

Current Status Of The English Speaking Skills Of Tribal Efl Learners Of Igntu

Pooja Tiwari

Research Scholar, Department of Linguistics and Contrastive Study of Tribal Languages,
Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak (M.P.) India
pujatiwari3@gmail.com

Dr. Promod Kumar

Assistant Professor, Department of Linguistics and Contrastive Study of Tribal Languages,
Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak (M.P.) India

Abstract

This study aimed to address the current status of the Tribal EFL learners of IGNTU. A questionnaire consisting of four different tasks namely story telling using link words, micro presentation on a given topic, visual interpretation and pick & speak was used to assess the current status of English speaking skills. Rubrics with four point rating scale from poor to excellent was used for assessment. The findings showed that the overall speaking skills of majority of the Tribal EFL learners of IGNTU were either average (35.38%) or poor (38.67%). Similarly the level of students in terms of comprehension, vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation were also average (48.46%) and poor (30.78%), average (29.23%) and poor (40.78%), average (33.09%) and poor (40%) and average (30.76%) and poor (43.09%) respectively. The study in a nutshell revealed that significant number of students lack English communication skills which need to be enhanced.

Keywords: English Speaking Skills, Tribal EFL Learners and Current Status

Introduction

Language is the essence of life. It distinguishes humans from animals. It defines an individual's culture and personality and facilitates communication within or outside a society that is nearly impossible without language. It is needed to express one's ideas, feelings, emotions, etc. We get involved in learning a language as we grow up surrounded by different dialects (Bashir, 2011). Language is a signaling system. Learning to write in a language comes much after learning to speak a language. Many communities still exist which have speech without a script (Barber, 2009). Language has a structure when it comes to the language spoken by humans. Even animals have language. They talk and communicate, which may not be accurate; but, humans' way of communication is accurate. There are different languages in the world depending upon other regions and cultures; however, there is no definite count on the languages that exist in the world (Anderson, 2010).

English is a language widely spoken across the world today. Hence, it is considered a universal language (Al-Eiadeh, et al., 2016). English language is more than 1500 years old when diversified cultures came in contact with each other. The literature recorded after World- War II shows the development and growth of the English language (C. Baugh & Cable, p.13). It is the simplest and easiest language accepted as a means of communication. There are about 2 billion people who use this language regularly, thereby giving this language a unique and different place in the society. English language is not limited to communication, but its scope and arena are broader. Individuals are motivated to learn this language because of its acceptance in the business and educational world. Hence, we can say that it is a language of growth, language of technology, economic development, etc. It has a place internationally because of the "ethnographical, technological, scientific, economic, political culture of the society" (C. Baugh & Cable, p.21). because of the global acceptance and fast-growing learning demands, it is essential to learn English. There is neither any need nor ground rule for an individual to learn or master the linguistic skills of any foreign language. However, it is reasonable for an individual to understand the structure of a foreign language, which will help him/her structure his/her speaking skills because speaking is different from communication.

English Speaking Skills

Out of all the languages, English is the most widely spoken language (Panigrahi, 2018). It is a common and easy means of communication among different individuals of different nations. Communication requires language and command over the language skills- speaking, reading, writing, and listening. All the skills are relatively essential, but the most critical skill is speaking (Rao,2018). It reflects what a speaker is thinking or what his views are, related to a specific object or scenario. Speaking skills need to be acquired and learnt, especially for those who study "English as a foreign language" (Boonkit, 2010) as it helps in building self-confidence and enhances the fluency and accuracy of the speaker (Rao, 2018). Today, English enhances employability across the world. Employability and English directly correlate with each other (Clement, 2018). Employers need effective communication skills for the presentation of their ideas. Lack of English-speaking skills might be an obstacle in their interaction with multiple diversified collaborators. The capacity to express thoughts, opinions, feelings, and ideas lies in an individual's speaking skills. An avid speaker holds on to the audience's attention, which largely depends upon how skillfully he expresses the idea of his message. It is important to note that speaking skill is not limited to the professional life of an individual. It enhances his personal life as well (Qureshi, p.3). Robert Frost says, "Speaking expresses clear thinking." For the learners who consider English a foreign language, expressing without fear or doubt requires a training and learning process.

Components of Speaking Skills

Considering English as a foreign language and its demand to be learnt, the educators need to help the learners acquire this language. Four components have been identified that would enable the learners to use effective spoken English. The first component is Pronunciation; the second component Vocabulary; the third component Grammar; and the fourth component Comprehension. Pronunciation is the essence of English language. It is a crucial aspect that is of significant concern. It is essential to understand that pronunciation in English language might be difficult and tricky at times. Different pronunciations exist in English language, but all that is needed is that the speaker speaks in a known standard (Morley,1991). Pronunciation in English language is mainly neglected by the teachers and sometimes even by the learners. There can be many reasons which are listed for this. For example, the unavailability of skilled teachers and lack of time as pronunciation requires time and practice (Harmer,2001).

A good speaker's success lies in his/her phonetic ability, intrinsic motivation, and achievement. It is the teachers' responsibility to maintain the learners' motivation and teach them correct phonetics. Failure to do so might damage their success (Kenworthy, 1987). Using correct pronunciation meets the listeners' needs and helps the learner be confident in what he/she speaks. The second component is Vocabulary. It is the integral and central part of English language. It is vital to learn and have a command over vocabulary. All the words and phrases in a language come under one umbrella word; Vocabulary.

The English language more or less being in a developing stage, often has frequent deletion and addition of words in its vocabulary dictionary. It becomes difficult for a learner to keep track of all the terms and memorize them until and unless used regularly. Lack of vocabulary or insufficient vocabulary can make the speaking skill poor. The process of communication can significantly be affected due to poor and inadequate vocabulary. A varied vocabulary improves spoken fluency and brings motivation and confidence in a speaker (Khan et al., 2018). The third component is Grammar. The existence of a sentence in English language is impossible without grammar. It gives meaning to millions of words put together. Using an incorrect structure of a sentence will result in incomplete communication. The message behind a sentence might get lost; hence it is essential that a learner learns the correct sentence structure and must know the proper use of grammar (Rao,2019). The role of grammar is sometimes unclear, and it goes unnoticed in a classroom (Elley et al.,1976) which can lead to an inappropriate framing of sentence, phrase, etc. Hence, it is essential to learn correct grammar. Teaching grammar must be taken seriously so that a learner can be an effective speaker and express his ideas with confidence and make the listeners comfortable. One of the most essential components is comprehension. Language components will be of use only when a learner knows how to comprehend them. There is a relationship that exists between reading & speaking and listening & speaking. Knowledge gained from different sources needs to be understood by the speaker. Speaking is all about expressing ideas, feelings, knowledge, and understanding. A speaker needs to comprehend first to express his ideas (Mart,2012). Reading and learning English language with correct sentence structure helps the learners in easy comprehension, precision, accuracy, and enhance their speaking skills.

Importance and benefits of English-Speaking Skills

English is a widely accepted communicative language. It is the language that is acknowledged nationally and internationally and it serves the purpose of communicating between cultures, countries, states, and continents (Rao,2019). English language is the most dominating language (Nishanthi,2018), and it needs to be acquired to achieve fluency and confidence while speaking. In English language, speaking is considered to be one of the essential skills as it helps in improving the comprehensive skills of the learner. It lays a solid foundation for speaking skills and helps in acquiring fluency in English. It removes shyness and brings in confidence. It is essential to understand the significance of speaking skills. Acquisition of speaking skills is time taking and is equally challenging due to the wide varieties of vocabulary, countless phrases, and the growth in the addition of new words (Rao,2019). Mastery over speaking skills will enable in communicating with people across the world, thereby making one a global citizen. English language is an official language in most educational institutions. To make study materials accessible and to accommodate international students, educational institutions accept English-speaking students (Nishanthi,2018). Thus, the demand for learning this language is great.

English Speaking skills of Tribal Students

English language is the second language taught in many regions of India. However, in some regions, it is the first language.

According to the 2011 census by the Ministry of Home Affairs, India, there are about 705 identified tribes in India (Chandramouli, 2013). Most of them live in rural areas with minimum basic educational facilities or sometimes no educational facilities due to their geographical location. In such a situation learning English as a foreign language for these tribes is beyond imagination. The education system's responsibility is to teach them English language and prepare them in language skills from the primary level itself. When they pass out of school to enter University, knowledge of English language helps them as a passport. Students must acquire English language skills before they enter University. In a study conducted in Orrisa; it was found that English speaking skills are lower in tribal students than non-tribal students (Mohankund, 2013). Many demographic factors affect the learning of English language. The ability to acquire language skills dramatically depends on the students' background and their environment. Studies have found that most of the tribal languages do not have written scripts, and hence when a tribal child is growing up and learning a language, he/she only knows to communicate. He/she doesn't read or write. Therefore, when exposed to a foreign language at primary or secondary school, speaking skills become difficult for him/her compared to those who don't come from a tribal background (Radhika & Nivedha, 2020). It becomes difficult to acquire English speaking skills because English is a language with more sound than symbols. Each symbol has more than one sound, and learning sounds without speaking and reciting is the most challenging skill to acquire by the tribal students. Lack of awareness in phonetics may affect the fluency and comprehension of the learners. Hence, the teachers and the educators need to bridge the gap between mother tongue and English (Varghese & Nagaraj, 2012). Learning a language is a difficult task, but it is also time taking, and the problem faced by the learner is due to his/her poor learning ability (Radhika & Nivedha, 2020).

Reasons for poor learning ability can be many, but one that grabs everyone's attention is the challenging background and environment and lack of infrastructure facilities to avail the resources. Teachers are the primary service providers of English in the tribal population. Madhya Pradesh ranks first in the tribal population. In the need analysis report of Madhya Pradesh teachers training (2013), it was found that less than half of the primary school teachers don't use English in their English classes, which might be one of the biggest reasons for students' poor performance in English. Due to lack of an English-speaking environment, the tribal students in Madhya Pradesh can only tell their names in English, and few of them can use some words like 'hello' and "how are you" (Hayes & Raman, 2013). Thus, it is crucial to take care of the demographic factors that affect the speaking skills of tribal students'. Inability to do so can make them tremendously incompetent in English language skills.

IGNTU EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners

Indira Gandhi National Tribal University (IGNTU) is a central university situated in the Annupur district of Madhya Pradesh. The main objective of the University is to provide quality education to the tribal population of the country. It came into existence in 2007 and into action in 2008. In the academic year 2020-21, the University had 478 tribal students. These students are highly influenced by their mother tongue and hence find it challenging to speak and understand English. The situation of the tribal students across India is almost the same. They go through almost the same challenges and problems. The influence of their mother tongue is

so strong that the students fear speaking in English. Since they are not introduced to the language at their earlier stages of education, learning a foreign language becomes difficult. Most of the students in IGNTU are from rural backgrounds and are part of a tribal community having an educational background of government school. English language skills in government schools are feeble, and no teacher in the school uses English as a medium of instruction. Even English classes are taken in the state language. This is because the level of competency of English language teachers in the government schools of tribal areas is lacking. Also, English textbooks used in government schools do not match the standard of English language textbooks used in English medium schools (Teaching of English SSA material, 2011). Because of the poor English background, it becomes challenging for the students at the university level to cope up with the English environment and the English skills that the University demands.

Need to Access and Enhance English Speaking Skills

The English language is a globally accepted language for communication. Communication can be effective only when a language is spoken, and comprehended properly. Studies have shown that the students at university level fear speaking English publicly. The reasons found were anxiety and low self-confidence (Boonkit, 2010). They come from different backgrounds, different cultures, and tribal groups. Each one has his/her mother tongue. Thus, few students acquire the skills, and few don't. However, the fear of speaking in public always remains unchanged. The environment of the tribal students has a great impact on their learning abilities. The motivation, support, and awareness they get from their parents or teachers related to English language learning are of great concern. Most of the students don't receive any motivation. The tribal students of IGNTU are first-generation English learners. Incompetency to learn the English language usually results in losing interest in learning the language. To hold on to the students' interest, it is essential to bridge the gap between the mother tongue and English language. Enhancing language skills is necessary to become a noticed part of the global population, and the fear of speaking English is minimized. Helping students improve the skills will help them build self-confidence, fetch a good job and contribute to any field recognized in the global market. In view of the above context, the researcher felt a need to assess the English speaking skills of tribal EFL learners of IGNTU.

Research method

An exploratory survey method has been used for the study. A questionnaire was designed to study the current status of speaking skills of tribal EFL learners of IGNTU. The questionnaire consisted of four different tasks: storytelling using link words, Micro presentation on a given topic, Visual interpretation, and pick & speak. The consent of ELT experts was obtained for the content and face validity of the questionnaire. The suggestions and recommendations regarding the deletion of a few tasks and modifications were incorporated. These four tasks were executed among 130 out of 478 tribal EFL learners of IGNTU, Amarkantak, M.P, during 2019-2020. To assess the four major components of English speaking skills: Comprehension, Grammar, Vocabulary, and Pronunciation. Rubrics with a four-point rating from poor to excellent were used.

The overall score of speaking skills was calculated by taking an average of each student's four components score.

Speaking Skill Score=	$\frac{\text{Comprehension Score} + \text{Grammar Score} + \text{Vocabulary Score} + \text{Pronunciation Score}}{4}$
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Further, the speaking skill score was classified into four categories ranging from poor to excellent. 0 to 39 as poor, 40 to 59 as Average, 60 to 79 as good and 80 to 100 as Excellent.

Data Analysis, Results, and Discussions

Descriptive analysis was used to study the current status of the speaking skills of tribal EFL learners of IGNTU and the results are depicted in the following table.

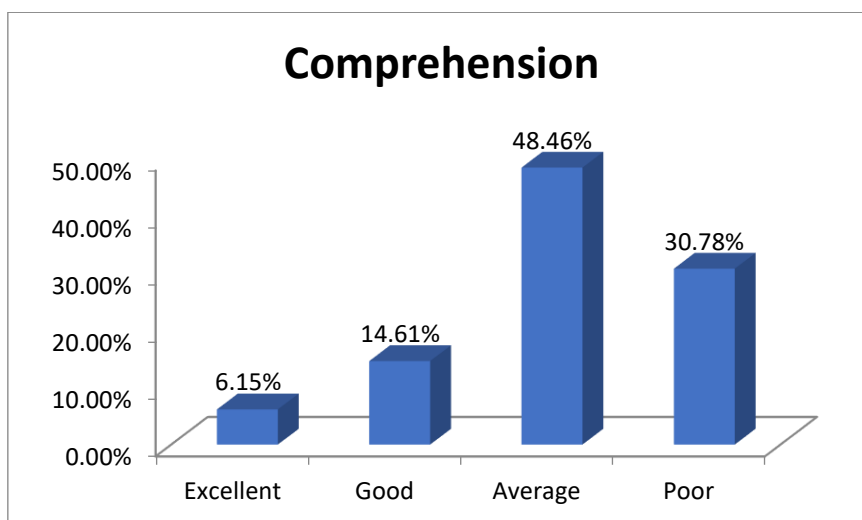
Table 1: Showing the current Status of Speaking skills of tribal EFL learners of IGNTU

Dimensions	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor
Comprehension	08 (6.15%)	19 (14.61%)	63 (48.46%)	40 (30.78%)
Grammar	08 (6.15%)	31 (23.84%)	38 (29.23%)	53 (40.78%)

Vocabulary	08 (6.15%)	27 (20.76%)	43 (33.09%)	52 (40 %)
Pronunciation	08 (6.15%)	26 (20%)	40 (30.76%)	56 (43.09%)
Overall English Speaking Skills	08 (6.15%)	26 (19.8%)	46 (35.38%)	50 (38.67%)

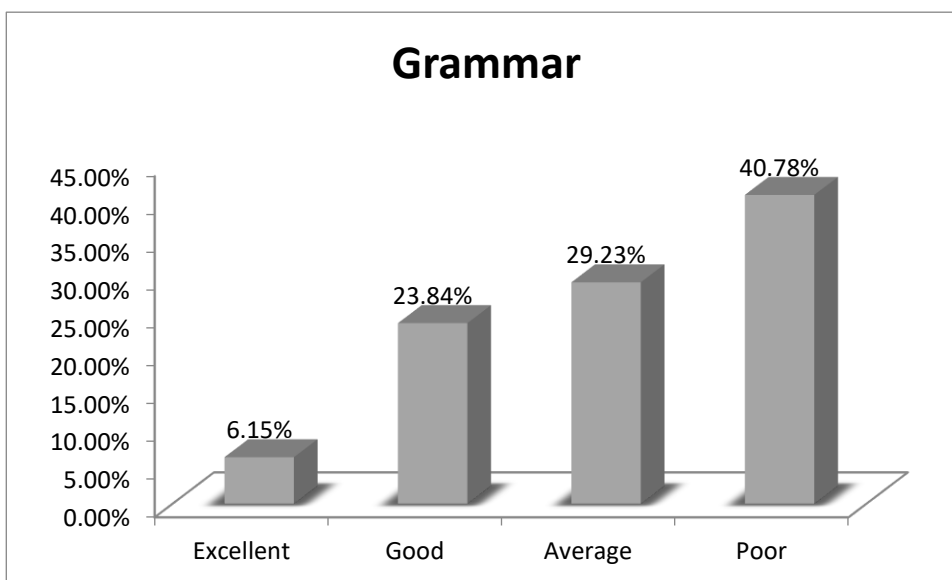
Comprehension:

From the above table, it can be observed that comprehension skills of 40 students (30.78%) was poor. It means that their comprehension of words and sentences they use at the time of speaking was not poor. They are unaware of the meaning of most of the words and sentences. They were familiar with the words and sentences, but they were unable to guess the meaning for the same. Also, inability to understand the correct meaning of even some most commonly used words in daily life was seen. 63 students (48.46%) comprehension skill was average, it shows that they can understand the meaning of few words while speaking with others however not knowing the essence of all the words. 19 students (14.61%) comprehension was good, it evidenced that they speak with full understanding of almost all words, and very few new words they cannot makeout the meaning. 08 students (6.15%) comprehension skill was excellent; they had a profound knowledge of words and sentences and used it contextually in different situations. The graphical representation of students comprehension skills is shown below:



Grammar

With regard to grammar in speaking skills, it can be observed from the above table that 53 (40.78%) of students' grammar was poor. It indicates that the students committed several grammatical errors and mistakes while speaking, and most of the grammar was ignored by them. Though grammar is an essential element in speaking skill, it is unfortunate that most of the students' grammar skill was incorrect. They could not distinguish between tenses, articles, prepositions, verbs, subjects, and objects, etc. Many inappropriate grammar rules and grammatical errors were predominantly observed during their verbal interactions. They felt that the grammar is more complicated and complex. Clear and correct grammar is a crucial element for effective communication, and it helps people understand a person precisely trying the communicate. Still, the larger proportion of higher education students grammar skill was unsatisfactory. It shows that their knowledge of English Grammar was inadequate and needs improvement. 38 students (29.23%) grammar skills were average wherein some of the grammatical structure was used correctly, and to some extent, they communicated with minor mistakes; however, it was noticed that few expressions were without proper grammatical parts. 31 students' (23.84%) grammar skills were good. It means that most of the parts of grammar were used clearly and appropriately while speaking. It indicates that they are aware of the rules, parts, and structures of grammar; hence, they communicated effectively. Only 08 (6.15%) students' were excellent in grammar skills speak with correct and precise grammar. They used all grammatical rules, parts, and structures. They were able to identify tenses, articles, prepositions, verbs, subjects, and objects, etc., in a sentence. It was noticed that the students communicated accurately and fluently with all correct grammatical structures. The status of students grammar skill is graphically represented below:

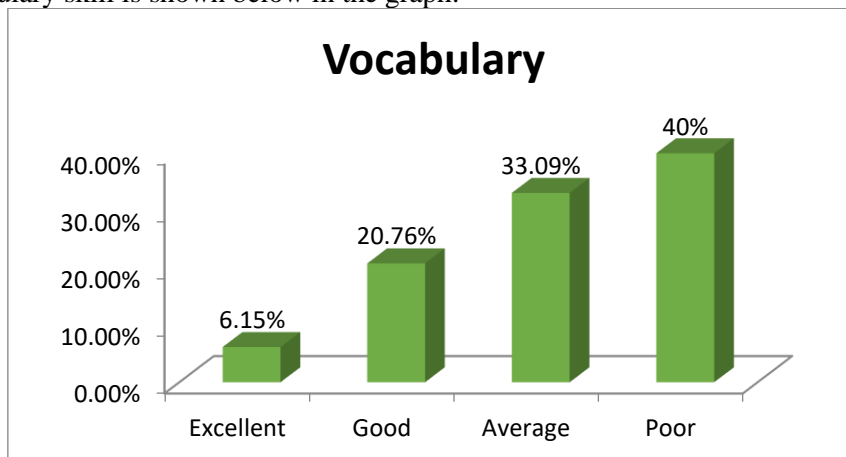


Vocabulary Skill

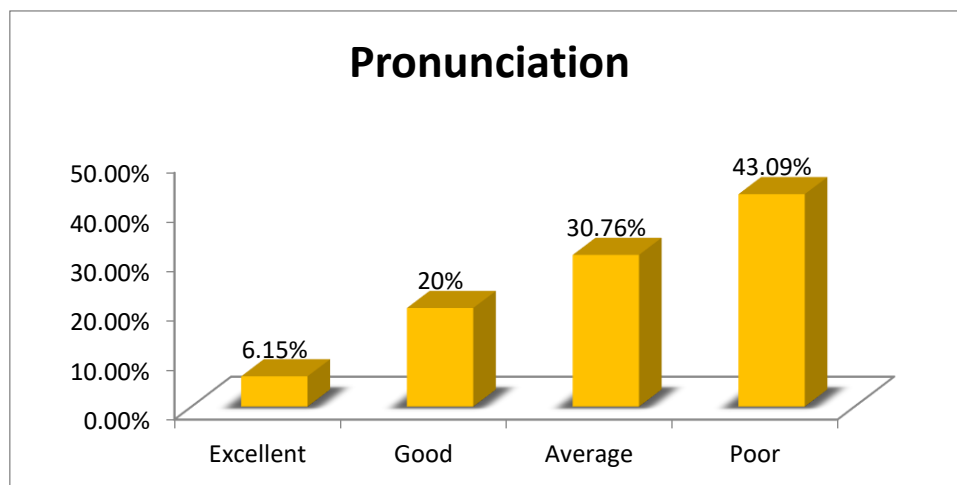
It is observed from the table that the vocabulary skills of 52 (40%) students' were poor. It shows that their minimum competency in English vocabulary is inadequate; hence they were unable to speak English proficiently. Majority of the students faced problem while speaking English. It was found that insufficient vocabulary is one of the significant factors behind the inability to express their thoughts while speaking. Learning new vocabulary and using it at an appropriate time is a sign of progression of speaking skills, but the student's conversation appears that they forgot newly discovered words after a short period; hence they struggled to speak English fluently. Usage of correct Vocabulary is significant in communication skills.

Nevertheless, the incompetency in terms of vocabulary among students significantly affects their performance in speaking English. As a result, due to the lack of vocabulary students' communication skills were poor. It indicates that the students need to make an enormous effort to develop and attain vocabulary proficiency. 43 students (33.09%) vocabulary skill was average. They expressed their ideas and communicated with a limited number of vocabulary; however, they have not attained mastery in the knowledge of vocabulary. Students thought and ideas have been shared with others using imperfect vocabulary.

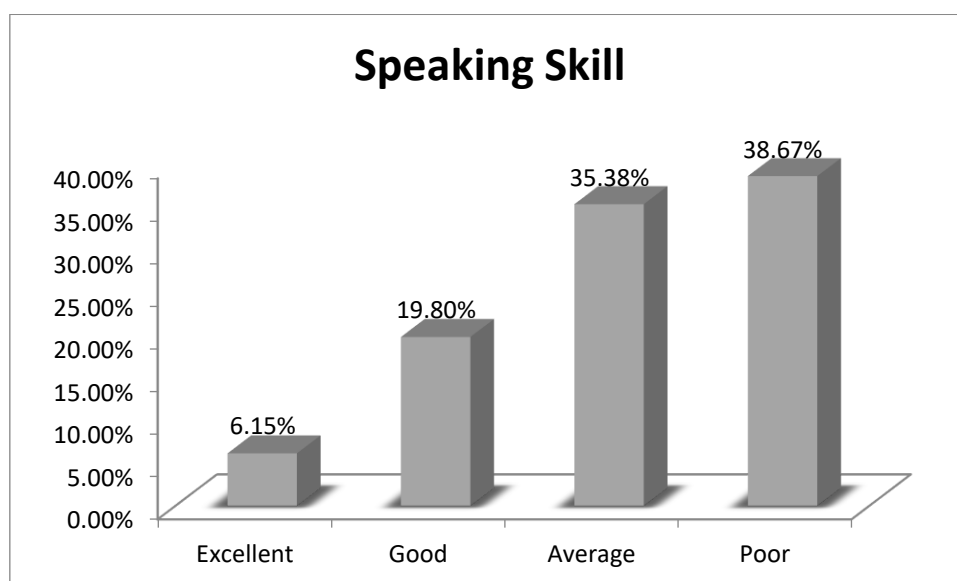
To some extent, students shared what they intended to communicate in various ways; however, some errors were found in using vocabulary. 27 students' (20.76%) vocabulary was good. It means that they used appropriate words or phrases fluently while communicating with others; their confidence in using new vocabulary seemed high. Only 8 students (6.15%) vocabulary skill was excellent. It means that they used different words and terms of similar meaning. The students used more than one word as synonyms while communicating with others. It shows that they used the right word when needed for the situation. The status of students vocabulary skill is shown below in the graph:



Pronunciation: It was observed from the above table that 56 students (43.09%) Pronunciation was poor it means that they were unable to pronounce the words correctly. The parts of speech such as stress pattern, rhythm, phonetics, intonation, and syllable were ignored. They were unaware of how to pronounce the sounds of consonants and vowels. They lacked speech modification and modulation. Pronunciation is an essential element for students while speaking English and social interaction. It is necessary to have correct pronunciation because if pronunciation is incorrect, the information will reach incorrectly, and the listeners may misunderstand the message. Unfortunately, it was found that a larger proportion of students mis-spelled the words. It shows that students were not exposed and had not practised pronouncing the English words regularly. They have largely neglected the importance of pronunciation of words and were found to use incorrect and imperfect pronunciation. 40 of the students (30.76%) pronunciation skills were average, it means that some of the words students pronounced correctly by using rhythm, syllable and stress wherever required. However, they pronounced some of the words incorrectly with vowels. Also, students faced difficulty in pronouncing some of the longest words in English. It indicates that students acquired limited pronunciation skills and also possessed pronunciation problems in some vocabulary. 26 students' (20%) pronunciation skill was exemplary. It shows that most of the problematic vocabulary and words with vowels are pronounced correctly with proper rhythm and syllables; however, they need some improvement in pronouncing some comments in terms of phonetics and style of pronunciation. Only 8 students (6.15%) pronounced the words and sentences correctly with proper rhythm, stress, syllable, and intonation. It indicates that the students are trained to pronounce the words correctly in their primary education. Graphical representation of pronunciation skill is shown below in the graph:



Overall status of Speaking Skills:



From the above graph, it can be inferred that a larger proportion of students (38.67%) speaking skill was lacking in the following elements as Comprehension, Grammar, Vocabulary, and Pronunciation. It shows

that they did not have enough exposure and have not practised speaking English in their daily lives. Poor speaking skill may be due to regular communication with friends and teachers in their mother tongue. They cannot express English clearly because of a lack of vocabulary, grammar, and grammar competency. 35.38% of students possess average speaking skills wherein they were not thoroughly competent in the above-mentioned elements of speaking skills but correctly used them. Their Comprehension, Grammar, Pronunciation, and Vocabulary skills were limited. 19.8% of students were good in speaking skills wherein they communicated effectively with correct pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary however committed a few errors and mistakes during their communication. 6.15% of students were excellent in speaking skills. No errors and mistakes were found while speaking English. It shows that they had deep knowledge and skills in the elements of speaking skills. In a nutshell, a more significant number of students lack speaking English speaking skills.

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