated that there is a significant difference in students' perception between GTM and CLT method in the presentation of contents. Students had positive attitudes toward deductive and lectured-based learning, and they were satisfied with GTM. In other four remained options, no significant differences were observed.

**Conclusion:** According to the results, it was revealed that although CLT method is confirmed and suggested by a large number of scholars to be an effective method in language teaching, its state of the practice is not in favor of learners in some cases, mainly among the students of medicine at UMSU.

**Keywords:** Teaching style, methodology, learners, satisfaction, GTM, CLT

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## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, teaching and learning are two crucial factors in education that are not separable from each

other, and their parallel occurrence in pedagogy is not deniable (1). These two dependable factors need an appropriate selection of teaching methodology (2) and

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teaching style (3) that leads to the fruitful learning, and paves the way to an acceptable result or achievement (3, 4). A large number of scholars confirm the impact of an effective teaching methodology on learning (5). Besides teaching methodology, appropriate choice of materials (6) and learners' needs analysis (7) should be considered as well. Accordingly, Prabhu (8) stated that '...what is best depends on who the method is for, in what circumstances, for what purpose, and so on' (p.162). Therefore, pedagogy is a critical item, and the role of teachers in instructing their students is so significant as well.

Among the variety of academic educational fields, one of the most popular areas is applied linguistics that is related to language teaching and learning, and has observed several language teaching methodologies in different eras. Accordingly, several methods were emerged in different periods to fulfill specific purposes. GTM or also known as classical method was primarily used in teaching classical languages including Latin and Greek (9). Thanks to the spread of the GTM in 19<sup>th</sup> century, the use of first language (L1) in target language (L2) context was almost an acceptable behavior (10). Then, the idea of monolingual teaching approach that traces back to the presence of direct method, completely banned the use of learners' L1 in L2 teaching process (11). By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some innovative approaches in applied linguistics were emerged, respectively (12). Correspondingly, the major shift from traditional methods to communicative approach by premium use of natural communication in target language (12) was considered as the fruitful approach in language teaching and learning (13). Nowadays, CLT is a totally accepted methodology in many countries (14) all around the world.

Among all different teaching methodologies, certain methods such as GTM and CLT were introduced to language teaching and learning in two different eras. By considering their time of emergence, GTM is a classical

method (9), while CLT is one of the most modern and popular instructional methods in English language teaching and learning (12). These two methods are familiar to instructors and teachers, and are widely used in many areas all around the world. A number of language scholars have discussed about them from different perspectives. Regarding the aim of present study, a brief summary of GTM and CLT along with their historical backgrounds and comparison between their principles and components are discussed in this paper.

### **1.2. Historical Background of GTM**

The origination of GTM dated back to the practice of teaching Greek and Latin languages in the 1500s, mainly for reading and writing of classical texts (15, 16) and translating them in to their first language (12). GTM as one of the earliest methods in teaching modern languages was developed in Prussia in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (15), mainly based on structuralism, behaviorism (17), and mechanical habit formation theories (18). Accordingly, it was the most popular teaching method from 1840s to 1940s in Europe (12) and was widely used till 20<sup>th</sup> century but gradually criticized by many scholars (19, 20), and paved the way to the development of communicative language learning (12).

### **2.2. Historical Background of CLT**

Because of several drawbacks in GTM as a classical method, an urgent need in developing of a new method was necessarily sensed (12). In order to support communicative skills and satisfy learners' needs in real life communication, CLT was developed by Robert Langs in the 1970s (18). Furthermore, Communicative competence theory introduced by Hymes (21, 22) and multi-functional theory of Holliday (23) were two fundamental and supportive theories in developing the foundation of CLT approach.

### **2.3. The Main Components of GTM and CLT**

Emergence of every individual method in applied linguistics had specific reasons behind itself. GTM and CLT methods followed the same route among other methodologies. They were developed based on specific principles and characteristics. A concise summary table

of GTM and CLT regarding their principles and features was introduced by Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (16) which was cited in Natsir and Sanjaya's (24) paper (p.59), respectively.

**Table 1:** Principles of GTM and CLT

Principle	GTM	CLT
<b>Characteristic of Teaching Learning Process.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students are taught to translate from native language to the target language.</li> <li>2. Students learn grammar deductively.</li> <li>3. Learners memorize native language equivalents for the target language vocabulary.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Everything is mostly done with communicative intent.</li> <li>2. Students use the language through communicative activities such as game and role plays.</li> <li>3. Communication is purposeful.</li> <li>4. Using authentic materials.</li> <li>5. Activities are often carried out by students in small group.</li> <li>6. Grammar is taught inductively.</li> </ol>
<b>Nature of Interaction.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The interaction is mostly from the teachers to the students.</li> <li>2. Little students' initiation.</li> <li>3. Little student-student interaction.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teacher is a facilitator.</li> <li>2. Teacher sometimes becomes co-communicator.</li> <li>3. Students interact with one another.</li> </ol>
<b>Handling the students' feeling and Emotion.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There is no principle related to this area.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Motivate the students.</li> <li>2. Teacher gives the opportunity to the students to express their individuality.</li> <li>3. Students' security is enhanced by cooperative interaction.</li> </ol>
<b>The Role of Native Language of Students.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The meaning of the target language is made clear by translating into the learners' native language.</li> <li>2. The native language is mostly used in teaching learning process.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students' native language is permitted.</li> <li>2. Most of the activities are explained by using target language and native language only for certain thing.</li> </ol>
<b>The Language Skills that are Emphasized.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Vocabulary and grammar are emphasized.</li> <li>2. Reading and writing are the primary skills.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The functions are reintroduced and the more complex forms are learned.</li> <li>2. Students work on all four skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking) from the beginning.</li> </ol>
<b>The Way of Teachers' Response to Students' Error.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Correct answer is extremely significant.</li> <li>2. If students make an error the teacher will supply them with the correct answer.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Error of form is tolerated during the fluency-based activities.</li> <li>2. The teacher may note the learners' error and return to the learners with accuracy-based activities.</li> </ol>

#### 2.4. Different Attitudes toward GTM and CLT

Regarding to the principles of GTM and CLT, there are a variety of attitudes and perceptions toward these

two methods. There are both supporting and opposing views on GTM and CLT concerning their use in the classroom context. By considering these contrastive

perspectives, one of the most controversial issues in English Language Teaching (ELT) has been the question of the use of L1 in English language classes. The use of L1 in L2 context is the most prevalent behavior in GTM (16). On the contrary, the avoidance of L1 in L2 context is one of the principle features of CLT that is in same line with direct teaching method (25, 26). By looking at the theoretical background of using L1 in L2 classroom, its use has been debated for many years (27). Some researchers advocate the use of L1 in L2 context (16, 28, 29); while some others consider its usage as a wrong methodology (11, 30, 31). Along with scholars, teachers also have some contrastive attitudes toward this pedagogical behavior. From some teachers' perspectives, the use of L1 in L2 is not an acceptable behavior, and its use has some side effects in language learning (32-34). Although GTM is an outdated method, it is still taught and used in many countries, and some teachers prefer its use in their classrooms (12, 35). It is also believed that GTM is an effective method in enhancing learners' development (36, 37). Therefore, the use of L1 in L2 is considered to be an acceptable phenomenon from some teachers' perceptions (38- 40). On the contrary, majority of teachers prefer CLT method and have negative attitudes toward GTM as the most effective teaching and learning methodology (41). For instance, in Schulz's survey (42), instructors pleased with CLT methodology. Peacock's finding (43) were also consistent with the same results. It seems that teachers whose L1 is not same as students' L1 language, more probably have negative attitudes toward GTM (44-46). By considering all the attitudes toward GTM and CLT methods among the researchers, scholars, and teachers, discussion concerning the attitudes and perceptions of students toward teaching methodologies appears to be a critical topic as well. As Ellis (47) stated, 'language learners are not only communicators and problem-solvers, but whole persons with hearts, bodies, and minds, with memories, fantasies, loyalties,

identities' (p.39). Therefore, paying attention to learners' attitudes and perception can play an important role in pedagogy (48-50). It means that learners' attitudes are leading factors in selection of pedagogical materials (51-54). Thus, by considering all the attitudes toward GTM and CLT, and due to few researches in evaluating the attitudes of students at the university level, especially among the medical universities in Iran, the present study aims to investigate the attitudes of students of medicine toward GTM and CLT at UMSU, and evaluate their attitudes and preferences toward these two teaching methods from their own perspectives. In other words, the students' preference regarding communicative and non-communicative teaching techniques are evaluated in the present research.

### 3. Materials and Methods

#### 3.1. Participants

Purpose of this study is to investigate the attitudes of students about two different methods of teaching, namely GTM and CLT. The participants of this study were 35 students of medicine (17 males and 18 females) ranged from 19-22 years old at UMSU, Urmia, Iran. Convenience sampling method including all the students due to their convenient accessibility to the researchers was applied in selecting the participants. All students were in pre-intermediate and intermediate level in English and their language proficiency level were almost homogeneous according to their own reports. They all passed their general English courses and were in the 3th semester of the university in the academic year in 2016. The course was taught by two different university teachers, and completely in two different styles of teaching. The first teacher who was female monitored the first half of class through GTM, while the second half of the class was taught by a male teacher according to CLT approach. In both of the teaching sections, two full time professors with considerable

experience in the medical science subject monitored the class at UMSU.

### 3.2. Teaching materials

The materials included in this study contained two different English course books as ESP with exactly similar content which were thought by two different teachers in two different teaching methodologies, namely GTM and CLT. In first half time of the class, The "Medical Terminology" book written by Cohen and DePetris (55) was thought by first teacher according to GTM, mainly translating the English texts into students' first language, while in the second half, the teacher thought the "English for medicine" book written by Fitzgerald et al.(56) based on CLT method. Both of these course books are in the academic chart of UMSU, and are confirmed by education department of health ministry of Iran.

### 3.3 Survey instrument

In order to evaluate the attitudes of students toward GTM and CLT, a designed questionnaire according to intended aim of the study including a set of 40 questions in Likert-type rating scales was used. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part of questionnaire addressed the students' demographic information including their age, gender, and English language proficiency level. The second part was related to students' attitudes toward GTM and CLT method in 5 options including 1) presentation of content 2) availability of teacher 3) suitable feedback to students' performance 4) students' class participation and discussion 5) overall effect of teaching methods. All questions were designed according to Likert scale, and were ranged from 1 to 5 and they were in following order: Weak = 1, Normal= 2, Good = 3, Very Good= 4 and Excellent= 5. The questions used in the survey were selected by the researchers in consultation with professional scholars in educational management field, and were translated into Persian language to have better understanding from the participants. Content validity of

the questionnaire was evaluated by 5 university professors according to a content validity index. They were asked to translate and back translate all the items from English to Persian. After making some revisions in the translation of some questions, and in order to confirm the reliability of questionnaire, a pilot test was conducted among 20 students before performing the main study. Its reliability estimated to be 0.95 through Cronbach Alpha test done by a statistic expert.

### 3.4. Procedure

The goal of present research was to make a comparison between GTM and CLT concerning students' attitudes and satisfaction. For this end, 35 students of medicine (17 males and 18 females) participated in the research. The study lasted three months and half, starting from October 2016 to the middle of January 2017 as the academic term of UMSU. It was a convenience sampling method research, and all the students took part in the study because of their availability. The course was a three credits ESP one held in 4 hours (in two days a week). The course was taught in 16 sessions during the academic term. The first half of the sessions was taught in GTM (lectured-based method) and the medical science articles and vocabulary were translated in students' national language which was Persian. The teacher also gave the answers of exercises and students' participation in class activities was not considerable. On the contrary, the second teacher who was favored in teaching English course in CLT approach taught the course book in communicative way using only target language (English) in which all 4 language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) were completely considered. Furthermore, e-learning tools such as projector and some online tasks were also used in CLT sessions. There were some free discussion sessions as well, and sometimes, students gave lecture in English language. Group work was another activity which was considered in CLT sessions. In contrast to GTM, Not much information was provided

by the teacher, and students tried to give the answers to questions. The participants were not aware of the real purposes of the study, so that their awareness of the fact did not have any effect on the final outcome of the research. Evaluating the participants' satisfaction and attitudes toward these two methodologies was determined by a designed questionnaire and was completed in 20 minutes in the last day of the class.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

A number of statistical analyses were used to analyze the research data. All of the data in the questionnaire were entered to SPSS software, version 17, and they were analyzed by a statistical expert in this subject. First,

Cronbach Alpha was conducted to estimate the reliability of the designed questionnaire. Accordingly, its reliability was 0.95 (see Table 1). The questionnaire included information related to participants' gender, age, and language proficiency level. The One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) test was conducted to evaluate the normal distribution of data in different variables ( $p > 0.05$ ). Using K-S test, it was revealed that p-value was higher than 0.05 ( $\text{sig} > 0.05$ ). So, all the variables were in normal distribution (see Table 2). In order to compare the mean scores of two methods, a paired t-test was used, respectively.

**Table 1.** Test of Reliability for Items of the Questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
.958	40

**Table 2.** Test of Normality for Variables in Students' Attitudes toward GTM and CLT

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>	
	df	Sig.
Students' attitudes	35	0.646

## 4. Results

In this section, the results obtained from data analysis are presented based on the distribution of learners' response to questions in the questionnaire. According to paired t-test analysis comparing the mean scores of all 5 options in the questionnaire including presentation of content, availability of

teacher, suitable feedback to students' performance, students' class participation and discussion, and overall effect of teaching methods, only in two options including 'presentation of content' and 'students' class participation and discussion', significant differences were reported, respectively.

**Table 3.** Paired Sample Test Regarding Students' Attitudes toward GTM and CLT

Items regarding students' attitudes	Mean difference	Standard Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Sig. (2-tailed)
Presentation of content	.303	.768	.129	.025
Availability of teacher	.142	.629	.106	.189
Feedback to students' performance	-.157	.696	.117	.191
Students' class participation	-.457	.968	.163	.009
Overall effect of teaching method	.206	.763	.129	.120

According to Table 3, the amount of p-value found in the t-test analysis (p-value=0.025) concerning the students' attitudes toward presentation of content in GTM and CLT showed a significant difference between the mean scores of these two methods. Accordingly, the majority of students had positive attitudes toward the presentation model of GTM in the content of their course book in ESP classroom. Furthermore, according to the amount of p-value found in the t-test analysis (p-value=0.009) concerning the students' attitudes toward class participation and discussion, there was also a significant difference between the mean scores of GTM and CLT. It was revealed that students had positive attitudes toward GTM model, and were satisfied with

non-communicative techniques in their classrooms. In other 3 options including availability of teacher, suitable feedback to students' performance, and overall effect of teaching methods concerning GTM and CLT, the p-values scores were 0.189, 0.191, and 0.120, respectively. It was revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of two methods concerning 3 above-mentioned options regarding their attitudes. Furthermore, the amount of p-value found in the Independent Sample Test relating to demographic variables of participants including their gender, no significant difference was reported between their attitudes and gender concerning two teaching methodologies at UMSU (see table 4).

**Table 4.** Attitudes of Students toward GTM and CLT in Term of Gender

Method	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Sig. (2-tailed)
GTM	Male	17	2.654	.903	.355
	Female	18	2.936	.873	
CLT	Male	17	2.775	.719	.538
	Female	18	2.913	.597	

## 5. Discussion

According to the aim of present study to investigate students' attitudes toward GTM and CLT, and evaluate their preferences concerning these two teaching methodologies at UMSU, the findings regarding students of medicine self-reported information revealed that CLT method was not a preferred approach among the students. Majority of students preferred the presentation of content in GTM model. Students also preferred non-communicative activities in the term of classroom participation and discussion activities. According to the findings of some previous studies concerning the students' attitudes toward GTM and CLT, it was revealed that they had also positive attitudes toward GTM method. According to Liao's (57) study, Taiwanese university students' attitudes toward using

GTM in classrooms were positive. In addition, in some Arabic countries GTM method is preferred by students and widely used among EFL teachers (58). Regarding the use of L1 in L2 context as one of the typical features of GTM, the same result reported by Scheers (29) among Spanish students at University Puerto Rico who preferred GTM. As Scheers's (29) study revealed that 88% of students agreed with using L1 in EFL classes, especially in explanation of difficult contents. Tang (28) also reported a similar finding conducted on 100 Chinese EFL students. Statistically, about 97 % of students preferred their teachers' using L1 in their EFL classroom. Therefore, GTM as a non-communicative method is an acceptable teaching approach from some students' perspectives, and several empirical studies conducted by researchers such as Barkhuizen (59),

Garrett and Shortall (60), and Rao (61) also confirm its acceptability among the learners. The popularity of non-communicative activities was also reported by some Iranian researchers who evaluated the attitudes of learners toward GTM and CLT (62-65). As a result, it was revealed that GTM is an acceptable method at UMSU, and it is preferred by students of medicine. All of the above-mentioned findings are in same line with the findings of present study concerning the students' attitudes toward GTM and CLT.

Accordingly, it is important to survey some main reasons which prevent the implementation of CLT as a new teaching methodology in EFL context (66, 67) such as Iran which cause dissatisfaction among the students. Besides the students, some teachers also face with same challenge. Mak (68) believes that the context of CLT method as a European method is not matched with the context of some Asian countries. From Iranian researchers' prespectives some main reasons that cause problems in applying CLT in Iran are related to traditional education system of Iran based on GTM rather than CLT (69), only paying attention to reading skill in high schools (70), paying particular attention to form rather than meaning (71), lack of attention to communicative skills in school (72), lack of attention to oral proficiency of students in school examinations (73), students' extrinsic motivation rather than intrinsic one to English language learning (71), lack of harmony between cultural features of CLT and EFL context of Iran (74), and finally, spending very little time to teach English language in schools and universities of Iran in comparison to European countries (71). These are some critical issues that must be resolved in order to achieve some fruitful results in English language learning and teaching, mainly in university context.

## 6. Conclusion

This study revealed that students of medicine concerning their gender and language proficiency level

do not have any positive attitudes toward CLT method in university context, and application of a new teaching method such as CLT is not preferred among the students of medicine of UMSU. Although the principles and theories of CLT may be well established and confirmed by a number of scholars in applied linguistics, it does not have enough popularity among some Iranian students. According to the findings, teacher-centered style is still a more preferable method than learner-centered one, and majority of participants self-reported that they were more comfortable in a GTM classrooms. In GTM teaching method, students are not dynamic, and majority of answers are provided by teachers. There is no doubt that in this case, students feel more comfortable and they do not have any anxiety in responding to the answers (75). The findings also showed that some crucial factors can affect the application of CLT at UMSU. The most critical factor is the classical teaching approach of education system in Iran which mainly follows GTM and teacher-centered approaches. Furthermore, the format of university entrance examination is multiple-choice one, and it is similar to school examination system in which listening, speaking and writing skills are completely removed, and students have been adapted to this traditional format and they do not have any motivation to take part in communicative and interactive activities. Therefore, it has fossilized the students' learning style and has changed their preferences, and totally affected their learning behaviors. So, it should be emphasized that the successful process of performing CLT requires a big revolution in educational, social, and cultural systems of all countries (76) along with development of locally acceptable version of CLT in each country (77). Nowadays, due to the globalization in medical sciences, traditional methods cannot satisfy the communicative needs of students, mainly the students of medicine. Therefore, it is so significant for students to approach to learn English as the global (78) and international



language (79) in the communicative way because students of medicine as the future doctors need to communicate with their foreigner patients in English language. As a result, it is necessary for university to adapt methods that provide opportunity to develop students' communicative skills for the sake of their needs.

## 7. Limitations

The present study suffered from some limitations that need to be acknowledged. The participants were asked to complete the questionnaires in a limited period. This factor maybe affects the results of study. Additionally, this study only evaluated the attitudes of students, while the attitudes of teachers are also significant factor. Finally, the arrangement of cooperative relation with students and acquiring their permission to distribute the questionnaires to collect related data was also a troublesome task.

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