

Running head: TEACHING EFL TO THE STUDENTS AT TERTIARY LEVEL

1

Teaching EFL Speaking to the Students at the Tertiary Level: A study at the Private Universities in
Bangladesh



Abstract

Primarily, communication takes place through speech. Hence, in the teaching-learning process of English language, teaching speaking skill has attracted the greatest level of interest. Teaching speaking English has been established as a professional and academic field at all levels, especially at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. However, the nature of teaching speaking has undergone some considerable changes in recent years. The study tried to focus on the effectiveness of the methods followed by the English language teachers and the appropriateness of the materials used by the teachers while teaching EFL speaking to the students at the tertiary level in the private universities of Bangladesh. This study conducted semi-structured interviews with 6 English teachers teaching English at the private universities located in Dhaka city. The study shows that teaching speaking to the students studying at the tertiary level is really a challenging task. Challenges mainly lie in inappropriate curriculums, unavailability of teaching materials, lack of research, traditional classroom environment and so on.

Keywords: Methods, materials, appropriateness, EFL speaking, tertiary level.

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Introduction

Language teaching method is a set of procedures which teachers are to follow in the classroom. Methods are also usually based on a set of beliefs about the nature of language teaching and learning. Throughout the history, the goal of language pedagogy was to find out a right method or a magical formula that would work for all learners at all times (Brown 2002, PELT-David Nunan). On the other hand, materials are “anything which can be used to facilitate the learning of a language, including course books, videos, graded readers, flash cards, games, websites and mobile phone interactions” (Tomlinson, 2012, p. 143). They can be “informative (informing the learner about the target language), instructional (guiding the learner in practising the language), experiential (providing the learner with experience of the language in use), eliciting (encouraging the learner to use the language) and exploratory (helping the learner to make discoveries about the language)” (Tomlinson, 2012, p. 143). Ideally materials should be developed for learning rather than for teaching and they should perform all the functions specified above.

The teachers, depending on the goals and objectives of the curriculum, select an appropriate teaching method, develop materials including tasks and activities, use those materials in the classroom and closely monitor students’ progress for better learning. Thus, the research work has tried to find out whether the method and the materials used by the language teachers teaching EFL speaking at the tertiary level are appropriate or not. The researcher has tried to evaluate the

picture of teaching EFL speaking at the tertiary level from the teachers' point of view.

Literature Review

Speaking is generally considered as one of the major productive skills. Basmah Ali (2014) observed that pair-work, reading aloud the dialogue are two ways of practicing speaking in class and tape recorders were used as a material to teach speaking. According to Benter Oseno Gudu (2015) students should be given chances to practice using authentic English language in context, teachers should integrate various activities in a lesson to meet learners' needs and curriculum to acknowledge learners' cultural backgrounds in order to develop their speaking skill. Shehadeh (2001) examined that communicative tasks gave students opportunities to practice both self- and others'-initiations, hence provided students with abundant opportunities to produce Modified input; significantly more resulted from self initiation.

Akter Jahan (2008) found that the problems in teaching EFL speaking lie mainly within the teaching methods and techniques. Effective instruction together with sufficient language input and speech promotion activities will gradually help learners to speak English fluently and accurately. Roksana Zarin (2014) found that that the techniques and materials used in teaching English speaking to the learners are moderately effective. She told that that developing material for the learners should be checked by experienced teachers keeping the social cultural issues in mind, teachers need to be trained properly to propel speaking classes and time to time materials for speaking should be upgraded. Ahmaddin Tuguis (2017) found that teaching speaking English will be effective and efficient when the English students and their lecturers always

speak English with each other and can make some disciplines to be obeyed in order to speak English.

Kardwish (2016) investigated that learners' weakness in listening skill caused speaking difficulties, negative psychological factors affected in developing speaking skill, there was no clear strategy of teaching English language which could help the students to speak English language well and some teachers had no time for practicing more speaking excurses. Dinapoli (2000) examined that planned and unplanned role-playing can be adapted to communicative tasks definition by giving it a goal orientation. Using these role plays provided a great deal of spontaneity in the classroom as they enhanced students' motivation. Furthermore, role plays and scenario tasks proved to be effective in developing both linguistic and pragmatic competences for this group of learners.

Research Design

The study is qualitative in nature, and applied a comprehensive approach for conducting the research. This study was designed to investigate the appropriateness of the methods followed by the English language teachers while teaching EFL speaking to the tertiary level students. The study also tried to find out the suitability of the materials used by the language teachers at the same level of teaching speaking. The study was conducted with in-depth interview with 6 EFL teachers teaching at different private universities in Dhaka in Bangladesh. The teachers for the interview were chosen randomly from different universities who had at least 10 years of teaching experience. The participants included both male and female teachers.

Participants

Of the participants 3 were male and another 3 was female teachers. All of the participants completed M.A. degree from public universities and 3 of them had PhD. For the purpose of observing research ethics, the names of participants were kept secret. Hence, the 6 participants were given pseudonym name as T1, T2...T6.

Instrument

The study collected data through in-depth interviews. The study confirmed the interview protocol refinement (IPR) framework adapted from Hoque (2016) comprised of a four-phase process for systematically developing and refining an interview protocol. The four-phase process included: (1) ensuring interview questions align with research questions; (2) constructing an inquiry-based conversation; (3) receiving feedback on interview protocols, and (4) piloting the interview protocol.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

The researcher tape-recorded the entire interview and discussion, and then transcribed the text word for word. The transcribed text then becomes the data that were analyzed. The study tape-recorded the interview and took notes at the same time; later he reviewed the tape and notes, occasionally writing down direct quotes that were deemed especially relevant. The researcher took extensive notes during the interview. It would have appeared that the strategy the study involved saved time and energy. On the other hand, it was sufficiently reliable and appropriate choice. The open-ended questions of the interview were discussed in qualitative method. In other

words, these items and comments were analyzed very closely line –by- line or even word-by-word. As the researcher belongs to the same professional group, and has a similar background as those of the participants, he holds an insider understands of the participants’ beliefs and perceptions. His teaching experience in EFL settings was valuable in perceiving and interpreting the data obtained in the interviews and observation. Finally, conclusion and recommendation were given based on the findings obtained from the research work.

Findings and Discussions

The interview questions were consistent with the research objectives and the researcher tried to find out the real picture of teaching EFL speaking at the tertiary level in Bangladesh through those interview questions. The study conducted a loosely structured interview. It allowed freedom for both the interviewer and the interviewee to explore additional points and change direction, if necessary. The findings focusing on effectiveness of methods and appropriateness of the materials in teaching EFL speaking are presented in the following sub sections:

Interview with Teacher One (T1)

The first interview was conducted with a teacher who had teaching experience for more than ten years. About the method he said:

I use the eclectic method to teach the English language. The reason for adopting this method is that it allows me to utilize and experiment a number of teaching methods in the

TEACHING EFL TO THE STUDENTS AT TERTIARY LEVEL

8

same class. In order to help students practice speaking skill of English, I employ role play, simulation and problem solving, describing people, personal story etc.

The teacher also said that he used the teaching materials like course books, overhead projectors, posters, colourful pictures, video equipment, worksheets etc. He believed those materials enabled students to participate actively in the classroom activities, and thereby facilitated learning. In his opinion, the above materials were relevant and sufficient for teaching speaking at the tertiary level in Bangladeshi context because they would expose the students to real-life English.

The teacher also said that the existing curriculum could be considered appropriate but not adequate for teaching English. To teach EFL speaking to his students he used a topic-based syllabus. The reason for using this syllabus is that it had been prescribed by the university authority. The materials were selected and designed by him as the course teacher, but the syllabus by the university authority.

Interview with Teacher Two (T2)

In the interview session the teacher seemed very active and enthusiastic. She told that he used TBLT and CLT to teach his students EFL speaking. He added that:

After the completion of the courses, the level of competency achieved by students is satisfactory to me in reading and writing. But their level of competency in speaking is mostly unsatisfactory as they find it hard to master during the time period (trimester) of

TEACHING EFL TO THE STUDENTS AT TERTIARY LEVEL

9

the course.

While teaching EFL speaking at the tertiary level, she faced with the following problems:

i) lack of students' motivation for engaging in classroom activities; ii) students' shyness in speaking; iii) shortage of materials consistent with age, level, context and culture of our students; iv) traditional testing systems which do not require students to take direct tests of their speaking skill; v) the adherence to old-fashioned syllabus in the department/ university etc. He said that if those problems could be overcome, we could give better English education.

The teacher also suggested some measures that could be taken to improve the status of English education.

I have the following suggestions in this regard: i) to motivate the students to use English both inside and outside classrooms; ii) to make necessary audio/video equipment available in all language classrooms; iii) to make arrangements for teacher training; iv) to ensure reliability and validity of language tests; v) to prioritize the design of context-specific materials.

Interview with Teacher Three (T3)

Teacher three was found to be traditional in the classroom though he had teaching experience of more than ten years. He said that he generally used both GTM and CLT, because they were convenient to teaching the four skills of English language in Bangladeshi context. He said:

For speaking the learners work in group and speak and discuss on given topics. Besides, the learners listen to the taped speech, news etc., and explain them in their own language.

TEACHING EFL TO THE STUDENTS AT TERTIARY LEVEL

10

Learners do some activities like MCQ, filling gaps, summary writing etc. based on listening text which promotes their speaking practise.

The teacher also said that he used some supplementary materials to promote English language teaching and learning. He said:

I usually use books, content-based videos, pictures, taped records etc. as teaching materials, because they make the class live and spontaneous. These materials are relevant to motivating and making them competent.

The teacher also said that the materials and syllabus for the English course were mainly designed by the authority with the help of subject experts. The senior faculty members also had a great contribution on the syllabus they followed.

She said about the students that the students mainly could develop the writing and reading skill in the maximum level but they could not achieve more speaking. The prime problem is the entry level of the students is really weak. Moreover, we cannot create an English speaking environment for them. Another problem is that most of the learners are examination and certificate oriented.

Interview with Teacher Four (T4)

The said that it was very hard job to follow a single method in teaching English language in Bangladeshi EFL context. So, mixture of some methods must be adopted in teaching EFL

TEACHING EFL TO THE STUDENTS AT TERTIARY LEVEL

11

speaking. She preferred to adopt Eclectic Approaches to teach English language in her classes, as it allowed her to adopt what methodology or approach to be used depending on the aims of the lesson and the learners in the group in classroom activities. She thought that it was a whole way of doing things such as listening coordinated speaking with subsidiary elements like pronunciation and form of the language. That's why she followed this eclectic approach in my class. About the conducted activities she also said:

I adopt varieties of activities in my classroom activities. These include pair work, group work, FGD, meet the press, questioning & answering, puzzle solving, picture analyzing, quizzing, note taking, story telling, acting, stimulations, writing paragraph, essays, stories, paraphrasing, dictation, requesting, and interaction etc. Because, all these activities help a learner acquire mastery over both macro and micro skills of EFL speaking.

The teacher said that she used whiteboard, marker, projector, slides, laptop, podcast, audios, sound box, smart phone, books, pen and handouts etc as the teaching materials. Those materials helped students being active and motivated to the classroom activities and those materials were relevant to teach EFL speaking, as language is related to both verbal and non-verbal communication she added.

Interview with teacher Five (T5)

In response to the question related to the methodology the teacher said that usually he was comfortable with the Grammar Translation, Audio- Lingualism, Communicative Language Teaching and Principal Eclecticism Method He said that he used the Grammar Translation

TEACHING EFL TO THE STUDENTS AT TERTIARY LEVEL

12

method to help the students to read literature in a target language and to memorize grammar rules and vocabulary of the target language. Audio Lingual method helped the students to learn structural patterns, to memorize a particular topic with a focus on intonation and to learn vocabulary in context he added. Communicative Language Teaching helped the students to control the behavior of others, to create interaction with others, to express personal feelings and meanings, to create a world of the imagination he also said.

Principal Eclecticism Method was used in both written and oral, to improve the learner's accuracy, fluency and communicative ability.

The teacher said that he usually took help from the different types of teaching materials.

He prepared lesson plans which were a prerequisite for starting a course. The students got an overall idea about dos and don'ts of the course, he remarked.

He said that he used phonemic chart which helped the students hear and understand the sounds of English using the British Council Phonemic Chart tool. The teacher also said that he used articles to develop the student's understanding of teaching methodology and practice; the British Council helped him with regularly updated articles. The further added that he used printed materials like Textbook, student's worksheet, pictures, photographs, newspapers & magazines. Audio materials like Cassette & compact disc Audio visual like Video compact disc, film Interactive teaching materials: Web based learning materials, computer assisted instruction for teaching English effectively.

Interview with Teacher Six (T6)

TEACHING EFL TO THE STUDENTS AT TERTIARY LEVEL

13

The teacher remarked that she used Communicative Language Teaching Approach to teach English in her class because it was an approach to the teaching of second and foreign languages that emphasized communication and interaction as the ultimate goal of learning a language. In response to the question about what activities did she conduct to make her students practice four skills of English language and why she said:

To develop the speaking skill of the students, I usually try to throw my lecture in correct English pronunciation to make the students to be familiar with the accentual variations. The students are asked to listen to BBC news and they are sometimes showed some English video clips in the class. These activities help them to be accustomed with the correct pronunciation of different words as well as improve their vocabulary. To develop the speaking abilities of the students, first of all I give emphasis on increasing their range of vocabulary and accuracy. Then I teach them phonetics for the accuracy of their pronunciation. Moreover, I use to give them ideas regarding the differences between American and British accents of English language that is very effective to develop their language proficiency. Very often in class they get engaged in conversation on different topics.

The teacher said that the curriculum they used in this university was basically literature based and is not appropriate and adequate for teaching English language. Only few courses are there on language which was also not so sufficient to fulfill the demands.

The purpose of EFL teacher interview was to explore the effectiveness of the methods and the appropriateness of the materials for teaching EFL speaking at the tertiary level of education in Bangladesh. The discussion above has given a clear picture of the existing scenario of teaching EFL speaking in the private universities in Bangladesh.

Recommendations

The results of the study show that some measures should be taken to bring effective changes in the field of teaching English language to the tertiary level learners in Bangladesh. Some recommendations are made in this part of the chapter for promoting English teaching and learning of the departments of English in the private universities in Bangladesh. The recommendations are made in relation to the findings of the study.

1. They should create temporary and permanent groups combining weak and competent students.
2. The teachers should use English as a medium of communication in the classroom.
3. Teachers must avoid traditional lecture based instructions.
4. The teacher should have perfect knowledge about the teaching methodologies and approaches.
5. The university administrations should monitor from the curriculum development process to the students' ultimate competency level after the completion of every course.
6. The university authorities should update the curriculums every year so that they can ensure international quality in education. They should also update the present assessment system.
7. The university administration should include English proficiency test in the admission process.
8. The curriculum developers should consider the needs of the students with the highest possible care.

9. The administration should fund English department for material adaptation and for arranging supplementary materials. Perfect materials could promote language teaching and learning. In this regard they could hire foreign experts.

Conclusions

The research has examined the scenario of teaching EFL speaking at the Tertiary level in Bangladesh. The researcher has explained the results got from the qualitative data analysis. He has seen that the scenario of teaching EFL speaking at tertiary level in Bangladesh is not up to the mark. The research also tried to figure out the problems of the EFL teachers regarding, the effectiveness of the method and the materials used by the teachers Based on the findings, the researcher has put forward some specific recommendations for improving the present scenario of teaching English in Bangladesh. The researcher believes that the present study will amazingly help the stakeholders develop a standard EFL teaching environment for the tertiary level students.

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TEACHING EFL TO THE STUDENTS AT TERTIARY LEVEL

17

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