CHALLENGES IN ORAL PRESENTATION IN ENGLISH FOR
THE FRESHERS AT TERTIARY LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

In the academic English courses, oral presentation can be considered as an integral part for developing the language proficiency of EFL learners. English is taught as a foreign language in a developing country like Bangladesh and in the 21st century this language is given priority at almost every sector of this country. However, presenting a topic in English facing the audience in the class, especially classmates and teachers is a challenging issue, particularly for the students at tertiary level in Bangladesh. The current study analyses those distinctive challenges in oral presentation by systematic scrutiny of class presentation performance of a renowned Bangladeshi university students. The researchers mainly highlighted some striking features in formal oral presentation following class observation, formal assessment in different presentation sessions and then tried to demonstrate the problems faced by the first semester students at undergraduate level. Some experts in the respective field were also interviewed to investigate the challenges deeply in oral presentation and find the possible solutions. It is expected that the particular guidelines provided in this study can be effective for the future presenters and prospective ELT practitioners to overcome those challenges, especially, in formal oral presentation.

Key Words: Oral presentation, EAP, Fresher, Presenters, Audience, Tertiary

1. INTRODUCTION

Presenting a topic facing an audience is related to many factors; speaking spontaneously with confidence is one of the most crucial factors indeed. If the medium of the presentation is in a foreign language and is evaluated as a part of an academic course, it is even more challenging for a non-native speaker. Again, lack of proper guidance regarding effective presentation techniques can make oral presentation very difficult for a new presenter. The researchers of the current study have experienced these challenges faced by undergraduate students at tertiary level in formal presentation sessions. It has been perceived that university students at undergraduate level get to know about the basic principles of formal presentation as a part of their course requirement from the beginning of their higher studies. Some students consider oral presentation issue seriously as far as marks and grades are concerned whereas some find it unnecessary or less important in life. The real fact is that this is

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a world of smart presentation in every sector. An impressive presentation is highly valued everywhere to face the challenges of the 21st century and sustain in this competitive world. For this reason, it is essential for freshers to be prepared regarding oral presentation issues from the very educational life.

Since the phobia of English language is always a big challenge for the Bangladeshi students, formal oral presentation in English is even greater challenge for many students at undergraduate level, especially freshers. In this country, the first semester students at tertiary level are hardly used to a favourable environment where English is widely practised in the class at their early stages, esp. in schools and colleges. These students are more focused and familiar with the uses of grammar rather than speaking comfortably in English. As a matter of fact, English has been taught in different ways in different mediums in Bangladeshi education system which is divided into several categories like English version, Bengali version, English medium, Madrasa (religious) education and vocational training. The students learn English in their primary and secondary education just to pass in the public exams where their educators are also concerned with pass marks and grades in English language. As a result, developing basic skills in a foreign language like English are neglected at maximum setting in Bangladesh.

Subsequently, when a student admits in a university where English is given priority as a medium of instruction, he/she takes time to adjust with the environment dominated by English. The fresher at tertiary level also faces difficulties in understanding the importance of English language in academic life and its necessity for career development in future. Consequently, oral presentation in English on a specific topic is a frightening issue for many learners at undergraduate level. However, proper guidelines and practices on oral presentation in English can be effective to overcome these challenges gradually. The responsibility of the educational institution and sincerity of the faculty members or mentors are inevitable in this regard.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In an academic English course like EAP², formal presentation on a particular topic is considered as one of the most important criteria to assess the language proficiency of undergraduate students. Separate marks are allotted in the course for the performance of oral presentation where students need to prove their multiple skills in presentation session either in individual or group performance. From the experience of the researchers as EAP course instructor at tertiary level, it has been commonly perceived that oral presentation in English is usually a challenging task for the undergraduate students, esp. freshers, regardless they belong to science,
humanity or business discipline. While assessing the performance of a student in oral presentation, the course teacher mainly examines the proficiency of the presenter-learner in terms of verbal and non-verbal communication, level of confidence, the delivery techniques and use of visual aids.

Like most private universities in Bangladesh, Green University of Bangladesh (GUB) emphasizes on the continuous practices of presentation skills of the students to create competent human resources. As a part of the course curriculum, GUB students need to give individual presentation at almost every course and there is fixed marks allotted for presentation segment for each individual course. The university authority believes that by virtue of good presentation skills, the learners i.e. the presenters can attain professional development and succeed in the long run. In order to encourage students to read English books, the Language Center of Green University arranges a ‘Book Reading Competition’ regularly in collaboration with British Council, Dhaka for the first year students at undergraduate level. To prepare the students for participating in this program actively, the course teachers of EAP conduct formal class presentation on the assigned story books (as mentioned in Table 1) that the students read over a period of time.

Table 1: Story books offered to EAP students to read in consecutive three semesters at undergrad level:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Title of the text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>English for Academic Purposes</td>
<td>EAP 009</td>
<td>The Curse of The Mummy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>English for Academic Purposes I</td>
<td>EAP 101</td>
<td>Five Canterbury Tales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>English for Academic Purposes II</td>
<td>EAP 102</td>
<td>Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is noteworthy that for better understanding in English, the students get the opportunity to read the story books stated above that are colorful and interesting too. The book reading activities are mainly tagged with the oral presentation activities so that the students practise English language intensely and know the context before presenting the topic formally. Again, the objectives of these types of activities through oral presentation are to upgrade the English presentation skills of the students along with developing reading habit.

During the presentation sessions, the researchers have tried to sort out the challenges the students face while attending oral presentation in English. As a matter of fact, these challenges faced by the new presenters are very common in some cases, but cannot be ignored initially as far as the future improvement of the learners is concerned. This study is, therefore, an investigation of the problems students face practically in formal presentation sessions with possible solution based on the guidelines from experts in the respective fields.
3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Though the students learn English in a non-native setting, speaking naturally in English and presenting a topic facing the audience are frightening issues for maximum learners at tertiary level. The current study is partially based on an action research where the English presentation competency and challenges faced by freshers at university have been assessed carefully. This study highlights the performance of the new presenters in English focusing their shortcomings or deficiency in verbal and non-verbal communication. Researches have been conducted earlier on the difficulties faced by English learners, esp. in oral communication. However, in the current paper, the major focus is the problems and prospects related to both speaking skills and oral presentation competency of the young learners who will lead the world in the upcoming days. It lays out a framework for implementing presentations in the classrooms in such a way that is helpful for both the practitioners and mentors of the respective fields. The pedagogical issues outlined in this study can assist the ELT practitioners effectively as a means of improving presentation techniques and related factors (Brooks & Wilson, 2014).

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researchers of the current paper proceeded systematically to conduct the study applying the qualitative research method. One of the key features of this type of method is using text as empirical material that is helpful for getting valid information (Harun & Sufian, 2015). This method is also effective for understanding the participants’ perspectives (Flick, 2009). As stated by Denzin et al (2000), qualitative research generally gives more emphasis on identification and interpretation of perceptions and experiences following its objectives such as extracting concepts from perceptions and simplifying the meaning of experiences from the provided data. To speak frankly, qualitative research method has been applied here for it clarifies the kind and quality of a topic properly while describing and attempting to understand an event. Less statistical data were thus used in this study to explain the research findings for being qualitative in nature (Akbas, 2015). To collect data for analyzing the problems of the presenters, random class observations and in-depth interviews were required for the current study. The researchers have also gone through a number of research articles from different journals, news articles, books on different areas of education to collect relevant information.
4.1. Participants

The students i.e. the target group for this study belongs to undergraduate level in different disciplines of GUB. Most of them were enrolled in EAP course which is generally offered to the freshers to cope with tertiary education. The participants of this study represent both Social Science and Science disciplines such as Law, Sociology and Anthropology, Business Studies, Computer Science and Engineering etc. As a matter of fact, oral presentation is an integral part of EAP program by which students at higher studies get the opportunity to develop their proficiency in English language. Data were mainly collected analysing the class presentation performance of more than 120 students in different batches. It is also noteworthy that the students of the final year of GUB also have some contribution in the data collection process at the end.

1.2. Interview Session

Some faculty members at tertiary level were interviewed to collect information regarding major challenges and future steps to overcome these in oral presentation. These interviewees are, in fact, experienced and associated with conducting formal presentation and mentoring students. As a matter of fact, for collecting primary data, interviews were very useful tool; it is possible to bring out in-depth information by interviews that may not easily available by simply questionnaire (Flick, 2009; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The interviewees are mostly facilitators of Career Development unit and Center of Excellence for Teaching & Learning at Green University. The interviewees gave their valuable opinions mostly from pedagogical point of view about the challenges faced by the presenters. They also provided detailed guidelines for the prospective presenters, educators as well as the educational institutions which added value to the study, undoubtedly.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section first of all the importance of oral presentation has been discussed from a comparative study based on Japanese and Bangladeshi English language practices in the classroom. The interesting fact is that there are lots of similarities regarding practices of English in these two countries just like their flags. As stated by Brooks & Wilson (2014), very few university students in Japan get the scope to apply spoken English in the classroom before entering university, and even less have the ample scope to talk about academic topics in English (Apple, 2011). Ultimately inexperience in practising spoken English affects the performance in oral presentations in formal occasion which is also true for Bangladeshi students. Similarly, before pursuing higher education, most of the Japanese and Bangladeshi
students hardly get favourable atmosphere to speak in English in front of their peers, especially for the purpose of oral presentation. Moreover, for most Japanese and Bangladeshi students at higher studies, the lack of familiarity with oral presentations and its techniques make them feel shy and embarrassed when they are asked to say something in English facing their peers.

One of the advantages of practising oral presentations in the classroom is that the learners can learn to use their L2 to communicate with others in a natural way. If this type of activity is properly designed and executed, participating in an oral presentation can really be an enjoyable learning experience for the presenter-learners for it allows them to interact with others using only their L2. In fact, formal presentations in English require the students to use only English to communicate an idea to the audience. This type of communication is also one of the major objectives of communicative language teaching. Apart from this, oral presentations, especially group presentations create opportunities for the students to engage in a cooperative task that requires them to use English to explain their ideas and to negotiate meaning while they are planning and practicing their presentations.

However, it is a matter of regret that oral presentations are often not incorporated in all language courses. As stated by Brooks & Wilson (2014), sometimes it is found as one-time summative assessment at the end of the course with very little class time spent on getting the students ready to present. The result of this is that students are not well-prepared to present any topic and often do not find the presentations to be a positive learning experience. All the facts stated here are mostly applicable for both Japanese and Bangladeshi context.

Another aspect of oral presentation is that it is possible to attain professional development by virtue of good presentation practices. Employers expect graduates to possess excellent communication skills, especially in speaking and writing. As a result, the skills the students develop in class presentation at tertiary level become an important asset in future for utilizing positive learning experiences (Alshare & Hindi, 2004). Usually, the employers seek excellent verbal and non-verbal communication skills in the potential candidates when they apply for jobs after graduation from any discipline. For presentation, acquiring communication competence is important and we know that language is such a human capacity which helps us acquire and use the complex systems of communication. So, to study language and use it in different circumstances effectively, oral presentation proves to be useful as because it covers the gap between language study and language use requiring the students to use all four language skills. In this regard, students’ engagement in learning language skills is very much important. Unless the students assimilate their skills with real life situation, the consequence of learning language skills will go in vein. It
is seen that oral presentations could possibly provide realistic language tasks for students to engage in. Otherwise speaking tasks without relation to real-life language use “are poor preparation for autonomy” (Thornbury, 2005).

King (2002) adds that oral presentations generally help to bridge the gap between language study and language use. Good presentation requires learners to apply all four language skills in a naturally integrated way; it also encourages the learners to be an active and autonomous learners. Another advantage of practicing oral presentations in the class is that it provides a student more authentic way of practicing English than simple speaking drills. The students get the scope to use their L2 to understand the topics they are presenting on and communicate this understanding to others. In fact, this is closer to real language use and gives learners a chance to develop research and critical thinking skills, as well as linguistic and communicative skills.

Although English is taught as a compulsory subject from primary to tertiary education in Bangladesh, most of the students are not exposed to the privileges for speaking English properly. The factors that affect learners’ oral communication here are mainly shyness, pronunciation difficulty, inappropriate uses of vocabulary and grammar (Khan, H.R., 2007). Moreover, EFL teachers in Bangladesh face big challenges in improving learners’ communicative competency for various reasons. Concentration on merely exam-based preparation upto higher secondary education disregarding essential communication skills is one of the major obstacles for Bangladeshi EFL learners (Munira, 2017). Thus it can be asserted that the study of oral proficiency in English is a neglected area in Bangladesh. Khan (2007) has opined that although English texts utilized from primary to higher secondary education cover all areas of language skills in English, the facilitators seem too unwilling to engage students in oral communication for the lack of technical and other resources and supports.

As a result, entering into tertiary education, the students find themselves at stake when they need to implicate their communication skills for lack of practice. Besides this grim truth, these non-native speakers of English are scared of making mistakes while speaking in English. This ultimately affects their oral presentation facing the audience for they hesitate to speak in English fluently. Robby (2010) addressing a foreign English speaker stated that some people avoid communication in the most crucial and serious situations only to avoid embarrassment and humiliation. In fear of making mistakes if someone stops speaking and practising enough, it cannot, as a matter of fact, help improving speaking English skills! (englishharmony.com, 2010)
Prof. Md. Fazlur Rahman of Institute of Education and Research, University of Dhaka expressed his concern that teachers involved in teaching English textbooks in higher secondary level have been teaching communicative English with traditional, non-participatory lecture method; more shockingly the English teachers teach English mostly in their native language for enabling the learners to score well in examinations (Chandan, M.K., 2016).

However, the current study can set a framework for the ELT practitioners and future presenters to overcome the challenges mentioned in this paper. It is expected that the strategies mentioned in the next parts of this paper will be effective for ‘better oral presentation in English’ in the classes and formal occasions. It can be useful for those who have the aspiration to impress their audience not only by their language skills but also by applying essential techniques for smart presentation. It is noteworthy that formal presentation is related to both good language skills and essential non-verbal communication techniques since the audience actually likes to enjoy the entire session visually and listening to the speaker/s. The following table can be effective for every presenter that are mostly vital during formal presentation session.

Table 2: Crucial factors that should be seriously taken into consideration prior to and during presentation session (Halder, A, 2016):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Important issues in formal Presentation</th>
<th>Actions to be taken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Target audience</td>
<td>Need to analyse their maturity, knowledge, status (position), interest, especially who are listening to the presenter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icebreaking session</td>
<td>Consider an innovative but interesting icebreaking mechanism before entering into the depth of the topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content of the presentation</td>
<td>Should be precise; limit the content considering the time, importance of the topic and the interest of the audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technological issues</td>
<td>Check multimedia systems in the venue prior to start the session to avoid problems later on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-verbal communication, esp. eye contact</td>
<td>Maintain proper eye contact with the audience including the last one in the venue or classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibility of Internet connection</td>
<td>Overdependence and reliability on the local internet connection might be too risky sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>key points to focus</td>
<td>Need to concentrate on the important part of the entire topic only during presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenter’s position</td>
<td>Hiding behind the computer screen reflect the lack of confidence of the presenter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. ORAL PRESENTATION SESSION- A FRAMEWORK

The researchers of the current study followed a systematic framework for obtaining required information and its proper analysis. They concentrated on
almost every step necessary to conduct a successful presentation session in the language class. As mentioned earlier, most of the participants of this study were freshers at Bachelor degree programs and they were enrolled in a course titled ‘English for Academic Purposes’ (EAP) in the first year at GUB (Munira, 2017). Along with careful analysis of the collected data from the classroom performance of the presenters, the researchers tried to understand the psychological state and perceptions about class presentation in English through survey (see format at Appendix part).

The researchers divided the entire formal presentation procedure into three stages for systematic analysis as mentioned in the following table:

Table 3: The series of action followed in the formal class presentation in ‘English for Academic Purposes’ (EAP) course-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.</th>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Role of the facilitator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>Pre-Presentation Session</td>
<td>Provided requisite guidelines to the new presenters to get prepared for class presentation both in individual and group performance along with mock presentation session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>Presentation Session</td>
<td>Observed the performance practically and assessed formally to investigate whether the presenters i.e. freshers could apply the learnt skills and presentation techniques properly (see checklist in Appendix)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>Post Presentation Session</td>
<td>Pointed out the shortcomings and provided necessary feedback of the performance based on the challenges the students faced in the real scenario, esp. the mistakes they made practically in the presentation session.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I. Pre-Presentation Session

It is noteworthy that before the main presentation sessions, the students were properly briefed by the facilitators i.e. researchers on the basic principles of oral presentation in English since it was their first experience of this type. These principles include proper verbal and non-verbal communication, planning content, using effective delivery techniques, designing powerful visual aids and gaining control of external factors that can impact on the presentation process. Applying lecture methods, written guideline and PowerPoint presentation techniques, the freshers were well-informed earlier to get prepared mentally for excellent class presentation and reduce stress on the right occasion. Mock presentation sessions were also conducted in the class for several times; the objective was to prepare the participants for presenting a topic following presentation principles and apply the learnt skills and techniques properly on stage.

As one of the convenient steps for preparation, the participants of the current study were given a familiar topic first to speak for a minute in front of the
classmates and teacher. They were then briefed on the specific book they are supposed to read and present orally in real presentation session. Some of them worked and presented on separate chapters of the text while others presented merely summaries or major characters from the text according to their choices. Before the final presentation, they were called on stage to boost up their confidence, esp. to speak in English without fear. Developing their other skills in presentation like body language was also the part of pre-presentation stage.

II. Presentation Session:

The main attraction of the entire study is, undoubtedly, the oral presentation session arranged for the first year students in English language class. The target students were given options to present their ideas on the assigned topic either naturally i.e. presenting a topic in front of the audience as usual or by utilizing technology i.e. PowerPoint presentation. They were even given choice to work and present their topics as a group. The remarkable aspect in this part is that the confident students of the class presented their assigned topic through individual performance. During the presentation session, the course instructor graded their performance following the criteria mentioned in the ‘Class Presentation Assessment Format’ in the Appendix part.

The major objective of the evaluation of performance is to assess the speaking skills of the students and their ability to apply formal presentation techniques within the stipulated time frame in the class environment. In fact, the effectiveness of pre-presentation session regarding the presentation strategies was cross-checked at this stage. Marks were allotted for good starting and icebreaking, clear voice, proper eye contact, maintaining gesture-posture, and most importantly, ‘confidence’. However, in PowerPoint presentation, the students’ preparation and use of visual aid were also assessed carefully. The class instructor tried to observe how the presenters managed their stress and remained spontaneous while presenting their individual parts. Sometimes the best presentation in the class was recorded as a guideline and reference for future presenters.

III. Post presentation Stage:

After the formal presentation session, constructive feedbacks were given to the presenter-learners by the course instructor based on their performance. They were also guided to overcome the mistakes they made during the oral presentation facing their course instructor and classmates. It is expected that the entire process will be fruitful to improve their presentation skills and related factors in future. Later, a survey was conducted (see Appendix part) to understand their feelings and
experience regarding oral presentation in English in formal occasion. Through their opinion, the perception of the presenter-learners on oral presentation and remarkable challenges regarding this issue could be well-perceived.

7. FINDINGS

In the EAP program, each presenter was given 3-5 minutes to present a topic in the class presentation sessions. Very few of them presented individually and used technology i.e. PowerPoint during oral presentation sessions. Maximum students took the advantage of presenting in a group. During the presentation sessions, the researchers observed and tried to sort out whether all presenters could apply the presentation techniques properly briefed earlier in the class. As an effective presentation makes the best use of the relationship between the presenter and the audience, the course instructor i.e. the researchers of the current study also assessed the capabilities of the students regarding this issue. Based on the performance on stage, each presentation was graded using a well-planned rubric.

The analysis from the findings of this research paper can be divided into three parts:

   a. Findings from real presentation sessions-
      i. Dress Code
      ii. Non-verbal Communication (such as gesture, posture, movement, eye contact, voice projection etc.)
      iii. Delivery techniques including language proficiency
      iv. Confidence level
      v. Managing Question-Answer Session

   b. Findings from the survey at post-presentation stage

   c. Findings from the interview

a. Findings from real presentation sessions-

i. Dress Code

In a formal presentation, visual effect plays a significant role since the audience likes to enjoy presentation from different aspects. Maintaining proper dress code by the presenter is important to draw the attention of audience at first stage. In fact, making a presentation puts the presenter or speaker on public display. The researchers of the current study allotted separate marks for the presenters or the target group for maintaining formal dress code i.e. presentable look; the female students were encouraged to put on traditional Bangladeshi attire ‘saree’ and the male students formal shirt-pant or complete suit with tie. Truly speaking, most of the presenters were aware about this issue and followed the proper dress code for
presentation on particular occasion i.e. presentation session as per instruction. They really looked different and matured in formal attire. Very few of them, especially the irregular students appeared in front of the audience with casual attire.

ii. Non-verbal Communication

Non-verbal communication refers to certain striking features of presentation by which the audience is convinced by the presenters’ body language specifically. In a formal presentation session, the speakers’ overall performance and preparation are reflected well by his/her body language i.e. by gesture-posture, facial expression, movement etc. rather than content of the presentation. In other words, when a speaker presents a topic in front of his peers and course instructor, positive body language becomes an important issue in supporting him develop credibility, express emotion and connect with the listeners in a perfect way. As a result, the presenter-speaker gets the full attention of the audience as a person and the listeners concentrate on what the presenter says in his presentation.

In the current study, the researchers who were also observers of different oral presentation sessions in the class noticed that the facial expression of the presenters reflected their overall preparation while their eyes focused their confidence level perfectly. Those presenter-learners who practised earlier before the final presentation and took ‘oral presentation’ issues seriously could maintain proper eye contact with the teacher and the entire audience, showed positive attitude in the body language and were successful in presenting their topic with clear voice. On the other hand, those who were weak in speaking or oral communication in English fumbled in their presentation quite often and proved themselves unprepared for the formal presentation. This fact is apparent in both individual and group performance. Another significant finding is that some students presented their topics based on PowerPoint slides completely where they couldn’t use their body language properly for they only read particular slides at a time. As a result, they failed to create a link with the audience by proper eye contact, gesture-posture etc. However, in the feedback session, they were guided properly regarding how to overcome their shortcomings. It is true that maximum presenters of the target group are new to this type of activity though they enjoyed a lot.

iii. Delivery techniques including language proficiency

The charm of a good food is not only dependent on spices or ingredients used in it, but also how it is served. Similarly, success of an oral presentation on a topic largely depends on the delivery techniques of the presenters. Again, a presentation is enjoyable if a presenter can deliver a topic in front of an audience in a lively,
flexible and interesting way. It is necessary to plan well and practise more for delivering the topic. At the same time, the presenters can identify their limitations in their expression, voice as well as body movements. The best presenters, however, focus on interactive speaking in oral presentation to establish a link with the audience. Only ‘smile’ in face during the delivery of information can make the whole environment lively and enjoyable to all. In a PowerPoint presentation, however, the presenter needs to be proactive to interpret the information stated in different slides by smart delivery techniques. Here the language of the presenter is required to be easy and intelligible for the listeners.

As a matter of fact, the researcher-observers of the current study allotted substantial score for delivery techniques applied by the presenters in their respective presentation sessions. Though the target group of students were freshers, some of them tried to present smartly adopting proper icebreaking techniques, spoke spontaneously on the assigned topic facing their peers and teacher in the class. In group presentation, usually the most confident presenter-speaker handled the crucial part of the presentation keeping the weaker one in the middle of the session to speak. Subsequently, students weak in spoken English delivered his/her part based on memorization or merely reading from PowerPoint slides or papers. Pronunciation problem was another striking challenge for some presenters while delivering their part.

Moreover, the freshers having less preparation and confidence finished their presentation within shortest possible time; in fear of facing the audience or shyness, some presenters all of a sudden stopped in the middle of their presentation. Unfortunately, some students even were abstained from facing the challenges of presentation due to lack of experience and for nervousness though they were the least in number. In such case, they hardly bothered about losing the assigned marks for presentation. However, in some individual presentation, a number of presenters impressed the audience i.e. their classmates and course instructor following the proper delivery techniques stated earlier. Needless to mention, those particular students obtained the highest score in oral presentation part and passed the semester with better grades at the end. Overall, it was a learning experience for all.

iv. Confidence Level

One of the major areas of assessment by the researchers was to investigate the level of confidence of the presenters on stage. As usual, students who put maximum effort for ‘oral presentation’ on the assigned topic and followed the guidelines of the course instructor performed the best with high confidence in their sessions. This confidence was reflected through their starting or introduction, eye contact,
body movement, even in voice modulation. As a matter of fact, these presenters were confident in both verbal and non-verbal communication for following all principles or basic requirements in formal presentation. To the contrary, less serious students in the language course demonstrated lack of confidence all through in their presentation; as a result, their performance was not up to the mark; there was hardly any variation in their intonation while delivering their speech. Consequently, they were unable to retain the interest of the audience either by content or by delivery techniques. It is noteworthy that the confidence of the best presenters could be identified through their movement of arms and hands while delivering their parts in front of the spectators.

v. Managing Question-Answer Sessions

It is, in fact, a very useful technique to engage and empower the audience in a presentation session. Usually in a presentation session, the audience is the silent listeners who are supposed to have patience to understand what the speakers say. It is also natural that this group of people i.e. the audience might have some questions to ask to the speakers out of curiosity or doubt. The freshers or the target group of the current study were guided earlier to invite questions to the audience before closing the session or wrapping up their presentation. Specially, the group leader of a group tried to practice this technique as a representative though respondent of this session was very few in number. Since it was their first experience, the presenters were less habituated to deal with question-answer session. Some instructors of similar language courses also encouraged students to invite questions from the audience by allotting separate marks for these practices. Truly speaking, this incentive was proved to be effective in the real scenario.

b. Findings from the survey at post-presentation stage

After the presentation session, the observers, more specifically, the researchers gave their feedback to the freshers regarding their performance and areas of improvement. The presenters also shared their opinions and feelings to the course instructor in a survey (see the form in the Appendix part), particularly about their experience on the first presentation in English. Maximum students pointed out three problems as major challenges in their oral presentation session—

i. Nervousness
ii. Speaking in English
iii. Facing the audience including the course teacher

As stated by the freshers, due to nervousness, some of them forgot the points they liked to present in front of their friends and course instructor in their
presentation sessions. Another interesting part is that some female students found difficulty to manage their traditional dress i.e. saree while presenting their topics. Secondly, since the freshers at undergraduate level are not used to speaking in English, they were very much frightened to present a topic in English for the first time. However, they asserted that their practice for preparation developed their language skills to some extent. Lack of practice in English made it difficult to present the assigned topic as per their expectation. Some of them felt comfortable to present in Banglish (mixture of Bangla and English language) due to their lack of fluency in English.

The most common challenges faced by freshers during presentation class were to face the audience and say something in English! Lack of experience and exposure mainly affected their psychological state for which some of them were afraid in first presentation. In addition to that the selection of topic for presentation is one of the vital issues for the undergraduate students. These facts have been revealed in the survey result where the freshers shared their feelings openly. Since the new presenters found the story book (that they presented part by part) interesting, it was convenient for many of them to practise and internalize the theme out of interest. After the presentation session, however, maximum presenters-learners considered the issue of ‘oral presentation’ as an effective learning experience to boost up their confidence in future. They also expressed their satisfaction for learning teamwork, practicing leadership, and finally, developing habit of reading especially in English.

c. Findings from interview session

In order to get a broader view of the challenges that our presenter-learners face while presenting a topic in presentation session, the researchers interviewed professionals in the related fields. The interviewees are mainly involved in grooming the undergraduate students for formal presentation at tertiary level as a part of career development. From their observation it has been found that basic principles of oral presentation should be taught seriously at the outset of tertiary education. The responsibilities of every course teacher are to train the students for achieving a better presentation skill. If the freshers are habituated with the presentation techniques from the very first year at tertiary education, they will be confident to present at any stage overcoming their shortcoming in communication.

The interviewees also emphasized on proper training on ICT, especially PowerPoint presentation. They opined that successful professionals in respective fields can be invited to motivate and guide the potential presenters with the support of educational institutions. It will be helpful for freshers to be aware about formal
dress code, the essentials of individual and group presentation and related issues. All through the process, the focus should be on developing essential skills rather than obtaining marks or grades in oral presentation.

8. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To sum up, it is mostly the responsibilities of both students as well as teachers to work together for overcoming the challenges in oral presentation session. ELT practitioners can find the following guidelines useful in their classroom practices.

8.1. Role of the facilitators

The facilitators or the course instructors involved in conducting oral presentation session can practise learner-centered activity that is effective for improving learners’ communicative competence. If the class is communicative with the special emphasis on English, the students can practise this language more; again, they should be encouraged to think beyond their textbook and explain their idea independently. Instead of limiting this practice within the language teachers, facilitators from other disciplines should come forward to guide their learners and develop their skills related to oral presentation. Occasional speaking practice in English on familiar topics can be effective to boast up the confidence of undergraduate students.

Along with creating awareness on speaking skills, the educators should also emphasize on non-verbal communication techniques so that the learners can connect their audience effectively in any formal presentation. In higher education, the teachers should motivate their students sincerely focusing on the need of presentation skills for future career. The learners can be first introduced with the facts of the oral presentation by proper examples. Gradually, they should be guided on the basic principles of formal presentation step by step. In this process, the learners at undergraduate level can develop both verbal and non-verbal skills with less challenge. Again, friendly and stimulating classroom environment is essential for managing stress and controlling psychological state of learners at real occasion. When the prospective presenters are habilitated with the entire process, we can expect the best output from them in future.

8.2. Introducing Separate Module on ‘Presentation Skills’

Another useful step regarding this issue can be introducing a separate module on ‘presentation skills’ in the course curriculum. The design of the module should be up-to-date and it can be conducted by the professionals in the related
fields like successful persons in the corporate sectors. Since oral communication part is a vital issue for formal oral presentation, module on ‘presentation skills’ should focus on communicative vocabulary, conversational strategies, word stress, intonation and pronunciation issues. Needless to mention, after realizing the necessity of presentation skills in real life situation, learners will be encouraged to spend more time for preparing themselves and practising the skills sincerely. As a course of action, students’ performance can be recorded instantly in the mock presentation session. The prospective presenters can watch and examine their activities later on at home and easily assess their performance starting from body language, voice modulation to fluency in speaking. This self-assessment practice can ultimately support any potential learner to overcome the challenges in the formal occasion (Brooks and Wilson, 2014)

8.3. Support from the concerned authority

Apart from the strategies mentioned above, the teachers involved in teaching at tertiary level should have opportunities for training on ‘presentation techniques’ from pedagogical point of view. The concerned authority should develop the training materials in a way so that the components are relevant to the challenges emerging from real scenario. It is also necessary to revise existing language syllabus from higher secondary to tertiary education considering the non-native speaking background in Bangladesh. (Khan, H.R. 2007). Moreover, hands on training on oral presentation along with the training on ICT are very essential to overcome the challenges faced by the freshers at tertiary level.

For this purpose, special fund can be allotted for the greater interest of the learners i.e. potential presenters and institutions as well. Colleges and University authorities should come forward to form ‘Clubs for Presentation and Public Speaking’ to create opportunities for exercising the basics of presentation, teamwork, leadership qualities etc. Under these clubs, more public speaking opportunities can be provided for the students to overcome the deficiencies in speaking and other areas. Apart from this, ‘Annual Presentation Contest’ can be organised by the university authority as inter-departmental competition to encourage the students positively. However, the authority should look after the irregular and weaker students mostly and groom them with special attention for the greater interest of the respective institution and the nation as well.

In this way the collective effort by the learners, facilitators and institution can bring success in the long run overcoming the existing challenges in oral presentation issues.
9. CONCLUSION

Since tertiary education is advanced in merit and very much connected to professional life, the necessity of learning & developing formal ‘oral presentation’ skills cannot be ignored at any discipline. Academic courses mainly fulfil the demands of the learners to create competent and skilled human resources. Therefore, if the oral presentation issues are treated seriously by the academia and practised accordingly, it will be beneficial to develop confidence among the future leaders of the world easily. It can be a challenging issue initially for the non-native speakers like freshers at Bangladeshi universities; in other words, it can be rewarding too if proper grooming sessions can be arranged from the very first semester at undergrad level. Arranging seminars and workshops on ‘oral presentations’ periodically for the learners can also contribute in enhancing students’ motivation, their sense of autonomy and communicative skills. Finally, it is expected that the current study can be useful for the stakeholders associated with these issues to practise in their own context, esp. classrooms.

Endnotes

1. EFL: It stands for English as a Foreign Language; English language is treated as a foreign language in a non-native speaking country like Bangladesh.
2. EAP: English for Academic Purposes is a mandatory English course which is usually offered to the university students to develop their English language proficiency in English language.
3. GUB: It stands for Green University of Bangladesh, a renowned private university of Bangladesh.
4. L2: It usually refers to second language or target language students opt to learn.
5. Communication competence: It refers to the ability to use the language appropriately in different circumstances to communicate effectively.
6. The complex systems of communication: The systems include one person speaks and the other person listens, and then they change their places while giving and receiving feedback.

References:

APPENDIX PART

Format - 1

Green University of Bangladesh
Class Presentation Assessment Format

Course: English for Academic Purposes
Main/Science Campus: 
Section:  
Semester: 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name &amp; ID</th>
<th>Dress Code</th>
<th>Ice Breaking</th>
<th>Voice Modulation</th>
<th>Eye Contact</th>
<th>Gesture Posture</th>
<th>Confidence Level</th>
<th>Overall Performance</th>
<th>Total Marks</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Format-2

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RESEARCH
on
CHALLENGES IN ORAL PRESENTATION IN ENGLISH FOR THE FRESHERS
AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL
Interview Session

Major focus:
Performance and challenges faced by GUB students in the formal presentation

Name of Interviewee: 
Department/Section: 
Date: 

1. What are the key factors in oral presentation in your consideration?

2. How can the learners overcome their shortcomings in presentation?

3. What is the performance of the undergrad students in presentation session as you have observed in Green University?

4. What should be the role of faculty members and mentors in this regard?
SURVEY ON ORAL PRESENTATION

Post Presentation Feedback

Course Title: English for Academic Purposes
Course Code: EAP 009/101/102
(Main/Science Campus), Green University of Bangladesh

Gender: Male / Female
Department:
EAP Section:

Date:

Answer the following questions regarding your experience on the class presentation.

Put tick mark (√) beside the appropriate option or give your opinion in writing where applicable:

1. Was it your first class presentation in English?
   i. Yes  ii. No

2. How was your feeling after oral presentation in English?
   i. Good  ii. Frightening  iii. Moderate
   iv. ____________

3. Is class presentation necessary for developing speaking English in real life?
   i. Yes  ii. No  iii. To some extent

4. Was the guidance on presentation skills beforehand helpful for improving your oral presentation in English?
   i. Of course  ii. Partially  iii. Not really

5. What were the main challenges/obstacles/difficulties for presenting in English? (your opinion please)

6. PowerPoint presentation is more effective than oral presentation- do you agree with this concept?
   i. Yes  ii. To some extent  iii. Not really

7. After the class presentation, are you confident about presenting any topic in English next time?
   i. Of course  ii. May be  iii. Not really

8. Write in brief your overall experience and feelings on oral presentation in English based on British Council story book. (Write in complete sentences, please!)