

Outside Class Learning: An Exploration

Md. Arman (rubelbdbhat@gmail.com)

M.A. in Applied Linguistics and ELT, Department of English, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh



Copyright: © 2022 by the authors. Licensee [The RCSAS \(ISSN: 2583-1380\)](http://www.thercsas.com). This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 International License. (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>). Crossref/DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55454/rcsas.2.9.2022.006>

Abstract: *Outside Class Learning (OCL) in the Bangladeshi context is one of the constantly used buzzwords among graduate and undergraduate students. The purpose of this research is to understand the real and on-ground phenomenon among adult learners. The study found the characteristics of OCL among tertiary students who are or not motivated to self-learning, the effectiveness of OCL, and the challenges of OCL. This study also tried to answer the questions about OCL whether students like it or not and why. The researcher used both open and close-ended questions to find out the data, and data were collected from forty graduate students of the class of 2014 of the Department of English, University of Dhaka. All the volunteers participated spontaneously and they had been given time as they required to submit the responses of questionnaire. This empirical study was purely unbiased in findings with unexpected results and responses to open-ended questions about this unexplored way of study.*

Keywords: ELT, Learners Autonomy, Outside Class Learning

Abbreviation:

OCL= Outside Class Learning

MEOC= Manifesto of Education: Outside Classroom

MA= Master of Arts

ELT= English Language Teaching

Introduction

Learning outside the class can be defined as a learning style which is taken place within an institutional context, relates to students' academic endeavors, and contributes to students' learning outcomes. OCL includes intangible elements such as the culture of a campus or faculty and the hidden curriculum evident in the value of an institution (Kerri-Lee Krause, 2007). OCL is a method of learning that positions students in a context that motivates them to learn (Wan Sulaiman et al, 2010). These student-centered learning activities enforce learners to implement the curriculum of the target learning subject or topics. This process of learning provides the students with real-life experiences of what they have just learned in class. The method of classroom teaching comes to be practiced in real life by students by OCL which is considered effective because it clarifies students' understanding and concepts about the subjects and at the same time it makes the learning enjoyable for students. "At the same time, learners also have fun and get some mental refreshment in the fresh air" (MEOC: 2006). It is a contextualized learning method that can help students to learn in a selected environment. It also helps pupils make the subject more vivid, interesting, and meaningful which contribute in personal and emotional development and social harmony among students (MEOC: 2006). OCL, in some cases, refers to learner autonomy. Learner autonomy is the ability to take charge of one's learning (Holes: 1981). Autonomy is a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making, and independent action. Student-centred OCL is related to learners autonomy. It presupposes that the learners will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of their learning (Little: 1991). So it is basically concerned with learning and learning style rather than teaching, as its development is considered to be a cooperative learning process among students that can be guided by teachers if learners want. While learning something in class, the curious minds of students look for the logical correlation in real life context. This learning process fulfills the curiosity and answers all the questions of the minds relating the theories to practices and it takes the readers from the classroom to the field to experience it firsthand. Since learners are autonomous in this learning environment, they are free to follow the way to learn how they like to do it and since the environment is created by the learners for the learners and no one is there to control them, they stay stress-free which is essential for learning anything. Autonomous adult learners always look for flexibility and a self-controlled environment in their learning time which can be practiced in OCL.

Methodology

A total of 40 students of MA in Applied Linguistics and ELT from the Department of English, University of Dhaka volunteered for the study. The participants were from diverse cultural, political, financial, and academic backgrounds where both male and female students were selected in the equal number, 20 males and 20 females. They were offered the same questionnaires to be answered freely. Four open-ended questions were given to find out the quantitative data and four close-ended questions were provided to determine the qualitative data. Some strategies were taken for collecting the questionnaires. There were a set of pre-prepared guiding questions, the researcher was totally neutral during the participants' answering the questions, and the participants were given the absolute freedom to answer the number of questions and the way to answer they wanted. The data found in the survey were analyzed both statistically and descriptively. The responses of participants were calculated into percentages manually.

2

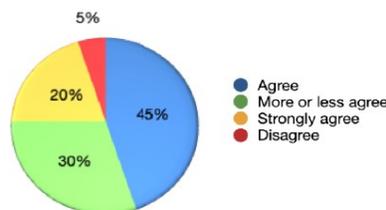
Research Questions

1. What are the challenges Bangladeshi students face in OCL?
2. What are the impacts of OCL on their academic studies?

Findings

The contributors were given the questions to be answered and the results were unexpected. It was unexpected because, in this setting, there was no such former study on this particular field, especially, among the tertiary group of students. In the Bangladeshi context, all groups of students of all ages remain busy studying outside the class but no such research can be found on this broad, widely used situation. The close-ended statements/questions given to the students were such:

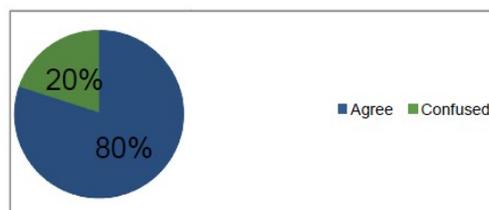
It is more comfortable to study outside the class.



Pie Chart No. 1

In this narrative, the results shown in pie chart No. 1, 20% of 40 participants agreed strongly and said that it is absolutely relaxing and comfortable to study outside of the class and they also acknowledged that they are used to studying in this environment from junior school. 45% of them only agreed with this statement whereas 30% of these adult participants were somehow confused and they more or less agreed but were not sure whether it is comfortable or not but they hoped it anyway finds some comfortableness for them in the OCL setting. On the other hand, 5% of the concerned participants totally disagreed with this statement and brought some logical arguments to display why it cannot be comfortable for them. So 95% of total participants showed positive or near positive interest in OCL.

The second question given to the volunteers: *Do you think learning outside class is helpful?*



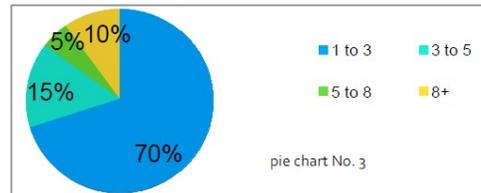
Pie Chart No. 2

By this question, the researcher discovered that there are only two groups of people; "Agreed" and "Confused" groups. 80% of the participants agreed and would like to say frankly that it helps them to prepare

their classroom lesson and it also helps them to profound their knowledge. Though a great number of participants displayed positive responses, 20% of them were confused and could not definitely say whether it would be helpful or not.

Then the third question: *How many hours do you study outside the class?*

The researcher divided the answers to this question into four groups:

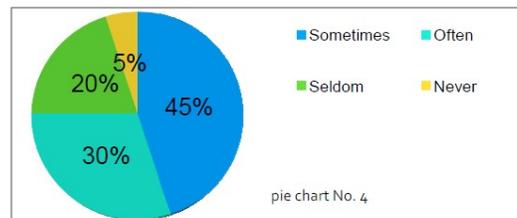


Pie Chart No. 3

- A. 1 to 3 study hours
- B. 3 to 5 study hours
- C. 5 to 8 study hours and
- D. More than 8 study hours

The study found that 70% of the participants study only from 1 to 3 hours a day, 15% of them study for 3 to 5 hours, 5% study from 5 to 8 hours, and only 10% of the volunteer participants study more than 8 hours a day.

The final close-ended question: *Do you study in a group or with a partner?*



Pie Chart No. 4

The close-ended responses were divided into four parts:

- A. Often
- B. Sometimes
- C. Seldom
- D. Never

The participants for this questionnaire are those people who think studying outside class is more comfortable, so the number of participants is only 38. 20 people of 38 participants are male and 18 are female. 30% of the participants said that they “Often” study with a group or at least with a partner. 45% said that they “Sometimes” study in a group or with a partner. 20% of participants mentioned that they “Seldom” go with a group for study and 5% of them “Never” tried it with a group or a partner outside the class but they think it will be absolutely fine.

From the open-ended questions, the researcher was looking for the opinion of participants on why it is helpful for learners. With the spontaneous responses of volunteers, the researcher found, that sometimes, their answers were the same. From the data, the researcher kept only once the repeated answer and showed it in the study precisely. The participants answered the questions in various ways by their own thought and idea based on their backgrounds knowledge and practice. They think the learners can learn in their own ways. The learning style varies from person to person, so they like the way they want. Learners feel more relaxed when they learn outside the classroom environment because of not being corrected by the teacher/ instructor.

Timing is a crucial issue for learning. In a classroom learning environment, the learners are given a fixed time which, sometimes, cannot be appropriate for a learner because the learning mode cannot be the same always. So a learner can learn whenever he/she wants to do it in an OCL environment. No one will impose the schedule of practicing and the duration. Since there is no one to interrupt them, they call it fluent learning. They also mentioned that the class teacher uses some prescribed materials and those materials may not always be helpful for pupils. So in the OCL environment, learners can choose any materials they want to or like to use for their learning which can be useful for their self-improvement. In the classroom, the teacher may not be able to take care of everyone or give time to each individual alike or if there is someone to be taken care of especially, the teacher may not find it easy or cannot be cautious enough about that special learner. So, sometimes, it can be a great catastrophe in classroom learning. So the participants emphasized the OCL. If they try to learn outside the class, they can get help from friends, family members, or even private mentors who can assist the learners spontaneously. Even some participants share their wish to take care of their family while they are learning because they have responsibilities for the family. Some of them might have children or even some other dependent people at home to be taken care of. So, they mentioned, that learning outside the class is helpful for them because it is less stressful since they can help their family members and learn together. So, this style of study is really flexible in timing, duration, materials, and mentors. There is no psychological pressure among the learners and that is why this mode of learning can be taken into consideration for pupils.

When the researcher was looking at the nature of OCL, the participants were spontaneous to share their opinion. This study found this genre of study is mostly Group Work or Group Learning. According to them, OCL is mostly for discussion-based learning, so group work will be at the top of the nature of this learning mode. Library work is, too, one of the top practiced outside learning modes told by the volunteers which can be done in both ways; group work and lonely work in a calm atmosphere. Generally, in Bangladesh, adult learners go to libraries for studying alone in a tranquil environment. Then comes, learning with technology; it can be “reading with a computer/ laptop connected to the internet or offline. All of the participants mentioned that they have at least a laptop or iPad or android big screen mobile to continue their study. Within this reading environment, they generally discuss with reading partners and share notes and materials.

The participants responded diversely when they encountered the question about the reasons for OCL. By this open-ended question, their responses were categorized into four separate types. First, they confessed that they practice this mode of study for the examination. To cut a good figure in the examination, they come out of the home to study and stay in the reading room, library, or anywhere they find it useful for study a long period. Some other people like to study or practice in an outside environment because they think it is a better option to learn more than in the classroom. Those learners who like the outside class environment do not mean that they do not like or they hate the prescribed class, they just preferred it in an open environment. Some participants also mentioned that they even do not know why they go outside of class to study but they still keep practicing this.

The fourth and final open-ended question was about the challenges of OCL and the participants answered spontaneously and unbiasedly. They mentioned that this is an informal learning environment and there is no structural and organized way of learning and that is why the learning is not much effective as people expect. Its time duration is longer but the output is less than that of classroom learning. It is so because the participants of OCL are volunteers and everyone is autonomous. There were no hard and fast rules and they are not bound to keep going in the same way as the rest of the group. So learning efficiency and learning results decrease. In this environment, learners generally do not find motivation because of the lack of guidance by mentors or instructors, more interruption by learning mates or, even, by outsiders or an unfriendly learning environment this type of unstructured learning environment does not have any clear and fixed objectives to be acquired in the meantime and they just roam around the text. So the ambiguous objectives of learners just waste the time and, sometimes, the result is zero. One of the participants said, “Since it is a self-motivated learning process, sometimes I cannot continue it because there are many other things to divert my concentration”. So the participants of this study emphasized on

- A) the concentration on learning
- B) the individuality and

C) the atmosphere and learning environment

According to the points of view of participants, LOC has both positive and neutral results. It is positive for them who really can harvest the fruits from it.

Discussion

A significant portion of the participants disagreed on the comfortableness of OCL. A large number of participants are also confused about what to do which means they do not know whether they should agree or disagree with this statement. This type of confusion can be happened because of many reasons. The socio-structural and socio-environmental differences can be counted as one of the most vital reasons. Students from different groups of societies, sometimes, cannot cope with campus culture. Of course, there are fast learners who are eager to learn new things and accept different views and ideas, but some people cannot accept the new environment or culture and it is absolutely normal. Students who come from rural areas, for example, sometimes take time to learn campus traditions if the campus is in an urban area or, sometimes, cannot adjust at all. The learners who cannot adopt the new environment will not feel comfortable learning outside of the classes and they will find it time-wasting, fruitless gathering of some anomalous or, sometimes, maverick people. This situation, even, can be juxtaposed. The less adaptive participant can wander about how her/ his group mates approach and how they talk. For this wandering behavior, most of his/ her time can be wasted without learning or achieving the goal. Two learners from two sides of a country may not have the same culture, same way of behavior, or even the level of education may vary. So it is very usual the partakers feel differently.

Financially every student will not come from the same class of family. Some can come from very affluent families or even the parents can be millionaires, some will come from a very poor background and, of course, some learners will be somewhere in the middle of these two groups. Even if someone is homeless, it is absolutely not something to be surprised by. For this reason, everyone can not have the same access to materials. So, of the differences in access to material, some learners can use the most common, most available materials. Others can have a personal library and a lot of collection of books and learning materials. The second group with a lot of access to materials, of course, can use the most available and useful learning equipment like the first group and, at the same time, they are also able to use the different ones, for example, books, articles, audio-visual equipment, electronic devices, etc. So, the range of learning or acquiring knowledge of a learner group cannot be the same. And they will feel differently. Additionally, of the difference in financial background, and learning environment, the study duration can vary from learner to learner and that is why the question about the comfortableness of OCL has different answers and sometimes the opposite.

Political turbulence is a common phenomenon in Bangladesh that affects the learning environment. In Bangladeshi culture student politics on the campus is a widely practiced activity and for this every now and then there are demonstrations, slogans using loudspeakers, reunions, and meetings of political student groups, sometimes clashes among them, unrest, and tensions on the campus. These types of activities hinder academic maneuver. In this unfriendly situation, the learners cannot sit for OCL, even sometimes, they do not want to go to the campus. Even if, the learners go to the campus and try to find a place to practice learning activities outside the class, it is difficult for them to concentrate.

Family plays a vital role in the life of students in Bangladesh and controlling the decision-making process is one of them, for example. The learner may want to practice learning with friends in or out of home but the guardians may not allow them to out with a group or fellow students for this informal learning environment because of uncertainty and fear on the one hand. On the other hand, some members of the family may not allow the whole group in the home because of the noise or overcrowding. By any means, it is clear that, somehow, the learner is bound to stay alone at home regardless she/he likes or not the OCL system. This type of incidence mostly happens with female learners with some exceptional cases. So, family is one of the key reasons why participants disagreed with the statement about the comfortableness of OCL.

For outside classroom learning in the Bangladeshi context, the weather should be taken into consideration. Generally, the transportation means are not so developed, which means the public transportation is so poor, and affording a car or motorcycle is a daydream for many citizens. So in the rainy season, meeting with group mates or finding a suitable place is much more difficult because while it rains, sometimes, it rains for

the whole day and night. So, people generally pass the time idly or learn along. In summer it is too hot outside for learners to learn in the open sky or in such a place. There are scarcities of public libraries where the learners can get together, and pass quality learning time in a student-friendly environment. So, in summer, like the rainy season, it is difficult for pupils to arrange the study session with a group. But it is not that difficult for them, rather it is a good opportunity to get more time to pass alone without any interruption.

A significant number of participants were confused about whether OCL is helpful or not and the researcher found that most of the confused partakers are from either the “Disagree” group or the “More or less agree” group of the previous question about the comfortableness of OCL. So, clearly, it can be mentioned that those learners who think OCL is not comfortable for them, somehow, they are confused about the helpfulness of OCL on the one hand. On the other hand, they never tried it before and even if someone tried to practice it, they never thought of it whether it is helpful or not. So, negative responses about comfortableness and helpfulness both came from the same group of people who either faced any obstacle or have a negative review on OCL or did not try it at all.

Next, it is clear that the participants who can spend more than 8 hours a day for study, alone or with a group, have more exposure to materials, a student-friendly environment and they are more affluent. They can easily use either a private library or they are privileged offered by family members. On the other side, the participants who confessed to spending from one to three hours announced that they remain occupied with other activities rather than studying. Sometimes, a less affluent group of participants has to do some jobs to support themselves and even their family members, for example. Sometimes, they lose motivation to continue learning and that is the reason they do not like to pass more time learning outside the class.

The pupils who think OCL is helpful and comfortable but never practiced with a group or seldom tried it with a partner think that serious study can be interrupted for the group members or for the reading partner. So, they like to do it alone in a calm atmosphere and they call it a “fluent learning system”. On the other hand, the pupils who often or sometimes practice with a group or at least with one learning partner think that the broad scale learning should be acquired through a discussion with others so that they can share each other’s point of view, knowledge, and learning experience which, they think, can broaden everyone’s knowledge and they believe it is a win-win situation. Group learning, they think, can help them prepare for the examination and learn very well.

Conclusion

This study on “Outside Class Learning: An Exploration” was conducted in February 2015. By analyzing data, it can be concluded that in the context of the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, researches on this particular area need to be conducted in a wide range. This study was taken place among a small group of students who are from only one academic session and only one particular department and all of them are of the same age. The researcher noticed that though they practice this process of learning, sometimes, a mentionable portion of the participants are confused about the pros and cons of OCL. They are confused because they are not well aware of this learning process. They are not aware because they are not informed about it and it can clearly be said that they are not informed because there is no research enough. If there were sufficient studies on the vital area, the students might have not been so confused and at the same time, they could have taken the decision quickly about what to do. By expressing learning satisfaction, the participants of this study prepared to take part in learning outside the class in a more open, calm, relaxed, and learner-friendly atmosphere. Education is not something to be kept in a box, even though the box is of classroom shape. The Education and Skill Select Committee in 2005 found that OCL can benefit learners of all ages and can be successful in a variety of settings. It allows learners to become risk aware but not risk averse to learning, to undertake meaningful exercise as a means of staying healthy and learning more about the topic, to have fun and enjoyment and achieve negotiated goals, to have the opportunity to work with others and share their knowledge and contribute as active learners in a vast array of activities, to develop their skill and self-confidence that can be applied later in their formal learning.

References

1. Kerri- Lee Krause (2007), Beyond classroom wall: *Students' Out-of-Class Peer Experience and Implication for Teaching and Learning*. <https://doi=10.1.1.564.6215&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.
2. Holec, H. (1981). *Autonomy and Foreign Language Learning*. Oxford/New York: Pergamon Press.
3. Benson, P., and Voller, P. (Eds.) (1997), *Autonomy and independence in Language Learning*. London: Longman.
4. Benson, P. (2001), *Teaching and Researching Autonomy in Language Learning*. Harlow: Longman.
5. Little, D. (1991), *Learner Autonomy*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259874253_Learner_Autonomy_1_Definitions_Issues_and_Problems.
6. Council of Europe, 2001,p. 106. <https://rm.coe.int/16802fc1bf>.
7. Manifesto for Education: *Outside the Classroom*, USA (2006). <https://www.lotc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/G1.-LOtC-Manifesto.pdf>
8. Terenzini, P. & Reason, R(2005), *Parsing The First Year of College: A conceptual framework of rethinking college Impacts*, Philadelphia, PA.

About Author



Md. Arman has been working in United Nations Peacekeeping Mission and was deployed in the Central African Republic. He has completed his BA in English and MA in Applied Linguistics and ELT from the Department of English, the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Address: 5/5, Bakshibazar, Dhaka-1211, Bangladesh, Cell + Whatsapp: +8801305393150, Email: rubelbdbhat@gmail.com