



Counselling, Mentorship, and Self-Regulated Learning in Public Speaking Education for Working Undergraduate Students: A Qualitative Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Working undergraduate students frequently encounter difficulties in attending regular university classes because of employment responsibilities and demanding academic workloads. This qualitative case study investigated how counselling, mentorship, and structured self-directed learning supported the learning experiences of five final-semester undergraduate students enrolled in a three-credit Public Speaking course at a private university in Bangladesh. Over a five- to six-month semester, students participated in weekly 45-minute counselling sessions that included guided discussions, textbook summaries, assignment reviews, quizzes, presentation practice, individualized feedback, and preparation for class tests and examinations. Multiple sources of qualitative data, including counselling records, attendance sheets, homework, assignments, PowerPoint presentations, quizzes, reflective messages, instructor field notes, and course documents, were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) thematic analysis. Four major themes emerged: the development of self-regulated learning, enhanced motivation through mentorship, sustained engagement through flexible learning, and improved public speaking competence. The findings indicate that structured counselling enabled working students to balance employment and academic responsibilities while maintaining active participation in course activities. Continuous mentoring, formative assessment, and personalized feedback promoted learner autonomy, confidence, and responsibility for learning. The study demonstrates that counselling-based self-study can provide an effective instructional alternative for working university students in communication-oriented courses and offers practical implications for higher education institutions seeking to implement inclusive and flexible learning support systems.

Keywords: Counselling, Flexible Learning, Higher Education, Mentorship, Public Speaking, Qualitative Case Study, Self-Directed Learning, Self-Regulated Learning, Working Undergraduate Students

1. INTRODUCTION

Public speaking is recognized as one of the most essential communication skills in higher education and professional practice. University graduates are increasingly expected to communicate ideas confidently, collaborate effectively, and deliver persuasive presentations in both academic and workplace settings (Lucas, 2001). Consequently, public speaking courses have become an integral component of undergraduate curricula worldwide, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts where oral communication opportunities are often limited (King, 2002).

Despite the importance of oral communication, many undergraduate students experience considerable barriers to successful participation in public speaking courses. Speaking anxiety, limited opportunities for practice, lack of confidence, and competing academic responsibilities frequently hinder students' oral performance (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). These challenges become even more pronounced among final-semester students who simultaneously manage demanding academic workloads, internship requirements, and part-time or full-time employment. As a result, maintaining regular classroom attendance may become difficult, creating a need for flexible instructional approaches that ensure learning continuity without compromising academic standards. Public speaking requires learners to develop confidence in their ability to communicate effectively before an



audience. Students' beliefs about their speaking capabilities influence their willingness to participate in oral presentations and persist when encountering communication challenges (Bandura, 1997).

Flexible learning has emerged as an important educational approach that accommodates learners' diverse circumstances by providing alternative pathways for engagement, instruction, and assessment (Bozkurt et al., 2020). Rather than replacing traditional classroom instruction, flexible learning emphasizes accessibility, learner autonomy, individualized support, and multiple modes of participation. Within this framework, counselling and academic mentorship can play a significant role in supporting students who encounter attendance-related challenges. Through structured counselling sessions, individualized feedback, guided self-study, and continuous communication, instructors can facilitate students' progress while encouraging independent learning and responsibility.

Self-regulated learning (SRL) provides a valuable theoretical lens for understanding such instructional practices. According to Zimmerman (2002), successful learners actively plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning through goal setting, strategic learning behaviors, self-reflection, and continuous feedback. Counselling and mentorship can strengthen these self-regulatory processes by helping learners organize study schedules, monitor progress, seek assistance when necessary, and maintain motivation despite external constraints.

In Bangladesh, relatively little research has examined counselling-supported self-study within undergraduate language and communication courses. Although flexible learning received increased attention during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, most studies have focused on online instruction rather than structured face-to-face counselling for students who cannot regularly attend classes because of employment commitments. Consequently, empirical evidence regarding counselling-based instructional support in skills-oriented courses such as public speaking remains limited.

The present qualitative case study addresses this gap by examining a counselling-guided self-study model implemented in a three-credit undergraduate Public Speaking course at a private university in Bangladesh. The participants were final-semester students who maintained part-time employment while completing full-time academic programs. Instead of attending regular classes, they participated in weekly counselling sessions that included guided learning, formative assessment, individualized feedback, mentoring, and continuous monitoring of assignments and presentations. By analyzing students' reflections, counselling records, assignments, quizzes, presentation materials, and course documents, this study explores how counselling and mentorship facilitated self-regulated learning, sustained engagement, and the development of public speaking competencies. The findings contribute to the growing literature on flexible learning and provide practical implications for supporting working university students in higher education.

1.1 Background

Public Speaking Education in Higher Education

Public speaking is widely regarded as a fundamental graduate competency that supports academic achievement, professional success, and civic participation (Lucas, 2001). Effective public speaking involves more than delivering prepared speeches; it requires critical thinking, audience awareness, organization, persuasive communication, vocal delivery, and non-verbal communication skills (Osborn & Osborn, 2003). Universities therefore integrate public speaking courses to prepare students for academic presentations, professional interviews, workplace communication, and leadership roles.

However, learning public speaking presents numerous challenges, particularly for students studying English as a foreign language. Fear of making linguistic mistakes, communication apprehension, limited vocabulary, and anxiety often reduce learners' willingness to participate in classroom speaking activities (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). These challenges are compounded when students experience competing personal and professional responsibilities that restrict opportunities for classroom attendance and speaking practice.



Flexible Learning in Higher Education

Flexible learning has become an increasingly important educational strategy for accommodating diverse learner needs and promoting equitable access to higher education (Bozkurt et al., 2020). Unlike traditional teacher-centered instruction, flexible learning enables students to engage with course materials through multiple instructional pathways while maintaining academic expectations.

Flexible learning may include asynchronous learning resources, blended instruction, individualized consultation, mentoring, counselling sessions, digital communication platforms, and alternative assessment methods (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000). Such approaches are particularly valuable for working students who must balance employment responsibilities with university coursework.

Research suggests that flexibility alone is insufficient unless accompanied by meaningful academic support. Students benefit most when instructors provide regular feedback, monitor progress, encourage reflection, and maintain consistent communication throughout the learning process (Bozkurt et al., 2020). Consequently, counselling and mentorship can function as essential components of flexible learning environments by strengthening students' academic persistence and motivation.

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Counselling and Mentorship in Higher Education

Academic counselling extends beyond administrative advising by providing continuous instructional guidance, emotional encouragement, and individualized learning support (Tinto, 2012). Effective counselling helps students overcome academic challenges, improve study habits, manage time effectively, and remain engaged with their educational goals.

Similarly, mentorship fosters supportive relationships between instructors and learners, facilitating academic development through personalized feedback, constructive dialogue, and professional guidance (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). In skills-based courses such as public speaking, mentorship enables instructors to identify individual learning needs, recommend appropriate strategies, and provide timely feedback on speech organization, delivery techniques, and presentation skills.

Studies consistently demonstrate that supportive instructor–student relationships enhance learner confidence, academic engagement, and persistence, particularly among students facing external challenges such as employment responsibilities and limited attendance (Tinto, 2012).

Self-Regulated Learning

Self-regulated learning (SRL) serves as the primary theoretical framework for the present study. Zimmerman (2002) defines SRL as learners' active participation in planning, monitoring, regulating, and evaluating their own learning processes. Rather than relying solely on teacher-directed instruction, self-regulated learners establish goals, employ learning strategies, monitor performance, and modify behaviors based on reflection and feedback.

Zimmerman's cyclical model consists of three interrelated phases: forethought, performance, and self-reflection. During the forethought phase, learners establish learning goals and select strategies. During performance, they implement these strategies while monitoring their progress. Finally, during self-reflection, learners evaluate outcomes and adjust future learning behaviors accordingly (Zimmerman, 2002).

The counselling model examined in this study aligns closely with this framework. Weekly counselling sessions encouraged students to plan independent study schedules, complete structured learning activities, receive instructor feedback, submit assignments, reflect upon performance, and prepare for subsequent assessments. Consequently, counselling functioned as a scaffold supporting students' self-regulatory development while maintaining academic accountability.



Effective adult instruction extends beyond the delivery of course content and includes facilitation, reflective dialogue, constructive feedback, and learner support. Brookfield (2013) emphasizes that adult educators should create learning environments that encourage reflection, collaboration, and active participation, all of which were incorporated into the counselling sessions implemented in this study.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The present study is informed by four complementary theoretical perspectives: Self-Regulated Learning (Zimmerman, 2002), Adult Learning Theory (Knowles et al., 2020), Social Constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Together, these theories explain how counselling, mentorship, and guided self-study can facilitate meaningful learning among working undergraduate students enrolled in a public speaking course.

Self-Regulated Learning

Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) serves as the primary theoretical framework of this study. Zimmerman (2002) defines self-regulated learners as individuals who actively participate in their own learning by setting goals, selecting learning strategies, monitoring progress, and reflecting on outcomes. Rather than depending solely on teacher-directed instruction, learners assume responsibility for planning, managing, and evaluating their learning.

Zimmerman's cyclical model consists of three interconnected phases: forethought, performance, and self-reflection. During the forethought phase, learners establish goals and prepare learning strategies. During the performance phase, they implement these strategies while monitoring their understanding and progress. Finally, in the self-reflection phase, learners evaluate their performance and modify future learning approaches based on feedback and experience (Zimmerman, 2002).

The counselling model implemented in this study closely reflects these phases. Students planned weekly study schedules, reviewed assigned textbook chapters, completed homework and presentations, participated in counselling sessions, received individualized feedback, and reflected on their progress through quizzes, class tests, and discussions. Consequently, counselling functioned as instructional scaffolding that promoted independent learning while maintaining academic accountability.

Adult Learning Theory

Adult Learning Theory, commonly referred to as Andragogy, emphasizes that adult learners are self-directed individuals who bring prior experiences, personal goals, and intrinsic motivation to the learning process (Knowles et al., 2020). Adult learners prefer education that is relevant to their immediate academic, professional, and personal needs and appreciate opportunities to exercise responsibility for their own learning. Merriam and Bierema (2014) further argue that adult learning is strengthened when learners are encouraged to reflect upon their experiences, solve authentic problems, and assume responsibility for their own learning. These principles were reflected in the counselling-based self-study model, where students independently completed learning tasks while receiving continuous academic guidance.

The participants in this study were final-semester undergraduate students balancing full-time academic study with part-time employment. Their inability to attend regular classes was not a result of academic disengagement but rather competing professional and educational responsibilities. The counselling-based instructional model acknowledged these realities by providing flexible learning opportunities while maintaining academic rigor.

Rather than replacing classroom instruction, counselling sessions complemented students' independent learning by clarifying concepts, discussing textbook chapters, reviewing assignments, providing formative feedback, and monitoring academic progress. Such practices reflect the learner-centered principles of adult education and support the development of lifelong learning skills.



Social Constructivism

The study is also informed by Vygotsky's (1978) Social Constructivist Theory, which views learning as a socially mediated process. According to Vygotsky, knowledge develops through interaction with more knowledgeable individuals who provide guidance within learners' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

Counselling sessions served as collaborative learning environments where students and instructor engaged in dialogue, problem solving, questioning, and feedback. Through individualized mentoring, students received instructional support that enabled them to accomplish learning tasks beyond what they could achieve independently.

The instructor's role extended beyond information transmission to include facilitation, coaching, encouragement, and academic mentoring. Continuous interaction through counselling meetings, assignment discussions, presentation rehearsals, and digital communication provided scaffolding that gradually strengthened learners' confidence and independence in public speaking.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) explains how intrinsic motivation develops when three basic psychological needs are satisfied: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

The counselling model supported learner autonomy by allowing students flexibility in organizing independent study schedules and completing learning tasks. Competence was strengthened through continuous formative assessment, instructor feedback, quizzes, presentations, and repeated opportunities for improvement. Relatedness developed through supportive instructor-student relationships characterized by trust, encouragement, empathy, and regular communication.

Students' reflective messages at the end of the semester demonstrated appreciation for the counselling process, personalized guidance, and supportive mentorship. Their reflections suggest that satisfying these psychological needs contributed to sustained motivation despite significant academic and professional demands. According to Self-Determination Theory, learners are more likely to demonstrate sustained motivation when educational environments satisfy their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The counselling programme supported learner autonomy through flexible study opportunities, competence through continuous formative feedback, and relatedness through supportive instructor–student interactions.

Conceptual Framework

Drawing upon these four theoretical perspectives, the present study conceptualizes counselling as an instructional intervention that promotes self-regulated learning through guided mentorship, flexible learning opportunities, individualized feedback, and collaborative interaction. These instructional processes support learner autonomy, motivation, academic engagement, and the development of effective public speaking skills among working undergraduate students.

1.4 Research Gap

Although numerous studies have investigated public speaking anxiety, flexible learning, online education, and self-regulated learning independently, comparatively little research has examined counselling-supported self-study in undergraduate public speaking courses. This gap is particularly evident in Bangladesh, where increasing numbers of university students combine full-time study with part-time employment.

Existing literature has primarily emphasized technology-mediated instruction rather than structured face-to-face counselling integrated with guided self-study, formative assessment, and continuous mentorship. Moreover, limited qualitative research has explored students' lived experiences of counselling-supported learning in communication courses requiring practical performance skills.



The present study addresses this gap by investigating how counselling, mentorship, and structured self-study supported working undergraduate students enrolled in a Public Speaking course. Through qualitative analysis of students' reflections, counselling documentation, assignments, presentations, quizzes, and course records, the study contributes new evidence regarding flexible instructional practices that promote learner autonomy, sustained engagement, and communication skill development.

1.5 Research Objectives

This study aims to:

Explore how counselling and mentorship supported working undergraduate students' learning in a Public Speaking course.

Examine how counselling promoted self-regulated learning among students balancing employment and university study.

Investigate students' perceptions of flexible learning through structured counselling.

Identify the pedagogical implications of counselling-supported self-directed learning in higher education.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018) to examine how counselling, mentorship, and structured self-study supported working undergraduate students enrolled in a Public Speaking course. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study sought to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and reflections within their natural educational context rather than measure predetermined variables quantitatively.

The case study focused on one cohort of working undergraduate students who participated in a counselling-based instructional model during a single academic semester.

2.2 Research Context

The study was conducted at a private university in Bangladesh offering a three-credit undergraduate Public Speaking course. The course aimed to develop students' abilities in speech organization, delivery techniques, informative speaking, persuasive speaking, impromptu speaking, role-play, visual aid preparation, and audience engagement.

The official course assessment included:

Class attendance (10%)

Class test (10%)

Role-play assignment (10%)

Mid-term examination (15%)

Final examination (15%)

Self-introduction speech (10%)

Impromptu speech (10%)



Informative speech (10%)

Persuasive speech (10%)

The prescribed textbooks were Lucas (2001) and Osborn and Osborn (2003).

2.3 Participants

Purposive sampling (Patton, 2015) was used to select five undergraduate students enrolled in the Public Speaking course. All participants were in their final semester and simultaneously engaged in part-time employment while completing full-time university studies.

Because of demanding work schedules and academic responsibilities, the students were unable to attend regular classroom sessions consistently. Instead, they participated in a structured counselling programme conducted throughout one academic semester (approximately five to six months).

To maintain confidentiality, all participants were assigned pseudonyms.

2.4 Counselling-Based Self-Study Model

Students attended weekly counselling sessions lasting approximately 45 minutes. These meetings provided individualized academic support while allowing students to continue independent study outside the classroom.

Each counselling session included:

Summary of weekly textbook chapters

Guided discussion of key concepts

Homework review

Assignment feedback

PowerPoint presentation guidance

Speech rehearsal

Quiz and oral questioning

Class test preparation

Mid-term and final examination preparation

Discussion of supplementary learning materials

Monitoring of learning progress

Students submitted homework, speech outlines, presentation slides, Word documents, PDF files, photographs of written assignments, and multimedia presentations both physically and through social media communication platforms. Attendance during counselling was recorded after reviewing submitted learning activities.

2.5 Data Collection

Multiple qualitative data sources enhanced the credibility of the findings through methodological triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The data included:



Counselling records

Attendance registers

Homework assignments

Speech outlines

PowerPoint presentations

Quiz scripts

Class test papers

Mid-term and final examination artifacts

Students' reflective messages

Instructor field notes

Course documents and assessment records

Students' written reflections at the conclusion of the semester constituted an important source of evidence regarding their perceptions of counselling, mentorship, and independent learning.

2.6 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase framework.

The analysis involved:

1. Familiarization with the data
2. Initial coding
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the final report

Codes were generated inductively from students' reflections, counselling records, assignments, and observational notes. Themes were subsequently refined through repeated comparison across multiple data sources to identify recurring patterns regarding counselling experiences, learner autonomy, motivation, and public speaking development.

2.7 Trustworthiness

The study adopted Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria to ensure trustworthiness.

Credibility was enhanced through triangulation of multiple data sources and prolonged engagement with participants throughout the semester.

Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the educational context, counseling proc-



edures, and participant characteristics.

Dependability was strengthened by maintaining systematic documentation of counselling activities, coding decisions, and analytical procedures.

Confirmability was established through reflective memo writing and maintaining an audit trail documenting the research process.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant departmental authority prior to the commencement of the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Students were informed that participation or non-participation would not influence their course grades.

To protect confidentiality, participants' identities were replaced with pseudonyms, and all identifying information was removed from quotations and course documents. Digital files and research records were securely stored and used solely for academic research purposes.

3. RESULTS

The thematic analysis of students' reflective messages, counselling records, assignments, quizzes, presentations, instructor field notes, and course documents generated four interrelated themes that explain how counselling and mentorship supported the learning experiences of working undergraduate students enrolled in a Public Speaking course.

Theme 1: Counselling Promoted Self-Regulated Learning and Academic Responsibility

One of the most prominent findings was that regular counselling sessions encouraged students to become more responsible for managing their own learning. Since participants were unable to attend regular classroom instruction because of employment commitments and final-semester academic workloads, they relied on structured weekly counselling to organize independent study schedules.

During counselling meetings, students reviewed textbook chapters, discussed difficult concepts, completed quizzes, submitted assignments, and received individualized feedback. These activities encouraged learners to monitor their progress continuously rather than relying solely on classroom instruction.

Students gradually developed greater confidence in planning their learning activities and completing course requirements independently. Their willingness to preserve the course materials, presentation slides, digital documents, and online resources for future use also reflected increased ownership of learning.

One student wrote:

“Thank you so much, Ma’am. We will keep the course group (social media) and all the documents (photos, Word or PDF files, PowerPoint presentations, information links, website content, and videos) as they are for future reference.”

Another participant reflected:

“Although we could not attend every class because of our work and studies, we studied the course through self-learning and did our best with your counselling services.”

Interpretation

These reflections indicate that counselling encouraged students to manage their own learning systematically. Rather than depending entirely on classroom instruction, participants actively organized study schedules,



completed required learning activities, preserved educational resources, and demonstrated responsibility for their academic progress.

Theme 2: Mentorship Fostered Motivation, Confidence, and Emotional Support

The counselling process extended beyond academic instruction by providing continuous emotional encouragement and personalized mentorship.

Students consistently described the instructor's patience, kindness, and guidance as important factors that helped them remain engaged despite balancing employment and university responsibilities. Rather than perceiving themselves as disadvantaged because of limited attendance, participants felt academically supported throughout the semester.

One student reflected:

"Thank you so much, Ma'am. We will keep the course group and all the documents for future reference. We sincerely thank you for your kindness, guidance, and support throughout the semester."

Such reflections suggest that mentorship strengthened students' confidence while reducing feelings of academic isolation often experienced by working students.

One participant stated:

"As our course comes to an end, we sincerely thank you for your kindness, guidance, and support throughout the semester. We truly appreciate everything you have done for us."

Another student wrote:

"Thank you once again, Ma'am. Wishing you good health, happiness, and continued success."

A further reflection stated:

"Thank you, Madam. We'll remember you all the time."

Interpretation

These reflections demonstrate that counselling provided important emotional and motivational support in addition to academic guidance. Students perceived the instructor as approachable and supportive, which contributed to a positive learning experience and strengthened their commitment to completing the course successfully.

Theme 3: Flexible Counselling Supported Continuous Learning Despite Limited Attendance

Another important finding concerned the effectiveness of flexible learning arrangements.

Students completed homework, speech outlines, PowerPoint presentations, written assignments, photographs of handwritten work, and multimedia materials through both face-to-face counselling sessions and online communication platforms.

Weekly forty-five-minute counselling sessions functioned as structured checkpoints where students clarified misunderstandings, demonstrated completed work, received feedback, and prepared for quizzes, class tests, and examinations.

Rather than replacing independent study, counselling complemented self-directed learning by providing consistent academic monitoring and accountability.



One participant reflected:

“We studied the course through self-learning and did our best with your counselling services.”

Another student commented:

“We will keep the course group and all the learning materials for future reference.”

Interpretation

The findings suggest that flexible counselling allowed students to continue learning despite attendance limitations. The combination of independent study, regular counselling, digital communication, and continuous monitoring helped students remain academically engaged throughout the semester.

Theme 4: Counselling Enhanced Public Speaking Competence

Students reported that counselling improved not only their academic performance but also their communication skills.

Repeated opportunities to rehearse speeches, discuss presentation organization, receive feedback, and revise assignments contributed to increased confidence in public speaking.

Students demonstrated gradual improvement in organizing speeches, selecting supporting evidence, using presentation slides effectively, and responding to oral questions during counselling sessions.

The combination of guided practice and independent preparation appeared to strengthen both communication competence and learner confidence.

One participant stated:

"We sincerely appreciate everything you have done for us."

Another student expressed:

"We studied through self-learning and completed the course with your counselling."

Interpretation

The data indicate that counselling supported the development of public speaking skills by providing regular opportunities for guided practice, individualized feedback, and formative assessment. Students' successful completion of multiple speaking-related tasks suggests that the counselling process facilitated continuous improvement in communication competence while strengthening confidence in oral presentations.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that counselling-based self-study represents an effective instructional approach for supporting working undergraduate students in skills-based courses such as Public Speaking.

The first theme aligns closely with Zimmerman's (2002) theory of Self-Regulated Learning. Weekly counselling encouraged learners to establish learning goals, monitor their progress, reflect upon feedback, and regulate their own study behaviors. Rather than depending exclusively on classroom teaching, students became active participants in their own learning process.

The findings also support Knowles et al.'s (2020) Adult Learning Theory. Adult learners benefit when education accommodates their professional responsibilities while encouraging autonomy and responsibility. The flexible counselling model respected participants' employment commitments without reducing academic



expectations. Students were expected to complete assignments independently while receiving individualized academic guidance.

From a Social Constructivist perspective (Vygotsky, 1978), counselling functioned as instructional scaffolding within students' Zone of Proximal Development. Through regular interaction, questioning, feedback, and mentoring, the instructor gradually supported learners in developing independent communication skills. As students gained competence, they assumed increasing responsibility for learning.

Similarly, the findings reinforce Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Counselling supported learners' autonomy by allowing flexible study schedules, strengthened competence through continuous feedback, and fostered relatedness through supportive instructor-student relationships. Students' reflective messages demonstrated appreciation for these interpersonal relationships, suggesting that motivation was enhanced through meaningful academic support.

The findings also extend previous research emphasizing the importance of instructor support for student persistence in higher education (Tinto, 2012). Although the participants experienced significant academic and employment pressures, regular counselling reduced the likelihood of disengagement and encouraged continued participation throughout the semester.

Unlike many flexible learning studies that focus primarily on online instruction, the present study demonstrates that structured face-to-face counselling combined with digital communication can provide an effective alternative for students unable to attend conventional classes regularly.

The findings also highlight the importance of learners' confidence in accomplishing challenging academic tasks. Students' willingness to complete presentations independently despite limited classroom attendance reflects the development of self-efficacy, which Bandura (1997) identified as a key determinant of motivation and persistence. Furthermore, the reflective nature of the counselling sessions corresponds with Brookfield's (2013) view that adult learning is enhanced through dialogue, reflection, and meaningful instructor support. Similarly, Merriam and Bierema (2014) suggest that adult learners become more engaged when learning activities are relevant to their personal and professional contexts. The supportive counselling environment also fulfilled learners' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thereby fostering intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

5. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings have several implications for higher education institutions, language educators, and curriculum developers.

First, universities should recognize that working students often require instructional flexibility rather than reduced academic standards. Structured counselling programmes can enable students to maintain academic progress while balancing employment responsibilities.

Second, instructors should integrate regular mentoring and individualized feedback into flexible learning models. Counselling sessions can provide opportunities to clarify difficult concepts, monitor learning progress, and encourage reflective learning.

Third, digital communication platforms can effectively complement counselling by facilitating assignment submission, sharing presentation materials, and maintaining continuous communication between instructors and students.

Fourth, public speaking courses should emphasize formative assessment through repeated practice, individualized feedback, and guided reflection rather than relying exclusively on summative examinations.

Finally, institutions may consider establishing formal academic counselling systems for students experiencing employment-related attendance challenges, thereby promoting educational equity and reducing dropout risks.

6. LIMITATIONS

Several limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the study involved only five participants from one private university, limiting the generalizability of the findings.

Second, the study relied primarily on qualitative evidence, including students' reflections and counselling documentation. Future research could combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine changes in communication competence and academic performance.

Third, the investigation focused on one Public Speaking course delivered over a single academic semester. Longitudinal studies could explore the long-term effects of counselling-supported self-study on academic achievement and professional communication skills.

Finally, the instructor also served as the researcher, creating the possibility of researcher bias despite efforts to maintain transparency through systematic documentation and data triangulation.

7. CONCLUSION

This qualitative case study examined how counselling, mentorship, and structured self-study supported working undergraduate students enrolled in a Public Speaking course at a private university in Bangladesh.

The findings demonstrate that counselling functioned as more than an alternative instructional arrangement. Rather, it served as a comprehensive support system that promoted self-regulated learning, learner autonomy, sustained motivation, and communication skill development. Through individualized mentoring, continuous formative assessment, structured feedback, and flexible learning opportunities, students successfully balanced demanding employment responsibilities with academic requirements.

Students' reflective messages further revealed that counselling fostered confidence, strengthened instructor-student relationships, and encouraged independent learning beyond the formal completion of the course. Their intention to preserve course materials for future professional use suggests that the learning experience extended beyond immediate assessment requirements and contributed to lifelong learning.

The study contributes to the growing literature on flexible learning, self-regulated learning, and higher education pedagogy by demonstrating how counselling-based instructional support can enhance student engagement in skills-oriented courses. As universities increasingly serve diverse student populations with complex personal and professional commitments, structured counselling and mentorship offer promising strategies for creating more inclusive, learner-centered, and supportive educational environments.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are included within this article. Additional anonymized data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to institutional and ethical considerations.

Ethics Statement

This study involved undergraduate students enrolled in a Public Speaking course at a private university in Bangladesh. Ethical approval to conduct the study was obtained from the Department of English prior to data collection. The study adhered to institutional ethical guidelines, and participants' privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. All identifying information has been removed from the reported data to protect participants' identities.

Informed Consent Statement

Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before the commencement of the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, the confidentiality of the information provided, and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without academic penalty. Participation or non-participation had no influence on students' course grades or academic evaluation.

Clinical Trial Registration

This research does not involve any clinical trials.

Author Contributions

The sole author was responsible for the conceptualization, methodology, investigation, counselling implementation, data collection, formal analysis, interpretation of findings, writing of the original draft, review and editing, visualization, supervision, and final approval of the manuscript.

Permission to Reproduce Material

All figures, tables, and supplementary materials included in this manuscript were developed by the author specifically for this study. No copyrighted figures, tables, or text excerpts from previously published sources have been reproduced. Therefore, permission to reproduce material from other sources was not required.

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APPENDIX A

Public Speaking Course Counselling Schedule

Week

Counselling Focus

Learning Activities

Assessment

1

Course orientation and counselling procedures

Introduction to course objectives, assessment system, counselling guidelines

Attendance

2

Fundamentals of Public Speaking

Discussion of textbook chapters, speech preparation

Homework

3



Speech Organization

Outline preparation and instructor feedback

Assignment submission

4

Audience Analysis

Guided discussion and quiz

Quiz

5

Speech Delivery Techniques

Voice, body language, eye contact practice

Viva

6

Visual Aids and PowerPoint Design

Multimedia presentation guidance

PowerPoint

7

Informative Speech

Practice presentation and feedback

Class Test

8

Mid-Term Examination Preparation

Revision and counselling

Mid-Term

9

Persuasive Speaking

Speech rehearsal

Assignment

10

Impromptu Speaking



Oral practice

Viva

11

Speech Evaluation

Peer and instructor feedback

Quiz

12

Final Presentation Practice

Complete presentation rehearsal

PowerPoint

13

Final Revision

Discussion and question-answer session

Attendance

14

Final Examination Preparation

Comprehensive revision

Final Examination

Appendix B

Sample Weekly Counselling Activities

Each counselling session lasted approximately 45 minutes and included the following activities:

Attendance verification.

Review of homework and previous assignments.

Discussion of weekly textbook chapters.

Clarification of difficult concepts.

Checking handwritten notes and assignments.

Review of Word/PDF assignments.

Review of PowerPoint presentation slides.

Speech rehearsal and instructor feedback.



Discussion of online resources and reference materials.

Sharing supplementary videos and website links.

Short quiz or oral questioning.

Preparation for class tests, mid-term, and final examinations.

Recording counselling progress.

Appendix C

Students' Reflective Prompt

At the completion of the semester, students were invited to submit a written reflection using the following prompts.

Describe your experience of participating in counselling sessions.

How did counselling support your learning in the Public Speaking course?

Which counselling activities helped you most?

How did counselling influence your confidence in public speaking?

What challenges did you face while balancing work and university study?

How did self-study contribute to your learning?

What suggestions would you provide for improving the counselling programme?

Appendix D

Course Assessment Rubric

Assessment Component

Marks

Class Attendance

10

Class Test

10

Role Play

10

Self-Introduction Speech

10

Informative Speech



10

Persuasive Speech

10

Impromptu Speech

10

Mid-Term Examination

15

Final Examination

15

Total

100

Public Speaking Evaluation Criteria

Speech Organization

Content Development

Language Accuracy

Fluency

Pronunciation

Eye Contact

Body Language

Voice Projection

Audience Engagement

Time Management

Appendix E. Sample Counselling Attendance Sheet (Anonymized)

Student ID

Date

Homework

Assignment

Presentation

Quiz



Counselling Completed

Signature

S01

XX/XX/20XX

✓

✓

✓

✓

✓

✓

S02

XX/XX/20XX

✓

✓

✓

✓

✓

✓

S03

XX/XX/20XX

✓

✓

✓

✓

✓

✓

S04

Persuasive Speaking

- A speech intended to influence opinions or actions.

Key Elements

- Strong claim
- Evidence
- Emotional and logical appeal
- Call to action

Structure

Structure

- Introduction
- Arguments with evidence
- Counterargument Conclusion

Techniques

- Facts and statistics
- Stories
- Repetition Rhetorical questions

Example Topics

- Ban single-use plastics
- Exercise daily

Public speaking...   

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Public speaking...   

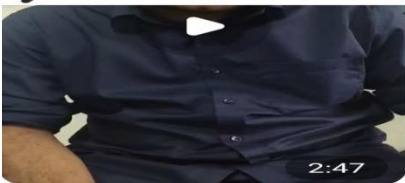
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 Public speaking...   





Dear Madam, Thank you so much. Ma'am, We will keep the group and all the documents as they are for future reference.

As our course comes to an end, we sincerely thank you for your kindness, guidance, and support throughout the semester. We truly appreciate everything you have done for us.

Please accept our sincere apologies if we couldn't attend every class or exam regularly due to our final-semester workload. However, we studied the course through self-learning and did our best.

Lastly, Ma'am, we have a humble request. If possible, kindly consider our efforts generously during the final evaluation. Good marks would greatly help improve our CGPA, and we would be truly grateful.

Thank you once again, Ma'am. Wishing you good health, happiness, and continued success.