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## FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENTS' LOW COMPETENCE IN SPOKEN ENGLISH AT GRADUATE LEVEL IN PAKISTAN

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### ABSTRACT

Spoken language production is often considered one of the most difficult aspects of language learning. In reality, many language learners find it difficult to express themselves in spoken language in the target language. Each student has their own problems. The main focus of this paper is to explore the factors affecting the student's low competence in spoken English at the graduate level in Pakistan. The paper tries to inculcate the real time problems in speaking skill faced by the students in the classroom. The data were collected from two universities, Minhaj University and Lahore Leads University. The research instruments used in this study were questionnaires. There are two population groups' teachers and students and diverse questionnaire has been designed for both the groups. Moreover, subject specialists have been interviewed in this regard. Based on the research findings some recommendations were made. The current study is expected to help the students in improving their performance in speaking classes.

**Key terms:** Factors, L2 learners, Competence, Spoken English, L1

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The most powerful medium of expressing ideas, views and feelings is the language. Language is a powerful as well as a valuable tool for imparting one's ideas to the other people. The human being used this tool to have better sharing of ideas. The importance of English is no doubt increasing day by day. English language is being used by 360–400 million human beings as their first language. English has been taken as an international language because of its massive use. It has become an epitome of modern civilization as well as it has been accepted language for international communication. The world has shaped itself as a global village due to the excessive use of electronic media. English is the language of electronic media so to convey message spoken competency must be up to the demands of the new era. English language works as a bridge to keep different people in contact.

Our leaders like sir Syed Ahmad Khan utilized their efforts to promote English language among Muslims so that they could be able to communicate effectively with the English. We are a developing nation thus we need to have better knowledge of English for effective trade and communication with English speaking nations. Even now a day's China is focusing on spoken as well as written English because they want to introduce their goods in other markets. In many countries as Korea, Japan, and some of the European countries and Latin and American countries English is being taught as a second language. By adopting the English medium of instruction, a direct link has been created among English and ESL learners. Pakistan is a multilingual country. English has taken its status as the language of media, medical, science as well as technology, trade and also the language of business. Therefore, for better performance and effective outcomes, a person must be proficient in spoken English. Spoken English enhances the chances of getting good jobs. Due to globalization, we need a better knowledge of written and spoken English to have better interaction with the people of the global village. Our syllabus does not include many activities that can be helpful for improving spoken English. The large amount of funds are being spent on teacher trainings but these training materials are not designed according to the needs of improving spoken English. In the present scenario as

the world has changed into a global village we must improve our spoken abilities for better cross cultural communication.

## 2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In Pakistan, the medium of instruction is English, but still hesitate to speak English and lacking in ability to speak English. English has become the language of administration in Pakistan and is being taught as a compulsory subject from primary level to the graduate level, but the question arises that why our people do not feel easy in spoken English. Teachers are still using old and traditional methods of teaching. Moreover the authorities have not done much to focus on spoken English.

## 3. KEY QUESTIONS

- What is the role of teachers in improving spoken English?
- What are the main reasons of low competency in speaking ability?
- What are the factors that affect their speaking performance?

## 4. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the world English's 'Pakistani English' (PE) has gained a definite status in the world. Pakistani spoken English is far different from the other varieties of English that are being used in the other countries. Pakistanis feel difficulty in speaking English. They can read well and their writing capabilities are also encouraging, but in the field of spoken English they are not much proficient. Parveen (2013) observes that Pakistani English is a new variety of ESL learners. People want to speak as the natives do. Some people say that pronunciation and grammar are a hindrance in spoken English while on the other hand, some don't agree because pronunciation and grammar do not stop the transmission of ideas. Rehman (2013) opines that the focus of our education system is reading and writing skills. Students work only to have a certificate rather than improving their spoken English ability. Bashir (2011) points out that in communicative output the learners' main purpose is to complete a task, such as obtaining information, developing a travel plan, or creating a video, to complete the task, they may use the language that the instructor has just presented, but they also may draw on any other vocabulary, grammar and communication strategies that they know. In communicative output activities, the criterion of success is whether the learners get the message across. Accuracy is not a consideration unless the lack of it interferes with the message. Language learners are often too embarrassed or shy to say anything when they do not understand another speaker or when they realize that a conversation partner has not understood them, instructors can help students to overcome this resistance by assuring them that misunderstanding and the need for clarification can occur in any type of interaction, whether the participants, language skill level.

Abbas (2013) observes that in Pakistan the competency of the students in spoken English is at a very pitiable stage. They focus only on their writing and reading skills rather than speaking skill. The sole purpose of the students is to pass the examination other than improving their speaking ability. Moreover, teachers are lacking in professional training. They don't follow the changed scenario of the syllabus and don't train themselves according to the requirements of the new syllabus and don't intend to follow new methods of teaching. Mostly they are inclined to use grammar translation method instead of adopting new ways of English teaching. Shehzad (2011) opines that the use of conventional curriculum is the main cause of the low competency in spoken English. Curriculum must be dynamic. The other causes are overcrowded and noisy environment of the classes that are a serious hindrance in the ways of spoken ability. Kannan (2009) is of the opinion that the examination system in Pakistan makes the rote memorization rather than testing the analytical and creative skills of the students. Hasan (2015) points out that mother tongue is used in a dominant way. Inadequate media and lack of facilities is a great hindrance to be proficient in spoken English.

Many researchers like Littlewood (2007) is of the view that in Asia secondary school teachers do not show enough confidence to conduct any communicative activity in schools because they themselves are not very proficient to engage with students in communication according to their needs. As a result attention has been paid to the

pedagogical implications of English language in second language classrooms. Bokhari (2011) says that owing to the important status in the World English has also got a privileged status as a second language in Pakistan. It is being taught from primary level to graduation level. Rahman (1999) in his survey of different schools deduced result that English learning desire is increasing in all types of students including religious schools. Hashima (2006) observes that even after having learnt English about eleven years, especially in rural area students are still incompetent in language and unable to use communicate the target language. Warsi (2004) points out that teaching and learning of English in Pakistan is based on the system of grammatical patterns and there is a trend of formal and bookish language, students just produce sentences and focus on reading and writing skills only.

**5. DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The data were collected from the two universities of Lahore region, i.e. Minhaj University and Lahore Leads University. The sample of the study comprises 50 from each university. Questionnaires have been made for teachers as well as students. Both male and female teachers and students have participated in this study. Five subject specialists were asked to share their views to improve spoken English skill. Subject specialists must have an experience of 10 years in the field of English teaching.

**6. DATA ANALYSIS**

**Teacher’s Questionnaire**

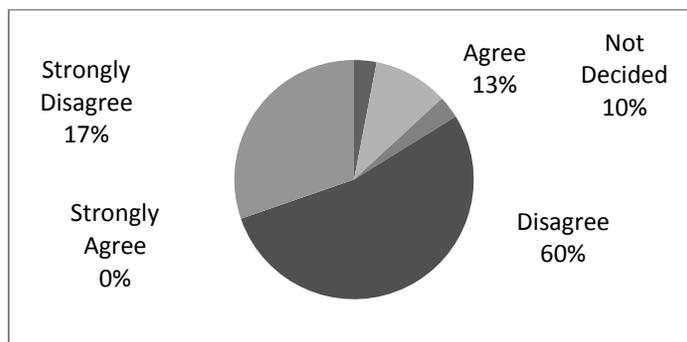


Figure:1 Students take interest in seeking spoken English.

So the analysis shows that according to 60% teachers, students don’t have much interest in spoken English and even 17% are strongly disagreeing that the students take serious interest in spoken English. Only 13% agree that students take serious interest in spoken English. Only 13% are agreeing that they have a serious interest in the learning of spoken English.

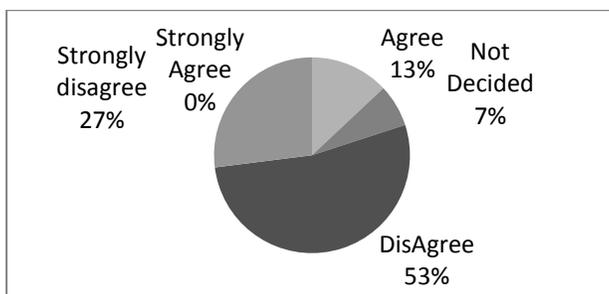


Figure:2 You prefer to speak English in spite of Urdu in the classroom.

53% teachers are disagreed that they prefer to speak English to their mother tongue Urdu and 27% teachers strongly disagree to use English in comparison to their mother tongue Urdu. Only 13% agree to use English than Urdu.

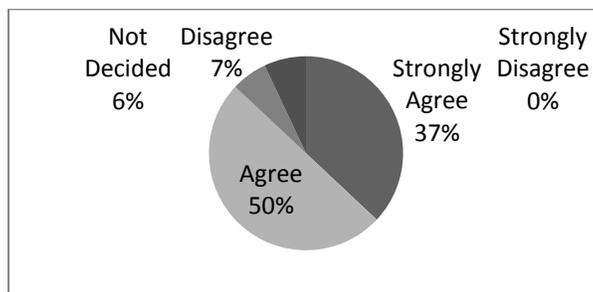


Figure:3 Textbooks are not designed to enhance spoken English.

37% teachers strongly agree that textbooks are not designed and while 50% are agreed that textbooks are not according to requirements to enhance spoken English. 6% could not decide about the textbooks. Only 7% are of the view that textbooks have no faults.

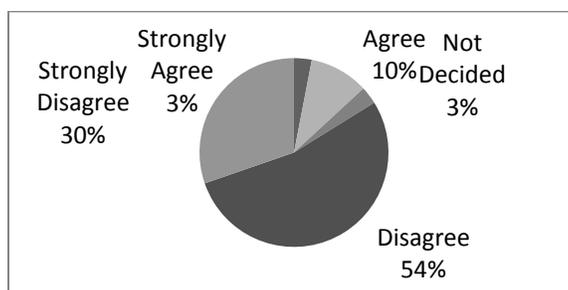


Figure:4 Multimedia helps in improving spoken English skill

According the analysis 54% teachers disagree that multimedia is available in the schools, while 30% people strongly disagree that there is any media available in the school. 10% are agreeing that there is multimedia in schools.

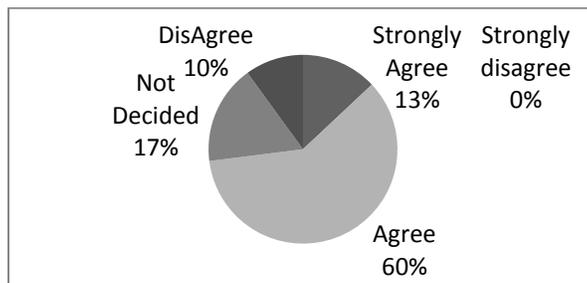


Figure:5 Spoken English is necessary for students.

Regarding this question 13% are strongly agreed and 60% agree that spoken English is necessary for students. Only 10% are disagreeing that spoken English is necessary for the learners.

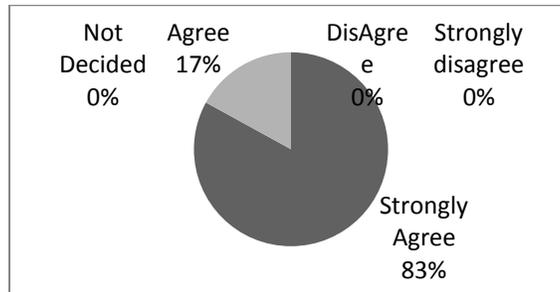


Figure: 6 The language laboratories are necessary in improving language skills.

According to 83% teachers the language laboratories' are essential to improve the ability of spoken English and 17% are agreed to the demand of language laboratories. So every teacher is agreeing that if we want to improve spoken English skill of the learners we need to establish language laboratories in our schools.

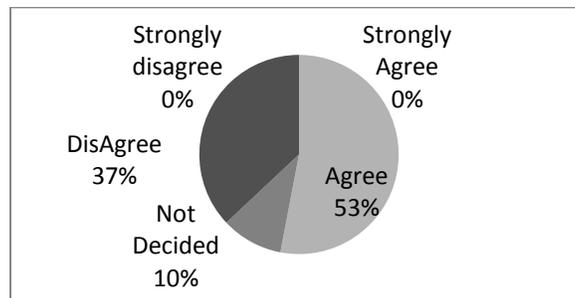


Figure: 7 you use teaching aids to improve speaking ability of the students regularly.

53% teachers use teaching aids during their teaching while 37% people don't use teaching aids. It means many teachers don't use teaching aids and 10% remained undecided.

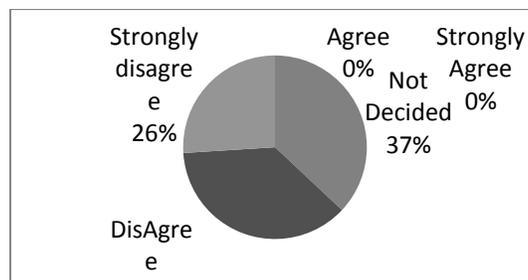


Figure: 8 Students learn English as they learn Urdu at an equal pace.

In response to this statement 37% did not decide and 37% are disagreed that the students learn English and Urdu at equal pace while 26% are strongly disagreed that the learners learn English and Urdu at an equal pace. So from the above given chart, it can be concluded that students don't have the ability to learn English and Urdu with equal competency.

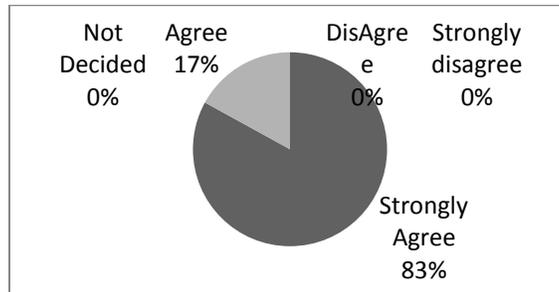


Figure:9 Teachers require training for improving speaking skills of the students.

Every participant is agreeing that teachers must have proper training to improve spoken English skills of the learners. 83% participants are strongly agreed to the demands of training of the teachers. 17% teachers are agreeing that teachers should be well trained in the field of spoken English.

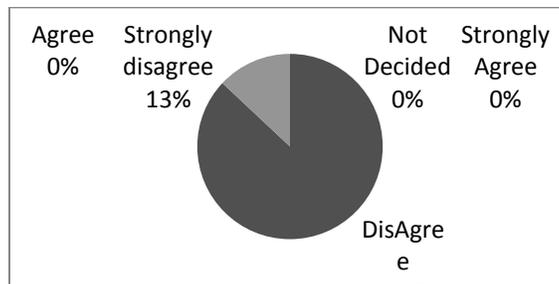


Figure:10 English speech competitions are conducted in schools.

English speech competition is not being conducted in the schools. The above given chart shows that 87% people of the study are of the view that English speech competitions are not conducted in the schools.

**Analysis of the Questionnaires, have been filled by the students.**

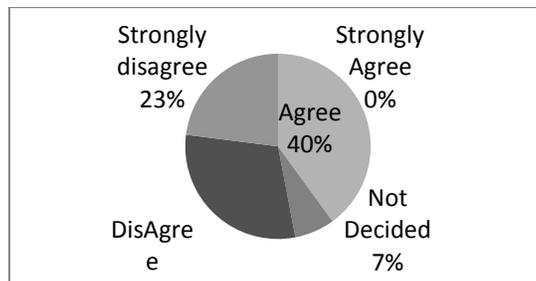


Figure:11 you like to speak English with interest, shows the following response.

40% students show interest in speaking English while 30% disagree and 23% are strongly disagree to have any interest in speaking English. Students' response is a mixed one.

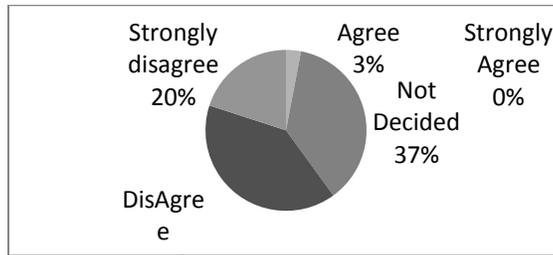


Figure: 12 Your teachers prefer to speak English to your mother tongue Urdu.

According to 40% students even teachers don't speak English and 20% are strongly disagreeing in this regard. Only 3% participants respond that their teachers like to speak English.

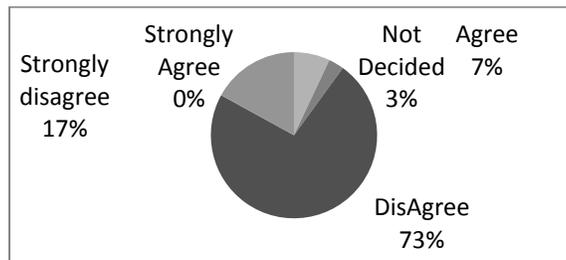


Figure:13 People speak English at your home.

73% students say that people don't speak English at their homes. Only 7% students agree that English is spoken in their homes. So the participants are of the view that English is not being spoken at their homes.

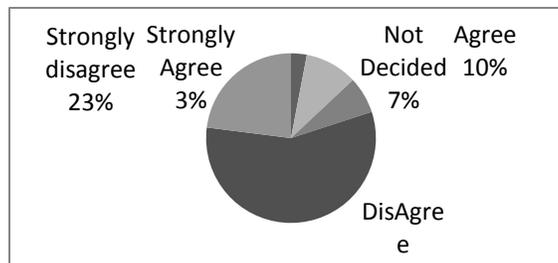


Figure:14 Multimedia is available in your school.

Only 10% learners agree that multimedia is used in their school and 57% disagree while 23% are strongly disagreed that multimedia is used in their classes. So multimedia is not used in the schools properly.

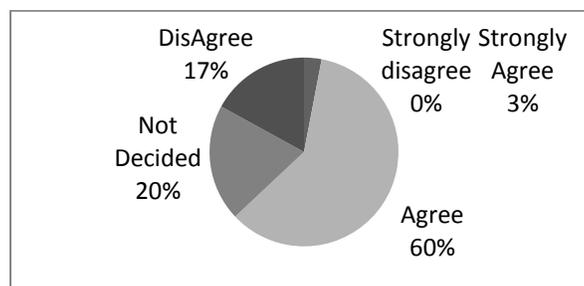


Figure:15: Spoken English is necessary for students.

60% participants say that spoken English is necessary for them while 20% remained undecided and 17% are disagreeing.

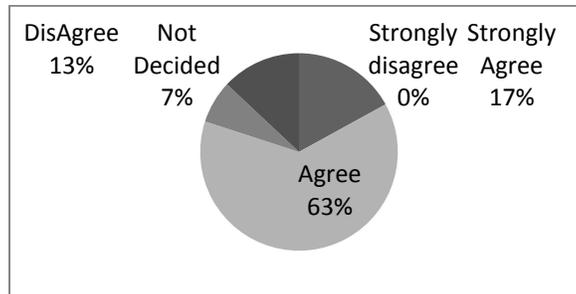


Figure:16 Language laboratories are necessary for improving spoken English.

63% participants agree and 17% strongly agree that for improving spoken English skills, language labs must be established in the school. So, mostly students are agreeing that to improve spoken English language laboratories are essential element in the schools.

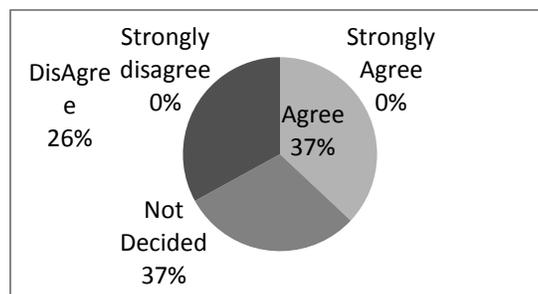


Figure: 17 Teachers use teaching aids regularly.

37% people could not decide whether the teachers use teaching aids or not while 37% agree that teachers use teaching aids in the class and 26% disagree that teachers are using teaching aids.

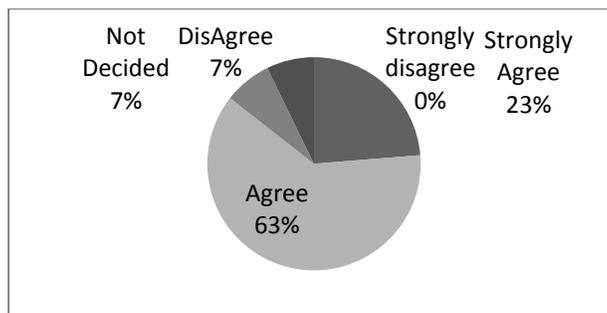


Figure:18 Speaking English is prestigious.

63% participants agree that speaking English is prestigious and 23% strongly agree with this statement. Only 7% disagree with this statement.

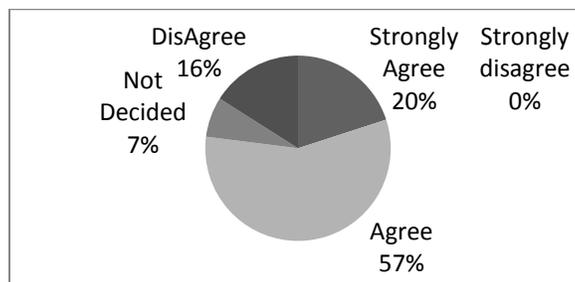


Figure: 19 you are learning English just to pass the exam.

57% are agreeing that they are learning English just to pass the examination and 20% strongly agree with this statement. So students are learning English just to pass their examination.

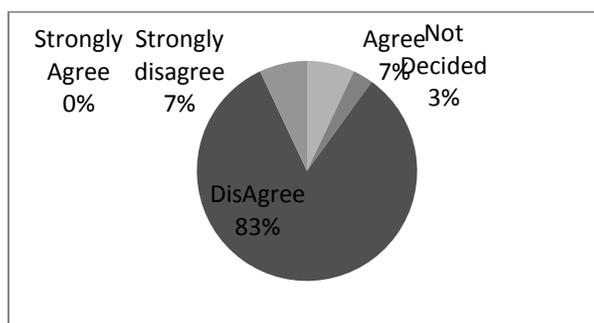


Figure: 20 your school conducts speech competitions.

7% learners agree that their school conduct English speech competitions while 83% are disagreed that their school conduct speech competition.

## 7. DISCUSSION

English is being used globally as a medium of exchanging ideas. Normally people try to acquire it to have better interaction with the people sitting far away from them. Due to the access to the international markets every country is trying to equip its people with English so that they could be able to work efficiently in the global village. Expanding business needs a language to introduce itself in the English markets. In Pakistan, spoken English is a tedious goal to achieve. It has been observed that students as well as teachers have less interest in spoken English.

The present study shows that only 13% learners take serious interest in spoken English. Though the medium of instruction is English, but still 60% learners show no interest in spoken English at all. Almost 80% teachers prefer to speak Urdu even in their English periods. Teachers use Urdu even they are teaching English. 87% teachers say that textbooks are not furnished with oral exercises and mainly written or reading based activities are included in the text books. Mostly teachers agree that the present textbooks are not designed keeping in view the needs of the spoken English. 53% teachers agree while 30% are strongly agreed that multimedia is not present in the schools. Almost 73% teachers think it necessary that the learners must speak English. Every participant is of the view that in every school there must be a language laboratory. . Moreover, participants stress that teachers are not well trained according to their professional requirements. On the other hand 100% teachers agree that for teaching spoken English every teacher must be well trained in this field. 53% teachers say that they are using teaching aids, but these teaching aids are not sufficient to improve the spoken ability of the learners. In schools English speech competitions are not conducted. According to the present study, 100% teachers say that the concept of English speech competition is not present in the schools.

On the other hand 40% learners agree that they study English with interest. 53% say that they don't have any serious interest in English. 3% participants respond that their teacher speaks English in the class while 53% are disagreeing with this statement. And even 37% participants could not decide the matter. Almost 90% participants are of the opinion that English is not being spoken at their homes. 13% learners say that multimedia is being used in school while 80% say that there is no multimedia in their schools to be used for improving spoken ability of the learners. 63% learners agree that spoken English is necessary for the students. 80% participants say that language laboratories can play a vital role in the development of the spoken English. 37% students say that their teachers use teaching aids while 33% don't agree. 83% students say that speaking English is surely prestigious and they feel proud to speak English. 77% participants say that their main aim of studying English is just to pass the examinations. On the other hand 90% people are of the opinion that schools don't conduct any English speech competitions. .

Subject specialists are of the opinion that teachers must be well trained and minimum qualification of an English teacher must be the masters in English language. Moreover, they argue that in the examination at least 20% portion of English paper must be in spoken for example viva voice. Subject specialists are of the opinion that we need to re-examine our text books they must be designed adding exercises as are helpful in improving spoken English. They also suggest that multimedia and computer technology must be provided in schools.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Teachers as well as learners opine that multimedia and language laboratories must be established so that a proper environment can be provided for improving speaking ability of the students. English speech competitions have not been conducted in the schools. On the other hand, mostly students agree that they focus on English just to pass the examination. Their main aim is to have a degree rather than the improvement of their speaking competency. The environment is also an effective in this regard. Teachers as well as parents should play a significant role in improving language skills.

To compete with the world we need to be fully prepared in international language. If we need to equip our learners, we will have to train the teachers. We must need to revise the textbooks. Moreover, the language labs and multimedia can play an important part to improve the present condition of the spoken English. Teachers must use new strategies and techniques to cope with the present situation.

## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Teachers must be trained keeping in view the needs of the spoken English.
- Textbooks must be rescheduled and activities must be added for spoken English.
- Teachers must try to speak English before the students.
- Language labs must be provided.
- Teachers must be aware of the new technologies. They must be able to use computer technology.

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