ENHANCEMENT OF STUDENTS' ENGLISH SPEAKING IN BANGLADESH: THEORY AND PRACTICES

Md. Zillur Rahman[*], **A.F.M. Moshiur Rahman**[**]**& Mst. Kulsum Begum**[***]

ABSTRACT

Effective communication demands the continuous enhancement and development of English language learning considering its worldwide appeal. The way of increasing communicative competences for the students of Bangladesh undoubtedly is a very crucial and burning issue. In a short period of time English received a wide geographical coverage and became one of the leading means of communication. Still English continues its domination and expansion over other languages. The chief factors for the importance of English are economic, political, and cultural influence of the English-speaking people over the modern world even on media, mass communication and Internet which demand the efficiency of English, especially of spoken English. In spite of the great importance of the English language, the state of English in Bangladesh is not satisfactory. Though the students are taught English as a compulsory subject up to H.S.C but their English is very poor. This study tends to go through the present scenario of communicative skill especially speaking skill of today's students and the existing methods of enhancing this skill. It also tries to discover the reasons of unwillingness to communicate and the ways of overcoming the language barrier.

Keywords: Communicative Skill, Speaking Skill, Competence, Enhancement, Methods, Motivation.

---

[*]Associate Professor, Department of Language and Communication, Patuakhali Science and Technology University, Dumki, Patuakhali, E-mail: zillu1977@yahoo.com

[**]Editor, The Campus Mirror, 27/A, Manipuripara, Sangsad Avenue, Dhaka-1215, E-mail: moshiureu@gmail.com

[***]Associate Professor, Department of Basic Science, Patuakhali Science and Technology UniversityDumki, Patuakhali.

1. INTRODUCTION

English language has undoubtedly achieved status as the world's lingua franca in course of the history. English is now the official or dominant language for two billion people in at least 60 countries. According to the British Council, speakers of English as a second language probably outnumber those who speak it as a first language, and around 750 million people are believed to use English as a foreign language (Kachru 1996: 11, 14). English is the most common language to communicate scientific, technological, academic and international trade information. Currently English is not only a language but it is a technology as it accesses to all knowledge based sectors of the world through the use of key board of a computer and web site.

English is clearly the world's lingua franca, but how did it get that way? Part of the reason is the feedback loop driving its history. Before English has infiltrated the world, many of the world's languages infiltrated English. It has a wide geographical coverage. English is the second or official language of a number of countries. Besides, English is the most accepted language all over the world. The other factors for the importance of English are economic, political, and cultural influence of the English-speaking people. English is thus the language of the tourists as well as the international communications in the fields of shipping, aviation, tourism, business and many 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 good communication skills. A person without oral communication skills will suffer in this era of competition and may find it difficult to achieve a higher position.

Thus, the problem of teaching English to students, especially the problem of oral communication has not yet been solved, and one can find much to explore in this field. Because of the significant role of speaking, many researchers like Bailey (2005) and Goh (2007) have proposed methods to enhance speaking skills by means of syllabus design, teaching principles, types of tasks and materials, and speaking assessment. Most researchers are sure that, since speaking is one of the four major skills necessary for effective communication in any language, speaking skills should be developed along with the other skills, so that these integrated skills will enhance the students' ability to communicate. Effective communication by means of speaking usually creates a number of benefits for both speakers and business organizations.

In general, for students it is essential to understand spoken utterances and give appropriate answers. Communicative competence, the ability and readiness to communicate (speaking and listening comprehension) is thus formed. To achieve this, students should be given integrated tasks which help them develop both skills.

1.1. Objective of the Study

Research suggests that the integrated use of modern techniques can yield positive results and lead to the improvement of communicative competence. Learning English by using new methods in education and traveling and working abroad encourages students to learn the language, develops their ability to speak fluently, and helps them overcome the language barrier. So, objectives of this study are

(i) to define the strengths and weaknesses of speaking skill of the students and to demonstrate the possibilities of enhancement of the speaking skill of students' learning English ,

(ii) to deal with the factors affecting students' speaking skill,

(iii) to focus on the methods that are adopted by teachers in order to enhance speaking skill, and

(iv) to provide research based guide to solve problems that are faced by students in order to speak English.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research methodology was qualitative in nature including practical classroom observation and the secondary texts such as critical studies, research papers, literary journals, periodicals, term papers, media talks, interviews etc.

3. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

This article mainly deals with three main topics: speaking skills of the students in Bangladesh, existing methods of enhancing speaking skills of students, and ways to overcome the language barrier.

3.1. The present State of Students Speaking Skills in Bangladesh

Lately, the substantial interest in the English language as a means of international communication has grown in the mind of a particular group of pupils in Bangladesh. But unfortunately it doesn't reach its expected level. Though in the meantime English has already become the language of professional communication in various spheres of life, speaking is considered to be one of the four macro skills necessary for effective communication in any language according to most research, particularly when speakers are not using their mother tongue. As English is universally used as a means of communication, especially on the Internet, English speaking skills should be developed along with the other skills so that these integrated skills will enhance communicative competence. The following scenario received through an extensive survey tells us the actual status of our students' speaking in Bangladesh.

The research has tried to deals with the issues related to teachers' and learners' attitudes towards English, their needs, extent of use of English, and has tried to look into how the factors mentioned above are impeding their proficiency in English. These issues have been discussed in terms of students' attitudes, motivation towards learning English and

different social variables. The findings basing on the survey seem to determine the student's social, environmental and family approach, this survey has been carried out in an ethnographic manner by having a direct contact with both researchers and informants in particular. To know what actually happens in the language classrooms in different institutions across the urban and the rural areas of particular districts, 300 students and 20 teachers from different schools and colleges have been interviewed by designing and developing two questionnaires. Through the closer look into the classroom teaching and learning, this research has emphasized on participant observation and direct exchange of views with the relevant groups.

The research based on data analysis, suggests that one may not learn English unless he/she is given congenial atmosphere, methodical teaching, and proper motivation. Most of the students in Bangladesh have lack of motivation not only in case of their English courses but also in their studies in which they need to know English in general. The assessment provides the fact that a very few have adequate knowledge in English and they seem not to take interest in acquiring knowledge or skill by means of practicing productivity by themselves but in earning certificates by means of memorizing the lines from the suggestive books. Here memorization is a kind of copying because of the lack of creativity by the students.

The survey also shows that there is the shortage of reasonable number of competent, efficient and experienced English teachers. Most of the school teachers who are teaching English have not graduated from the discipline of English and thus they are not that much qualified to teach English. It is observed that the situation at the college levels is same as that of the schools. College teachers have obtained M.A. degree in English but their courses are oriented towards literature rather than language. At this point, this research focuses on English Language Teaching for making students proficient in English at school, college and university levels. At the same time, it is observed that the teachers need training of how they can reinforce the students to learn English in the proper manner. Moreover, untrained teachers do not know the current methods of language teaching. As a result of it, untrained teachers are failing to communicate to the student's right way of learning English and thus most of the students consider English learning difficult.

Effective teaching requires not only competent and efficient teachers but also suitable teaching materials. It is also observed that the text books used in the schools and colleges do not seem to be that suitable for serving the purposes of teaching and learning English. The national curriculum and text book board have produced a series called "English for Today" for school children. The last in the series intended for class IX-X. Language testing is very important because it affects teaching and learning. It is observed that the testing methods used by the Secondary Education Boards seem ineffective. Moreover, the ELT syllabus demands to make full use of audio visual aids and electronic equipment

for creating a foreign language environment but the reality existing in Bangladesh is that many schools and colleges in the countryside cannot afford to procure even a tape recorder. Interestingly in our surveyed area there is not a single school and college where the ELT equipments are available. In some remote areas there is no electricity. This is a major constraint in the innovation of ELT in Bangladesh today.

The study has also given the scenario that English is very much domain specific and is used only for specific purposes, especially limited and restricted within the academia. The reason for the findings can be explained as: Bangladesh being a predominantly monolingual country, *Bangla* can serve most of the purposes; English is learnt only for its utilitarian value. i.e. to get a good job, to build up a successful career, and to go abroad and many other facilities. There are few places to interact with or to befriend with the target language community. Many of the informants never have opportunity to speak with their peers. Their knowledge about the target language community is very much limited to books, novels or English movies.

In addition to the above, some researchers observe that not enough time is given to various exercises and opportunities for the improvement of speaking ability. Students often complain of scolding, and discouraging by their teachers for not speaking correctly. Although both teachers and students are responsible for the poor speaking ability of the latter, the teachers, who have the professional knowledge and skills, bear a greater responsibility.

Besides, there are a number of factors relating to speaking skills to be considered for effective English speaking performance. Pronunciation, vocabulary, and collocations are singled out as important factors to be emphasized in building fluency for EFL speakers. Providing students with a variety of situations and frequent speaking tasks plays 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).

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.

In general, the problems of the students related to learning to speak can be divided into four main groups:

i. Students feel shy speaking English because they are afraid of making mistakes. It is usually seen at the initial level as they are afraid of being criticized by teachers and other students.

ii. Working in pairs (or groups), students often begin to use their native language.

iii. Students don't have enough information on the topics discussed even in their native language.

iv. Students feel a lack of linguistic and verbal resources for solving the given task. In that case the teacher should create a friendly atmosphere of collaboration so that students will not be afraid of admitting their mistakes and will accept criticism.

Analyzing the topic of speaking skills, it becomes clear that speaking skills of most students, especially in Bangladesh, are insufficiently developed. It is a real problem in the field of ELT and it should be solved by the use of different methods of enhancing speaking skills.

3.2. Methods Applied to Enhance Speaking Skill

In ELT, every teacher should choose a definite set of methods of enhancing students' speaking skills. Nowadays it is possible to use traditional and modern technologies either separately or in integration. Internet communication tools have begun to be used in education, especially in English language teaching. New technologies are supplementing traditional English teaching methods. Students learn faster and easier than before because of the use of technology in schools. If they are trained during their school years, they learn language and technology simultaneously. Learning English through the Web and using new trends in education in schools and colleges make students willing to learn the language. Web-based technologies and useful Internet sites provide new possibilities and latest trends for teachers and students.

English has become easier to learn than ever before with the availability of many sources to help people learn in an effortless and enjoyable way. Web-based learning 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 environments (Khan, 2005). For this reason, it could be suggested that internet-surfing is an alternative way to study English. Web-based technologies and useful Internet sites provide various new possibilities and latest trends for teachers and learners. Today it has become possible to enhance speaking skills with the help of tools such as Skype, e-mail, blogs, chats, and mobile devices.

Basic communication skills are at the core of every organization. It is crucial that we as teachers help students build this vital set of 21st century skills. Everything depends on our ability to be creative and to use modern teaching methods. We can choose any methods

used available in ELT because all of them help to develop speaking skills. It is possible to use them in integration or separately to get positive results. As it was mentioned above, given the significant role of speaking, Bailey (2005) and Goh (2007) proposed methods to enhance the development of speaking by means of syllabus design, principles of teaching, types of tasks and materials, and speaking assessment.

Promoting speaking confidence, together with appropriate task design, were recommended for the English skills development of EFL/ESL learners (Bailey, 2005; Nunan, 2006; Patil, 2008; Trent, 2009; Zhang, 2009). Other out-of-class factors that enhanced participants' speaking abilities included frequent listening to English materials, such as listening to music, watching movies, listening to the radio, watching television programs, and accessing multimedia websites. Previous studies supported the finding that speaking and listening skills were usually intertwined in terms of language learning and development (Noon-ura, 2008). In addition, suggestions for EFL learners' speaking improvement included a variety of course activities, encouragement of more listening through the media, and seeking opportunities to speak in real situations. 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).

Classroom interaction is also necessary and useful as an educational strategy to enhance speaking skills. The role of interaction in a classroom context in enhancing speaking skills comes from the understanding of its main types: teacher-learner interaction and learner-learner interaction, where negotiation of meaning and the provision of feedback are highlighted. Classroom interaction involves verbal exchanges between learners and teachers. Teachers should know that the learners need to do most of the talk to activate their speaking, since speaking skills require practice and exposure.

Some authors consider that, at the basic level, more emphasis should be placed on books and speaking ability, since learning is a step-by-step process and such competencies cannot be improved abruptly. English should be taught as language, as well as a subject, so that more time may be available for the students to perform various activities/exercises in a natural way. Some individual activities, such as speaking on a certain topic for a minute or so should be assigned to students in the beginning speaking stages. Students should be given motivation, encouragement, some psychological training, reassurance, and counseling for removing their shyness and fear of being laughed at by their classmates and scolded by their teachers. Teachers should also be trained not to discourage the students and to control the other students in order to provide a friendly and stimulating environment in the classroom.

Linguistic skills such as familiarity with grammatical structures, vocabulary, and phonetics should be emphasized by the teachers in the classroom. Students should develop the habits of listening to BBC, CNN and similar programs for the improvement

of their speaking skills. Checking the students' language competency at various levels viva-voce as a compulsory part of the examination system may be included. There should be a balance between literature and language in reading materials, since presently they are more literature-oriented and lack language competency activities. The problem of poor speaking ability is a crucial one in many countries and Bangladesh is not an exception. This is why Bangladeshi authors should pay more attention to the issues of enhancing speaking skills of students because English has become very popular in our country and it is necessary to build communicative competence of learners.

In general, to improve the speaking ability of students, the following steps should be taken:

i. placing more emphasis on the quality teachers and of study books at the basic level
ii. ensuring congenial atmosphere and leting enough time to speaking and phonetic drill of students
iii. no scolding but rather providing a friendly environment
iv. using practical and applicable strategies by teachers for students while speaking in English
v. developing boldness and confidence in students to ask questions of their teachers
vi. maintaining reasonable class size
vii. awarding students for encouragements and motivation
viii. encouraging to listen to CNN, BBC and to watch movies, keeping up-to-date and constantly retraining teachers
ix. arranging various activities and balance in the courses with respect to literature and language
x. arranging a short presentation or debate on any contemporary interesting issues
If teachers take these steps into consideration and try to use them in their work, the students will be able to build communicative competence of EFL speakers and improve their speaking ability.

Analyzing all the existing methods of enhancing speaking skills of today's students it becomes clear that those methods are not as difficult as they seem to be and every teacher can choose those that he/she considers more appropriate for her students according to their level of knowledge of English. In Bangladesh like in many other countries we try to use modern technologies in ELT, including Internet-based techniques, listening to audio and video, creative tasks like role-playing, storytelling, describing pictures, and the like. All these together with students' interest in learning help teachers enhance speaking skills and make progress in ELT.

3.3. Language Barriers and Way-out
The study has tried to find out the main reasons for poor speaking skill of mentionable area. Students are reluctant to communicate for many reasons, including psychological discomfort and fear of making mistakes. Considering this situational view, many researchers have investigated how students can be affected by situational variables, such

as social contextual variables. Nevertheless, some authors are sure that before helping students to enhance their speaking ability any teacher should assess the reasons for the language barrier and choose the materials that will awake interest in learning English accordingly. But the main condition is confidence in one's own strength. It appears when a speaker ceases to concentrate on his mistakes in language practice. So, to begin speaking any foreign language, one has to overcome his lack of confidence. Considering the context of Bangladesh, it is mandatorily important to address this area both in case of teachers and students as teacher may be the mentor of running such a session.

It is also alleged that the language barrier does not exist, or that it was created by people. That's why any person who begins to learn a foreign language should not think about any possible mistakes and misunderstandings. Everything depends on the ability to concentrate on the material and being a good listener. So, at the initial level one should listen and repeat as much as it's possible. The best way to express one's thoughts is by simple words and phrases. One can train the ability to understand the gist of speech using key words. More than that, it's more important to discuss interesting topics. And, of course, the conditions of communication should be comfortable.

Sometimes, to overcome the language barrier, it is necessary to use fairy-tales, poems, jokes, or to become a part of a situation where one should speak only the foreign language.
This study opines, whether the language barrier exists or not, everybody should try to overcome it and find the best way. Otherwise, it will be impossible for the students to enhance the speaking skills and become fluent in any foreign language.

4. CONCLUSION
In this study, several factors related to the enhancement of students' speaking skills were studied and observed through analyzing current teaching materials, methods, equipment, classroom situation etc. It is important to set an educational agenda which acknowledges the importance of adaptation of suitable method to improve speaking and recognizes the significance of its applicability in Bangladesh. The development of physical instruments for institutions and the proper training to supply effective and efficient teachers should be ensured on special priority along with providing the necessary resources.

REFERENCES

B. BrajKachru, 1996. "*Opening borders with world Englishes: Theory in the classroom.*" In: *On JALT 96: Crossing Borders.* The Proceedings of the 23rd Annual JALT International Conference on Language Teaching/Learning. Hiroshima, Japan:10-20.

Bailey, K.M. (2005). *Practical English Language Teaching: Speaking.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Barman, B., Sultana, Z., & Basu, B.L. (2006). *ELT Theory and Practice.* Dhaka: Friends Book Corner.

Breen, M.P. (1985). The Social Context of Language Learning in a Neglected Situation. Studies in Language Acquisition, vol. 712, 125-158.

Brown, H.D.(2001). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. New

York: Longman.

Canale, M. & Swain, M. (1980). *Theoretical Basis of Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing.* Applied Linguistic, 1, 1-47.

Dörnyei. Z. (2005). *The Psychology of the Language Learner: Individual Differences in Second Language Acquisition Erlbaum*, London.

Goh, C. (2007). *Teaching speaking in the language classroom. Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre.*

Koshy, V. (2005).*Action research for improving practice: a practical guide.* London: SAGE.

Kuhl J. A.(1994). *Theory of action and state orientations.* J. Kuhl, J. Beckmann (Eds.), Volition and Personality, Hogrefe & Huber Publishers, Gottingen. pp. 9-46.

MorozovaYulia (2013), *Methods of Enhancing Speaking Skills of Elementary Level Students*, Translation Journal, Vol.-17, Issue-1, Institute of Fundamental Education, Ural Federal University B.N. yeltsin, Yekaterinburg, Russia.

Nunan, D. (1989). *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Richards, J. C. (2008). *Teaching Listening and Speaking from Theory to Practice.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Trent, J. (2009). *Enhancing oral participation across the curriculum: Some lessons from the EAP classroom.* Asian EFL Journal, 11(1), 256-270.

Zaremba, A. J. (2006). Speaking professionally. Canada: Thompson South-Western.