



## A STUDY ON THE PROBLEMS OF TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE SECONDARY LEVEL SCHOOLS (CLASS-IX & X) OF ASSAM

PRANJAL SAIKIA

Ph.D. Scholar, Mahatma Gandhi University, Meghalaya

E-mail: [pranzalsaikia@gmail.com](mailto:pranzalsaikia@gmail.com)



PRANJAL SAIKIA

Article Received:22/07/2020

Article Accepted: 09/09/2020

Published online:12/09/2020

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.8.3.265](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.8.3.265)

### Abstract

This paper attempts to throw light on the problems of teaching learning condition of English in the Secondary Level Schools of Assam and provide some workable suggestions to improve it. It has been witnessed that the teaching learning condition of English is not up to the mark of satisfaction in the Secondary Level Assamese medium schools. During the field work the investigator realises the most essential fact that instead of blaming the students for their failure to learn, the teachers must take teaching English to be a great challenge in front of them. This study was carried out in Jorhat District of Assam (India).

**Keywords:** Teaching English, teaching learning condition, English teachers.

### Introduction

The English language has exercised a great influence over the past two centuries in shaping the political, social, economic, intellectual and cultural life of India and is still serving as a dynamic instrument of social change. English is today one of the foremost international languages in the world. It provides easy access to the world's rich literature, science and technology, radio and TV and an evergrowing number of books, periodicals and newspapers. We in India have gained immensely by partaking of this great heritage through the English language.

F.G. French says, "No language ancient or modern can be compared with English in the number of geographical distribution of the homes, factories and offices in which the language is spoken, written or read;.....Because of the spread of industrial development, science and technology, international trade and commerce, and the close

interdependence of nations English has become a world language".(1)

To give stress upon the importance of English the Report of the Secondary Education Commission (1952) says:

"It was stressed by some of our witnesses that much of the national unity in political and other spheres of activity has been brought about through the study of English language and literature and modern Western thought by all educated Indians. They also stated that the present position of India in the international sphere is partly due to the command that educated Indians have acquired over English. Many eminent educationists and scientists have, therefore, expressed the opinion that under no circumstances should we sacrifice the many advantages that we have gained by the study of English. They hold that in matters pertaining to education, sentiment should not be the ruling factor and that what was most urgently needed was that our youth acquire knowledge from

all sources and contribute their share to its expansion and development. In the attainment of this objective, study of English was bound to play an important part".(2)

According to David Crystal "There has never been a language so widely spread or spoken by so many people as English. There are therefore no precedents to help us see what happens to a language when it achieves genuine world status".(3)

"English in India is a global language in a multilingual country. A variety and range of English-teaching situations prevail here owing to the twin factors of teacher proficiency in English and pupils' exposure to English outside school. The level of introduction of English is now a matter of political response to people's aspirations rather than an academic or feasibility issue, and people's choices about the level of its introduction in the curriculum will have to be respected, with the proviso that we do not extend downwards the very system that has failed to deliver."(4)

"As has been recommended by the Official Language Commission, English is to be taught in our schools primarily as a 'language of comprehension'. Since it will now be taught for a limited period of six or even three years and since most of the students will ultimately be required to gather knowledge from books and journals written in English, setting up of a single objective, namely, 'development of reading comprehension', seems to be the only sensible course. But it is also obvious that reading comprehension as a language skill cannot be developed in isolation. The psychology of language learning also tells us that the four basic language skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing, reinforce each other, and even for the development of a single skill, some amount of emphasis on the other skills will be found beneficial. Moreover, even for the limited use of English as a library language, our students will have to acquire some mastery of the other language skills besides reading comprehension. For example, they may be required to listen to talks and radio broadcasts in English, have discussions with experts from different parts of the world, make notes for

future reference and exchange views in writing with other people in different parts of the world."(5)

The Position Paper of the National Focus Group on Teaching of English makes an attempt to find out the place and role of English in today's context in India. Stating that '**English does not stand alone**', the Position Paper argues that it (English) needs to find its place-

- **Along with other Indian languages**
  - i. in regional-medium schools: how can children's other languages strengthen English teaching/learning?
  - ii. in English-medium schools: how can other Indian languages be valorised, reducing the perceived hegemony of English?
- **In relation to other subjects:** A language-across-the-curriculum perspective is perhaps of particular relevance to primary education. Language is best acquired through different meaning-making contexts, and hence all teaching is in a sense language teaching. This perspective also captures the centrality of language in abstract thought in secondary education; whereas in the initial stages contextual meaning supports language use, at later stages meaning may be arrived at solely through language.(6)

"Throughout India, there is an extraordinary belief, among almost all castes and classes, in both rural and urban areas, in the transformative power of English. English is seen not just as a useful skill, but as a symbol of a better life, a pathway out of poverty and oppression. Aspiration of such magnitude is a heavy burden for any language, and for those who have responsibility for teaching it, to bear. The challenges of providing universal access to English are significant, and many are bound to feel frustrated at the speed of progress. But we cannot ignore the way that the English language has emerged as a powerful agent for change in India."(Graddol 2010:120)(7)

It is very important for a teacher of English to make his learners equipped with the command of English which allows him to express himself in speech or in writing that can sustain them in the present world which functions through the English language. Teachers should realize the objectives of teaching English as a second language and enable the learners to:

- a. understand English when spoken;
- b. speak English correctly and fluently;
- c. read English with comprehension at a reasonable speed for gathering information and enjoy reading;
- d. write English neatly and correctly with proper speed and legibility;
- e. acquire knowledge of the elements of English for achieving a practical command of the language; and
- f. translate English into their mother tongue and vice-versa.(8)

The main objectives of the English syllabus for class IX and X prepared by the Board of Secondary Education, Assam (SEBA) are:

- to build greater confidence and proficiency in oral and written communication.
- to develop the ability and knowledge required in order to engage in independent reflection and inquiry.
- to use appropriate English to communicate in various social settings.
- to equip learners with essential language skills to question and to articulate their point of view.
- to build competence in the different registers of English.
- to develop sensitivity to, and appreciation of, other varieties of English.
- to enable the learner to access knowledge and information through reference skills (consulting a dictionary/thesaurus, library, internet etc.)

- to develop curiosity and creativity through extensive reading.
- to facilitate self-learning to enable them to become independent learners.
- to review, organise and edit their own work and work done by the peers.(9)

In this present era we cannot think of a world without English. English acts as our vital force to have close contact with the day to day happenings of the world. Even after seven decades since Britishers left India the teaching learning condition of English in our state is not yet up to the satisfactory level. The Assam Government has taken several measures to upgrade the quality of teaching learning condition of English in the schools but with no result. The Board of Secondary Education SEBA (academic authority of the Secondary Schools of Assam) has also designed the curriculum and syllabi for class IX and X with some specific objectives to provide quality education in English but surprisingly the output is very poor.

In spite of all the efforts made in the public as well as private sector, we still need to do a lot in order to have the desired result. Particularly, in rural areas the situation is not as good as it should have been.

As the students from Assamese medium schools are found not good in English, so they cannot show good performance in competitive examinations. Most brilliant students' performance in English is also not up to the level of satisfaction. Teachers are always seen putting the blame upon the students for their inability to learn English. But in practical field it is witnessed that it is not the fault of the students but it is due to defective teaching methods, the students will have to suffer a lot. It is high time for the English teachers to take teaching English to be a great challenge before them and should try their best to win the goal.

### Objectives

The main objectives of this paper are:

- To find out the problems of teaching-learning condition of English at the Secondary Level Classes.

- To provide some satisfactory suggestions/remedies to improve the quality of teaching English on the basis of the findings of the study.

### Methodology

This paper is mainly an outcome of field study. Documents such as seminar papers, proceedings and minutes related to workshops and meetings have also been studied.

- One thousand, five hundred and six (1506) students, both boys and girls studying in class IX & X from Assamese medium schools have been taken as sample for the study.
- Thirty teachers (30) were randomly selected from Secondary Level Assamese medium schools (IX & X) to examine the role played by the teachers in the teaching learning of English.
- Fifteen (15) Heads of Institutions were interviewed to know some facts related to English teaching learning condition.
- Fifteen (15) schools situated in greater Jorhat area were selected on purposive sampling basis.

### Parameters used

The following parameters were used for the purpose of this study and data collection-

- A self prepared questionnaire for students.
- A self prepared questionnaire for the English teachers.
- An interview schedule for interviewing the Heads of the Institutions.

### Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative research techniques were adopted for classroom observation related to effectiveness of bi-lingual classroom situations. Data related to training of teachers, availability of teaching learning materials etc. were collected during the visits to the schools. Simple percentage calculations were used for analysis as and when necessary. The interview technique was adopted for gathering relevant information from students,

teachers and Heads of the Institutions to know the teaching learning process of English.

### Findings of the Study

The qualitative analysis of the data collected reveal that lots of problems are there in the teaching-learning condition of English in the Secondary level schools of Assam. These problems can be sorted out as follow:

- In all the schools it is found that English is taught as a subject not as a language. Teachers are always seen pressurising the students to secure good marks in English and to reach this goal they themselves create a shortcut for students by providing readymade notes because of what their language cultivating power becomes deactivated. Teachers do not consider it important to make aware the students what prospects they will have in future with English or without English.
- In most of the schools, the methods and techniques of the English teachers are found obsolete (out of date) and defective. They are found accustomed in using the age old Grammar Translation Method (GTM). The English teachers of these schools are unaware of the current trends and techniques of English Language Teaching (ELT). Teachers do not care to use English as medium of instruction inside the classroom. They use their First Language (Assamese) in the teaching learning process. The teacher just enters the class, picks up a textbook of the prescribed syllabus, opens it and starts reading himself/herself and then tells the meaning of some lines or all the lines translating into Assamese. No difference is being found between an English or other Assamese medium classes, i.e. Social Science, Geography, General Science, Assamese subject class etc. No conducive environment of teaching English is being found created by the English teachers.
- 56.67% teachers have B.Ed. degree but still they are found unwilling to use all the teaching skills in the practical field. They are

not at all interested in using the Teaching Learning Materials (TLM) in the class along with their own innovative ideas.

- Most of the teachers are found totally unaware of their aim of teaching English, that is to concentrate on the four fundamental language skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing.
- In most of the schools teachers are found not at all caring for all kinds of students. They just prefer to guide only the brilliant students and always bear a negative attitude towards the slow learners or weak students. They are also found not supervising the students' home assignments, class-works etc regularly. Very few teachers try to motivate students for English learning. All teachers know it well that motivation plays the major role in learning the English language but in real life its implementation is not up to the mark of satisfaction.
- Teachers are found not preparing their lesson plans along with the course plans regularly. 46.67% teachers prepare lesson plans for every class and 50% teachers prepare lesson plans sometimes and 3.33% teachers not at all prepare lesson plans for any class.
- Most of the English teachers do not have the sound knowledge about the objectives of the Extensive Reading of class IX and X.
- Experienced friendly teachers are not found in most of the schools. At the same time classroom management is not satisfactory.
- Teachers are found unable to understand the difference between the teaching of literature and the teaching of language skills. One of the reasons for the declining standard of teaching English is the inability of the teachers to understand the difference between the teaching of literature and teaching of language skills. Situational language teaching is marginalized. English teaching is seen limited only on literature teaching not on language teaching
- 95.88% students opine that they have a pre-existing fear towards English. If English is not

a compulsory subject then they will all be happy enough and try for other subjects like Hindi. It is found that they want to keep themselves away at a safe distance from English. They admit the fact that they have always heard from their teachers and senior students that English is a very tough subject. They are found afraid of the English subject and also found not at all interested to read and learn the English subject. They are found getting frustrated inside the classroom as they feel uncomfortable with the teaching learning process of English.

- All the students are found keeping in themselves a solid belief that to know or to learn English they must know the rules and regulations of grammar minutely before giving entry into the subject, that notion is found to be indebted from their English teachers.
- The Examination System conducted by the Board is not up to the mark of satisfaction. Repetition of the same questions is a common occurrence; as a result students having very limited knowledge can secure very good marks. In the grammar section there is found no practical value. In the question paper it is witnessed that same sentences (questions) are repeated in alternate years for Voice change, Correct tense, Preposition, Do as Directed etc. It is very easy to predict what questions will be asked in the Examination. The students simply have to memorize. The question paper has not been found designed in a manner that it helps students to have an authority over English language rather it makes the students to take it for granted.
- The training programmes offered to the English teachers by RMSA, SSA etc. are very limited. Teachers do not get orientation on change of syllabi. Teachers are lacking in on job training and refresher courses.
- Though almost all the schools have their libraries but only 13.33% schools have the provision of English newspapers, magazines, journals etc.

- 80% Institutional Heads are unable to monitor the English classes properly as they do not have a strong hold over the English language.

#### **Suggestions**

- Teachers should teach English as a language not as a subject. For this the teacher should have the capacity of finding out the difference between the teaching of literature and the teaching of language skills. Teachers should know it well that the study of a language is not an end in itself, it is a means to develop one's power of expression and comprehension can be achieved by mastering stylistic elements of the language. Teaching English should not be only literature centric it must be language centric to a great extent.
- Interest and motivation are indispensable in the teaching learning process. To motivate the students towards English, teachers should conduct child centered activities in the class. Once the student is motivated towards English learning then easily he/she will be interested in the learning process. Teachers should try to stimulate the immanent activities of the students. Good teachers are more important than good methods but an efficient teacher can only motivate the students and improve the quality of teaching by applying good methods and techniques of teaching.
- Students generally develop a fear for English due to wrong approach of teaching. The teachers should keep this in mind and adopt good methods and techniques that can make learning effortless to students. Students' confidence level of learning English language should be upgraded by the English teachers by such type of activities as when the teacher enters the class then he/she should welcome the students with a smiling face, that will help the students feel comfortable with their teacher and also they will be mentally diverted to have a good attachment with the teacher. The teachers

should never directly begin with the lesson to be taught. He/she should begin by talking with them about day to day happenings in simple English and can motivate them by saying that they are learning the world's most important language. Teachers should appreciate the students' ability to communicate in English whether they are right or wrong. Anyway students should be encouraged. This will help the students to be free with the teacher to share their feelings which will indirectly help them learning the language easier. And when the students start participating in the discussion, the teacher should draw their attention tactfully to the topic to be discussed.

- English teachers should try to develop students' four language skills, i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking. Our education system is concerned only with reading and writing skills for long years. But listening and speaking which play a major role in communication have been neglected and ignored. Our examination system does not have the tool to measure or to test these two very important skills, the examination system is not at all language oriented. Teachers should understand that listening is the basic skill which makes speaking possible, nobody can speak a language without listening to it. A baby starts speaking in a particular language after listening to it for many years. Our students can't speak English because they are not taught the art of listening or properly guided in the listening skill. Teachers must convince the students that if they have the communicating power then in future they will have lots of opportunities to establish themselves in various fields anywhere around the world. They should not chase only after marks in examination, otherwise one day they will have to repent for their inability to speak in English. So, teachers should give utmost importance not only on reading and writing but also on listening and speaking. In short the teachers should

always give importance on the aims of teaching English – to enable them to understand English when spoken, to enable them to speak English, to enable them to read English and to enable them to write English.

- Direct method of teaching English should be encouraged to Translation and Bilingual method. Direct method gives the students more confidence so far as speaking and writing are concerned.
- Language teaching should be instrumental like the instruction given to a dog by the coach. Students should not be allowed to be aware of much about the rules and regulations of grammar that hinders language learning process. A child born in London need not go first to the rules and regulations of grammar. By self, listening only he acquires it, that is why teachers should create the environment of communication inside and outside the classroom, this is not an easy task but it can be mastered. It is advisable to the teachers to instruct their students that grammar should not go ahead their learning, it should go parallelly with the lesson. New techniques of teaching English must be implemented by the English teachers. Instruction should be changed from teacher centric to student centric. Student Talk Time in class should be more than Teacher Talk Time.
- In learning a language feel is must. Teachers should try to arouse emotion in the minds of the students in connection with the content of the lesson. For example when the activity of a hero is described to them, they should have the heroic feelings in them, likewise when a poem of sadness is going on in the class then they should feel sorrow and sometimes tears must come into their eyes. Teachers must learn the art to play the major role of the character of any prose or poem to draw the emotion in them. When the students will have that emotion or feel

within themselves then definitely they will be tied up with the learning process.

- Teachers must suggest their students to do their thinking in English not in Assamese (their mother tongue). No doubt, it is not an easy task, it will take months altogether but if the students are well trained with this then definitely they can do the same. For example whenever we talk about animals, birds, sky, water, trees, flowers etc. the Assamese terms of these things should not come to our minds. We have to try our best to connect directly with the English terms. Same must be done for other terms like an axe, a horse, a deer, a knife, a banana, a carpenter, a street, a basket etc. at the primary level. The Primary school teachers should try to introduce the students directly with the English terms. One very effective example is that whenever we say about night super (bus) or day super (bus), the Assamese terms won't come to our minds anyhow. Same should be done for other things. One most important suggestion is that teachers should enter the class with the motto not to teach but to talk with them (students) about various issues related to their day to day happenings or problems. Through this the students will be able to build up a close link with English language and as a result with flying colours they will acquire the language skills without any effort.
- Teachers should be tolerant to handle errors or mistakes of the students. They should correct the students' mistakes willingly with their kind hands and should encourage them not to mind so much for their mistakes. Students will feel comfortable at their (teachers) polite behaviors and come to them of their own accord to show their mistakes without hesitation or fear. Because of this students will definitely consider English learning as a fun not as a burden. The students may not be able to construct or say correct sentences still the teachers

should encourage them to do the same with care.

- Teachers should prepare lesson plans regularly along with the course plan and teaching aids for English classes. The lesson plans are essential for the mastery of language skills and at the same time teaching aids are essential for better teaching learning experience. Course plan is important as it helps the teacher to complete the syllabus very effectively within the stipulated time, otherwise teaching will become somewhat chaos.
- Teachers should encourage the students to read English newspapers, magazines, books, journals etc. and the same should be available in the school library. For this, teachers should study the minds of the students in what subjects they are interested a lot. Suppose a student is fond of sports, then he should be advised to read sports magazines. At the primary level teachers can advise the students to read children's magazines in English with pictures like Tinkle, Panchatantra, Chandamama etc. Through this they will be able to grasp the English language easily with interest. At the same time teachers should advise the students to watch or listen English news programmes regularly specially to listen English news along with various talk shows, English speeches on television or on radio.
- Regular home works or assignments should be provided to the students by the teachers. Home works or assignments should be so designed that it may be ensured that the students regularly read at least a page of English from any source, learn at least five new words with usage, write at least five sentences on any topic every day.
- At the initial stage of learning, to give the students example or reference for effective teaching, the teachers should always try to use local contents familiar to them (students) for better learning. For example to give the students idea of the sea the

teachers should draw their attention towards river Brahmaputra (sea like vastness during flood). Likewise the teacher should not give students example as 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' (By Alfred Lord Tennyson) to give them idea of a devastating attack; instead they can use the attack of Mughals during Ahoms' role in Assam, teachers should not give example of the Trojan War; instead they can use the example of Saraighat war (Battle) or Harihara (Lord Krishna and Lord Shiva) War (From Hindu mythology), instead of mentioning kathakali dance (Kerela); the teachers can mention Bihu dance (folk dance of the Assamese people) etc. By this means the students will have a easy grasp in the learning process because all contents related to examples are familiar to them. In the same time teachers should not use bombastic words before the students because they will not understand the meanings of such words and as a result get puzzled and will lose interest in learning English. Involvement of students' creativity is must unlike teachers' creativity in the class. Once the students will have a grasp over the language automatically problems related to teaching learning process of English will be over.

- Computer training for the English teachers should be made mandatory to work with modern methods of teaching including communicative methods like using overhead projector, use of CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning), internet etc.
- The Heads of the Institutions as well as the parents of the students should approach the English teachers with constructive criticism. They should encourage the English teachers to teach by new techniques and methods. The school authorities should see that the teacher is well conversant with good methods of teaching. The Institutional Heads who have good command over English language can self-supervise the English classes. If not they can invite subject experts from other schools for better teaching



learning process but in this case they have to compromise with their pride.

### Conclusion

From the overall analysis, it can be summed up that there are lots of problems in the teaching learning process of English language in the Assamese medium Secondary schools of Assam, especially in Jorhat District. If the above mentioned suggestions can be implemented then undoubtedly the quality of English teaching may improve to a great extent.

### References

1. Mowla, Dr. Shaikh., Rao, Dr. M. Prabhakar. & Sarojini, B.B.: Methods Of Teaching English. pp.2-3.
2. Report of the Secondary Education Commission, Mudaliar Commission Report. Ministry of Education, Government of India, October 1952 to June 1953. p.51.
3. Crystal, D. (1997): English as a Global Language. p.139. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
4. National Curriculum Framework 2005. p.38. NCERT-2005
5. Baruah, T.C.: The English Teacher's Handbook, Third Revised Edition. pp.8-9.
6. Position Paper: National Focus Group On Teaching Of English. pp.3-4. NCERT 2006
7. Graddol, D. (2010): English Next India. p.120. New Delhi: British Council. Source - Teaching English (BRITISH COUNCIL). Paper 4. (Language policy in education and the role of English in India: From library language to language of empowerment by Ramanujam Meganathan), [www.britishcouncil.org](http://www.britishcouncil.org)
8. Pedagogy of English – 1, pp.27-28. Directorate of Translation & Publications. Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad. Edition: June-2018. [www.manuu.ac.in](http://www.manuu.ac.in)
9. CURRICULUM & SYLLABI For Class IX-X. pp.117-118. Board of Secondary Education, Assam (SEBA).