



## DEVELOPING ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILL FOR BANGLADESHI TERTIARY LEVEL LEARNERS

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### Abstract

Developing English speaking skill is now a common effort in almost all the universities in Bangladesh because of its growing demand in the job market. The main purpose of this study was to make an investigation on the development of speaking skills for Bangladeshi tertiary level learners. The study adopted a mixed method approach (both quantitative and qualitative) to investigate the development of speaking skills for Bangladeshi tertiary level learners. The study was conducted from June to October 2019. The study selected five universities, such as Dhaka University, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST), Daffodil International University (DIU), University of Asia Pacific, and Stamford University. Primary data of this present study was collected by analyzing the curriculum of the selected universities. Articles journals and research papers are the secondary sources of this study. The data of this study was presented descriptively. The results have showed that not all the universities adopt the same policy in this regard, and even it is an ignored issue till now.

**Key words:** Speaking skill, Tertiary level, Development, Bangladesh.

### Introduction

To communicate effectively with the outside world, the development of speaking skill is a must. It is doubly important for the people of the non-native English-speaking countries as English is the widely accepted means of communication with different countries at present time. In countries like Bangladesh, the development of speaking skill indicates the improvement of English-speaking skill. Commonly the speaking skill gets a bit importance at the tertiary level and before that level, relevant institutions teach students mainly to read and write correctly. The reason is that at the tertiary level, the students become at the verge of entering the job market where smoothly speaking skill gets importance. To prepare the students for the development of this important skill, colleges and universities have already taken and also are taking some initiatives but it seems that these initiatives are not so much effective for the development of speaking skill of the learners at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. Without understanding the niceties of this skill adopting a measure will be a waste of time and that will be good for nothing. Dewey (2001) stated that reflection was a complete systematic process of decision making to solve a given problem. Bashar and Islam (2020) have stated that speaking skill is one of the most important means of communication, understanding, thinking and improvement. They have added that students in Bangladesh are interested only to listening in English language classroom but only listening in English language classroom does not provide much opportunity to express their ability and weakness. Thus, the students are reluctant to speaking in classroom and they are also afraid of speaking in classroom. This study has explored the development of speaking skill for Bangladeshi tertiary level learners.

### Literature Review

Commonly, one can express an idea or thought completely or somehow meaningfully in his/her mother

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language but it is difficult to express the same idea or thought at the same way in other language without having much command of that language. And it is not possible because the formation style of the words and the sentences of one language to another language is not familiar to the speakers and the learners. To communicate effectively, having that skill is important and it is called the speaking skill. Laksana has said “Speaking skill is related to communication. Speaking is a skill to use a language appropriately to express someone's idea, opinions, or feelings in order to give or get information and knowledge from other people who do communication” (Laksana, 2016). Laksana’s opinion refers that the ultimate aim of achieving English speaking skill is to run communication in English fluently and effectively. To Laksana, just reading or reciting something in correct pronunciation cannot be treated as speaking skill. For better understanding, Laksana (2016) also writes- “In speaking there are some aspects that must be fulfilled by the learners. It can be used as a measurement whether our speech is good or not. Those are fluency, comprehension, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation.” (Laksana, 2016) So, developing speaking skill does not mean only one skill rather it includes a variety of skills through which we can establish effective communication or interaction. Laksana has suggested to develop speaking skill but she has not mentioned the measures which should be taken to develop the skill. Thus, this study has investigated to find out the measures that have been taken by the universities in Bangladesh.

Some studies have suggested to practice reflectively for the development of speaking skill. Bashar and Islam (2020) have stated that reflective speaking practice in English language classroom is one of the most important ways for improving students’ ability of communication, understanding and rethinking. This practice stimulates the students to develop their skills in English language like communication, understanding, thinking and improvement. Dewey (1938) stated that reflective thinking was active and persistent thinking based on logic that originates from the ground reality. Students’ reflective practice in English language classroom shows their talent and it helps them to improve their other skills in English. A teacher also can measure students’ ability and weakness through students’ reflective speaking practice in English language classroom (Bashar and Islam, 2020). By analyzing the curriculum of the universities, this study has attempted to know whether the universities in Bangladesh have made any opportunity for the students to be reflected in the classes for developing their speaking skill or not.

Some studies have suggested to give importance on conversations like dialogue and monologue. Nunan (1989) nicely describes this issue saying, “Basic distinction we can make when considering the development of speaking skills is between monologue and dialogue. The ability to give an uninterrupted oral presentation is quite distinct from interacting with one or more other speakers for transactional and interactional purposes. And the presentation on any given topic gets importance in tertiary level institutions in Bangladesh and the teachers of tertiary level institutions sometimes give a bit importance on effectively accomplishing presentation. But the more effective tools like group discussion or conversation get no importance here.” (Nunan, 1989).

Thus, the literature review reflects that universities should create opportunities for the learners to develop speaking skill. Needless to say, fear of English is very common among all levels of students in Bangladesh. It is one of the strong barriers for which learners can’t get the advantages of programs taken by universities at present times. Universities of Bangladesh did not give much importance on English, immediately after the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971. That is rightly pointed out by Banu and Sussex (1999) - “After Bangladesh became independent in 1971, one of the first domains to be more affected by the government’s Bengali effort was the domain of education. The education sector was greatly affected by this policy especially at the primary and secondary levels.” That is why in the 80s, students started to enter tertiary level education without a strong background in English. Another problematic thing is that English teaching system of the then universities was not satisfactory. “Moreover, at the university level, in addition to the regular courses, English was introduced as a compulsory subject in many disciplines since 90s. Because of faulty language policies since 1972, English was set back and English education suffered tremendously, leaving a vacuum, which is yet to be filled.” (Rahman, 2005) So, the fear of English is the result of ignoring English for many years. Though after the 90s English became a compulsory subject in many disciplines, but the situation remains almost the same. Removing the fear overnight is not possible at all, the only way is to amend

the learning method and apply the same effectively. However, this study has attempted to investigate the curriculum of the universities and the initiatives taken by the universities for the development of speaking skill at tertiary level in Bangladesh.

### **Objective of this Study**

The objective of this study was to examine the curriculum of the universities and the initiatives taken by the universities for the development of speaking skill at tertiary level in Bangladesh.

### **Methodology of this Study**

Main purpose of this study was to examine the curriculum of the universities and the initiatives taken by the universities for the development of speaking skill at tertiary level in Bangladesh. The study was conducted from June to October 2019. First this study has examined the initiatives taken by the selected universities for developing the speaking skill. And for this purpose, this study has taken repeated look at the curricular and co-curricular activities of some universities. To check the importance of developing skill initiatives given in curricular activities, this study has discussed the marks distribution methods of different courses offered by five universities. Besides these, this study has examined the co-curricular activities of universities like Bangladesh University of Business and Technology (BUBT), and ASA University. In the light of suggestions provided by some renowned specialists, some recommendations have been given here. Primary data of this study was collected by analyzing the curriculum of the selected universities and initiatives taken by these universities. Articles journals and research papers are the secondary sources of this study. The data of this study were analyzed descriptively.

### **Discussion on the Curriculums and the Initiatives of the Universities**

In most of the public and private universities of Bangladesh, it is mandatory to complete a course on Basic English. Commonly universities offer such a course on English in the first year/semester. This one course is offered for developing the Key Grammar Concepts among the new students. Here speaking skill does not get any importance at all, as it is like the other ordinary courses where oral practicing is not mandatory. Most shocking incident is that till now, a good number of departments don't include this type of course in their curriculum.

Suppose, the Syllabus of Department of Applied Chemistry and Chemical Engineering (ACCE) of Dhaka University includes 13 courses for first year in three categories- Major Course, Physics (minor), and Math (minor). Total credits of these 13 courses are 35.5, but here not a single course for Basic English has been included, even such an English course has not been offered 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, or 4<sup>th</sup> year. It is well known to all that for removing speaking anxiety presentation or oral practicing is the most effective tool. But this department doesn't keep any system like oral practicing in English in anywhere of its four categories courses, named Theoretical, Laboratory, Field Work/In-plant Training, and Project. In these categories of courses, 100 marks have been distributed in class attendance, in-course assessment, written examination, etc. There is no room for oral practicing in English, even presentation on a given topic is not in there.

The course offering of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST) is richer than that of Dhaka University. The reason is that the Syllabus for B.Sc in Chemistry includes courses like English Communication Skills (ENG 101K), and English Language Lab (ENG 102K), at first year second semester. SUST provides a common marks distribution policy for BSc and MS. In the case of theory courses, Class attendance carries 10% marks, Term test and/or assignments carries 20% marks, and Final Examination carries 70% marks. But in the case of Thesis/project courses, the oral presentation carries 35% marks but students have to complete such a course only once in a year (two semesters).

Like all the private universities in Bangladesh, in Daffodil International University (DIU) completing Basic English courses is mandatory in graduation level. DIU's rules and regulation contains a uniform mark distribution system for all the courses. This system includes Presentation (Mandatory) on any given topic in each of the courses, but it carries only 8 marks out of 100.

Being a private university, University of Asia Pacific gives some discretion to the teachers regarding determining the teaching method, but to a limited extent. In this university, for every theoretical course, 70% marks are allotted to the mid-term and final exam. And the rest 30% marks are for class



assessment, and this assessment includes attendance, quizzes, reports, homework, assignments, presentations, *etc.* The teacher or facilitator is free to apply any of these, or more than one of these as he wants. Even if the course teacher wants to avoid presentation, he can do so easily that's also problematic.

The evaluation system of Stamford University, one of the renowned private universities, is unique in the sense that they divide each course in two parts, though there are similarities between these two. First part includes Case/Assignment (5% marks), In-course /Class test (10%), and Midterm (30%). In the second part, the first two will remain the same, but in lieu of midterm here final exam carries 30% marks like midterm. But the university doesn't keep any room for oral practice or presentation.

In developing speaking skill, co-curricular activities may be superbly effective if effective initiatives can be taken. Though in Bangladesh, studying or practicing efforts are mainly job or grade oriented, the role of co-curricular activities cannot be ignored. For developing the speaking skill, different universities establish debating clubs, language clubs, or so.

Suppose, Bangladesh University of Business and Technology (BUBT) established a modern facility furnished language lab under Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project (HEQEP). BUBT website details the activities of this lab and it is goal- "BUBT Language Lab has been furnished with necessary technical equipment for the four skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. It has the following parts: Listening Lab with Computer Workstations for students and Instructors; Speaking Lab with Record-Playback options, Reading-Writing Lab with all modern technological features. The target of achieving students' proficiency would be fulfilled through classroom lessons, one-to-one tutoring and group discussion, oral presentations like public speaking, seminar, role-play, intensive and extensive reading, visualization through videos that would reflect the use of the language in context."

This is an excellent example of co-curricular activity by which a student's speaking skill must be developed if he participates in the programs here. Establishing such a club or lab is not new in different Bangladeshi universities but the arrangements or modern facilities are not like that of BUBT. Suppose, in 2010, ASA University of Bangladesh established a language club to develop the speaking skill of university students. But in this university of thousands of students, only 150 students are the members of it. It arranges some common programs like English spoken classes, Monthly language sessions, or the like. So it's not so helpful for the students like that of BUBT, and students' participation rate is not satisfactory.

Some departments of public universities like ACCE of Dhaka University do not keep any system for oral presentation or so. Even being a renowned private university, Stamford University allots all the 100 marks of a course in class attendance, assignment submission, written examination, and the like, though it's very rare in private universities. In those departments or universities, students may achieve the highest grade being very dull in English speaking. The universities which keep scope for presentation keep only a limited scope, that's not enough for developing speaking skill. Curricular activities taken by universities are helpful for the students in developing speaking skill, to a very limited extent. Suppose SUST keeps the scope of presentation in Thesis / project courses, but just once in a year. DIU keeps the opportunity in every course, but allots only 8 marks out of 100. In the University of Asia Pacific, 30% marks are in the hand of the course teacher, and he is free to take a presentation or any other form of oral practicing session.

### **Findings and Interpretation**

Most of the universities of Bangladesh adopt the initiatives for developing speaking skill in presentation only. But in presentation, there is commonly no scope for running effective interaction, and ultimately it becomes a presenter's statement. Presentation is effective for developing speaking skill, but to a very, very limited extent. Till now, a number of departments of some universities, like ACCE of Dhaka University, have not taken any initiative for developing the speaking skills. Even some universities, like Stamford University, maintain a uniform mark distribution system where presentation or oral practicing sessions get no importance at all, though it is rare. The universities which provide the scope of presentation, allots very low marks in oral presentation. Even without participating in any presentation, it is easily possible to get a good grade. Establishing a language club



or lab for developing the skill is not rare in universities. But more often students don't participate in programs because their efforts are mainly for getting a good grade or job. Even these clubs do not seem attractive to the learners because of the unavailability of modern facilities.

Universities which underscore speaking skill, keep only the presentation system. Presentation may be effective in developing speaking skills to a very limited extent, because here effective interaction cannot be done. In the presentation, the presenter just tells some lines in front of other students, nothing more. There's the possibility of memorizing some lines, and telling those lines in a presentation, so, it is not the right way. Through co-curricular activities, some universities are trying to develop the English-speaking skill of students, but they are fewer in number. Some common initiatives are establishing language clubs or labs, debating clubs, or the like.

Commonly, when we communicate with someone, we have to do two things- listening and speaking. If anyone has any lacking in listening, he will not be able to show his speaking skill efficiently in real life as he can't understand people's sayings. That is why conversation between learners is important, and the benefit of that is impossible to get in any other forms like reading loudly, presentation, or something like that. "Conversation between two people is a blend of listening and speaking. Reception and production are so bound up together that we should not have students practice skills in isolation" (Harmer, 2001) Really, in isolation or through bare speaking anyone can develop his English speaking skill partially but when he will talk with someone, he will face some difficulties. The reason is that he has to think about the response he will give and has to deliver it immediately, maintaining grammar and pronunciation. That is possible for the people who commonly interact with people in English, just bare speaking will not help at all the learners in this regard.

### Conclusion

How to develop one's English speaking skill is still a vague concept to almost all the universities in Bangladesh. Saying some lines in English in a semester will ultimately do nothing for making someone smart in speaking English. But years after years, such types of presentations are going on in the name of developing speaking skill. Most shocking is that some universities even don't keep the scope of such so-called presentations for graduate and post graduate level students. These initiatives are mostly ineffective, and English speaking fluency of students is deteriorating day by day. Most of the universities keep the system of presentation on a given topic, and they consider it as an effective way for developing speaking skill. Partially, it is effective as it can develop the speaking tendency, but in only presentation, there is no effective interaction. So, the long standing pattern of presentation should be changed immediately. And at the same time, a variety of measures like role play, group discussion etc. should be adopted for the betterment of the development of the student's speaking skill.

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