

Reasons Behind the Challenges Faced by Undergraduate Level Students While Communicating in English: Khulna University Perspective

Md Fajlay Rabbi¹, Fairuz Kamal², Md Sefatul Islam^{3*}, Shahriar Shajid Abir⁴

¹²³⁴Education Discipline, School of Education, Khulna University, City: Khulna, Country: Bangladesh

*Corresponding Author: sefatku192905@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

English is a required subject in the national curriculum of Bangladesh and pupils have to study English for twelve years. Even after twelve years of studying English, most of the pupils cannot speak English. Often it can be noted that tertiary-level students struggle when communicating in English in courses. Therefore, the study attempts to find out the challenges that the learners encounter in speaking English in the tertiary level courses. The study has conducted interviews with undergraduate students in almost every discipline of Khulna University. Students who were fresher in universities and studied basic courses in English were picked for the interview. In total, 40 individuals were chosen relying on opportunity sampling from various disciplines. Interview questions for the pupils were developed following the thesis objectives. Interview questions were translated into Bangla. All interviews were done in Bangla. After a comprehensive investigation of qualitative techniques, suggestions have been offered for the learners and instructors. The gathered data were thematized and examined in terms of two broad categories: causes of Problems faced by students and Causes of Writing and Speaking Problems. The study studied mainly: personal, social, environmental, and language problems for speaking issues and teacher and teaching, course content, overuse of mother tongue, poor schooling, and classroom culture as the cause factors of speaking weakness. The study suggested building a positive setting, increasing student liberty, changing teaching practices, rewriting classes, and conducting speaking activities time and again.

Keywords: English Language, English Learning, Communication, University Students

Article History:

Received 2025-02-16

Accepted 2025-06-11

INTRODUCTION

English language competency is emphasized by universities all around the globe, including those in non-native English-speaking nations, as a crucial skill for their student's academic success and future employment (Neumann et al., 2018). The number of universities offering all or a portion of their curricula in English is increasing as these establishments strive to gain a foothold in the current global education industry (Murry, 2016). In the modern era, speaking is seen to be one of the four fundamental language abilities that may result in effective interpersonal communication (Al-Roud, 2016). To facilitate knowledge and information sharing among speakers in an academic setting, speaking abilities play a crucial part in English as a foreign language (EFL) (Rao, 2019). Since English has become the de facto standard language for communication around the globe, graduates of universities all over the world need to be proficient in it (Islam & Paul, 2019). Although there seems to be a consensus that English is a global language, very little comprehensive data on its influence on educational practices and policies in educational systems worldwide has been acquired (NUNAN, 2003).

Speaking seems to be the most crucial and challenging of the four language skills for ESL and EFL learners (Ur, 2002). It is widely acknowledged that someone should be able to speak a language well if they study it. Users of that language must typically participate in a variety of discussions and conversations; hence they must be fluent speakers. According to Richards & Renandya (2002), many language learners across the globe study English to become proficient speakers of the language.

Speaking is thus seen to be the most crucial ability. Despite this obvious truth, a significant portion of university students struggle with fluency in the English language. In research by Alam & Ashrafuzzaman (2018a), the primary issues experienced by EFL students in strengthening their speaking abilities via classroom engagement were found to be anxiousness, fearfulness, inattention to the lesson, and grammatical errors. The results of research on the variables influencing students' English-speaking abilities that was carried out in Pakistan by Bashir et al. (2011) vary from those of other studies. According to the research, both instructors and students employ interactive teaching methods to enhance speaking abilities while using English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in the classroom.

Similar to the research of Heriansyah, Alam, and Ashrafuzzaman, another study by Sokip (2020) on overcoming the difficulties of learning foreign language skills in the classroom discovered that students' speaking skills problems are primarily motivated by their fear of making mistakes. The primary issue was shown to be fear of making errors in their research as well. Bangladesh's setting provides a distinctive background against which to examine issues with English communication. Kachru (1986, p. 33) and Jenkins (2009, p. 16) state that Bangladesh is classified as an ESL country (English as a Second Language). The nation's educational, linguistic, and historical developments combine regional cultural quirks with colonial legacy. English is used extensively in the country's educational system, particularly at the tertiary level, despite not being an official language (Rahman, 2022). The majority of first-year students in Bangladesh complete their secondary and upper-secondary education using Bengali as their primary language of instruction (Naznin & Hassan, 2016). Some of them may find it difficult to adjust to the new medium of teaching at the tertiary level, which might hinder their academic progress (Naznin & Hassan, 2016). However, the reality that many students leave the system with insufficient competency despite its focus on education presents a conundrum (Sumilong, 2022).

Addressing such inquiries is essential. Not only does the inability to speak successfully in English affect the immediate academic life of students, but it also hinders their potential to participate in international platforms, pursue further studies abroad, or secure work in global companies. Furthermore, as Khulna University tries to place itself as a globally competitive school, knowing and subsequently solving these issues becomes important for its educational goal and vision. In light of these considerations, this study tries to understand the basic reasons behind the communication issues met by the college students of Khulna University, thereby adding to possible answers and treatments.

Literature Review

A thorough examination of the existing literature is instrumental in situating our research within the broader academic landscape and in identifying gaps that our study aims to address. This section reviews the literature concerning challenges faced by non-native English speakers, with a particular focus on the linguistic, cultural, and educational factors that contribute to these challenges. English has emerged as a global lingua franca, becoming indispensable in academic and professional settings (Rahman, 2021). However, for non-native speakers, acquiring proficiency is fraught with challenges. These challenges encompass grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and the understanding and use of idioms and colloquial phrases (Zhai & Razali, 2022).

Chand (2021) conducted English speaking difficulties faced by Nepali bachelor-level students, identifying four main types: emotional, social, environmental, and language. Causes included teacher, teaching, course topics, mother tongue overuse, bad learning, and classroom culture. He suggested adopting learner-centered methods. Al-Sohbani (2018) studied the challenges faced by Yemeni EFL learners at Sana'a University in improving their speaking skills. He found that students faced obstacles like lack of exposure, enthusiasm, vocabulary, grammatical errors, pronunciation issues, fear of mistakes, and anxiety. He suggested updating the curriculum, improving teaching methods, reducing class sizes, improving classroom facilities, and stabilizing the social and political climate. Alshammari (2018) studied the obstacles and challenges met by Saudi EFL students in speaking communication skills at Qassim University. He used a questionnaire and a conversation to collect data from 60 male students and 10 teachers. He found that the students met various difficulties such as lack of knowledge, spelling mistakes,

speech problems, nervousness, shyness, and lack of confidence. He also found some factors that affected the students' speaking communication skills such as the curriculum, the teaching methods, the grading system, the class size, and the cultural setting. He suggested that the curriculum should be revised to include more communicative activities, the teaching methods should be more interactive and learner-centered, the assessment system should be more authentic and formative, the class size should be reduced, and the cultural differences should be respected.

Al-Seghayer (2014) examined at King Saud University's Saudi EFL students' difficulties in improving their speaking abilities. He gathered information from 120 pupils and 12 instructors using a questionnaire and an observation. He discovered that the kids had a variety of difficulties, including nervousness, a lack of vocabulary, grammatical faults, pronunciation issues, and a fear of making mistakes. Additionally, he discovered that the curriculum, the teaching strategies, the evaluation procedure, the size of the class, and the available learning materials all hampered the development of speaking abilities. He suggested that more communicative activities be added to the curriculum, that teaching strategies be more interactive and learner-centered, that the assessment system be more formative and authentic, that class sizes be lowered, and that learning resources be improved. Al-Nouh, Abdul-Kareem, and Taqi (2015) did a study to explore the views of EFL college students in Kuwait about the challenges they face in public giving as a form of assessment. They used a questionnaire and a discussion to collect data from 500 female students and 10 teachers. They found that the students experienced problems at a middle level ($M=3.10$) and that the main sources of their difficulties were personal traits, public presentation skills, teacher, and audience. They also found that students' countries and GPAs had significant effects on their views of the challenges. They suggested that teachers should provide more chances for students to practice public presentation skills, give helpful comments, and build a friendly learning environment.

Al-Mahrooqi and Sultana (2012) studied the factors affecting the growth of speaking skills among Omani EFL trainees at Sultan Qaboos University. They used a questionnaire and a focus group discussion to collect data from 60 kids and 10 teachers. They found that the students faced several difficulties such as lack of knowledge, grammar mistakes, speech problems, nervousness, shyness, and lack of confidence. They also found that some things that affected the students' speech skills were the curriculum, the teaching methods, the grading system, the class size, and the cultural setting. They suggested that the curriculum should be more open and relevant, the teaching methods should be more engaging and learner-centered, the grading system should be more real and formative, the class size should be smaller, and the cultural background should be recognized.

Culture plays a pivotal role in shaping language use. In many non-western societies, English is viewed as a tool for upward mobility, yet its use in daily life might be limited (Jafari, 2022). Moreover, cultural norms might instill hesitations in speaking up or questioning authority, which can manifest as challenges in academic settings where active participation is encouraged. Ur (1996) states that the following elements contribute to pupils' trouble speaking English: inhibition (when students feel self-conscious about their errors, bashful, and fear criticism); low engagement (some students talk more than others because they are dominating); Nothing to say (many students lack the inclination to express themselves); and Mother Tongue utilize (Because it is more comfortable for them, learners often utilize it).

Barrot (2016) studied oral communication issues among Filipino EFL learners at De La Salle University, identifying obstacles like vocabulary, grammatical errors, pronunciation issues, fear of mistakes, and anxiety. Factors affecting communication abilities included curriculum, teaching techniques, evaluation system, class size, and cultural background. A similar image may be seen in Hong Kong. Whatever the case, Hong Kong is a monolingual and monocultural nation. Gan (2011) examined twenty final-year English language bachelor's degree students who were pursuing a four-year degree in education. He discovered that there is very little environmental access for Hong Kongese pupils to practice speaking English outside of the classroom (pp. 54–55). Moreover, they have insufficient vocabulary. For example, a student stated that some terms and phrases never occur in her mind while

speaking English, and consequently, she cannot express what she wants to express precisely. Hence, vocabulary is a challenge that maintains the students' speaking intention behind the screen (Gan, 2012). Rabbi et al., (2024) analyzed that the Enhancing English Language Learning in Tertiary Education through Blended Approaches. The structural and phonetic differences between native languages and English often lead to challenges in communication. For instance, Bengali, the native language of Bangladesh, possesses sounds and structures absent in English, and vice-versa. This discrepancy can result in mispronunciations and grammatical errors (Awal, 2022).

Chowdhury & Shaila, (2011) said, "At the tertiary level most of the Bangladeshi universities include at least one speaking course in the syllabus or at least some speaking activities are integrated with the other English language courses. This importance given to the speaking activities is vital for the students because most of them in their secondary and upper secondary level obtain some ability in reading and writing, but many of them experience trouble to deal with the listening and speaking skills." They also noticed that the setting created by the peers affects the speaker's words. When a student talks, his friends laugh and do not support his speech. Therefore, the kids get less confidence and feel scared and afraid to talk in English.

Arju, (2011) revealed that a lack of suitable vocabulary inhibits speaking English in our nation. Bangladesh has relatively few competent and skilled English instructors who can educate learners in appropriate procedures. Indeed, Bangladesh is among the few nations in the world where teachers may begin their careers without receiving any official training (Siddique, 2004). The most frequent issues facing Bangladeshi students include administrative setup, teacher-centered classrooms, big courses, and cultural problems (Siddique, 2004). Bangladeshi students' enthusiasm to speak English is waning as a result of the hostile and unsupportive atmosphere. The student who shows the least interest in speaking therefore loses it. Given these identified gaps, this study is positioned to make a significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge. By focusing on the undergraduate students of Khulna University through a constructivist lens, it aims to provide a holistic, context-rich understanding of their English communication challenges, laying the groundwork for effective, targeted interventions.

METHODS

Research Method

The theoretical framework of this study is based on a constructivist worldview, which influenced the decision to use a qualitative research technique. This approach is considered appropriate since it is consistent with the goals of the research, which are too deeply examine participants' viewpoints within the particular setting and subject matter being examined. Qualitative research methods include a more thorough and involved procedure of gathering data than quantitative research methods. Through an exploration of the complexities of the study situation, the qualitative technique used makes it easier to get a comprehensive grasp of individual experiences. It acknowledges that quantitative measurements may not effectively capture certain elements of human experiences that are crucial to the study. According to Creswell and Poth (2017), the focus here is on revealing the complexity, richness, and depth present in human experiences and perceptions.

Semi-structured questions served as the main data-gathering instrument for this qualitative investigation. The purpose of these open-ended questions was to enable participants to provide in-depth explanations of their viewpoints, experiences, and difficulties with communicating in English. The investigation also included an examination of the linguistic, cultural, and educational elements that contribute to these difficulties.

Regarding the selection of participants for this research, an organised and purposeful sampling strategy was followed. This strategy was judged essential to enable an accurate review of the participants' experiences. To retain the relevance of the research to the environment of Khulna University, a particular criterion was established—only persons who had been attending the institution for a minimum of one year were included in the sample group.

To strengthen the validity and reliability of the study, an internal check procedure was implemented into the research design. This required presenting the processed data to the participants, enabling them to check if the interpretations fit appropriately with their personal experiences. His check not only confirmed the results but also supported the openness and authenticity of the study process.

Throughout the investigation process, the researcher was careful in addressing and minimising personal prejudices. Continuous self-reflection was performed to detect and reduce the possible influence of any personal predispositions on the study findings. This continual commitment to self-awareness aims to safeguard the integrity of the research and ensure impartiality in the assessment of the acquired data. The strict method employed in data collecting and research design indicates a focus to developing a strong and trustworthy basis for knowing the specifics of English communication experiences within the given area. By embracing these methodological concerns, the study attempts to create a rigorous framework for comprehending the subtleties of the participants' experiences and giving relevant insights to the greater area of research.

Sample

A purposive sampling method was employed to select participants who have spent at least one year at Khulna University, ensuring that they have enough experience to reflect upon. Purposive sampling is a planned and purposeful strategy typically applied in qualitative research to choose participants based on specified criteria linked with the study aims (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This strategy allows for a focused and purposeful collection of information, frequently leading to a more in-depth knowledge of the topic under inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). By purposefully choosing participants who can contribute rich and relevant information, researchers may increase the complexity and significance of their results, leading to a more nuanced and thorough knowledge of the investigated phenomena (Patton, 1990). Approximately 40 students were sampled from different faculties to capture a diverse range of experiences. About forty students were specifically selected from different disciplines to guarantee a wide variety of experiences in the research. Twenty people from 19 different specialties were in-depth interviewed among these participants. Twenty people participated in each of the two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) that were held for the remaining ten disciplines at Khulna University. This method was used to get a thorough grasp of the experiences with English communication in a variety of academic domains.

The FGDs and in-depth interview sessions both adhered to well-constructed rules. The FGD rules and in-depth interview schedule were provided to the participants, and to guarantee the correct recording of their answers, they were given both paper and recorded versions. Each participant gave their affirmative agreement before to participation, stressing that they understood the goals of the research and that it protected their rights as participants.

Twenty minutes was the maximum amount of time allotted to each interview to preserve order and timeliness. Bengali was the language of communication used in the in-depth interviews, which reflected the participants' linguistic background. The data was translated into English after the in-depth interviews and FGDS, making it possible to analyze the themes that emerged from the participants' comments in a way that was easier to understand. To ensure the study's validity and comprehensiveness, this rigorous methodology placed special emphasis on language inclusiveness, ethical concerns, and a methodical approach to data gathering. It also aimed to include a varied variety of pupils.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Personal Problems

In the context of the idea of "personal problems," we go into the fundamental hurdles people encounter, embracing features like uneasiness, shyness, fear of making errors, and a widespread lack of confidence. The experiences offered by the participants underline the universality of these personal obstacles, with uneasiness and confidence concerns surfacing as regular themes. Some interviewees also mentioned battling with a limitation in language knowledge.

One participant presented a new viewpoint by attributing language challenges to the atmosphere of attending school in a smaller community. This approach broadens the scope beyond language competency, encompassing larger issues such as economic restrictions, teacher quality, and school choices. It reveals the subtle interaction between unique situations and language difficulties, showing a socio-environmental factor that greatly determines English communication ability. Furthermore, a recurring issue across respondents was the reported lack of confidence in spoken English. Participants recounted occasions when they have cognitive abilities in English but hesitated to actively engage in discussions or react in English during classroom interactions. The dread of making mistakes in front of peers and instructors revealed as a key psychological obstacle, showing the subtle interaction between psychological barriers and confidence in English communication. Their unwillingness to participate in spoken English activities reveals a self-imposed hindrance to advancement, revealing the fundamental importance of psychological variables on language development.

Another respondent stated, "I understand when someone speaking English but I do not have the confidence to speak in English or any respond in the classroom." One of them expressed, "The fear of making mistakes in front of teachers and peers makes him low confidence in communicating English." The responses show a disturbing trend whereby students feel a drop in confidence when charged with speaking in class. These comments together suggest that students' own actions function as obstacles, affecting both their desire to talk and their potential for progress in spoken English. This combination of problems generates a cyclical dynamic, where emotions of uneasiness, worry, and lowered self-esteem form a self-reinforcing cycle.

In general, the unwillingness to fully engage creates a self-perpetuating circle. Nervousness and dread operate as important deterrents, stopping pupils from participating in English communication possibilities. This avoidance, in turn, adds to a lack of practice and exposure, prolonging the cycle of fear and inhibiting the development of more proficient English-speaking abilities. The interconnected nature of these issues underlines the need for focused interventions to break this loop and provide a more supportive environment for students to acquire confidence and skills in spoken English.

Social Problem

Both within and outside of institutions are considered social problems in this context. In this context, the classroom serves as a society where students with diverse origins, interests, and perspectives coexist. This segment also looked at the environment outside of the classroom. Multilingual classrooms have a very diverse classroom culture, and children exhibit a range of behavioral patterns. One of the respondents stated, "As a girl from a conservative family, I lacked sufficient support in learning English as my family consistently discouraged me, asserting that girls are destined for marriage and don't require a thorough grasp of the English language."

Another student faced a stereotyped family "Why do girls have to learn so much English, just finish your study somehow." One of them also said, "Growing up in a rural environment, I faced challenges accessing educational resources, particularly for learning and practicing English communication." But most of the learner starts to hesitate to speak in front of the class out of concern that they would be made fun of. Students' attitudes about making errors are still another thing that hinders them from using their English in class. Parallel to this, one of the main issues with speaking is the teacher's quick correction. However, the use of teacher corrective strategies is equally essential to language acquisition. When they get an instant correction in front of their peers, kids become disheartened.

Linguistic Problem

Learners find it quite challenging to choose words that convey their point of view. The majority of EFL students think in their native language first, then translate it into English to express their opinions in such situations, they perceive a deficiency of appropriate translation vocabulary.

A respondent expressed, "Though I can write in English well while speaking, I cannot change my dialect tone of speaking in English. Which becomes a matter of fun to my friends and teachers."

Another student stated, "While speaking or writing in English, firstly I process it in Bangla then think of English which takes a lot of time and sometimes causes many mistakes." Therefore, the majority of the learners feel a lack of vocabulary is a challenging issue.

Similarly, another student stated her feelings, "I find trouble in selecting proper tense when speaking." Based on their responses majority of the learners concentrated on grammatical inadequacy in speaking. They find trouble in applying the right tense structure and prepositions in their phrase when speaking. Pronunciation was considered another challenge for the kids. particular of the students mentioned that they had trouble pronouncing particular words properly so they did not use such terms even if they understood the meaning and usage of the phrases. When they attempt to communicate in English; their mother tongue comes first in their head and communication is delayed owing to translation from their mother tongue to the English language. Students also mentioned that they have issues when creating sentences in English; they discover difficulty preserving grammar occasionally. From the foregoing study, we can claim that students confront numerous sorts of challenges not only linguistic but also non-linguistic problems that may also emerge when speaking.

Environmental Problem

The Environment in the current study implies the classroom culture of the learners. Many researchers have studied the influence of the environment in learning a language (Heriansyah, 2012; Sokip, 2020). In this study also many learners brought out the environmental crisis as an essential topic. One of the participants stated, "I believe our classroom culture predominantly emphasizes excelling in exams rather than practicing English communication, with teachers not actively encouraging English communication in class, resulting in limited opportunities for such practice."

Another respondent expressed, "Though our medium of instruction is English, but all the teaching-learning process goes through Bangla. Only the teaching contents like slides, books, notes, assignments, and presentations are held in English. I think it decreases our opportunity to learn English more as well as this teaching-learning process remains lacking of communication in the English language."

In a similar circumstance, other students said, "Sometimes while teachers ask questions in English, I don't understand properly and couldn't able to answer clearly. Also, if any teacher lectures in English, I have to say yes sir without understanding the context."

The primary emphasis of their interview comments was the unfavorable atmosphere both inside and outside of the classroom. Nobody encourages them to speak English; neither their friends nor their instructors are willing to help them practice. Learning a language becomes very challenging if students are not allowed to practice it outside of the classroom. Their comments indicate that one more significant element that contributes to speaking challenges is the surroundings.

Based on the comments above, it can be inferred that most students struggle with personal issues like speaking nervously, hesitating, or lacking confidence. Speaking challenges are significantly influenced by social issues such as class culture, fear of criticism, and fear of making errors. Adult students' ability to communicate fluently was hampered by linguistic issues including lack of adequate vocabulary, difficulty starting a conversation, difficulty connecting sentences, interference from mother tongues, and difficulty pronouncing words correctly.

Teaching Factor

Teachers and his/her teaching styles in the classroom have a direct influence on pupils' learning. In this research, most of the students claimed that the involvement of the instructor in increasing speaking fluency was considered the most significant causative element. From the comments of learners, it was observed that instructors are more engaged in the classroom while pupils are merely passive listeners.

"The traditional teaching method is acting as a barrier in our speaking or writing in English" every participant said it from both FGD-1 & and FGD-2 groups. The explanation they have given: "We have been facing this since our school life when we were taught transmission in school or college it was taught that translation by giving a special thing or a situation but it is real. In life or free handwriting, how to

write or how to speak is never taught, and many times clear instructions are not given through which we do not understand how to learn English or how to use English while speaking.”

Most of the participants agreed that the learner-centered teaching style will help them develop English communication because if a student gets the opportunity to participate in the classroom from the beginning, he will be able to grasp the English language along with the teacher. As he becomes able to participate in the classroom, his interest in learning will gradually increase through this participation because when he is slowly able to speak English or learn English, it will become a regular matter for him, and he will gain courage and no fear or hesitation in communication. the learner center teaching style will increase peer working or group work, as a result of which we can enjoy and learn English together in our English communication, which will develop English communication skills or writing skills.

Demotivation from teachers was faced by every participant as they said: “If I try to say something in English or give a presentation in English, I make mistakes. As a teacher, he doesn't encourage me to correct it rather tells me to stop there and say it in Bengali which is demotivating. Also, in our English version university, the teaching method is given in Bengali. As a result, we are not able to learn much English from the teachers except if we go to say something in English, the teacher stops us there and encourages us to say it in Bengali. Very few teachers have been found in the university who have encouraged us to respond in English even though we are making mistakes.”

They also think that teachers have a role in creating interest in learning the English language which the students do not get properly. Starting from teaching method, teacher quality is also holding them back in learning English as most of the teachers emphasize memorizing English grammar paragraph composition which makes them in English. Communication skills are not developed properly and many teachers teach wrong pronunciation and grammar, especially in village schools. As a result, when they come to the university and study in English, they have to face various problems including lack of confidence, inertia, and being mocked by friends and teachers.

Poor Schooling

The effect of Poor Schooling on English communication is clear, as the evidence underlines the main reliance on mechanical memorizing of grammatical rules without practical application. Almost every respondent of FDG-1 and FGD-2 agreed with this term. Some participants explained English as segmented into individual subjects, lacking an integrated approach to language development. The concentration entirely on memorizing leaves pupils wrestling with theoretical information but ill-equipped to utilize it in real-life communication. Most of the participants face challenges in English grammar, and sentence-making perpetuates the difficulty, with many students unable to bridge the gap between theory and practice in speaking and writing.

Additionally, some participants faced family barriers in the shape of guardians who, frequently lacking skill in English, struggled to lead their children successfully. This leads to a loop where improper language use continues undetected, generating a lack of motivation and promoting the acquisition of English with chronic faults. Vocabulary and sentence-making prove to be tough hurdles, heightened by the widespread admission of spelling and grammatical faults in English writing. The consensus among participants is a resounding attribution of these challenges to the deficiencies in the educational system, particularly in the primary and secondary levels, where English is treated more as a subject to memorize than as a language to develop essential speaking, writing, and freehand skills.

On the other hand, 5 participants didn't face any challenges in speaking or writing in English as they claimed they had proper learning opportunities in school and family. Also, lack of vocabulary makes it difficult to speak. Some students said they did not understand the English language and could not fully understand the answer.

Higher Use of the Mother Tongue

A noticeable sentiment arose throughout discussions, as most participants emphasized the issue of having Bengali, their native language, heavily impacting their mental process even while talking in English. The linguistic comfort with Bengali frequently took priority, presenting a mental impediment

while trying to articulate ideas in English. This phenomenon demonstrates the fundamental relationship people have with their native language, altering their linguistic cognition.

Furthermore, a frequent issue reported by almost all interviewees was to challenges with English pronunciation during verbal communication. The subtle intricacies of English phonetics offered obstacles, resulting to reluctance and self-consciousness when speaking. Participants reported worry about probable mispronunciations and the fear of being misunderstood, underlining the psychological hurdles involved with verbalizing ideas in a non-native language. This twofold struggle—juggling linguistic influences and struggling with pronunciation intricacies—underscored the multidimensional character of language learning. It underlined the necessity of personalized tactics that address both mental connections with original languages and the technical elements of pronunciation to promote a more supportive and successful English language learning environment. Addressing these obstacles systematically may lead to greater confidence and competency in spoken English among the participants.

"I think that the mother tongue has an effect on English because if we had learned Bengali as a language from the beginning, then maybe we could have used English in all aspects of speaking and writing like Bengali" one of the participants from FGD-1 expressed this.

Another participant said, "Since childhood, English is shown as a separate subject rather than language as a subject. is shown as English subject gives more importance on memorization due to which we no longer accept English as a language or communication as such in future."

More importance is given to the mother tongue and because of taking English as a subject, we have this communication barrier from the beginning.

Two of the participants from both groups stated "I found that when my cousin is used to watching English cartoons, he feels more comfortable speaking in English since childhood because he has very little communication in Bengali because both his parents are working so there are very few people to talk to him in Bengali. He watches English cartoons all the time as a result of which he understands English better and can easily express his thoughts in English."

If from the beginning we could learn English as a language then our communication would be easier. Another participant from FGD-2 gave an example, "before reading a slide in English or before giving a presentation, we read it in Bengali first, or before reading an English book, we read the related information or any such book in Bengali first, then we go to read it in English."

As surroundings are not supported in speaking English, or English in conversation, at all. the efforts get doomed and demotivated to use English in conversation. 3 of them in FGD-1 don't feel embarrassed, and one of them feels nervous stated "In front of whom I am speaking English, I get nervous thinking about how he is taking it or if I am making a mistake somewhere, how he is taking it".

Course Content Factor

During the interview, students identified a key problem affecting English - a lack of focus on speaking practice. Many participants expressed discomfort about the main focus on writing work, noting that the instructor infrequently gave chances for spoken communication in English. The opinion among the students was that comprehension in Bengali before translating to English helped their grasp of the course content.

A contacting finding was that despite the lesson being held in Bengali, pupils were dissuaded from replying to lecturers in English. This discouragement had a harmful influence on their desire to participate in English conversation. The lack of a speaking habit further worsened the problem, resulting to a drop in confidence while trying to interact in English.

Participants reported that their unwillingness to talk arose from a fear of judgment. They acknowledged to continually worrying about their pronunciation and how others interpreted their language abilities. This anxiety-induced self-consciousness impeded their capacity to express themselves clearly in English. The absence of a supportive atmosphere for English communication increased these concerns, generating a loop of unwillingness to participate in spoken English activities.

Some respondents from FDG-1 & FGD-2 expressed, "I think lectures should be given in English from the beginning because whenever Sir gives a lecture in English, we can always be in an English

communication environment. Even if we don't understand anything, by struggling slowly, after taking classes for a few days, we will become used to English, then we will slowly learn to understand it. I can learn new vocabulary because I think content delivery or course content lectures should be in English, it will further develop our speaking skills or communication skills."

"Most of our students come from Bangla backgrounds, schools, and colleges if suddenly all the studies are conducted in English medium, from content to lectures, if everything is conducted in English, it will be difficult to understand as well and communication or writing skills will continue to deteriorate. In this case, if our concept is clear in Bengali and later, we will be able to present it in English. That's why I think course content delivery may be better in Bengali. I think our primary education should be in Bengali and then from secondary, we should be taught in Bengali as well as in English, in that case, it will be convenient for us to understand it in our future university life" Stated by one respondent.

The students' input underlined the need for a more balanced approach in language training, integrating frequent speaking exercises to promote oral skills. The discussion provided light on the delicate link between language acquisition, confidence development, and the significance of developing an inclusive and welcoming climate for students to overcome inhibitions and actively engage in spoken English activities.

Implementing a gradual method to teaching English to university students who haven't previously acquired the language may provide considerable advantages. Instead of a rapid switch, adopting English content delivery in modest increments provides for a gentler learning curve. This strategy supports varied learning styles and offers a more inclusive educational environment. Students may master English language complexities gradually, encouraging a better knowledge of the course content. This technique not only boosts language competency but also develops confidence and active involvement. Overall, adopting a step-by-step technique for English education at the university level proved helpful for both instructors and students, promoting a more successful and accessible learning experience.

Classroom Culture

It is thought that learning is directly impacted by the culture of the classroom or organization. In this context, classroom culture refers to the procedures, customs, roles of the instructor and students, and activities that take place in the classroom. Peer unwillingness to motivate or practice English is remarkably noticed. When two or three friends practice English together, after some days they lose interest, As a result, it doesn't become practiced. Peer bullying is like mistakes in words or using new words or English speaking in regular conversation. They don't like to hear English but rather insist on speaking Bangla. Peer demotivation such as Mocking around friends & and demotivating those who are trying to speak in English. Financial barriers to accessing English learning resources.

One of the participants from FGD-1 stated, "In many cases, I can speak English, and I know English well, but when I am in front of a certain teacher or a certain person, I cannot overcome the inertia of speaking English or I am afraid that he thinks that person or that teacher does not appreciate me."

Another respondent from FGD-2 expressed, "I can't speak English properly because of panic. One of them has the problem of mixing Hindi and English while speaking." He can speak Hindi fluently as well as Bengali. As a result, when he goes to speak English, Hindi comes along with English. Others feel embarrassed to speak English because they think that if they speak English fluently or wrongly, everyone will laugh or think that they don't know anything and can't do anything. Bullying in the classroom is more about speaking English because if someone can speak or try to speak English well, then classmates or friends will make fun of him and later he will not speak English anymore. Because of this fear, English is no longer spoken or practiced, so bullying takes away their confidence. It turns out that whoever they want to practice or make conversation with doesn't feel interested. Many people don't personally show interest in learning English or speaking English. When English is spoken incorrectly or the pronunciation is done incorrectly, it is also looked down upon or dampened because he cannot speak English properly, and English is neither practiced nor spoken nor is English practiced or practiced due to being demotivated in every way. I don't dare to do it anymore.

From the discussion above, it can be inferred that the primary factors influencing student and instructor attitudes toward English, the classroom atmosphere, the teaching strategies the teacher uses, and the structure of The university's course curriculum directly affect how well students can talk. The main reasons why students struggle to improve their speaking fluency include elements covered before.

The focus of the study is to explore the barriers experienced by undergraduate students at Khulna University when participating in English communication. The study attempted to investigate numerous problems, including anxiousness, lack of confidence, limited expertise, fear of making errors, absence of a suitable setting, poor vocabulary, and difficulty in applying grammatical patterns. These variables were identified as the key impediments affecting students' capacity to successfully communicate in English.

Among the key issues noted, anxiousness and lack of confidence revealed as important impediments, limiting students' desire to engage in English discussions. The dread of making errors further increased these obstacles, generating a reluctance to participate in verbal communication. Additionally, the research underlined the function of the learning environment, highlighting the need of an appropriate setting for supporting successful language acquisition. A striking conclusion of the research is the constraint created by a lack of rich vocabulary and an inability to apply grammatical patterns successfully. These limits connect with worldwide trends, as indicated by Liu and Jackson (2008), who cited restricted vocabulary as a barrier for Chinese English speakers, and Gan (2012), who related it to 'incomplete expressiveness' for Hong Chinese English speakers. In the Bangladeshi context, Sayma Arju (2001) has previously underlined the problem of insufficient vocabulary among pupils, matching the present study's results.

This study sheds light on the multiple problems experienced by Khulna University undergraduate students in their English communication activities. By addressing these challenges, educators and stakeholders may build tailored interventions to strengthen students' speaking skills and establish a more conducive learning environment for successful language acquisition. It is observed from the interviews that the majority of the students are adequately keen to speak English in their lectures. However, they do not engage in various speaking activities simply because of their fear of making errors, nervousness, and lack of guidance from peers. Some interviewees were shy and nervous to express their thoughts properly. Throughout their academic careers, they have been lacking motivation, and their lecturers have never felt the need to encourage them or emphasize the need to have good English-speaking skills. Our students at the tertiary level indeed speak English with insufficient accuracy and fluency. As a result, these students, like the majority of FEL and ESL students, often make errors. The important thing is how the instructor and classmates handled this error, regardless of the cause. However, increased access to the English communication environment is necessary for students to overcome their anxiety and exam-focused mindset. According to Chowdhury and Shaila's (2011) research, Bangladeshi students do not have the opportunity to practice spoken English outside of the classroom. The majority of participants in this study also said that they are very uncomfortable speaking in front of the class due to a fear of making errors and being made fun of by their peers. The study of Heriansyah (2012) also pointed out that lack of vocabulary, not being confident to speak, and not being accustomed to communicating in class are the key issues in English speaking which are also comparable to our current study. Alam and Ashrafuzzaman (2018) have studied similar sorts of issues experienced by the students in Bangladesh. They further add that lack of vocabulary, fear of blunders, and self-confidence are the most prevalent obstacles to speaking in Bangladesh which is by this research. Sokip (2020) in his research in Indonesia discovered that fear of making mistakes, anxiety, and low motivation was the biggest challenge experienced by students of university level in Indonesia and this study also revealed similar sorts of difficulties. However, the results of Bashir et al. (2011) are different from these three investigations. In their study instructors were discovered employing EMI and classroom interaction to increase the English proficiency of the pupils.

In the context of English communication, a considerable proportion of students suffer discouragement from their classmates and instructors, hampering their capacity to build excellent

speaking abilities. This issue is revealed by this study where 80% of students stated feeling embarrassed when exposed to laughing from their peers, resulting in a progressive loss of their passion for speaking English. The implications reach to the point where some students forsake their desire to speak in English completely, mostly owing to the harsh views they receive. The common impression is that students regularly battle with the pressure of contrary evaluation from their classmates, producing an environment of concern that leaves them anxious and inflexible in their linguistic activities (Kumaravadivelu, 2009). Addressing the cognitive impact suffered by peer dynamics is vital. The influence of such unpleasant experiences on students' confidence and desire to participate in English communication is evident. The need emerges for these learners to overcome the widespread fears, pressures, and negative judgments that limit their language development. Conversely, a ray of optimism comes from those kids who emphasise the positive attitudes demonstrated by their classmates and professors. The presence of encouragement and support works as a catalyst, encouraging these learners to actively engage in English discussions inside the classroom (Kumaravadivelu, 2009).

The focus on speaking as a fundamental English language competence is emphasised by study results. Students should be given with adequate opportunity to develop their language competence both inside and outside the limits of the classroom (Brown, 2001; Richards & Renandya, 2002). However, Akbari's (2016) study offers another side to the difficulty - the influence of course books or content in determining speaking skills. Insufficient attention to speaking exercises in the curriculum might prevent students from actively engaging the English language in their practice, leading to a loss in their speaking skills. This provides insight on the diverse character of the barriers experienced by learners in improving their speaking abilities.

Contrary to past studies, which largely focused on individual language-related concerns, this study brings to the forefront other variables impacting speaking deficiencies. Instructional methodologies, classroom culture, student backgrounds, and the excessive use of the mother language are cited as key factors to the issues noticed in speaking development. This deviation from the typical emphasis on psychological and linguistic characteristics underlines the need for a more thorough knowledge of the subtleties involved in establishing successful spoken language abilities. The study serves as a novel addition to the discipline, providing light on the subtle interaction of educational approaches, classroom dynamics, and social restrictions influencing students' capacity to explain themselves in English.

CONCLUSION

This study involves an investigation of the common challenges experienced by tertiary-level students in strengthening their English communication abilities. It finds a frequent reluctance among students to participate in English conversation, explaining their hesitation to multiple factors. The study undertaken at Khulna University notably stresses language challenges, dependence on the mother tongue, lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, and issues in sentence making as the key difficulties experienced by undergraduate students.

To overcome these challenges, the study recommends for the introduction of frequent speaking exercises inside the classroom context. Such activities are seen as crucial in encouraging learners confidence, and effectively addressing the mentioned problems. The concept envisions a future where students no longer regard speaking English as a difficult activity, proving the perception that it is comparable to dealing with an unreachable.

Furthermore, the study underlines the relevance of captivating activities in encouraging students to actively engage in English communication. It acknowledges the natural challenges in encouraging desire for sharpening speaking abilities, but maintains that a good experience with spoken English could inspire students to delve into the content.

Despite these provided methods the study emphasises the need of cooperation between educationists and teachers. Together, they are urged to establish an atmosphere favourable to the frequent practice of spoken English. The group effort is portrayed as crucial in generating an environment

where students not only overcome obstacles but also discover a natural motivation to gain competence in the language.

In conclusion, the study encourages action, emphasizing that overcoming these challenges is crucial for students to increase their speaking abilities and acquire fluency in a foreign language. The combined efforts of educators, teachers, and students, together with engaging educational techniques, are viewed as crucial components in this path towards successful English communication at the tertiary level.

REFERENCES

- Akbari, Z. (2015). Current Challenges in teaching/learning English for EFL learners: The case of Junior High School and High School. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 199, 394-401.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.07.524>
- Alam, M. A., & Ashrafuzzaman, M. (2018). Challenges of developing speaking skill through classroom interaction of EFL learners. *Prime University Journal*, 12(1), 45-67.
- Alam, M. A., & Ashrafuzzaman, M. (2018b). Challenges of developing speaking skills through classroom interaction of EFL learners. *Prime University Journal*, 12(1), 45-67.
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332155144>
- Al-Nouh, Abdul-Kareem, and Taqi (2015). *Perceptions of EFL College Students on the Difficulties in Oral Presentation as a Form of Assessment. International Journal of Higher Education*, 4(2), 105-121.
- Al-Roud, A. A. (2016). Problems of English-speaking skills that university students encounter from their perspectives. *British Journal of Education, Society & Behavioral Science*, 18(3)(1-9). <https://doi.org/10.9734/bjesbs/2016/28404>
- Al-Seghayer (2014). The Four Most Common Constraints Affecting English Teaching in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 4(5), 17-26
- Alshammari (2018). Difficulties and Challenges in Oral Communication Skills: A Case Study of Saudi EFL Students at Qassim University. *International Journal of English Language Teaching*, 6(4), 1-14.
- Arju, S. (2011). A study on ESL vocabulary acquisition needs and classroom practice: a Bangladeshi context. *Stamford Journal of English*, 6, 54-71
- Awal, A.M. (2022). Standard English in Bangladesh: A legacy of colonization. *INDONESIAN JOURNAL OF SUSTAINABILITY*.
- Barrot (2016). Difficulties in Oral Communication Skills: A Case Study of Filipino EFL Learners at De La Salle University. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 4(2), 21-34
- Brown, G. and Yule, G. (1983). *Teaching the spoken language*
- Chand (2021). Challenges Faced by Bachelor Level Students in Speaking English: A Case Study of a University in Nepal. *Journal of NELTA*, 25(1-2), 1-16.
- Chowdhury, N., & Shaila, S. M. (2011). Teaching speaking in large classes: Crossing the barriers. *Stamford Journal of English*, 6, 72-89.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2017). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Creswell, J. (2015). *Educational Research* (5th ed.). Pearson.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. *Sage Publications*.
- Gan, Z. (2012). Understanding L2 speaking problems: Implications for ESL curriculum development in a teacher training institution in Hong Kong. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 37(1), 3
- Islam, M.R., & Paul, A. (2019). Current Practice of Student-Centred Classrooms for Learning English at Tertiary Colleges in Bangladesh: Issues and Solutions.
- Jafari, A. (2022). The role of institutions in non-Western contexts in reinforcing West-centric knowledge hierarchies: Towards more self-reflexivity in marketing and consumer research. *Marketing Theory*, 22, 211 - 227.
- Jenkins, J. (2009). World Englishes. *Milton Park, Abingdon: Routledge*.
- Kachru, b. B. (1996). *Opening borders with world Englishes: Theory in the classroom* [Paper presentation]. The Proceedings of the JALT 1996 International Conference on Language Teaching and Learning, Paper presented at the S. Cornwell, P. Rule, & T, Sugino (Eds.), On JALT96: Crossing Borders.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2009). *Understanding Language Teaching*. New York, NY: Lawrence Erlbaum Associations.
- Murry, N. (2016). *Standards of English in higher education*. Cambridge University Press.
- Naznin, H., & Hassan, F. (2016). Challenges of linguistic transition at tertiary level: case of a private university in Bangladesh. *International Journal of English and Education*, 5(2) 51-60).
- Neumann, H., Padden, N., & McDonough, K. (2018). Beyond English language proficiency scores: understanding the academic performance of international undergraduate students during the first year of study. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 38(3) 324 - 338).
- NUNAN. (2003). The Impact of English as a Global Language on Educational Policies and Practices in the Asia-Pacific Region. *TESOL Quarterly*, 34/4(589).
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). Qualitative evaluation and research methods. *Sage Publications*.
- Rabbi, M. F., Islam, M. S., & Hossain, M. J. (2024). Enhancing English Language Learning In Tertiary Education Through Blended Approaches: A Bangladesh Perspective. *Indonesian Journal of Education Research (IJoER)*, 5(1), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.37251/ijoe.v5i1.745>
- Rahman, M.S. (2021). Challenges for Learning English of Rural Primary Students at Pabna District in Bangladesh. *International Journal of Advance Research and Innovative Ideas in Education*, 7, 805-816.
- Rahman, M. M. (2022). An Error Analysis of Students' Paragraphs and Essays: A Case of First-Year Students of an English Medium University in Bangladesh. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*.
- Rao, P. S. (2019). The Importance of speaking skills in English classrooms. *Alford Council of International English & Literature Journal(ACIELJ)*, 2(2) 5–18).
- Richards, J. C., & Renandya, W. A. (Eds.). (2002). *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice*. Cambridge University Press.

-
- Siddique, R. (2004). Another assumed ideal from the West. *Stamford Journal of English*, 61(1), 1-7.
- Sokip. (2020). Overcoming the problem of learning foreign language skills in the classroom. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 8(2), 723-729.
- Sumilong, M. J. (2022). Learner Reticence at the Time of the Pandemic: Examining Filipino Students' Communication Behaviors in Remote Learning. *British Journal of Teacher Education and Pedagogy*.
- Zhai, X., & Razali, A.B. (2022). Uncovering Challenges Mainland Chinese International Students Face in English Language Communication in Malaysian Higher Education Institutions. *Asian Journal of University Education*.