

## **ELT SCENARIO AMONG THE UNDERGRADUATES IN NAGALAND: AN OVERVIEW**

*T. ImsunaroAo, Department of Science & Humanities, National Institute of Technology,  
Chumukedima- 797103 Nagaland*

*Prof. Rosaline Jamir, Professor & Visiting Faculty (English), Department of Science & Humanities,  
National Institute of Technology, Chumukedima- 797103 Nagaland*

**Abstract:** *English Language teaching (ELT) scenario has undergone a radical change across the country. This changing scenario has also created an impact in Nagaland which is one of the North-Eastern states of India. The main focus of this paper is to study the ELT situation among undergraduates in Nagaland. The need for such a study is felt because the present system of the teaching-learning process has failed to empower learners.*

*From close quarters, it is observed that an English literature teacher also needs to be equipped and updated with specific language skills and knowledge. The assessment was done via Google forms. Questionnaires were sent to all the English teachers (i.e.76) spread across thirteen (13) government colleges in Nagaland, seventy-one teachers responded. The study suggests that teachers felt the need to give equal importance to English language teaching as to any other discipline. Moreover, teachers also felt that they should undergo short-term ELT courses to be more effective and hence resourceful.*

**Keywords:** *ELT in Nagaland, teaching-learning process, language departments, effective and resourceful.*

### **Introduction**

Nagaland is characterised as a multi-cultural and multi-lingual landscape where many tribes co-exist. The state is inhabited by 14 tribes such as Angami, Ao, Sumi, Lotha, Rengma, Chakhesang, Khiamnuingan, Chang, Konyak, Phom, Sangtam, Yimjunger, Pochury, Zeliang and numerous sub-tribes (State Human Development Report: 2016). All these tribes have a shared uniqueness in their culture, tradition, language, attires and lifestyle as a whole. What is noteworthy and even more remarkable is that even within a particular tribe, dialectal variation is present. This poses immense problems and confusion leading to communication barriers even within the tribes. No Naga language could be considered as dominant and a link language among the different tribes of Nagaland. In such a situation, the English language is considered to be the state language.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1963, the then President Dr S. Radhakrishnan officially inaugurated Nagaland as the 16<sup>th</sup> state of the Indian Union and subsequently in 1967, the Nagaland Assembly proclaimed English as the official language. From then on English did not only become the link language among the Nagas but it was highly valued and a lot of prestige was attached to the language. The high status of English has been reaffirmed even in the 12<sup>th</sup> 5-year plan which has placed the teaching of English on par with Science and Math (Planning Commission, 2013).

Higher education began in 1959, when Fazl Ali College was established in Mokokchung, Nagaland. There are fifteen government colleges, out of which two are professional colleges and 45 private colleges with a total enrolment of 30523 and all of them are affiliated with Nagaland University (Nagaland Statistical Handbook:224). The recent trend shows many graduates in Nagaland end up being

unemployable. As Harvey stated employability is not just about getting a job, it is about developing attributes, techniques or experience for life (Harvey 2005:13). The situation is very daunting because it means even if there are jobs, such graduates cannot be hired, after all, they are not skilled enough and lacks the personality that the job demands. The prevailing education system in Nagaland does not fully equip the students with the necessary skills and expertise especially language skills. Therefore, the majority of the students coming from rural backgrounds simply graduate, without acquiring any of the language skills thereby rendering themselves unemployable. The researcher being a Naga and an English teacher has observed this problem at close quarters and hence has undertaken this study. It is a vexed and very deep-rooted problem that urgently needs attention. The present study will be on the English language situation in Nagaland and the focus will be on English teachers of government colleges in Nagaland.

### **Why government colleges?**

Some of the reasons are stated below:-

1. In government colleges, admissions are done on merit basis, but it is not too stringent as compared to private colleges. It is observed that admissions are open to all categories of students, be it meritorious or average. Hence the research is on government colleges/teachers because it proves to be of wider scope.
2. Of late, the government colleges have been given a facelift by the sincere competency of its teachers, the reason being ascribed to connectivity, infrastructural development etc.

### **ELT scenario in Nagaland**

With an impressive literacy rate of 79.55%, Nagaland stands at 15<sup>th</sup> place in India. As per census 2011, the literacy rate among the male population is 82.75% while 76.11% of the female population is literate. Although Nagaland has achieved a high literacy rate, yet there are still gaps and a myriad of problems that need to be addressed. The present system of education has failed to empower learners. Moreover, the entire education system should be changed and revolutionized from the grassroots level to the higher education level.

The core problem lies in the fact that English is taught as a subject and not as a language (Nagaland Post: 2018). English literature is the core subject taught at the undergraduate level. Students who opt-out for English honours are taught literature with little or no emphasis on language skills.

Taking into consideration only Arts and Science in Nagaland, a study of the syllabus will show that English is taught as a compulsory subject for the Arts students whereas for the Science students, English is not given prime importance and the students themselves take the subject lightly. Functional English teaches communicative skills but it is taught only in two government colleges in Nagaland thus far. The subject is practical, takes in very few students. It is again compounded by the Naga society being a rich plurilingual society and it is because of this reason that it becomes imperative for the students to learn the English language well. The students bring all these diverse multilingual complexities into the classroom. Moreover, both the students and teachers come from the multi-lingual background. Hence, mother tongue interference is another problem that needs immediate attention. Other than English, Nagamese, a Creole language is widely spoken. This study is also like groundwork to prepare the teachers to meet the needs of students in the teaching and learning of the English language. In line with what Sharma has pointed out, it is true that English language teaching today has grown into a big industry and profession (Sharma:2014)

### **Aims and Objectives of teaching English**

It is of paramount importance to look at the aims and objectives of teaching English. According to Thompson and Wyatt (1952), the four specific aims of teaching in English are:-

- (1) To understand spoken English
- (2) To speak in English
- (3) To understand written English

#### (4) To write in English

These four basic aims are still the core principles of teaching and learning English. Though it is very basic, yet there are still gaps among the undergraduates in Nagaland in the realisation of these goals. This paper will also skim through the aims and objectives stated above.

Teachers themselves should possess a fair knowledge of the phonemic sounds, accent and intonation. It should be kept in mind that teachers in Nagaland too come from a multilingual background and are influenced by their mother tongue. A teacher commented thus- “when teachers themselves are affected by mother-tongue interference, students cannot be expected otherwise. This concept is sadly overlooked for many teachers strongly opine that as long as we understand each other pronunciation, grammar should not be given much importance. Proper learning of the language must begin at the grassroots level. Teachers must positively inspire and motivate the learners to be active and dynamic learners”.

Teachers should not expect students to talk fluently by simply listening and taking down notes. Too many students have graduated without being able to use English confidently. “Nagaland Governor P.B Acharya while commenting on the state of education in the state and country stressed that graduates were not employable and degrees like B.A, B.Sc. and B.Com. have become redundant and thus there is a need for skill development” (Nagaland Page:2018). Applying this thought to language skills, we can infer that competence at all levels viz communicative; grammatical is important to help the students become autonomous learners. Students confront innumerable problems which are both physical as well as psychological in nature. Physical problems like poor articulation, wrong pronunciation, lack of confidence, poor voice quality and psychological problems like low self-image, lack of motivation and lack of self-confidence or simply lack interest. Therefore, teachers should plan out their lessons well keeping all these problems in mind. Some students with such problems end up memorising without understanding and some merely give up and end up being mediocre students. Writing skills are significantly tied up with communication skills. The present study shows that both communicative skills and writing skills are found to be rather moderate among the students. Teachers can also identify students strong in writing and help them develop and refine their writing skills. This may also go a long way to lay a foundation for a future career in writing.

This is a call to replace the conventional method of teaching with a student-centred one in Nagaland. It is of emergent need to change the model of teaching and learning.

#### **The rationale of the study**

The Researcher is a teacher herself and has observed at close quarters, why undergraduate students are unable to use English communicatively and confidently even after learning to speak and write in English for more than ten years. The question I am teaching English, Are the students learning it well? led the researcher to conduct a thorough study on this problem.

#### **Such a study is necessary because of the following reasons discussed here:**

In Nagaland, English was given the status of an official language way back in 1967. It is now more than half a century that English has been given such a significant status in society. English has also been the medium of instruction since the establishment of the first college- Fazl Ali College, Mokokchung. A recent survey titled “Survey on School-based Statistics in Nagaland” conducted by SCERT (State Council of Educational Research and Training) has shown that majority of the government schools based in the state prefers English as the most comfortable language (Sentinel e-paper 2021) . English is taught from the pre-primary level but the level of spoken as well as writing skills among the undergraduates leave much to be desired. Despite years of learning, students fail to communicate fluently in English. Moreover, when the students are taught English from the pre-primary level, how can the problem lie only at the undergraduate level?

## Methodology

The main thrust of the study is fieldwork and the collection of data. The present study adopts the descriptive and quantitative methods in research. This research is carried out during the covid pandemic. Hence, challenges in undergoing educational research are many and varied. It was a daunting task but technology came to help in a big way. Questionnaires were carefully drafted and send via google form to 76 teachers spread through all the 13 (thirteen) government colleges in Nagaland.

## Data analysis and discussion

The implementation and assessment through google form during the covid pandemic brought in some novelty to the research work. It was also found to be effective and the assessment process was simplified and made more lucid. On the flipside, sit-in interviews and discussions bring a lot of emotions and nuances to the table. This subtle difference at times reveals more than the actual responses which add value and weightage to the overall interview. However, the teachers' responses were very forthcoming. Out of 76 teachers, 71 of them responded.

The researcher's report focuses on responses received from the teachers of 13 government colleges across the state of Nagaland: (1) Fazl Ali College, Mokokchung (2) Kohima Science college, Jotsoma (3) Kohima Arts college, Kohima (4) Dimapur Government College (5) Mount Tiyi college, Wokha (6) Sao Chang Government College, Tuensang (7) Zunheboto Government college (8) Zisaji Presidency college, Kiphire (9) Peren Government college (10) Wangkhao Government College, Mon (11) Pfutsero Government College (12) Phek Government College (13) Yingli Government College, Longleng.

The data obtained from the questionnaire are analysed using both quantitative and descriptive methods.

To what extent do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

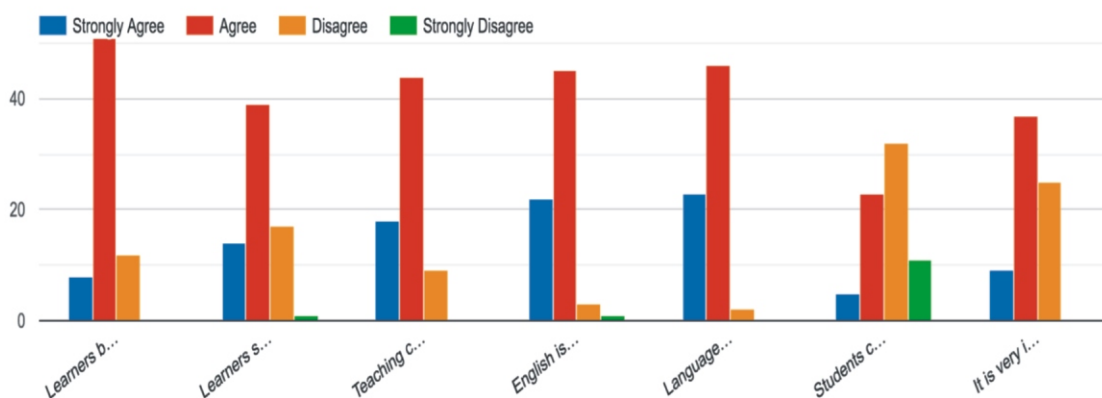


Figure 1- Assessment of teachers. The responses received from the following questions

- Learners bring their attitude, motivations, expectations, learning strategies influence the way they learn.
- Learners simply prefer to sit and take down notes.
- Teaching communication skills is a neglected area of classroom teaching.
- English is the only language used in the classroom.
- Language is meaningful communication and is learned by practice in informal situations.

(f) Students can acquire English without being taught grammar;

(g) It is very important to keep a check on whether students use English outside the classroom.

The results indicate the need to bridge the gap between teaching and student performance. While the result shows that 67% (taking both agree & strongly agree) of the teachers agree that only English is used as the medium of instruction in the classroom, 62% (both agree & strongly agree) agree that teaching communication skills is a neglected area of classroom teaching. This is contradictory and calls for a thorough evaluation of the techniques of language teaching. The gap between language taught in class and language use does not correspond to each other.

The result also indicates that learners simply prefer to sit and listen to lectures. The teacher is required to choose teaching methodologies so that the classroom space is invigorated and re-activated. Learning happens when there is interaction, discussion and the very teaching process is student-centred.

How often do you observe/introspect the following as your class progresses? The tasks/lessons taught -

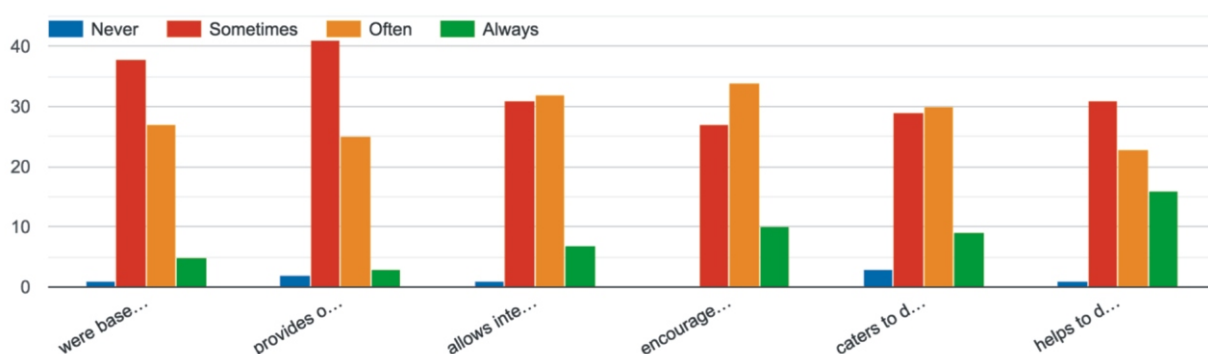


Figure 2-

The following queries are structured along the following lines:-

The task/lessons taught

(a) were based on real-world needs

(b) provides an opportunity for skill practice

(c) allows interaction among students

(d) encourage learners to reflect critically

(e) caters to the different levels of learners

(f) helps to develop a curious mind and prompts to ask questions

It has been observed that the lessons taught at times have no bearings on the real-world scenario, so the students cannot connect their learning to real-world needs. More often than not, what they learn is just meant for exam purposes. The figure above clearly shows that the majority of them make sure that the lessons taught are always connected to real-world needs, which is encouraging. While we cannot encompass into the classes all the features of the real world, it is very important to ensure that we include in our curriculum as many as we can.

The present education system is skill-oriented. Skill-based learning gives priority to the competency and proficiency level and does not emphasize grades alone. In such a learning environment, students can excel and become achievers in their chosen field.

One of the problems in the ELT scenario of Nagaland is also the English syllabus. There is very little emphasis on language skills. The syllabus is heavily inclined towards literature where students



receive no training in communicative and language skills.

There are many problems and challenges in ELT at the undergraduate level in Nagaland. In the descriptive and open-ended part of the questionnaire, some of the problems that need immediate attention are identified and suggestions of improvement are brought forth by the English teachers teaching in the government colleges in Nagaland:-

- Phonetics should be taught at a tender age.
- Regular interactive sessions will help the students to enhance their communicative skills.
- The teaching-learning process should be student-centred and not teacher-centred
- Students seldom interact when the group is big, so dividing them into smaller groups will help the students to open up and interact. The problem is that teachers are always on the run to complete the syllabus and such activities are time-consuming.
- Some students perform better in such assessments like projects, assignments, task-based activities than written exams, such changes allow them to enhance their learning abilities.
- Stop giving ready-made notes.
- The grossly unbalanced student-teacher ratio and the current semester system with an unsuitable syllabus gets in the way.

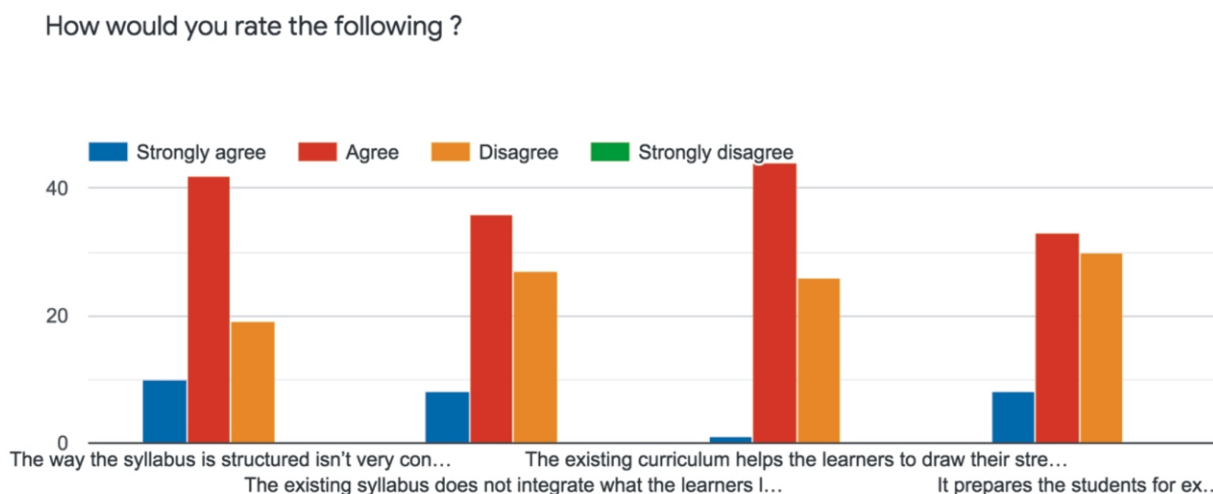


Figure 3

The above figure shows that the syllabus is not conducive to language learning in general. Now the question Are they acquiring the language skills?

The course in a way enables the students to enhance their reading and listening skills and may also inform the student about the rich culture of the English society which is more theory-based. Teaching them to understand such literature is one thing but equipping their minds for communicative and practical purposes is another. Therefore, what is required is not simply teaching, but training the students to enhance their communicative and other important skills in life.

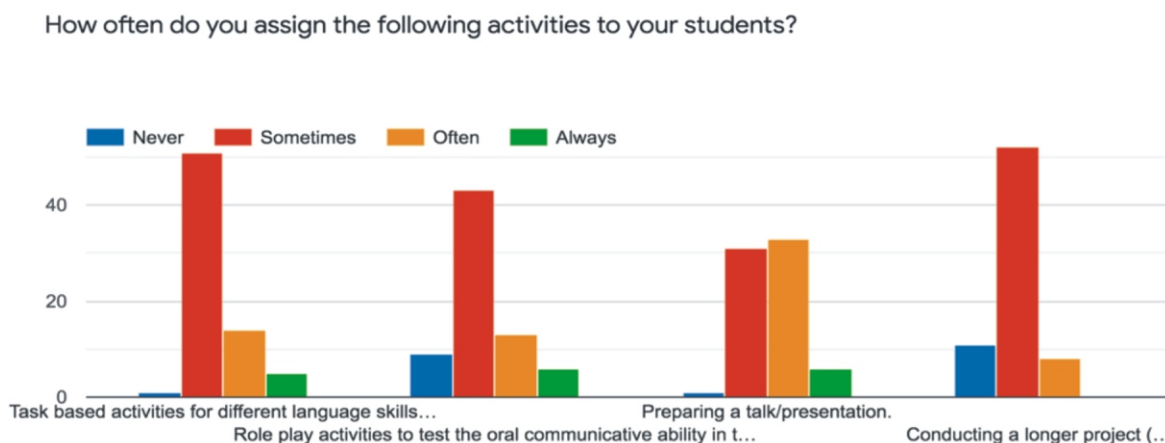


Figure 4

As teachers have expressed, the main objective is to complete the bulky course. In a rush to complete the syllabus, teachers find very little or no time to train the students to develop their learning abilities. The figure above confirms that task-based activities, role-play activities which are communicative language teaching is not much used in the classroom. The classroom space is also not congenial to adopt such teaching approaches. Moreover, the student-teacher ratio is also grossly unbalanced.

### Conclusion

The challenges and problems of teachers are immense and may look unsurmountable. However, teaching is a special skill and continues to evolve. To improve the ELT scenario in Nagaland, English teachers need to re-orient their teaching skills to be relevant to the 21st-century teaching-learning process. Teachers should realise that while it is important to teach literature, it is equally crucial to teach language skills. To date, there has been only little effort given to training the students in communication skills and soft skills. Kannan & Srivathsan rightly pointed out that future is uncertain, but education should lead to general enrichment during our lifetime. (Kannan & Srivathsan 2008). As discussed above, the English language teaching scenario needs to be addressed from the grassroots i.e. from school level teaching. The study strongly suggests that teachers should assess their own teaching, confront their age-old beliefs and actively work to bring about innovative changes to develop ELT scenario in Nagaland at the undergraduate level.

### Work Cited

1. Harvey, L. (2005) Embedding and Interpreting Employability. *New directions for Institutional Research*, 2005 (128), 13-28.
2. Human Development Report Nagaland State 2016. Government of Nagaland, Department of Planning and Coordination, Nagaland- Kohima.
3. Kichu, Arenka. "English as a Language but not as a subject." Nagaland Post online edition, 11 October 2019.
4. Samson, J.F & Collins B.A. Preparing all teachers to meet the needs of English Language Learners: Applying research to Policy and Practice for Teacher Effectiveness. *Center for American Progress*. April 2012
5. Kannan K & Srivathsan K.R. Quality Education through Education Grid- The Nagaland Initiative. Guest article for the forthcoming issue of *Development- North-East (DNE)* 10 August 2008.
6. Nagaland Statistical Handbook 2020, Published by Directorate of Economics and Statistics,

Government of Nagaland.

7. Planning Commission, Govt. of India (2013). Twelfth five-year plan (2012-2017) Vol.3 New Delhi: Sage.
8. Primary Education should be in mother tongue: Guv. Nagaland Page 3 April 2018
9. Sharma, Dharendra, Prasad. An Overview on ELT Scenario in Surkhet. *Journal of NELTA Surkhet* Vol.4, December 2014, pp 41-47
10. Survey on School based Statistics in Nagaland, The Sentinel 7 October 2021.
11. Thompson & Wyatt. (1952) Teaching of English in India. Vol 8. Madras, Oxford University Press.