

**English Language Teaching (ELT) at the Undergraduate Level in Assam:****A Study of Learners' Needs and Educational Policy****Mohd. Mahib ur Rahman, Ph.D.****ABSTRACT****Rationale for the Study**

The rationale for the study is primarily based on certain fundamental considerations of the socio-economic characteristics of the target group. Most of the time, it happens that language teaching done in colleges seems to be losing significance simply for the reasons beyond the control of the variables that are local to the target area of language teaching: teacher, learner, curriculum and resources. The teaching is simply not effective since the wants, needs and lacks go unnoticed or underrepresented. Rather language teaching is meant to be one-size-fits-all approach and it is actually distanced from the socio-cultural and contextual realities in which it takes place. Hence teaching done in colleges does not provide enough opportunities for learners' needs. Even when teacher puts in a serious effort for good teaching for a purposeful end, it is sometimes good but not effective. Hardly any studies are available to explore these connections; in fact no such studies are specifically available in the region confirming this connection. As a result of this reflection, language teaching is a highly decontextualized activity. Moreover, it is the teacher who is expected to perform magic and wonders in classroom. As for any serious effort to sensitize teachers, most of the educational institutions have no region-specific or need-based program.

As part of this investigation the study involves analysis of learners' needs. No attempt is made in this study to formulate any theoretical construct. A very simple rationale is used to report the state's educational and ELT policies and a review of theoretical approaches to needs analysis keeping in view survey findings based on learners' needs analysis.

**Problem to be Investigated**

Although significant developments have been made in the field of ELT in Assam, after studying English for 10 long years the undergraduate students fail to acquire functional use of English in

real life situations. The policy, curriculum and the teachers often place much more emphasis on linguistic knowledge such as grammatical accuracy, vocabulary, and syntactic analysis at the expense of communicative skills like listening, speaking, reading and writing. The concern of the study is to explore the needs of the undergraduate students in the select target areas familiar to investigator. The basis for needs analysis stems from the facts and certain indicators reported in the tables. The target areas of the study Nagaon and Morigaon have lower HDI than that of the state average and they also rank 12 and 17 respectively. Going by the literacy rate figures of these two districts: 62.28 % and 59.46% for Nagaon and Morigaon, the district wise performance is not so poor, however the percentage of students failing HSLC examination from 1997-2000 is comparatively higher. The pass percentages for these two districts from the year 1997 to 2000 are 30.34 and 25.36; over the years results have improved, yet they fall below than the state pass percentage figures. The data procured for these neighbouring districts and investigators' native familiarity with Morigaon become the potential ground for problematizing this study.

### **Research Objectives**

1. What is the current status of educational policies in the state of Assam?
2. What is the current status of ELT programme in the state in the light of the language policies in Assam?
3. What are the implications of ESL learners' needs at the undergraduate level?

The sub objectives of learners' needs analysis are as follows:

- 3.1 To identify the needs of the first year ESL Undergraduate Learners on the basis of Gender.
- 3.2 To identify the needs of the ESL Undergraduate Learners on the basis of Faculty-wise distribution; Science, Arts and Commerce.
- 3.3 To identify the needs of the ESL Undergraduate Learners on the basis of family income.
- 3.4 To explore the relationship between attitudes towards English and skill-specific needs.

### **Research Methodology**

Quantitative information was obtained through needs analysis based survey questionnaire administered on 250 first year ESL undergraduates enrolled in 6 colleges of Nagaon and Morigaon districts affiliated to Gauhati University.

**Tools of Investigation**

1. Needs Analysis questionnaire (NAQ) on Socio-Economic Profile.
2. Needs Analysis questionnaire on Motivation to study English.
3. Needs Analysis questionnaire determining Attitudes towards Learning Language.
4. Needs Analysis questionnaire determining Skill-specific Needs.

**Data Interpretation and Analysis**

Information collected through the questionnaires was classified into different categories; Socio-Economic profile, motivation, attitude and language skill-specific needs. Mean and standard deviation were used for data analysis.

For the purposes of analysis, the 12.00, SPSS (a statistical analysis software package) version was used with the results tabulated, cross tabulated and analyzed for statistical correlation between the various responses.

**Learners' Needs Analysis at the Undergraduate level**

Against this background, a review of needs analysis has been attempted in order to conduct learners' needs analysis related to few variables such as skill-specific preferences (LSRW), attitudes, motivation and certain related activities. The rationale for conducting the Learner's needs analysis was to suggest indicators of English Language learning development in the regions that were familiar to the researcher. The following section takes a brief summary of the findings related to learners' needs analysis.

The findings of the research confirmed the hypothesis of the study since there is dearth of baseline data on learner's needs analysis. The data for boys and girls suggest that English plays an important functional role in career building, seeking employment and even in completion of their studies. The data for the most preferred activity under the comprehension skills as well as the most preferred language skill (LSRW) supports the aforementioned view.

**Delimitations of the study**

1. The study is a small scale project undertaken primarily to focus on the undergraduate learners in the few colleges of Assam. This was possible since the investigator's has a native familiarity

with the local surroundings. The various approaches to needs analysis involving triangulation of sources, various methods that specifically relates to wants, lacks and necessities both at the level of the learner and the teacher, as discussed in chapter 2 need further research enquiry.

2. This study is limited to undergraduate learners of the select regions of the central part of Assam; henceforth proper needs analysis is needed to establish the linkages and connectivity from Primary to University level language Education.

### Organization of the Chapters

**Chapter 1:** states the research design of the study keeping in view the rationale and the formulation of the problem.

**Chapter 2:** reviews the theoretical framework of Needs analysis, following a brief discussion on models of needs analysis and various approaches to Needs Analysis. Finally, a brief discussion is attempted on methodology and factors in conducting needs analysis.

**Chapter 3:** This chapter attempts to review a brief history of English education in Assam against the backdrop of colonial rule in English. This is followed by progress of Primary, secondary and higher Education in Post Independence period in the light of national policies on education. Subsequent sections consider the status of women Education in Assam followed by teacher education, teacher training institutes in Assam and medium of Instruction issue.

**Chapter 4:** Chapter 4 traces the growth, status and development of ELT in Assam. Subsequent section deals with the vision and prospects of ELT in the state. Finally, policy and operational issues are examined, each critical to the task of improving the reach and quality of ELT education.

**Chapter 5:** states the research methodology for conducting the field work on ESL learners' needs. This is followed by results and discussion featuring the learners' data and related findings to support the research questions of the study.

**Chapter 6:** presents the conclusions and comments on the limitations of the present study followed by a discussion of implications and recommendations of the study.