

A Comparative Analysis of Speaking Skills in English of Secondary Level Students from Schools Affiliated to PSEB and CBSE in District Barnala, Punjab

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Abstract

In this paper, the performance of secondary level learners from ten schools affiliated to Punjab School Education Board (PSEB) and Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) in district Barnala, Punjab with regard to speaking in English was examined and compared. 200 participants (100 each from schools affiliated to PSEB and CBSE) of grade 10 from ten schools (5 each from the two boards, and 20 students per school) were selected through random sampling procedure. The data, in the form of audio-recordings, was collected by administering a variety of questions to them regarding their day-to-day life. The analysis of the data was done on the basis of five components- Pronunciation, Grammar, Vocabulary, Fluency, and Comprehension. A significant difference in the performance of learners from the schools affiliated to the two boards was observed when 't-test' was applied to the data. Furthermore, the performance of the students from the two boards in five sub-skills of speaking was analysed by comparing their average scores against each skill.

Key words: Speaking skill, ELT, PSEB, CBSE.

1. Introduction

In the present scenario of globalization, knowledge of English is considered as a gateway for participation in national and international life. English is so widely used all over the world that it can no longer be considered as 'owned' by any single nation. Its popularity can be estimated from a prediction that "by 2010, a surge in English language learning will include one

third of world's people” (Graddol 34). Everybody wants to acquire proficiency in English to get academic advancement and social elevation. People who are able to communicate in English are more likely to win a coveted position of authority and carve a place of eminence for themselves. On the contrary, those who lack expression in English are relegated to backward positions as Kiran Karnik, president NASSCOM also states, “Today only twenty five percent of India’s technical graduates and ten to fifteen percent of other graduates are employable at once.” According to him, the reason behind the unemployment of a sizable percentage of graduates from reputed institutes may be their inability to speak English fluently.

In the case of majority of third world countries where English is not the mother tongue, people still strive to attain proficiency in it for growth in their professional lives which, by no means, is a simple task. A glaring difference can be observed in the way, and at the speed at which people develop proficiency in their mother tongue and in a foreign or second language. They develop communication skills in their mother tongue effortlessly while using it in their daily lives, but it is not so in case of a foreign language which has different semantic and syntactic norms as compared to one’s mother tongue.

Attaining communicative proficiency in a foreign or second language involves control over all the four skills of that language viz. Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Till about 1980s, more emphasis was laid on developing reading and writing skills in comparison to developing speaking and listening skills; but as globalization gained ground in the decade of the 80s necessitating oral communication, the emphasis shifted to development of listening and speaking skills. Speaking is central, but a complex area of language acquisition as David P. Harris also confirms: “speaking is a complex skill requiring the simultaneous use of different abilities which often develop at different rates” (71).

In the context of Indian students also, it can be seen that learning conversational English is not easy for them due to a number of reasons; the foremost among them being the fact that it is not their first language. Their difficulties are compounded by the fact that the teachers

themselves have studied English as a second language, and many of them may not be adept at subtleties of teaching speaking in this language.

Furthermore, the students who are expected to converse in English at the school or college level use their mother-tongue at home and in their social lives, which influences their pronunciation in English. One also needs to develop certain new muscular habits in order to master the pronunciation of sounds of any foreign or second language as the articulation of the sounds of one's mother tongue is different from the articulation of the sounds of the target language. In addition to this, with limited opportunities for real- life interaction, teaching speaking in English as a second language requires spending a substantial amount of time on part of the teachers in classrooms which becomes extremely difficult in wake of time constraints.

Though a number of studies have been conducted on teaching of speaking in English as a foreign language in India, yet there is a further need to study the level of proficiency in spoken English of learners at primary, secondary and college level in context of Punjab specifically as the proficiency of the learners varies according to different geographical regions with varied socio-cultural-economic set-up and different school education boards which prescribe different syllabi and recommend different teaching methodologies. This research paper aims at analyzing and comparing the performance of secondary level students from the schools affiliated to PSEB and CBSE in Barnala District, Punjab with regard to speaking skill in English language.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Research Participants

For the present study, 200 students (100 each from schools affiliated to PSEB and CBSE) of grade 10 from ten schools (5 each from the two boards; and 20 students per school) from district Barnala were selected through random sampling procedure.

2.2. Research Design

The data was collected in the form of audio-recordings of the responses of the learners to a set of questions (See Appendix). The responses were analysed on the basis of a 'rubric

assessment' scale containing five criteria recommended by a noted scholar David P. Harris to assess the speaking skill.

1. Pronunciation (including articulation of vowels and consonants, stress and intonation patterns) (skill P)
2. Grammar (skill G)
3. Vocabulary (skill V)
4. Fluency (skill F)
5. Comprehension (skill C)

Harris had designed the scale by taking into consideration all the above mentioned components, which have been further classified on the basis of five short behavioral statements defining the degree of proficiency of the learners. The statements indicating a score of '5' against all the five components of the rubric suggests that there are possibilities of the learners speaking as accurately and fluently in the second language as the native speakers do. In the component titled 'pronunciation', for example, Harris states that the speech of the learners who scored a perfect '5' has hardly any traces which show them to be foreign speakers of the language. Their pronunciation and fluency of the speech is closest to that of the native speakers. Furthermore, with regard to the component of 'vocabulary', Harris states that the learners exhibit a range of vocabulary which they are able to use as precisely and effectively as a native speakers do. With regard to the component of 'comprehension', it has been presumed that the learners can understand and interpret everything as clearly and at the same speed at which native speakers speak. In actual practice, however, young learners find it extremely difficult to perform to the level which indicates a score of '5'. A closer observation of the scale suggested by Harris, however, leads to a conclusion that it might be suitable for application on advanced learners; but the target group for the present study will definitely be very inexperienced, and none of them would be able to score 5 or even 4. It necessitated modifications especially in the behavioral statements corresponding to the top two scores in each component, thus making the assessment more reliable.

Another scale designed by Widya Arun Wicaksani which is based upon the one suggested by Harris, but has incorporated certain modifications which made it more suitable for use for the present study was adopted. The scale is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Modified rubric assessment used by Widya Arun Wicaksani

Sr. No.	Criteria	Rating Scores	Behavioral statements
1	Pronunciation	5	The pronunciation is clear and quite understandable for secondary level learners.
		4	There are some pronunciation problems, but still quite understandable.
		3	Pronunciation problem necessities concentrated listening and occasionally lead to misunderstanding.
		2	Very hard to understand because of pronunciation problem, most frequently be asked to repeat.
		1	Pronunciation problem to serve as to make speech virtually unintelligible.
2	Grammar	5	Errors in grammar are quite rare.
		4	There are few grammatical errors but still intelligible.
		3	Make frequent errors of grammar and word order, which occasionally obscure meaning.
		2	Grammar and word order errors make comprehension difficult. Must often rephrases sentences or restrict him to basic patterns.
		1	Errors in grammar and word order are so severe as to make speech virtually unintelligible.
3	Vocabulary	5	Almost all vocabularies used are in a proper use.
		4	Frequently use inappropriate terms or must replace ideas but still intelligible.
		3	Frequently uses the wrong words conversation somewhat limited because of inadequate vocabulary.
		2	Misuse of words and very limited vocabulary makes comprehension quite difficult.
		1	Vocabulary limitation so extreme as to make conversation virtually impossible.
4	Fluency	5	Able to use the language fluently, rare skip, and the speed of speech are at the normal rate.
		4	Speed of speech seems to be slightly affected by language problem.
		3	Speed and fluency are rather strongly affected by language problem.
		2	Usually hesitant, often forced into silence by language limitation.
		1	Speech is so halting and fragmentary as to make conversation virtually impossible.

5	Comprehension	5	Understand most of what is said at average speed.
		4	Understand what is said at average speed, but occasional repetition may be necessary.
		3	Understand what is said is at slower than average speed repetition.
		2	Has great difficulty following what is said. Can comprehend only, "social conversation" spoken slowly and with frequent repetition.
		1	Cannot be said to understand even simple conversation.

2.3. Technique of Data Analysis

To discover whether there are statistically significant differences between the average scores of two groups, a statistical test named 't-test' was used. This test is commonly used to examine the truth or falsehood of null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the results of two samples. In the present research, the independent-samples 't-test' was used as a tool for analysis as the sample size from both the groups was equal, the same variable (achievement in speaking skill) was used; but both the groups (from schools affiliated to two boards PSEB and CBSE) represented different populations. The two-tailed 't-test' was used for not hypothesizing a direction in the relationship between two groups and the dependent variable. The following equation was used to calculate the 't-value' in independent samples after applying 't-test' to the responses of the two groups having equal sample sizes (n):

$$t = \frac{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}{\sqrt{\left[\frac{SS_1 + SS_2}{n_1 + n_2 - 2} \right] \left[\frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_2} \right]}} \quad (\text{Student t-test theory})$$

Where \bar{x}_1 and \bar{x}_2 = the mean of each sample

n_1 and n_2 = the number of replicates for sample 1 and sample 2 respectively.

$\sqrt{\left[\frac{SS_1 + SS_2}{n_1 + n_2 - 2} \right] \left[\frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_2} \right]}$ = the standard deviation of the difference between the means

In which

$$SS_1 = \sum x_1^2 - \frac{(\sum x_1)^2}{n_1} \quad \text{and}$$

$$SS_2 = \sum x_2^2 - \frac{(\sum x_2)^2}{n_2}$$

Where

Σx^2 = Sum of the squares of each replicate value and

$(\Sigma x)^2$ = Square of the total (Σx). It is not the same as Σx^2

(Σx) = Total sum of each replicate value

Then the calculated t value was compared with tabulated values for higher levels of significance (e.g. $p = 0.01$). If the calculated t value exceeds the tabulated value we say that the means are significantly different at that level of probability. By convention, we say that a difference between means at the 95% level is "significant", a difference at 99% level is "highly significant" and a difference at 99.9% level is "very highly significant". This statistical test allows us to make statements with a degree of precision.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. T-test Analysis

As mentioned earlier, the study was conducted on 200 participants (from five schools each affiliated to PSEB and CBSE) with 20 students from each school. While analysing the samples, average score of total marks obtained by the students of one school against all the sub-skills of speaking, were taken as one unit in each sample. In this way, the total numbers of replicates (n_1 and n_2) for each sample (sample 1 and sample 2) were five.

To apply 't-test' on the data collected from the schools affiliated to PSEB and CBSE in the speaking skill, a null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the performance of schools affiliated to PSEB and CBSE, was formulated. The data regarding the overall performance of the learners from schools affiliated to the two boards in speaking skill in English, and application of 't-test' on this data is shown in table 2.

Table 2. Overall performance of the learners from schools affiliated to CBSE (Group A) and PSEB (Group B) in speaking in English and application of the 't-test' on this data

Schools	Group 1		Group 2
1	14.7		10.3
2	18.8		10.5
3	19.75		10.35
4	17.55		12.9
5	19.45		13.8
N	5		5
\bar{x}	18.05		11.57
$\sum x$	90.25		57.85
$(\sum x)^2$	8145.0625		3346.6225
$\sum x^2$	1645.8975		680.3125
$\frac{(\sum x)^2}{n}$	1629.0125		669.3245
SS	16.885		10.988
$\frac{SS_1 + SS_2}{n_1 + n_2 - 2}$		3.484125	
$\frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_2}$		0.4	
$\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2$		6.48	
$t = \frac{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}{\sqrt{\left[\frac{SS_1 + SS_2}{n_1 + n_2 - 2}\right] \left[\frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_2}\right]}}$		5.489062127	

Plugging all the values into the t-test equation, the t-value based upon the results of the students from the schools affiliated to two boards, was found to be 5.48. Now, to see whether this is significant or not, this value is compared to the critical t value from a t table. For this, first the degrees of freedom for an independent samples t-test were calculated.

$$df = n_1 + n_2 - 2 = 10 - 2 = 8$$

Entering a t-table at 8 degrees of freedom, a critical t score of 2.306 for a two-tailed t-test at the .05 probability level was found. As the absolute value of our calculated t score 5.48 exceeds the critical t score of 2.306, hence the differences between these two groups is significant at the .05 probability level. Furthermore, looking at our critical t score table, we can

see that these differences are even significant at the .001 probability level, meaning that there is less than 0.1% chance that these differences in scores are simply due to error or chance. It can be concluded that our null hypothesis is rejected and the difference in scores between learners from the schools affiliated to two boards was statistically significant at the 99.9% confidence level. ($t = 5.48$, $df = 8$, $p < .001$).

3.2. An Analysis and Discussion of Comparative Performance of Schools

The comparative performance of learners from the schools affiliated to PSEB and CBSE in five sub-skills of speaking skill in English is shown in Fig.1. From the results, it can be observed that the average scores of the learners from the schools affiliated to CBSE are higher than that of learners from the schools affiliated to PSEB in all the five sub-skills of speaking in English language.

In pronunciation skill, the average score of learners from schools affiliated to CBSE is 3.57, whereas the learners from the schools affiliated to PSEB got an average score of 2.13, lagging behind by a difference of 1.44. The difference in the performance of the learners from schools affiliated to two boards in pronunciation is quite significant. During conversation, learners adopted various strategies such as the strategy of self-repair in order to correct their pronunciation. They followed the strategy of inter lingual transfer when there was a difference between the first and the second language.

In most schools affiliated to CBSE, the impact of technology upon English language learning can be clearly observed. Various audio-visual language teaching aids are used and the learners also get chance to listen to various discourses. These aids prove more effective for language learners in knowing how native speakers of English language use it while communicating with each other.

However, in schools affiliated to PSEB, the learners are more familiar to a particular set of pattern of pronunciation of their mother-tongue. They cannot cope up with the difference in the patterns used in English and that of their mother-tongue. T .R. Kansakar opines in this

regard: “A non-native learner has problems in pronouncing certain vowel and consonant sounds of English accurately because these sounds do not occur in the mother tongue” (59).

Regarding grammatical skills, where the learners from the schools affiliated to CBSE scored an average score of 3.44, the learners from the schools affiliated to PSEB scored an average score of 2.42, lagging behind by 1.02. Majority of learners from the schools affiliated to PSEB were unable to produce even a single sentence without grammatical error. They often tried to answer in one word due to their inability to construct grammatically correct and meaningful sentences.

Grammatical competence enables speakers to use and understand the structures of English-language accurately and unhesitatingly, making it fluent. According to Spratt et al., “We can develop learners’ speaking skills by focusing regularly on particular aspects of speaking e.g. - fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, body language” (50).

Regarding vocabulary component of speaking skill, the average score of learners from schools affiliated to CBSE is 3.96, whereas the learners from the schools affiliated to PSEB got an average score of 2.76, lagging behind by 1.20. It was observed that learners from the schools affiliated to PSEB were often in search of an appropriate word which they were unable to find. When they failed to find an appropriate word in their mental lexicon, they coined new words to facilitate communication. In certain contexts, the learners followed the code switching strategy, i.e., they use certain words of L_1 while trying to answer in L_2 . Approximation was another strategy in which the learners used the approximate words sharing semantic feature of the correct ones, instead of the correct ones. This may have happened due to their lack of exposure to a range of vocabulary.

Regarding fluency skill, where the learners from the schools affiliated to CBSE scored an average of 3.46, the learners from the schools affiliated to PSEB scored an average of 1.78, lagging behind by 1.68. Majority of learners from the schools affiliated to PSEB followed the

strategy of voice reduction and overuse of fillers in the process of communication. Their answers in incomplete statements rendered their speech as completely lacking fluency.

In comprehension skill, the average score of learners from the schools affiliated to CBSE is 3.62, whereas the learners from the schools affiliated to PSEB got an average score of 2.48, lagging behind by a difference of 1.14. It was noticed that learners from the schools affiliated to PSEB could not co-operate semantically in the conversational discourse with the researcher. Reasons for this kind of semantic avoidance are the learners' linguistic inadequacy as well as ignorance of the semantic norms of L₂ utterances. While answering, they used the strategy of expanding the linguistic resources available to them by one way or another without considering the required response for the question asked. It created disturbance in the comprehension of speech.

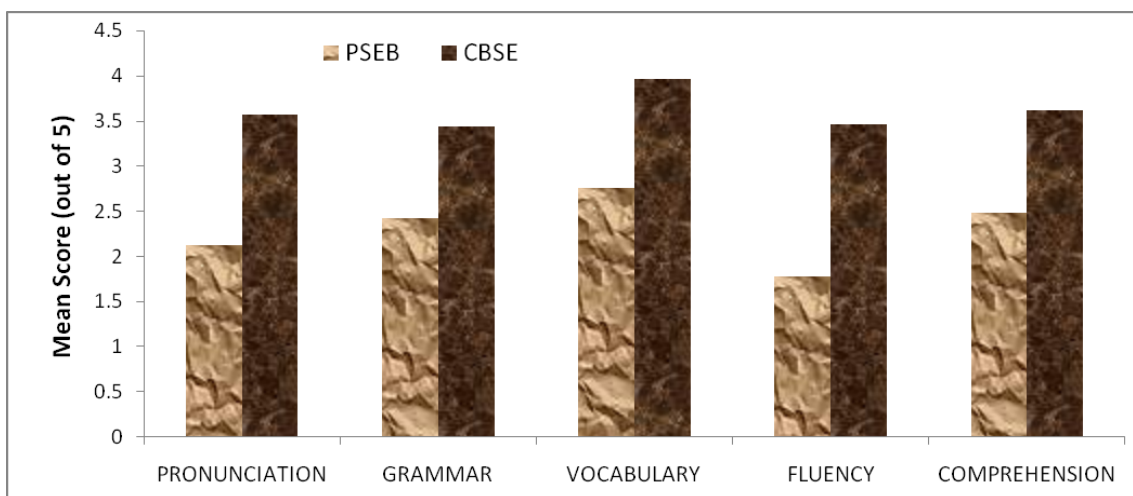


Fig. 1: Comparative performance of learners from schools affiliated to PSEB and CBSE in five sub-skills of speaking skill in English language.

The comparison of overall performance of learners from the schools affiliated to PSEB and schools affiliated to CBSE in speaking skill of English language is shown in Fig.2. From the results shown in the Fig.2, it can be concluded that the learners from the schools affiliated to CBSE scored an average score of 18.05, and the learners from the schools affiliated to PSEB scored an average score of 11.57, lagging behind by a score of 6.48. It is found with learners

from the schools affiliated to PSEB that they make an excessive use of their mother-tongue in productive skills namely- speaking and writing.

When asked about their tactics of performing a speaking activity, the learners from the schools affiliated to PSEB confessed that at first, they thought about the topic in their mother tongue, framed what they wanted to say in their mother-tongue and then translated it into English. It resulted in a number of mistakes in their speech. When learners of rural background from the schools affiliated to PSEB were asked to perform a speaking activity, they ended up saying nothing. Even when they tried to speak, they often made use of their mother tongue making mistakes which further resulted in losing the motive of learning the language.

The most common problem noticed while performing a task in the second language is inhibition. Sometimes, the students possess good knowledge about the concerned topic; yet while speaking, they are worried about making mistakes, or about being criticized in front of the rest of the class resulting either in making mistakes while performing or remain completely silent. Other common obstacles observed are lack of proper vocabulary, under-developed listening skills, quick learners' dominance in the class, and social background etc.

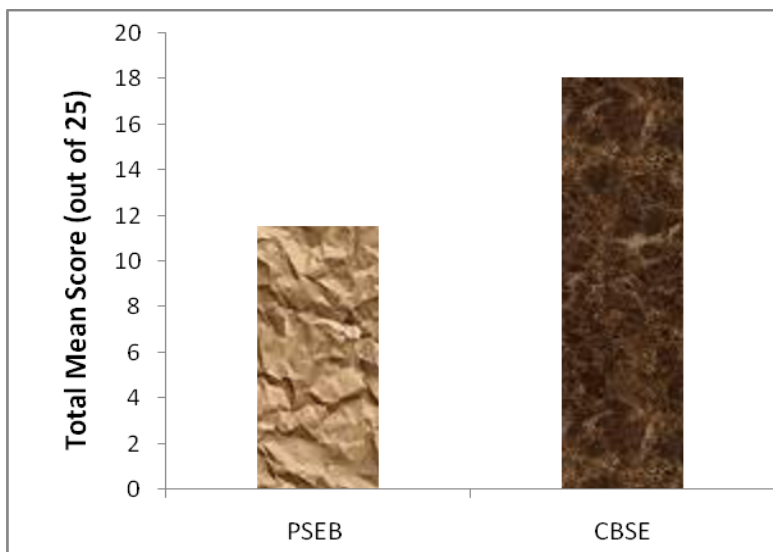


Fig. 2: Comparison of overall performance of learners from the schools affiliated to PSEB and CBSE in speaking skill of English language.

The reason for the below par performance of learners from the schools affiliated to PSEB in comparison to learners from the schools affiliated to CBSE is the fact that most of the learners of PSEB are the first generation learners and they get very little exposure to English in their daily life. The overall performance of the learners under study from both the boards is dissatisfactory in the productive skill of speaking.

3.3. Strategies Adopted by Learners While Speaking

While conducting the speaking tests, some of the learners avoided communicating in English with the researcher. It was so because perhaps the learners wanted to conceal their linguistic inadequacy in the second language. Further, the anxiety, language shock and cultural shock are some other important factors that are responsible for their usage of the strategy of avoidance. The learners adopted various strategies while speaking that affected their ability to communicate effectively and efficiently with proper pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension.

It was noticed that whenever learners from the schools affiliated to CBSE realized while answering questions that there was something incorrect in their speech, they followed the strategy of self-repair. However, these self-corrected elements were not necessarily correct in all contexts, leading the self-correcting process to the production of wrong linguistic elements also. Voice reduction was another strategy adopted by the learners from both the groups while speaking. They reduced their pitch to the level of getting inaudible.

It was also observed that while speaking, majority of the learners from the schools affiliated to PSEB adopted the strategy of responding in elliptical form instead of giving elaborate response. They answered the questions in one word instead of constructing sentence or giving complete answers.

Literal Translation is another strategy adopted by the learners from the schools affiliated to PSEB while speaking. Without considering the sentence structure of L_2 , the learners translated the L_1 words with the L_2 words which are stored in their mental dictionary.

Another strategy adopted by the learners from the schools affiliated to PSEB was the use of fillers and repetition which literally do not carry any meaning in conversation. The students made use of fillers and repetition to take time to think about the apt word and to conceal the internal process taking place in their inner minds. In some other contexts, instead of using fillers, the learners took long pause. The reason behind using this strategy is that they do not have appropriate vocabulary to express their views. Other strategies adopted by the learners from the schools affiliated to PSEB while speaking are message abandonment, expansion of resources, and semantic avoidance etc.

Actually, all the above discussed strategies followed by the learners in the process of oral communication as the strategy of avoidance, self-repair, responding in elliptical form, literal translation, and the use of fillers and repetitions carrying no meaning etc., together affects on the overall performance of the learners while speaking in English.

4. Proposed Remedies

The goal of every speaking activity should be to develop the communicative ability of the learners. They should be motivated through various oral practice activities so that their interest level goes up and they also derive fun out of these activities. During these activities, the teacher should play the role of a guide, mentor and facilitator. Beginning should be with simple and easy activities to encourage the slow learners, and boost their morale. Gradually, the difficulty level of activities may be increased; teacher's talk time may be reduced while giving more opportunity to the learners to make efforts to talk so that the learners can express their ideas in the target language "with more confidence as Gurray also states " just as a young bird learning to fly must use his wings even if he falls, the young people must speak the new language, even if his efforts are, at first, inept and incorrect. But like the parent bird, the teacher can foster these early faltering until the bird that is the student, learns to fly (speak English) by quiet patience, clear speaking, and encouragement" (20).

A task-based approach which includes Role play, Games and Groups discussions will prove to be very useful in minimizing learners' inhibition (their worries about making mistakes,

being criticized or losing face in front of the rest of the class) and thus enhancing their communicative competence in English.

5. Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that there is significant difference between the proficiency level in speaking in English of learners from the schools affiliated to PSEB and CBSE in Barnala district of Punjab. The overall performance of the learners from the schools affiliated to CBSE is found to be better in all the five sub-skills in comparison to the performance of learners from the schools affiliated to PSEB.

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APPENDIX

The following questionnaire was used for conducting the speaking test:

Sr. No.	Question
1.	What is your name?
2.	How old are you?
3.	What do you do in your free hours?
4.	What do you do to help your mother at home?
5.	Where are you going today evening?
6.	Do you like English? Why?
7.	What will you do if you get first rank in 10 th standard?
8.	What will your father do if you get first rank?
9.	What will you do for the people if you become a doctor?
10.	What will you do if it rains while you are going to school?
11.	What would your father have done if you have failed in 9 th examination?
12.	What do you want to be in future? And why?
Speak About Any One of The Following Topics	
A	Your likes and dislikes
B	Your favourite sports star

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