

Learners' Attitude towards Business English at Tertiary Level of Education: A Case of Business Students of Islamic University at Kushtia in Bangladesh

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Abstract - The aim of this study is to investigate students' attitude regarding business English activities at tertiary level of business education in Bangladesh. The participants of this survey were the students who have completed the Business English or Communicative English course from different departments of business faculty at Islamic University Kushtia in Bangladesh. The instruments used were questionnaires developed for students to gauge their preferences in teaching and learning related to business English or communicative English in different business departments like Accounting and Management. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency and percentage. The findings of the study indicate that business students have a positive attitude towards business English or communicative English and its association with their academic achievement.

Keywords - Attitude, Business English, Tertiary Education, ESP.

I. INTRODUCTION

With the growing demand for English courses tailored to specific needs, new ideas began to emerge in linguistics, the scientific study of language. Traditionally the aim of linguistics had been to describe the rules of English usage; however, the new studies shifted attention away from defining the formal features of language usage to discovering the ways in which language is actually used in real communication (Widdowson, 1978). This phenomenon, along with the new developments in educational psychology, contributes to the rise of ESP (English for Specific Purposes). Business English is an area of ESP, and must be seen in the overall context of ESP, as it shares the important elements of needs analysis, syllabus design,

course design, and materials selection and development which are common to all fields of work in ESP.

However, Ellis and Johnson (2002) state, 'Business English differs from other varieties of ESP in that it is often a mix of specific content (relating to a particular job area or industry), and general content (relating to general ability to communicate more effectively, especially in the business situations)'.

There have been many developments in the ways in which teachers and course designers look at Business English. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, special vocabulary was considered as what distinguishes Business English (BE) from General English (GE). A second approach placed a greater emphasis on training "the skills of communication in English speaking, writing, listening and

reading within a business context". In the mid-1970s and 1980s, following the trends in GE, BE teaching began to focus more and more on functional areas-formulaic language for recommending, giving opinions, showing agreement, and so on. It is common knowledge that students with a major in economics or business should study business language and vocabulary, whereas students with a major in chemistry, history or any other science should have a course in general English (or another foreign language) with the necessary adaptations to the specific language of their major area (Zagan-Zelter & Zagan-Zelter, 2010:246). During the 1980s the development of company training programs began to provide employees with opportunities to attend courses in presentation techniques, negotiating, and effective meetings skills, which led to the publication of books and materials on business skills.

Business English teacher, as a language teacher, should perform the basic functions required for a language teacher, specifically as organizer, assessor, prompter, participant, controller as well as knowledge-resource. However, to be a qualified Business English teacher something more is needed. Swales (1985) prefers with some justification to use the term 'ESP practitioner' rather than 'ESP teacher' in order to reflect the difference for being a ESP teacher from being a GE teacher. In BE, the term BE trainer is used as some BE trainers come from a business background, who have worked in companies themselves and have useful knowledge of the way in which companies are organized and run, and some may once be TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) teachers, geologists or architects etc. Whatever the background, it is of great importance that the trainer should be seen as an expert in presenting and explaining the language, in diagnosing the learners' language problems, and in providing them with certain awareness of Business English. It is important and necessary to take the students' practical need into consideration in BE teaching to make the learners benefit most from the class.

The main reason of this study is to get the response of ESP learners about the business English course of Business Faculty at Islamic University Bangladesh. This research hopes to shed more light on the preference of students and highlight them to the teachers to enable them to be more empowered in knowing genres that students are more or less confident in.

1.1. Research Questions

- a) What is the business students' attitude towards business or communicative English?

- b) What are the current practices and activities used by teachers in a business English classroom?
- c) What are the learners' perceptions of the activities that are used in the business English classroom?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Very few would argue that English language is sought after by many as it is a lingua franca. ESP was formed due to the demands of English language learning for various purposes such as commerce, engineering etc. An important aspect of any course is the course design. Basturkmen (2006:17) states that "ESP is understood to be about preparing learners to use English within academic, professional, or workplace environments, and a key feature of ESP course design is that the syllabus is based on an analysis of the needs of the students". Business English involves the teaching of the system of strategic communication in the social and economic domain of international business in which participants, adopting/adapting business conventions and procedures, make selective use of lexico-grammatical resources of English as well as visual and audio semiotic resources to achieve their communicative goals via the writing modality, speaking modality and/or multimodality (Zhang, 2007:406). Business English is concerned with teaching communication rather than just language forms or skills. There is an increasing awareness that the teaching of business English is an interdisciplinary endeavour and should be informed by research into three essential fields – subject knowledge, business practice and language skills – and that they should be integrated.

2.1. Status of English in Bangladesh: a Brief Overview

Bangladesh is a virtually monolingual country, unlike India. As Bangladesh is not a multilingual country where the majority of Bangladeshi people always speak in Bangla in their everyday conversation, there is naturally no need for any lingua franca here. Most importantly, the students and the teachers use Bangla most of the time inside and outside the classroom. However, few people would argue that the modern conscious and dynamic people of Bangladesh nowadays desperately feel the necessity of gaining skills in the English language although the majority of Bangladeshi people still prefer to use Bangla in oral communication in their daily conversation. Rahman (2009:35) identifies the major issue regarding the deteriorating standard of English language teaching in the country looking closely at the required qualification for English teachers at different levels in Bangladesh. Although teachers at primary and secondary

levels receive some pre-service training and some in-service workshops to teach English, teachers at higher secondary and tertiary levels receive no sustained teacher training at all in language teaching by the public universities. Moreover, as Bangladesh is a overpopulated third-world country in the Indian subcontinent, it needs to be noted that the classroom size, teacher position, seating arrangements, the number of students and the traditional curriculum, methodology, teaching-learning aids and the examination system are not favourable for learning English language.

To put it more simply, students learn English as a compulsory subject in the national curriculum to meet specific purposes, e.g. to provide overseas employment, to help in foreign trade & commerce and to facilitate higher education in ESL countries. Students learn English also to be able to know the culture, tradition, history and the country in general of the target language and also to pursue knowledge and pleasure about the universe. Most of the conscious and educated parents want to make sure their children achieve communicative competence which will eventually open up doors to a better future. Modern companies and employers in general emphasise on English language skills and most of the cases, fluency in English is a prerequisite of success and advancement. Realising the growing demand and the necessity of its use, the government of Bangladesh along with some organisations and educators have taken initiatives towards teaching communicative abilities through ESP approach.

The government of Bangladesh established Islamic University in 1979 which is the only university in the country where a specialized stream of theological studies and six other of humanities, social sciences, applied sciences, engineering, law and business are running parallel in order to produce qualified and competent scholars for the advancement of knowledge as well as society. Faculty of Business Administration offers Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) with Honours and Master of Business Administration (MBA) along with MPhil and PhD in accordance with the appeal and acceptability in the job market and modern business world.

2.2. Differences between General English and Business English

There are significant differences between general English i.e. EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and Business English i.e. ESP although there are some similarities as well. There seems to be a consensus among researchers and practitioners that Business English is a

branch or variety of ESP which was developed in the 1960s as a major reform in English teaching (Ellis & Johnson, 2002). Business English contrasts with general English teaching in terms of syllabus design and materials production. Hutchinson and Waters (2002:19) state:

ESP must be seen as an approach not as a product. ESP is not a particular kind of language or methodology, nor does it consist of a particular type of teaching material. Understood properly, it is an approach to language learning, which is based on learner need.

Very few would argue that the purposes for learning English differ. In ESP courses, there is a need to learn English in order to perform specific job-related functions. Therefore, ESP emphasizes language in context or language functions rather than language structures in general. In ESP, English is taught and integrated in the learners' subject area of interest. In general EFL courses, all the traditional language skills like Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening are covered whereas in ESP more emphasis might be given to only one or two of the skills according to learner needs. ESP teachers need to perform different tasks not only as language experts but also as content specialists.

2.3. Attitude

The term attitude is a French term that originated from the Italian word *attitudine* and the Late Latin *aptitudo* and *aptitudin* (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2000). The term 'attitude' is most often defined as a noun. The following are some definitions of attitude –

- i. "Behaviour based on conscious or unconscious mental views developed through cumulative experience" (Venes, 2001:189).
- ii. "An enduring, learned predisposition to behave in a consistent way toward a given class of objects, or a persistent mental and/or neural state of readiness to react to a certain class of objects, not as they are but as they are conceived to be" (Dark, 2005).
- iii. A position of the body or manner of carrying oneself . . . 2a. A state of mind or a feeling; disposition . . . b. An arrogant or hostile state of mind or disposition. 3. The orientation of an aircraft's axes relative to a reference line or plane, such as the horizon. 4. The orientation of a spacecraft relative to its direction of motion. 5. A position similar to an arabesque in which a ballet dancer stands on one leg with the other raised either in front or in back and bent at the knee"

(American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2000)

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs the descriptive survey design. This design is usually advantageous for research involving beliefs, opinions, characteristics, attitude and behaviour to obtain data. Population for the present study is all MBA students of Islamic University Kushtia Bangladesh as they are almost ready to complete their degree and at the same time, they are in a better position to give authentic data for the study. Out of the population, a total 251 participants were selected using random sampling technique from Accounting (AIS – Accounting and Information System) and Management departments of business faculty at Islamic

University Kushtia in Bangladesh. A close ended 3-point Likert scale questionnaire was used to collect data from the participants of the study. There were also some open-ended questions along with demographics and basic background information of the learners in the questionnaire to help the researchers understand the sample better.

IV. FINDINGS

To collect the data, a survey has been conducted during the study by the researchers. Participants have filled up the questionnaire under the direct supervision and guidance of researchers. First five pie charts show business students' attitude towards communicative or business English i.e. ESP and rest of the pie charts represent their attitude towards English language learning's association with their academic achievement.

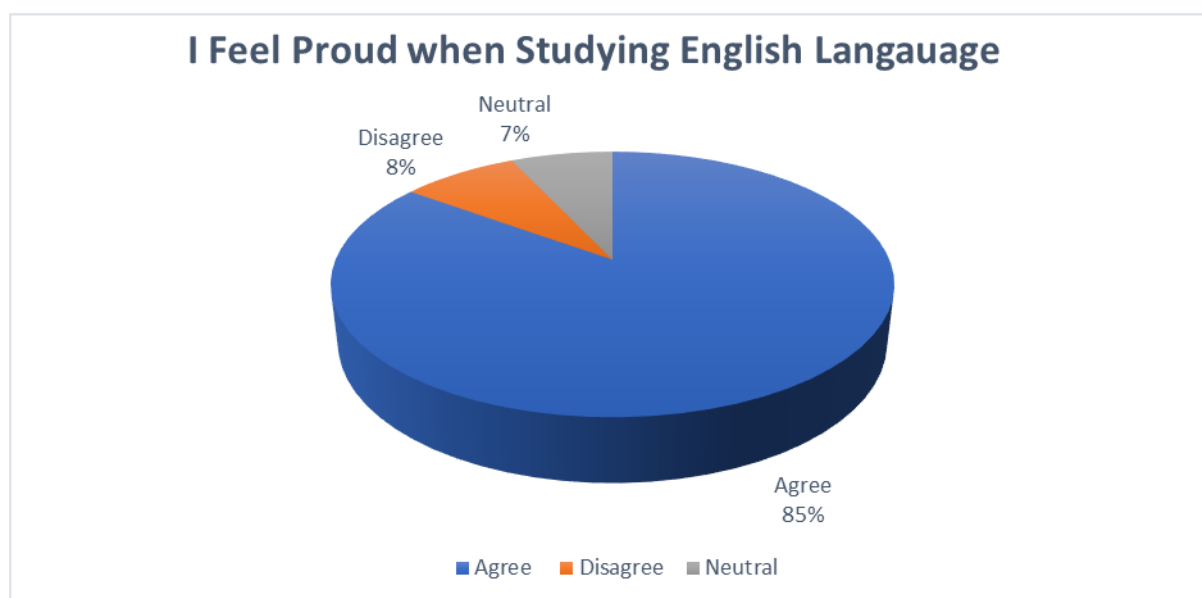


Figure 1: Statement 1

Figure 1 shows that 85% of the participants were agreed to the statement 1 that they feel proud while studying

English, 8% did not agree to the notion whereas 7% of the participants remained neutral.

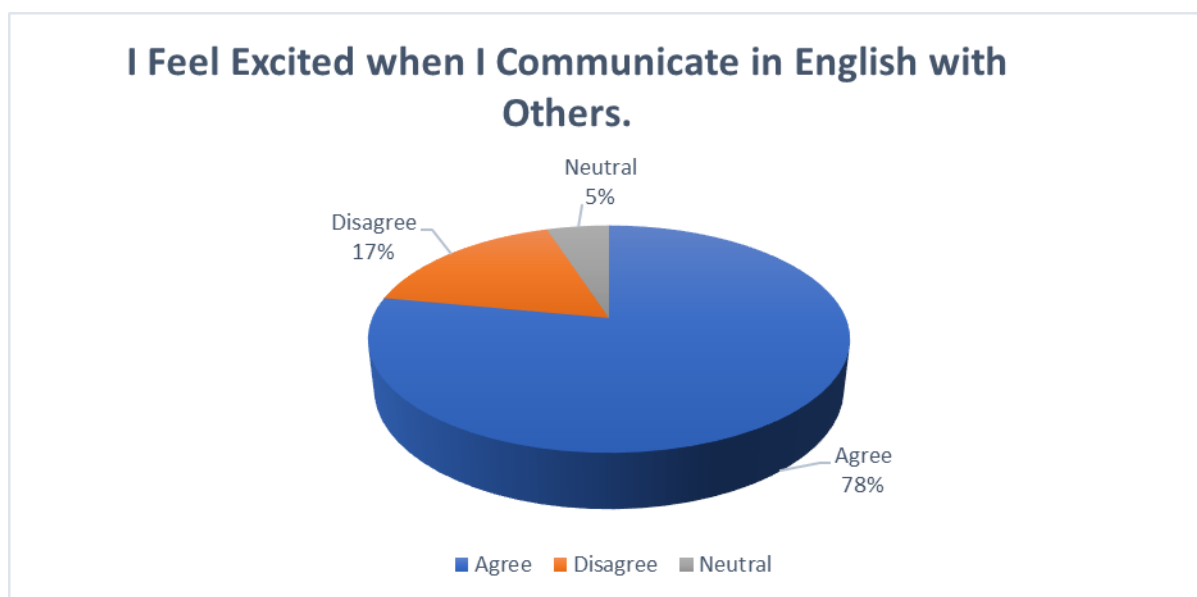


Figure 2: Statement 2

Figure 2 depicts that 78% of the participants were agreed to the statement 2 that they feel excited while using English

in conversation, 17% did not agree to the notion and 5% were neutral about this.

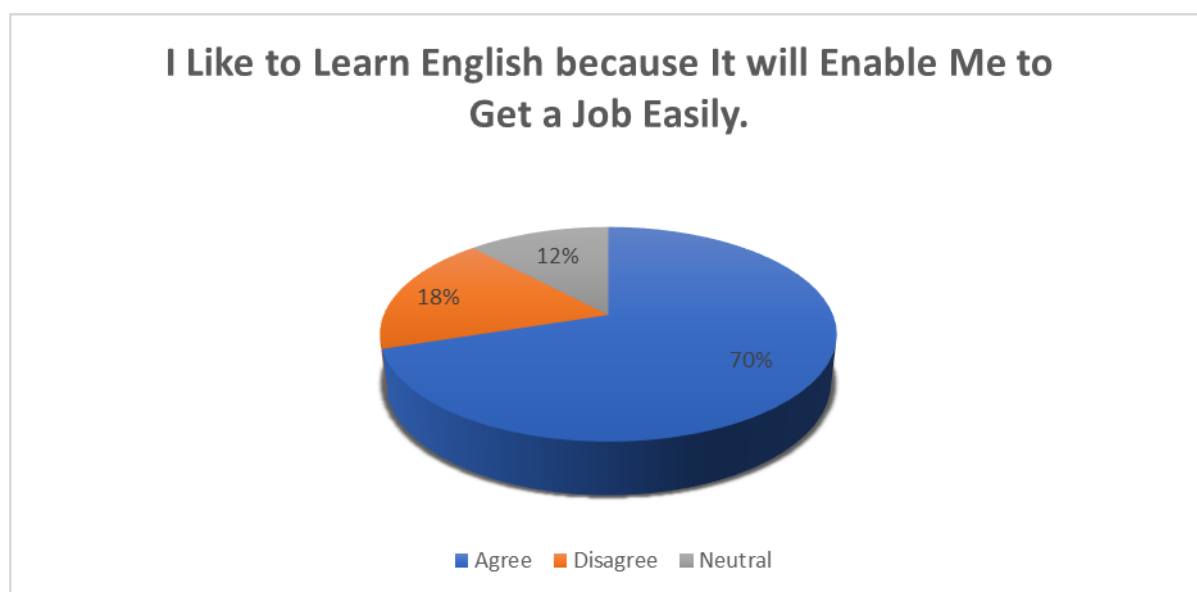


Figure 3: Statement 3

Figure 3 illustrates that 70% of the respondents think that they like to learn English because that might help them

getting a job, 18% disagree with the notion and 12% have a neutral attitude towards the notion.

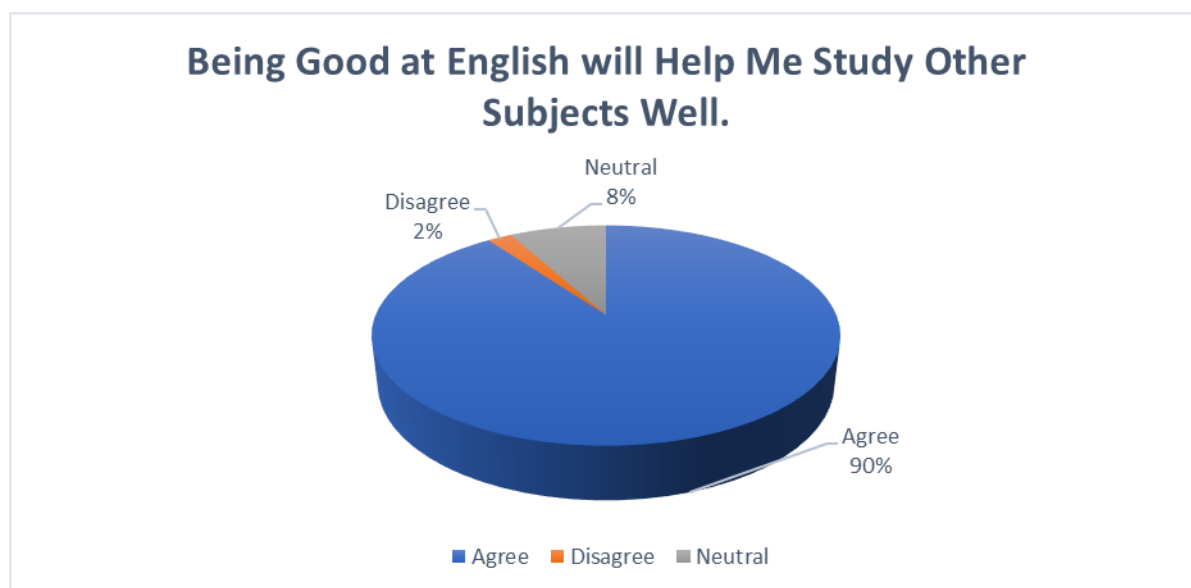


Figure 4: Statement 4

Figure 4 depicts that 90% of the participants believe language skill will be helpful for them to study well whereas 2% of them disagree and 8% remain neutral to the belief.

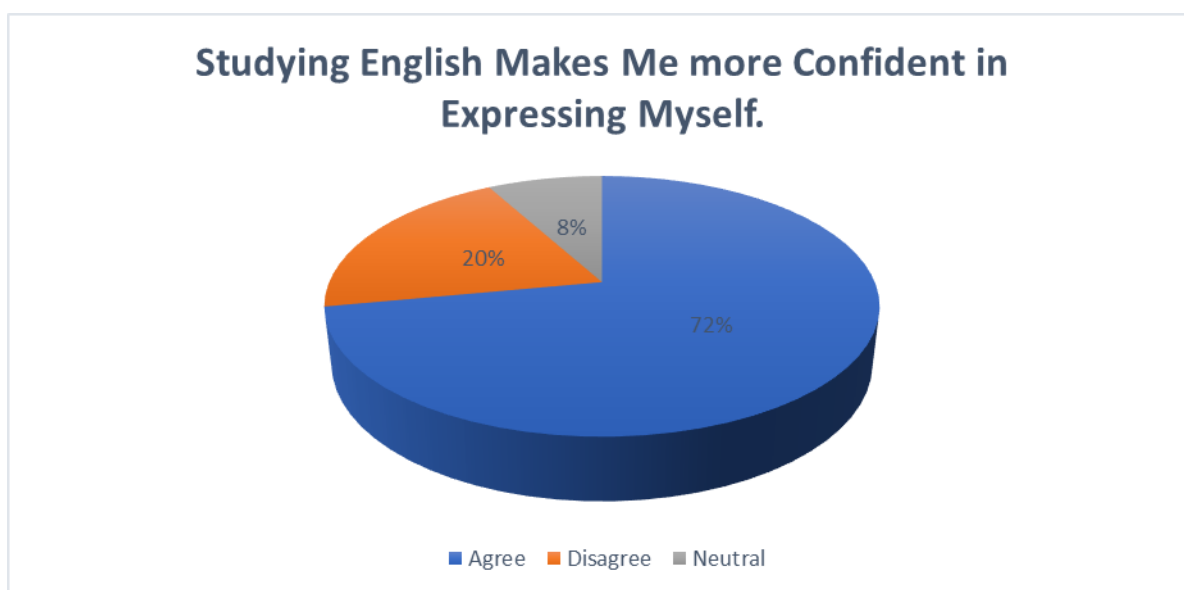


Figure 5: Statement 5

Figure 5 is about business students' attitude towards their spontaneous use of target language by studying English confidently. 72% think that studying English make them

more confident in expressing themselves whereas 20% disagree with the belief and 8% remain silent.

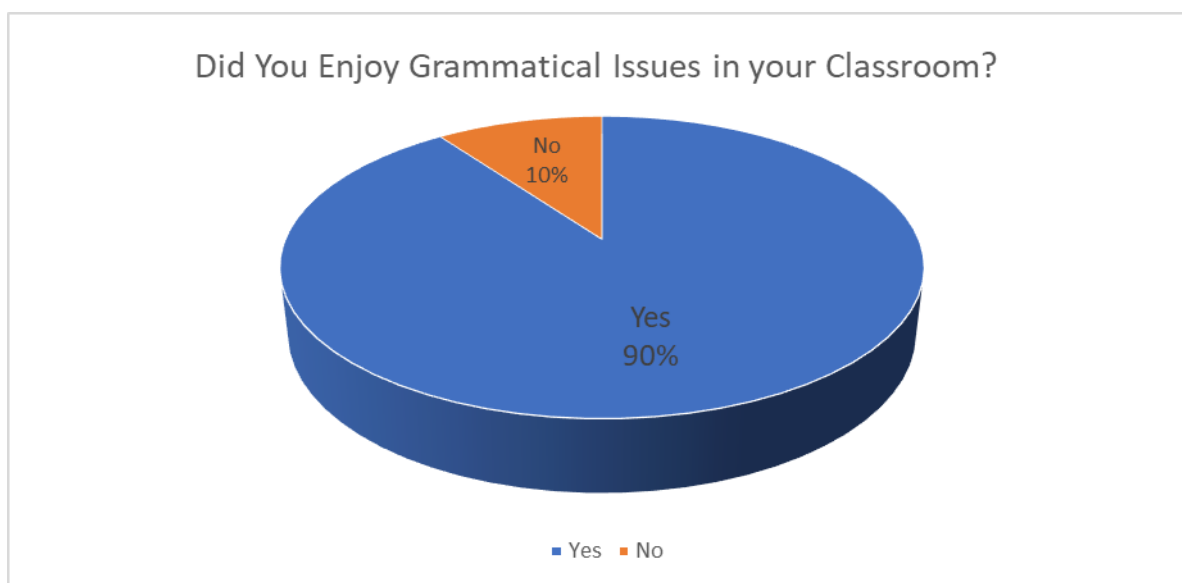


Figure 6: Grammatical Issues in Business Classroom

Figure 6 is about participants' attitude about grammatical issues in their business classroom. 90% of the participants enjoyed grammatical issues in their business English course while 10% participants did not enjoy the items. The learners had to choose if they preferred grammatical issues in business classroom. The most of them preferred grammatical items in their classroom.

Based on the study, the most liked activity was 'Answering comprehension questions' and the least popular activity was Drama activities. Learners showed preference of comprehension questions over other activities.

V. DISCUSSION

In the field of sociolinguistics, it is very significant to investigate second language learners' attitudes towards language and its varieties. According to Friedrich (2000), teachers and administrators should be conscious of their learners' attitude towards English as a second or foreign language. As McKenzie (2015) explains, sociolinguistics appreciates the worth of scrutinising the awareness of linguistic variation as a key dimension in the building of sociolinguistic theory. The main purpose of the present study is to investigate students' attitude regarding business English activities at tertiary level of business education in Bangladesh. The findings of the study as presented through pie charts clearly demonstrate that business students have positive attitudes towards business or communicative English i.e. ESP – English for Specific Purposes.

Figure 1 shows that 85% participants feel proud while studying business English, figure 2 shows that 78% participants feel excited when communicating in English, figure 3 illustrates that 70% of the respondents think that they like to learn English because that might help them getting a job, figure 4 depicts that 90% of the participants believe language skill will be helpful for them to study well, figure 5 is about business students' attitude towards their spontaneous use of target language by studying English confidently and 72% think that studying English make them more confident in expressing themselves; figure 6 is about participants' attitude about grammatical issues in their business classroom and 90% of the participants enjoyed grammatical issues in their business English course. This interpretation shows that overall there is a positive attitude for ESP among the business students and provides answer to the research questions of the study. All the findings show that business students view business English as closely associated with their overall academic achievement and there is a positive attitude prevailing among the business students about the association between learning business English and their overall academic achievement.

Present study explores academic achievement of the business students with respect to learning business English only. Moreover, this study has been conducted Islamic University Kushtia in Bangladesh. So, the findings of the study can only be generalisable to this population only.

VI. CONCLUSION

In accordance with the overall findings of the study, there is a positive attitude among the business students about the association between ESP and their overall academic achievement. The business students of Kushtia Islamic University, Bangladesh, have a positive attitude towards business English course.

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