Exploring Effective Pedagogical Approaches for Enhancing EFL Speaking Proficiency at the Tertiary Level in Bangladesh

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Abstract: *In Bangladesh, students attend a wide range of public and private universities, where they often encounter challenges in speaking English at the tertiary level. Despite studying English for many years during school and college, many students struggle to speak English at the tertiary level. Improving speaking skills is essential for these students. This study aims to identify effective methods for enhancing speaking skills among tertiary-level students. This survey was conducted with 200 students from various public and private universities. The research employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative data were collected through an online survey, while the qualitative data were gathered from two university professors. This study examines effective methods to enhance speaking skills by addressing gaps in traditional English teaching. It advocates some effective steps to involve students with more speaking-oriented activities, aligning with post-method pedagogy to make students more efficient in speaking English.*

Keywords: tertiary level, challenges, effective methods

INTRODUCTION

Even though speaking is the most crucial and widely recognized language ability, teaching speaking skills remains peripheral and ignored at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. The EFL learners continuously struggle, even after dedicating a significant portion of their academic careers, spanning almost 13-15 years, to learning English, and still, they fail to achieve the minimum communicative competence. Studies and closer

inspections reveal that a number of factors are behind the narrow development of speaking abilities. Absence of appropriate courses and course materials, ineffective teaching methods, approaches and techniques, large class sizes, excessive focus on grammar-based examinations, insufficient individual attention, inadequate assessment and evaluation practices, and teacher reluctance and unwillingness of students are a few to name them. What should be taken into consideration is that 95% of the population of Bangladesh speaks Bengali (Farooqui, 2007), and just about 86% of the tertiary-level students come from Bangla-medium educational backgrounds (Jahan & amp; Jahan, 2006). The opportunity to enhance spoken abilities is further hindered as students get fewer chances during their pre-university years because of the negligence of speaking skills in the teaching objectives of English language instructors due to the negative backwash effect (Farooqui, 2007; Majid, 2007). Furthermore, many students in Bangladesh without proper knowledge and without any enquiries enroll in the English departments of existing universities with the goal of becoming fluent in English, whereas the syllabuses of the English departments are organized keeping literature in focus. Thus, they appear on an unknown land and feel overwhelmed by the pressures to understand the complex ideas of literature. To teach speaking skills, experts suggest that learners should be brought into contact with a curriculum that is authentic, provides practical speaking situations, and encourages active engagement during lessons; such a curriculum should incorporate both global and local cultural aspects (Talley & Hui Ling, 2014). Factors such as motivation, confidence, anxiety, time management, planning, support, performance standards, listening ability, and feedback during speaking activities are pinpointed as influences on students' speaking performance (Tuan & Mai, 2015). There is an emergence of a substantial number of approaches and methods in the last half of the 20th century in contexts of EFL. But the principal obstacle remains to find and develop an appropriate method of teaching. The search for the most effective language teaching method is ongoing as educators and researchers are still dealing with the continuous arrival of difficulties. The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the barriers that both teachers and students encounter in an EFL context and to also explore potential approaches to overcome these barriers. The objective is to provide practical and contextualized recommendations to education policymakers to develop spoken English programs that work better.

Background
There are undeniable challenges for EFL students and teachers in developing communicative skill at the tertiary level. The closing half of the 20th century saw a remarkable upheaval of strategies and methods in the field of EFL. Still, there was concern, and the search continued to find a teaching that is convenient. As GTM (Grammer Translation Method) did not live up to the expectations, different scholars and educators paved the way for new methods such as the audio-lingual method, the direct method, de-suggestopedia, communicative language teaching, and the list continues. The challenges that have been found through different methods and approaches dissatisfying linguistics and researchers are given below:

Omaggio points out the drawback of error correction in GTM as he says, "students are clearly in an offensive environment where correct answers are always expected" (Omaggio, 91). The absence of translation or the use of the learner's first language renders it counterproductive. Richards and Rodgers (2001) cite psychologist Roger Brown "described his frustration in observing a teacher performing verbal gymnastic in an attempt to convey the meaning of Japanese words, when translation would have been a much more efficient technique" (p.13). In case of Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) learners aiming to communicate at an advanced level may find the drills tedious and insufficient. Extensive drilling is also impractical for large classes. Students are unfamiliar with Total Physical Response (TPR) activities might feel embarrassed. It is only appropriate for beginner levels. The teacher cannot cover everything with this method, and excessive use can make it repetitive. In desuggestopedia, the mental barriers are removed with the help of soft background music, easy chairs, and relaxing environment. It is impossible to create such an environment in places like Bangladesh because of large classes. It is costly also. Task-Based Language Teaching(TBLT) demands active participation from both teachers and learners, involving pre-task, during-task, and post-task phases. In Bangladesh, where teachers are 'relatively underpaid' and therefore 'resort to extra teaching jobs' resulting in demotivation in the classroom', as Siddique (2004) observes, it is hard to see how they will bear with huge demands that TBLT makes on them. It requires group work and pair work in the classroom, which is unfeasible in countries like Bangladesh, where classrooms are large and overcrowded. As Carless (2002) lists some conditions as impeding implementation of TBLT in Hong Kong primary schools. Large class sizes, cramped classrooms, lack of appropriate resources, teachers not trained in task-based methodologies, teachers with limited language proficiency and traditional examination-based syllabi are among factors affecting successful task-based pedagogy. Swan (2005) criticizes TBLT for rejecting 'proactive syllabus design' and 'misrepresenting traditional classroom practice'. He argues that heavily task-based programs are inappropriate in situations where exposure outside classroom is unavailable and time is limited. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has become very popular in many contexts, especially in the USA and Europe. Though it is considered that the introduction of CLT marked a shift in Bangladeshi ELT theory, there is almost no remarkable substantiation that can suggest that this policy brought about any groundbreaking changes in the conventional teaching system at the school level, particularly in the rural areas. Although the policies have changed, the classroom teaching methods have remained basically as before over the two decades. As per the reports of English teachers from all over the country, Siddique (2004) suggests that the constraining factors in the implementation of CLT in Bangladesh are as follows:

● Limited academic competence and abilities of local ELT practitioners.
● Economic challenges and cultural conflicts.
● Administrative structure.
● Infrastructure limitations.

These are the contemporary challenges that exist in the current EFL scenarios. Consequently, the Grammar-Translation method, Direct Method, Audio-Lingual Method, Total Physical Response, Desuggestopedia, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) are ineffective in the progression of the speaking abilities of Bangladeshi students at the tertiary level. Thus, there remains an urgency to incorporate effective and learner-centered teaching strategies that will contribute to enhancing the fluency of students at the tertiary level.

Objectives of the Study
The objectives of the study are as follows:
- This study aims to investigate the factors behind the low proficiency of students on spoken English at tertiary-level
- The study will assess existing practices, approaches, and instructional methods in order to identify any deficiencies that impede students' progress in developing their English-speaking skills.
- The study will provide necessary recommendations aimed at potentially enhancing the effectiveness of English language learning, with the intention of motivating students to overcome their limitations in speaking English.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Putting emphasis solemnly on the grammatical instructions, to be more specific, on isolated grammatical instructions in tertiary education often hinders the natural flow of communication in real-life scenarios. To exemplify, spoken English classes are organized and conducted in such a way that these only focus on reading and recitation, whereas the interaction of the students is at a minimal rate, thus hindering the students' ability to organize words at a natural flow during practical circumstances such as conversations or presentations. Besides, the strictness of teaching methods, teachers' or instructors' use of overly formal language, and lesser comprehension of spoken grammar and vocabulary lead to demotivation in seeking help and obstruction of effective learning. Task-based and cooperative learning programs are gaining the approval of students as days pass by and proving to be beneficial for improving English speaking skills in academic, social, or professional contexts. The study emphasizes the noteworthiness of teacher education in enhancing the productivity of language learning experiences. (M.S. Islam & Stapa, 2021).

Correspondingly, antiquated lecture-based teaching methods and the use of mother tongue impede students' learning processes. Insufficient facilitation, such as a lack of supporting tools and authentic materials and scarcity of appropriate speaking environments, negatively influences the teaching of oral English communication skills.(Seraj et al., 2021).

Getting accustomed to grammar-focused English education from the very beginning of their educational life, which approximately spans 12 years, students become

unenthusiastic about communicative or practical use of English as a spoken language. The absence of practicing facilities and a supportive environment has made students introverted and embarrassed in terms of speaking as they have inadequate conversational experience. (Alam et al., 2022).

According to another study, a problem that is considered to be significantly affecting students' speaking competency in the context of tertiary education in Bangladesh is the lack of confidence among students. Also, the study unequivocally hands out some effective methods to triumph over this issue; these methods include role play, debate, and the implementation of drama in English language learning (ELL) classrooms, as well as illuminate the necessity of facilitating student-friendly learning environment (Jamila, 2014).

In a similar way, another research seeks to determine the challenges in the context of the tertiary educational system of Bangladesh that many learners come up with and tries to investigate the occurring complexities prevalent within these settings. This research points out the hindrance caused by negative feedback, shyness, and lack of confidence, which slackens off the ability to learn spoken English. Nevertheless, the data of the research includes sampling from only a small number of private universities; results could potentially be more accurate if the survey includes data from public universities and other institutions. (Sharmin, 2019).

Akter Jahan also stressed out on students' discontentment with the existing teaching methods for speaking skills by teachers, and teachers also admitted their flaws. Learners can enhance and develop their fluidity and fluency of English speaking by directing their concentration on the core elements, influential factors, conditions, and components of speaking skills and if they are provided ample language input and engaging activities (Jahan, 2008).

Learner's autonomy is one of the promising factors that is still not extensively implemented in Bangladesh but holds immense potential to improve students' spoken English. The teachers of the private universities are enthusiastic to adopt this. This research includes thirty teachers from four different private universities; hence, the findings cannot be generalized, and there remains the need for a larger-scale survey (Jamila, 2003). Correspondingly, another study indicates effective ways to promote learner autonomy in the classroom and suggests that activities like solving jigsaw and crossword puzzles and group debates can be put to use to enhance learners' autonomy (Begum, 2018).

MD. Nurullah Patwary and Swarna Chowdhury (2011) provided that the development of Bangladeshi tertiary EFL students' communication skills is effectively influenced and, to some extent, improved by classroom interactions. However, poor vocabulary, inconsistent proficiency levels, lack of enthusiasm, poor academic atmosphere, poor EFL background, and limited time for interactive activities obstruct their learning process.

According to another study, blended learning increased the engagement of students in learning. As students embraced technological advancement, they went into the depth of digital literacy, which is now regarded as an essential skill in the modern workplace (Rabbi et al., 2024). Naushin Nazifa Islam argued that communicative language teaching (CLT) is outdated in the present scenarios of developing English speaking skills and opined that post-method pedagogy can be a better option or alternative to CLT. In her research, she introduced the following findings, which, according to her, are required for the progression of language education: reducing the number of students in classes, minimizing bureaucratic and hierarchical approaches in academia, adapting course outlines and lesson plans based on students' performance, giving teachers the autonomy to organize and evaluate teaching components, and prioritizing the fulfilment of students' needs over merely completing the syllabus. (N.N. Islam, 2020).

A number of researchers draw attention to the use of online platforms. Platforms like Duolingo provide free exam opportunities that prove to be beneficial for students to enhance their vocabulary, grammar, and other English language skills. Creative and inventive teaching strategies, such as gamification techniques of Duolingo, have proven to be more engaging and motivating for learners. To implement such learner-engaging strategies in the English teaching classrooms of Bangladesh, teachers require adequate facilitation and training that are effective. This survey makes it evident that there remains a lack of academic research on the application of Duolingo assessments for English language learning in the context of Bangladesh (Sadaf, 2023).

 In addition to offering an enjoyable and relaxed atmosphere, YouTube also avails the learners of audiolingual content that enables them to gain fluency and makes them effective presenters throughout their semesters. YouTube motivates the students and improves their speaking skills by enhancing their skills over the suprasegmental elements such as accentuation, stress, tone, and intonation. In summation, YouTube plays a remarkable role in improving tertiary-level students' speaking skills (Hasan et al., 2018). On the other hand, social media enhances EFL learners' speaking abilities, and teachers primarily use it for their personal development rather than for the educational growth of students. However, the assessment of social media is positive in the eyes of the students as it encourages independence and self-correction and provides better grounds for improving their English-speaking abilities.

Theoretical Framework:

Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis
Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis highlights the role of emotional factors, such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety, in language acquisition. A high affective filter (high anxiety, low motivation) obstructs the processing of comprehensible input, while a low affective filter (low anxiety, high motivation) facilitates language learning. Therefore, creating a positive and supportive environment is crucial for lowering the affective filter and promoting language acquisition. Additionally, teaching should align

with the natural order of language acquisition. Krashen's theory emphasizes the importance of meaningful language input and a low-anxiety learning environment, which can help tertiary students improve their English-speaking skills. [Krashens,1985].

Post method Pedagogy

Post-method pedagogy as a method of language teaching suggests that there are no universal methods; to be more precise, there are no fixed set of techniques for language learning. B. Kumaravadivelu, a prominent scholarly figure in the field of second language education instituted this method.

Major Characteristics of The Post-Method Condition

An Alternative to Method

To begin with, the post-method condition upholds the view of an "alternative to method rather than an alternative method" (p. 29). Post-method pedagogy recommends a flexible, learner-centered, and contextually responsive approach to language teaching while rejecting the rigid, one-size-fits-all methods. It differs from the conventional methods, such as grammar-translation or CLT, in the way that it rejects the idea of a single method meeting all of the various needs of a learner. Rather than confining to some specific designs and outlines, it allows the teachers to create their own approaches based on various techniques and principles and promotes reflective practice as well as informed decision-making. The teacher's autonomy, adaptability, and responsiveness to effectively address the learner's unique goals, backgrounds, and contexts are prioritized in this strategy.

Teacher Autonomy

The post-method condition puts importance on "teacher autonomy," which suggests "enabling and empowering teachers to theorize from their practice and practice what they have theorized" (p. 30). Post-method pedagogy autonomizes the teachers as the method provides them the freedom and authority to take decisions and responsibilities for their teaching practices. It provides significance on the fact that teachers have their own speciality, expertise, insights, and understanding of learners and educational contexts. B. Kumaravadivelu opines that teacher autonomy consists of both professional and personal knowledge obtained through situations of formal and informal educational experiences. Though the lion shares of L2 teachers obtain professional knowledge from teaching method textbooks, they quickly understand the inherent shortcomings of these methods in practical uses and hence develop and rely on their own knowledge of teaching and learning. The progression of personal knowledge is dependent on reflective actions in teaching and research, while professional knowledge can be attained through reading journals, attending seminars and conferences, and participating in online communities of language teachers.

Principled Pragmatism

Furthermore, the post-method condition substantiates itself from "eclecticism," as it advocates for "principled pragmatism," which is another characteristic of this method to add to the list. Due to the inadequate preparation and random amalgamation of techniques from various strategies of teachers, eclecticism often proves to be an unsystematic and unprincipled approach. Principled pragmatism in this context serves to stand the test and emphasizes informed teaching and critical appraisal. B. Kumaravadivelu (2001) suggests that teachers gain the ability to shape and manage classroom learning constructively through this approach.

Learner Autonomy

The study is grounded in the theory of learner autonomy (Schwartz, 1977; Dickinson, 1978; Holec, 1979), which emphasizes learners taking responsibility for their own learning, making them the central figure in managing all aspects of their education. This self-directed approach encourages learners to view their learning as a personal asset, which psychologically motivates them to achieve their goals. It also enhances their intellect, knowledge, and academic excellence in language learning. These factors are particularly crucial in language learning, especially in the development of speaking skills, as previously discussed.

METHODOLOGY

This is an exploratory research study in which quantitative data were collected from nearly 200 students, while qualitative data were gathered from two university professors. The population of this study was the first semester student's semester who had speaking course at the English Department of different universities of Cumilla and Dhaka. The institutions were chosen based on researchers' convenience to collect data. Two professors were interviewed from a public university. Besides, at least 40 to 50 students survey conducted from each institute. Both primary and secondary data have been used. To collect data from the teachers, the researcher used face to face interview session. On the other hand, researcher used a set of questionnaires for students as an instrument to collect data from them.

Data Analysis

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the analysis of data collected from the students' questionnaire surveys. After that, the qualitative findings resulted from the teachers' interviews are discussed.

The first few questions to the students were formulated to have a knowledge about the teacher's proficiency, classroom equipment and classroom environment. The questions are as, **"Do you think the teachers are well-trained to effectively carry out their teaching responsibilities?'' "Does your classroom have enough equipment to support effective learning?'' "Do the teachers provide a stress-free environment conducive to learning?''**

Figure 1. Teacher Training and Classroom Environment
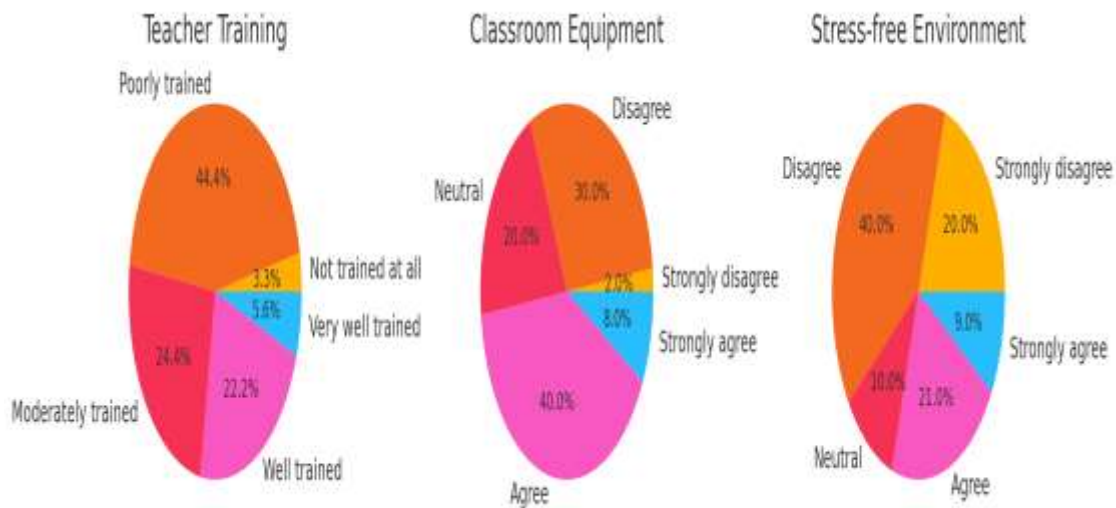
In terms of (figure: teacher training), only 5% of students believe that teachers are very well trained, while a significant 40% rate them as poorly trained, and 22% consider them moderately trained. A smaller portion, 20%, think teachers are well trained, and 3% feel teachers are not trained at all.

Regarding (figure: classroom equipment), 40% of students agree that there is enough equipment to support learning, while 30% disagree and 20% remain neutral. Only 8% strongly agree that there is sufficient equipment, and 2% strongly disagree.

When evaluating whether teachers provide a stress-free learning environment (figure: stress-free environment), 40% of students disagree, and 20% strongly disagree, indicating a less favorable view. Only 21% agree, and a minimal 9% strongly agree, while 10% remain neutral on this aspect. This analysis highlights that students hardly get a stress-free environment and emphasizes the need for improvements in teacher training and the overall classroom environment to enhance the learning experience.

The next question was framed as **"Do you think lack of confidence is the main hindrance behind students' difficulties in learning to speak English?''**

Figure 2: Lack of confidence
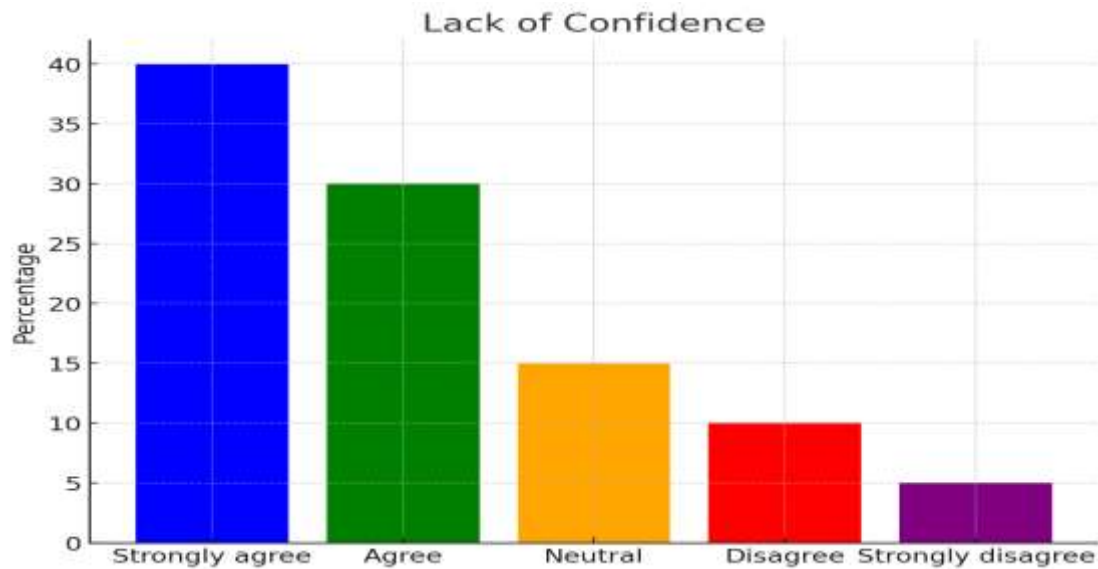
The analysis of data on students' confidence and technology use for enhancing English-speaking skills reveals several notable trends. Firstly, a considerable number of students (70%) feel that a lack of confidence is a major barrier to developing their speaking skills, with 40% strongly agreeing and 30% agreeing. Only a small portion of students remain neutral (15%) or disagree (15%), suggesting that confidence issues are a widespread concern among learners.

The next questions in the questionnaire were **"Do the teachers inspire you to utilize social media to enhance your speaking skills?" "Does the motivation of your teachers regarding social media usage impact your performance?"**

Figure 3: Use of Social Media
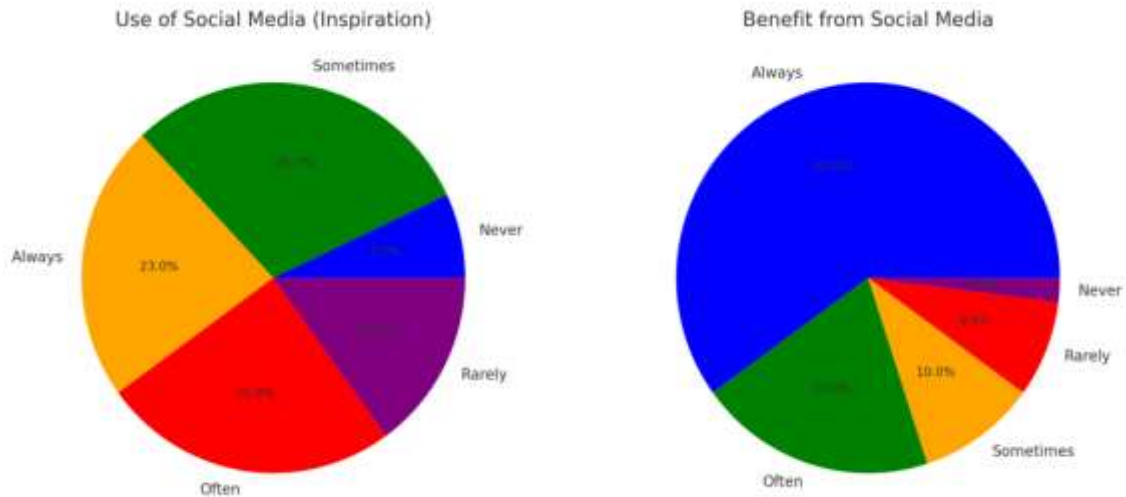
When it comes to the use of social media (figure: use of social media), teachers appear to have a mixed influence. About 30% of students state that teachers sometimes encourage them to leverage social media for improving their speaking skills, and 25% say this happens often. However, only 23% report always receiving such encouragement, while 15% say they are rarely inspired, and 7% never receive this motivation. This indicates an inconsistency in how teachers integrate social media into language learning. Despite the varied encouragement from teachers, social media remains a valuable tool for many students (figure benefit from social media). An impressive 60% always find it beneficial for improving their English-speaking abilities, and 20% often benefit from it. Only a minor percentage (10% sometimes, 8% rarely, 2% never) perceive limited benefits, highlighting the effectiveness of social media platforms for language practice.

The subsequent question of the questionnaire to the student was **"Do the teachers motivate you to improve your speaking skills?" "Does the motivation of your teachers impact your performance?"**

Figure 4: Motivation from Teachers
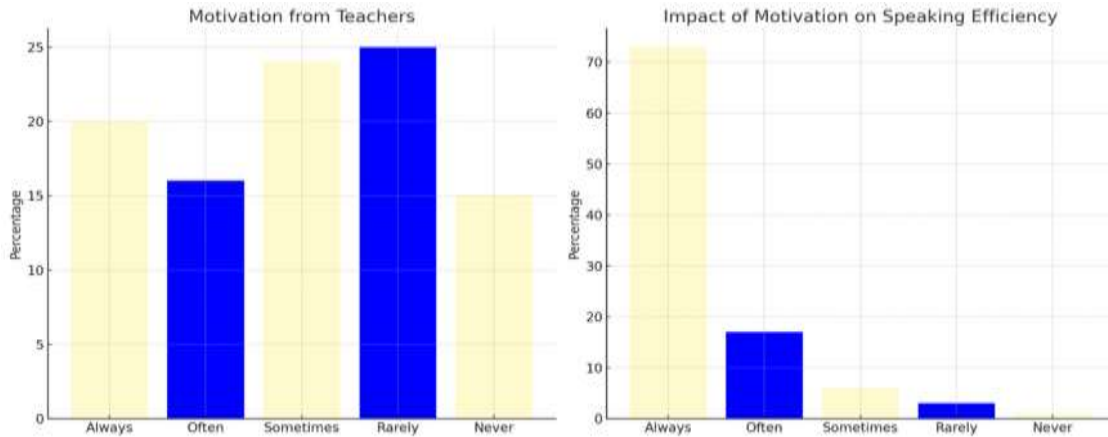
According to figure(motivation from teachers), teacher motivation plays a crucial role in students' learning experiences. While 20% of students feel they are always motivated by their teachers, and 16% often experience this support, a combined 40% of students report being rarely or never motivated. This gap in motivation impacts the overall engagement and willingness of students to improve their speaking skills. Nevertheless, when teacher motivation is present, it has a significant positive effect: 73% of students say that it always enhances their speaking efficiency, and 17% note it often helps, suggesting a direct correlation between motivation and language proficiency.

A few questions were designed as **"Do you use technology (e.g., apps, online resources) to learn English speaking skills?" "Do you think teachers are well-trained in using technology?**

Figure 5: Use of Technology
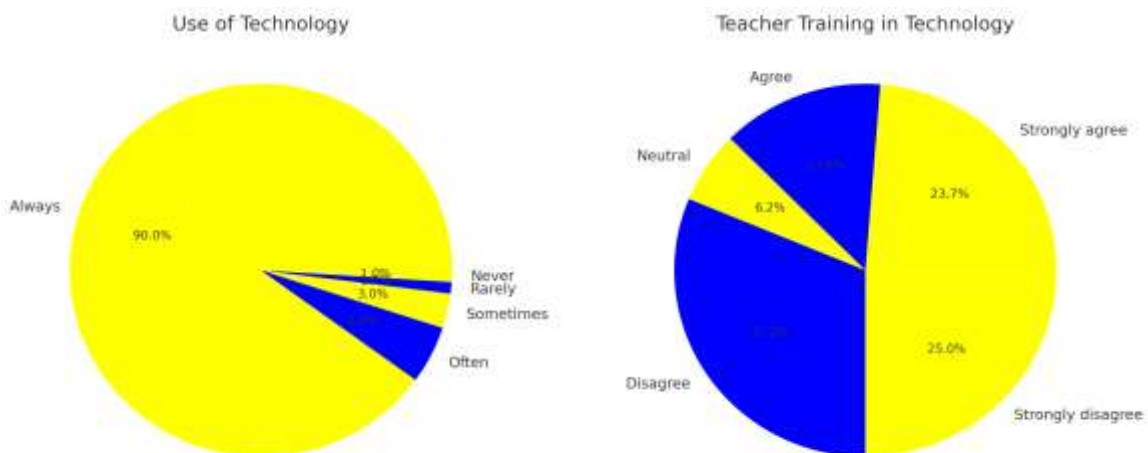
According to figure (use of technology), a vast majority of students (90%) consistently use technology, such as apps and online resources, to learn English speaking skills. In

contrast, only a small fraction uses it less frequently. However, when it comes to teachers' proficiency with technology, opinions are more divided: only 23.7% strongly agree that teachers are well-trained, while 25% strongly disagree and 31.2% disagree, indicating a notable concern about teachers' technological capabilities. This suggests a high reliance on technology among students but a perceived gap in teachers' technological training.

Some questions were designed as **"Do you think CLT isn't appropriate for the Bangladeshi context, and some new methods should be encouraged?" "Do you take part in pair work, group debates, and classroom activities to enhance your speaking skills?" "Do you agree that instead of depending on a specific methodology, teachers should utilize effective strategies from different methods?"**

Figure 6: Teaching Methods and Learning Activities
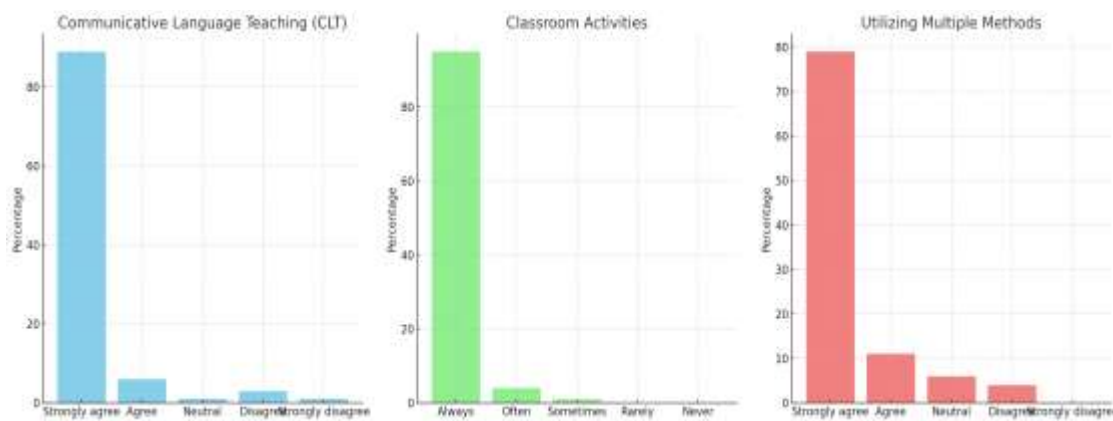
The data (figure CLT) reveals significant insights into teaching methods and learning activities in the Bangladeshi context. An overwhelming 89% of respondents strongly agree that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) may not be suitable and believe that new methods should be encouraged, while only 6% agree, and very few remain neutral or disagree. Regarding classroom activities (figure: classroom activities), 95% of students feel that engaging in pair work, group debates, and other activities always enhances their speaking skills, with just 4% saying it often helps and 1% indicating it sometimes helps, while no respondents rated it as rarely or never beneficial. Additionally, 79% strongly agree that teachers should adopt strategies from multiple methods rather than relying on a single methodology, with 11% agreeing and a smaller percentage being neutral or disagreeing (figure: utilizing multiple methods).

Among the interviewed teachers, a professor from English department emphasized that teaching English speaking skills should be grounded in a needs analysis. Teachers need to be highly trained in using technology and social media to implement a blended learning approach effectively and must continuously work on improving their skills. In addition to relying on the traditional syllabus, incorporating methods such as watching movies, giving presentations, and ensuring cultural relevance can be beneficial. The

professor noted that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) does not align well with the Bangladeshi context and suggested adopting a post-method pedagogy. Another professor highlighted that students should focus on becoming skilled rather than just aiming for high scores. He advocated for smaller class sizes and a blended approach tailored to students' needs instead of relying on a single methodology. He also stressed the importance of motivating students to boost their confidence. To engage students in practicing English speaking skills, he often encourages them to upload movie reviews or short video clips on Facebook, suggesting that similar initiatives could be highly effective.

DISCUSSION

The findings clearly indicate that teachers need more training to implement new strategies effectively. Utilizing social media platforms and technology can bring significant positive outcomes for students. Teachers' motivation plays a pivotal role in students' performance. However, a stress-free environment, which is essential, is not being practiced. Lack of confidence is one of the critical hindrances and should be taken seriously. Instead of solely focusing on achieving good exam marks, students should also prioritize enhancing their skills. The existing methodologies are not appropriate for the Bangladeshi context. Rather than relying on a single methodology, a blended approach or post-method pedagogy is more effective.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this research, several recommendations can be made to enhance students' spoken English proficiency:

Inducing learners to have open discussions on the topic they are eager to speak up about in a supportive and learning-friendly environment may help. This may include platforms like YouTube, Duolingo, and even social media to provide them with more confidence, ensure participation, and make teachers aware of the pulse of the students. Need analysis can also play a vital role in navigating the students' lacking and requirements.

Moreover, in a friendly environment such as a language club or speaking competition, concise and constructive verbal peer feedback will motivate students to participate in speaking tasks, using multimedia technologies to assist the teacher in evaluation as well. A well-arranged seminar held with native speakers and teachers across the World will provide the learners the scope to explore more in this regard with the guidance of a well-trained teacher addressing his findings of the students and encouraging them to interact in the classroom, keeping them aware of their mistakes. A personalized approach in the native context may assist better in the notion above.

Moreover, bringing changes in the curriculum and examination methods to focus more on spoken English and practical use can bring about significant improvements.

Implementing these strategies can significantly improve students' spoken English proficiency and contribute to more effective English language teaching at the tertiary level.

Future Research on Post-Method Pedagogy
Future researchers can investigate how post-method pedagogy can face difficulties and how teachers can be very well-trained to conduct post-method pedagogy effectively at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. Further research should be done encompassing a range of public and private universities and gathering perspectives from both students and teachers, with a view to investigating the ability of post-method pedagogy to provide a better environment for effective learning at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. Future researchers can also explore effective blended approaches that are suitable for tertiary-level students.

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