Chapter 3

Proficiency Acquisition of English as a Second Language

3.0 Transferable and Transferring Skills

Proficiency implies a balance between ability, competence, and performance and it is directly related to the academic ability of an individual which is defined as 'successful performance on a defined set of tasks' (Caroll, 1993). Proficiency impacts the 'transfer skills' (Botha and Cillers, 1993) of an individual. Lack of proper and augmented development of the transfer skills limit the academic ability of a learner thereby impacting negatively on his proficiency levels. Transfer skills fall under two categories: (a) Lower Order Transferable Skills and (b) Higher Order 'Transferring Skills' (Bridges, 1993). Transferable skill implies learning of a specific skill under a specific situation or circumstance and applying the learned skill in a different situation or circumstance. In other words, it implies a transference and application of a specific skill set to a different situation or circumstance. Some of the common transferable skills include using a particular language code learned in a specific environment, such as school and transferring the same to a different environment such as restaurant or home, etc. or a child learning new words and applying the same to denote the number of activities or events, etc. Transferring Skills, on the other hand, refers to three basic meta-competency skills (Bridges, 1993), viz.,

(i)   Skill to make a distinction between similarities and differences

(ii)   Developing cognitive ability to modify, adapt and expand

(iii) Attitudes and Dispositions supporting the two skills above (Bridges, 1993)

Proficiency development is directly related to the higher order transferring, or meta-competency skills in that without being able to distinguish between similarities and differences, a skill that was learned in a particular situation cannot be suitably modified, adapted or expanded. Further, the skill to modify, adapt or expand depends on the learner's attitude and desire to learn which makes all three meta-competencies interlinked. An improper development and subsequent lack of application skills hamper

the proficiency level as the learner finds it difficult to adapt and appropriate the skills in a new context suitably. For instance, the errors committed by students while translating the source language to the target language, like from their respective mother tongues to L2, could be attributed to the lack of proper meta-competency skills.

Thus, transferring skills which are cognitive and based on the abilities have to be developed through the innate and inborn mechanism of an individual using which he can hypothesize and make distinctions between different concrete situations.

3.1 Developing Competence: Chomsky and Hymes

It is in this context of developing proficiency or language abilities that competence and performance plays a major role. The first step towards becoming *able* regarding language use is rooted in the innate grammatical structures which are hardwired into a child's brain with which he generates an infinite number of expressions. This is what Noam Chomsky terms as 'linguistic competence' which he defines as 'deep-seated mental state that exists below the level of conscious language use by which even children are allowed to generate a large set of utterances' (Chomsky, 1957). Thus, competence is logically and cognitively stands before the performance which involves the use of language in concrete situations. Chomsky's treatment of competence takes into account the transferring skills which are unique and innate, and it gets developed over a period. However, Chomsky's position only addresses the *ability* of the speaker as 'the notion of the grammatical cannot be identified with the meaningful' (Chomsky, 1957:15). To be proficient in a language implies a speaker is able in both linguistic/grammatical competence as well as the communicative competence in a particular language and its performance in a structured and contextually appropriate manner.

Drawing upon Chomsky's theory of grammatical competence, Dell Hymes broadened the focus from being competent grammatically to communicative which he describes as:

"the knowledge of sentences, not only as grammatical but also as appropriate. [The child] acquires the competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where and in what manner. In short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others." (Hymes, 1974: 277).

Marking a departure from Chomsky's position, Hymes broadens the whole perspective of language learning and appropriating the same according to specific social conditions. In the 'Ethnography of Speaking,' Hymes links language learning as an integral structure consisting of speech community, speech situation, speech event, speech act and speech style respectively (Hymes, 1967) and thus, presences language learning and proficiency within a specific context or a social situation, which makes a speaker communicatively competent. Thus, Hymes emphasizes on cultural dimension as a major factor in becoming proficient in a particular language which provides dialect and idiolectic differences within a particular language. Since cultural dimension and specific social context play a vital role in using language appropriately, lack of proficiency in any language, therefore, can be attributed to the learning of it in an environment that doesn't match with the specific social or cultural context. This is one of the primary reasons for the lack of communicative and grammatical competence of L2 in India.

3.1.2 Saville - Troike

Drawing upon Chomsky and Hymes, Saville-Troike (1982) further broadens the scope of communicative competence by incorporating social and cultural knowledge along with linguistic knowledge and presents an expansive domain of cultural, interactional and linguistic factors that play a major role in the development of communicative competence. Broadly categorizing the three levels, she presents the following elements in each that contribute and complement towards making socially appropriate communication:

I.   Knowledge of Language

(i)   Elements of verbal communication

(ii)   Elements of non-verbal communication

(iii)   Elements and patterns of a particular speech structure.

(iv)   The range of difference and variants in a particular speech structure.

(v)   The range of meaning according to different contexts.

II.   Skills about Interaction

(i)   Understanding different contexts for making appropriate and meaningful communication.

(ii)   Competence to use appropriate mode and interpret the meaning of a message according to the given context.

(iii)   Frames of reference for interpretation and interaction

(iv)   Strategies for achieving communicational goals by minimizing the gaps between the intended and the conveyed message

(v)   Selecting an appropriate medium and channel for the transference of the message

III.   Cultural knowledge and values

(i)   Social structures

(ii)   Values and attitudes

(iii)   Cognitive maps and 'structures of expectations' (Tannen, 1979)

(iv)   Transmission of knowledge and skills

A speaker upon attaining the balance of all three levels can become fluent or 'conversationally competent' (Fillmore, 1978) in a particular language. Fluency, according to Fillmore, is a result of the fulfillment of the following conditions on the part of a 'maximally gifted speaker' (1978):

(i)   The ability to talk at length

(ii)   The ability to talk in logical, coherent and structured sentences, which are semantically and syntactically correct.

(iii)   The ability to talk in a contextually appropriate manner

(iv)   The ability to be creative with the use of language befitting the context.

3.2 BICS and CALP

Proficiency in a particular language is impacted by the gaps between the Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) on the part of a user (Cummins, 1979) particularly in case of the bilingual students. At this juncture, it is important to make a distinction between 'being proficient' and 'being fluent.' Fluency implies oral communication in a language expressed in a flow without any halts. While using L2, fluency relies on the prosody of the language used, articulation, pronunciation, and timing of the dialogue. Fluency is directly dependant on the use of the language in real life contexts with the native or an equally fluent speaker of the same. Proficiency, the other hand, refers to the ability on the part of the user to understand, communicate and translate in a particular language. Proficiency relies more on the skills of listening, reading and writing, apart from speaking and translate, along with a sound knowledge of grammatical rules in the said language.

Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) are basic language skills required to communicate in a particular language in social situations in a contextually appropriate manner. BICS are generally proficiency independent and fairly *relaxed* and *liberal* regarding adherence to the rules. As far as English as L2 is concerned, the problems with fluency and proficiency are due to an emphasis on acquiring and developing BICS, prompting a deliberate and systematic compromise on teaching and learning of English in India. Such an emphasis on developing oral English skills to make one fluent has more of social value as fluency in English is inseparably attached with the notions of class, status, social positioning, cultural sophistication, and general social acceptability. Its impact is also evident financially in the opening of a large number of non-accredited institutions offering courses on spoken English with the help of non-customized and non-standard study materials. The students, to get a quick grasp over the spoken component, use these material and learn the content generally by rote, followed by using the language mechanically devoid of contextual considerations. Since the

material provided doesn't take into consideration the unique and individual problems experienced by the users and is rather general and often copied from eclectic sources, the students are, therefore, seldom exposed to the customized solutions to the errors they commit while using English. Regarding the material available online, the students are found to follow the results generated by the search engine on the basis of the keywords fed, rather than searching for the material based on a careful understanding and identification of their specific problems. All these factors contribute towards forming their notions of the *correctness* of using English in oral as well as the written medium in both off and online modes.

The Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), on the other hand, implies formal academic learning with an adequate focus on developing listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating skills in a given language. Apart from the emphasis on the basic skills stated above, CALP also stresses on other major aspects of language learning as classification, comparison, the skills to synthesize, infer, evaluate and interpret in both context-bound as well as context-free or displaced situations. CALP is cognitively more demanding than BICS and plays a pivotal role in developing proficiency in a given language. Excessive emphasis on developing BICS tend to compromise with the learning of CALP which is comparatively rigorous and content-intensive than the former.

In case of the students who have been surveyed, it has been found that barring 4.5% of the respondents (14 students), the rest of them have been institutionally exposed more to BICS than CALP in English, with their syllabi too focussing more on improving communicative skills than developing or learning languages. As a result, the students are found to have a slightly better command over spoken skills of English than written and translation skills. Further, it has also been found that the students cannot classify the grammatical components of English and are unable to specify the nature of errors they commit while using English in all three modes of usage, viz., reading, speaking and writing. Moreover, it has also been found that in a significant number of instances,

the students are not even aware of the fact that they have committed errors in their use of English in all three modes of usage.

Thus, it is evident that there has to be a balance of both CALP and BICS to make a learner proficient as well as fluent in L2, with the former playing a major role in the development of the latter.

3.3 Testing Proficiency of the students

To test the proficiency level of the students in the English language, English Language Use, and Proficiency Questionnaire has been used. The questionnaire is designed taking into account the classroom composition, prospective respondents and their levels of the English language use. 'The Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire' (LEAP-Q) (Marian, Blumenfeld, and Kaushanskaya, 2007) and 'Language History Questionnaire' (Li, Sepanski, and Zhao, 2006) served as the models for designing this questionnaire. The composition of the respondents remained the same as was in the case of the questionnaire designed for measuring the English Language Classroom Anxiety Scale. The questionnaire contains twelve questions, which are used to measure the English language proficiency level of the students regarding reading, writing, speaking and the knowledge of grammar. Further, the questionnaire also assesses students' use of their respective mother tongue vis-à-vis English for speaking and reading. For the analysis of responses, the Likert scale has been used. Descriptive analysis has been done to analyze and interpret the responses.

Prior to designing the English Language Use and Proficiency questionnaire, a detailed study of both the Language Experience and Proficiency questionnaire and the Language History questionnaire was done. While both the questionnaires deal with a standardized set of parameters to measure the proficiency level of the L2 users, yet considering the unique composition of the respondents of this study, a certain degree of appropriation was required as some questions in both the questionnaires do not fit into the testing criteria of the surveyed group. Hence, adopting these two questionnaires without any modification would not have generated the correct findings.

For instance, the Language History Questionnaire tests the proficiency level of a respondent on the basis of his ability to speak, read, write, and understand L1 and its impact on the similar parameters of L2. Along with these, the standard questionnaire also has questions about a respondents' exposure to a foreign language and foreign culture through traveling to different countries. Most of these questions do not apply to the respondents of the target group as they belong to communities which don't have a script and the literature is mostly in the oral mode, and they are exposed to L2 more than L1 as far as reading and writing of a language are concerned. Similarly, circulating LEAP-Q without the necessary customizations would not have served the purpose either because for testing the L2 proficiency, there are questions about medium and sources of instruction that includes electronic medium, which isn't applicable to the students who have been surveyed for this research. This is so because most of the students, during their entire feeder level of education, seldom or very rarely had the opportunity of getting exposure to the electronic mode of instruction.

Considering the uniqueness of the composition of the respondents and also taking into consideration their academic, linguistic and social backgrounds, a new questionnaire has been designed by re-appropriating the Language History questionnaire and the Language Experience and Proficiency questionnaire (LEAP-Q). The new questionnaire factors in the background of the respondents and as a result, appropriate and context-specific responses could be collected.

Of the 300 respondents, 245 are male respondents, and 55 are females. 97% of the respondents (291 students) belong to the following communities of the Northeast: Garo, Nyshi, Bodo, Chokri, Khasi, Manipuri, Mizo, Lushai, Ememei, Galo, Adi, Apatani, Assamese, Tagin, Kokborok, Sangtam, Hrangkhawl, Meteilon, Sumi, Lotha, Mizotawng, Dimasa, Bhutia and Thadou-Kuki with each having their own distinctive cultural, linguistic or dialectal pattern. 77% (231 students) of the respondents had English as the medium of instruction in their schools, 11%, i.e., 33 students had Hindi, and 12% (36 students) had their school education from the vernacular medium schools. Like the medium of instruction, the affiliating boards too vary from state to state. For

instance, all government and private schools in Arunachal Pradesh are affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE). On the other hand, in Assam and Meghalaya, there are private schools which are affiliated to the Assam State Board, CBSE and ICSE along with the government schools. Other states of the north-eastern region also have the same composition as far as the affiliating boards are concerned. 72.3% of the total respondents (217 students) learnt to communicate in English through formal classroom instruction, 16.7% (50 students) through interacting with people and 11% (33 students) through self-study mode which includes learning through online learning videos as available on YouTube or the learning materials provided by the British Council or offline study materials like books and materials given by the coaching institutes.

3.4 Analysis of the data

Apart from the five common variables, viz., mother tongue, the medium of instruction in school, affiliating board, state of domicile and the ways of learning to communicate in English, the questionnaire dealt with the following questions prominently, the detailed analysis of which are given below:

(i) Apart from your mother tongue (L1), in how many other languages you consider yourself as fluent?

Of the surveyed respondents, 74.7% (224 students) consider themselves as fluent in two languages of which one is their mother tongue, 18.7% (56 students) are fluent in three languages, 2.2% (7 students) in four languages and 4.4% (13 students) in more than four languages. All the students *consider* themselves as fluent in English apart from their mother tongue; those who speak more than two languages, English figures one of the languages apart from their mother tongue, with the other two being Hindi and Bengali or Assamese.
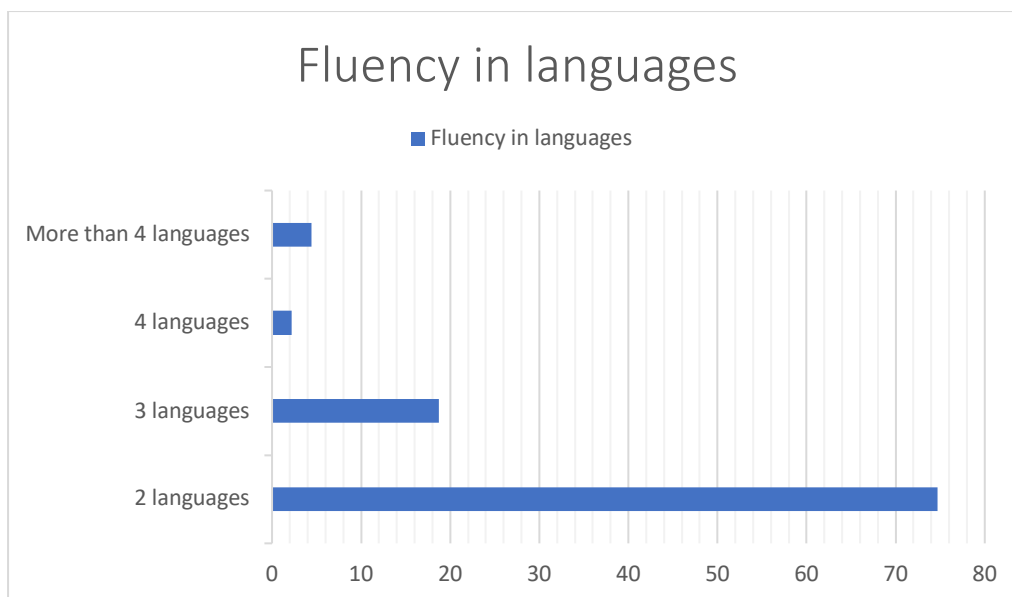
Fig: 3.1: The fluency statistics of the respondents

(ii) Which language do you use most with family members, friends, teachers, and others?

This question was designed to measure the specific language use in particular contexts by providing five prospective scenarios, namely:

        (a) Using L1 with family, friends, teachers, and others

        (b) Using L1 with family members, L2 with friends, teachers, and others

        (c) Using L1 with family members and friends, L2 with teachers and others

        (d) Having no fixed language for anyone

        (e) Code-switching from one person to other every time.

The sub-questions were designed after observing the nature of the language used by the respondents in the contexts given above. 8.8% of the respondents (26 students) use their respective L1 with family, teachers, and others and they have the least exposure to English as a medium of communication. 42.9% of the respondents (129 students) use L1 with their family members and L2 with friends, teachers, and others. In the case of this category, respondents prefer using Hindi, Assamese or Bengali with friends and others and English or Hindi with their teachers. 19.8% respondents (59 students) use L1 with family members and friends and L2 with teachers and others. As the

respondents in this category prefer using L1 as a medium of communication with family members and friends, their use of English is largely restricted to classroom contexts only. 11% of the respondents (33 students) have no fixed language for anyone while 17.5% respondents (53 students) change their codes frequently every time, irrespective of the context.

(iii)   How do you rate your proficiency in English with the following skills?
(a)   Speaking (b) Reading (c) Writing (d) Knowledge of grammar

The respondents were asked to respond on the basis of self-assessment regarding the levels of proficiency in the English language. Prior to getting their responses, the respondents have not been tested on the standard parameters to check their levels of proficiency and fluency in English on the four listed skills. The four areas were measured on the scale of four parameters ranging from poor to excellent with a score of 4 for excellent, 3 for good, 2 for average and 1 for poor in four-point Likert scale.

While only 1.1% (3 students) of the total respondents rated themselves as excellent as far as speaking skills are concerned, and 14.3% respondents (43 students) rated themselves as poor in these skills, 54.9% respondents (165 students) consider themselves as average, and 29.7% (89 students) rated themselves as good.
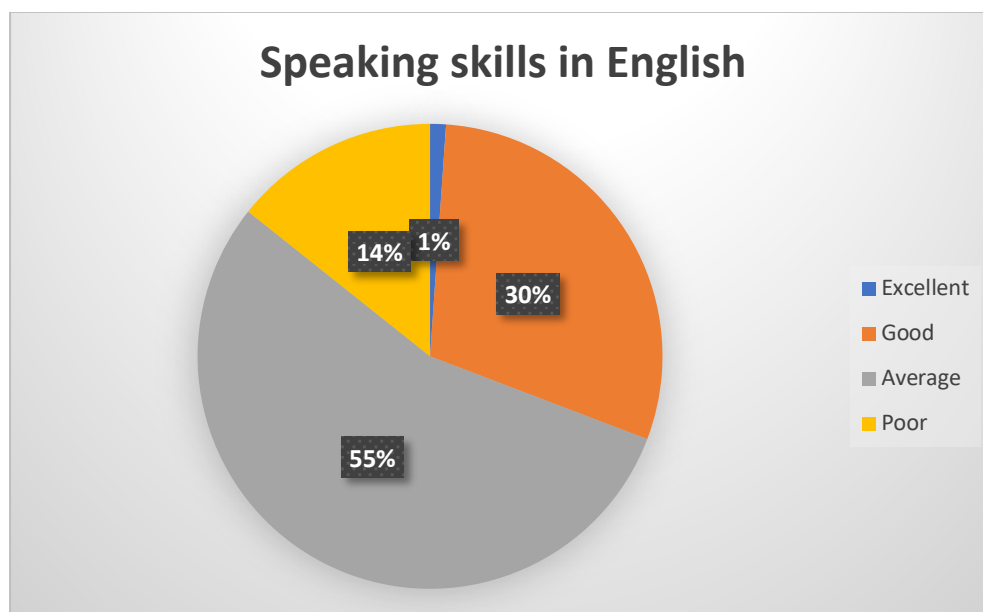

Fig: 3.2. Speaking Skills in English

As far as reading skills are concerned, 1.1% respondents (3 students) rated themselves as poor in these skills, 50.3% (151 students) as average, 45.1% respondents (135 students) as good and 3.5% (11 students) consider them as excellent.
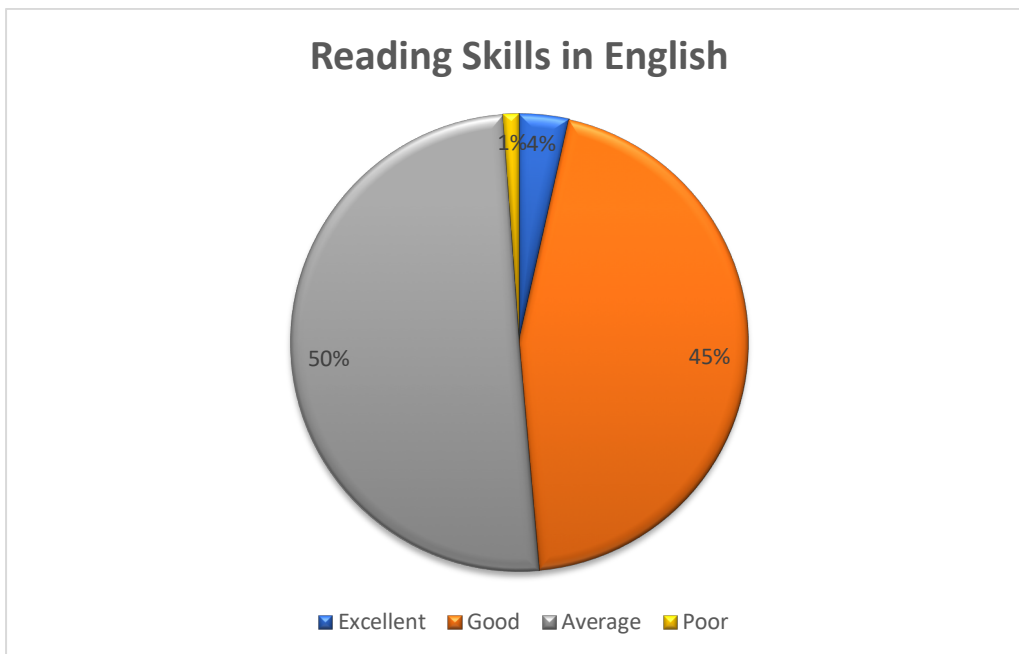
Reading Skills in English

Fig. 3.3: Reading Skills in English

On the other hand, 2.2% of the respondents (7 students) rated themselves as poor in writing, and 2.2% (7 students) consider themselves as excellent, with 50.5% (151 students) rating themselves as average and 45.1% respondents (135 students) good in the written form of English communication.
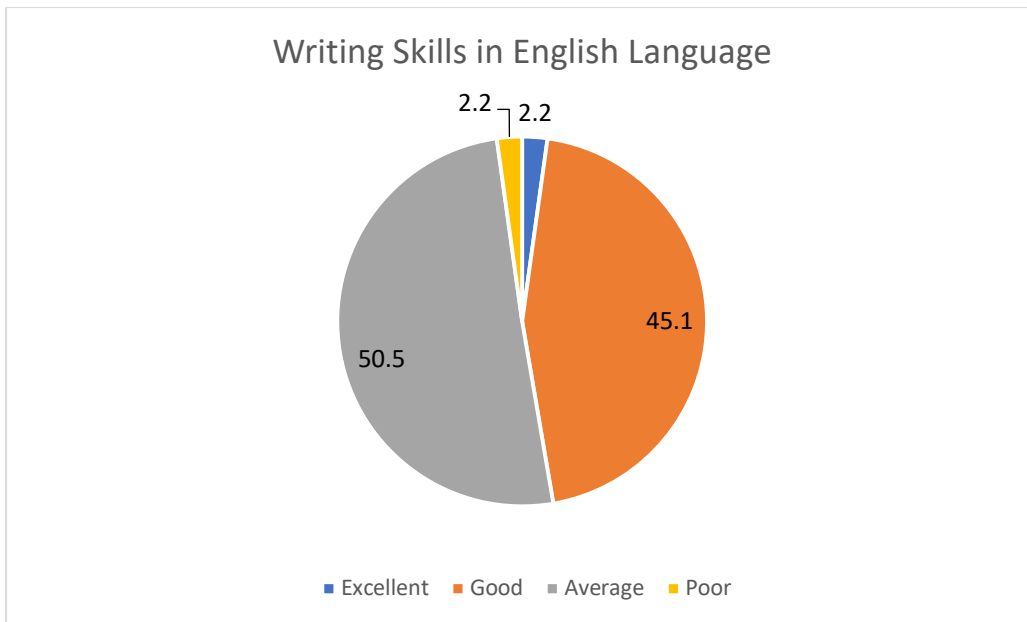
Fig.3.4: Writing Skills in English

Even though a majority of the students have scaled themselves between average and good in speaking, reading and writing skills, 16.5% of the respondents (50 students) have, however, rated themselves as poor in the knowledge of English grammar and only 27.5% (82 students) consider themselves as good. 51.6% of the respondents (155 students) have rated their grammatical skills as average and 4.4% (13 students) as excellent. Considering 95.4% of the respondents (286 students) scaling themselves between average to good in reading, writing and spoken skills combined of English language, it is only 31.9% of the respondents (96 students) who have good to excellent knowledge of grammar by their own admission while 68.1% of the respondents (204 students) scaled themselves between poor and average.
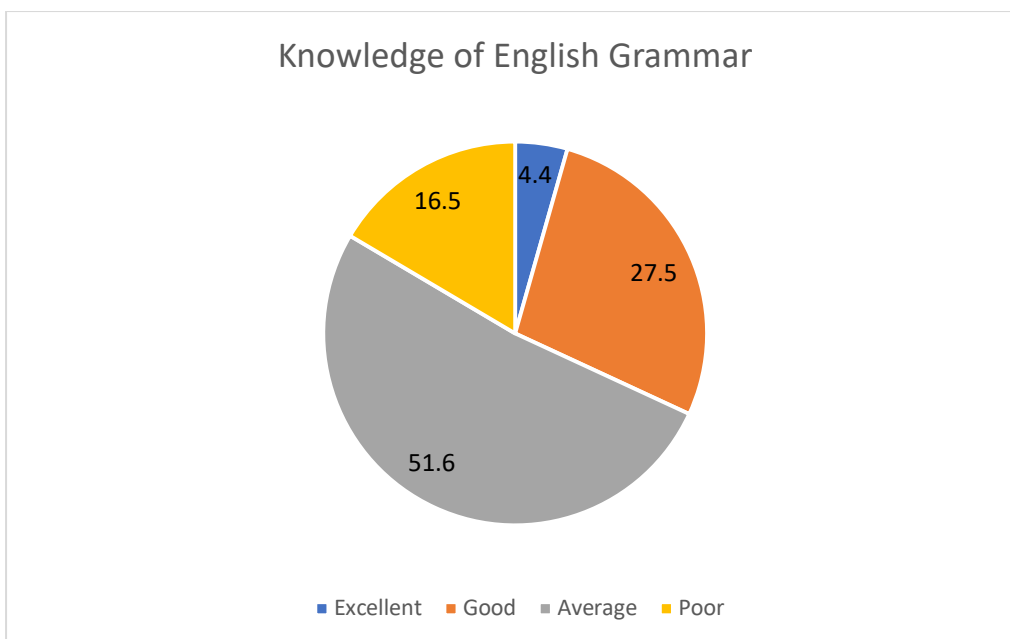
Fig.3.5: Knowledge of English grammar

(iv)   How do you rate your proficiency in your mother tongue on the following skills?
(a)   Speaking (b) Reading (c) Writing (d) Knowledge of grammar

Along with L2, i.e., English, the students were also assessed on their levels of proficiency in their respective mother tongues on the skills of speaking, reading, writing and the knowledge of grammar. The responses are based on self-assessment, and no specific tests were conducted to measure the same. The question has been designed to measure the impact of L1 grammar and style on the use of L2.

Of the 300 respondents, 39.6% (119 students) rated themselves as excellent as far as speaking skills are concerned, and 3.3% respondents (10 students) rated themselves as poor in these skills. 12.1% respondents (36 students) consider themselves as average, and 45% (135 students) rated themselves as good.
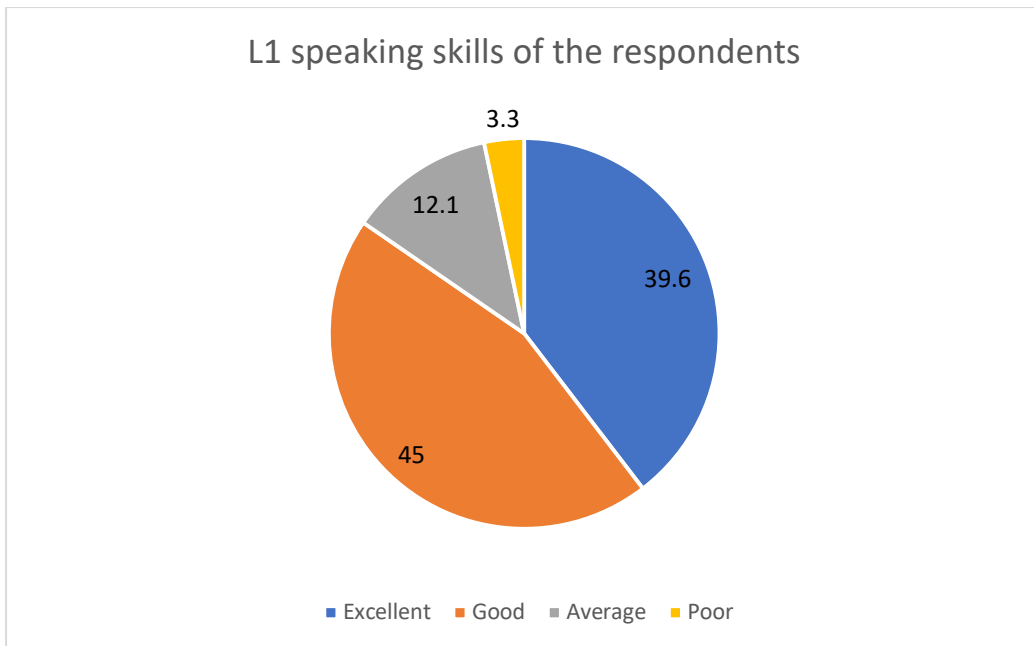
Fig.3.6: Speaking Skills in L1

As far as reading skills are concerned, 16.5% respondents (49 students) rated themselves as poor in these skills, 18.6% (56 students) as average, 44 % respondents (132 students) as good and 20.9% (63 students) consider them as excellent.
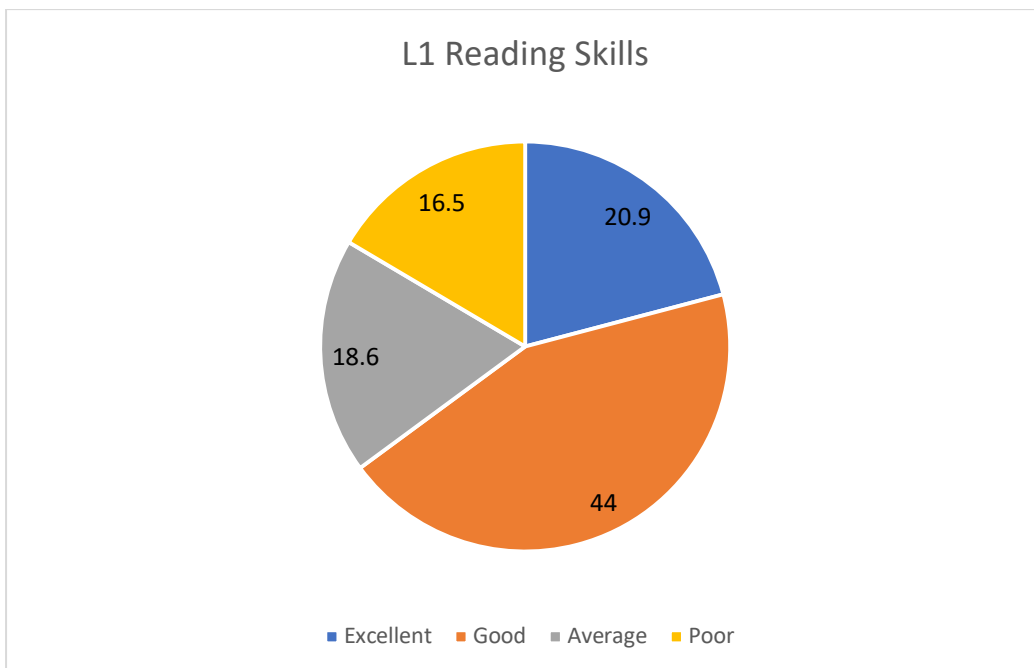

Fig.3.7: Reading Skills in L1

On the other hand, 23% of the respondents (69 students) rated themselves as poor in writing and 13.2% (40 students) consider themselves as excellent, with 27.5% (82 students) rating themselves as average and 36.3% respondents (109 students) good in the written form of their respective mother tongues.

Fig.3.8: Writing Skills in L1

As far as the knowledge of grammar is concerned, 30.8% respondents (92 students) have rated their knowledge of the grammar of their mother tongue as good and 9.9% (30 students) as excellent. 39.5% respondents (119 students) have placed themselves on average, and 19.8% (59 students) have marked themselves as having poor knowledge of grammar.
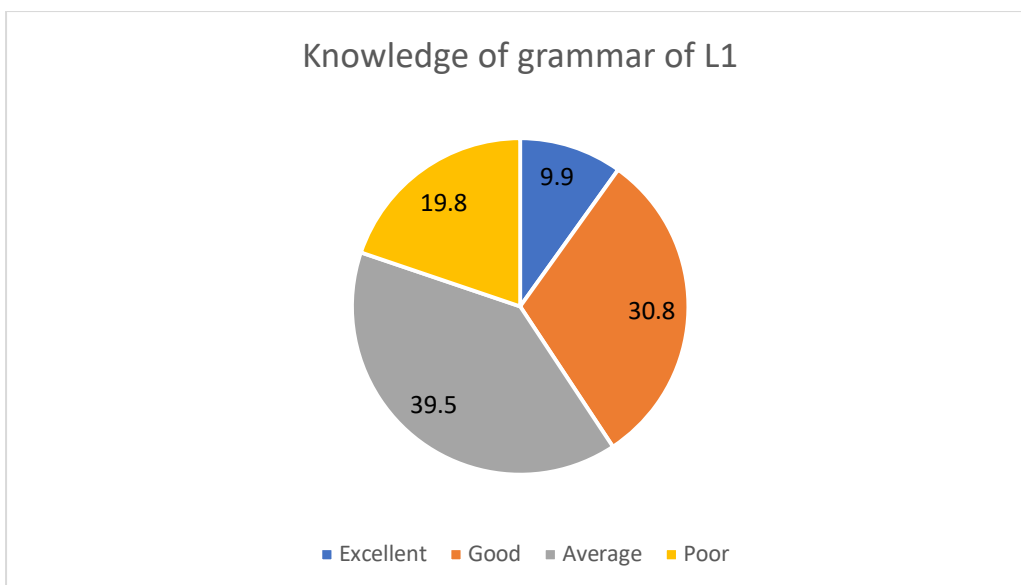
Fig.3.9: Knowledge of grammar of L1

It is evident from the responses that those students whose knowledge of grammar in their respective mother tongue ranges between average and good, their subsequent classroom assessment of the knowledge of the grammar of L2, i.e., English too have ranged between the same scales.

(v)   While writing in English, my ways of organization and presentation of ideas are cluttered and often contain a lot of errors.

This question was framed to assess the stylistic knowledge of the respondents regarding L2 use, particularly cohesion and logical expression of his thought process while writing. The responses were subsequently tallied with their assignments and examination answer scripts along with their updates and other forms of online data they post on several social networking sites as well as web-mediated communication portals.

45.1% of the total respondents (135 students) have agreed to the position that their organization and presentation of ideas in English is cluttered and marred by errors with 8.8% (27 students) agreeing strongly to the contention. 16.1% respondents (48 students) disagreed and maintained that their presentation and organization of ideas in English are logical and cohesive with minimal to no errors in writing. 4.8% of the

respondents (14 students) have reported error-free presentation completely. 25.2% of the respondents (76 students) have given a neutral response to the question asked.
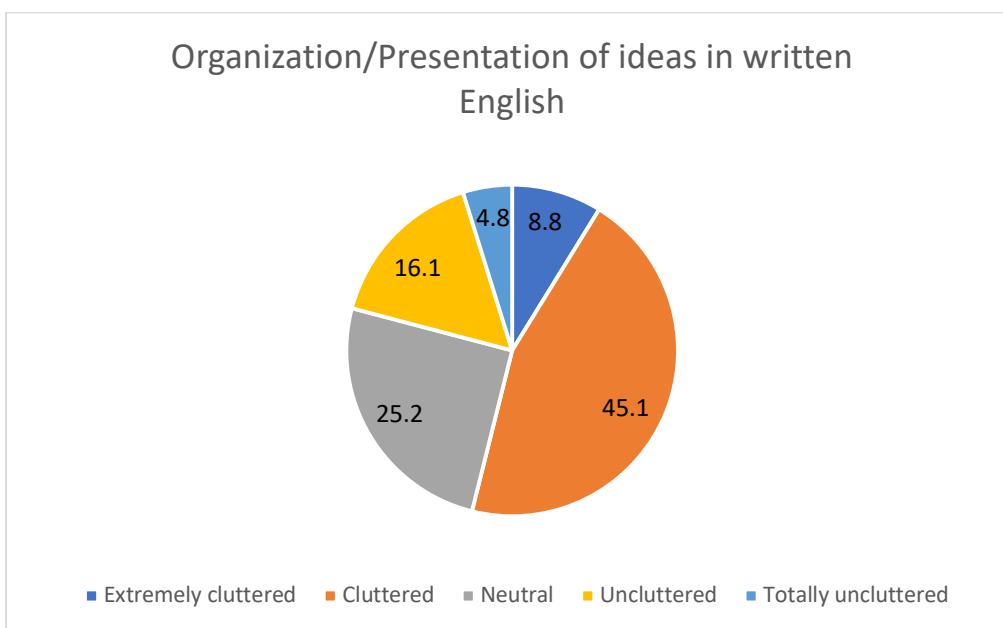

Fig.3.10: Organization/Presentation of ideas while writing in English

(vi)   While speaking in English, my ways of organization and presentation of ideas are cluttered and often contain a lot of errors.

The question was framed to assess the oral skills of the respondents regarding their use of L2. The responses were subsequently tallied with their oral presentations in the class. Each presentation was videographed, and their problems with oral communication were further tallied with their written skills. This has helped in finding out the errors they commit in each mode of communication and the strategies adopted, particularly in the written mode to negotiate with their lack of knowledge. However, one of the problems faced with the assessment of this question is the anxiety that the respondents have shown once they were informed about that their presentations would be recorded which has some impact on their performance.

42.8% of the respondents (128 students) have agreed that they lack the quality of speaking English cohesively and in an organized manner without flaws. 15.4% (46

students) strongly agreed to the same contention. 12.1% respondents (36 students) disagreed with 1.1% (3 students) strongly disagreeing and maintained their contention during their performances. 28.6% respondents (87 students) remained neutral.
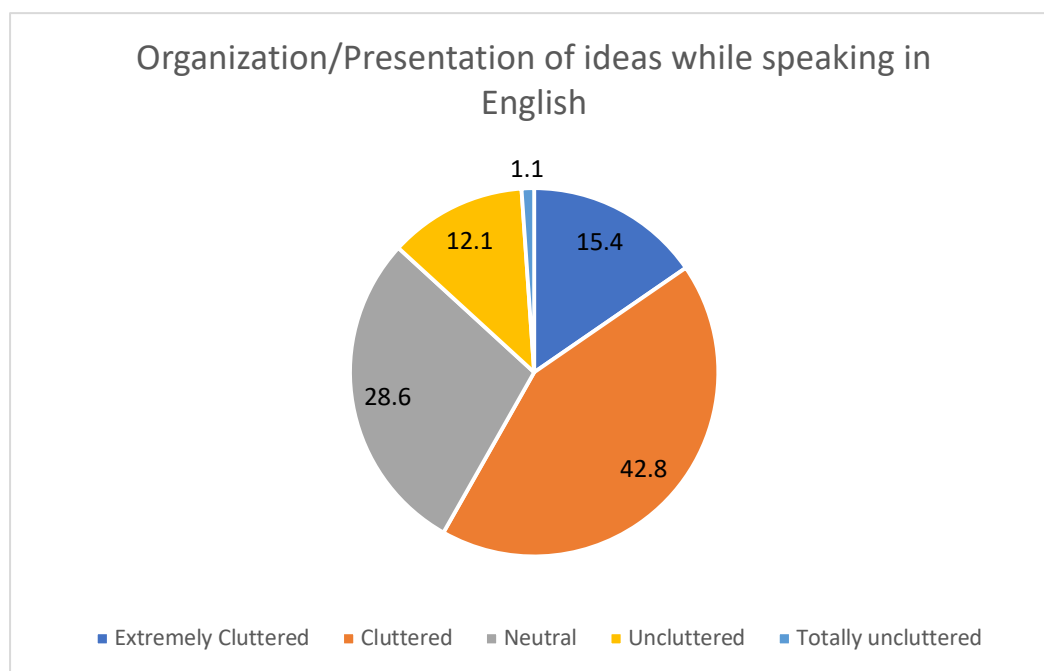
Fig.3.11: Organization and presentation of ideas while speaking in English

(vii)   While writing in English, I often have to pause and correct the improper use of words, expressions, and sentences.

This question was framed to assess the impact of FLA on the written skills of L2, i.e., English. Language anxiety is evident on the part of the respondents in that whenever they are told that their writing would be evaluated for grammatical correctness as well as contextual appropriateness as in the case with their class assignments and examinations, they suddenly become conscious and stressed which results in long pauses to make correct choices of words, expressions, and sentences.

63.7% of the respondents (191 students) have agreed to the position that they pause in search for correct expression with 11% (33 students) agreeing strongly to the same. Only 10.5% respondents (32 students) have disagreed and stated that their written

expressions come spontaneously without having to pause for exact words and sentences. 6% of the respondents (18 students) have expressed complete fluency in writing in English. 8.8% of respondents (26 students) took a neutral stand.
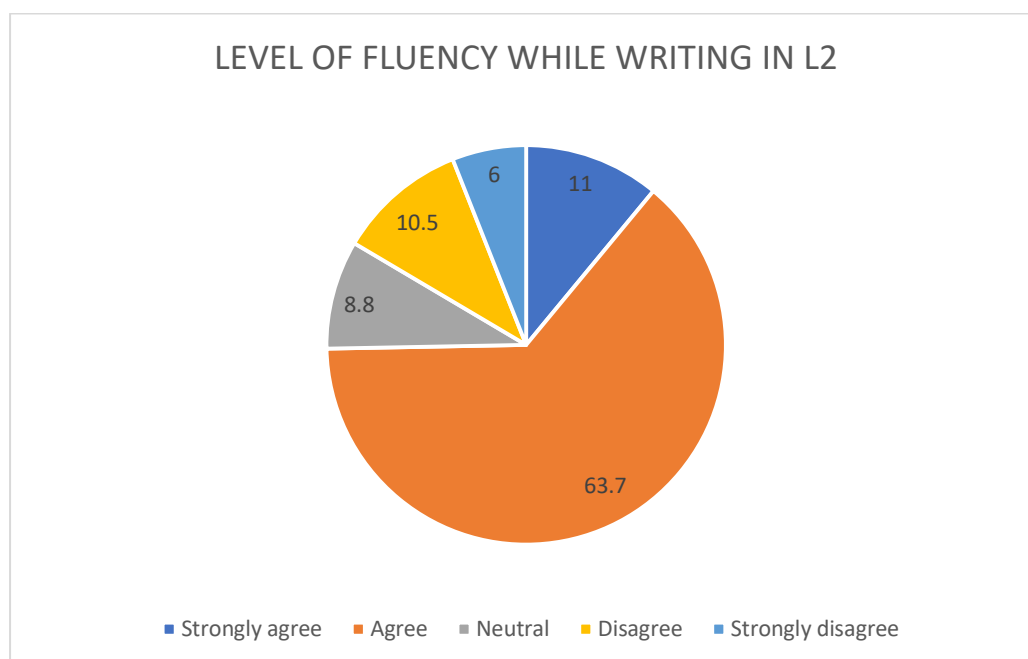

Fig.3.12: Level of fluency while writing in L2

(viii)   While speaking in English, I often have to pause and correct the improper use of words, expressions, and sentences.

Almost similar has been the response concerning the oral skills in L2 with 60.5% respondents (182 students) stating that they have to pause to correct improper use of words, expressions, and sentences. Only 17.5% respondents (52 students) disagreed and stated that they are fluent with the oral skills of English and can use the same with grammatical and contextual correctness. 22% of respondents (66 students) remained neutral.
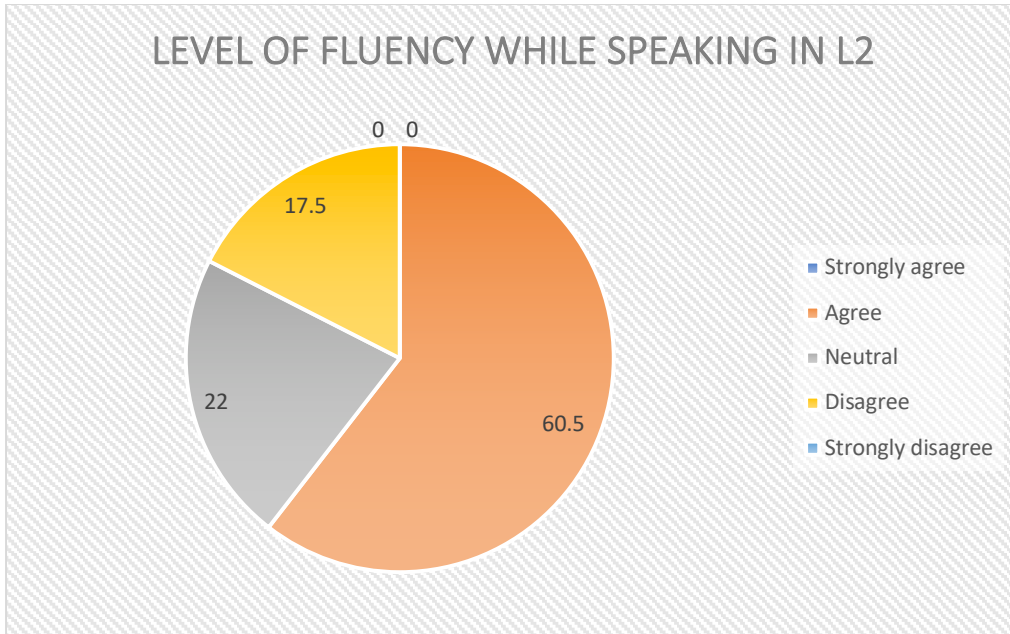
Fig.3.13: Level of fluency while speaking in L2

(ix)   If a text is available in English as well as in my mother tongue (L1) and other languages that I know, I often choose to read the same in English.

Despite being proficient in their respective mother tongues, with moderate to high problems in speaking, reading and writing skills of L2, i.e., English, along with the knowledge of grammar, majority of students prefer English over other languages including their mother tongue for choosing a text and other available reading materials in both online and offline modes. 73.8% of the respondents (221 students) have agreed that they would read a passage in English even if the same is available in their mother tongue with 7.5% (22 students) strongly agreeing about the same. Only 8% (25 students) disagreed with 3% (9 students) strongly disagreeing and 7.7% (23 students) stating that they could opt for either or both.
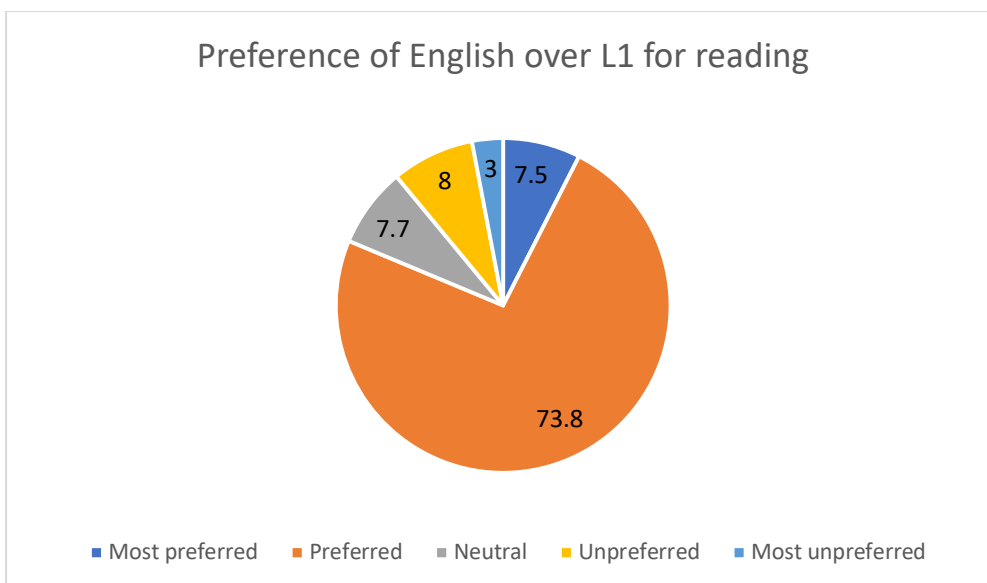
Fig.3.14: Preference of English over L1 for reading

(x)   If I have an option to speak in English or in my mother tongue (L1) and other languages that I know, I often choose to speak in English.

However, for oral skills, the respondents prefer their respective mother tongues over English and other available languages with 59.2% respondents (178 students) stating that they will invariably choose their mother tongue with 10.1% (30 students) strongly agreeing about the same. Only 15.4% (46 students) reported that since they are comfortable with either language, and they could choose either or both depending on the context and situation. 11.2% (34 students) would prefer English over their respective mother tongues, and 4.1 % (12 students) will opt exclusively for English.
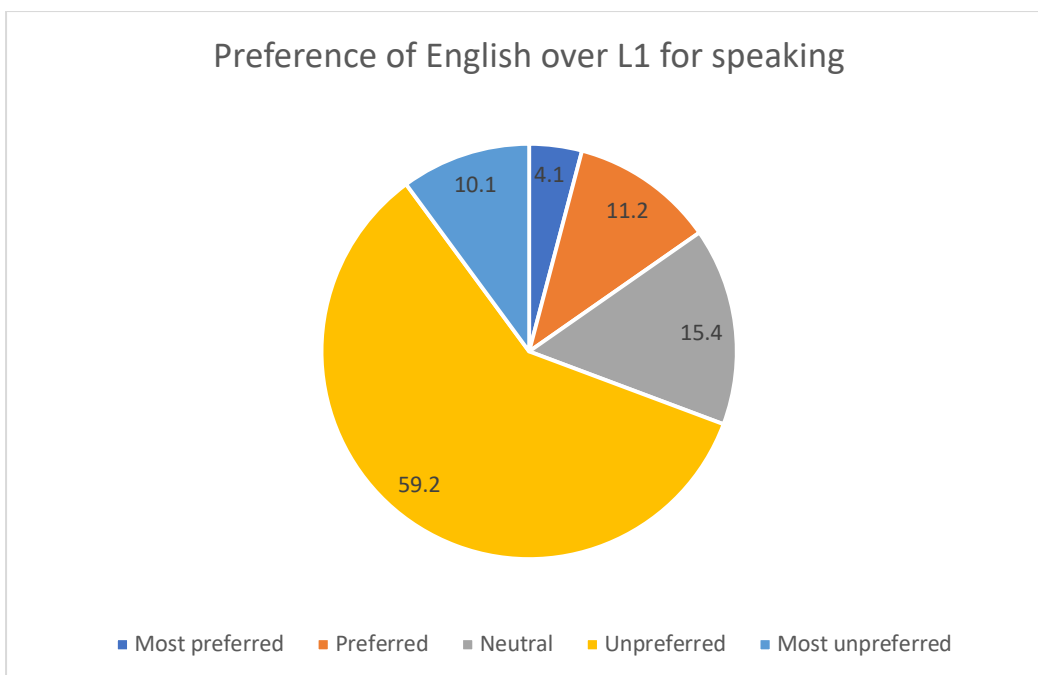
Fig.3.15: Preference of English over L1 for speaking

(xi)   If I have an option to write in English or in my mother tongue (L1) and other languages that I know, I often choose to speak in English.

For writing, in spite of the availability of the option to write in their respective L1s and other languages, 58% respondents (174 students) prefer English with 12.9% (39 students) strongly agreeing to the position. While 14.3% respondents (43 students) disagreed with 7.1% (21 students) disagreeing completely, 7.7% respondents (23 students) mentioned that they could choose either or both depending on the context or situation.
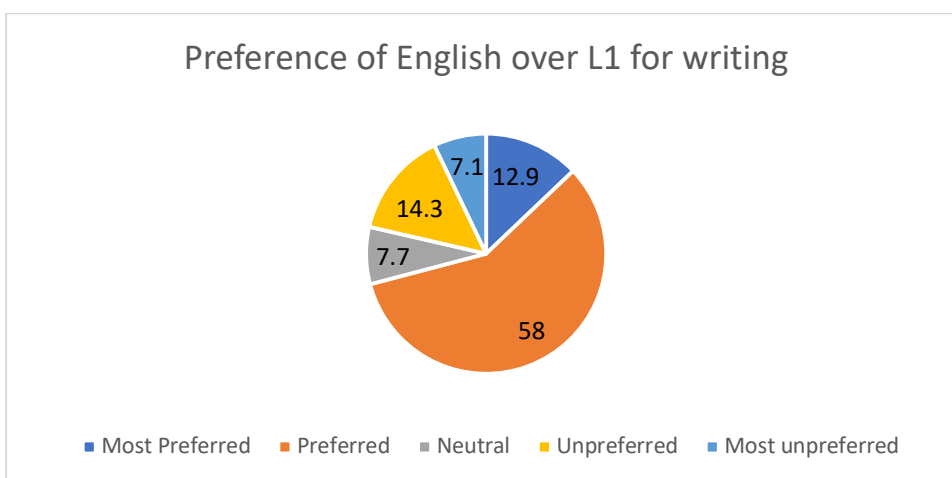

Fig.3.16: Preference of English over L1 for writing

3.5 Findings

All the respondents *consider* themselves as fluent in their respective mother tongues and English. Their belief stems from the fact that a majority of them have been speaking English right from their school days and have preferred it as the primary medium for writing and reading over other languages. However, when tested on the parameters of speaking, reading, writing and translatability to determine fluency, 87.5% of the respondents (263 students) are found to be lacking in skills of writing and translatability in English with moderate to a significantly high range of errors in speaking and reading. As far as their use of the mother tongue is concerned, 77.3% respondents (232 students) cannot do the translations from L2 (English) to L1 and vice versa correctly and 68.3% (205 students) couldn't write their native tongue correctly. While testing fluency with the indigenous students from Arunachal Pradesh, given the fact of their lack of script, their reading, writing and translation skills were tested using the Roman script and as a result, the students from Arunachal Pradesh have scored marginally higher compared to those from other states in terms of reading and speaking skills of English.

Foreign Language Anxiety against English too is a major limiting factor for the students during speaking, reading, and translation of English. As far as writing skills are concerned, it has been found that anxiety impacts less on offline writing than during synchronous messages online, especially when they are aware of the presence of the evaluator or observer on the other end. In case of offline writing, however, due to the possibility of delayed feedback, unlike the instant ones online, the users are less anxious.

Following are the primary reasons which impact English proficiency and fluency:

(i)   Translations from English to Hindi or other vernacular languages.

In the feeder level, the emphasis on language teaching is primarily to *score* in examinations than to *learn* to use the same in different situations and contexts. Translation method is widely followed while teaching language in which English gets invariably translated either to Hindi or the respective vernacular without creating any

opportunity for the students/learners to express their understanding in English. Further, the learners were given specific topics, areas or questions to prepare for the examinations, to which the answers are dictated in the class, and the students are required to cram and write. Such an examination-centric focus on English, as well as the mother tongue or Hindi, has resulted in incomplete learning of all the three languages. The outcome, therefore, is a lack of proficiency or fluency in either language.

(ii)   Language Anxiety

Foreign Language Anxiety, particularly towards English, has been found to be a significant limiting factor towards becoming fluent or proficient in the target language. The most prominent reason for triggering anxiety that impacts proficiency is the lack of knowledge of grammatical rules and inadequate vocabulary, particularly in the oral mode of communication. However, it is worth noting that the same set of students are *not* anxious while using English as the target language in other subjects and courses of their study. They become anxious at the presence of the teacher or anyone who possess better oral or written communication skills in English. This has been observed during the group discussions which are a part of compulsory class assignments and other group tasks. These groups are formed by mixing students with different levels of proficiency and fluency in English so that with peer effort, the respondents could solve their problems among themselves. However, it has been found that those students who have issues with oral communication skills found such an arrangement with the fluent and proficient peers *dominating* and it impacted their performance severely. 73.5% respondents (220 students) who have the problems with oral communication in English have pointed towards this problem forcefully. While writing, on the other hand, the number of errors are few while writing spontaneously and without the *fear* of instant feedback or evaluation. The same is true in case of asynchronous updates online, but the errors compound once the respondents become *aware* of instant feedback or assessment offline or an immediate corrective comment online.

(iii)   The standard medium of communication or the link language happens to be Hindi.

Students use English as a medium of oral communication primarily in the language classroom. For the rest, they use Hindi or their respective mother tongues which serve as the primary link language. Thus, on the face of Hindi or mother tongue, the use of English gets compromised, and the students get no opportunity to work on it to gain fluency or become proficient.

(iv)   Lack of curation and management while using web resources for learning.

On being pointed out the errors and emphasized on developing speaking, reading and writing skills along with the knowledge of grammar, it has been found that the respondents' first option is to search the online resources available and typically, they *rely* on the first three results of any search that the search engine displays. Rarely they engage in an extensive search of the subject and seldom are they found making a comparative assessment of the results which are available. With the lack of region-specific pre-curated content on the web for learning L2, the respondents get a general treatment of the subject which doesn't serve their purpose. Only 30% of the respondents (90 students) have stated that they follow the curated online material provided in the class and the rest relied solely on the search engines for getting the content. With a lack of proper, systematic knowledge about language and communication skills, such a reliance on unmonitored and unmanaged resources have compounded the problem further as the respondents started *using* the screen knowledge in their oral and written modes of communication.

(v)   Lack of regulation and evaluation or feedback while communicating online

While the respondents have been encouraged to use technology and internet-mediated tools to learn the language, but it has been found that their use of the language online is substantially *liberal* regarding grammar, style, punctuation, and choice of words, mainly while communicating in an asynchronous mode. With a considerable amount

of data getting generated every minute, evaluation and instant or timely feedback are not possible. As a result, the errors go unnoticed or unchecked which makes the respondent *believe* that whatever is communicated or posted by them online is correct and thus, they form their *notions of correctness* which they use across mediums. Even the options of auto-correct in a word document or app-based or extension based corrections in online portals haven't helped as the students respond to the blue or red squiggle intuitively than basing their choice on logic or reason.

(vi)   Extreme emphasis on oral skills, mainly English and using non-standard offline learning materials.

Proficiency and fluency are directly related to the knowledge of grammatical rules as well as the ability to make the distinction between the lexical and contextual meaning of any word or expression. While Harmer (2001) opposes the use of L1 in an L2 class as it becomes 'uncommunicative, difficult and irrelevant' (2001), studies by Ross (2000), Mattioli (2004), Carless (2008) have strongly advocated the use of L1 for teaching L2 as it is essential to develop 'accuracy, clarity and flexibility' (Ross, 2000). Further translation is considered as the 'fifth skill' (Ross 2000) of the communication process along with listening, speaking, reading and writing, which helps in fulfilling 'cognitive and [numerous] social functions' (Carless, 2008). According to Schweers (1999), L2 taught by keeping L1 as a base lends a positive impact in that it helps in providing a sense of 'security' to the learners and 'validate' their experiences (Schweers, 1999).' Thus, it is evident that a sound knowledge of L1 is a must to make a learner proficient and fluent in L2.

However, it has been observed that one of the major reasons for the students' lack of proper development of communicative skills in both their mother tongues and English result from an emphasis on developing oral skills in English over the other skills in the same as well as the mother tongue. As a result, the learner gets *exposed* to learning materials and in many cases, getting enrolled in spoken English programs, which makes a negative impact on learning a language. More than applying reason and rules, the

learners have mastered the materials by rote and use the same without any consideration for contextual appropriateness and correctness. The outcome of such an application of language is an unintended gap between the ideated and the conveyed message. Further, with the emphasis on learning only a single skill of L2, the other skills and the learning of mother tongue gets compromised. This is evident from the responses of the students as lacking in one or more skills in both L1 and L2. The offline materials as available in the market or the institutions providing courses on developing oral proficiency in English are just copied materials taken either from the web or materials which are developed in other countries for a specified target group. Using the same material by the students devoid of any guidance towards relating the same to the rules of their respective mother tongue have impacted their proficiency and fluency in English as well as their respective mother tongues.