



English Language Speaking Anxiety (Elsa) Among the Undergraduate Students of the Private Universities in Bangladesh

Muhammad Afsar Kayum

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Manarat international University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

* Corresponding Author: **Muhammad Afsar Kayum**

Article Info

ISSN (online): 2583-8261

Volume: 04

Issue: 04

July - August 2025

Received: 10-05-2025

Accepted: 12-06-2025

Page No: 77-81

Abstract

English Language Speaking Anxiety (ELSA) is a significant barrier to effective communication for many undergraduate students in private universities in Bangladesh. This study investigates the prevalence, causes, and impacts of ELSA among this demographic, exploring its implications for academic performance and personal development. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through surveys and interviews with students across multiple private universities. Findings reveal that ELSA is influenced by factors such as limited exposure to English-speaking environments, fear of negative evaluation, and cultural inhibitions. The study also identifies a correlation between ELSA and reduced participation in classroom discussions, lower confidence in professional settings, and hindered career prospects. Recommendations include implementing targeted language support programs, fostering interactive speaking environments, and integrating anxiety-reducing strategies into the curriculum to enhance students' English-speaking confidence and overall academic experience.

Keywords: English Language Speaking Anxiety, ELSA, Undergraduate Students, Private Universities

Introduction

In the context of verbal English communication in Bangladesh, Bengali medium students always struggle due to their lack of exposure to communicative English language context. The rigid Grammar Translation curriculum at their secondary and higher secondary level hamper their learning and acquisition ability at the tertiary level verbal English classroom. The communicative Language Teaching (CLT) modules also fail in most cases due to the lack of resources and logistics. At the same time, the difference between the culture of learning and culture of classroom in both tertiary and secondary level also creates obstacle in their language learning. As a result, the sole purpose of oral communication course fails. Therefore, the students entering the universities often show the lack of confidence in speaking English. Many of them who enter the universities from the Bengali Medium institutions face difficulties in the universities where the lessons, lectures and all activities follow the English Medium pattern. So, the current study is an attempt to give ideas and motivations to the interlocutors and students to use the speaking skills in English language to keep pace with the fast-running world.

Background of the study

"Anxiety is a psychological construct, commonly described by psychologists as a state of apprehension, a vague fear that is only indirectly associated with an object" (Hilgard, Atkinson, & Atkinson, 1971 cited in Scovel, 1978). According to Hashemi and Abbasi (2013)^[5], when anxiety is related to learners' second or foreign language learning process, it is known as second/foreign language anxiety (p. 640). Horwitz (2001) added a psychological dimension to language anxiety saying that it is a factor that creates a negative effect on learners' psychology (p. 114).

For example, a shy student may feel anxious when asked to give a short talk in front of the whole class. Anxious students might not be able to successfully pass oral tasks due to their anxiety impeding their ability to fare well (Yan & Horwitz, 2008) ^[13]. In contrast, relaxed students would perform better because they do not experience the language anxiety impedance (Woodrow, 2006) ^[12].

What causes language anxiety is a central question of this research study and is of interest to all language teachers and learners, as well as SLA scholars who are interested in classroom anxiety. English is a compulsory subject in Bangladeshi mainstream schools and colleges. In spite of that, the majority of the students are not competent enough in English, especially in speaking. It is axiomatic that to most of the students taking an attempt to speak English is like facing the ghost in the dark. They have a tendency to think it as an impossible attempt to achieve the English-speaking proficiency. Moreover, most of the students think English as a 'Subject' to pass rather a language to speak which is one of the obvious reasons behind the inefficiency in this oral skill. Majority of Bangladeshi University students, specially the students of the private universities experience anxiety while speaking English language.

Problem Statement

Many teachers at tertiary level do not take learners' speaking anxiety in classroom into account though they are aware of this problem. When learners at various private universities enroll in different courses, they are offered only to develop their English but most of the time no systematic steps are taken to reduce their anxiety. As a result, learners who have English speaking anxiety face difficulties when they are required to speak even after learning the language for a long time. The scenario is quite alarming more in private universities than in Government universities. As the Government universities offer more advantages and resources with less or almost free of cost, many meritorious students can enter after a successful competitive entrance exam; On the other side, a majority of the students giving higher tuition fees enter the private universities display a more speaking anxieties. Hence, It is time that systematic attention be paid on this issue to tackle language anxiety and thereby improve students' speaking proficiency in English.8

Objectives of the study

The main objectives of the study are to find out the current scenario of the Private University fresh English learners' speaking skills, speaking anxiety, the causes of their difficulties in speaking English language and the possible ways to overcome these difficulties. Hence, to conduct this study, the following objectives have been laid out.

1. To find out a picture of speaking skills among the English undergraduate fresh learners at the private universities in Bangladesh
2. To identify the problem encountered by the students in the process of speaking.
3. To investigate the causes of the problems encountered by the students in the process of speaking
4. To resolve the problem and findings the way out to overcome this speaking difficulty.

Research question

In correspondence to the above, the research questions of this study have been formulated as follows:

- a. What is the current level of speaking English skills among the fresh undergraduate English learners at the private universities in Bangladesh?
- b. Which problems and anxieties students face in speaking?
- c. What are the causes of the problems and anxieties encountered by the students in the process of speaking?
- d. What are the ways to overcome those speaking difficulties?

Research Design and Methodology

The aim of the research is to find out the factors responsible for students' anxiety in English speaking in the classroom of Bangladeshi Private Universities. With a view to unearthing the sources of anxiety, a mixed-method approach has been followed, linking both qualitative (open-ended questions in the semi structured interviews) and quantitative (questionnaire). "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale" (FLCAS), developed by Horwitz *et al.* (1986) ^[6] is used in order to collect quantitative data. "Mixed method research is a methodology for conducting research that involves collecting, analyzing, and integrating quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or a longitudinal program of inquiry (Creswell *et al.* 2003) ^[4].

Sampling

Participants (N = 27) studying in English in a well-reputed private universities (names of participants and the University being kept anonymous) were selected in order to collect quantitative data and participants (N = 5) were selected to collect qualitative data. This survey was based on random sampling to make up the sample.

Instrumentation

To motivate the students to give reliable responses, they were informed that there was no right or wrong answers. Moreover, to maintain confidentiality, they were told that they do not have to write their names on the questionnaire sheet. This questionnaire took about 10-12 minutes to complete. This was a qualitative research. The collected data were sorted out and distinguished in chart. Afterward, the data were analyzed in qualitative approach.

Validity and reliability of questionnaires

To ensure validity and reliability of the questionnaire all the items included in the questionnaires were based on the literature review of this study. The items basically have been asked for the participants' opinion about the factors responsible for English language speaking anxiety. A pilot survey will be conducted with three private university students and then necessary changes of the items were made in the questionnaire after consulting with the supervisor.

Data collection and Interpretation

The descriptive and the contextual methods have been followed for the data analysis. The two methods have been applied in the data analysis of the present study because these methods are inexpensive, time saving and easily understandable. The findings of the present study are shown in the pie charts and tables, and then narrative description

have been presented in the text in a quantitative manner. Finally, the data is interpreted in the contextual and the descriptive methods. The presentation of the findings of 20 questions have been presented step by step in the proceeding pages.

Item 1: What is your academic background?

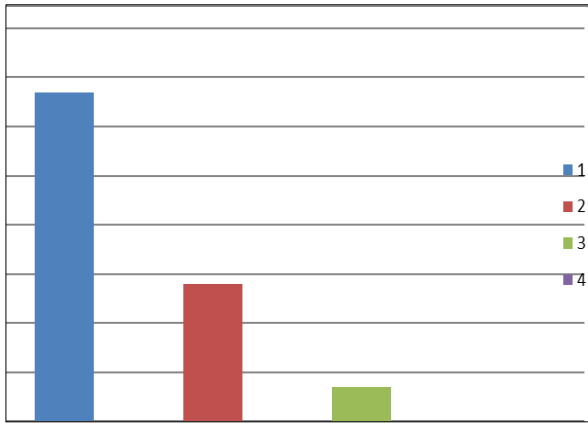


Fig 1: Student Academic background

The above chart shows 67% student’s academic background was bangle medium, 7% students belong from English medium and 28.6% student’s academic background was madrasha. The highest percentage of student’s which is 67% students belongs from bangla medium. This is one of reason that the student’s getting problem during their speaking.

Item-2: Do you read English books, newspapers, journals etc. at home?

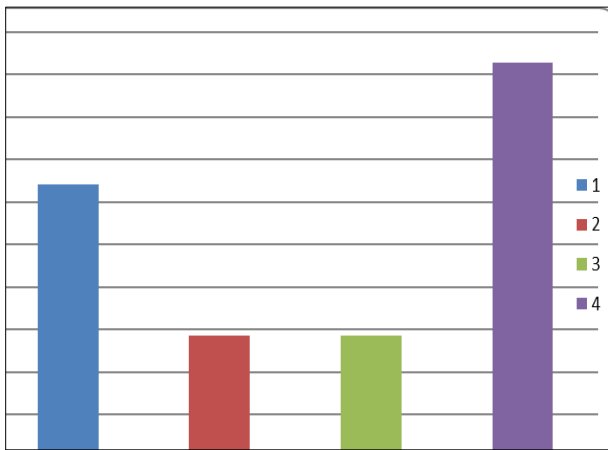


Fig 2: Students English reading practice at home

The students show different opinions about reading English books, newspapers, journals etc. at home. The results for the item suggest that 37% students read English books, newspaper, journal etc. at home. 13% students say they do not read anything at home. 11% students say the often read English books, newspaper, journal etc. at home. And 39% students say they have read different books, newspaper, journal etc. at home.

Item-3: Do you practice English at home with your parents?

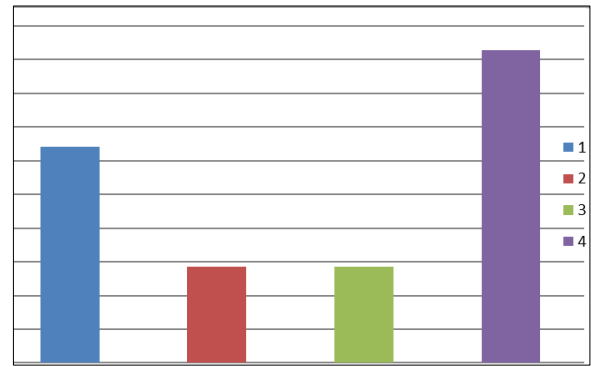


Fig 3:

The above statistics reflect that 24% students practice English speaking at home with their parents, 35% students do not practice English speaking at home, 23% students say that they have often practice English at home, and 17% students say sometimes they have practiced English speaking at home with their parents. It is one of the reasons that the students of Bangladesh are weak in English speaking.

Table 1: In the similar way, the next 16 questions have been asked and the collected data have been tabulated:

| Questions | Survey Results |
|---|--|
| 1. What is your academic background? | a. Bangla medium-67% b. English Medium-7% c. Madrasha28% |
| 2. Do you read English books, newspapers, journals etc. at home? | a. Yes-32% b. No-14% c. Often-14% d. Sometimes-46% e. Not at all-0% |
| 3. Do you practice English speaking at home? | a. Yes-32% b. No-14% c. Often-21% d. Sometimes-30% e. Not at all-5% |
| 4. Do you memorize oral presentation? | a. Yes-85% b. No-5% c. Often-5% d. Sometimes-5% e. Not at all-0% |
| 5. Do you consciously try to improve English speaking skill? | a. Yes -48% b. No- 10% c. Often- 13% d. Sometimes- 29% e. Not at all- 0% |
| 6. Do you think your English medium curriculum is helpful for the improvement of your English speaking skill? | a. Yes- 62% b. No- 12% c. Often- 7% d. Sometimes- 10% e. Not at all- 2% |
| 7. Do you feel shy while trying to speak in English? | a. Yes- 42% b. No- 14% c. Often-14% d. Sometimes- 13% e. Not at all- 31% |
| 8. Do you practice speaking with your friends outside the class room? | a. Yes- 28% b. No- 36% c. Often- 20% d. Sometimes- 16% e. Not at al- 2% |
| 9. Do you feel your teachers are | a. Yes- 59% |

| | |
|---|---|
| helpful for the improvement of your speaking skill? | b. No- 10% c. Not everyone- 27% d. Not at all- 4% |
| 10. Do you think your teachers are good English speakers? | a. Yes- 51% b. No- 17% c. Not everyone-31% d. None- 1% |
| 11. Do you think your secondary and higher secondary courses were helpful for the improvement of your speaking skills? | a. Yes- 45% b. No- 17% c. Sometimes- 23% d. Not at all- 7% |
| 12. Which environment is more helpful for speaking you think? | a. Institutional- 25% b. family- 51% c. Both- 22% d. none but yourself- 2% |
| 13. How much time do you spend every day to practice speaking English? | a. 30 minutes- 4% b. 1 hour- 15% c. More than 1 hour- 11% d. Not fixed- 66% e. Not at all- 4% |
| 14. Do you think coaching centre for learning spoken English are more helpful than your regular institution? | a. Yes -12% b. No- 24% c. fifty-fifty - 35% d. Not at all- 29% |
| 15. What do you think is needed for spoken English skill? You can select more than one answer. | a. Fluency with correct and accurate grammar-26% b. Don't speak till you don't learn it perfectly-24% c. fluency with less grammatical mistakes-4% d. try to speak from the very beginning-44% |
| 16. Do you think listening to music, English news, watching movie is helpful for the improvement of speaking skill? | a. Yes-58% b. No-14% c. Often-8% d. Sometimes-19% e. Not at all-1% |
| 17. Do you think chatting through e-mail in English could be helpful to improve your speaking skill? | a. Yes-45% b. No-8% c. Often-11% d. Sometime-35% e. Not at all-1% |
| 18. Do you think extracurricular activities viz- English club, drama club, debate club etc. are helpful to improve your English speaking skill? | a. Yes-53% b. No-11% c. Often-12% d. Sometimes-24% e. Not at all-0% |
| 19. Which grade will you give to your spoken English? | a. Excellent-13% b. good-55% c. Ok-29% d. None-3% e. Not at all-0% |
| 20. What do you think is the main problem of speaking? Please specify... | a. Grammatica-114% b. vocabulary-32% c. lack of practice-36% d. suitable environment-14% e. proper assistance-4% |

10. Results and Findings

The present study finds some problems and prospects for the existing conditions of English speaking skill at the university level. The findings of the study are briefly presented below:-

1. The present study finds that most of the students are from Bangla medium school or colleges. This is one of the reasons for their poor speaking skill.
2. Students are not serious in reading English books, newspaper, journals etc at home.
3. The study reveals that most of the students do not

practice speaking at home.

4. Students feel shy when they start speaking with strangers.
5. Students do not learn new words with synonyms and meaning.
6. The students blame that their teacher is little helpful in improving English speaking.
7. Students, in improving their speaking give emphasis on their family learning than the learning at their institution.
8. Most of the students do not practice speaking outside the classroom.
9. The present study finds that most of the students do not have proper schedule for practicing speaking.
10. The present study discovers that the lack of practice is one of the main problems for the improvement of their speaking. They also do not get suitable environment for practicing speaking.

Speaking Anxiety in Bangladesh context

However, the above findings are not beyond Bangladeshi context. The Bangladeshi learners also feel the similar challenges in learning, speaking and practicing English. Arju (2011) [2] has said that "While commenting on the ESL learners' competence in speaking, language instructors frequently complain that the learners are lagging behind because of having an inadequate stock of vocabulary" (p. 52). However, a regular practice in the classroom may enhance the learners' vocabulary. But, it is unfortunate that the Bangladeshi students do not have that facility. The crowded and large classes are causing the constant challenge to practice speaking to these students. Regarding the number of students in the language classroom, Sinha & Idris (2013) [11] has said that "In a language classroom, we need a limited number of students" (p. 173). But, in reality, nearly all English classrooms in the public sectors in Bangladesh are overcrowded and often have as many as 200 students in them (Siddique, 2004, p.3). Siddique (2004) has carried out a study in Bangladesh and pointed out that administrative set up, teacher-centered classrooms, large classes and cultural conflicts are the most common challenges prevailing among Bangladeshi students.

In Bangladeshi classrooms, most of the teachers do not know or adapt the different style to teach language. For example, Sinha (2001) has conducted a study in the Bangladeshi context and found that in Bangladeshi classrooms, teachers do not use any energetic way to teach English. Thus, students get less energetic and lose their interest in learning the spoken English.

There is a huge scarcity of competent teachers in teaching English. In fact, "Bangladesh is one of the few countries of the world where teachers can start teaching without any formal training (Siddique, 2004, p. 2). Finding the unfriendly and non-supportive environment, the Bangladeshi students are losing their motivation in learning spoken English. As a result, the students who have a minimum interest to speak in English, lose it. "Most of the Bangladeshi students are very reluctant to speak in English irrespective of their proficiency in one or the other skill" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 4). Ahmed (2006) and Chowdhury & Shaila's (2011) researches have pointed out that the large classes, lack of confidence, lack of co-operative and less access of communicative environment, students' shyness are the main hindrances behind Bangladeshi students' learning and speaking English.

Limitations and Obstacles

The study faced a few problems in collecting data and the availability of the resources in the relevant field. Besides, the participatory students mostly have provided general answers rather going deep into their answers. The questions are open ended questions. Since this is their first experience of giving opinions, they have been cautious while giving their answers. In some answers, they have not opened up in true sense.

For example, in question number 9, all of the students have agreed that teachers are cooperative but didn't explain in what ways teachers are cooperative. Perhaps, they have fear that negative answers might hamper their grades even after the assurance that their identification is secured. In question 10, all of the students have agreed that they participate in the class activities. However, it can be assumed that this participation is not self-triggered rather forced participation by the teachers in most cases.

Conclusion

Speaking is "the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts" (Keyi, 2006) Speaking is a crucial part of foreign language learning and teaching. Despite its importance for many years, teaching speaking has been undervalued and English language teachers have continued to teach speaking just as a repetition of drills or memorization of dialogues. However, today's world requires that the goal of teaching speaking should improve students' communicative skills, because, only in that way, students can express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rules appropriate in each communicative circumstance. To sum up, the study has investigated some of the major causes of English language speaking anxiety among Bangladeshi private university English undergraduate students. It explored the perceptions of 25 students studying English in well reputed private Universities. To fill the gap in literature, a mixed method approach will be utilized to produce a more reliable and valid data. Thus, the study diagnosed the sole causes of this problem and suggested the possible solutions so that the Bangladeshi EFL learners at the private universities can use the spoken English language with more knowledge, more confidence and enthusiasm.

References

1. Ahmad SS. Communicative English in Bangladesh: A feedback. Stamford J Bangladesh. 2006;2:1-15.
2. Arju S. A study on ESL vocabulary acquisition needs and classroom practice: a Bangladeshi context. Stamford J English. 2011;6:54-71.
3. Chowdhury N, Shaila SM. Teaching speaking in large classes: crossing the barriers. J English. 2011;6:68-81.
4. Creswell JW, Clark VLP, Gutmann ML, Hanson WE. Advanced mixed methods research designs. In: Tashakkori A, Teddlie C, editors. Handbook of mixed methods in social & behavioral research. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications; 2003. p. 209-40.
5. Hashemi M, Abbasi M. The role of the teacher in alleviating anxiety in language classes. Int Res J Appl Basic Sci. 2013;4(3):640-6.
6. Horwitz EK, Horwitz MB, Cope J. Foreign language classroom anxiety. Mod Lang J. 1986;70(2):125-32.
7. Horwitz SM, Irwin JR, Briggs-Gowan MJ, Heenan JMB,

- Mendoza J, Carter AS. Language delay in a community cohort of young children. J Am Acad Child Adolesc Psychiatry. 2003;42(8):932-40.
8. Kayi H. Teaching speaking: Activities to promote speaking in a second language. Internet TESL J. 2006;12(11):1-6.
9. Scovel T. The effect of affect on foreign language learning: A review of the anxiety research. Lang Learn. 1978;28(1):129-42.
10. Siddique R. Another assumed ideal from the west? Stamford J English. 2004;61(1):33.
11. Sinha BS, Idris N. Shifting teachers' role in the English language classroom in Bangladesh. English Teach. 2013;42(2).
12. Woodrow L. Anxiety and speaking English as a second language. RELC J. 2006;37(3):308-28.
13. Yan JX, Horwitz EK. Learners' perceptions of how anxiety interacts with personal and instructional factors to influence their achievement in English: A qualitative analysis of EFL learners in China. Lang Learn. 2008;58(1):151-83.