Investigating the Methods of Teaching English at Secondary Stage Provincialised Schools in the District of Sivasagar and Charaideo

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Abstract*: The effectiveness of English language teaching (ELT) at the secondary school level is crucial for enhancing students' language proficiency. This study investigates the methods employed by English teachers in provincialised secondary schools across the districts of Sivasagar and Charaideo, Assam. It explores the pedagogical approaches adopted by teachers, their awareness of various ELT methods, and the extent to which these methods are practically implemented in classrooms. Additionally, the study assesses the availability of infrastructure, teaching aids, and technological support that facilitate effective language learning. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, including teacher surveys, classroom observations, and interviews, the study identifies prevailing teaching practices and challenges faced by educators. The findings aim to provide insights into pedagogical gaps, highlight best practices, and suggest strategies for improving English language instruction at the provincialised secondary stage. This research contributes to the broader discourse on ELT methodologies in rural and semi-urban contexts, offering recommendations for policymakers and educators to enhance English teaching standards in Assam.*

Keywords: ELT, ESL, Language Proficiency, Pedagogical Approaches

1. Introduction

English language teaching is a crucial aspect of secondary education in Assam, as it enables students to access higher education and employment opportunities. English language instruction is a fundamental component of secondary education, laying the groundwork for future academic and professional achievement. As English has become a global lingua franca, it impacts various areas of life, including education, business, culture, and communication. Therefore, effective language teaching is vital for promoting global citizenship, economic growth, and cultural exchange. However, teaching English effectively presents numerous challenges and complexities, which require a thorough understanding of factors such as learner characteristics, teaching strategies, and cultural contexts. This study aims to explore and update the different methods employed by English teachers at the secondary level. It has been observed that many secondary school students face difficulties with English proficiency, which impacts their performance in other subjects. Addressing this issue requires the use of effective teaching methods. In the context of the Indian education system, the role of English is both significant and complex, offering opportunities for advancement while highlighting social inequalities, especially among marginalized groups. However, the methods of teaching English in secondary schools in Assam have been criticized for being outdated and ineffective. English was introduced in India in the early 19th century by the British East India Company, with its role formalized by the 1835 education policy, becoming a symbol of modernity and social mobility. Over time, English adapted to local contexts in India, evolving into "Indian English," characterized by unique vocabulary, syntax, and pronunciation reflective of India's diverse linguistic landscape.

Today, English serves as both a second language for many Indians and a lingua franca, crucial in business, education, and technology. However, its dominance has sparked concerns about overshadowing indigenous languages and impacting cultural preservation. English's evolution in India is shaped by colonial history and contemporary identity dynamics, with a dual role: empowering some while contributing to social divisions in cases of ethnic language conflicts.

In Assam, English was introduced during colonial rule and became a medium of education, influencing local literature and cultural identity. The introduction of English was further shaped by Assam's ethnic movements in the 1950s and 1960s, where English was associated with modernity, contrasting with regional languages. Today, English remains vital for academic success in Assam, but it coexists with Assamese, reflecting both historical influences and contemporary challenges. English language education in Assam faces hurdles, particularly in rural areas, but innovations like Text-to-Speech systems are being developed to enhance bilingual learning. While English is key for educational progress, preserving Assamese is essential for maintaining cultural identity and linguistic diversity. Balancing both languages is necessary for fostering global engagement while respecting local heritage.

2. Materials and Methods

A mixed-methods approach was used, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods. A total of 30 English teachers were interviewed to gather qualitative data. 60 students were interviewed throughout the survey. The survey questionnaire and interview schedule were designed to gather data on the methods of teaching English, challenges faced by teachers, and recommendations for improving English language teaching. Classroom observations were made in 15 secondary schools. In short, classroom observations, interviews and questionnaire were used to collect the data. The primary aim of this study is to analyze the approaches and methods used by high school teachers in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). The study focuses on English Language Teaching (ELT) practices in high schools across Charaideo and Sivasagar, Assam, with the following specific objectives:

- To assess English language teachers' knowledge of various approaches and methods used in ESL teaching.
- To examine the practical application of different teaching approaches by English language teachers in high schools of Charaideo and Sivasagar.
- To evaluate the availability of infrastructure and teaching aids that support the implementation of different teaching methods.
- To identify existing teaching practices and challenges faced by educators and suggest possible improvements for more effective ESL instruction.

3. Results

This study aims to investigate the methods of teaching English at secondary schools in Charaideo and Sivasagar districts of Assam. This study focuses on the districts of Charaideo and Sivasagar, located in the northeastern region of India Sivasagar shares borders with the districts of Jorhat, Charaideo, and Dibrugarh, with its geographical coordinates being 94.25° E and between 26.45° N and 27.15° N. Both districts are renowned for their historical monuments dating back to the Ahom era. The population in these districts is predominantly composed of indigenous communities from various tribes and tribal groups. According to the 2011 census, Sivasagar has a population of 679,632, with a population density of 431 people per square kilometre. Assamese is the most widely spoken language, with around 90% of the population using it. Mishing, Hindi, and Bengali are spoken by smaller portions of the population, at 2.78%, 1.96%, and 1.58%, respectively.

Charaideo, situated to the east of Sivasagar, shares borders with the states of Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. Its coordinates are 95.0325° N and 27.056° E.. Charaideo, with a total population of 471,418, shows that 75.64% of people speak Assamese, followed by 4.22% Bengali speakers and 3.20% Odia speakers from the tea tribe community. Hindi is spoken by only 1.92% of the population. This analysis reveals that Assamese is the dominant language in both districts.

Sivasagar and Charaideo, two historically significant districts of Assam, are known for their rich cultural diversity and multilingual communities. Despite the presence of various linguistic groups, Assamese remains the dominant language due to historical, social, and administrative factors. Sivasagar, the erstwhile capital of the Ahom Kingdom, played a crucial role in shaping Assamese culture and language. The Ahoms, who ruled Assam

for over 600 years (1228–1826), adopted Assamese as the lingua franca, integrating it into administration, literature, and daily life. Charaideo, being the first capital of the Ahoms, also shared this linguistic influence. These districts are home to various ethnic communities. Despite this diversity, Assamese serves as the unifying medium of communication as Assamese is the official language of Assam and is used in government offices, education, and media. Schools, colleges, and universities primarily offer instruction in Assamese, ensuring its continued dominance. While Sivasagar and Charaideo host multiple linguistic communities, Assamese continues to be the dominant language due to its deep-rooted historical presence, official status, cultural significance, and widespread use in daily life. It acts as a bridge among diverse ethnic groups, fostering a shared regional identity.
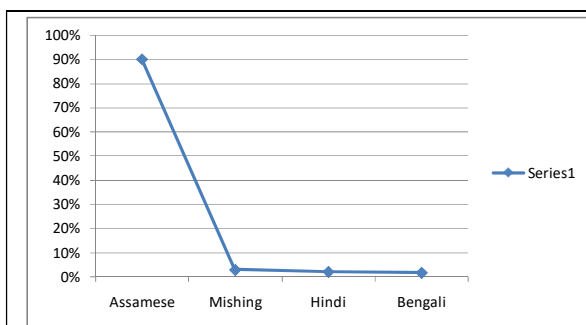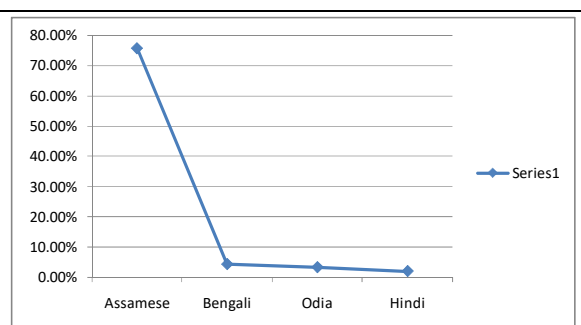
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| Figure 1: Language Profile of Sivasagar District | Figure 2: Language Profile of Charaideo District |

Urban	Rural	Tea Garden	Total
5	5	5	15

Table 1: Schools visited

Table 1 shows the data of total number of schools visited for data collection. These schools belong to different educational blocks and to different clusters.

Male Teacher	Female Teacher	TransgenderTeachers
22	8	0

Table 2

Table 2 shows data regarding gender of teachers interviewed. The numbers of male and female teachers vary because the visited schools do not have equal number male and female teachers. The data is presented in graphical image as follows:
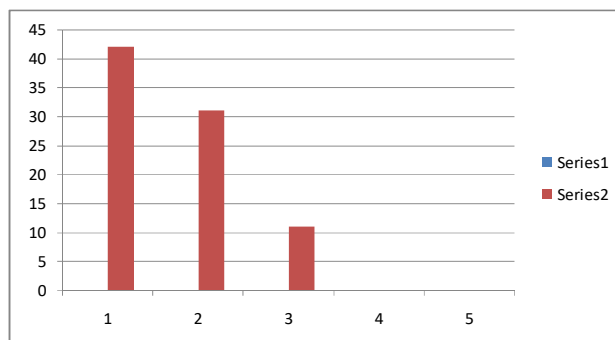

Figure 3: Male and Female Teacher

Figure 3 shows data of total number of teachers interviewed. The numbers relating to male teachers and female teachers are different as some schools lack female teachers. 8 students from each school have been interviewed-4 students from Class IX and 4 from Class X (2 boy students and 2 girl students). The interview with the students was conducted to know their preferences for methods used by their teachers. It was also held to know whether

there is enough space for the students for active participation. During the interview, focus was on the understanding of the students in their classroom.

Classroom observations clearly reflect that majority of the teachers at secondary schools relied on Grammar Translation Method for teaching English, thereby leaving little room for students to develop their speaking skill. A total of 66% teachers are found to have employed Grammar Translation Method-translating the English texts into Assamese and vice versa. Besides, there was significant emphasis on grammar, a fundamental aspect pf Grammar Translation Method. During the interviews it came to light that the teachers carried on this method from their own student lives. It was not kept in mind that the materials and aims and objectives of education policies have changed throughout. As a result, students are found to be not fluent in English and they are not at home during conversation which is out of the context. The findings of the study reveal that traditional lecture methods are predominantly used in teaching English in secondary schools in Charaideo and Sivasagar districts. The use of technology-enhanced teaching methods is limited, with only 0% of teachers using technology in their teaching practices. The study also identifies challenges faced by teachers, including lack of resources, inadequate training, and large class sizes.

This observation highlights several critical issues in the teaching of English at the schools under study. It sheds light on a teacher-centered approach, misconceptions about student-centered learning, challenges in implementing the curriculum, and broader structural issues affecting English language acquisition. The study found that the teacher dominated classroom interactions, with students mainly acting as passive listeners. This indicates a traditional lecture-based teaching method, which contrasts with the modern student-cantered approaches encouraged in contemporary pedagogy. The teacher relied heavily on Assamese for explanations, resulting in minimal English exposure. This limited practice in English could hinder students' ability to develop language proficiency, as language acquisition requires active engagement, immersion, and interaction in the target language.

The observation suggests that the teacher may have misunderstood the concept of student-cantered learning. While the curriculum encourages student engagement and active participation, the teacher reverted to teacher-cantered instruction, possibly due to a lack of confidence in students' ability to learn independently. Effective student-cantered learning requires guided activities, collaborative work, and interactive methods such as discussions, problem-solving tasks, and project-based learning, which were missing in the observed class.

The current curriculum emphasizes 4C skills-Critical thinking, Communication, Collaboration, and Creativity-to help students become independent learners. However, the teaching approach in this classroom did not reflect these principles. The teacher mentioned attempts to follow the scientific method but found that students struggled to grasp the lessons. This suggests that either the method was not appropriately adapted to their level or that the students lacked foundational skills necessary for higher-order thinking. Even though the curriculum had been in place for over five years, some teachers still found it difficult to implement effectively. These conditions point to potential gaps in teacher training, professional development, or institutional support. If teachers are not equipped with adequate strategies to transition from traditional methods to modern student-centered approaches, they may default to familiar teaching practices. The teacher attributed students' difficulties in learning English to several factors:

- Lack of English foundation: Many students entered school with little prior exposure to English, making it challenging for them to follow English-medium instruction.

- Large class sizes: Managing a large group can limit individual attention and hinder interactive learning strategies.

- Low student motivation: If students are not engaged or see no practical value in learning English, they may not actively participate.

- Limited English learning time: If English is allocated only a small portion of instructional time, students may not get sufficient practice to develop proficiency.

The findings suggest that without addressing these challenges—such as teacher training in student-centred methods, increased exposure to English, and improved classroom management strategies—it will be difficult to achieve the desired learning outcomes. A shift towards interactive, participatory teaching, supplemented with additional support for students struggling with English, is necessary for effective language acquisition.

Data collection on methods of teaching English involves gathering information through various techniques to analyze teaching strategies, classroom practices, and their effectiveness. Common methods include questionnaires, interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Questionnaires help in collecting standardized data from teachers and students about their experiences, teaching preferences, and challenges. Interviews, whether structured or semi-structured, allow for in-depth insights into teachers' pedagogical approaches, their perceptions of student learning, and the difficulties they face in implementing different teaching methods. Classroom observations provide firsthand data on how English is taught, the interaction between teachers and students, and the use of instructional materials. Additionally, document analysis, such as reviewing lesson plans, textbooks, and curriculum guidelines, helps in understanding how teaching methodologies align with educational policies. A combination of these methods ensures a comprehensive analysis of English teaching practices, highlighting areas that need improvement and guiding future pedagogical strategies. The questionnaire was derived from the theory of methods in teaching English as a foreign language, such as Grammar Translation Method (GTM), Direct Method (DM), Audio-Lingual Method (ALM), Cooperative Learning (CL), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and Task-based Method (TBM). Due to the fact that many English teaching methods can be applied in the classroom, the researchers selected basic teaching activities from those methods, which are categorized as common teaching techniques as follows:

Methods	Activities
GTM	• Students copying from the book/board • Translation of the text • Grammar Exercises • Reading comprehension questions • Filling in blanks
DM	• Question and answer • Reading aloud • Antonym/synonym
ALM	• Drilling • Dialogue memorization • Use of minimal pairs • Jigsaw
CLT	• Role play • Opinion sharing • Problem solving • Group work
TBM	• Designing poster • Writing articles/report • Conducting interview

Table3: Teaching Methods and Techniques

No of Schools	GTM	CLT	TBM	Audio-Lingual	DM	Others
15	10	1	1	0	2	1

Table 4: Method Used

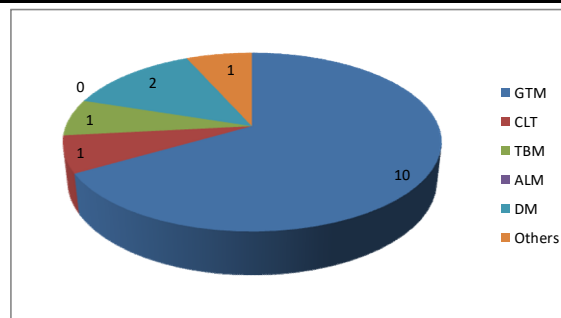The data is presented in the pie diagram below:

Figure 4: Methods

It was observed that most of the teachers heavily relied on GTM. More than 66% teachers used GTM in their daily classrooms. 13.33% teachers made use of DM, followed by CLT, TBM and Lecture Method with a percentage of 6.66%. It can be inferred that this method benefits to ease teaching and learning process such as explaining abstract words and also this method can help students in advancing their vocabulary and grammar knowledge to understand the reading text in target language. However, this method with its techniques like translation, grammar explanation followed by exercises, and paragraph writing is no longer consider as an effective teaching technique due to some reasons. For instance, this method does not feel right with the current National learning goal which in attempt to upgrade students' 4C skills (Creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication), with this method students are passive with the teachers as the only source and the teaching centre makes this method is not relevant anymore. In fact, many teachers out there who are still applied this method massively. Although the participants in the study mentioned in the questionnaire that they were familiar and used various teaching methods, and in addition in the interview with one of the participants who said that he applied various teaching activities in her daily teaching and learning, it was found that the following routines were found in the observations with one of the participants: greeting, checking the students, reviewing the previous lesson, telling the next lesson, explaining the current lesson, asking and answering, and giving a task. The class was conducted exactly according to GTM principles, including the use of mother tongue, limited exposure to English, teacher-cantered instruction, grammar instruction, and isolated vocabulary instruction. Interactions with the students reveal that they are not fluent in English. This may be the result of extensive use of GTM.
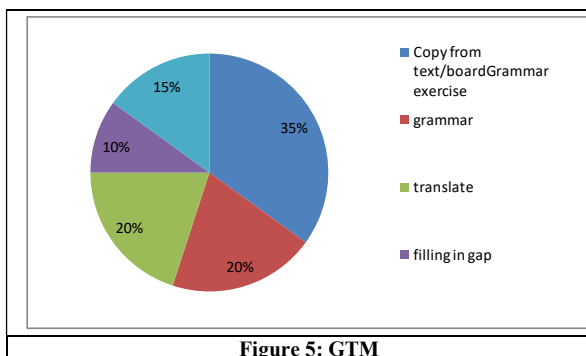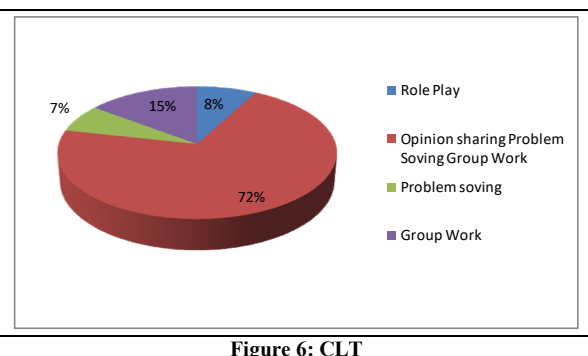

Figure 5: GTM	Figure 6: CLT

Relying solely on the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) for teaching English has significant limitations and it was observed during interactions with the students. While GTM helps students develop a strong understanding of grammatical rules and vocabulary through direct translation, it fails to promote communicative competence, as it lacks emphasis on speaking and listening skills. This method encourages rote memorization rather than active language use, making it ineffective for real-life communication. Furthermore, GTM tends to create a passive learning environment. Students' lack of communicative capacity in these schools can be attributed to the use of GTM in teaching English. Traditional English language teaching methods in Asia have come under criticism for being teacher centric. Linguists have emphasized the need to prioritize confidence building,

fluency, and appropriateness over mere grammatical accuracy. Focusing heavily on rote memorization of grammatical rules and definitions may lead to students developing a "fear complex".

CLT was seen used in a school situated in urban area. Use of CLT provides the students with interactive opportunities. As a result, it was observed that students of the schools are fluent in answering the questions asked during the interview. This is in sharp contrast to the students who were taught by using GTM. The figure 6 indicates the activities used during the used of CLT.

The use Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in these secondary schools has significantly impacted students' English learning experience. While GTM focuses on grammar rules, translation, and written exercises, CLT emphasizes real-life communication, interactive learning, and student engagement, leading to more effective language acquisition. CLT is seen encouraging the students to converse in English through group discussions, role-plays, and peer interactions, improving their fluency and confidence. However, it was found that group works and role play activities are less practiced than opinion sharing. There is enough scope to improve in this regard. Since GTM relies on rote learning, students often forget concepts once exams are over. It was observed that CLT's interactive and meaningful approach has helped the students of these schools to retain knowledge better, as they learn through experience rather than memorization.

The Direct Method (DM) emerged as the second most familiar teaching approach among participants, underscoring its enduring influence in language instruction. At its core, DM advocates for teaching the target language directly, eschewing reliance on learners' native languages (L1) to facilitate a more immersive learning experience. This traditional method prioritizes authenticity, prohibiting translation and mandating that all classroom interactions be conducted solely in the target language. Furthermore, DM places a premium on the intuitive acquisition of language skills, emphasizing the importance of sounds, simple sentences, and direct association with real-life objects to foster a natural learning process. By replicating the way native speakers acquire their mother tongue, DM aims to cultivate proficiency by enabling learners to think in the target language. The figure 7 shows the activities done in the classrooms.
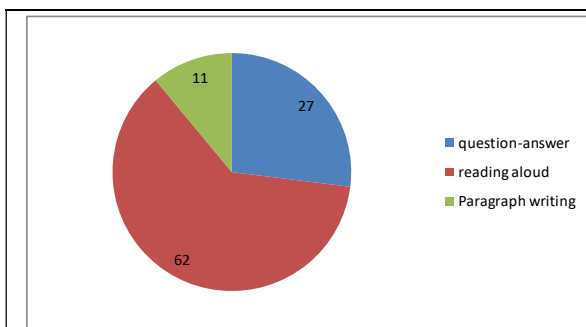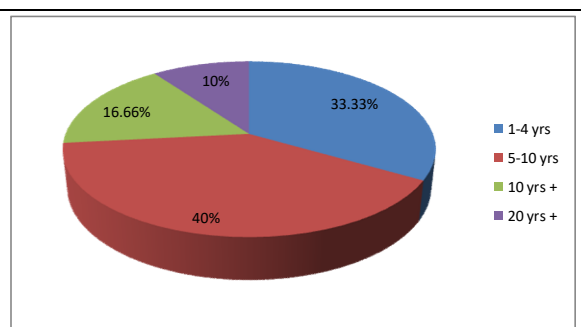

| Figure 7: DM | Figure 8: Teaching Experience of the Teachers |

As shown, reading aloud is the first preference which accounts for 62%, followed by question-answer (27%) and paragraph writing (11%). Writing paragraphs requires organizing thoughts, making connections, and supporting ideas with evidence. Writing paragraphs allows students to express their thoughts and ideas in a creative and meaningful way. It has communication benefits like improvement of communication, self-expression. But this activity is seen preferred less which directly affects the students' performance. During the study it was found that students taught with the Direct Method speak fluently and with correct pronunciation. Simultaneously they develop strong oral skills but are found to struggle with writing. Students are found to grasp with expression of original thoughts beyond memorized phrases. In contrast, students who learn through CLT are found to communicate effectively in real-life situations. They have shown confidence in expressing opinions and ideas.

The other teaching method as indicated in Figure 3 is the lecture method. The lecture method is a traditional teaching approach where an instructor delivers information to students through oral presentations, often accompanied by visual aids, handouts, or multimedia resources. However, in the visited school no use of

multimedia or visual aids was seen. The teacher is seen delivering the concept through oral presentation. As a result, it can be termed one way communication, instructor-centered. The students receive information without active participation. These schools lack language laboratories. Language laboratories are specialized facilities equipped with audio visual equipment, computers and software designed to support language learning. They provide students with opportunities to practice listening, speaking, reading and writing in a controlled environment. The teachers' lack of familiarity with the Audio-Lingual Method suggests that they may not be equipped to implement modern language teaching approaches. Indeed, it is an interesting fact that highlights the potential gaps in language teaching methodologies and resources in these schools. It underscores the need for ongoing teacher training, updated curriculum design and investment in language learning infrastructure to provide students with the best possible language education.

Then, the questionnaire was administered to English teachers in secondary schools through google form. There were eleven female teachers and thirty male teachers who were willingly involved in this study, so the total participants in the questionnaire were forty-two English secondary teachers. From the questionnaire, it was gathered that only one teacher agreed to be observed. There were only three teachers who wanted to be interviewed. After administering the questionnaire and conducting the interview, then observations were done to see the actual teaching implementation in the classroom. In addition, the observations were done in order to cross-check the claim from the questionnaire. To add to that, the interview was done to ask about and clarify particular activities from the questionnaires and observation. After collecting the data, the researchers then analyzed the data based on the research problems. It was done through coding, transcription, and putting the results on the chart. Then it was analyzed. The findings from the questionnaire have found that mostly teachers do not have English as core or major in their BA and MA. Based on the questionnaire and interviews, it was known that most of the participants earned their undergraduate and master's degrees in other subjects like political science, education. The participants were at the age of 23 to 50 who had quiet number of teaching experience in teaching English. Regarding to the teaching experience, 12 of the participants have gained experiences in teaching English for more than five years, while 10 have experience less than 5 years. Majority of the teachers have teaching experience in between 5-10 years. 5 teachers have teaching experience of more than 10 years. Only 3 teachers have teaching experience of more than 20 years. To convert it into percentage, 33.33% teachers have teaching experience of less than 5 years, while 40% teachers have teaching experience of 5 to 10 years. 16.66% teachers records teaching experience of more than 10 years, while 10% have teaching experience of more than 20 years. This is shown in the figure 8.

A questionnaire was developed based on various English language teaching methods, including Grammar Translation Method, Direct Method, Audio-Lingual Method, Cooperative Learning, Communicative Language Teaching, and Scientific Method. The questionnaire was administered to 30 English secondary school teachers in these two districts. The study aimed to investigate the teaching methods and techniques used by English secondary school teachers. The findings provided insights into the teachers' qualifications, experience, and teaching practices. During the study questionnaire was distributed and collected later. There were 60 students over which questionnaire were administered. The first section of the questionnaire contained demographic details and the second section was designed in accordance with the objectives of the study.

4. Discussion

Assamese students come from diverse linguistic backgrounds. GTM can alienate students with weak grammar foundations, whereas CLT accommodates different learning styles, making English learning more inclusive and adaptable. This contrast is explicit in the schools visited for collecting data. CLT's focus on meaningful communication, fluency, and the integration of language skills, highlighting its departure from traditional grammar-focused methods may be effective approach in schools having vernacular medium. However, there are challenges in implementing CLT, such as aligning curricula with communicative objectives and addressing teacher preparedness. Adaptable teaching strategies that consider learners' needs and contexts, aiming to enhance communicative competence in diverse educational settings is, therefore, advocated.

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Recommendations are made as follows:

Integrate technology: Schools should invest in technology infrastructure and provide teachers with training and support to integrate digital resources into the teaching-learning process.

Teacher training and development: Educational authorities should provide teachers with ongoing professional development opportunities that focus on modern teaching methodologies, technology integration, and language proficiency.

Communicative language teaching: Schools should adopt communicative language teaching (CLT) approaches that focus on developing students' speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. Curriculum reform: The state government and educational authorities should initiate curriculum reform that focuses on developing students' communication skills and promotes cultural awareness. In conclusion, the study emphasizes the need for a paradigm shift in the methods of teaching English in secondary level schools of Assam. By adopting modern teaching approaches, integrating technology, and providing teachers with ongoing training and support, we can enhance the quality of English language education and prepare students for the challenges of the 21st century.

5. Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the existing methods of teaching English in secondary level schools of Assam and explore the need for updating these methods. The findings of the study revealed that the traditional grammar-translation method is still prevalent in many schools, which often results in students' lack of proficiency in English communication skills. This is a cause for concern, as English language proficiency is essential for students' future academic and professional pursuits. The study found that many schools lack the necessary infrastructure and resources to integrate technology into the teaching-learning process. This limits the use of digital resources, such as language learning apps and multimedia materials, which can enhance the learning experience. The study revealed that many teachers lack the necessary training and support to implement modern teaching methods. This highlights the need for ongoing professional development programs that focus on teaching methodologies, technology integration, and language proficiency. It was observed that many schools focus on rote memorization and grammar rule, rather than developing students' communication skills. This approach can lead to students' lack of proficiency in English language usage. The rise of English as a global lingua franca has influenced educational systems in Asian countries. Studies have identified significant confusion and inconsistency at the policy level, particularly concerning the appropriate age to commence English instruction. A shortage of adequately trained and skilled English language teachers is noted, impacting the quality of instruction and student outcomes. A disconnect between curriculum objectives and actual classroom practices, with educational rhetoric not always aligning with pedagogical realities. The present study advocates cooperative learning as it enhances language skills, motivation, and social cohesion among EFL learners. Such approach is found to be fruitful in Taiwan.

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