Teaching Presentation Skills to Tertiary Students in Bangladesh

AKHTER JAHAN
NUSRAT JAHAN

Abstract:

This paper is an endeavor to focus on the underlying problems involved in teaching presentation skills in English to tertiary level students in Bangladesh as a part of their academic achievement. The learners, who have acquired the effective techniques of presentation, can be considered as communicatively competent. Because presentation skill is the integration of all four major skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. Though each course at tertiary level irrespective of subjects has a certain percentage of marks allotted to this skill, most of the students' level of performances in classroom presentation is not yet satisfactory. Students mainly tend to present the topic by memorization without communicating it to the audience. Therefore, the difficulties in teaching this skill have to be figured out and the students also have to be taught the basics of this skill. These in turn will help them to gain the best in their academic as well as in their professional lives. With this purpose, the study has been done through questionnaire survey both from students' and teachers' point of view and the survey results have been analyzed by several statistical tools. Thus it has been located that the problems lie mainly within the teaching techniques and methods. Besides, our age old education system is also partly responsible in this regard.

1. Introduction

Oral presentation has been identified as one of the most effective classroom activities by both EFL and ESL teachers to promote

communicative competence of the learners who are graduating into today's global village. The acquisition and learning of oral presentation skills not only enhance learners' critical thinking and analyzing abilities but also foster learners' autonomy through their growth in collaborative and interpersonal skills. Though presentation can be written and spoken, this paper deals with only oral presentation. Since Bangladeshi students are likely to be concerned with only written presentations from the very beginning of their schooling, the teaching and learning of oral presentation skills are mostly disregarded at Secondary and Higher Secondary levels. Further, it has been found that at tertiary level 86% Bangladeshi students come from Bengali medium background (Jahan 162). As a result, most of them face difficulties in learning oral presentation in English at tertiary level where each course irrespective of subjects has a certain percentage of marks allotted to this activity. Even in formal or informal speaking in English, most of our tertiary students fail to stand on their feet, either on a one to one basis, or before a group, and make a presentation that is convincing. Therefore, in order to prepare the tertiary students to face today's competitive business oriented climate, it has become obligatory for the EFL teachers of Bangladesh to know about the problems in teaching and learning these significant skills and also to take necessary measures to solve them.

2. The Study Purpose

The present study aims to focus on the gaps in and between teaching and learning oral presentation skills at tertiary level in Bangladesh both from teachers' and students' point of view. It tends to find out whether the lack of suitable application of the teaching techniques are solely responsible for causing the problems in this

field or students' lack of practice and preparation and our traditional educational system are also accountable in this regard.

3. Literature Review

Oral presentation skills are the integration of all major receptive and productive skills i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. McDonough & Shaw hold:

> Preparing learners to give short oral presentation in class to the rest of the group is useful way of achieving skills integration in the classroom…It is possible to devise a fairly rudimentary evaluation sheet where small groups of students are asked to answer questions which might cover: what they thought of the presentation; was it well organized and were they able to follow the main points; could they summarize the talk for someone who was not present; did the speaker make effective use of visual support material; what advice would they give to the speaker for future presentation. This activity can thus inter-relate the reading, writing, speaking and listening skills in a motivating way. (215)

So, while teachers are teaching these skills, they have to be particular about all four major skills. According to Richards and Rodgers:

> The range of exercise types and activities compatible with a communicative approach is unlimited, provided that such exercises … engage learners in communication, and require the use of such communicative process as information sharing, negotiation of meaning and interaction. (165)

From this perspective, oral presentation is a perfect example of the activity that can be practiced while teaching through communicative approach. Besides, during oral presentations, students are always encouraged to take an audience centred approach to communicate ideas to real people rather than merely stand up and go through the actions of delivering a speech. Now-a-days the classrooms have become an ideal place where students can gain both confidence and experience by practicing these skills before the audience, who are friendly and helpful and made up of students who will have to go through more or less the same experience.

According to Gregory speaking and communicating is not the same thing (4). We can speak to a listener but if the listener does not comprehend the massage in the way we meant it to be understood, we will fail to communicate it. As a result, during the oral presentation, speakers have to be quite careful about wording as well as the manner of presenting the speech. Gregory notes that while we are examining how speech communication works in both formal and informal speaking situations, we can identify seven components of the speech communication process (5-10):

a. Speaker: The speaker is the source or originator of a massage that is transmitted to a listener.

b. Listener: The listener is the recipient of the massage sent by the speaker and also shares part of the responsibility for communication

c. Message: The message is whatever the speaker communicates to listeners and is the combination of both verbal (i.e. words) and non-verbal (i.e. extra-linguistics feature involved in communication) symbols.

d. Channel: The channel is the medium used to communicate the massage. For oral presentation in the classroom, students' primary channel is auditory (voice), accompanied by a visual channels (gestures, facial expressions, visual aids etc.).

e. Feedback: Feedback is both verbal and nonverbal responses that listeners give to the speaker.

f. Interference: Interference is anything that blocks or hinders the accurate communication of a massage. It can be of three types: the external interference arises outside the listener (e.g. people talking loudly in the hall), the internal interference comes from within the listener (e.g. s/he might be worried about personal problem) and the speaker generated interference (e.g. use of unfamiliar words)

g. Situation: The situation is the context (time and place) in which communication occurs. Different situations call for different behaviors by both speaker and listener.

Consequentially, all these components are also involved in an effective oral presentation. Moreover, Rockland in "Teaching Presentation Skills", has mentioned seven key items that relate to oral presentations primarily in a technical environment. They are: planning a presentation, reducing anxiety, creation of the presentation, delivery of the presentation, enhancing a presentation, making technical information more interesting and how to practice a presentation (1). In "Preparing EFL Learners for Oral Presentations", King has also described almost the same step by step procedures to prepare students for oral presentation. The steps are grouping learners, choosing topics and gathering information,

handling technical problems, holding question and answer session and preparing peer and teacher evaluation forms (par.15-21).

3.1. Teachers' role

As oral presentation is a student-led activity, teachers should pay more attention to lesson planning and teaching strategies (King, "Preparing EFL Learners for Oral Presentations," par.13). Teachers need to be facilitators especially to those students who are not receptive to collaborative learning environment and feel shy and uncomfortable when learner autonomy is initiated. Besides, Rockland thinks that teachers should prepare an evaluation sheet before delivering instructions on presentation skills in the class (5). It can meet several purposes. Firstly, teachers can use it as a grading criterion. Secondly, if this form is given to students prior to presentation, it will help them to focus on what is required for a good presentation. Thirdly, by having students who are not presenting fill out the evaluation form as a peer review, it can stimulate good presentation skills. Teachers can also help students in taking the following steps which will lead to an effective classroom presentation:

1. Introducing presenters to basics of effective communication
2. Concentrating on a focus
3. Preparing a content
4. Organizing the speech
5. Presenting the speech

These steps are explained bellow:

3.1.1. Introducing Presenters to Basics of Effective Communication

To introduce presenters to basics of effective communication, firstly, teachers should make the students familiar with the main

components of speech communication as stated above. Secondly, they have to provide students with both verbal and printed instructions to take preparation for presentation beforehand. It will not only help students to reduce their speech anxiety but also give them a preview of the activity and a clear understanding of teachers' expectations from them. In this way, their increasing nervousness about the presentation will be controlled and they will be able to turn this dispiriting feeling into a rather positive constructive energy which will ultimately help them to speak with "vitality and enthusiasm" (Gregory 27). To reduce students' nervousness, teachers should also encourage them to gain in depth knowledge on the presentation topic and discourage them to memorize the speech which will sound rather mechanical; discuss weaknesses and strengths of earlier presenters; help them to develop their summarizing and outlying skills; and explain the importance of using pauses, visual aids and note cards during the presentation. Finally, in order to be a good speaker, students have to become an efficient listener first. According to Carlin and Payne, "Good listeners provide far more clues to a speaker's success or failure than poor ones" (52). Therefore, teachers should encourage them to improve their analytical listening skills.

3.1.2. Concentrating on a Focus

To promote collaborative learning environment, according to King, teachers should at first divide the whole class in several groups and schedule two groups per week throughout the semester. It will help students as well as teachers to be well focused. Then, teachers have to give the groups free choices among various topics or help them to select topics according to their interests. It will inspire learners to use research strategies and give variation in classroom presentation activities. Next, teachers have to explain the purpose and the central

idea of the selected topic and the eventual outcome of the oral presentation in the class.

3.1.3. Preparing the Content

Teachers should work as mentors while students are preparing presentation content. Firstly, teachers have to inform students about the possible sources like English newspapers, magazines, websites, questionnaires, surveys, interviews, library research, radio programs etc for gathering information to prepare the content of the presentation. Then, teachers should guide them to use that information wisely and ethically with reference as well as should promote students' own ideas. Carlin and Payne think that a well-developed speech should make the proper use of a wide variety of supporting materials and the materials should be chosen for its interest to the audience, its appropriateness to the context, and its ability to support the central idea (236).

3.1.4. Organizing the Speech

Since oral presentation involves multi-skills, a carefully planned and well fabricated speech will help developing students' receptiveness to oral presentations. Osborn and Osborn has emphasized that in developing oral presentations, it is necessary to determine the appropriate design to organize thoughts. The design that is selected mainly determines how the body of speech will be structured and developed (58). Therefore, teachers have to help students to divide the whole speech sequentially into introduction, body and conclusion; should encourage them to do timed rehearsals as many times as possible; help them to identify their pronunciation errors; guide them to operate equipments; and help them in designing visual aids, outlining the main points in the note cards which they

will use while delivering the speech. Levin and Topping have also referred that the teachers should explain the main types of visual aids as being a whiteboard, flipchart, overhead projector (OHP), power point, and video, and discuss the advantages of using both visual aids and handouts (65). Again, they have to make the students understand that timed rehearsal of the presentation allows a great opportunity to assess and practice timekeeping skills, effective body language, such as eye contact and gestures, voice projection (or the lack of it) and also the content.

3.1.5. Presenting the Speech

Teachers should emphasize on students' appropriate and confident use of voice and tone modulation, confident use of body language, eye contact, comprehensible speaking rate, vocabulary and humor to communicate with the audience in the class while delivering speech. Besides, according to Carlin and Payne teachers should not allow the use of unfamiliar terms and jargons during oral presentations as much as possible. Because it will make the message ambiguous and the audience will also be bored and confused (180). Further, Lucas refers "The impact of a speech is strongly affected by how the speech is delivered…you should concentrate on speaking intelligibly, avoiding distracting mannerisms, and establishing eye contact with your listeners" (306). And teachers should be careful that students are not using filler i.e. such words as 'like', 'you know', 'ok' while presenting their speech. During the presentation, the rest of the class will take note and after the presentation they will ask questions regarding the presentation. After that, McDonough & Shaw have advised to spend sometimes with students' assessment by asking them to asses each other's work which can be termed as peer evaluation (215). Further, oral presentation in classrooms can be regarded as small sessions of

public speaking. Carlin and Payne have explained some 'benefits of learning' how to make effective public speeches such as organizational skills, writing skills, critical thinking skills, research skills, listening skills and self-confidence (9-10). So, by developing oral presentation skills, learners' all these skills will be nurtured as well.

4. The Study Method

4.1. Participants

For the questionnaire survey, one hundred students and thirty teachers have been selected at random from eight private and two public universities in Bangladesh in December 2007. The universities surveyed are Dhaka University, Jahangirnagar University, Daffodil International University, Stamford University, State University, Northern University, Eastern University, East West University and North South University.

4.2. Survey Instruments

To collect primary data, two structured questionnaires were developed following Likert (1-55) scale with different satisfaction levels of some aspects as well as some other related variables through different statements ranging from strongly satisfied (1) to strongly dissatisfied (5). Both of the questionnaires for teachers and students consisted of seven multiple choice questions and an open ended question. The questionnaires had some common and some different questions to compare and contrast the opinions of the two groups. Data were analyzed by SPSS 15.0 (Statistical Package for Social Science) and a common statistical tool like descriptive statistics was used.

4.3. Analysis of Students' Information

Descriptive analysis of the considered variables in students' information has shown the average response values along with their standard deviation in table 1.1. While analyzing data (the frequency distribution of all the variables used in this analysis can be found in Annex A Table 2.1) firstly, it has been observed that there exist vast disparity among students' responses about the satisfaction level of the oral presentation skills in English before getting teachers' instruction (Mean is 2.63 and Standard Deviation is 0.939) and the level of improvement in these skills after following teachers' instructions (Mean is 2.22 and Standard Deviation is 0.894).

Table 1.1 Descriptive Statistics of the considered variables under study

Name of the variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Satisfaction with oral presentation skills before instruction	100	2.63	.939
Satisfaction with those skills after teacher's instruction	100	2.22	.894
Rehearsal outside the class	100	3.09	1.248
Memorization of the content	100	.68	.469
Internet(the most common source)	100	.76	.429
Stage fright(the most common problem)	100	.75	.435
Peer evaluation during presentation	100	.66	.476
Valid N (list wise)	100		

It is found that a considerable number of students (48%) are only 'satisfied' with their oral presentation ability before teachers'

instruction. In contrast, this satisfaction level has gradually increased after teachers' instruction as more than half of the students (54%) are then found to be 'satisfied' and about quarter of them (18%) are found to be 'strongly satisfied'. Secondly, it has been ascertained that only quarter of the respondents (24%) rehearse presentation more than four times outside the class. Thirdly, majority of the students (68%) have widely accepted that they memorize the content of oral presentation. Fourthly, it has been observed that the highest percentage of the respondents (76%) use only internet to gather information for preparing the content of their presentation. However, more than half of the respondents (66%) use library books as the major source. Fifthly, it has been noticed that 75% of the respondents have detected 'stage fright' as one of their major problems during classroom presentation. Still, almost 68% of the respondents have located their problem as 'lack in communication skills in English' as their major problem. Finally, more than half of the respondents (66%) have replied that they like 'peer evaluation'.

4.4. Analysis of Teachers' Information

The mean satisfaction score of students' level of presentation before instruction (See table 1.2) shows that teachers' dissatisfaction score is very high (Mean is 3.47 and Standard Deviation is 0.819). Also, students' level of improvement in oral presentation skills after instruction is not satisfactory (Mean is 2.87 and Standard Deviation is 0.90) according to the teachers. As a result, (the frequency distribution of all the variables used in this analysis can be found in Annex B Table 3.1) it has been found that most of the respondents (53.3%) are 'dissatisfied' with students' level of these skills before instructions. On the contrary, a significant number of respondents (56.7%) are 'neutral' in their opinion regarding students' level of

improvement even after instruction. Again, a large number of the respondents (50%) have claimed that they prefer to assign presentation activities during the last half of the semester.

Table 1.2 Descriptive Statistics of the considered variables under study

Name of the variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Satisfaction with oral presentation skills before instruction	30	3.47	.819
Satisfaction with that skills after instruction	30	2.87	.90
Time of assigning presentation	30	2.83	.950
Taking trial presentation before graded ones	30	.33	.479
Dependence on memorization(the most common mistake)	30	.70	.466
Providing printed guideline	30	.43	.504
Peer evaluation is beneficial	30	.83	.379
Valid N (list wise)	30		

There exists vast disparity in that opinion because the Standard Deviation of the score is found to be 1.248. It means teachers are much diversified in choosing the preferred time for assigning presentation. Whereas, almost one fourth of them (23.3%) have preferred to assign it during the whole semester and only few of them have preferred to take it during the first half of the semester (13.3%) and also in the middle of the semester (13.3%).

Furthermore, most of the respondents (70%) have claimed 'too much dependence on memorization' as the major mistake done by students. Whereas, more than half of the total respondents (63.3%)

have marked 'poor communication skills in English' and just half of them (50%) have identified 'poor preparation' as one of the most common mistakes of students during the presentation.

Moreover, only 33.3% of the respondents take trial presentation before the graded one. Finally, most of the respondents (56.7%) have widely accepted that they do not provide students with any printed guidelines for oral presentation and 83.3% of them think that peer evaluation is beneficial to students.

5. Discussion of the Findings

The purpose of this research was to figure out the obstacles in teaching oral presentation skills at tertiary level in Bangladesh. Accordingly, it has been observed that as most of the students enter this level from Bengali medium background, they are naturally weaker in spoken English than those coming from English medium background. Since oral presentation in English or even in Bengali is not introduced till tertiary level, students are actually quite unfamiliar with the techniques of performing this classroom activity efficiently and also remain far away from having the knowledge about speech communication process. Therefore, teachers are not that satisfied with their level of performance in presentation before or even after giving instructions.

Next, it has also been revealed that since oral presentation is a time consuming classroom activity, most of the language teachers in Bangladesh tend to assign this task during the last half of the semester when the syllabus is almost finished. At that time, students become busy with their final examinations. As a result, they do not rehearse as many times as necessary to overcome their weaknesses and to master the persuasive techniques of oral presentations. On

the other hand, teachers also do not get time enough to take trial presentations before the graded ones where they may have the opportunity to assess the students' presentation performance more minutely.

Besides, it has been found that teachers usually give only verbal instructions to students on presentation skills. Sequentially, students do not get the chance to look at printed guidelines outside the class while they are rehearsing. So, this is one of the reasons why most of the times they fail to reach the target in learning these skills.

On the top of that, comparison between opinions reflects that teacher' feedback do help students to improve their presentation skills at a smaller scale even when the problems primarily lie within the teaching techniques. And students have widely accepted that though they like classroom presentation activities, they tend to memorize the content, practice mostly two times and use mainly internet and library books as the major sources for gathering information because of their easy accessibility.

From the analysis of the open ended questions, it has been drawn that both of the groups (teachers and students) have accepted 'practice' as the best remedy to overcome the problems on students' part. Further, it has been suggested by both sides that if students are properly motivated in the class, they will be able to improve themselves a lot. That will ultimately enable them to overcome the most common problems like 'stage fright' and 'poor communication skills in English'.

6. Recommendations

From the above findings, it can be said that EFL teachers of Bangladesh should make the best use of the techniques necessary in teaching oral presentation skills. This initiative by the teachers will ensure such a learning experience for the students during which not only the target language (TL) will be practiced properly but also lifelong skills will be incorporated. Besides, to gain this rewarding experience mutual cooperation of the students and teachers is a pre-condition. In fine, in Bangladeshi context the following recommendations can be followed:

1. Teachers should provide students with printed guidelines so that students can have a look at them while rehearsing. Practical examples of oral presentations should also be given by the teachers in the class for instance they can invite the best presenters from the senior batches to demonstrate before the students.

2. Teachers should assign presentations during the first half of the semester when students are comparatively less busy with their studies.

3. To promote students' collaborative and interpersonal skills, classroom presentations should be organized in groups and then teachers have to monitor each group member's activities. Teachers have to assign specific roles to team members so that they can perform accordingly.

4. To make oral presentations more appealing, teachers have to explain the difference between written and spoken languages clearly to the students. They also have to introduce students with the communication process so that students can

inaugurate conversational tone in their speech to reach the audience. Besides, they should emphasize fluency rather than accuracy while they are teaching and make the students understand that presenters' verbal communications should coordinate with their non verbal expressions. The presenter should talk to the audience, not talk at the audience by making proper eye contacts.

5. Teachers have to explain the importance of using visual aids to support the presentation not to dominate it.

6. Students should make the appropriate use of note cards to avoid memorizing the presentation content.

7. Teachers should maintain time limits strictly during each presentation. This will not only help teachers in classroom management but also encourage students to practice and prepare their presentations beforehand.

Above all, oral presentation activities should be introduced earlier at Secondary and Higher Secondary levels. And public speaking courses can also be offered at tertiary level. As a result, students will get more time to work with oral presentation.

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Annex-A: Table 3.1 Frequency Distribution of the considered variables (Students)

Satisfaction with presentation ability before instruction	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly satisfied	6	6
Satisfied	48	48
Neutral	26	26
Dissatisfied	17	17
Strongly dissatisfied	3	3
Total	100	100

Satisfaction after teacher's instruction	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly satisfied	18	18
Satisfied	54	54
Neutral	17	17
Dissatisfied	10	10
Strongly dissatisfied	1	1
Total	100	100

Rehearsal	Frequency	Percentage
Two times	49	49
Three times	17	17
Four times	10	10
More than four times	24	24
Total	100	100

Content Memorization	Frequency	Percentage
No	32	32
Yes	68	68
Total	100	100

Sources used for presentation	Frequency	Percentage
Internet	76	76
Library	66	66
Radio and TV	19	19
Survey	9	9
Interview	8	8

Problems faced during presentation	Frequency	Percentage
Stage fright	75	75
Lack in communication skill	68	68
Lack of enthusiasm	38	38
Lack of knowledge in research	34	34
Topic no interested	24	24
Lack of knowledge in technical equipments	22	22

Like peer evaluation during presentation	Frequency	Percentage
No	34	34
Yes	66	66
Total	100	100

Annex-B: Table 3.1 Frequency Distribution of the considered variables (Teachers)

Satisfaction with presentation ability before instruction	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly satisfied	1	3.3
Satisfied	2	6.7
Neutral	10	33.3
Dissatisfied	16	53.3
Strongly dissatisfied	1	3.3
Total	30	100.0

Satisfaction with presentation ability after instruction	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly satisfied	1	3.3
Satisfied	7	23.3
Neutral	17	56.7
Dissatisfied	4	13.3
Strongly dissatisfied	1	3.3
Total	30	100.0

When do you prefer to assign the task of presentation?	Frequency	Percentage
During the 1st half of semester	4	13.3
Middle of semester	4	13.3
Last half of semester	15	50.0
During whole semester	7	23.3
Total	30	100.0

Trial presentation before graded ones	Frequency	Percentage
No	20	66.7
Yes	10	33.3
Total	30	100.0

Common mistakes of students	Frequency	Percentage
Dependence on Memorization	21	70
Poor Communication Skill	19	63
Poor Preparation	15	50
No Audience Involvement	10	33
Use of Fillers	4	13
Excessive or Insufficient use of Visual Aids	4	13

Printed guideline	Frequency	Percentage
No	17	56.7
Yes	13	43.3
Total	30	100.0

Peer evaluation is beneficial	Frequency	Percentage
No	5	16.7
Yes	25	83.3
Total	30	100.0