

# LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 11 : 5 May 2011

ISSN 1930-2940

Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.

Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.

Sam Mohanlal, Ph.D.

B. A. Sharada, Ph.D.

A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D.

Lakhan Gusain, Ph.D.

Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.

S. M. Ravichandran, Ph.D.

G. Baskaran, Ph.D.

L. Ramamoorthy, Ph.D.

## English Language Teaching Conditions in Assam - A Case of Secondary Schools

ATAUR RAHMAN

M.A., B. Ed., P.G.C.T.E., P.G.D.T.E., Ph.D. Candidate

---

---

### Introduction

Assam is one of the seven states of North East India. Dispur is the capital of Assam. The official language of the state is Assamese. Like all states in India, Assam is a multilingual state. Apart from the Assamese language, Bengali, Hindi, Bhojpuri, Nepali, and Rajasthani languages are also used by different communities. There are also schools teaching several languages spoken by the members of the Scheduled Tribes.

The state has introduced the *Three Language Formula* in its educational system. English is introduced in the Assamese medium schools at class V; recently it is being introduced in standard 1. English is studied as a compulsory subject up to the Matriculation (HSLC) level. Thereafter, English is studied for two years in the +2 stage and three years at the under-graduate level. In other words, English is studied as a core subject for eleven years. The time allotted for English class is same as to other subjects, i.e., five/six periods of forty/forty five minute's duration per week.

In this paper an attempt is made to depict the English teaching conditions of the Provincialised secondary schools of Assam. The Provincialised schools are the aided schools of the state. The state government sanctions grants to these schools. The teaching and the non-teaching staff are provided with salary by the state government. Management responsibility rests with that of the administration of the school. The students are not required to pay fees.

The Board of Secondary Education, Assam (SEBA) is the academic authority of the secondary schools of Assam. It also conducts the final examination (HSLC) of class X. The curriculum and textbooks of English followed in the secondary level are prepared by SCERT (State Council of Education Research and Training). It also conducts English teaching trainings to teachers of secondary level. The Sarva Shiksha Aabhijan (SSA) Assam, too, prepares textbooks and these are prescribed for use up to class VIII since the introduction of the Bill of Compulsory Education for all children up to 14 years of age.

There is a general belief among the people that most of the Provincialised and non-provincialised Assamese medium schools fail to provide quality education; especially the English language attainment level is very low. The students from Assamese medium schools are 'scared' of English. A good number of students from Assamese medium schools every year pass the HSLC examination at the mercy of the policy holders in the form of 'grace marks'. It is believed that even the most brilliant students from the Assamese medium schools may fail to achieve the standard in achieved in the English medium schools. Because of their inability to speak fluent English, a good number of students from the Assamese medium show poor performance in interviews for in job recruitment drive. They are not able to communicate well in day-to-day transactions where English is required.

Parents give first preference to the English medium schools for their children. If they cannot afford to pay the high tuition fees charged by the English medium schools, they seem to send their children to the privately managed Assamese medium schools. Only the poor students and students from the rural areas would go to the Provincialised and non-provincialised Assamese medium schools.

## **2. Objectives**

The main objectives of this paper are as follows.

- (a) Examine the efficiency of the English teachers teaching in the secondary level Assamese medium schools of Assam.
- (b) Examine the role of the government in facilitating students in the teaching-learning of English as a subject in the Secondary level Assamese medium schools of Assam.
- (c) Examine the role of the school as an institution in facilitating students in the teaching-learning of English as a subject in the Secondary level Assamese medium schools of Assam.

### **3. Methodology:**

Descriptive field survey method was used in this study.

### **4. Sample**

(1) A sample of **five hundred students**, both boys and girls studying in provincialised secondary level Assamese medium schools in five districts, viz., Dhemaji, Dibrugarh Golaghat,, Jorhat, and Sibsagarh of Upper Assam in class VIII, IX and X have been taken as the sample for the study.

(2) **Twenty five teachers** were randomly selected from secondary level Assamese medium schools to examine the role played by the teachers in the teaching-learning of English.

(3) **Twenty Heads** of the Institution were interviewed to know the facilities available for teaching-learning of English.

(4) **Eleven schools** were selected on purposive sampling basis situated in rural and urban areas.

### **5. Parameters used:**

- (a) a self prepared questionnaire for students
- (b) a self prepared questionnaire for the teachers
- (c) an interview schedule for interviewing the Heads of the Institution

### **6. Analysis of responses**

#### **6.1 Role of Teacher**

##### **6.1.1 Use of Assamese language in class**

Teachers were asked how often they used Assamese language in class, 20% teachers said they often used Assamese language in class, 56% said they used Assamese language sometimes and for the rest 24% said always used Assamese language in English classes. None of the teachers said that they never used Assamese language which was also one of the options in the questionnaire.

On the question of for what purpose the teachers use Assamese language in class, 14 (56%) said they used Assamese language to facilitate learning. 11 teachers (44%) said that they used it to explain certain concepts.

Outside the classroom, all the 25 teachers (100%) said they used the regional / local language to talk with their students.

### 6.1.2 Use of Media

Regarding use of media like print media and audio-visual media as teaching aids in the classroom, 11 teachers (44%) said they never used any media in the classroom, while the rest answered in the affirmative. However, almost all the students responded that no audio-visual aids were used in their English classes.

The teachers could have made use of audio-visual aids for better teaching-learning. Audio-visual aids could help generate many language activities in the class. Absence of the use of audio-visual aids in English classes might have been due to the teachers' lack of training in the use of audio-visual aids or their lack of interest in using the aids. In any case, lack of audio-visual aids could be a reason for the lack of motivation in getting involved in learning English.

### 6.1.3 Exposure to English in Classroom

Do the teacher speaks English in class was another question the students were asked to answer. This was intended to see the amount of exposure to English the students get in the classroom. The responses received are given in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**

<i>Sex</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>
<b>Boys</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>Girls</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>217</b>

Thus the table shows a total of 230 (47.2%) students responded that the teachers did not speak English in class and 217 (43.4%) students said the teachers sometimes used English in class. Only 53 (10.6%) students responded that the teachers used English in class. Thus, it is revealed that the teachers, who could work as one of agents to improve the listening skill among the students, have failed to do so, probably because they did not have well developed skills.

### 6.1.4 Methods Adopted by the Teachers

In order to make teaching effective, appropriate methods that suit the cognitive level of the students are very important. The students were asked to respond to questions whether the teachers organized group discussion, pair work, and group activities, and used audio-visual aids in order to supplement learning, whether they encouraged loud reading, and whether

they gave practice, home assignments, class tasks, etc. The responses obtained are given in Tables 2 (A) and 2 (B).

**Table 2 (A)**

<i>Sex</i>	<i>Organise Group / Pair Work</i>			<i>Use of audio-Visual aids</i>		
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>
<b>Boys</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Girls</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>497</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>469</b>	<b>31</b>

**Table 2 (B)**

<i>Sex</i>	<i>Loud Reading</i>			<i>Home Assignment/Class Work</i>		
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>
<b>Boys</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>179</b>
<b>Girls</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>152</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>331</b>

These tables reveal that the students were never given any pair/group activity in English classes. The teachers probably did not want to take any extra pain or may not be aware of such techniques of teaching. The only method the teachers were aware of was the Grammar Translation Method. Every word, every sentence is translated into Assamese. The practice of giving Home Work and class task is also not a regular phenomenon in these schools. 331 (66.2%) said teachers 'sometimes' gave Home assignments and class work. But one commendable point that could be seen from the table was that 384 (76.8%) students answered in affirmative that loud reading in class was a regular practice.

### **6.1.5 Lesson Planning**

Regarding the preparation of Lesson Plans, 15 (60%) teachers said they prepared Lesson Plans for every class and 10 (40%) said they prepared Plans sometimes. Somehow these responses were not absolutely convincing, because even the teachers who have not received any training responded that they prepared Lesson Plans for every English class. Moreover, while interviewing the Principals/Headmasters said that the teachers did not prepare LP in spite of repeated instructions given to them.

### 6.1.6 Motivation

Teachers were asked if they considered that the English teachers had a great role to play in motivating the students to learn English. All the 25 teachers (100%) agreed to this view but none of them could comment how and what the teachers should do to motivate their learners. This clearly showed the lack of clear objectives on the part of the teachers in teaching English. Unless and until our teachers know how to motivate the learners to learn English the student performance may not change for the better.

### 6.1.7 Use of Audio Visual Aids

The teachers were asked whether the use of newspapers, magazines, and audio-visual aids were necessary for the students, all the 25 (100%) said they fully agreed with this view. This response of the teachers was quite paradoxical because none of the students in their response talked about the teachers using audio-visual aids in English classes. While informally talking, most of the teachers said they were given only the textbook, a blackboard (which in most cases was not in good condition) and chalk to teach English. They did not know how to operate Over Head Projectors, Tape Recorders and other teaching aids.

### 6.1.8 Peer Consultations to Develop Activities

Next, the teachers were asked whether they consulted with their colleagues in preparing and planning activities to fulfill different objectives in English classes. 23 (92%) teachers answered in the affirmative, 01 (4%) teacher in the negative and 01 (4%) teacher did not make any comment on it. The teacher who answered in the negative commented that there is no other language teacher to offer suggestion to his planning for English classes. But it appears that none of the teachers actually does so. English teaching has remained the job of the English teacher alone; no other teacher is consulted.

### 6.1.9 Teaching Training

The training received by the teachers working in the secondary level Assamese medium schools of Assam proves hardly adequate. Moreover, the teachers seem to be not qualified enough to handle the subject smoothly.

**Table 3**

<i>Sl No</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>BA/ Bsc/ Bcom</i>	<i>MA/ Msc/ M com</i>	<i>B.Ed./ BT/ M.Ed</i>	<i>Training in teaching Eng</i>	<i>Teaching exp. (in years)</i>	<i>Mother tongue</i>
1	48	√	-	-	5 days training by SSA	10	Assamese
2	57	√	-	√	5 days training by SSA	24	Assamese
3	52	√	-	-	Nil	03	Assamese
4	50		√	-	5 days training by SEBA	28	Assamese

5	54	√	-	-	Nil	18	Assamese
6	31		√	√	Nil	02	Mishing
7	37	√	-	-	7 days workshop by SSA	05	Assamese
8	52	√	-	√	18 days Winter training by SSA	26	Assamese
9	34		√	-	Nil	06	Assamese
10	48	√	-	√	7 days each by ELTI, GU and SSA	15	Deori
11	38	√	-	-	Nil	11	Deori
12	56	√	-	-	10 days by SSA	03	Assamese
13	48	√	-	-	10 days by SSA	09	Assamese
14	42		√	√	3 days by Academic Council, Golaghat	15	Assamese
15	35		√	-	7 days by SSA	02	Assamese
16	46	√	-	√	18 days NCERT, DIET, SSA	23	Assamese
17	39	√	-	-	3 days Normal School, Jorhat, 5 days Academic Council, Sibsagarh	09	Assamese
18	50	√	-	√	10 days by SSA and SEBA	27	Assamese
19	43	√	-	-	3 Days by SEBA	17	Assamese
20	57	√	-	-	7 days by SSA	25	Assamese
21	51	√	-	-	3 Days Dibrugarh. University.	23	Assamese
22	46	√	-	-	NIL	26	Assamese
23	44	√	-	-	NIL	09	BODO
24	30	√	-	-	3 days by SEBA	15	BODO
25	54	√	-	-	7 days by SSA, & days by SEBA	28	Assamese

**N.B.** 1.*S.S.A.*(Sarva Shiksha Abhijan) 2.*SEBA* (Board of Secondary Education, Assam) 3.*ELTI* (English Language Training Institute, Assam) 4.*NCERT* (National Council of Education Research and Training) 5. *DIET* (District Institute of Education and Training) 6. *G.U.* ( Gauhati University)

Out of the twenty-five teachers who responded to the questionnaire, only 7 (28%) possessed teacher training degrees (B. Ed.), 20 (80%) teachers had Bachelors Degree and only 5 (20%) teachers had Masters Degree. 18 (72%) teachers have received short-term training in teaching English and 7 (28%) were teaching without any English teaching training. They have not received any short-term in-service training. Assamese is the mother tongue of 20 (80%) teachers.

Regarding teaching experience,

**Table 4**

<i>2-5 years</i>	<i>5-10 years</i>	<i>10-15 years</i>	<i>15-20 years</i>	<i>more than 20 years</i>
5 teachers	5 teachers	3 teachers	3 teachers	9 teachers
20%	20%	12%	12%	36%

5 (20%) of the teachers had 2-5 years of teaching experience, 11 (44%) of the teachers had experience ranging from 5 to 20 years, and 9 (36%) had more than 20 years of teaching experience. Despite having long years of teaching experience, the performance of the teachers have not resulted in better student performance.

## **6.2 Role of School – General Observations**

### **6.2.1 Class time**

The school authorities did not allot more time to the study of English. English is taught like other subjects for 40/45 minutes duration of five/six days a week in almost all secondary level Assamese medium schools.

### **6.2.2 Class Tutorials**

The provincialised secondary level Assamese medium schools of Assam rarely organized tutorials or after-school study sessions.

**6.2.3 Classes split into sections:** Even schools which have sufficient infrastructure do not split the class into smaller sections.

**6.2.4 Lesson Plan and Teaching aids:** Teachers working in these schools do not prepare Lesson Plans and teaching aids for English classes. The teaching aids are essential for better teaching-learning. The Lesson Plans are essential for the mastery of language skills. The school authorities do not take any encouraging step or organize training programmes to prepare teaching aids and Lesson Plans at low cost.

### **6.2.5 No computer training to English teachers**

Schools which possess computers do not make it available to the teachers of English. They are prevented from using it.

Use of CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) is conspicuous by its absence. Teachers need to get trained in the use of computers.

### **6.2.6 Evaluation Technique**

The ways students are evaluated are far from being satisfactory. There are only two–examinations, Half Yearly and Annual. Basically the performance in the Annual examination determines the students' promotion to the next higher class. Written examinations are held. Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) is not followed in these schools. Moreover, there is no evaluation to test the spoken skill of students. The practice of giving the mark sheet is followed only in a few schools.



### 6.3 Role of the State Government

The Heads of the schools under survey were interviewed to identify the infrastructural facilities available in the school, library facilities, how classes were managed in the absence of the English teacher, availability of teaching aids, Teaching Learning Materials like Over Head Projector (OHP), Liquid Crystal Display (LCD), Tape recorder etc.

1. It was found that out of 11 schools, 9 schools were run with only one English teacher, for the classes at the secondary level. When the English teacher was absent for various reasons, English classes were not held. In some schools, the Headmaster/Principal took the classes at this time, if he or she was free from administrative work. Very often the Heads of the Institutions did not have any English teaching training.
2. In all the 11 schools there is no Liquid Crystal Display (LCD), Over Head Projector (OHP), Tape recorder or Radio for students. However, a TV with satellite connectivity supplied by the state government could be found running in 05 schools and in another 06 rural schools these could not be put to use for want of electricity connection.
3. 05 schools, which offered Higher Secondary courses, had Computer sets and a teacher. But the use of these computers was restricted to students taking computer courses at the Higher Secondary level. Other students and teachers were not allowed to use these.
4. Regarding infrastructural facilities, 09 of the school buildings were not well furnished and in 04 the partition walls were made of bamboo, and so the voice of the teacher and students could be heard in the next room.
5. The Library in the Higher Secondary Schools had only a few books which were not suitable to the cognitive level of the students. There was no practice of issuing books to students. There were no Reference books to help the teacher to prepare any additional materials for their classes based on recent developments in language teaching methodology. For example, dictionaries were not made available. The only material that was available in the schools was the Anglo Assamese Dictionary but these were kept on the Headmaster's/Principal's table.
6. The class size is too large for the teacher to do anything worthwhile. In 04 schools classes were divided into two sections while in the others each class consisted of students in between 65-82 in a single room, seating at least six to seven students against each desk-bench. This overcrowding of classroom made teaching-learning totally unproductive since the teachers could not extend any individual attention to all the students.

## Suggestions

1. A six month pre-service training should be made compulsory. The training period should be considered as probationary period. End term examination should be conducted to assess the trainees' level of attainment at the end of the training programme. The training should include micro and macro teaching, CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) basics, Lesson Planning, Methods of Teaching, Discussion, Group/Pair activity, Basics of Phonetics, Question paper-setting, Use of Audio-visual aids, Preparation of Teaching aids and Evaluation techniques.
2. In-service training after five years should be made compulsory. This training should be made a criterion for promotion and annual increment.
3. The English textbooks prescribed by SCERT should have a teacher's handbook and a workbook, the former containing guidelines for the teachers and the latter containing exercises in primary, secondary and advanced skills for the students. The textbooks should help develop language skills and practical application of English in day to day activities.
4. Grants should be allotted to schools for the purchase and use of Audio Visual aids in English classes.
5. School library should be provided with English language learning materials like books, magazines, audio cassettes, CDs on singing, grammar, Phonetics, Word drill etc. Teachers Resource books, Guides, Dictionary, Pronouncing dictionaries should be made available to all English teachers.
6. Schools situated in rural areas not yet provided with electricity connection should be given electricity connection early so that these schools are not left out from the use of modern technology in language learning.
7. A secondary level class which has more than forty students in should be split into two sections to provide better practice in language learning.
8. The lessons in English should be prepared with the quality of internal consistency and logical development and should leave possibilities of interlinking themselves with the preceding as well as succeeding lessons. Students must have the feeling that there is definite joy and gain in each lesson.
9. Summer classes should be organized which should help students who have little opportunity to use English or learn it at home.

10. At present, the only assessment that matters is the year end examination administered by the district Boards or SEBA and students study for it cramming answers to likely questions. Assessment should be made a continuous process with Unit tests, Assignments and oral examination.
11. Since the exposure to English for the students is restricted to their practice within the classroom, special classes for spoken English may be arranged after school.

---

---

### References

1. Aslam, Mohammad. *Teaching of English - A Practical Course for B.Ed. Students*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press , 2008.
2. Chandy, Varghese. *The Teaching of English in School*. Mavelikara: The Loyal Press, 1973.
3. Huda, Nurul. *The English Language in India . Teaching English to Indian Pupils*. New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 2007.
4. Lucantoni, Peter. Introduction. *Teaching and Assessing Skills in English as Second Language*. UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
5. Rahman, Ataur. *Factors Affecting Achievement in English of the Tribal Students of Assamese Medium Secondary Schools of Assam*. Minor Research Project of University Grants Commission. 2009.
6. Sharma, Ram Kumar. *Problems and Solutions of Teaching English*. New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 2008.
7. Unissa, Syeda Syadath *An Investigation into factors leading to Low Achievement in English at the Secondary Level*. Dissertation: Central Institute of English and Foreign Language, Hyderabad, 1995.
8. Verghese, C. Paul. *Problems of Second Language Learners. Teaching English as a second Language*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited.

Ataur Rahman, M.A., B.Ed., P.G.C.T.E., P.G.D.T.E., Ph.D. Candidate  
Assistant Professor (Senior Grade) in English  
Dhemaji Commerce College  
Dhemaji  
Assam  
[rahmanataur00@ymail.com](mailto:rahmanataur00@ymail.com)