

English Speaking Problems of Bengali Learners: A Case Study of Selected Secondary Schools in a Native District in Bangladesh

Esat Tamanna Megha and Dr. Kusumika Sarkar

Department of English
Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh
Uttar Pradesh, India

esattamanna@gmail.com, Phone: +8801710559135

Abstract

English, undoubtedly and indirectly, is one of the factors which decides the future of the students. We cannot negate the importance of English because of its broad acceptance and understanding worldwide. Considering the effectiveness of communication speaking is the most important skill for communication. Many non-native learners find it arduous to communicate through spoken English. English is a global language, and we cannot ignore its significance in our life. It is strenuous for the non-native learners to communicate effectively, and bear problems using a foreign language to express their thoughts. They stop communicating because they face irrational impediments or cannot find the proper words and eloquences. The central focus of this paper is to uncover the constituents which problems faced by the students from speaking English. Because of mother tongue intervention and ineffectual education, the Bengali-speaking learner of (EFL) can barely comprehend. English intonation and their speech, therefore, appear outrageous and even incomprehensible. In this paper, the author essentially tried to find out the issues which are liable for speaking problems of the learners and guide a survey among language learners from five secondary level schools which are located in the Panchagarh district of Bangladesh. This study has been performed based on the experiment on 150 secondary level students from 5 different schools, and data received from the different students has been analyzed numerically. Finally, based on the data, the author provided recommendations to overcome the English-speaking problem.

Keywords: Bengali speakers, learning English, high schools, Bangladesh, Speaking, Communication, Bengali medium and English learning.

Introduction

English, because of being the international language, is spoken as a first language by 400 million people (Estglobal, 2020), all over the world. Learning English is so crucial that without English we cannot even think of access to the whole world or making the world a Global Village. English gives us access to the whole world- a world of trade, a world of business, a world of entertainment etc. English gives us access to the billions of web pages of information that might not be possible without English. Skills in communication in English are very important in the tourism as well as many other sectors. English, nowadays, is a medium of research connecting researchers all over the world and making them able to share and gather knowledge.

Understanding the importance of speaking English many educational institutions set English as a medium of learning all over the world. Speech communication is considered to be the simplest form of communication where influential speakers should deliver their message to the listeners. Though English is the international language, many students suffer from being unable to communicate effectively through speaking and their communication skills are not up to the level of expectation. To discover the problems in English speaking researchers in this article had some case studies on some selected secondary schools in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is a South Asian country where Bengali is the predominant language as it is the mother tongue of the Bengali nation. Bangladesh is the country where people fought for their language and this country was created based on language. 98% of the people of this country speak Bengali (Bhuiyan, 2019). English is a second language and for some other reasons, the quality of speaking English among Bengali learners is somewhat below standard. Though some of the schools, here in Bangladesh, use English as the first language, these schools are known as English medium schools, and most of the schools are Bengali medium. Bangladesh is a fast-growing nation, according to the recent reports- e.g., surpassing India in GDP, and improvement in the English language in Bangladesh has become a prior concern, considering the importance of English (Rahman et al., 2019). Nowadays in Bangladesh, lots of importance have been put on providing education in the English language, both lettering, and speaking, and in the National Education Policy of Bangladesh English is recognized as an indispensable means to build a knowledge-based nation.

Speaking English is the first criteria for effective national or international communication which is also now an unavoidable condition because the world is a 'Global Village'. In this article, we have tried to find out some of the reasons for the English-speaking problem of the Bengali students through a case study in five selected secondary schools.

Objectives of This Study

- i. Finding out the factors responsible for the difficulties in English speaking of the Bengali learners.
- ii. Helping the Bengali learners to overcome the difficulties in English speaking.
- iii. Making them aware of the factors that affect English speaking.
- iv. Finding out the problematic areas, influenced by the mother tongue, in English speaking.
- v. Discovering the connections among the regional accents that create problems in English speaking.
- vi. To help tertiary learners overcome speaking difficulties which are produced due to inter - lingual factors.

Background Study

Lack of proficiency in English speaking acts as major barrier to higher communication. But the English - speaking problems are unexplored in the small city of Bangladesh named Panchagarh. The aim of this study is to find out the English - speaking problems and ways to improve the condition.

Speaking

Factors that Influence Speaking

1. Use of Mother Tongue

All the nations in the world have got their mother tongue. The Bengali learners, the native language here in Bangladesh is Bengali, communicate in their daily life using Bengali. It is difficult for them to converse and learn English as it differs from their mother tongue. Challenges in acquiring English may be a dilemma for anyone of any utterance setting out to procure a different semantics. While training in English, the pedagogy of pronunciation is not given much attention. The number of dialects is so big that it is essentially difficult to address all the accents in a classroom. This can be considered to be the most severe hurdle in Bangladesh during teaching the English language. The areas of sound relating to spoken English and pronunciation in the Bangladeshi context needs to be consciously addressed to counter the challenge and to make a native-like accent in Bangladeshi learners more probable. The importance of pronunciation in communication cannot be denied. It is important as grammar and vocabulary. Yet, the testimony of the mother tongue's impact on English is very prominent. Errors in pronunciation may be due to many upshots. The errors that are generally made in pronunciation are because of variations in the sound system and spelling symbols connecting the mother tongue and English. A teacher can be considered a model for accurate speaking in a class. The probability of achieving a native-like articulation is more comfortable when the second language is acquainted with the

learners before adolescence. We can meet this challenge by practicing the mother tongue relocation mechanism that appeared in an ideal language lab.

2. Vocabulary

All four areas of communication (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) can be improved with a strong vocabulary. School achievements are directly linked to the germination of vocabulary. Vocabulary is one of the most important skills needed for teaching and learning a foreign language. It is absolutely important to know what the words mean. The English language mentor will necessitate utilizing other maneuverings also to supplement the level of thesaurus of the English as a second language apprentice. One can increase vocabulary by the use of suffixes and prefixes. There are numerous manageable yet powerful tactics to influence and intensify the thesaurus of English as a second language learner.

3. Fear of Making Mistakes

Getting out of your comfort zone will rapidly enhance your language learning abilities. You need to get over your fear of making a mistake while speaking. Mistakes will occur, even in your native language. No need to dwell on them and let them keep you away from practicing the language.

4. Shyness

One of the reasons for students feeling shy is when they speak English, they presume they will invent bewilderment when they communicate. They are also frightened of being snickered at by their companions. Students are expected to consider fine of making mistakes in their learning.

There are many tips out there that will help you feel less shy:

- i. Speak slowly: There is no need to make it look like you are as fluent in English as you are in your mother tongue. Speaking slowly will help you organize your thoughts and feel calmer.
- ii. Ask questions: Asking questions is not only a great way to feel engaged in a conversation but is also an excellent way to feel in control of the dialogue.
- iii. Act confident: Many studies are now showing that by acting confident, people essentially become more confident.
- iv. Use filler words: There is nothing wrong with using “ums”, “errs” and “ahs” when you speak.

- v. Practice: This is the most important tip of all. The most effective way of becoming a better speaker is by practicing speaking. You can find a speaking partner you feel comfortable with so that you won't feel shy or judged.
- vi.

5. Pronunciation

There are many elements of efficient communication. The most basic form is to utilize the language accurately. Pronunciation is an appearance of linguistic communication that makes the communication more charming and efficacious. Pronunciation performs an indispensable part in the sound system of any language.

6. Confidence

Confidence is an interesting thing. Some people just naturally seem to have it, even if they are 'not necessarily the best at something. For the rest of us, though, it's something we need to develop over time.

7. Lack of Motivation

When someone notices that he/she cannot communicate with others, he/she is expected to suffer from a lack of motivation.

Methodology

This study has been performed on 150 secondary-level students from 5 different schools in the Panchagarh district of Bangladesh. The snowball technique has been used to collect data. The duration of the data collection is from October 2020 to November 2020. Data received from the different students has been analyzed numerically.

Results and Data Analysis

A wide range of schools, depending on the ranking, has been selected for the experiment. Name of the schools are given below:

1. Panchagarh B. P. Govt. High School
2. Panchagarh Govt. Girls High School
3. Pouro Adarsha High School, Panchagarh
4. Barrister Jamiruddin Sarkar High School
5. Dewan Hat High School, Panchagarh.

Google Forms were used to collect the data. Along with the answers to the questions set by investigators in the Google Forms other data like age, address and email addresses were collected.

Result of the Interview of the Students

As mentioned earlier in the previous section, 150 students of the secondary school level have been interviewed and asked different questions to understand their level of speaking. Let's discuss some of the topics.

- i. All the students believe speaking is a powerful mode of communication and have a desire to obtain efficient speaking skills.
- ii. 70% of the students are fully aware of English phonetics and phonology also they understand the lack of pronunciation and want to perform like Native speakers.
- iii. In an effort of finding out the weakness in speaking English, we found that their syllabus and current education system do not fully focus on speaking.

Students over the world are languishing immensely with their education interfered by the COVID-19 pandemic. There are now schemes for starting a blended, hybrid education policy, utilizing both online and offline platforms. The research is designed following qualitative data like interviews. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all educational institutions are closed, so the researcher has gone to the student's homes and collected data. Analysis of students' observations is also a major part of the process of data analysis of this research. The questionnaire was escorted among 150 students of five secondary schools of Panchagarh city namely Panchagarh B. P Govt High school 30 students, Panchagarh Govt Girls High school 30 students, Pouro Adarsha High school 30 students, Barrister Jamiruddin Sarkar High school 30 students and Dewan Hat High school 30 students. Among the respondents, 75 were male students and 75 were female students. The responders were interrogated about the classroom communication and the medium of lecture delivery at the secondary level only 25% of them reported that their classroom communication was in English and 45% had a classroom environment of both languages. The majority (70%) received lectures in Bengali. Though the curriculum and texts rendered by the National Curriculum and Text Book Board (NCTB) of the country highlight four skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) 40% of students acknowledge that they did not understand the presence of this accent. Moreover, 50% of them acknowledged that they were not forced to speak in English by their teachers and 25% students said that their classroom environment failed to provide them an opportunity to use their skills of English speaking and listening. 20 students gave their opinion about the English syllabus to the SSC course which according to them is not sufficient for promoting listening and speaking English. The result conducted so far exactly recognized that the

students did not believe that schools performed a significant part in developing their speaking ability. Now let's see in data perspective:

Table 5.1: Number of participants and their institutions'

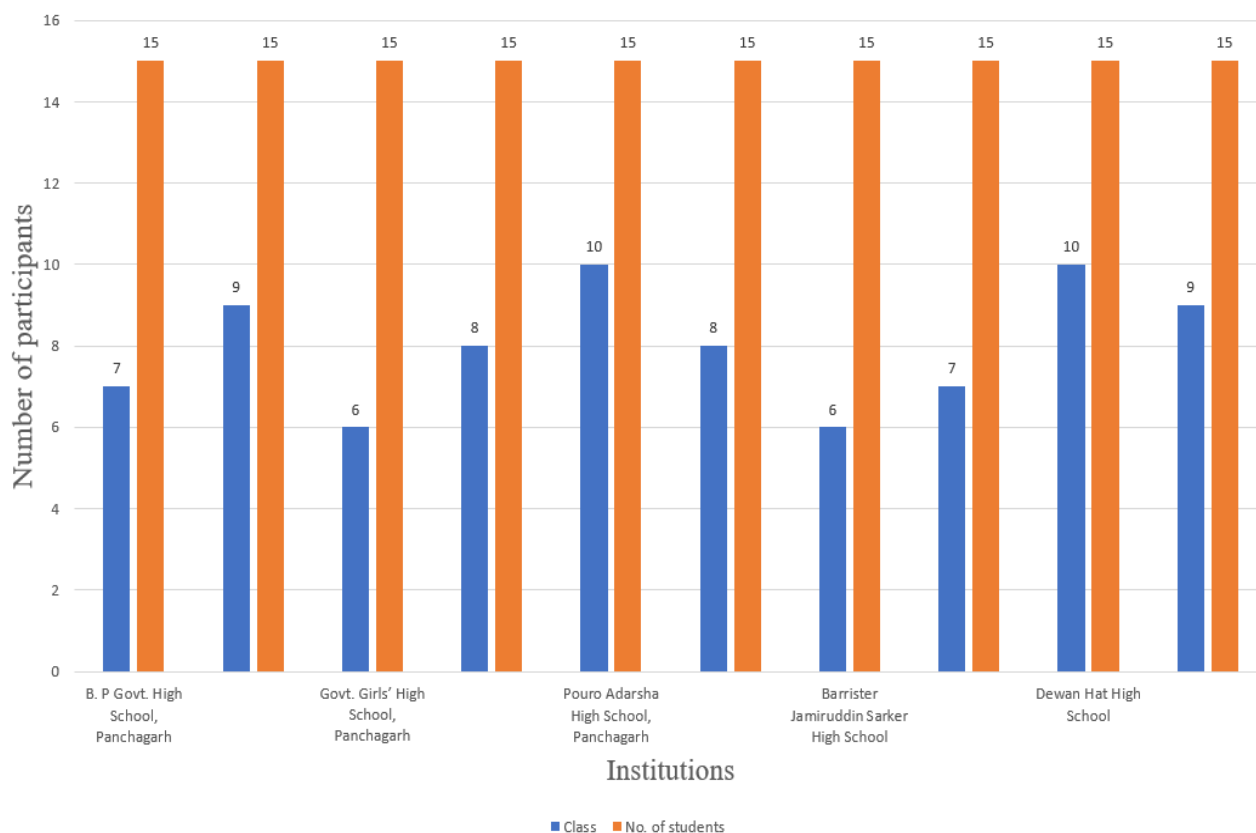
Institution	Class	No. of students
B. P Govt. High School, Panchagarh	7	15
	9	15
Govt. Girls' High School, Panchagarh	6	15
	8	15
Pouro Adarsha High School, Panchagarh	10	15
	8	15
Barrister Jamiruddin Sarker High School	6	15
	7	15
Dewan Hat High School	10	15
	9	15
Total	-	150

Table 5.2: Results of the interview

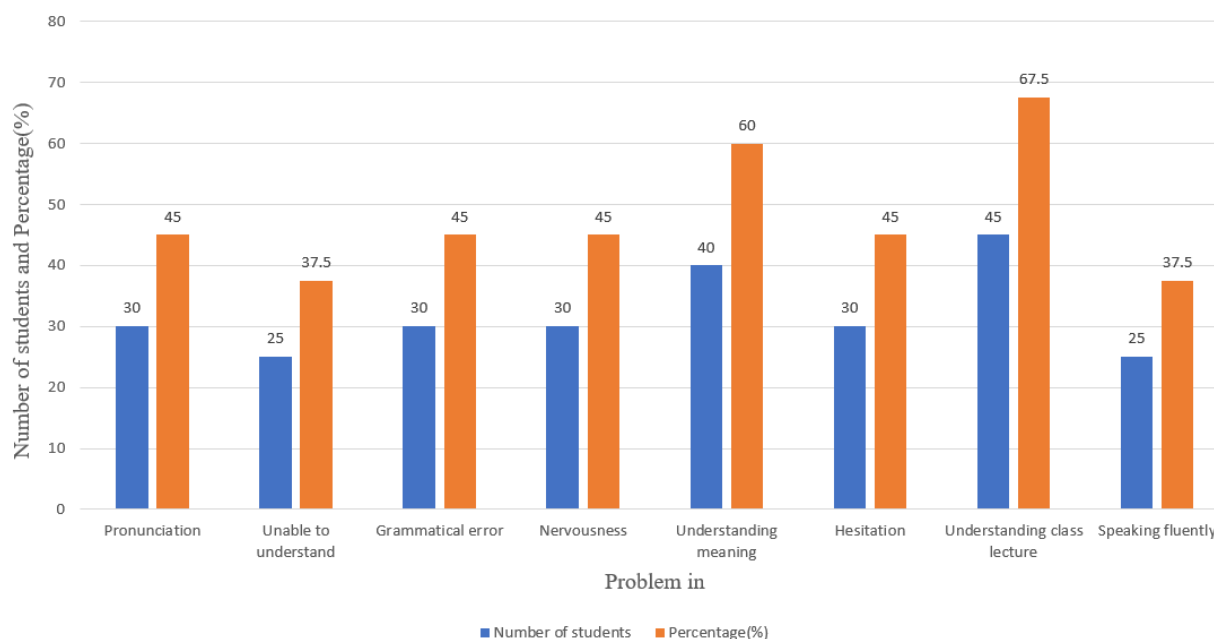
S. L No.	Problem in	Number of students	Percentage(%)
1	Pronunciation	30	45
2	Unable to understand	25	37.5
3	Grammatical error	30	45

4	Nervousness	30	45
5	Understanding meaning	40	60
6	Hesitation	30	45
7	Understanding class lecture	45	67.5
8	Speaking fluently	25	37.5

Number of participants and their institutions



Results of the interview



Limitations of This Study

Main challenge of this study was to get students and interview them because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Importance was given to the accuracy of data but because of students wearing a mask, it was difficult to measure their pronunciations and fluency properly.

Another limitation of this study is that students in the Panchagarh district were interviewed. Moreover, students all over the district were not interviewed whereas only 6 institutions were selected. To get more accurate results about the test we are carrying out, we need more data. But as we mentioned earlier, due to the COVID-19 situation, we couldn't collect a larger amount of data.

Another limitation of this research is that data/opinion from the teachers is not included. We could not interview teachers from the mentioned institutions as most of them were not interested. This is because of the pandemic. A clearer idea about the students and their English-speaking condition could be obtained from the teachers' opinions.

Despite the limitations, in the future, it can be conducted in border areas with more students and get more data on speaking of the Bengali students.

Recommendation

Based on the data, mentioned above, the following recommendations are given to overcome the English-speaking problem.

1. Teachers should be careful about the pronunciation of words so that students can get exposed to the correct pronunciation.
2. Different kinds of educational materials, directed at both the sense of hearing and sight called 'Audio-Visual-Aid' should be used.
3. Students should take part in interschool and intraschool debating competitions.
4. Different kinds of practical sessions can be added to the syllabus so that students are bound to attend English speaking.
5. Specific courses on English pronunciation can be added to the syllabus. National Curricular for English Textbook syllabus has been reviewed and we think it's not sufficient for the students to improve their pronunciation. This requires that teachers should also know the correct pronunciation of the words; so sufficient training for the teachers should be arranged.
6. The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) chart should be arranged.
7. Based on the importance of Communication in our life, different kinds of Communication Workshops, both for the teachers and the students, can be arranged in different institutions locally and nationally.

Conclusion

A survey of 150 students has been done. School is a place where different kinds of good practices are taught, and teachers and the management of the schools have to focus on the English speaking of the students. Bangladesh, as its mother tongue is Bengali, is situated in the south-east of Asia, students here suffer from the English-speaking problems. Most of the students here are afraid of speaking English in front of people. We found that majority of the students have problems with pronunciation and speaking fluently because of not having the habit of speaking English in daily life. Students can focus on all four skills and a little bit more importance can be put on English speaking.

Acknowledgement

I wish to express my heartiest gratitude and honorable submission to my supervisor Dr. Kusumika Sarkar, Lecturer of English Department, Aligarh Muslim University, for her valuable recommendations, support, and encouraging enthusiasm throughout the entire process of performing this research paper. Last but not the least, I would like to thank my family and friends for their constant source of inspiration.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 22:9 September 2022

Esat Tamanna Megha and Dr. Kusumika Sarkar

English Speaking Problems of Bengali Learners: A Case Study of Selected Secondary Schools in a Native District in Bangladesh

References

Bhuiyan, B.A., Urmi, IJ, Chowdhury ME, Rahman T, Hasan As, Simkhada. P. (2019) Assessing whether medical language is a barrier to receiving healthcare services in Bangladesh: an exploratory study.

Estglobal (2020). Received from <https://www.etsglobal.org/pl/en/blog/news/importance-of-learning-english#:~:text=1.,second%20language%20in%20the%20world>

Rahman, M. M., Islam, M. S., Karim, A., Chowdhury, T. A., Rahman, M. M., Seraj, P. M. I., & Singh, M. K. M. (2019). English language teaching in Bangladesh today: Issues, outcomes, and implications. *Language Testing in Asia*, 9. doi: 10.1186/s40468-019-0085-8
