



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



## Developing Oral Communication Skill among the Tertiary level students in Bangladesh

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### Abstract

Competency in Oral Communication has become the most spoken issue of Bangladesh in the recent years (Brunfaut, T., & Green, R., 2017). English Language is no more the communication medium for the English only; it has achieved the status of the official or the dominant language for above two billion people in more than 60 countries. In a short period of time, English received a wide geographical coverage and become one of the leading means of communication. In line with the present competitive world, Bangladesh is not an exception. In the country, English continues its domination and expansion as the highly demandable and an inevitable language. People who have a very sound communication skill in English, especially of spoken English, are in the triumphant march. However, the way of increasing this oral communicative competence for the students of Bangladesh, is indeed a very crucial and burning issue. Despite acknowledging the great importance of this language, our students have not reached to that required level. Only 'mutual intelligibility' or 'mere communication through English' cannot be considered as competency in speaking. Even the students entering the tertiary level have a very poor knowledge in English Language. This paper, therefore, goes through the present scenario of communicative skill especially speaking skill of today's students and the existing methods of developing this oral communication skill in Bangladesh. In doing so, the researcher collected survey data from 50 students and 10 Teachers from 3 different schools of different geographical locations, data from 30 students' and 6 teachers' interviews. Significant innovations are also found from the practical observations of 3 English language classes of three different institutions. The paper, thus, attempts to diagnose the reasons behind the students' incompetency, and to propose some new strategies to overcome the language barriers.

**Keywords:** Communicative skill; Speaking; Existing practices; Correction; Development; Methods

### 1. Introduction

For a comprehensive development of students' communicative skills, Reading, Writing, Speaking & Listening, all are important to be emphasized. However, practically, development of one's oral communication skill is more important than others. In our present education system, much emphasis is given to improve students' English communication skills considering its worldwide appeal. Hence, Academicians and linguistics today are investigating various pedagogies and methods to develop our learners' communicative skills. In the formal education, our students' efforts mostly circle round the development of reading and writing as they are mostly concerned about good grades in examinations; although two vital sectors- speaking and listening skills remain untouched. But, practically effective communication demands the continuous development of one's speaking and listening ability. Therefore, a person without oral communication skills will suffer in this competitive era and may find it difficult to achieve a higher position as English is the language of the international communications in the fields of Shipping, Aviation, Tourism, Business, and many

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other activities. Every person wishing to get the benefits of modern education, research, science, trade etc. knows that it is impossible without a working knowledge of the English Language and a good communication skill.

### *Objective of the Study*

This paper aims at proposing to remodel some of the existing and some new techniques which the researcher thinks would make them more effective, practical and usable in our English language classes. Learning English by using the new methods in education, travelling and working abroad encourages students to learn the language, develops their ability to speak fluently, and helps them overcome the language barrier. So, the specific objectives of the study can be cited as –

- To analyze students' error in oral communication and to demonstrate the possibilities of developing their spoken skill.
- To deal with factors affecting students' speaking skill
- To focus on the existing methods adopted by the teachers in Bangladesh to develop speaking skill, and-
- To remodel some of the existing and to propose some new techniques for enhancing students' speaking skill.

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## **2. Literature Review**

If we trace back the geo-political history of Bangladesh, it is seen that English language has been used in this country since early Middle Ages (Das, 2009). Since some European traders arrived in this land and began trading through the Indian ocean in 1510, English language also began its intrusion into this land from then. After the Palashi tragedy in 1757, the practice of using English language had been widely mixed into the Bengali culture during the British reign between 1757 to 1947. With the establishment of India and Pakistan in 1947, English continued to play a very important role in multilingual West Pakistan (present Pakistan) and East Pakistan i.e. the present Bangladesh (Rahman, 1999 & Das, 2009). Eventually, Bangladesh obtained independence in 1971 and continued its education policy independently although the English language legacy of that region corresponded with the long colonial history of India under the British Raj. After independence, Bangladesh started its education policy following Standard British English (Rumnaz, 2005). Although, Bangla is the official and most commonly-used language of Bangladesh, proficiency in English has been argued to be vital for the country's future. But, concerning the EFL English Proficiency Index, the status of English proficiency in Bangladesh is within the band categorized as very low proficiency (EPI, 2019) However, English proficiency is considered important for individuals, since "a solid grasp of English" (Pinon & Haydon, 2010, p.86) is associated with higher employment opportunities and pay, with salaries gaps of up to 15% between those who can and cannot communicate in English (Pinon & Haydon, 2010). The Euro monitor International report states that "English speakers in the business environment are expected to speak English to at least intermediate level" (Pinon & Haydon, 2010, p.110), with employees in sectors such as foreign trade and telecommunications needing higher levels of English communicative ability. At the same time, Pinon and Haydon (2010) report that, in 2009, only 18% of the Bangladesh population spoke English (p.87). A number of government initiatives have been taken to help develop the population's English proficiency, including making English a compulsory subject from the start of Primary School (Grade 1) until the end of Secondary School (Grade 12). Nevertheless, students' performance in English is still reported as low, and its status "is still widely an area-specific language confined to academia" influenced by historical-political factors (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014, p.1).

Time and again, many linguists and theorist have addressed errors and error correction mostly in teaching reading and writing, but few have addressed error and error correction in the spoken language. The communicative approach of language teaching has made the situation for error correction more perplexing. The motto of the communicative approach, "Get your students to communicate at all costs" stretches the students and virtually guarantees that they will make errors (Mendelsohn : 1990). Although, some researchers like Bailey (2005) and Goh (2007) have proposed some methods for developing our students' speaking skills by means of syllabus design, teaching principles, type of tasks, materials and speaking assessment; the overall resolution, especially the problem of oral communication has not yet been solved.

Based on the information of modern ways and methods, error analyses and their correction, enough critical essays and analyses were published in the shapes of different books and in many literary and linguistic journals which were very helpful as supporting materials for this paper. Different critical books composed by – C. James, R. Ellis (1985), D. Larsen Freeman (1991), M.H. Long etc. remain helpful for the part of the study. The critical articles of M.K.Burt (1975), M.Sawkins (1987), P.D. Shastri (2010), D.J.Mendelson (1990), J.M. Hendrickson (1978) etc. were also supportive for the part of the study.

Regarding speaking effectiveness, Shumin (1997) pointed out a number of elements involved, including listening skills, sociocultural factors, affective factors, and other linguistic and sociolinguistic competences such as grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence. Grammatical competence enables speakers to use and understand English language structures accurately and unhesitatingly, which contributes to their fluency, which, in turn, develops confidence in communication. Moreover, providing students with variety of situations and frequent speaking tasks play a significant role in the improvement of students' fluency when speaking (Tam 1997). Confidence and competence usually reinforce English speaking skills. Patil (2008) asserted that building up the learner's confidence to eliminate their fear of making errors was a priority that a teacher should consider in order to make learners feel comfortable with their language use. Confidence and competence in speaking could be developed from appropriate syllabus design, methods of teaching, and adequate tasks and materials (Bailey, 2005; Songsiri, 2007). Moreover, practice and exposure to both listening and speaking activities in real world situations appeared to be a practical method to promote speaking confidence (Songsiri, 2007).

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### 3. Methodology

The Research method of the current study is qualitative in nature including practical classroom observation and the Data is collected from the secondary sources like- survey questionnaires, Interviews, critical studies, research papers, literary journals, periodicals, term papers, media talks etc.

For collecting data, the researcher distributed survey questionnaires to 50 students and 10 teachers from three different schools- one from urban, one from semi-urban and one from the rural area. The study chose 20 EFL Bangladeshi learners and 6 teachers from these schools who actively participated in an interview session. As the researcher announces special gifts for the few of the good speakers from each school, the students spontaneously participated in the interview session. The teachers participated spontaneously as they thought the research as significant and worthy. All of their interviews are carefully recorded, and adequate data have been collected. All the data have been coded and analyzed to check the learners' deficiencies in oral communication. The questions are set in a way so that the relevant responsible factors of learners' weaknesses in oral communication can be pointed out.

The researcher also observed as many as 3 language classes from each of the three schools with a checklist with him to check whether there is the lack of technological aids and skilled instructors or any other factors.

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### 4. Discussion and Findings

This paper endeavors to focus on three main topics: 1) Present state of Bangladeshi EFL secondary Students' speaking skills 2) Existing methods of developing speaking skill 3) Resolution, or the spoken error correction and recommendation.

#### 4.1. Present scenarios of Students' speaking skill in Bangladesh

Although the integrated use of modern techniques can yield positive results and lead to the improvement of the oral communicative competence, the present students of Bangladesh have not been taught using the benefits of these techniques. Most recently, the substantial interest in the English language as a means of international communication has grown in the mind of particular groups of pupils in Bangladesh. To some extent, English is becoming the language of communication in various spares of life in Bangladesh. As the prime time of students' life and its' learning and practices determine a persons' success, a survey followed by an interview session have been done by the researcher to three different educational Institutions at different geographical locations of the country to have the idea of the present state of Bangladeshi students' speaking skill. The Survey and interviews were taken both from some selected rural, urban and semi-urban Institutions focusing on the Teachers' and learners' attitude towards Oral communication skills, extent of the use of English, factors of Language barriers, motivation towards spoken English and different social variables. In general, the problem areas in learning to speak can be identified as –

- Shyness and uneasiness in speaking English
- Over-influence of the native language as the students often use Bengali when they hesitate to continue speaking English fluently.
- Many of the EFL Bangladeshi learners often make a parallelism between Bengali (L1) and English in their English oral communication. These sometimes create confusions.
- Lack of ideas and vocabulary and of linguistic resources.

The following are the conceptions, the Researcher developed through the survey data analysis, through analyzing the coded transcribed and coded interviews, through classroom observations and through his long experience as a language teacher at various levels:

- Most of the students in Bangladesh have lack of motivation in developing speaking skill in general. The Teacher or the Instructor may try to keep them in the congenial atmosphere during the classes; but this influence is often diminished when they mix with others in social circumstances where people hardly use this global language for communication.
- Besides, the shortage of the competent, efficient and experienced English Teachers are also the causes of the slow progress of oral skill development in Bangladesh. Many teachers teaching language in schools & colleges although they obtained M.A in literature rather than language. The shortage of the regular and effective training facilities for the language instructors also result in failing to communicate to the students' right of oral learning and thus, most of the students consider English speaking difficult.
- Moreover, to develop oral communicative skill, suitable teaching materials are also needed. Effective oral communication skill teaching demands the full use of audio-visual aid and the electronic equipments for creating a foreign language environment, but the reality existing in Bangladesh is that many schools and colleges in Bangladesh cannot afford to procure even a tape recorder. In some some remote areas, there is no electricity. Even the communicative English taught in secondary and higher secondary schools are of little use or even of no use in making the students fluent in English. Students, therefore, entering the University levels often display a very poor oral communication skill. What happens here is that, the participants remain over-ingenuec This finding was aligned with the studies of Musliadi (2016) and Ahmed and Qasem (2019) in which the participants reported that the use of mother tongue was the other problem to teach oral English communication skills in the EFL contexts.

The general problems of speaking skills in Bangladesh discussed are not the whole story as in many educational Institutions, the scenario is being changed due to the intrusion of Internet and modern technological study aids. Web based learning for students is one of the fastest growing areas in education. "It is widely accepted that advances in information technology and new developments in Pedagogy provide opportunities to create well-designed, learner-centered, interactive, affordable, efficient and flexible e-learning environment (Khan, 2005). It is, therefore, becoming possible for the Bangladeshi students to develop speaking skills with the help of tools such as – Youtube, e-mail, WhatsApp, blogs, chats & mobile devices.

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## 5. Recommendations and the proposed role of the instructors

To overcome weaknesses in speaking English, classroom interaction is very necessary. There may have two types of interaction: Teacher-learner interaction & learner- learner interaction. Since Learning is a step-by-step process and such competencies cannot be improved abruptly. The learner must continue his sincere effort since speaking skill requires practice and exposure.

### 5.1. The Role of Teachers/ Instructors

To develop students' speaking ability, the main role has to be played by the teachers or Instructors. Students should be given motivation, encouragement, some psychological training, reassurance, and counseling to give up their shyness and uneasiness while speaking. Teachers should also be trained not to scold or discourage the students and to provide a friendly and stimulating environment in the classroom; And to do this, the following steps should be taken in general, to improve the Oral Communication skills of the Students:

- Help the students give up shyness and hesitation while speaking
- Ensuring congenial atmosphere and give enough time to speaking and phonetic drill.
- Use of the proven and the most effective strategies of enhancing speaking.
- Maintaining reasonable class size.
- Only speaking English throughout the classes.
- Awarding students for encouragement & motivation
- Encouraging them to listen to CNN, BBC, English movies & commentary to enhance the speaking ability.
- Arranging various activities like Dialogue, In pair & group discussion etc.
- Arranging a short presentation or debate on any contemporary interesting issues.
- Using audio-visual aid & making the classroom congenial for foreign language learning environment.

Although today's Teachers of Bangladeshi schools are becoming quite familiar with the language equipments, an effective oral English class demands the most appropriate presentation of the teachers. In oral English Teaching, students are the implementers, while teachers play different roles during this process through correct positioning. During lesson, teachers should assess the level of the learners and should avoid too much input during the course of teaching, which will affect students' output. Students' input and output positively are the reflection of excellent teaching results, as John and Morrow (1981) said, "The Teacher can help, advise, and teach, but only the learner can learn". Besides, teachers should play the following roles as – demonstrators, conductors, directors and commentators.

#### *5.1.1. Demonstrators*

In the eyes of students, teachers are their models and tasks to be imitated. Therefore, teachers should be aware of their status in the eyes of students, undertaking responsibilities actively and demonstrating themselves positively. Oral teaching consists of listening and speaking in simple terms. Besides, it also involves body language, rapid response capabilities, and language organization abilities. In oral teaching, teachers should require themselves strictly to correct their pronunciation to make sure they do not pronounce mistakenly. In this way, students can learn gradually without notice.

#### *5.1.2. Conductors*

Conductors in bands play roles of expressing their understanding of music. A good conductor is like a doctor who can point out the band's shortcomings and come up with some improvement. They make the whole band reach the ideal state by adjusting the band. Likewise, for students, teachers are the conductors in classes, while the class is a symphony.

#### *5.1.3. Directors*

Conductors grasp the general situation of classroom teaching, while the roles of directors are shown in different activities of teaching. Oral classroom teaching is different from writing and reading. It requires students to take part in various activities to achieve different purposes. So how to design activities and how to carry them out have been the questions for teachers to act into the role of directors, arranging roles according to different teaching activities. For example, in Spoken English Course Volume III Unit 3 Parttime Job, teachers can design an activity of finding a job and doing interviews, with two students being the interviewers and some being the interviewees. Students should be divided into groups. Finally, the best group should be selected. In this activity, teachers act as directors, assigning roles, designing situations, and solving problems occurring during the activity. In this way, students' ability to express themselves orally in English can be improved.

#### *5.1.4. Commentators*

The task of conductors is to coordinate students in a macro way, while the job of directors is to grasp the situation in a micro way. It is the task of commentators to evaluate all the teaching activities in a summative way. They should evaluate the advantages and shortcomings comprehensively during students' oral expression to make students more confident.

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## **6. The error correction and Recommendations**

While correcting errors in spoken classes, the primary concern of the teacher is to create a congenial, healthy atmosphere in the classroom where students do not feel threatened or scared to make mistake. Therefore, the best result can be achieved by remodeling some of the strategies and techniques proposed by researchers and linguists. These are depicted below:

### **6.1. The use of feedback sheets in Oral communication**

The use of the feedback instruments propounded by Mendelsohn (1991, pp. 27, 28) is an excellent way to enable students to keep track of their errors on a regular basis, observe not only by their teachers but also by their peers. The feedback sheets include both linguistics and socio-linguistic features of spoken discourse which the teachers and the peers will observe when an individual or group is giving an oral presentation in class. A detailed feedback instrument not only ensures specific feedback but also reminds the presenters of the parameters they should pay attention to (Mendelsohn, 1991: p. 26). Thus, "constructive error correction" (p.26) can be best achieved with the help of these feedback instruments.

### **6.2. The reduction of L1 influence in EFL learners' oral skills**

The EFL learners should be taught oral English in the English ways. There are a lot of differences in the grammatical patterns between Bengali (L1) and English. Native language facilitates the learning process when the learners find the

similar aspects, but they produce the erroneous oral expressions when they find the dissimilar aspects. (Odlin, 2013). So, the learners should be taught the dissimilar aspects focusing on the theories and aspects of Cross-linguistics Influence (CLI) as to overcome the overinfluence of their native language interference in English oral communication.

### **6.3. The Use of media technology**

Recording or filming students' interactions enables replay and detailed analysis (Mendelsohn, 1990: p.28). It also gives students the opportunity to be self-critique. I enable students to view the socio-linguistic features like eye contact, hand movement, facial gestures, body movement, etc. and be a better judge themselves. Besides, the use of a series of technological devices like- Audio, video, the use of a built-in camera in the classroom, the use of voice recorder etc. will be very helpful to students to analyze their linguistic errors. One-on-one tutoring: In spoken language classes, the use of the feedback instruments mentioned above can be fully utilized when it is followed by One-on-one tutoring at the end of each oral presentation. After each presentation, the teacher can sit with student individually and allow them to analyze their errors first and then end the session with teacher's observation of sociolinguistic and linguistic errors and suggestions for improvement.

### **6.4. Self-Correction by students**

This view holds that there is no need to correct the learner's errors. The teacher should not make correction; what is the essential to do is to make the learners correct the errors themselves. "Self-correction is which learners correct themselves instead of a teacher doing it." (Teaching English/ British Council / BBC, as cited from [www.teachingenglish.org.uk](http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk)). It provides the positive reinforcement to the learners. So, We should give the chance the learners to commit errors and correct his errors himself that motivates the learners positively.

### **6.5. Model self-correction of Spoken Errors**

#### *6.5.1. Using Teacher Correction Technique*

T: Tania, how do you come to school?

S: I am come on bus.

T: That is not correct. The correct answer is 'I come by bus'. Here the student is discouraged when I correct his errors he became very nervous and scared to speak further because I didn't give him chance to say the sentence correctly. It hindered him and he felt victimized.

#### *6.5.2. Using Self-Correction Technique*

I asked the same question to the students of class four but used self-correction technique.

T: John-how do you come to school?

S: I am come by foot.

T: Well, Anyone else? How do you come to school, Priya?

S2: I come to school on foot.

T: You come to school on foot but I come to school by bus.

And when I asked him the same question again after some days he said the sentence correctly

### **6.6. Teacher Training:**

Teacher Training is also required because teacher need to accomplish their teaching goals within a specific time span. In order to accomplish as much as possible within the set time, strategic planning, organization of syllabus and methods to be used, is prerequisite to the actual process of spoken teaching. Teachers need to prepare their students in such a way that when the time comes for them to leave their teachers behind, students are well-prepared to carry on learning on their own (Sawkins, 1987:p.71) .

## 7. Conclusion

This research paper aimed at proposing some recommendations to the barriers of developing oral communication skills through analyzing errors and other social variables which the researcher strongly believes as solvable with the performances of the students as well as the teachers. Overall, the guidelines and the recommended strategies stated in the paper might help our spoken classes come out of the traditional teacher – centered oral teaching; and can develop our students' initiatives to a large extent and thus, can improve their abilities of oral expression in English.

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## Compliance with ethical standards

### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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