

## **Investigation of English Spoken Abilities of Pakistani ESL Learners**

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### **Abstract**

The present paper aims to investigate the spoken abilities of undergraduate students of Sindh Madressatul Islam University, Karachi. The paper investigates three parameters of spoken skills of the students i.e., the importance of speaking skills, the types of mistakes made in English speaking, the causes of poor speaking skills and the solution to the problems in speaking of undergraduate students. For this purpose, a study was designed to carry out among the undergraduates of Sindh Madressatul Islam University, Karachi. For data collection, a questionnaire was developed and given to forty participating students (20 males and 20 females) were asked forty questions each on *Likert Scale*. The data analysis shows that almost 70% of the Pakistani English language learners face pronunciation problems and tenses problems. It was also further discovered that the causes of these problems were lack of practice, being a non-native speaker and less attention toward English language. The language learners can enhance their spoken abilities, if the proper help of the language teacher is taken timely.

**Keywords:** Investigation, Spoken Abilities, Pakistani English language learners

### **Introduction**

The present paper aims to investigate the importance of spoken skills for undergraduate students. The research paper will also try to figure out the causes of poor speaking skills of students and the solution to these problems. For this purpose, data was collected from forty students. Twenty male and twenty female, each student was given a questionnaire consisting forty questions that fall in four main questions/parts which were on the importance of speaking skills, types of problems in speaking, causes and solution to the

problems. The present study will help understanding the problem of poor speaking skills among undergraduate students and will also help the teachers better understand the needs of the students. It will give the teachers a signpost to follow while teaching English to ESL learners and to aid some knowledge to the existing study. In addition, ESL learners will also know about the areas of spoken English they need to improve to develop better spoken abilities. Amongst the four basic learning skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) speaking ability is the most important as they give a person the power to persuade the audience. Speaking skills help to develop the other basic learning skills and gives the student the ability to compete in the job market and other spheres of life. In today's world where English is the official language of many countries and a powerful tool of communication individuals with good English speaking skills are highly sought. Therefore, the development of speaking skills among students on undergraduate level has become most important. Without good speaking skills it is not possible to have command over a language, thus the development of speaking skills is the most important.

### **Purpose of Study**

Four basic investigating queries as follows:

1. Importance of speaking skills
2. Types of mistakes made by undergraduate students in speaking
3. Causes of poor speaking skills
4. Solution to these problems.

### **Research Questions**

There are four main research questions, each major question consists of 10 questions, as follows:

1. What is the importance of speaking skills for undergraduate students?
2. What types of mistakes in speaking are made by undergraduate students?
3. What are the causes of poor speaking skills in undergraduate students?
4. How can we improve poor speaking skills in undergraduate students?

## **Literature Review**

### **Importance of Speaking Skills**

As far as importance of speaking skills is concerned, Jones (2006) argues that the 'speaking skills can enable our learners to better convey their thoughts and sentiments and additionally prevail in the occupation advertise and different zones of life'. Urrutia and Vega (2010) argue that 'Speaking is the most troublesome ability to build up, understudy's generally present absence of vocabulary, timidity and dread of being embarrassed; also, the writers clarify that confirm the significance of executing amusements in classroom for enhancing the speaking'. Ishtar Aamer Qureshi (n.d.) argues that 'a language is an apparatus for correspondence. We speak with others, to express our thoughts, and to know others' thoughts also. Communication happens, where there is discourse. Without discourse we cannot speak with each other. The significance of speaking abilities subsequently is gigantic for the learners of any dialect'.

### **Cause of Poor Speaking Skills**

Horwitz et al., (1986) states 'Numerous learners express their powerlessness and now and then even recognize their disappointment in figuring out how to talk a moment/remote dialect. These learners might be great at learning different abilities yet with regards to figuring out how to talk another dialect; they claim to have an 'inability to think straight' against it'. McIntyre and Gardner (1994) argue 'It has been found that the sentiments of pressure or apprehension fixate on the two fundamental assignment necessities of foreign language learning: listening and speaking'.

In addition, Shamas (2006) argues 'The accentuation on group work and oral introduction in the cutting edge open classroom can be especially intensifying for undergraduates who have communication apprehension'. Pica (1987) states about the examination on classroom cooperation that 'Speaking in a foreign language was observed to exasperate due to the dread that it may prompt the loss of one's sure mental self-view or self-personality'. Tanveer (2007) suggests that the most common cause of poor speaking skills in undergraduate students was found to be anxiety. Nasreen, Shumaila and Pathan (2016) argue that shows that the main cause of 'anxiety in ESL learners in Pakistan was communication apprehension, dread of being contrarily assessed, nervousness and learners' self-assessment capability were other reasons'.

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## Methodology

### Samplings and Procedure

A study was conducted in which 40 students were provided 40 questionnaires each related to the research topic. Among the 40 students, 20 were male and 20 were female undergraduate students. 30 questions were measured on the *Likert Scale* and 10 questions were option based. For data collection survey was conducted for three days. The collected data was compiled on Excel and the graphs were developed on their results.

### Data Collection

Data for research was carefully collected from the students of SMI University, Karachi, Pakistan and they were asked to mark against the option of their understanding. Questionnaires were divided into four parts i.e., Importance of speaking skills, Types of mistakes made by undergraduate students in speaking, Causes of poor speaking skills and last not the least the Solution to these problems. The tables illustrate the data collected from the participating students. Table 1-2 illustrate the first and second question as follows:

Table 1. Question 1- Why are the speaking skills important?

Questionnaire	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Uncertain
to have command over language	22	3	14	1	0
to express ones thought	29	0	11	0	0
necessary for success	23	2	15	0	0
to create confidence	23	0	17	0	0
for good presentation skills	19	1	20	0	0
to persuade an audience	20	1	14	0	5
same as presentation skills	9	18	3	3	7
only element for success	2	22	3	7	6
to development of other basic skills	17	12	5	1	5
no effect	16	15	3	3	3

Table 2. Question 2- What types of mistakes in speaking are made by undergraduate students?

Questionnaire	Mistake	No Mistake
Pronunciation Mistakes	24	16
Tenses Mistakes	8	32
Syllable Mistakes	19	21
Others	15	25

Table 3-4. Illustrate the third and fourth questions as follows:

*Table 3. Question 3- What are the causes of poor speaking skills in undergraduate students?*

Questionnaire	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Uncertain
lack of confidence	32	2	6	0	0
lack of practice	30	2	0	6	2
does teacher help improving speaking skills	8	3	8	6	1
you have good speaking skills	21	8	3	4	4
does teacher help in improving pronunciation	25	6	6	3	0
does your course contain helping material	26	4	7	2	1
past education	20	16	3	0	1
other students face the same problem	28	3	4	1	4
due to being non-native speaker	25	8	4	1	2
low attention towards the subject	21	12	2	5	0

*Table 4. Question 4- How can we improve poor speaking skills of undergraduate students?*

Questionnaire	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Uncertain
by improving listening skills	31	1	7	0	1
by listening conversation of native speakers	28	2	6	0	4
by watching movies/tutorials	23	1	14	0	2
by attending seminars	26	3	9	0	2
by reading newspapers/ articles	27	1	11	0	1
by practicing in front of others	28	2	10	0	0
by conversation with others in English	26	4	10	0	0
by teachers assistance	22	2	11	2	3
by taking English language classes	19	10	9	0	2
by trying to make English sentences	26	2	8	1	2

## Data Analysis

### Results

The data was collected and compiled on excel data base and analysed. The following graphs and tables were developed. Table 5 illustrates the results in percentage as follows:

Table 5. Question 1- Illustrates the results in percentage

Questionnaire	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Uncertain
to have command over language	55%	8%	35%	3%	0%
to express ones thought	73%	0%	28%	0%	0%
necessary for success	58%	5%	38%	0%	0%
to create confidence	58%	0%	43%	0%	0%
for good presentation skills	48%	3%	50%	0%	0%
to persuade an audience	50%	3%	35%	0%	13%
same as presentation skills	23%	45%	8%	8%	18%
only element for success	5%	55%	8%	18%	15%
to development of other basic skills	43%	30%	13%	3%	13%
no effect	40%	38%	8%	8%	8%

Figure 1. Illustrates the bar chart graph of first major query

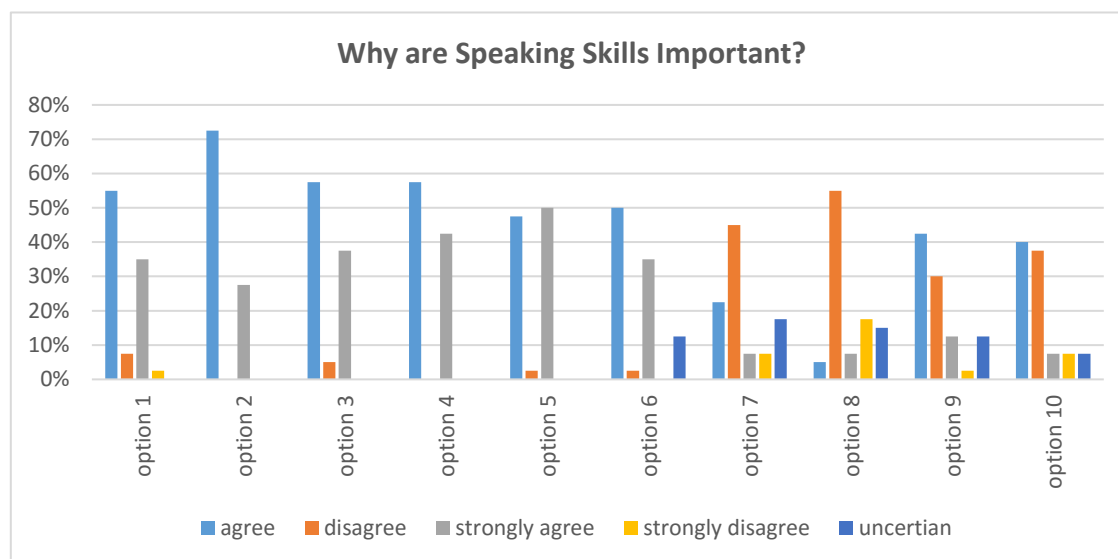


Figure 1 and Table 5 illustrate the percentage through *Likert Scale* on the question i.e., importance of speaking skills is as follows: 55% students agree and 35% strongly agree that speaking skills are important to have command over a language. 73% students agree that speaking skills help to express ones thought. 58% students agree and 38% strongly agree that speaking skills are necessary for success. 48% students agree that speaking skills are important for good presentation skills. 55% students disagree that speaking skills are the only element for success. 40% students agree while 38% students disagree that speaking skills have no effect on learning.

Table 6. Question 2- Illustrates the results in percentage

Questionnaire	Mistakes	No Mistakes
Pronunciation Mistakes	60%	40%
Tenses Mistakes	20%	80%
Syllable Mistakes	48%	53%
Others	38%	63%

Figure 2. Illustrates the bar chart graph of second major query

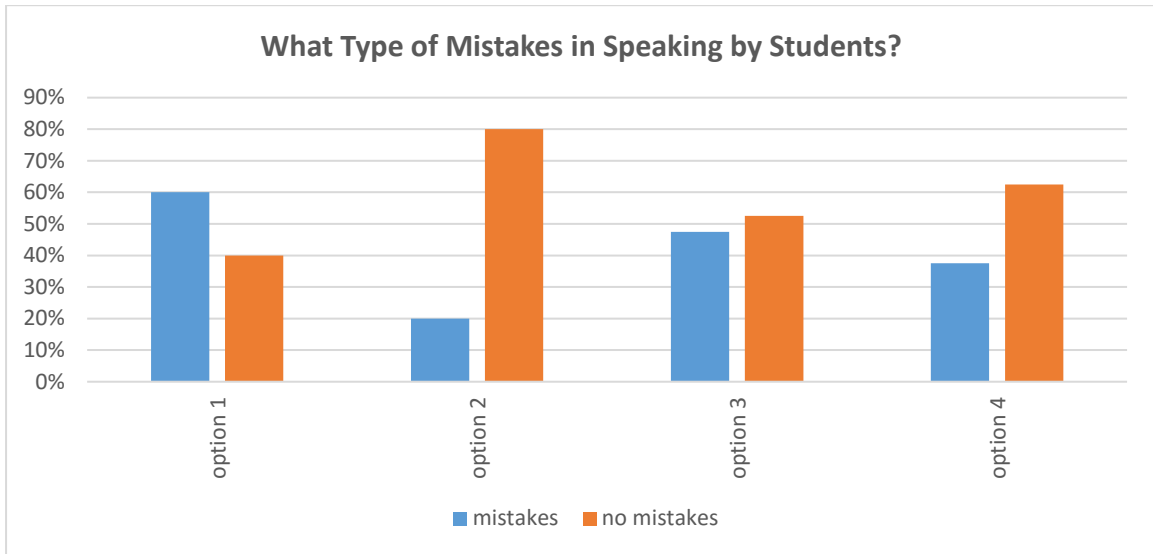


Figure 2 and Table 6 illustrate the percentage of *Likert Scale* on the question, i.e., what type of mistakes in speaking by students are as follows: 60% students made pronunciation mistakes. 80% students did not make tenses mistakes. 48% students made mistakes in identifying the number of syllables. 38% students said other mistakes. From this it concludes that students have most difficulty in pronunciation and syllables, and further the undergraduate students do not make many mistakes in tenses.

Table 7. Question 3- Illustrates the results in percentage

Questionnaire	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Uncertain
lack of confidence	80%	5%	15%	0%	0%
lack of practice	75%	5%	0%	15%	5%
does teacher help improving speaking skills	20%	8%	20%	15%	3%
you have good speaking skills	53%	20%	8%	10%	10%
does teacher help in improving pronunciation	63%	15%	15%	8%	0%
does your course contain helping material	65%	10%	18%	5%	3%
past education	50%	40%	8%	0%	3%
other students face the same problem	70%	8%	10%	3%	10%
due to being non-native speaker	63%	20%	10%	3%	5%
low attention towards the subject	53%	30%	5%	13%	0%

Table 7 illustrates the percentage of *Likert Scale* on the question i.e., what types of mistakes in speaking by students is as follows: 80% students agree that the cause of poor speaking skill is lack of confidence. 75% students are of the view that their poor speaking skills are due to lack of practice. 15-20% students blame their teachers to be the cause of their poor speaking skills and only 10% blame their course. 50% students said that the cause of poor speaking skills was their past education. 63% students said that they had poor speaking skills due to being a non-native speaker. 53% students agree that low attention towards the subject is the cause of poor speaking skills. From these results, it cannot be concluded that teacher's negligence is the cause of poor speaking skills of undergraduate students only.

Figure 3. Illustrates the bar chart graph of third major query

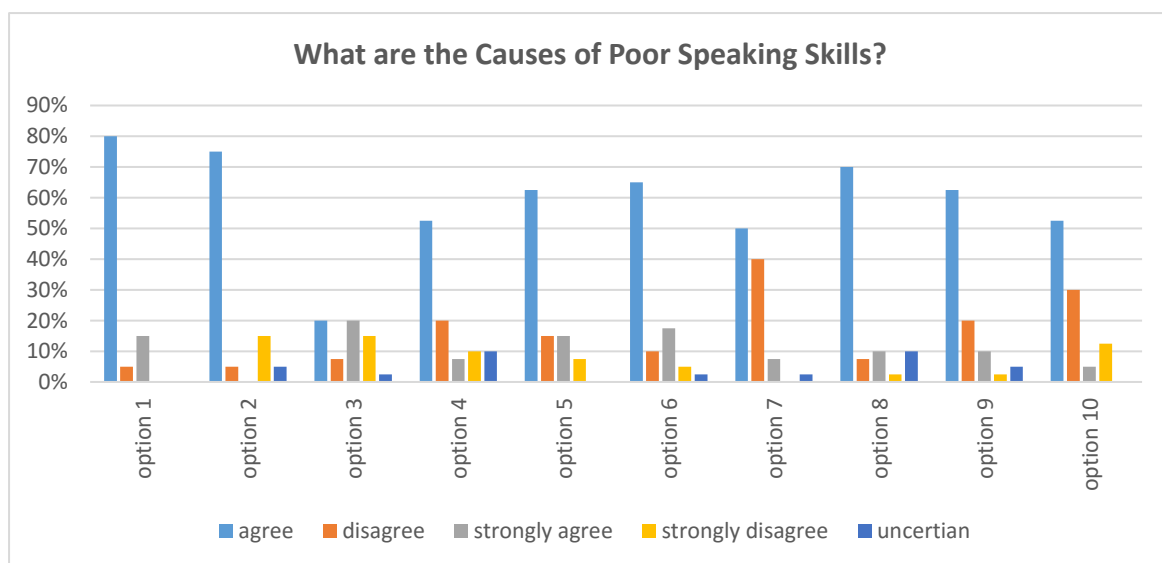




Table 8. Question 4- Illustrates the results in percentage

Questionnaire	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Uncertain
by improving listening skills	78%	3%	18%	0%	3%
by listening conversation of native speakers	70%	5%	15%	0%	10%
by watching movies/tutorials	58%	3%	35%	0%	5%
by attending seminars	65%	8%	23%	0%	5%
by reading newspapers/ articles	68%	3%	28%	0%	3%
by practicing in front of others	70%	5%	25%	0%	0%
by conversation with others in English	65%	10%	25%	0%	0%
by teachers assistance	55%	5%	28%	5%	8%
by taking English language classes	48%	25%	23%	0%	5%
by trying to make English sentences	65%	5%	20%	3%	5%

Figure 4. Illustrates the bar chart graph of fourth major query

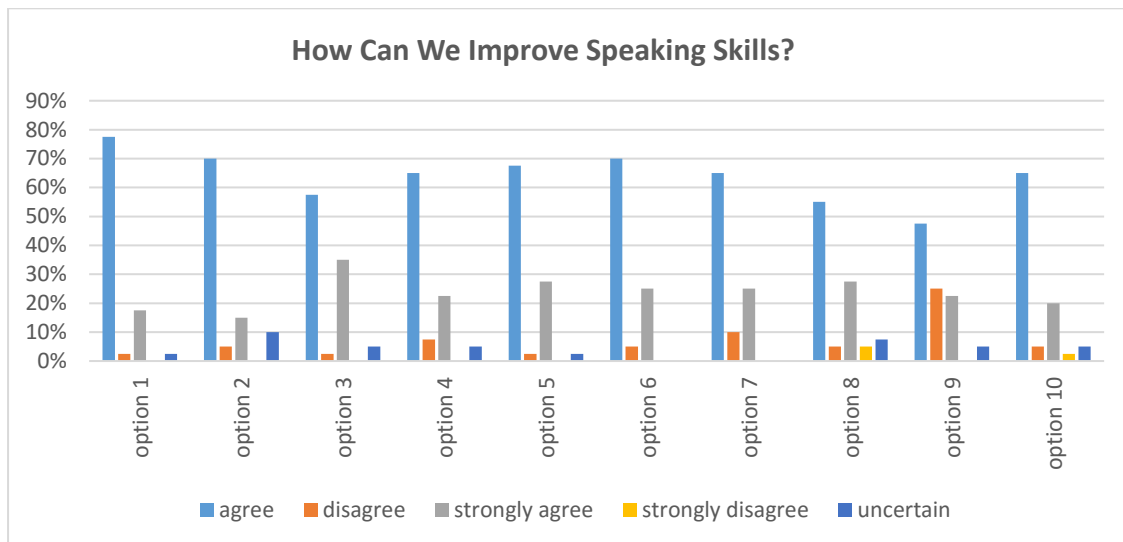


Figure 4 and Table 8 illustrate the percentage of *Likert Scale* on the question i.e., how undergraduate students can improve speaking skills, as follows: 78% students agree that they can improve poor speaking skills by improving their listening skills. 70% students agree that they can improve poor speaking skills by listening to conversations of native speakers and attending seminars of professionals. Almost 55% students agree that the teacher can help them in improving their speaking skills. Nearly 20% students said that they need to take special English classes to improve their speaking skills. 30-40% students mentioned other source.

## **Summary**

The study investigated a variety of factors related to development of spoken abilities. In the first section importance of speaking skills were investigated and it was found that speaking skills are the fundamental skills that must be developed at the undergraduate level at least and before is recommended. The second section investigated the types of problems in speaking faced by students especially ESL learners and it was found that the most students face pronunciation and the problem of syllabification. The last not the least, third section a solution to the problem of speaking was investigated and many solutions were found one of solutions was improvement of listening skills and both student-teacher complete involvement in learning and teaching English speaking skills.

## **Conclusion**

The present study concludes that the speaking abilities of the students can be developed by complete understandable interaction between teacher-student conversation in and outside the classroom. Based on the study, it was discovered that if the students are encouraged by the teachers and given frequent participations on behalf the teachers, then spoken abilities of the students develop at the higher level of competency. The study further explored the causes, need and development of English pronunciation. Main hurdle in the development of spoken skills of the undergraduates at SMIU, Karachi, are pronunciation issues. If English language teacher works on the poor pronunciation of English, in addition to other grammatical aspects of a language, then it will be highly appreciated that the students can come out of this phonetic problem of English pronunciation. From this research, it can be concluded that there is a great need to improve the speaking skills of undergraduate students especially the students of SMIU who are found to have poor speaking skills and have unsatisfying knowledge of English. The most important role is the role of the teacher who can develop and enhance the speaking skills of students.

## Recommendations

Since poor speaking skills can cause an individual to lose the job therefore, it is necessary that the speaking skills of students be developed at the undergraduate level. Based on the findings of this study, following recommendations are made. First and foremost, ESL/EFL instructors should know the type of problems faced by the students. As a student lack of practice is the main factor of poor speaking skills, therefore the students should improve his/her speaking skills by practice. To increase the student's participation in the class the teachers should encourage the students through a friendly gesture and class environment. Teachers should encourage students to have confidence to make mistakes in order to acquire communication skills. The teacher should give the students class activities based on development of speaking skills. To encourage students to feel successful, the teacher should not make activities that increase a student's chances to fail. Teachers should try to get information about the students past academic experience and to help them accordingly. Teachers should be given special training on how to handle the poor speaking skills of students and develop their spoken abilities through class activities and daily routine matters.

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## Appendix 1-Questionnaire

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ Semester \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Gender \_\_\_\_\_

### QUESTION-1

SN	QUESTION	DISAGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	UNDECIDED
1	Without speaking skills it is impossible to have command over a language				
2	Speaking skills help to express one's thought				
3	Good speaking skills are necessary for success				
4	Speaking skills create confidence in an individual				
5	Speaking skills are necessary for good presentation skills				
6	Speaking skills give a person to persuade the audience				
7	Speaking skills and presentation skills are the same				
8	Only speaking skills are important for success				
9	Speaking skills help in the development of other basic skills				
10	Speaking skills have no effect on English learning				

## QUESTION 2

What type of mistakes in speaking are made by undergraduate students?

### Questions

1. what type of mistake do you commonly make in English
    - a) pronunciation mistakes
    - b) tenses mistakes
    - c) syllables
  2. PRONOUNCIATION
    - a) Pronoun-ciation
    - b) Pronun-ciation
    - c) Pro-nun-ciation
  3. PHENOMENON
    - a) Fi-nom-uh-non
    - b) Fi-nomenan
    - c) Pho-nom-e-non
  4. How many syllables are in the word "secure"
    - a) One
    - b) Two
    - c) three
  5. How many syllables are in the word "Georgia"
    - a) One
    - b) Two
    - c) three
  6. Amazing
    - a) One
    - b) Two
    - c) three
  7. Identify the present tense in " she has learnt a lesson"
    - a) present perfect tense
    - b) present continuous tense
    - c) present indefinite tense
  8. Identify the past tense in " He was playing"
    - a) past perfect tense
    - b) past continuous tense
    - c) past indefinite tense
  9. Identify the future tense in " I will ask him some questions"
    - a) future perfect tense
    - b) future continuous tense
    - c) future indefinite tense
  10. Is there any other kind of mistake commonly made by you?
    - a) yes
    - b) no
-

### QUESTION 3

What are the cause of poor speaking skills in undergraduate students?

SR#	QUESTION	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	UNDECIDED
1	Speaking skills of students are weak due to lack of confidence.					
2	Lack of speaking skills due lack of practice.					
3	Your teacher helps you in improving your speaking skills.					
4	You have good speaking skills.					
5	Your teacher takes steps to improve your pronunciation.					
6	Your course includes help to improve your speaking skills.					
7	Only improvement of speaking skills help you improve your vocabulary.					
8	Your other class mates face the same speaking problems.					
9	Your English speaking skills are weak due to being a non-native speaker.					
10	Your speaking skills are weak due to low attention towards the subject.					

QUESTION 4						
How can we improve our poor speaking skills?						
SR#	QUESTION	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	UNDECIDED
1	By improving our listening skills.					
2	By listening to conversation of native speakers.					
3	By watching movies/tutorials.					
4	By attending seminars of professional speakers.					
5	By reading articles / newspapers / magazines.					
6	By practicing our speaking skills in front of others.					
7	By conversation with friends and family in English.					
8	By teachers assistance.					
9	By taking special classes for improvement of speaking skills.					
10	By trying to making English sentences.					

SIGN \_\_\_\_\_



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