| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Role of Pairwork in Enhancing Speaking Skills and Learner Autonomy among Bangladeshi Tertiary Level Students

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| ABSTRACT

The study aims to explore pair work activities in EFL-speaking classrooms at tertiary level education in Bangladesh. Pairwork has been an issue of interest among English language researchers and learners of English as a second language. In recent years, learner autonomy in language learning has added new dimensions. As pair work can relate to learner autonomy in speaking, everyone can look into the phenomenon. Through a mixed-method approach, the investigation was conducted at a university in Chittagong, Bangladesh, with a survey through a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews of teachers, and classroom observation. The findings show that pair work has been proven to be a significantly useful strategy to improve learners' speaking skills. Moreover, teachers can utilize different strategies in pairing learners to create a positive learning atmosphere. Through pair work, learners can work independently, and they turn into autonomous users of the English language in both academic and real-life situations. The study throws light on some issues of providing more speaking opportunities to students at the secondary level. It ends with recommendations for both teachers and policymakers in tertiary-level ESL classrooms.

| KEYWORDS

Learner autonomy, pair work, speaking fluency, using language, collaborative tasks, enhancing speaking ability, etc.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

1. Introduction

Teaching English speaking skills has been an interesting issue for discussion in the realm of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL), especially at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. The real challenge lies in teaching speaking to Bangladeshi students at this stage, as the primary and secondary stages do not have enough scope for teaching speaking. For some reason, in previous phases of English teaching, speaking has been neglected significantly, which increases the intensity of the struggle of both learners and educators. Speaking, a crucial skill among the four skills in English is never assessed in Bangladeshi contexts before the tertiary stage. At schools, students only memorise grammar rules and structures, which makes them nothing but trained parrots. Consequently, pairwork attempts in tertiary classrooms have to face a lot of trials and challenges. Many students are not motivated to learn the language; rather, they try to overcome the hassle of academic examinations through preciously-learned techniques. Therefore, teachers have to undertake daunting trials in teaching speaking and making learners more autonomous. Moreover, great communication skill depends frequently on the English-speaking ability of the graduates. Pairwork strategy has been considered an effective classroom activity in EFL classes in recent years. As speaking requires more than one person to participate, the teacher's lectures and other skills do not have a notable impact on students' enhancement in speaking skills. More often than not students' language (EFL) ability is considered on the basis of their speaking competence. Therefore, making them fluent in speaking is absolutely critical and demanding. Without fluently-speaking graduates, industries struggle to establish communication with their stakeholders. In addition, students face different problems while at university, especially in other courses where communication in English is quite frequent among peers. Educators in modern days frequently use speaking activities in small groups and pairs. It would be bizarre to see any speaking class without any pairwork activity in most corners of the world.

But unfortunately, in Bangladesh, the idea is still infrequent for many reasons. However, English language teaching (ELT) experts opine in favour of the frequent use of pairwork activities in English speaking classrooms. Speaking is one of the most effective skills that is known as productive skill. But, undergraduate students in Bangladesh always feel anxiety in speaking classrooms. As a consequence, it affects their other abilities in the long run. According to Rianti et al. (2022), speaking anxiety lowers while in pairwork activities that provide better augmentation in speaking ability of eight graders.

With the advancement of the communicative approach in teaching, learner-learner interaction has become the centre of attention for educators. Speaking classrooms should be more learner-centred rather than teacher-centred. Learner autonomy is a unique concept that ensures a learner's self-motivation and reliance on his ability. Moreover, task-based work in pairs enhances learner autonomy, which makes them less dependent on teachers and text books. According to Tuan and Mai (2015), aspects like students' listening ability, partner's support, motivation, teacher feedback, etc. Additionally, students' speaking ability has a gradual impact on their future careers. To improve the speaking engagement of the learners, teachers must encourage pairwork activities and help them reduce their anxiety. Educators must adopt effective pairwork strategies to get the best out of it. As many researchers suggest, pairwork tasks create a warm and trustworthy atmosphere in the classroom, which makes the learners feel at ease with his/her partner as well as with the teacher. Without pairwork, learners remain dependent on the educator solely and expect some magical solution to their speaking struggles, which never happens. On the contrary, while in collaborative speaking tasks learners receive some power back to exercise it and become an autonomous user of language. Eventually, this increases the chance to speak English more independently in real life situations at work and other professional atmospheres. According to Davies and Pearse (2000), the prime objective of teaching English is to create users of the language who can interact effectively in correct English. But in the Bangladesh context, the EFL learners hardly use English on social occasions. In a professional context, few cases are exceptional. As Benson (2016) suggests, learners usually learn very little in an institutional context, and they learn more when they are given autonomy to practise their own. When learners feel anxiety and lack motivation in learning speaking, pairwork activities can make them elated to work independently. As a result, in a globalized world of English as a lingua franca, teaching and learning strategies must be interesting and two-way. Yet, teachers must work effectively on improving the pairwork strategies at different levels.

2. Literature Review

As many researchers propose, pairwork activities contribute effectively to enhancing communicative language teaching, which triggers the frequent use of language in EFL classrooms. They increase motivation in students' learning practices, improve proficiency, reduce classroom tension, and provide better opportunities for learners to help each other. According to Thornbury (2011), in order to enhance the autonomy of language users, some elements play a vital role. For example, productivity in a speaking task can engage the learners through the production of language. He also emphasizes purposefulness, authenticity, interactivity, challenge, safety, etc. He underscores the significance of collaborative activities like chain a story, role play, guess the lie, show-and-tell etc. As a productive skill, speaking in classrooms requires interesting activities, opinions, role-plays, sharing ideas, social and academic friendships, etc. Learners use a new language through encountering, understanding and practicing it at different levels. According to Kırkgöz (2011), speaking requires a lot of support and listening engagement. Age-appropriate pedagogies for teaching speaking skills can make it more collaborative. Without the learners-engagement, students can not produce the language and their confidence as speakers will not grow at the desired level. As Harmer (2007) opines, individual activities do not inspire the sense of belonging of students to the class. In pairwork, students can practise language together, study a text, research language, etc. It brings sharp changes in the amount of speaking automatically as students have to communicate to solve the task. In the case of speaking classes, it creates an advantageous climate of language use with limited time and effort from the teacher. Therefore, pairwork promotes learner-autonomy and makes them independent users of the language. Hence, pairwork and groupwork are essential to engage the reluctant students. Sampson (2021) asserts the standing of pairwork in EFL classrooms, especially during Covid-19, which was a time of social distancing from each other. Through the 'sociocultural theory,' he examines the "process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language." Rianti et al. (2022) show the effectiveness of pairwork activities in removing speaking anxiety and enhancing the ability to speak English. His study reveals that using pairwork activities has a substantial impact which is quite unusual in the conventional method. Based on the method of multivariate analysis variance, the researcher notifies the benefits of collaborative learning speaking classrooms of eighth graders which can be appropriate in other levels as well. An increased score in tests in post-test results in the experimental class shows that pre-activity, core activity, and closing activity through pairwork create a supportive environment for teacher-student interaction and learners-autonomy. However, teachers need to be tactful in using pairwork activities and making useful pairs to connect learners with each other comprehensively. Baidya (2015) conducts a study at BRAC University and reviews the policy of the university in terms of language learning and teaching pedagogy. He explores the obstacles of BRACU learners in learning speaking and finds mixed feedback on classroom practices of speaking classes. As he identifies, shyness, lack of vocabulary, and lack of speaking atmosphere are the major issues to improve speaking in English. He suggests speaking English more on campus can create a better environment for English speaking among the students. Alhamdi (2014) exposes the prominent barriers to learning and speaking at Tibah University in Saudi Arabia. After observing ten different classes, she concludes by providing different

suggestions for the Saudi education system, which mostly emphasize motivating students to speak both inside and outside the classrooms. Her study ends up recommending empowering teachers to introduce new and interesting topics that may be personalized for learners so that they participate more collaboratively while speaking. Zahin and Zannat (2021) also reveal similar findings through their study on barriers to teaching speaking skills in online classrooms. They focus on private university learners, which shows some relevance to the present study. They specifically stress the use of pair and group work in speaking classrooms online. They acclaim that more practice among learners, using innovative materials, motivation, effective feedback, and essential teachers' training can assist the learners in overcoming the hurdles of teaching speaking effectively. According to their perceptive commendations, speaking activities should be increased in language classrooms with real-life situations, which is quite similar to the aim of the present research on collaborative speaking activities. Teachers also need to be diversified with depth of subject knowledge and innovation in assigning activities. Mridha and Muniruzzaman (2020) state the Bangladeshi EFL learners' challenges at the undergraduate level. In a quantitative study, they expose the existing factors like shyness, lack of a pleasant environment for speaking, fear, etc., which are the issues to be explored in the current research. They recommend increasing conversational practices with more interaction and practice, which implies the necessity of collaborative learning in Bangladeshi EFL speaking classrooms at the undergraduate level. Matsuno (2017) shows the adoptability of peer assessment in Japanese ESL classrooms among the engineering students of a national university. His research explores the engagement of peers in assessing the presentations. Baleghizadeh and Rahimi (2011) discovered the preference between pairwork and group-work among Iranian students. They also investigate the issues of factors influencing choosing the partners like age, proficiency, familiarity and language learning motivation. According to their findings, learners prefer to be engaged in pairwork, which maximize their involvement in speaking ESL. As the research suggests, students would enjoy working with friends or people of the same age. More research like the current one would be suggestive of similar results depending on the socio-cultural perspectives. According to a study conducted by John and Amuthu (2020), online ESL classrooms in India have to deal with the predicaments of engaging learners. It focuses on highlighting the language barriers in cross-cultural business communication and emphasizes speaking both inside and outside classrooms. Zohairy (2014) stresses the pairwork activities among Saudi pre-intermediate students. His study shows mixed results in pairing students as learners prefer the upper-level partner in speaking tasks while teachers prefer the same-level learners. It suggests proper monitoring by the teacher and graded tasks for low-level learners can bring the best out of pairwork activities. Govindasamy and Shah (2020) investigate students' points of view regarding collaborative speaking tasks in ESL classrooms in the context of Malaysian secondary schools. Though it focuses on a secondary level, it unravels the preference for pair work from students, which opens a new horizon of thoughts for the present research. Through the Likert Scale questionnaire by Google Form, the results foster positive feedback from learners with minimal effort from teachers, and that promotes learners' autonomy. According to the research, students feel motivated, confident, relaxed, and fluent in using the language. Achmand and Yusuf (2014) experiment on students having equivalent to IELTS band 5.5 with pre-test and post-test results, which shows significant development of speaking abilities through pair work activities. They also suggest rotating pairs for better cultural and language orientations. According to Hermann (2013), in pair work activities, learners play a crucial role in their independent choices. As Scrievner (2005) suggests, learners can exchange what they already know or what they do not know through pairwork activities, which is similar to the experiment in a chemistry laboratory that brings out something new. Seraj et al. (2021) investigate the challenges of teaching EFL oral skills at the tertiary level in Bangladesh. According to their findings, teaching methods, authentic materials, oral activities, class size, culture shock, multimedia facilities, use of L1, etc., are the major issues to focus on. They suggest smaller class sizes with the use of authentic materials and genuinely interested learners. Alam (2020) opines in favour of task-based language teaching for developing speaking skills at the tertiary level of education. Ahmmed (2017) points out the relevance of peer conversation in speaking classrooms in the context of a public university in Bangladesh.

3. Methodology
The main objective of the study is to explore the challenges in teaching speaking EFL in the Bangladeshi context at the tertiary level using pairwork activities. The research also aims to investigate the issues of using English by teachers in classrooms, students' speaking English both inside and outside classrooms, class size, assessment in speaking, classroom responses from students etc.

3.1 Rationale
The previous studies were conducted from different perspectives in different countries, including Bangladesh. Most of the researches outline the uses of pairwork and group-work in speaking tasks, which includes communicative and task-based language teaching. Almost all of them show the positive impact of collaborative activities in enhancing speaking activities and lowering anxiety among students. The current study aims at unravelling the factors from different perspectives regarding using pairwork activities to ensure learners' autonomy and can make them independent users of language.

3.2 Data Collection: Sampling and Population
The study was conducted using a mixed-method approach, using both quantitative and qualitative data. 137 students, both male and female, from different departments were selected to answer a questionnaire. The questionnaire had two sections. The first one investigated students' personal information and language level, and the second one investigated students' insightful feedback on

pairwork activities and their effectiveness. Twenty close-ended questions were provided to them. The sampling was random. The students included departments like English, Law, Business, and Engineering. All questions were on a Likert scale that included five fixed choices: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strong agree. They all were from different semesters of private university based in Chittagong. All of them had to take a course titled 'Public Speaking' which is a mandatory course in the first year of a four-year bachelor course. The course usually has some task-based lessons that involve some pairwork and group-work activities. At the end of the course, they are supposed to speak English fluently and offer speeches independently without the teacher's assistance or minimum assistance. It should be mentioned that from a Bangladeshi tertiary level education perspective, all undergraduate students had to take at least 12 courses in English in a 12-year span of school and college before they attended the university.

3.3 Semi-structured Interview
A semi-constructed interview was conducted for data collection from teachers. 8 teachers were interviewed with five questions who conducted the speaking course among different students from multiple disciplines. Teachers provided their opinions about selected issues of teaching speaking. Teachers were selected randomly as they possessed experience in teaching between 1 and 10 years at the tertiary level. After collecting the data, a thematic analysis was done to create a final conclusion. All questions were reviewed by an ELT expert and modified later on.

3.4 Classroom Observation
Two classrooms were observed to ensure the accuracy of the data. Two different teachers conducted the courses for students from two different departments. The students were from the same level as those in their first year of university. Four questions (criteria) were used to observe classroom teaching, focusing on the pairwork strategies, students' use of the language, the teacher's role, and students' improvement. The first-class size was 42, and the second one was 36. The researcher closely observed students' collaborative tasks, spending 20 minutes in each class. He also observed the teacher's instructions, responses, and guiding techniques in the classes.

3.5 Research Questions:
The current study is focused on the following research questions:

1. How do pairwork strategies contribute to enhancing speaking skills in EFL classrooms?

2. What are the effective pairwork strategies that promote collaborative learning?

3. How can a teacher's role play a positive impact on learner-autonomy?

3.6 Limitations of the Study:
The study was conducted within a limited span of time and with a medium sampling. It was conducted only at one private university in Bangladesh based in Chittagong. It is included in a few departments of the university, but it represents Bangladeshi tertiary students in general. Therefore, the data were focused on a single institution, whereas involving more private and public universities could have provided an extended picture of the issue. Moreover, the students were quite new to taking part in such research, which might have influenced the data and, thereby, the results. Some students may not have understood the questions properly. Some others may not have revealed the real data as they might have been too shy to provide feedback on teachers, as research and accountability are not common in some cultures.

Because of time shortage, detailed interviews with teachers could not be conducted. More time, people, and enough funding could make it more reliable and more representative. The researcher also did not have time to observe learners outside the classroom on campus. A final presentation, viva-voce, and assessment strategies could be considered for a deeper analysis of the pairwork activities. However, these issues can create more opportunities for future research in this field.

4. Results and Discussion
Twenty statements with five options were served among students to collect data. The options were:

a. Strongly Disagree
b. Disagree
c. Neutral
d. Agree
e. Strongly Agree

Table 1. Students' responses to the questionnaire:

Sl.	Statement	SD(%)	D(%)	N(%)	A(%)	SA (%)
1.	In speaking classes, I prefer pair work to class lectures.	1.5	3.6	14.9	66.8	13.2
2.	As a student, I feel motivated while doing pairwork activities.	0.7	1.5	10	58.1	28.7
3.	I speak English mostly while in the class.	0	6.6	20.6	58.8	14
4.	Teacher speaks English most of the time while in class.	1.5	0.7	4.4	47.1	46.3
5.	While in pairwork activities, I feel more confident in speaking English.	0.7	2.2	12.5	52.9	31.6
6.	I feel less shy, and I can learn from my partner in pairwork.	0	4.4	16.9	50.7	27.9
7.	I feel more comfortable with a partner of equal speaking ability.	3.7	2.9	9.6	65.4	18.4
8.	I feel more comfortable when my speaking partner is more capable in speaking than me.	2.2	8.8	18.4	47.8	22.8
9.	I feel more comfortable when my partner is weaker than me.	15.5	41.2	19.9	19.1	4.4
10.	I learn more and get help from the partner in pairwork.	0.7	2.9	10.3	69.9	16.2
11.	There are marks for speaking in pairwork in the class.	0	5.1	11	69.9	14
12.	Teacher guides us while speaking in pairwork.	0.7	0	5.1	63.2	30.9
13.	Due to pairwork (peer conversation), I become more fluent in speaking English at viva, presentations, and interviews.	0	1.5	7.4	61	30.1
14.	Pairwork usually continues for	Less than 5 minutes (0)	Up to 5 minutes (11.8)	5-10 minutes (38)	15 minutes (25.7)	More than 15 minutes (24)
15.	Pairwork makes classes more interesting and interactive.	0.7	0	5.9	60.3	33.1
16.	I think my' level of English has improved due to pairwork activities.	0.7	0	6.6	64	28.7
17.	Pairwork helps me solving grammatical problems.	0	3.7	16.2	56.6	23.5
18.	Pairwork should be included in other English courses.	1.5	0.7	8.8	61	27.9
19.	Pairwork makes me an independent learner.	0.7	2.4	7.4	69.9	19.9
20.	I speak English outside the class as well.	2.9	9.6	26.5	47.8	13.2

In response to Statement no. 1, most of the students preferred collaborative tasks and pairwork activities. However, over 12% of learners remain neutral, and a negligible percentage goes against pairwork. In the case of the second statement, a substantial number of students expressed that pairwork motivated them to participate actively in the class. The third statement showed that a good number of learners speak English in the class, but 10% of students remained neutral. Considering speaking in classrooms, 6.6% replied negatively. Most students showed positive feedback regarding the teacher's instructions in English in classrooms in terms of the fourth statement. In addition, in the case of feeling confident, almost 80% of learners replied positively. In regard to the sixth statement, a huge number of (88%) learners expressed that they felt less shy while in pairwork. However, 16.9% of students

remained neutral to this statement. In a statement of equal-ability partners, 83.8% of learners expressed that they felt comfortable in pairs. Yet, 9.6% remained neutral. 70.6% showed their effortlessness in working with partners of more speaking ability; another 18.4% stayed neutral, while 11% replied negatively. However, only 23.4% of learners agreed that they were comfortable with weaker speaking partners, 55.7% showed disagreement, and 19.9% of students remained neutral. 86.1% of students thought that they got help and learned more in pairwork, while almost 10% remained neutral. 73.9% of learners opined that they had the opportunity to be assessed while pairwork, although 11% were neutral and 5.8% replied negatively. 94.1% of learners claimed that the teacher guided them while in pairwork, but 5.1% were neutral to this statement. 91.1% of learners stated that they had benefited in the long-term during their later presentations and viva thanks to pairwork activities, while 7.4% remained neutral. Statement no. 14 was about the duration of the speaking activity. 49.9% of students thought they had the opportunity to practise speaking in pairwork for 15 minutes or more. However, 38% opined in favour of 10 minutes, and 11.8% opined for 5 minutes of pairwork activities. 93.4% of learners thought that pairwork made the class interactive and interesting, while 5.9% remained neutral. 92.7% of students admitted that pairwork activities improved their level of speaking; however, 6.6% were neutral. 80.1% of learners claimed that while in pairwork, they solved grammatical problems easily, while 16.2% remained neutral. 88.9% of learners were in favour of introducing and practicing pairwork in other English courses rather than speaking, while 8.8% were neutral. 89.8% of students thought that they became autonomous learners with more independence in learning through pairwork, though 7.4% stayed neutral. 61% of students spoke English outside the class, though 11.5% disagreed, and 26.5% expressed neutrality.

After a closer analysis of the collected data from learners, some significant issues came to the point. It is undoubtedly true that learners enjoyed pairwork activities in speaking classes as they received better opportunities to practise speaking on their own. Pairwork provided them with free choices in both learning and enjoying at the same time. It is essential for learners' engagement, especially in the tertiary level EFL classrooms at Bangladeshi universities. It is evident that pairwork activities create the right atmosphere for producing language. Learners feel geared up, and at least they try to speak English, being inspired by the environment created through task-based activities. As both teachers and students speak English in classrooms, they have listening and speaking practices at the same time, which creates a relaxed atmosphere of learning. It is noticeable that learners are more confident in speaking English and are able to overcome the shyness that they usually face when talking to the whole class instead. It is interesting to observe the feedback on pairing strategies by teachers as most students look for someone with a similar capacity for pairwork. From the above results, it can be concluded that accommodating mixed-ability classrooms can be daunting in tertiary EFL classrooms. It is obvious from the presented data that students feel some positive pressure when their speaking tasks are marked or assessed. In addition, teachers' guidance can make pairwork livelier and more emphatic in terms of making them speak more in class. It is also noticeable through the data analysis that conversing for more than 15 minutes is useful for learners as it provides them with enough time and opportunities to self-correct, learn, and produce the language. Pairwork makes learners independent as they have to choose language instantly with free choice of words and expressions. It is not controlled at all by teachers, but sometimes it can be semi-controlled. However, when learners start a conversation, they require less guidance from the teacher. As most students opined in favour of long-term improvement made by pairwork, real-life situations like studying in a foreign country, professional interviews, and presentations can be managed well by learners who practise pairwork. It also obviously shows the growth of students' habitual speaking outside the class. The university should play a greater role in creating a suitable English-speaking environment on campus.

4.1 Semi-structured Interview Questions
1. How often do you encourage pair work in speaking classes?

2. How do you think pair work activities in speaking classes can enhance students' fluency in English?

3. Do you pair similar-level or mixed-level learners? Why?

4. How do you assist the pairs when they speak with each other in the class?

5. In previous speaking courses, have your students improved significantly to become fluent, confident and autonomous learners through pair work? How?

The teachers' interviews showed interesting results for pairwork activities. Most of the teachers opined that pairwork activities play a crucial role in improving speaking fluency among students, and they always promote pairwork in speaking classes. But they also think that the traditional lecture-based courses should be changed drastically, and ready-materials should be accessible to facilitate pairwork. They always speak English and inspire students to interact in English. But sometimes the phobia of English makes some students puzzled, and some students are shy because of some external factors like family, culture, background, etc.. Teachers have to translate in L1 what they have already said in English. Most teachers pair students according to mixed ability as they think that a weak student can learn from a better one. Bust sometimes, they think, the abler students feel it uninteresting to take part in peer

conversation as he/she cannot learn anything from the other and has to help him/her continually. Some teachers avoid pairing the mixed-level learners as their strategies. However, a few teachers shared their challenges in mixed-ability classrooms, as most of the students came from Bangla-medium schools and colleges. Learners feel shocked when they discover themselves in an English-speaking situation created by the teacher. According to the teachers, many students lack the motivation to learn English for the sake of language. They would rather learn it for career success and social status. Therefore, most learners look for shortcuts, which makes the tasks of teachers more challenging. In terms of question no. 4, most teachers said they usually stop the pairs if they make any mistake while speaking. This has a mixed impact as learners correct themselves immediately, but it slows them down in speaking. Teachers also responded positively in terms of the long-term impact of peer conversation, as many students developed the habit of speaking in classrooms later. As the course progresses, they gradually turn into better speakers, and eventually, in later presentations or viva-voce, they usually perform much better than expected. This is evident from the grade sheet as they achieve better marks. Most importantly, students give their feedback to teachers after achieving fluency and learner autonomy.

4.2 Class Observations
Two classes were observed by the researcher, and the following results came out:

The first class consisted of 42 students, and the teacher divided them into pairs for the topic 'Childhood Memories.' The students were English major. They enjoyed the conversation, used the language, and asked each other questions. It continued for nearly 15 minutes. The teacher gave them clear instructions, and he was moving from pair-to-pair to help them out. In terms of language use and interaction, it was impactful. However, the second class consisted of 36 students majoring in law. The teacher divided them into pairs for the topic 'Your Travelling Experience'. The students were readily engaged in conversations, and they used expressions and vocabulary of travelling, sharing their real-life stories. The teacher was observant and did not interrupt them in the middle. It went on for 12 minutes.

After observing the classes, it can be concluded that learners enjoy peer conversation and have better confidence in such tasks. It makes them engaged and less worried about correction; rather, they use the language freely. The sitting arrangement was not suitable for peer conversation as they sat side by side, which could have been done face-to-face. One teacher was helping them more than they needed, which interrupted their natural flow of conversation. The second teacher allowed them to converse freely, which made them independent learners for a while, and they used the language freely. It is obvious that pairwork serves the purpose of effective teaching-learning strategies for speaking English.

5. Recommendations
Based on the thematic analysis of data and its findings, the following recommendations are provided for teachers, students, and policymakers:

1. Pairwork activities should be increased in speaking classrooms. In fact, teachers should use pairwork activities as much as possible.

2. While teaching other skills such as listening, reading, and writing, collaboration should be made mandatory so that learners interact and act more independently.

3. Speaking English in all language classrooms should be made compulsory at the tertiary level in the Bangladeshi context. Techer can motivate them more in using easy language in the beginning. The university authorities can ponder over it.

4. Learners can be given the opportunity to choose topics and materials for pairwork in speaking tasks. They will feel more involved and independent.

5. Using English outside the class on campus must be promoted. English can be the campus-language at tertiary level institutions.

6. Teachers should use interesting games, flashcards, online apps, etc., to make speaking classes more interesting. Lecture-based lessons should be avoided as much as possible.

7. Teachers should interrupt the peer conversation less. Small mistakes can be allowed initially or for the time being. They should not correct mistakes initially, rather ask another student to do it to promote learner-autonomy.

8. Teachers should be ready with need-based lesson plans, materials, and assessment strategies for particular classes. They should have specific plans for each batch and for particular classes.

9. Class size should be standard. In the Bangladeshi context, small class sizes like European and other developed countries should be applied. But, for better feedback and well-management of classrooms, speaking classrooms should not exceed 30 students.

10. Teachers should have more freedom in designing lesson plans and choosing materials. Teachers should be given more facilities so that they put more efforts into teaching, and logistics support from the institutions should be ready-to-provide.

11. In-class assessments and time-to-time feedback are essential for measuring students' improvement, which will make them crave learning more and will give them the pleasure of improvement.

12. Teachers should rotate the pairs and experiment with mixed-level learners. Sitting arrangements should be changed and made face-to-face for students. Students and teachers should build rapport with each other so that everyone feels at ease while in the class.

13. Apart from the tasks in the class, learners should be encouraged to share their own stories and experience. This will make them independent users of language rather than just learners of a speaking class.

6. Conclusion

Pairwork strategies are distinctively effective for teaching speaking in tertiary classrooms in the Bangladeshi context. Learners can share opinions independently and exchange ideas without hesitation. Eventually, pairwork makes them engaged in the class and solves minor correction issues between the pair. The teacher can provide feedback in the middle or end only if needed. It makes a dramatic paradigm shift from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred classroom. Learners occupy the dominant part in class as they use the language of their own with their own vocabulary, expressions, and sentence structures. Therefore, it turns out to be a productive class even with minimal efforts from teachers. However, learners can easily seek assistance from the partners or other pairs, which may make the dynamics more engaging and interesting. In fact, with mixed-ability classes, teachers can use better learners to correct mistakes made by weaker learners, which empowers them and promotes learner-autonomy. A student-centered class can be created with collaborative speaking tasks, and the teacher, being the facilitator, can produce effective content and materials suitable for speaking. In a class with more pairwork activities, learners have the power to use and correct languages, which makes them more independent and confident when using English outside the class. It also encourages them to speak English fluently in different academic and professional situations like interviews and presentations. Therefore, effective strategies in pairing students in speaking classes can take learners a long way to success.

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