

INABILITY OF ENGLISH GRADUATES IN SPEAKING ENGLISH FLUENTLY: CAUSES AND EFFECTS

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ABSTRACT

The article has attempted to investigate the causes of failure of English honors graduates in speaking English fluently in Bangladeshi context. Moreover, the study also tries to find out learners' psychological, personal, social and academic problems, teachers' restrictions in teaching and last but not the least, identifying the limitations of implementing the methods helping learners master speaking skills. An understanding of cognition, context and prevalent educational culture are also incorporated in this study. Then the study sheds light on the possible solutions on the basis of teachers', experts' or researcher's opinion and learners' needs. The article has firstly provided a discussion on the theoretical overview of speaking and later has presented the practical and effective tasks for students to practice in Bangladesh. As fluent speaking is a demandable skill, this study argues for the maximum use of English at the tertiary level to make learners proficient in academic English.

1. Introduction

Speaking is the second most frequently used language skill among the four skills of a language. It involves learners' motivation and participation directly. In this `era of globalization and communicative world speaking English is often the main goal of many adult EFL or ESL learners. If the goal of language course is to enable the students to communicate in English, then speaking skill should be taught and practiced in a proper way. If students do not learn how to speak or do not get any opportunity to speak in the classroom, they may get de-motivated and lose interest in learning. If the right activities are taught in the right way, speaking in class can be a lot of fun, raising general learners' motivation and making the English classroom pleasant and dynamic place to stay.

Since the eighties, amongst the variables in education improvement, the teacher and the learner have been considered of the utmost importance and there have been a strong focus on the professional development of the teacher to help the learners to be fluent speaker (Hardgraves & Fullan 1992). Thus, the need for an effective provision to initiate, develop and sustain learners through an appropriate process of intervention and learners' need to be proficient in the examined skill are gradually being accepted as amongst the highest properties of educational planning and practice.

2. Objectives of the Study

This study, therefore, attempts to deal with the issues of failure of speaking fluently. Another objective of the research is to find out the reluctance in terms of process of teaching and learning, materials and conditions, learners' attitude to new approach and search for the possible solutions that can overcome these problems.

So, the main objectives of this study are to –

- discover teachers' difficulties that they face during teaching.
- find out the necessary materials that can motivate learners in speaking English.
- understand learners' attitudes to speaking .
- collect experts' or researchers' opinions to overcome the obstacles to fluent speaking.

3. Literature Review

Chaney (1998) defines Speaking as the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts. Nunan (1991) writes, “Success of Speaking Skill is often measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the language”.

Anderson and Lynch (1988) have expressed that fluent speaking requires considerable training because it is a difficult skill requiring multiple sub-skills and stages, which have to be undertaken simultaneously. They have identified the following stages in the process of speaking:-

- The spoken signals have to be identified from the midst of surrounding sounds.
- The continuous stream of speech has to be segmented into units, which have to be recognized as known words.
- The syntax of the utterance has to be grasped and the speaker’s intended meaning has to be understood.
- Learners also have to apply their linguistic knowledge to formulating a correct and appropriate response to what has been said (Anderson and Lynch 1988).

Shelagh Rixon (1986) like Anderson and Lynch (1988) considers speaking to be a complex process requiring interdependence of different skills. She remarks that speaking is concerned with listening because listening implies conscious attention to the message of what is said (1986: 28). She puts forward the idea that speaking comprises three levels—global message, grammar and vocabulary and finally the sound system. One evidence that listening helps to improve speaking is the 14 years dumb girl who always refers to listening to music and songs. In her 14 years age one day she surprisingly becomes able to utter the lines of a song.

Speaking, therefore, requires the ability to understand phonology, syntax, lexis and information within real time situation. Apart from time pressure, there are also problems stemming from inexplicit information given by the speaker and environmental obstructions such as distracting noise in the background, unclear voice on sound of recording and lack of visual support to assist speaking.

Brown and Yule (1983) have also listed some factors that complicate oral skill. First of all, the speaker, his or her style, accent and even number of speakers affect the spoken text. The learners’ role also has an impact on speaking whether it is participatory or non-participatory whether response is required or not. Another factor is the content of the text and finally whether or not it is accompanied by visual aid for support. Richards (1985) registers the following features of oral or spoken language that makes learners’ understanding difficult. Make an obstacle on fluent speaking:- the clausal basis of speech as opposed to the sentence unit of written discourse; reduced forms which appear in native speakers’ language to express meaning quickly; the frequent occurrences of ungrammatical forms; suspects about the components of pauses in spoken language, consisting of hesitations, false starts, corrections, filler pauses or silent pauses that make it difficult to follow a text; the rate of understanding affects delivery; rhythm and stress of the English language; the information content which in interactive texts, involves the participation and co-operation of speaker making speaking even more challenging; and finally even not introducing with the interactive quality of spoken discourse; verbal and non-verbal signals and formality/informality create further hurdles for the listener.

Besides shortcomings in grammar and vocabulary, the non-native tongue has to face the alien quality of the sound system itself. Rixon (1986 : 36) argues that the sound of English is a major problem for the L2 learner making fluent speaking the most difficult skill. She lists four sources of difficulties arising from pronunciation:-

The weak relationship between English sounds and the way they are spelt in written language.

- Changes in sounds when they occur in rapid, connected speech.
- The rhythm pattern of English speech.
- Different ways of pronouncing the same sound e.g. absent (n)->/eɪbsent/ and (v) -> /sbsent/.)

The problem with sound is that when English is spoken the words are not very clear or emphatic since natural talk is unrehearsed; full of pauses repetition, hesitation and it is swift, slurred or even unclearly articulated. Rixon (1986) shows that words sound different depending on whether the word is spoken in isolation or in connected speech. For instance, some words are very clear when pronounced in isolation, such as “you” /ju:/but when it is part of connected speech it is unstressed so that : “Will you come?” becomes /wi j kAm/.

Hedge (2000) lists some problems which are psychological/internal to the speaker such as “lack of motivation towards the topic, negative reaction to the speaker or to the event; anxiety to rehearse one’s own contribution to a debate or the next part of a conversation, to the extent of missing what the current speaker is saying; on distraction by the content of a talk into thinking about a related topic thereby losing the thread of the argument (237). She also mentions that lack of topic knowledge can lead to mishearing or misunderstanding. While native speakers, L1 learners have to deal with the difficulty of information and message quality concerned with their speaking, L2 learners confront added challenges of language and cultural unfamiliarity.

According to Penny Ur (1981), there are four prominent causes that make problems in fluent speaking : These are:

- Inhibition : learners are often inhibited about trying to say things in a foreign language fluently because they are worried about mistakes, fearful of criticism or losing face or simply shy of the attention that their speech attracts.
- Nothing to say : even if the students are not inhibited, it is often heard that learners complain that they cannot think of anything to say, especially in the class room.
- Low or uneven participation : this problem arises in a large group class room where each one will have only very little talking time so, the problem is compounded by the tendency of some learners to dominate, while others speak very little or not at all.
- Mother tongue use : In classes or institution where all or a number of the learners share the same mother tongue, they may tend to use it; because it is easier, because it feels unnatural to speak to one another in a foreign language and because they feel less exposed to if they are speaking their mother tongue. On the other, if learners are talking in small groups, it can be quite difficult to get some classes-particularly the less disciplined or motivated ones to keep to the target language.

4. Proficiency in Speaking

Mark Coughlin (2006) states that proficiency in speaking often ties with pronunciation and grammar skills which are necessary for oral communication. Thus, he has divided the efficiency in speaking in two parts. These are accuracy and fluency .Accuracy refers to the ability of avoiding confusion in the message due to faulty pronunciation, grammar, or

vocabulary and to observe the social and cultural rules that apply in each communication situation. Accuracy in speaking class includes the control of grammar and pronunciation as a part of learning language. On the other hand, fluency means using the language quickly and confidently with few unnatural pauses. Signs of fluency include a reasonably fast speed of speaking and only a small number of pauses.

5. Standards of English Speaking Program in Bangladesh

The first extensive study on the English Teaching was Task Force (1976). A large sample study of college was carried out on the basis of proficiency tests. It found a gap between their achieving level of proficiency in English and the target level. Rahman, and MC Ginley (1981) found students entering tertiary education suffering a lacking in their language proficiency. The UGC report (1988) found a wide gap between the proficiency they achieved and the proficiency needed to perform successfully

The 1990 survey conducted by 'The People's Republic of Bangladesh' in different parts of the country showed no improvement in English speaking proficiency in spite of the fact that grammar had been made compulsory with literature at graduate level since then new textbooks had been introduced. Proficiency test administered to graduate students showed a general failure to reach the required standards of normal speaking. A summary of the findings of the survey is given below:

- In all two categories of universities visited (public ,private and national universities), the majority of students are not attaining satisfactory levels of proficiency in speaking as measured against the requirements of the syllabus and textbooks in use.
- The situation is particularly serious at national university, where over 95% of the students are failing to reach the expected standards of speaking proficiency. In addition, over 70% of these students have a command of the language being taught which is close to non-existent.
- Given these results, it is almost inevitable that the weaker students (i.e. the vast majority) will fall progressively further behind the goal of fluent speaking. The lower scores achieved at their every year results and their fearing of facing viva-board as a English language user suggest that this is happening.
- The situation is a little better at the private universities but even here over 40% of the students are failing to reach the supposed standards of fluent speaking.
- University teachers who have taken the ELT courses could be thought well perfected in their teaching. But the problem arises when report shows the crisis of teachers in lots of national university colleges.
- The results indicate continued low levels of English language speaking throughout the graduate level and inadequacy of teacher levels. At the public universities the situation can be described as better than that of national university colleges.

The Baseline survey reported that most communication during the study (even when it involved interacting with native speakers of English) had to take place through the medium of Bangla. So, they can be able to attain proficiency in written English but not in speaking. Consequently, the general feeling has been that urgent measures were needed to reverse the decline in English speaking standards and to meet a critical need for curriculum reform and students development.

ELT in the Bangladesh context has been undergoing a paradigm shift from the traditional Grammar Translation approach to the Communicative Language Teaching framework since the 1990. Unfortunately, though the reorientation has led to some changes in syllabus and material design, most classes still focus on the literacy skills, reading and writing. This goes against the principles of CLT where Diane Larsen Freeman (2000, 130) mentions, “students work on four skills from the beginning”. Moreover this method adopts a functional view of language in order to facilitate the ability to use language for different purposes. The neglect of the speaking skill, in our language classes, has meant that learners continue to be weak in understanding and producing spoken language, thereby failing to attain the CLT goal of communicative competence.

Given the research findings and methodological emphasis on speaking, it is surprising and shocking that language classes in Bangladesh are not giving due importance to this area. The most commonly offered national curriculum’s negligence of speaking skill is the barrier of teaching speaking in the context of large classes with almost no logistical support. This has led to the absence of testing speaking in final exams which in turn results in further neglect of this skill. While the resource constraints and administrative difficulties at SSC and HSC levels make the integration of speaking in those classes problematic, let alone the fluency of it. Then the study feels that fluent speaking can be effectively and successfully introduced at the tertiary level. Hedge (2001) has pointed out that training second language learners in speaking 5 English is particularly important at the tertiary level because they need to comprehend the language of classrooms and lecture halls. It should be noted that much of university teaching is done through lectures, thus learners have to be able to listen and understand and interact with what the teacher says. In Bangladesh most public and private university classes are conducted in English, so students need to be able to understand spoken English in order to participate in the class and to follow teacher’s instructions, feedback, talk etc. In this paper, the researcher aims to provide an appropriate methodological framework for teaching speaking in Bangladesh at the university level which will develop fluency strategies to facilitate the speaking of both academic and general English. This intended to provide the theoretical basis and exemplify.

6. Methodology

6.1 Research type

This research is a survey study and it is Qualitative research. The researcher has collected information by making a survey among the students of MA in English from Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University and Govt. Anondomohon College. This research is a survey study using ethnographic study methods. Nunan (1992) states that ethnography involves the “study of the culture/characteristics of a group in a real world rather than laboratory setting”. It involves “interpretation, analysis and explanation not just description”.

6.2 Survey Study for Data Collection

Population

The Population for the study consisted of the followings:

- All the teachers and students of English Department of the public universities in Bangladesh.
- All the teachers and students of English Department of the govt.college in Bangladesh.

Sampling

The study is conducted at both a public university and a govt. colleges under national university. The participants selected for the collection of data are both teachers and students

of MA class of English Dept. from Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University located in Trishal and Govt. Ananda Mohan College of Mymensingh District. This is done to make a comparison between the scopes of attaining satisfactory speaking skill in two types of educational systems.

Table 1: Sample

Location	College	Gender	Male	Students	Male	20
			Female		Female	20
	University		Male	Teachers	Male	10
			Female		Female	10

6.3 Instrumentation

Two Questionnaires (three point Likert Type scale) for students and teachers were developed respectively. Each questionnaire consisted of ten statements. The questionnaires were tried out and piloted before finalization. After trying out and piloting questionnaires were reviewed by three experts and five doctoral research fellows.

6.4 Data collection

The researcher conducted a set of interviews with the participants with a view to getting the probable solutions of research questions and for this the subjects were required to respond to questions. The interviews were of both structural and flexible nature because the interviewer (the researcher) firstly used a set of predetermined questions and followed a rigid procedure but later the interviewer asked the interviewee some open-ended supplementary questions which were analytical. The interviewed questions were Likert-scale questions, short answers questions and analytical. First, the researcher made these interviews with students to recognize their difficulties they usually face while speaking English, and then the researcher asked some open-ended supplementary questions regarding students' failure in speaking English fluently. After that the researcher made interviews with the teachers to find out the factors of students' reluctances in speaking English and teachers' perceptions about students' speaking habits.

7. Data Analyses and Discussion

This research involves a study of the culture and characteristics of a group in a real-world setting and its objective is to produce a 'thick' explanation or description of the situation that takes into account all factors which may have an effect on the phenomenon being investigated. The possible solutions are collected through internet service suggested by the experts or researchers.

For each section (national and public university) of the subjects (i.e. learners or students) speaking history, the study first presents their feelings or attitudes on fluent speaking in tabular form. And to make this tabular the study expresses Likert Scale/ levels of agreement with adverbs of degree or with a simple yes, no or sometimes. The following findings were drawn on the basis of question analysis of the questionnaire.

A. From Teachers' Questionnaires

1. More than half (60%) of the teachers have stated that they use English as a medium of instruction. It affirms that they are highly qualified teachers and they can thoroughly deliver their lecture in English. Only (20%) teachers stated that they use Bangla as a medium of instruction in the class room. It may be that some of these teachers don't have the ability

of delivering their lecture in English. Some of them may have the ability but they think that it is easy to communicate information \understandings\knowledge through mother language.

2. More than (60%) of the teachers think that the syllabus at the graduate level is not suitable for developing speaking skills of the learners. Among these teachers, (80%) are from public universities and (40%) are from govt. colleges. Generally most universities including national universities do not have any courses on speaking and listening skill. As a result these two skills always remain neglected both in teaching and learning. So, they suggest that syllabus should be moderated at Graduate level and oral test should be arranged that will compel the learners to develop their speaking skill.

3. About (70%) of the teachers disagreed they use mother tongue while teaching English. It may also confirm that teachers are using English as a medium of instruction rather than mother language Bangla. Some of the teachers said that they use Bangla in the classroom. They think that our students feel comfortable when the teachers deliver their lecture in Bangla.

4. About (32%) teachers agreed that students respond in English. It may be that they are good students. But about half (50%) of the teachers said that students never respond in English.

5. About (40%) of the teachers stated that students participate in English debating, story-telling in English and other activities requiring speaking English. It may be that these students are from reputed institution where extra-curricular activities were regularly arranged. But the other (60%) opined that they do not regularly participate in such type of activities.

6. About half (50%) of the teachers stated that the students are not interested to speak in English with them outside the classroom. This is because most of our teachers follow lecture method where they go on lecturing all the time and students remain passive. Only (30%) teachers stated that students interact with them in English outside the class.

7. In an average, about 50% of the teachers agreed that they use CLT in the class. It is a positive sign. Among these teachers 50% are from public universities and 30% are from govt. collages.

8. About (70%) of the teachers stated that the students are more interested in learning grammatical rules than speaking English as questions are set directly from the grammatical rules.

9. About 60% o the teachers stated that most of the students are not interested in watching English Program including English Movies. They mentioned that our students are not used to native English. They cannot understand native accent and pronunciation. About (60%) of the teachers stated that students are interested in watching English Movies. This students might be from educated family where they got the opportunity of watching English movies earlier.

10. About half (50%) of the teachers stated that the students want them to use Bangla in the classroom. Students want Bangla as they find Bangla lecture much easier than English. The teachers also mentioned that our students don't like to have any access to ESL online class, thus they miss the opportunity of getting familiarity with native English pronunciation.

B. From Students' Questionnaires

1. In average, about (50%) of the students stated that they do not regularly speak in English. Among these students, (40%) are from public universities and (60%) are from govt. colleges. It exposes the deplorable condition of our English Graduates. So, teachers should motivate students for cultivating English Speaking Environment.

2. About half (50%) of the students stated that their teachers deliver their lecture in English. These teachers may feel that their lecture in English would train the students and make them familiar with some structures and words that would help them to develop their speaking skill. Only about (30%) of the students stated that teachers do not deliver lectures in English.

3. About (40%) of the students agreed that they interact with their teachers in English. The rest of the students (40%) confirm that they do not interact with their teachers in English.

4. About (60%) of the students stated that they cannot follow the English lecture of their teachers. It may indicate that they are not good students and they don't have a strong academic background where they were taught English properly. Their teachers might not have taken care of their language proficiency.

Only about (40%) of the students stated that they can follow the English lecture of their teachers.

5. About (85%) students stated that their teachers follow lecture method. Basically our classroom arrangement is suitable for lecture method not for CLT. In lecture method only the teachers talk. As a result this method provides less opportunity for our students to enrich their speaking.

6. About (85%) students stated that they feel proud to speak in English.. Traditionally, knowledge of English is a status symbol in the subcontinent. As the vast majority in the class remain silent in the English class, the students who speak English there are regarded as good students both by teachers and the other students. This is also positive for learning English. Only 7 percent disagree. They think that there is no any additional gain in speaking English. Perhaps this group thinks, speaking English is as good as speaking Bangla.

7. About (95%) students think that speaking English is essential now-a- days. It is very positive. It indicates that they are aware of the necessity of learning English as English opens the gate of modern knowledge, technology and job market.

8. Regarding getting nervous, (60%) percent learners say that they get nervous while speaking English in the class. It may be for that out learners are not used to speak English regularly. As English is a foreign language, they think it is difficult to speak in that language. Besides they are much anxious about accuracy .They think if they make mistakes, people will laugh at them. As a result, naturally, they feel nervous if accidentally they have to speak English in the class.

9. More than half (60%) of the students stated that they cannot follow English movies as they cannot understand the English pronunciation in the movies. Only (40%) students stated that they can follow English movies. These students are supposed be from upper or upper middle class family where they got the motivation and opportunities of watching English movies.

10. About (60%) of the students agreed that English is essential for getting a job. It reveals that our students are conscious about the necessity of learning English.

8. Causes and Effects

In light of the discussion made above for effective teaching-learning of English speaking skill, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Teachers should use English as a medium of instruction in the class. At the first stage, the weaker students may face some problems to follow English lecture. But, if teachers continue lectures in English, students will gradually improve listening skill. They will acquire new vocabularies and new English structures which will add to their stock of vocabulary and these, in turn, will act as an input for developing their speaking skill.

2. In order to ensure students' participation in the class, the concerned teachers should initiate the interactive class.

3. In order to motivate students to practice English speaking skill, a teacher should always encourage the better ones and reward the weaker students when they show a sign of little improvement. He should guard against discouraging the weak students.

4. Since our students make all efforts to pass the examination, at least there should be a paper of one hundred marks on listening and speaking of English. If it is done, everybody will attach much importance to developing their individual listening and speaking skill.

5. For proper practice of listening and speaking skills, all the classrooms of English at graduate level must be equipped with necessary modern technological facilities such as microphones visible boards or seats etc. It will help them get emerged into a native like English environment. Besides, class size and classroom arrangement should be taken into consideration for practicing pair work and group work.

6. Contents of the syllabus for English graduates should be selected keeping an eye to the learners' interest and requirement. If it is ensured, the learners will be interested to read the text and the textbooks should be prepared by language experts and text books should contain huge number of exercises so that learners can practice them at home.

7. The teachers who are trained in CLT and do have native like or near native skills in speaking English should be recruited

08. MA (English) courses should be remodeled in order to produce English teachers.

9. Conclusion

To conclude, this study provides a general picture of Bangladeshi English Graduate speakers' failing in speaking English fluently. It has attempted to construct a set of perspectives to formulate effective solutions. In the process, experts have outlined their opinions to the problems and their solutions. In this context, The author of this research work thinks that if the above mentioned recommendations are implemented in our graduate level, it will bring some positive changes.

However, there is no reason to lose heart. Today's digital era has offered lots of attractive programs to a speaker's speaking development; such as ESL (English speaking program on Net, on cell phone etc.). What is needed is to broaden the parameters of the program to include an engagement with teachers' beliefs and to adapt and recast ideas to suit all over the Bangladeshi speakers. In this regards, this study is offered as a small contribution to a much larger sphere and will help the future researchers to carry out further research.

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Appendices

Appendix- 1:

Questionnaire used for interviewing the teachers

	Sometimes	Yes	No
1. Do you use English as a medium of instruction in the classroom?			
2. Is the syllabus at the university level suitable for developing speaking skills of the learners?			
3. Do you use Bangla in Your classroom?			
4. Do you think the existing syllabus is suitable for teaching English?			
5. Do the students participate in English debating, storytelling in English and other activities requiring speaking English?			
6. Are your students interested to speak English with you outside the class?			
7. Do you use CLT in your classroom?			
8. Are your students more interested in learning grammatical rules than speaking English?			
9. Are the students interested in watching English Program including English Movies?			
10. Do your students want you to use Bangla in the English class?			

Appendix- 2:

Questionnaire used for interviewing the students

Question	Sometimes	Yes	No
1. Do you regularly speak in English?			
2. Does your teacher deliver his\her lecture in English?			
3. Do you interact with your teachers in English?			
4. Can you follow the English lecture of your teacher			
5. Does your teacher give lecture?			
6. Do you feel proud to speak in English?			
7. Do you think speaking English is essential now a days?			
8. Can you follow English Movies?			
9. Do you feel nervous to speak in English??			
10. Do you think speaking English is essential in workplace?			