

# Teaching Spoken English in Large Classes: A Case Study at a Private College in Bangladesh

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## Abstract

The study aims at showing the situation of speaking skill in the syllabus and the necessary measures to improve the speaking skill of students. Students of our country are not good at speaking skill. Even the students from English department cannot speak English fluently. Fear of English, hesitation, lack of confidence, time constraint, congenial atmospheres are the causes of students' failure of speaking skill. The present study explores the problems of students' inability to speak English. The paper also presents some recommendations for overcoming the barriers in speaking English.

**Keywords:** Speaking Skill, Language Skill, Teaching Speaking skill

## Introduction

The teaching scenario of our country gives a painful picture where we see the unusually large class size (Chowdhury & Shaila, 2013, Bashir & Ferdousy 2006). The number of students is 60-70 students in the educational institutions. In that situation, it is not possible to deliver a good lecture. On the other hand, students also make noise in the class which hampers the class extremely. Effective classroom strategies are applicable for a small class. Class size is a great matter in getting the best performance of the teacher. So, teachers have to take various strategies in taking their classes in the context of Bangladesh. It becomes a great challenge for the teacher to teach speaking skill in the class. Through this study, I will try to highlight the effective strategies that might be adopted by the teacher to teach speaking in the large classroom and at the same time, causes of students' inability of speaking fluently in the class, will be discussed with some recommendations.

Speaking skill takes a 'prominent place' in language teaching. Proper material design fosters effective language teaching (Richards, 2008). According to Richards (2008), speaking refers to the utterance by students as dictated by the teacher, memorization of a piece of topic. Richards (2008) also emphasizes that to develop the oral skill, students need to converse with others. With the change of English language teaching and the introduction of communicative language teaching, the previous shift of speaking skill has changed to a great extent (Richards, 2008).

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English has acquired the fame of spreading around the world for various reasons (Aktar, 2011; Farooqui, 2007; Jahan, 2008). The necessity of speaking skill has increased a lot and for a better communication in English, speaking standard English is one of the essential qualities. In public and private universities, the students have to study reading skills, writing skill, speaking skill. They have courses on speaking skills (Farooqui, 2007). They are to be engaged in those tasks related with the enhancement of their speaking skill. They have to present their topic in front of the teacher along with students. They have to participate in speaking with each other. They have some marks for speaking skills. On the other hand, there is no speaking course in the syllabus of National University in English Department let alone other departments. As a result, the students cannot develop their speaking skills. There is no mark for the speaking skill. However, undergraduate students of English Department have to face the viva voce examination only in their final year course. Throughout the whole session of their courses, they do not need to face any speaking test though speaking is considered one of the important skills (Ur, 1996). The paper will throw light on the present scenario of students' speaking skill, their problems—taking time to utter the proper word, hesitation, fear, anxiety, lack of courage (Aktar, 2011; Jahan, 2008). In the second phase, the valuable ideas/suggestions of 5 English language teachers at a private college in Bangladesh under National University will be analysed. Finally, the research paper will provide some recommendations in enhancing students' speaking ability.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the educational context of Bangladesh, it is seen that students cannot speak English correctly. When they try to say something in English, they take time to produce the correct expression. On the other hand, they do not find out the right word to express their feeling. Moreover, it is noticed that students studying in English department cannot speak English fluently. Same situation is prevailing in a private college under National University. When asked about to speak on a topic, students cannot give a satisfactory answer (Jahan, 2008). So, speaking skill is one of the important skills (Ur, 1996) to be mastered by the students.

### **Research Objectives**

The research objectives of this study are:

- a) to find out the challenges of teaching spoken English in large classes in Bangladesh colleges
- b) to find out the impact of teaching spoken English in larger classes in Bangladesh colleges

## Research Questions

1. What are the challenges of teaching spoken English in large classes in Bangladesh colleges?
2. What is the impact of teaching spoken English in larger classes in Bangladesh colleges?

## Significance of the Research

We have to teach a large number of students. In the assessment, the priority is not given on speaking skill. But it is very much needed for developing the skill of the students. As the world is going faster, learners need to master the 21st century skills. If the learners cannot prove their quality in the classroom or outside the classroom, that will be a great deficiency in their skill. Speaking creates an atmosphere of communication among different persons, community. Speaking is also needed in the real world where questions are not asked to students to write something rather they are told to express themselves. If they cannot do it, they will not get access to take various opportunities. Students need to develop the skill of speaking. Learners of tertiary level and teachers of tertiary level will be benefited through identifying the challenges of teaching speaking at tertiary level and few techniques of overcoming them. The study will help the policy makers, curriculum developers to formulate a contextual and effective syllabus focusing on speaking ability of the students.

## Current Practice

Bangla is the mother tongue here and English is considered to be a foreign language in Bangladesh. Students have to read English language from class 1 to 12 as compulsory subject. After their HSC exam, they enrol themselves in various universities. In public universities, the students have to read English as a requirement of passing their course. The students studying in various colleges under National University, do not have to study English course particularly, in business honours subjects. The students of science department and humanities department have to pass the English compulsory course. It was seen earlier many students could not pass in the exam. For this reason, they did not get their certificate in time. English was withdrawn from the syllabuses of business studies subjects.

## ELT in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has achieved independence in 1971. Before that she was under the domination of Pakistan. Before independence, students had to continue their studies in English medium (Aktar, 2011). All the books were in English. Students at

that time were very skilled in using English. Their reading, writing, speaking and listening skills were satisfactory. After the independence, there was widespread use of Bangla in all stages of education and administration. In the early 1990s, English teachers used Grammar Translation method in the classroom. This method ran for a couple of years. After 2000, there was the introduction of Communicative Language Teaching. This communicative approach sounds nice but the scenario is different.

Though ignored in the Grammar Translation Method, speaking skill is a primary skill in the Direct Method (Aleksandrazak, 2011). Communicative Language teaching added a new way of for the classroom interaction (Aleksandrazak, 2011). In the language classroom of Bangladesh, we see a different scenario where the initiatives of engaging speaking activities are challenging (Chowdhury & Shaila, 2013; Jahan, 2008).

Luoma (2004 as cited in Richards, 2008) points out the key features in spoken discourse: formal and casual speaking. Use of fixed expressions on various situations are uttered by people as suggested by Wardhaugh (1985 as cited in Richards, 2008) and Pawley and Syder (1983 as cited in Richards, 2008). Brown and Yule (1983 as cited in Richards, 2008) present three ways of functions of speaking: talk as interaction, talk as transaction and talk as performance. In the Bangladesh language classroom, teachers use talk as interaction among the students.

### **Literature Review**

Performance on integrated skills increases the employability for the learners (Chowdhury & Shaila, 2013; Farooqui, 2007). In this regard, English has a great market value in our country. Employers want people who are proficient in speaking and writing. There is a gap between students' learning and the demands of the employers in the job market. It is seen that a student can get a good degree but he/she cannot write or speak correctly. Teachers also like those students who are good at speaking. Students will be more serious in their speaking ability if they are assessed through their speaking (Matin, 2012). The teacher could design his/her lesson plan emphasizing for the betterment of oral skill (Cameron 2011 as cited in Hsieh & Wang, 2017).

A study conducted by Gan (2013) identifies the problems faced by students in China. English is not the second language in China and the same is applicable in Bangladesh. Students do not get the environment for developing their speaking skill. For speaking, other factors are also needed for example; vocabulary, grammar, cultural competence (Gelce-Murcia and Olshtain 2000; as cited in Gan, 2013). The study found by them shows students' various types of obstacles in speaking for

example, linguistic, speech processing, academic and conversational inability and so on. Horwitz (2008; cited in Gan, 2013) points out that uttering the target language also creates anxiety in the minds of the learners. Shyness and anxiety hinder their speaking (Liu, 2006 as cited in Sun et al., 2017). As a result, the students perform badly. Learners have to have the willingness to communicate (Paran, 2012). In our country, learners usually show less willingness to communicate in English with their friends, family members. Even they do not speak English with their teachers. Hughes (2010 as cited in Paran, 2012) shows the difference between written and spoken language. She also includes that voice, confidence, gesture, look are also necessary for speaking. Paran (2012) clearly illustrates the style of coursebook where there is a lack of real life communication. In that case, students cannot choose their own vocabulary and they have to rely on the book. This way, students have to be dependent on their coursebook.

Teaching speaking in a large class has some impacts on the quality of teaching and learning. To give individual feedback in a large classroom is not possible (Bahanshal, 2013; Chowdhury & Shaila, 2013). Time is also a factor. Within a short class duration e.g. 45 minutes, the teacher cannot finish the speaking activity (Chowdhury & Shaila, 2013).

Mobile social networking plays a great role (Sun et al., 2017) for the development of student's speaking skill. According to Sun et al (2017), educational mobile applications can remove shyness and anxiety of learners. The study conducted by Sun et al (2017) was meant for young learners. In the context of Bangladesh, it can be applicable for the adult learners. Use of skype, google talk, Facebook messenger, WhatsApp can help the learners in developing their speaking (Yen, Hou, & Chang, 2015). Now a days, learners pass a great deal of their time using modern devices. If their time of using those devices is utilised, their time will not be wasted. Some mobile apps from Android and iOS can come to a great help in this regard. News provider apps like BBC, CNN, Kahoot (an online gaming platform used for creating quizzes) can be a great tool in sharpening their English language skills. Technology has made a tremendous impact upon the minds of the learners. Students can be made engaged using online games meant for developing their speaking skill.

Farrell & Yang (2017) explore in their study about the students' speaking ability focusing on their fluency. According to them, the learners should not take pauses in speaking and they could continue speaking. They do not need to think about the correctness of their words. Teachers of our country can encourage learners to continue their speaking. With practice, they will be able to develop their skill. According to Paran (2012), teaching speaking refers to teaching pronunciation,

conversation, spoken grammar. Therefore, teachers can give emphasis on the fluency of the learners and then the accuracy.

Assessment of speaking discussed in (Matin, 2012) does not throw light on the tertiary level. With the growth of their age and study, students acquire new knowledge. Bangla medium students cannot speak English fluently (Matin, 2012). A study shows by Jahan (2008) shows that students from English medium institutions speak well than those coming from Bangla medium. In our country, there are different kinds of education system. All the students do not get the chance of studying the same syllabus. Even the syllabus of private universities and public universities is also different. There is a gap between government and public universities.

Considering the literature review it is to be said that with the passage of time language teaching has changed a lot and the integration of technology in imparting speaking skill to the students is an important factor for the teachers to adopt. Use of educational technology will foster a nice and effective environment for teaching and learning speaking skill in the classroom.

### **Research Methodology**

In this study, I will use qualitative research method. The aim of the researcher is to find out the reasons of students' failure in spoken English at a large class. Qualitative research approach will be taken into consideration. Non probability purposive sampling technique will be followed in selecting the samples. I will take undergraduate students of studying in English department.

The study will use one focus group discussion as a qualitative research design. Interview of 5 teachers will be taken to get their views. The teachers are chosen particularly who take classes of undergraduate fresher students. The reason for choosing the teachers is to see how they think about the performance of the students. The sampling technique is purposive. Undergraduate students of English department were selected purposively. This will fulfil my intention of research. FGD and interview questionnaire were chosen as the instruments of the research. The interview of teachers was semi structured. In the FGD, the respondents were comfortable in discussing their ideas. Teachers will be selected teaching in tertiary level. Samples will be taken from learners and teachers. Using various tools will be helpful for the reliability and validity of data. I will select those teachers who teach speaking skills in the tertiary classroom. As data are collected from both parties involved in teaching and learning, the output of the data will be reliable and valid. Data were collected from FGD of the students and interview of 5 teachers. Taking interviews from teachers will help me to know their opinions and sugges

tions. In this way, the current study will be strong to establish the role of teachers in teaching speaking to the students.

### **Data Analysis**

The focus group discussion was conducted after the class. The researcher will record reflective notes after each session with the teachers. After every session, transcription of data will be made. The study will reveal the views of students and teachers. Questions will be asked from the students and teachers will also express their ideas through interview. This is a limited scale research project focusing on a private college in Bangladesh. The research is not conducted to other colleges under National University, Bangladesh.

The participation of the students was lively. They expressed their views spontaneously. The discussion lasted for 20-25 minutes. While discussing with the students, they have talked about the causes of their inability to speak in English. They have indicated that nervousness, lack of confidence, lack of vocabulary, shyness are the causes of their speaking incompetence.

An important issue has come out the discussion about their stopping in the middle of their speaking. They have clearly pointed out that after uttering a few words, they do not find any word to complete the sentence. On the other hand, they take pauses during their conversation. The discussion was going on in the mixture of Bangla and English. If they gave their views in English, they could not easily express their emotions. Language gap creates a barrier in expressing their minds. The discussion was transcribed from note taking and audio recording.

From the discussion it is understood, that most of the participants do not usually listen English programme. In Bangladesh, English is used as a foreign language. Students have fear about English. They regard English as a tough subject not as a language. Their view of English is thought to be the subject which is tested in the examination. It is seen that because of the nature of English questions, students get good marks in English. But when they are told to speak or to write on a new topic, they cannot produce the correct English. Whenever they try to speak, they cannot give proper answers. Students study targeting the examination and their aim is not to learn the language. In spite of doing well in the examination, they cannot show their performance in speaking and writing. Syllabus has a great role in shaping their mindset for the exam. If their exam system is changed, they will be able to show their performance in the exam and also in real life. Generally, the students do well in the examination but their real life use of language is poor.



Students also take some initiative in developing their speaking skill. Some students watch English movies with English subtitle. The subtitle helps them understand difficult words or pronunciation.

Generally, students understand everything uttered in English. But when they try to speak, a kind of unknown fear appears in their mind. They become tongue tied. They have also admitted that they need practice in order to develop their speaking ability. The participants have responded that speaking skill is not in their syllabus. They are not provided with some materials needed to better their speaking fluency.

### **Findings & Discussions**

Five teachers of English Department, with various length of service, of a private college in Bangladesh were interviewed. They provided their valuable opinion. The teachers got their masters in English from different universities of Bangladesh. One of them was also from National University. The teaching experience of the teachers ranges from 3 to 16 years. Some of them are highly experienced teachers. In the research, data were collected through interview and FGD (Focus Group Discussion). Interviews were taken and it took 10-15 minutes. The interviews were conducted in their educational institute. An information sheet, consent form were provided to the participants and the confidentiality of the data was maintained. Questions were asked about the teaching method in developing speaking skill of the students, problems faced by teachers in conducting their classes. The interviews were originally taken in English.

In the questionnaire for the teachers, question no. 3 about the class size, the teachers give the number of students for example 60-70 students in a class. From their reply, it is easy to understand how difficult it is to manage a large class.

While asking about the problems of taking class in question no. 4, they give various kinds of problems, noise, student's inability to speak, lack of confidence, time constraints and so on.

Some teachers say about the grade of speaking in question no. 5. Some grades are there but in the syllabus of National University, there is a provision of viva voce at the end of their course only in 4th year. Only that viva-voice examination is not enough for enhancing their speaking ability.

While analysing the data, the interviews of the teachers were taken into consideration to project the overall situation of teachers' initiative in teaching speak



ing skill to the undergraduate students of English department. From the question no. 10 about the facility of language lab/language centre, the teachers admit the lack of language lab/language centre in the institution. The findings from teachers' interview truly illustrate the lack of language lab or language club hampers the student's speaking skill ability. From their opinion it is found that institution's not setting up of language club or language lab is one of causes of students' poor performance in their speaking.

Students have also expressed the necessity of setting up a language lab/-club in the institution. In the free time, they could pass their time through writing and speaking in English with their friends. Motivation is necessary for the students. Easy and everyday topic can be given to students for practice. On the other hand, the class can be taken using a multimedia projector and audio recorder can help a lot in speaking classes. However, the syllabus does not provide any specific speaking tasks. The teachers give emphasis on the completion of the course/texts. In spite of their willingness to engage students in speaking activities, they cannot do it properly. Lack of proper speaking friendly materials, influence of Bangla and social environment, students often code switch while speaking.

The educational institute can set up a language lab or language club for the enhancement of students' language ability for example speaking skills. The students will get the congenial atmosphere for sharpening their speaking skills. The language club or lab will facilitate their language skills. It is seen that learners find it difficult to use the right word to continue their conversation (Richards, 2008).

Practice is necessary to initiate conversation (Hatch, 1978 as cited in Richards, 2008). Teachers can scaffold students in their spoken English. The language teachers can play an important role through his presentation technique. In order to make the class fruitful and effective, the teacher can make a good lesson plan to initiate speaking activities in the classroom. He/she can tell students to come to deliver a short topic for example introduction of the learner. Students feel comfortable when they speak on the easy topic. For lack of courage, students cannot utter the words which they could produce in a different situation.

Syllabus plays a vital role for the learning of Speaking skill. In the National University syllabus, no marks are allotted for speaking skill and at the same time, students are only accessed in their fourth year final examination for viva voce examination which is not adequate for students to hone their speaking skill. The syllabus can be designed in such a way where the importance of speaking skill is to be added.

Sometimes, teachers do not wilfully engage students in the speaking activities

because of the huge syllabus. They have to cover everything within a short time. As the syllabus does not have any access of assessing students' speaking skill ability, the teachers are not interested to do speaking skill activity in the class. Some teachers also tell students to increase their speaking skill.

The college authority can take special care if they want to better the conditions of students' speaking ability which is very much needed for their performance in the real life situation and also for showing their worth in the job market (Chowdhury & Shaila, 2013; Farooqui, 2007; Jahan, 2008). While engaging students in speaking activities in a large class and giving feedback to every student is a daunting task for the teacher (Chowdhury & Shaila, 2013). The class time is short and it is 45 minutes. It is not possible to give support to individual students.

If the class size is large, the students make noise and to control the class is a big issue in Bangladeshi classrooms (Chowdhury & Shaila, 2013). Due to huge population, the educational institutions have to take a huge number of students. The situation gets worsened when the class is taken by a female teachers. To some extent, female teachers cannot control the male students.

A teacher can play a vital role in motivating students to practise speaking with their friends and watch English movies, documentaries, news to increase their power of speaking. In the class, some speaking activities can be facilitated by the teacher for creating a sense of participation among the students.

Harmer (1991) clearly expresses the inter dependence of language skills. He points out that listening has a connection with speaking and on the other hand, writing has connection with reading. Students should practise all the skills in order to equip themselves for the new trend of learning in the era of globalisation. Speaking is not only to utter some words but also other sub skills are also needed (McDonough, Jo, Shaw, Christopher, Masuhara, 2013). If students listen a lot, they will be able to speak a lot. Some listening practices are also necessary for speaking (Chowdhury & Shaila, 2013). The instructor can guide students in a proper way so that students can practise the speaking at their leisure period apart from their class time.

### **Conclusion & Recommendations**

Change of classroom layout and sitting arrangements can be changed for fitting the needs of the students. Motivating students and arranging workshop or exchanging views with the students can empower them. We need to listen to their voice. In our educational institution, students' suggestion/feedback is not given priority or sometimes their words are not accepted. We do not give value to their

words. If they are valued, they would create the mind of ownership. Then they could devote themselves to their studies.

The speaking competition can be arranged in the institution and students from other institutions can join. Debate, story telling, extempore speech can be arranged and prizes can be given to best performers. This kind of competition will push students to prepare themselves to compete with other students and they will be able to judge their quality. If they think that they lack something, they can correct themselves. In order to motivate the participants in the speaking activity, they can be given small prizes and this recognition will create the atmosphere of competition among the classmates and their fellow feeling will also enhance. Role play, individual talk, story telling, presentation of a topic through group work are very essential for students' development of speaking skill.

From the above discussion it is clear that lack of integration of speaking skill in the syllabus hinders the speaking ability of the learners. On the other hand, lack of congenial learning atmosphere is also absent in educational institution for example, lack of English language club/lab. Teachers can motivate students to make them realise the present demand of English speaking skill in the job market. Students should also give concentration on developing their speaking skill. Participation of guardians, teachers, and involvement of students are necessary for the enhancement of speaking skill of the students.

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