



## IDENTIFYING THE CHALLENGES OF TEACHING SPEAKING SKILL IN UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL: A STUDY AT TERTIARY LEVEL IN BANGLADESH

**Md. MAHADHI HASAN<sup>1</sup>, NADIA AMIN LABONYA<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Former Lecturer at BRAC University, & PhD Researcher at Infrastructure University Kuala Lumpur (IUUKL)

Email: [mahadhi4bd@gmail.com](mailto:mahadhi4bd@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor at Govt. of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, & TESOL Graduate from Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

Email: [nadiaamin.bncu@gmail.com](mailto:nadiaamin.bncu@gmail.com)



### ABSTRACT

The growing need for verbal competence for undergraduate level learners to be competent in academic and extra-academic activities created room for me to attempt to identify the challenges in teaching English speaking skill. The aim of this research is to find out the challenges of speaking skill teaching in undergraduate level. This research includes both public and private university perspective to find out the research. Here I have collected the data from one ideal classroom in a renowned private university in Dhaka city. Then I have collected data from a newly established public university located in Dhaka. I have shown why ideal classroom gets more success than public university traditional classroom. The failure in teaching speaking skill in public university is shown as the challenges. Nevertheless, I have also shown some common challenges existing in both ideal and traditional classroom. This research found that stage fright, lack of motivation, language shock, shyness, lack of vocabulary and sentence structure, lack of practice and improper teaching are the challenges or barriers in teaching proper English language speaking skill in undergraduate level in Bangladesh.

**Key Words:** Speaking, undergraduate, challenges, classroom, identify

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English language skill in undergraduate level in Bangladeshi universities and colleges is a must if students want to do better in further study and also in their professional life. However, during teaching speaking skill, teachers and learners face a number of problems that needs to be identified. Therefore, I have chosen speaking skill as the problem area. I have narrowed down the problem area in Speaking Skills in undergraduate Level. The research topic of this study is "Identifying the challenges in teaching speaking skill in undergraduate Level: A Bangladeshi perspective." Doing the study on this field is a crying demand now. The identified challenges in this study have helped teachers; students and ELT organizations to learn and teach better.



### 1.1 Hypothesis

Demotivation, lack of teacher training, improper teaching method, lack of technology and teaching materials, heterogeneous learners, teachers' disinterest, lack of interaction are the challenges that influence negatively in teaching speaking skill.

### 1.2 Background and Context

Bangladesh experienced a number of changes regarding English language learning and teaching in different levels. Changes in English text books and syllabuses have deteriorated the normal flow of learning and teaching English in all levels. English was widely rejected by the people of Muslim majority areas like Bangladesh during the colonial period. Our language Act (1987) barred the use of English in any official and socio-economic domain. These barriers in the use of English declined use of English in Bangladesh (Banu and Sussex, 2001). The banning of English-medium schools in 1972 and the de-emphasize on the overall teaching of English in government schools, followed by the introduction of the Language Act of 1987, have contributed significantly to the serious decline in the standard and status of English in Bangladesh. The impediments in the use of English language affected the English language learning and teaching in school, college and university levels. In Bangladesh, private and public universities and many institutions are trying to teach English for diversified purposes. But often the teaching institutions and universities find it difficult to teach speaking skill.

Even for our socio-economic development, knowing English language speaking skill is a crying demand while teaching English speaking skill is facing a number of challenges. Both the teachers and learners are the victims of these challenges. These challenges need to be identified soon for better teaching of speaking skill. In university level (undergrad), teaching and learning of speaking skill becomes less effective due to the challenges that this research tries to discover.

### 1.3 Research Question and Objective

The primary purpose of this classroom research is to demonstrate the challenges within the classroom that hinder better English speaking teaching in undergraduate level where students from different disciplines participate. This research opens up the latent actual barriers due to what learners cannot speak even studying English for a long period of time. After discovering the challenges, teachers and learners has to be aware to mitigate the challenges for better learning and teaching of speaking skill. The main research question for the study is,

**What are the challenges in teaching speaking skill at tertiary/undergraduate level in Bangladesh?**

## 2. Literature review

Among the four modules of English language, speaking is the mostly used one by the users all around the world. Teaching speaking skill is more challenging for any teacher in a non-native environment due to learners' uneasiness to interact inside the classroom (Kamal S. H. and Parisa, 2012). Therefore, "Acquisition requires meaningful interactions in the target language - natural communication - in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding." (Krashen, 1988). To teach speaking in a better way to any group of speakers, a positive environment needs to be created (Yellen, Blake & DeVeres, 2004). Since speaking is the mostly used skill in any language, therefore, the challenges in speaking classroom needs to be identified for better teaching and learning (Kathleen & Egan-1999).

In a classroom, students communicate specially for academic (clarification, interpretation check, digression and challenge) and personal purposes orally and, therefore, identifying the challenges for better teaching and learning is necessary (McKenna, 1987 as cited in Jordan, 1987, p.194). Moreover, teaching speaking skill in a non-native classroom is more challenging and the gap between the native and non-native speaking classroom is the challenge for the non-native teachers of speaking (Lynch and Anderson (1991) cited in Jordan 1997, p.198). There is a wide variety of factors such as: age, aptitude, anxiety, intelligence etc. in



second language learning. These are also responsible for individual differences in learning a second language or foreign language (Rahman, 2006). Moreover, not much study is done in this field in Bangladesh and for this reason we need to know the challenges regarding Bangladeshi university undergraduate context. Therefore, the challenges in teaching speaking skill in non-native undergraduate classes needs to be identified for facing those challenges brilliantly. This research tries to show the possible challenges that prevent teachers from better speaking skill teaching.

### 3. Methodology

The whole study is conducted in two university classroom in Dhaka, Bangladesh where English speaking skill is taught for many years. The study is on few particular batches at undergraduate level. Qualitative design is followed during the research. I have selected private university due to my intern in private university with some speaking teachers. Another reason for selecting private university in Dhaka is due to the time constraint for the study. Then I have gone to a public university classroom located in Dhaka to find out the challenges and to compare and contrast and finally, through synthesizing, to show what are the common challenges in both institutions.

The study has encompassed on site observation in the classroom, a questionnaire related to research question and one to one interview with speaking English teachers to collect the primary data. The student FGD and teacher interview were recorded in cell phone recorded. Then the interviews and discussions were transcribed for analysis. All the collected data are analyzed according to qualitative designs to identify the challenges in teaching speaking skill in undergraduate level.

#### 3.1 Significance

Identifying the challenges in teaching speaking skill is significant to teach better English speaking in undergraduate level. Bangladeshi context requires finding out the challenges because both the teachers and learners face difficulty in teaching and learning English speaking. If the challenges can be identified, teachers and learners have to be aware to fill up the gaps in teaching and learning speaking skill. Literature review tells about the need for identifying the challenges in teaching speaking skill.

### 4. Results and Discussion

Teachers have given some very good ideas about the challenges in speaking teaching skill. Both private and public university teachers have participated in the interview. Private and public university teachers have mentioned some challenges while they were asked questions 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 from the teacher interview questions. The challenges that private and public university teachers have mentioned are dealing students' coming from different background, students are not intrinsically motivated, students speak Bangla outside the speaking class, madrasah students are too weak and most of them have English phobia. As Rahman mentioned in his article that motivation is a must in teaching speaking skill in university students.

While teachers were asked to tell the challenges in teaching speaking skill, private university teachers mentioned that irregular study, lack of speaking outside the class, stage fright, shyness and anxiety level are the common challenges in teaching speaking skill. One private university teacher told that,

"Stage fright and their (students) negligence for learning and lack of practicing habit are the major challenges that hinder teaching speaking skill in undergraduate students."

The hypothesis of the research not mentioned this point. However, the interview with the teachers exposed some new challenges that the study can claim as credit of the study. Two public university teachers have mentioned the point of students' negligence in practicing speaking skill. So, I find that negligence of learning and practicing speaking skill is a common challenge in both public and private university classroom



At least two public university teachers have mentioned that lack of training for speaking skill teaching is a problem in teaching speaking skill properly. One teacher said that if he was trained properly he could teach better than present state. As he said during interview,

“lack of training for speaking skill teaching makes it challenging to teach speaking skill properly. We the teachers also need to take some responsibilities in our shoulder before blaming the students.”

So here I find that if teacher could be trained for speaking teaching, they could train better than this stage. The research hypothesis did not even mention this point as a probable finding as a challenge. The research question is looking for the challenges of speaking skill teaching in undergraduate level.

Another public university teacher mentioned that they find it difficult to deal with learners coming from heterogeneous background. They mentioned that they get students from Bangla medium, English medium and madrasah background as well. On the other hand, private university teachers do not usually face heterogonous learners because they select learners in a way that all the learners are with same potential though they are from different backgrounds. But two teachers out of 5 from private university agreed that dealing a heterogeneous classroom is challenging. Therefore, I can say that the research hypothesis in this point is true.

From classroom observation, I have found some challenges that hinder teaching speaking skill in both public and private universities. In private university classroom, it is found that learners do interact between themselves and with the teacher as well. Here teachers are found helping learners to interact with each other through group activities. Teachers do not allow learners to speak in Bangla language. Therefore, students are seen speaking well. On the contrary, in public university classroom, teacher is found using Bangla language frequently. Learners are using at least 70% Bangla to communicate between themselves and with the teacher as well. As Kamal and Parisa (2012) mentioned in their writing that lack of interaction in the target language hinders language learning. Thus, I find that lack of interaction is a challenge in teaching speaking skill in undergraduate level in Bangladeshi universities.

In both public and private university classroom, it is found that students suffer from stage fright. In private university I have found that in each class at least 70% students suffer from stage fright that is a big challenge in teaching speaking skill. Similarly, the ratio of stage fright in public university is found in more than 80%students. Thus, I find that stage fright is a common challenge in both types of universities. The reason for stage fright is due to the lack of practice in English speaking. The hypothesis of the research did not include this newly found stage fright problem. Therefore, I find that research hypothesis is not matched here. However, the research question is getting the possible challenges of teaching speaking skill.

During FGD (Focus Group Discussion) with private university students, they have mentioned that anxiety and lack of practice are the main problems in their way of speaking in English. Similarly, four out of eight public university students have mentioned their anxiety when the y attempt to speak in English. So I find that anxiety as mentioned by Rahman (2006) is one of the challenges of speaking English in or outside the classroom.

Public university students mentioned that there is no language lab in their department to practice speaking skill. But the private university students are happy with their language lab. 3 out of 11 private university students mentioned that their language lab is not properly utilized for speaking practice. So I find that the availability and proper use of language lab is one challenging job in teaching speaking skill in undergraduate level. The research hypothesis rightly matches here. Indeed, proper use of audio-visual materials creates wider room for learning and practicing speaking skill in undergraduate level.

From the analysis, I find that students' negligence in speaking, low motivation, dealing heterogeneous classroom, lack of interaction in the classroom, stage fright and high anxiety level are the common challenges



in teaching speaking skill in both public and private universities of Bangladesh. This study did not give the solution of the challenges. A further study on the same field has given the solution of the challenges.

#### 5. Limitations and delimitations

The study tried to answer the research questions within its limitations. This study would be the best one in solving the raised question if I could get more time. It tried to answer the research question in identifying the challenges and for that purpose students' and teachers' role in the speaking skill teaching classroom have been analyzed. Motivational, interactional, classroom condition, course duration and class hour are observed and analyzed to find out the challenges. Moreover, the study did not try to show how to solve the identified challenges. The mitigation of the identified challenges has been solved in a next study.

#### 6. Conclusion

Due to the challenges sought out in the study, learners of undergraduate level in Bangladesh cannot speak in English properly. Their motivational and anxiety level turns them back from proper speaking performance in and outside the classroom. The removal of these challenges have helped teachers teach better English language speaking skill teaching that has helped learners of undergraduate level to perform better in study and future professional life.

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#### Appendix

##### Data Collection Instruments

##### Classroom Observation Checklist

1. Teacher-student number ratio
2. Performance by male and female students
3. Medium of instruction
4. Teacher student talk-ratio
5. Is the class enjoyable?
6. Do the learners take part in group or pair activities?
7. What is students' level of speaking?
8. What method is followed in teaching speaking skill?
9. How students are engaged in speaking?
10. Setting of class
11. What activities are done?
12. Use of technology
13. Students anxiety level
14. Listening level
15. Students' motivation level



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16. Stage fright
  17. Language shock

**Appendix-2**

**FGD with Students**

1. How has you use English in future?
2. Do you speak English in other classes?
3. What do you like best/least about speaking class?
4. Do you feel scared speaking before others and why?
5. Do you understand your teacher's English?
6. How your grammar structures and vocabulary do help you?
7. What are the problems you face while speaking in English?

**Appendix-3**

**Interview Question with Teachers**

1. What is your favorite technique or activity in speaking classroom?
  2. What are the challenges of teaching speaking?
  3. Do you enjoy teaching speaking skill using the existing materials?
  4. Do you get training to update your teaching strategy? If yes, then how it helps?
  5. What are the challenges of teaching in heterogeneous classroom?
  6. How do you motivate your learners?
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