

From Policy to Classroom: Changing Roles of English Teachers under NEP 2020 in Provincialised Middle-Stage Schools of Sonitpur and Biswanath Districts in Assam

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Abstract: NEP 2020 places considerable emphasis on learner-centred, experiential and multilingual education, together with the purposeful use of technology and competency-based learning. For English Language Teaching (ELT), these priorities have particular significance at the Middle Stage, when learners begin to encounter more specialised subject teaching but still need sustained support, interaction and opportunities to use language meaningfully. This study examines how far the expected shift in the English teacher's role can be seen in provincialised schools of Sonitpur and Biswanath districts of Assam. Questionnaire responses were collected from 30 schools, 15 in each district, covering 60 English teachers and 180 students. Each school contributed two English teachers and six students, with two students each from Classes VI, VII and VIII. The responses point to a classroom in transition rather than one that has already been transformed. Teachers recognise the importance of skill development, multilingual support and technology, yet relatively few have received ELT-specific training after NEP 2020. Textbook-based explanation, grammar teaching and written assessment remain prominent, while group work, role-play, digital resources and assessment of speaking and listening occur less consistently. Students value patient explanation, supportive correction and the use of Assamese or another familiar language when a lesson becomes difficult, but they also ask for more opportunities to speak, interact and learn through varied materials and activities. The findings suggest that the expanded role envisaged for the English teacher is beginning to take shape, although stronger professional development, resources and institutional support are needed for it to become routine classroom practice.

Keywords: Activity-Based Learning, ELT, Multilingual Pedagogy, NEP 2020, Provincialised Schools

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1. Introduction

English teaching in Indian schools can no longer be understood only as the teaching of prescribed texts, vocabulary and grammatical rules. Learners also need to use English for study, communication, access to information and participation in a world increasingly shaped by digital media. This makes the work of the English teacher broader than conventional instruction. The teacher has to explain, motivate, create opportunities for language use and respond to learners who differ widely in linguistic background, confidence and exposure to English. These responsibilities become particularly demanding in multilingual classrooms, where a single lesson may involve students with very different levels of familiarity with the language.

The priorities set out in NEP 2020 give this changing role a clearer policy context. Learner participation, experiential learning, multilingualism, technology, competency development and changes in assessment all have consequences for the English classroom, even though the policy does not prescribe a separate method for ELT. At the Middle Stage (Classes VI-VIII), the issue is especially important: subject teaching becomes more specialised, but learners still benefit from interaction, guided practice and links between classroom learning and experience. For English teachers, this implies a gradual movement from predominantly explanatory teaching towards a wider repertoire that includes communicative work, suitable multilingual support, varied materials and formative assessment.

The policy itself places teachers at the heart of educational reform, stating that “The teacher must be at the centre of the fundamental reforms in the education system” (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020, p. 5). It also envisages assessment moving away from a predominantly summative culture of rote memorization toward regular, formative and competency-based assessment that tests analysis, critical thinking and conceptual clarity.

In language classrooms, these principles imply a teacher who creates opportunities to speak and listen, uses multilingual resources judiciously, organizes pair and group tasks, connects English with life and other subjects, employs varied teaching materials, integrates technology where feasible, and evaluates more than written recall.

The important question, however, is whether this redefined role has become a classroom reality in government-supported provincialised schools. Sonitpur and Biswanath districts of Assam offer a particularly meaningful context because their schools serve linguistically and socio-economically diverse communities. The student questionnaire itself records Assamese, Bengali, Nepali, Hindi, Sadri, Karbi and other home-language backgrounds. In such settings, the English teacher has to negotiate the simultaneous demands of curriculum completion, examination preparation, multilingual explanation, communicative practice and unequal access to English outside school.

Against this background, the present paper compares what teachers say about their changing responsibilities with what students' report experiencing in English classes. Bringing the two sets of responses together is useful because professional intention and classroom experience do not always change at the same pace. The comparison makes it possible to identify both areas of movement and areas where established practices continue to dominate.

2. Objectives of the Study

The study has five related objectives:

- to examine how English teachers understand and practise their changing role after NEP 2020;
- to identify the methods, they use and their relationship to communicative, activity-based and multilingual approaches;
- to examine the selection and use of teaching-learning materials;
- to understand students' experience of classroom change; and
- to identify the major difficulties teachers face including the ways in which they prepare themselves through training, collaboration and self-learning.

Assessment is considered throughout because changes in pedagogy are difficult to sustain when evaluation remains largely examination-centred.

3. Methodology

The study adopts a mixed-method orientation, combining quantitative questionnaire responses with qualitative comments and suggestions. The broader research design also provides for interviews, classroom observation and focus-group discussion; however, the present paper concentrates on the questionnaire evidence supplied for analysis. Thirty provincialised schools were selected, 15 from Sonitpur and 15 from Biswanath. From each school, two English teachers and six Middle Stage students were included. The student sample was balanced across Classes VI, VII and VIII, with two students from each class. The resulting sample consists of 60 teachers—30 from each district—and 180 students—90 from each district.

The teacher questionnaire covers demographic and professional background, post-NEP training, teaching objectives, perceived role change, classroom methods, handling of learner errors, participation, teaching materials, assessment, challenges and professional preparation. The student questionnaire covers attitudes toward English, opportunities to use the language, observed teaching methods, digital and activity-based learning, multilingual support, assessment and feedback, teacher preparedness, classroom challenges and open-ended suggestions.

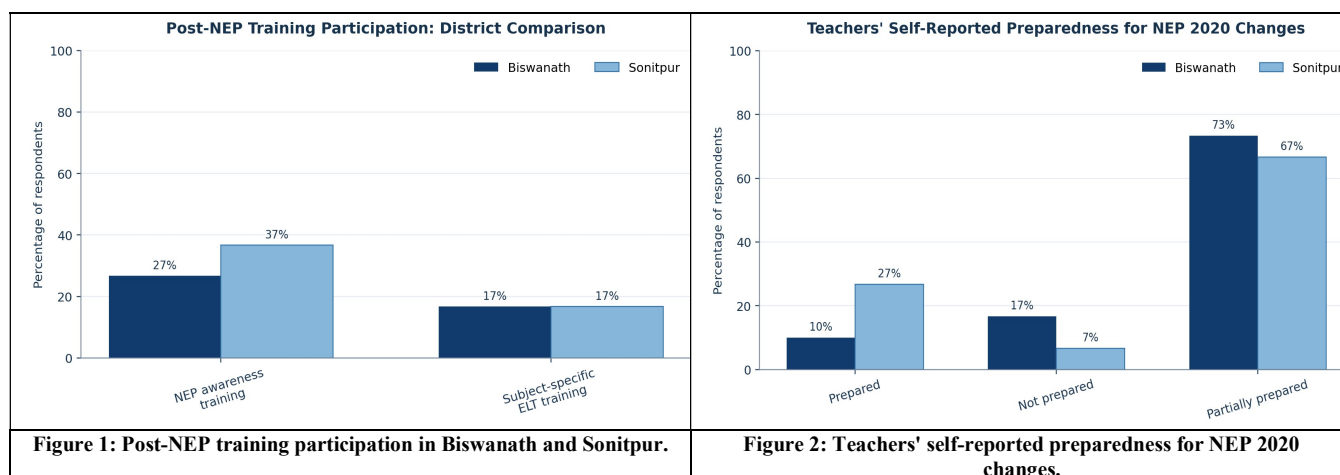
For analysis, frequencies from the two districts were combined where the same item and response category were used. Percentages are calculated against the stated sample of 60 teachers or 180 students for single-response and

multiple-response items as appropriate. In multiple-response questions, percentages indicate the proportion selecting an option and therefore do not sum to 100. A small number of questionnaire entries contain totals that do not correspond to the stated district sample—for example, some Sonitpur student items and some demographic entries. These are not silently corrected. The discussion gives priority to internally interpretable items and uses problematic items cautiously, preserving the integrity of the recorded data.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Awareness of NEP 2020 and Teacher Preparedness

The responses reveal a clear imbalance between awareness of reform and access to structured preparation. Of the 60 teachers, 19 (31.7%) had attended a general NEP-related training or awareness programme, while 41 (68.3%) had not. ELT-specific preparation was still more limited: only 10 teachers (16.7%) reported post-NEP training meant specifically for English teachers. The district pattern for this item was identical, with five teachers from each district reporting such training. Responses to the question on training in the objectives and methods of English teaching also show that many teachers depended on informal sources of information or had not attended a relevant programme.



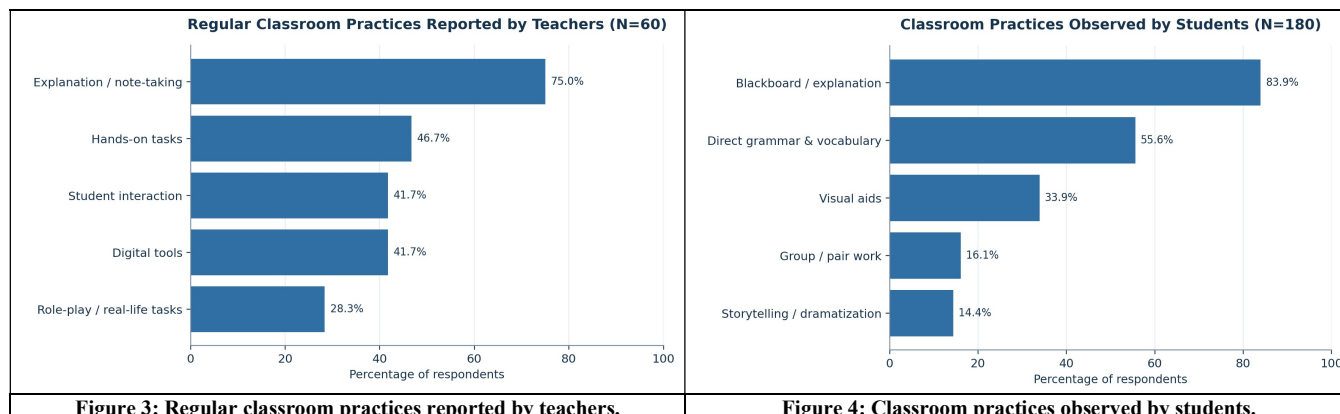
This limited training background is reflected in teachers' own assessment of preparedness. Twenty-two of the 30 Biswanath teachers and 20 of the 30 Sonitpur teachers described themselves as only partially prepared for NEP-related changes. Taken together, 42 of 60 teachers (70%) placed themselves in this category. The pattern does not suggest an absence of awareness; rather, it indicates that many teachers have yet to receive sustained, subject-specific support that translates broad policy principles into workable ELT practices.

The teachers' open-ended comments make this need explicit. Biswanath respondents call for "Frequent training programmes, especially on English Language Teaching (ELT)" and training in bilingual pedagogy. Sonitpur teachers similarly ask for greater awareness of what NEP 2020 recommends regarding "language teaching, ELT, and multilingualism" and for hands-on training in digital tools. These comments indicate that professional development should be subject-specific and practical rather than confined to general policy orientation.

4.2. Changing Objectives and the Persistence of Traditional Classroom Practice

Teachers stated objectives show a combination of traditional and newer priorities. In Biswanath, 28 teachers selected improvement of speaking and writing, 26 selected reading and understanding texts, and 26 selected grammar and vocabulary; 21 also selected examination preparation. In Sonitpur, reading and understanding texts was selected by 20 teachers, speaking and writing by 18, interest and confidence by 17, grammar and vocabulary by 13, and examination preparation by 12. The pattern suggests that communicative aims are recognized, but they coexist with textual, grammatical and examination-oriented objectives.

When asked how NEP 2020 had changed their objectives, teachers identified communication skills, experiential learning, multilingual integration, digital tools and movement toward understanding-based teaching. Perceived role-change also included skill-based teaching, technology and multilingualism. Yet reported classroom practice shows a more gradual transition. Across the two districts, 45 of 60 teachers (75%) said that they regularly explain lessons while students listen and take notes. By comparison, 28 (46.7%) reported hands-on activities, 25 (41.7%) encouraged students to share views and interact, 17 (28.3%) used role-play or real-life enactment, and 25 (41.7%) used digital tools.



The students' observations strongly reinforce this finding. Across both districts, 151 of 180 students (83.9%) reported that teachers explain lessons using the blackboard or whiteboard, and 100 (55.6%) observed direct teaching of grammar rules and vocabulary. Only 29 (16.1%) reported group or pair activities and 26 (14.4%) storytelling or dramatization. Visual aids were more visible, reported by 61 students (33.9%), but still far below blackboard-based explanation. Thus, the teacher remains a central explanatory presence in the classroom even when newer methods are acknowledged.

The figures should not be taken to mean that explanation itself is undesirable. In these multilingual classrooms, students repeatedly say that clear explanation helps them, particularly when a difficult point is clarified through Assamese or another familiar language. Biswanath students mention simple explanation, correction of mistakes and time to clear doubts; Sonitpur students make similar observations and also value a classroom atmosphere in which they can ask questions. The pedagogical issue, therefore, is not whether explanation should disappear, but whether it can be combined with greater learner participation and meaningful language use.

4.3. Multilingualism: from necessity to pedagogical resource

The questionnaires show that multilingualism is already part of classroom reality. The student samples include speakers of Assamese, Bengali, Nepali, Hindi, Sadri, Karbi and other linguistic varieties. Teachers also recognize multilingualism as a dimension of their changing role. In Biswanath, 22 teachers selected "emphasis on multilingualism" as a post-NEP role change, compared with seven in Sonitpur. In response to changes in teaching objectives, integration of local languages and culture was selected by 23 Biswanath teachers and 15 Sonitpur teachers.

Student comments provide a more concrete account of how multilingualism operates. Learners repeatedly state that English becomes easier when difficult content is explained in Assamese. One Biswanath response says, "English is not difficult to understand when the teacher explains the lessons in Assamese," while Sonitpur students similarly value the use of both English and Assamese when a topic is difficult. This is not evidence that English should be displaced by the home or regional language. Rather, it suggests the value of strategic multilingual scaffolding: teachers can use a familiar language to clarify meaning, compare structures, build vocabulary and reduce anxiety, while gradually increasing purposeful English use.

The student data also shows why such scaffolding is necessary. Many learners have limited opportunities to use English beyond the classroom. In Biswanath, no student reported speaking English outside the classroom every day; 34 reported never doing so. Although the corresponding Sonitpur item contains a response-total inconsistency and should be interpreted cautiously, the general pattern still points to restricted everyday exposure. Students' open comments repeatedly express a desire to speak English confidently, practise spoken English and overcome nervousness or fear of making mistakes. The changing teacher role must therefore combine multilingual support with deliberate creation of English-rich communicative opportunities.

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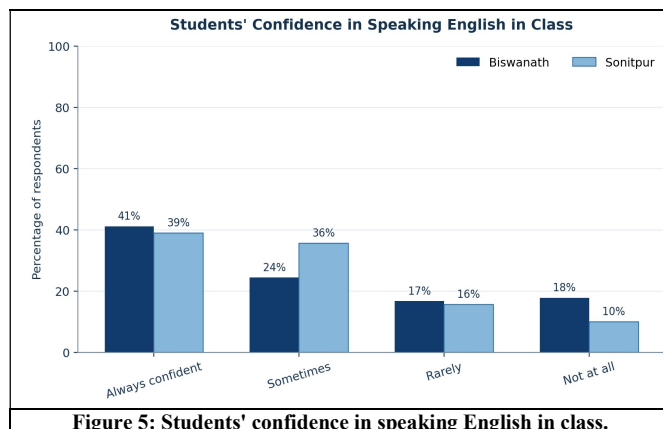


Figure 5: Students' confidence in speaking English in class.

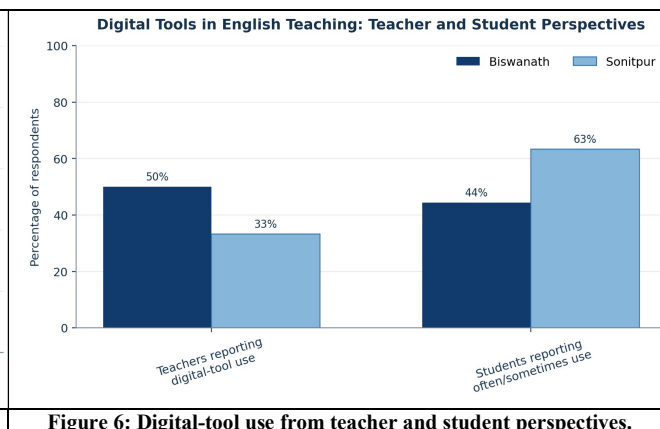


Figure 6: Digital-tool use from teacher and student perspectives.

4.4. Teaching materials and technology

The material base of English teaching remains heavily textbook-centred. All 60 teachers reported using textbooks. Supplementary books were selected by only 12 teachers. Visual aids were more common, selected by 39 teachers, while digital content such as videos, slides or apps was selected by 27. Teachers also mentioned smartboards and mobile applications, but access is uneven. When asked about challenges in preparing or using materials, 33 teachers (55%) identified limited access to digital tools and 29 (48.3%) reported lack of training in designing or using materials. Sixteen cited lack of preparation time.

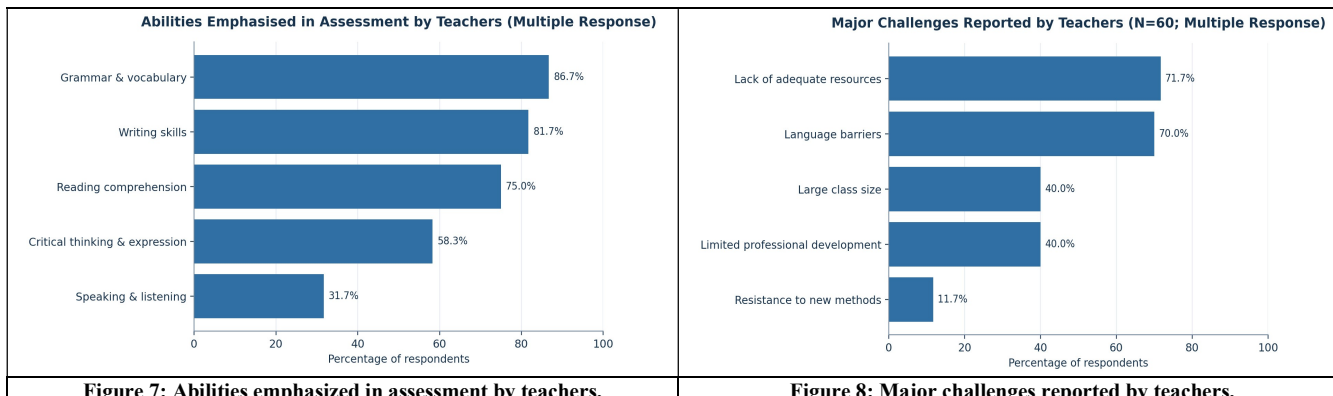
Students describe the same need from the learner side. In Biswanath they ask for “new and innovative teaching aids like computer, TV,” more activities outside the textbook, simple storybooks, English quizzes and word games. Sonitpur students ask for videos, audio-visual materials, computers, projectors, songs and short videos, and “more interesting teaching aids besides the textbook and blackboard.” These are important qualitative findings because they show that learners are not merely passive recipients of innovation; they actively desire varied modes of engagement.

Technology, however, is useful only when access and pedagogy come together. Sonitpur teachers refer to weak internet connectivity and shortage of digital equipment, especially in rural schools, while Biswanath respondents ask for easier access to ICT tools and richer classroom resources. In such circumstances, even modest resources - an offline audio clip, a short video, a recorded dialogue or a projected image - can be valuable if they lead to a purposeful language task. The relevant question is therefore not how much technology is used, but how effectively available technology supports listening, speaking, reading or interaction.

4.5. Assessment: Change Is Visible But Incomplete

Assessment provides another clear example of partial transition. Written tests were reported by all 60 teachers. Creative assignments were also common—27 teachers in Biswanath and all 30 in Sonitpur reported essays or projects—suggesting some diversification. Oral presentations were used by 21 teachers across the two districts, while peer review was very limited in the recorded responses. When teachers were asked what abilities they focus on, grammar and vocabulary, reading comprehension and writing were selected much more frequently

than speaking and listening. Only 19 of 60 teachers (31.7%) selected speaking and listening as assessment targets, compared with 52 (86.7%) for grammar and vocabulary and 49 (81.7%) for writing.



Student responses correspond closely. Written tests or examinations were reported by 171 of 180 students (95%), while oral questions and answers were reported by 131 (72.8%). Projects and assignments were present, but written evaluation remained dominant. At the same time, students generally reported receiving feedback and regarded teachers as prepared for class. This suggests that the issue is not absence of teacher effort; rather, the assessment system still privileges forms that are easier to administer within conventional school routines.

There are nevertheless signs of movement. Teachers report increased attention to regular and continuous assessment, participation and creativity, oral or interactive assessment and real-life skills. The important next step is to make these practices systematic. In ELT, competency-based assessment should include observable performance in listening, speaking, reading and writing, short communicative tasks, portfolios, projects, peer or self-assessment, and feedback that helps learners identify specific areas for improvement. Without such changes, communicative teaching may remain secondary because students and teachers naturally orient classroom time toward what formal assessment rewards.

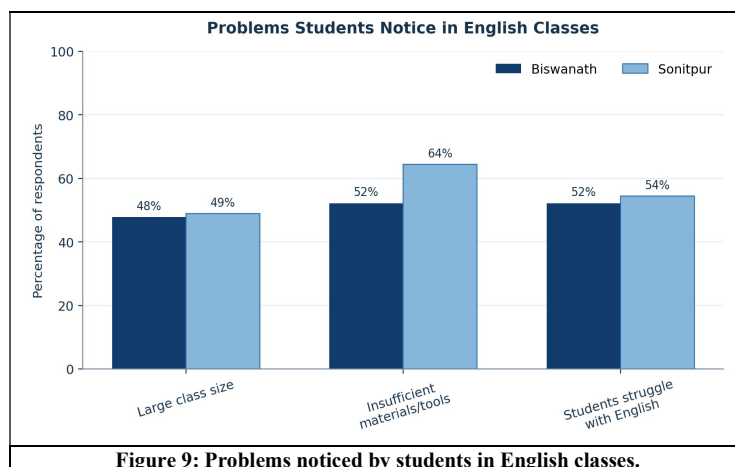


Figure 9: Problems noticed by students in English classes.

4.6. Challenges, Teacher Agency and the Policy–Practice Gap

The strongest structural challenges are resources and language barriers. Across the teacher sample, 43 of 60 teachers (71.7%) identified lack of adequate resources, 42 (70%) language barriers, 24 (40%) large class size and 24 (40%) limited professional development. Resistance to new methods was selected by only seven teachers, suggesting that the principal obstacle is not necessarily unwillingness to change. Teachers appear more constrained by conditions of implementation.

Students perceive similar problems. Across the two districts, 105 of 180 students (58.3%) reported that teachers do not have enough materials or tools, 96 (53.3%) said many students find English difficult to understand, and 87 (48.3%) pointed to large classes. Student comments also reveal a specific consequence of these conditions: not every learner gets enough opportunity to speak. They ask that “Every student should be given chance to speak and answer,” that more attention be given to those who find spoken English difficult, and that classes include more group work, role-play and everyday English.

Teachers respond to constraints through professional agency. Collaboration with colleagues and adaptation of teaching strategies are much more common than formally seeking training. Self-study and research were selected by 21 teachers in each district, making it the most prominent reported mode of professional preparation. This is encouraging because it shows initiative, but it also exposes a systemic weakness: individual self-effort is carrying a responsibility that should be supported by regular institutional professional development.

Taken together, the responses point to a policy-practice gap, though not to a simple opposition between 'old' and 'new' teaching. Teachers are aware of communication, multilingualism, activity-based learning, skill development and technology, and students do encounter some visual aids, digital resources, interactive questioning and supportive feedback. At the same time, the most common classroom pattern continues to centre on explanation, textbooks, direct grammar teaching and written assessment. The evidence therefore suggests an uneven transition: newer expectations have entered teachers' professional thinking, but they have not yet become equally visible across everyday classroom practices.

5. Major Implications

Several practical priorities emerge from the findings. Professional development needs to be regular, ELT-specific and closely connected with classroom work. Demonstration lessons and hands-on training could help teachers use multilingual strategies, communicative tasks, low-cost teaching aids, digital resources and competency-based assessment more confidently. Reform also needs to acknowledge the multilingual reality of these schools. Assamese, Bengali and other familiar languages can be used strategically to secure comprehension, provided that such support gradually opens more space for learners to produce English themselves.

Third, communicative practice must become routine rather than occasional. Pair conversation, short role-play, storytelling, information-gap tasks, reading circles and brief presentations can be introduced even where technology is limited. Fourth, schools need a wider material ecology: supplementary readers, charts, flashcards, audio resources, projectors or smart displays where feasible, and offline digital content for low-connectivity settings. Finally, assessment must reward the abilities that policy expects teachers to cultivate. If speaking, listening, creativity and practical language use remain marginal in assessment, they are likely to remain marginal in classroom time as well.

The students' comments are particularly instructive. They do not ask for the teacher's explanatory role to disappear. Instead, they want that support to be accompanied by a wider range of experiences: games, stories, digital and visual materials, group activities, spoken-English practice and opportunities for every learner to participate. This combination offers a practical way of understanding the changing teacher role in these schools - retaining the strengths of careful explanation while giving greater place to facilitation, interaction, resource design, mentoring and meaningful assessment.

6. Conclusion

Evidence from the selected provincialised schools of Sonitpur and Biswanath suggests that the role of the English teacher is changing, but unevenly. NEP 2020 has brought skill-based learning, multilingualism, experiential pedagogy, technology and formative assessment more clearly into discussions of school education. Teachers in the study are familiar with many of these priorities, yet implementation is constrained by limited

subject-specific training, shortages of resources, language-related difficulties, large classes and uneven digital access.

The most consistent evidence across teacher and student questionnaires is the continued dominance of explanation, textbook-centred instruction, direct grammar teaching and written assessment. At the same time, the data also reveals important foundations for change: teachers frequently correct learners supportively, explain difficult content again, use familiar languages to aid comprehension, provide feedback, adapt strategies and engage in self-study. Students appreciate these practices but want more opportunities to speak, interact, use digital and visual resources, read beyond the textbook and learn through games, stories and real-life situations.

The findings also caution against describing the changing English teacher simply as a technology-enabled 'facilitator' replacing the traditional teacher. In the context studied here, effective teaching requires a combination of roles: the teacher remains an informed explainer, but also works as a multilingual mediator, organiser of interaction, designer of activities, user and creator of resources, supportive corrector, assessor, mentor and continuing learner. These roles are already visible in parts of the data, but their sustained development depends on institutional conditions. The practical success of NEP 2020 in ELT will therefore depend not only on teachers' willingness to change, but also on the training, time, materials, infrastructure and assessment practices available to them.

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