

Vernacular Medium Schools in Assam (India) and Teachings of English at Secondary Level with Special Focus on Bodo Medium Schools

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Abstract: Assam is one of the 29 states of India, the literacy rate of which is 73.18 as per 2011 census report. Assam is one of the eight states of North Eastern part of India which has Multi Lingual and Multi cultural population. The education pattern here has many choices: Private School English Medium, Central School, State Govt. School with Assamese Medium, Bodo Medium, etc. The concept of Regional Language Medium of Education is to teach their children with their own language, culture and tradition so as to preserve and enrich their own Language, Literature and tradition. Such concept is quite inspiring in today's trend of endangering smaller Languages. However, a big shortcoming is being noticed in terms of English Language Teachings in such schools. In today's globalized competitive market the standard of English is expected to be very high. So, this paper would try to elaborate the problems and its remedial measures to enhance the standard of English Teachings required for Vernacular Medium Schools in Assam with special focus on Secondary Level in Bodo Medium Schools. Key words: Vernacular Medium, Education, English, Language, Secondary Level, Bodo Medium.

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1. Introduction

Assam is one of the 29 states of India inhabiting different communities from various language families especially Indo-Aryan, Tibeto Burman. In vernacular schools of Assam the mother tongues are the medium of Education L1 and English is the L2 and a student can learn any one language amongst other scheduled languages. So, Three Language Formula is seen in the state education policy. Presently English is a part of the curricula right from the primary classes. Despite this, most of the students from vernacular medium students are not seen being comfortable with this Language. The concept of Mother tongue education is quite inspiring so as to preserve the Language, Literature, Tradition of a community in a situation whereby languages are endangered. But modern parents are very much conscious about their children's future career and they consider English medium as more secure option in terms of career building. So presently, there is a perception in people's mind that students studying in English medium schools are more shrewd, and do have a brighter future.

Assam is a state where the Official Language is Assamese, an Indo-Aryan Language. Apart from it Bengali, Hindi, Nepali and others are also here. But there are many indigenous Tibeto Burman Languages such as Bodo, Garo, Dimas, Rabha which are not even close to Assamese language in terms of understanding it. So, many students from such communities had to pursue their education in Assamese in many places. But a mass language movement took place in Assam by the Bodo communities to establish their language and accordingly Bodo Medium Education started in Assam from 1963 which has been able to serve in preserving and enriching the language and literature and culture of the community. The language is taught up to university now and it has been recognized as one of the scheduled languages in India Constitution. However, maximum students face a

massive challenge in learning quality English from such schools. And to improve the teaching and learning of English necessary steps are being carried out.

Board:

The Board of Secondary Education (SEBA), Assam is the state board of the Secondary Schools of Assam which conducts the High School Leaving Certificate Examination of class X and its prescribed curriculum and materials of English are followed in Secondary school which are prepared by State Council of Education Research and Training (SCERT). It also conducts English Teacher's Training and various Orientation Programmes in collaboration with English Language Teaching Institutes, Assam.

Vernacular Schools of Assam:

Besides Assamese medium schools, there are Bodo, Bengali, Hindi and recently introduced Karbi Medium schools in Assam.

Most of the Vernacular medium schools especially elementary schools were Government undertaken but ME and High schools (many of them) were not Government undertaken. As per as Bodo medium schools are concerned the community contributed quite a lot to teach poor people in rural areas by setting up ME and High Schools affiliated under SEBA. So these efforts at that level have been able to educate many poor young children through their mother tongue. Moreover it has been quite successful in preserving and enriching the language and literature.

Adumu Assefa studied students' attitude towards mother tongue instruction as correlates of academic achievement in her online thesis quotes: Assebe, 1981 who points out that unfavorable attitude towards their mother tongue or

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preference to some language over mother tongue could develop due to unawareness and prejudices. Adumu also quotes Chumbow, 1990, UNESCO listed out the importance of mother tongue instruction in education by providing more scientific arguments: (Pathan and Shiakh 2012).

1. Mother tongue has psychological value to the child, that is it serves very important role in shaping child's early perception because language and thought are highly correlated, No one can think without using language in its any form.
2. Mother tongue has socio-cultural significance.
3. The early school use of mother tongue in the child's life will enhance cognitive development.

English in Vernacular schools of Assam:

It is seen and believed that Assamese Medium schools in Assam is poor in English language attainment level and so is in Bodo medium and other vernacular medium schools in Assam. Very few students can succeed in learning it with their own effort and proper guidance by their parents at home. Many students from such schools do not perform well in HSLC examinations. It is seen that many good students in such schools also fail to communicate well in English. So, though they have talent their inefficiency in English leads to poor performance in interviews and many serious meetings and discussions and other conversations. Earlier parents have no options to send their children to Good English medium schools due to Economic condition, communication and lack of many schools. But now conscious parents never compromise their children to send in English Medium schools and some Central Schools. So, the unloving attitude of modern parents towards Vernacular Medium schools is all because of not having quality English teachings and learning, which is the apparent outcome of today. The measures to sustain the mother tongue education in Assam have been initiated in several ways. There used to be good Secondary Government schools that could produce very meritorious students earlier. But the English Medium private schools excel far ahead than those schools. So, the group of community intellectuals started standardizing the Mother Tongue Education by opening Private schools in the line of English Medium Private Schools. These schools have performed much better compared to previous models of Bodo medium schools. But here too maximum schools fail to deliver quality English teachings.

Objectives:

The main objectives of the paper are:

- (i) To examine the level of capacity of students from vernacular medium to use English language at secondary schools before they are promoted to higher classes which need a very strong hold in English.
- (ii) To evaluate the methods and efficiency of English teachers of Secondary schools of Bodo medium Schools.
- (iii) Examining the role of Government in facilitating the policies and facilities.

- (iv) Examining the seriousness and measures adopted by the management to impart quality English teaching and learning in such schools.
- (v) To evaluate the future of Mother tongue education in Assam.

Methodology:

- (i) Field survey
- (ii) Interview with the students, teachers, head of the institutes and officers of Education departments.
- (iii) Observation of the performances of the students in classrooms
- (iv) Syllabus and class room activities

Parameters used:

- (i) A self prepared questionnaire for students
- (ii) Interview with the teachers
- (iii) Interview with the heads of the institutions and officers

Findings and Recommendations:

It is observed that in the vernacular medium schools of Assam there is a lot to improve in the teaching methods and the seriousness of students towards English have to be changed a lot.

Methods of teachings:

- (i) Translation method with literature and Grammar:

The methods of teachings used 20 years back from now has not changed much. The translation method of Poem and stories are still being used. The emphasis is given much on grammar and the target is to get the students passed in the examinations and secondary schools is much crucial since HSLC examination is the gateway of higher education.

- (ii) Focus is to complete the syllabus and to pass the examination
- (iii) English speaking environment is not seen.
- (iv) Tutorials and extra activities are not initiated.
- (v) The methods being instructed in the trainings are not applied properly. (Teachers fail to do so)
- (vi) Audio visual facilities are not seen anywhere I visited.
- (vii) Not defining the cultural differences while teaching English.

Responses of the students towards English:

While interviewing the teachers an alarming response came from one teacher that English seems to be not important language for them since their forefathers have also lived very comfortably without learning English. And it is like Alien's language for them. But while discussing with the students in the class room about 200 students whom I met have responded a very strong enthusiasm to learn English. They feel the need of English

communication at least in English Class from their teachers which is not seen anywhere. Many of the class IX and X students still struggle to read the texts clearly. So, following factors have been noticed while discussing with the students:

- (i) A strong curiosity is seen but an English environment to learn it correctly is not provided.
- (ii) Loud reading practice is not done much by many students. So clarity in reading is not seen.
- (iii) A proper direction to learn English for functional use is not seen.
- (iv) Pronunciation is a big challenge for them. Proper listening and pronunciation practices should be done.

Quality of Management and teachers to improve the English teaching environment:

Management of many of the schools is lacking in dealing with such problem. They have fully handed over it to the class teachers. Focus is much on scoring good marks in examinations. They have an easy option to blame the lower classes of the students where they were taught English in Primary and ME schools. Instead of that there is a need of team work with more practical approaches to improve the quality of English teachings in schools. The importance of English in market has to be understood and accepted widely in present times.

Role of Private Vernacular Medium Schools:

In terms of classes, punctuality, discipline and result the Private Vernacular medium schools in Assam are doing much better results than Govt. Vernacular schools. However, the focus on quality English teachings has delivered same results of poor performance in Speaking and writing in Secondary Schools.

Future of Vernacular Medium schools including Bodo:

Presently future of Vernacular Medium schools in Assam cannot be called as a very bright one. People are inclined towards English medium schools, Kendriya Vidyalaya and other model schools. However, the new education policy 2020 of India has emphasized the mother tongue education with special importance along with other languages. It is observed that there are several privately run Bodo medium schools who have good infrastructure, strict classroom activities and sufficient teaching staff and other facilities. Compared to the Govt. schools these schools have better enrolments and better academic performances. So, it is expected that the private Bodo medium school with such standard will survive in long run.

2. Conclusion

In present times there is always a debate in India that the students of Vernacular medium schools are poor in English. So, the students of such schooling background face difficulties in higher education, job interviews and perform poorly in communication skills in professional domains. So, this study was made with an objective to

find out some of the root causes of the issues of poor performances of English in vernacular medium schools of Assam. So, the main issues lie in the inadequate teaching methods, inexperienced teachers, translation methods, no proper speaking, listening and reading practices. Since these practices are not properly done in the vernacular schools of Assam the quality of English is seen not up to the mark. However, some students who have strong intention to learn English and who have proper guidance at home and who have received proper exposure in higher education have good command over English and their expertise of English and Mother Tongue becomes a great help in many occasions. Finally, it is expected that New Education Policy of India (2020) will bring quite improvement in all these respects and the vernacular medium schools will also shine by overcoming all kinds of challenges in long run.

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