

# A SURVEY ON ORAL PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH AMONG THE SECONDARY STUDENTS OF NAMSAI DISTRICT OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH: PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

Language is our primary source of communication and the most effective way to communicate is through speech. The goal of teaching any foreign language for that matter any language is to develop the learners' oral proficiency. As such communicative competence becomes increasingly important in every teaching and learning process. Communicative competence is the ability to use the language accurately, correctly, appropriately, functionally, strategically, and competently. While imparting knowledge of the English language, teaching methods and objectives are mainly focused on reproducing the learned facts in written form. Focus on oral communication and development of English as a medium to share and express ideas is not really found. The survey done among the 132 secondary students of Namsai District, in Arunachal Pradesh, using Google Form, sheds light on the level of oral proficiency, their problems and challenges. Although learning of English begins early in school, the expected results are not met. The study found lack of, proficient teachers, proper language learning facilities, favourable family environment, sufficient vocabulary, opportunities and exposure in speaking and reading as major factors and challenges affecting oral proficiency. Awareness of the problems and issues and taking corrective measures can empower students and brighten their future.

**Key Words:** Arunachal Pradesh, Namsai, communicative competence, Empower students, language skills, oral proficiency, speaking skills

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Arunachal Pradesh, popularly known as the 'Land of the Dawn-lit-Mountains'[1], lies on the Northeastern part of India, bordering Bhutan, Bhutan, China, Myanmar, Nagaland, and Assam. Its capital is Itanagar. Though it is the largest state, the educational scenario does not reflect that. With an overall literacy rate of 66.96 as per census 2011, the state doesn't reflect a good picture of the education system, although it has made remarkable progress in the last 50 years with several plans and

projects being initiated by the central, state as well as non-governmental organizations [2]. Although English is the primary medium of instruction in all the educational institutions of the state, from the lowest to the highest, the quality is far from expected. Namsai, the blessed land of pagodas, and home to the Tai Khampti, Singpho, Adi and other tribal communities, was established as a separate district in 2014[3]. According to population census 2011, the District, has a population of 95950 with a literacy rate of 54.24% [4] despite a large number

of educational institutions in the District. With a focus on the foundational principles and issues, the article investigates the problems faced by secondary school students in the district, particularly in the area of oral proficiency.

## **2. ROLE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS**

Language is our primary source of communication and the most effective way to communicate is through speech. However, the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing are all interconnected. Proficiency in each skill is necessary to become a good, effective, and skillful communicator.

English as an international language is the official language of 53 countries and is spoken by around 400 million people across the globe [5]. It is the most common second language in the world and in most parts of India. Looking from a broader perspective English plays an important role in our everyday life – in business, education, getting a job, information, media, and entertainment, national and international relations [6].

Ahmad states that “It is the language required by the world for greater understanding; it is the most international of languages. English has become a global language, a connecting link, a language of modern science and technologies, a language of the latest sciences, like information technology and space science, a language of all competitive examinations-be they the state level, national level, or international level.” A foreign language is always an asset and a gateway to success in national and international spheres [7].

## **3. IMPORTANCE OF ORAL PROFICIENCY**

The goal of teaching any foreign language is oral proficiency. As such communicative competence, which is the ability to use language accurately, correctly, appropriately, functionally, strategically, and competently in the real world, becomes is the most important element in every teaching-learning process. The importance of oral proficiency hence is enormous for learners of any language. Speaking and listening are generally thought to be the most important of the four skills especially when the language is not the mother tongue of the speaker.

The four main goals of communication are to inform, request, persuade, and build relationships. The ability to speak skillfully provides, therefore, several advantages – ability to inform, persuade, and direct, personal satisfaction, ability to negotiate, career enhancement, improved self-confidence, career success, success in professional aspiration [8].

According to P. M. I. Seraj, speaking is a productive skill while listening is a receptive skill. Learning cannot take place effectively without the proper practice of these two language skills [9]. Education in the English language begins early in Arunachal Pradesh, however oral communicative competence among the students, is found to be weak. They are not proficient in using the language competently and effectively. This is due to the lack of practice of the language in and outside the classroom, the influence of mother tongue and other local languages, teaching methods, and other environmental factors.

## **4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Shumei Zhang, made a study on the role of input, interaction, and output in the development of oral fluency in the EFL context. Instruments used were tests of oral fluency and face-to-face interviews. The study found that non-native oral fluency could

be obtained through efficient and effective input, interaction, and output in EFL [10].

Heriansyah, investigated the difficulties and causes in learning English speaking in the department of English at the University of Syiah Kuala. Data were collected through observation and interviews. The findings showed that the main problem encountered by the students were lack of vocabulary and fear of making mistakes [11].

Gill, studied the impact of Drama in enhancing the English Language oral skills of ten non-speaking background students of Bond University. For 12 weeks, the participants were tested, first through Communicative non-drama-based (CNDB) lessons and then through Communicative drama-based (CDB). The second part revealed lot of positive findings of the impact of drama-based lessons [12].

Hosni, points out that speaking is an important component of a language and that problems in speaking can be a major challenge to effective foreign language learning and communication in EFL learners. Studies have indicated that oral language development is neglected in the classroom. Although teachers use the language, it hardly functions as a means for the students to gain knowledge and explore ideas. To resolve the communication problems in an EFL context, one needs to know the real nature of the problems and the circumstances of the problems [13].

Gudu, used Krashen's Monitor Model, to study the lack of communicative and linguistic competencies in the school leavers. Data was collected through a questionnaire, administered to teachers and students as well as direct observation during speaking skills lessons. The analyzed data showed variation in the use of classroom activities – the discussion was the most used activity while oral drills were the least used. There was also a lack of integration of various activities. The study

suggested practice using the authentic English language in context, integration of various activities in a lesson to meet the learners' needs, and awareness of the multi-cultural backgrounds of the learners [14].

Alharbi, states that the learning environment both inside and outside the classroom can act as an obstacle to students' English communication skills and English-speaking capacity in EFL contexts. The author attempted to identify the causes of Saudi students' low proficiency in English communication. He suggests reformation in the education policies, utilize contemporary approaches to teaching emphasizing problem-solving and critical thinking, and converting public schools into bilingual schools [15].

Nakhalah, explored causes of speaking difficulties of English language students of AI Quds Open University. Using the experimental method, an interview design was applied to the samples. The findings showed reasons like fear of mistake, shyness, anxiety, and lack of confidence as the causes [16].

Ahmad, states that effective communication skills always involve a systematic and continuous process of speaking, listening, and understanding. Even though many are born with the natural and physical ability to talk, we need to learn to speak well and communicate effectively. While some skills are learnt through observation like speaking, listening, and understanding other need to be taught in the classroom and educational context [7].

Marriam Bashir; Muhammad Azeem; Ashiq Hussain Dogar, made a study on the factors affecting students' speaking skills and found that lack of opportunities to speak either inside or outside the classroom and exclusion of testing speaking in examinations. Speaking is not only the

utterance of words but the ability to convey messages. To speak well, a lot of practice and attention is required. Just as the mother tongue is learnt through listening and repeating, English can be learnt through repetition, drilling, dialogues, short questions, and answers. Therefore, teachers should promote maximum teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil interactions [17].

Abdel-Rahman Al- Eiadeh, studied the oral communication skills of Ajloun National University (ANU) students studying the English language. The sample consisted of 20 students, 12 female, and 8 male. A random sampling method was used. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The findings showed revealed that students face many problems related to speaking skills, such as confusion and embarrassment, difficulty in pronunciation, not learning to speak properly in school, poor vocabulary leading to difficulties in understanding questions. The study suggests remedial measures like practice speaking inside and outside the classroom, use modern media resources to communicate well [18].

Leong & Ahmadi, focused on the factors influencing learners' English speaking skills, such as difficulties in suitable words and expressions, and other psychological obstacles. Through a thorough investigation of the term speaking, the importance of speaking, characteristics of speaking, speaking problems, and factors affecting speaking performance it was found that there's a need for appropriate speaking instructional methods based on students' interests, feelings, confidence level, etc [19].

Rao, while highlighting the significance of the basic language skills, emphasizes the importance and the need to teach speaking skills in English classrooms. The author also suggests several

techniques to develop speaking skills among the EFL/ESL learners in the classroom. The teachers need to understand the problems of the learners and use varieties of instructional materials, methods, strategies, activities, in the classroom to develop their speaking skills. Teaching has to be more practical than theoretical [20].

Mofareh A., made a study on the poor language proficiency of English language students in terms of conversational and desired standards of fluency in the classroom and public environments and identify the factors and causes. Descriptive research was conducted on perceived challenges that the students face, and devise effective solutions through appropriate teaching styles, methodologies, and strategies, and modern instructional resources. The study revealed fear, shyness, embarrassment, distrust, weakness in English grammar, vocabulary, syntax, poor fluency in speech, low understanding of grammar frameworks, and inaccurate pronunciation as major factors to the problem [21].

## 5. OBJECTIVES

- a. To study the quality of English oral proficiency skills at the secondary level.
- b. To find out the opportunities provided in developing oral proficiency skills.
- c. To create awareness of the existing problems and provide recommendations for the improvement of oral skills of the students

## 6. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- a. Is the level of English oral skills appropriate to the level of their education?
- b. What are the facilities available to the students in improving their English oral skills?

- c. What are the factors affecting the proficiency and fluency of secondary school students in Namsai District?

## 7. METHODOLOGY

The survey was done among the students by the researcher to investigate the oral proficiency of the students in English. The methodology used for the research is the Descriptive and the data collection was through a questionnaire. It is quantitative. The questionnaire containing 30 questions was made and circulated using Google forms. Questions were both closed-ended and open-ended to get a wider range of answers from which problem analysis was be done. The responses were collected and arranged. From the collected data we were able to analyze the English proficiency of the students. The study points out the existing problems and challenges in English language teaching and speaking in the district and suggests recommendations to improve the situation.

Do you wish to communicate better with your friends in English?  
132 responses

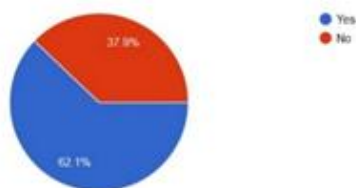


Figure 2: Use of English with friends

Even though many are born with a natural gift to talk, but one needs to learn to speak well and communicate effectively, which requires a systematic and continuous process of speaking, listening and understanding. Some skills, like speaking and listening are learnt through observation, and therefore the role of the teacher is of great importance in a classroom context. To the

## 8. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The aim of teaching a foreign language is oral proficiency or communicative competence, which is the ability to use the language accurately, correctly, appropriately, functionally, strategically, and competently. While examining the quality of English oral proficiency skills among the secondary students of the Namsai District, in Arunachal Pradesh, it was found that of the 132 respondents 62.1% expressed their desire to communicate in English with their friends both inside and outside the classroom (Fig. 2). There are many factors influencing learners' English speaking skills, such as difficulties in finding suitable words and expressions, and other psychological obstacles. In our study, 50.8% of the respondents, wished to improve their mastery of the language through the improvement of vocabulary as seen in Fig.1. Students were fully aware of their insufficiency of words and expressions, to communicate well and the necessity of a good vocabulary build-up.

Do you wish to improve your vocabulary for better communication skills in English?  
132 responses

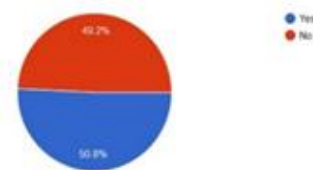


Figure 1: Sufficiency of vocabulary Fluency in English

query, if the students wished their teachers to communicate in English in English class, 92.4% of the respondents supported the idea as seen in Fig. 4. It is a clear indication that students want the English teachers to teach them in English, showing the importance of the role of the teacher in developing the language skills of the students. It becomes even more crucial in a situation where they lack family support in learning English as it is

clear from Fig.13 that 62.1% of the respondents expressed the view that their family environment does not help them to speak English at home. In this context, emphasizing the responsibility of the teacher in ensuring and creating ample opportunities for better learning English in the

classroom settings. Of the students who responded to the question of whether they wished to have more English-speaking opportunities in the class, 58.3% answered positively. It is a clear indication that the students do not get sufficient opportunities in the class as seen in Fig. 9.



Figure 4: Use of English while teaching English

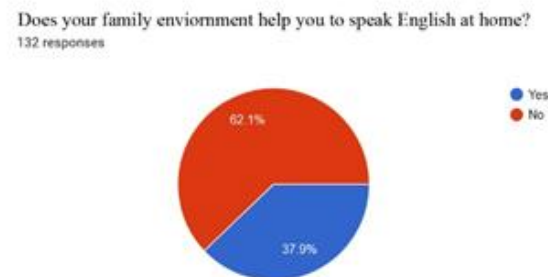


Figure 13: Help of family environment in speaking English

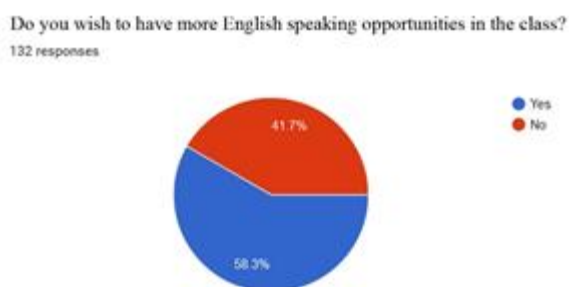


Figure 9: Conduct of English speaking in the classroom

teachers. Among the respondents, 63.6% said that there were no language learning labs and facilities in the school as seen in Fig. 6. Language learning needs to be more practical and interesting rather than theoretical. The classes could be conducted out of classroom contexts with more practical and interesting methods and techniques. Fig.10, shows that 88.6% of the English classes are held in the classroom. It could lead to boredom and monotony, even kill interest and motivation to learn.

While providing infrastructure for learning the English language and oral proficiency, it is important to provide sufficient instructional tools, resources, and facilities to the students and



Figure 6: Availability of language learning facilities

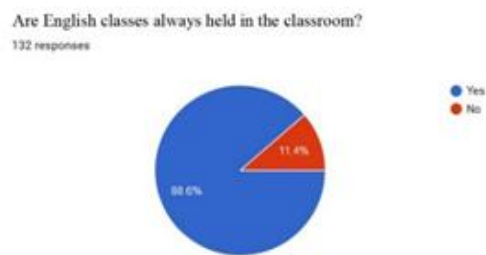


Figure 10: Classroom as the normal venue for the English class

Factors like fear, shyness, embarrassment, distrust, weakness in English grammar, vocabulary, syntax, poor fluency in speech, low understanding of

grammar frameworks, and inaccurate pronunciation may affect oral proficiency. Therefore making learning more practical, activity-based, interactive, and synergistic rather than classroom-based. To

enhance their motivation, learning and confidence, it is important to provide exposure and public platforms for the students to express themselves. It can be done both in large and small contexts and situation. English language classes could incorporate more practical lessons in reading and speaking which will build confidence among the student in oral proficiency. Fig. 8 shows that 95.5% of the students were interested in the proper reading of English text in the classroom. It provides

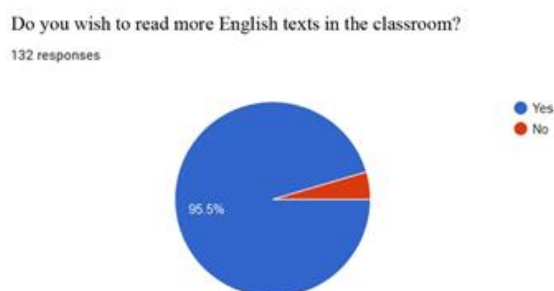


Figure 8: Reading of English text in the classroom

Proficiency in communication skills can make an individual more versatile and competitive, as communication is the process of transferring messages, thoughts, feelings, thinking, imagination and ideas. Every student needs effective and impressive communication skills. In this, teachers play a significant role in enhancing communication skills among students, through innovative methods and strategies, quality instructional resources, thus

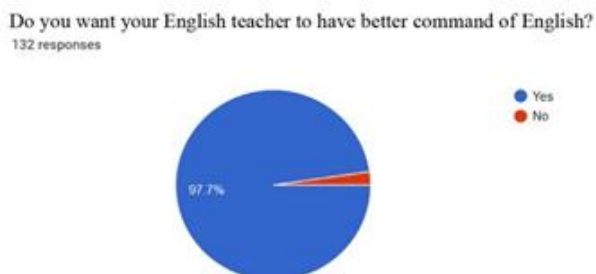


Figure 15: English teacher's command of the English language

In Namsai District of Arunachal, the medium of instruction is English in all educational institutions.

opportunities for the teacher to rectify the mistakes in pronunciation and language usage. As the students improve in reading and proper usage of the language their confidence in speaking English in public improves. Fig. 12 shows that 78.8% of the students feel that they are not confident. It is an indication to the teacher that corrective measures have to be taken to develop and improve English communication skills of the students.

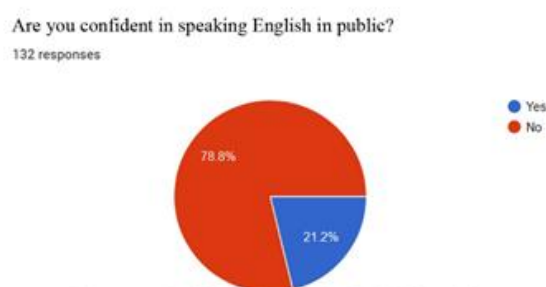


Figure 12: Confidence in speaking English in public

preparing them to face future challenges. Many things are learnt through observation and imitation. Role models are important protagonists. To achieve language proficiency, the teacher needs to ensure that English is used in communicating in the English classroom. 97.7% of the students expressed their desire to have their English teacher have a better command of English as shown in Fig.15 and 81.8% appreciate their English teachers who have a good command of the language as seen in Fig.16.

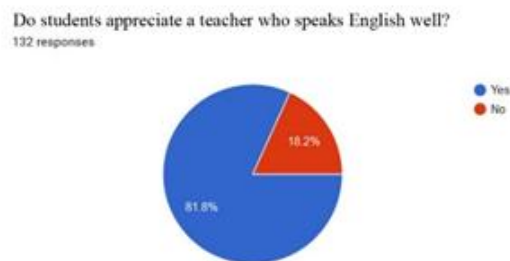


Figure 16: Appreciation of teachers speaking English well

However, a student who completes class 10, is not able to have a good command of the English language. Among the 132 respondents, it is seen in

Fig. 14 that 59.8% of the students felt that the students who complete their class 10 should have much better command in using the English language.

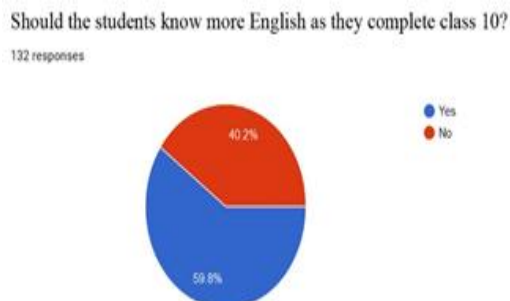


Figure 14: Ability to speak English on completion of class 10

## 9. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The District of Namsai is comparatively new, established only in the year 2014. However, if the educational scenario needs to be changed, all changes need to begin from the initial stages of education. Proper foundation, the right direction, right policies, and precise plans from the part of various administrative bodies, departments, and stakeholders will pave the way for change and improvement. Mastery of a language is a life-long process, and more so, when it is a question of achieving oral proficiency in a foreign/second language. While focusing on progress and development in education, paying attention to the foundational issues is the need of the hour. With the survey that was conducted, the following points come up for consideration.

1. Ensure proper and well-trained teaching faculty to teach English as well as in-service training to keep themselves abreast of the modern technological developments in language learning techniques and methods.
2. Make available language labs, and other modern infrastructure and instructional tools and resources, to increase the oral proficiency

of the students, particularly in listening, pronunciation, and speaking.

3. Make learning more practical rather than theoretical, more activity-based rather than classroom-based, more interactive, and synergistic, through repetition, drilling, dialogues, short questions and answers.
4. Provide exposure and public platforms for the students to express themselves in English, both in large and small contexts and situations, to enhance motivation and confidence of the students.
5. Ensure proper and maximum learning environments within the institution to counteract the poor and unfavourable environments of the families.
6. Use appropriate teaching styles, methodologies, strategies and modern instructional resources in reading, and speaking based on the students' interests, feelings and confidence level.
7. Focus on building up proper and sufficient words and expressions, through subject-based competitions, debates, discussion, interaction, drama, and other participatory and interactive activities.
8. Create favourable ambience where there is maximum teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil interactions so as to have hands-on experience and practice of oral skills.

The above suggestions and recommendations have emerged from the survey and analysis of the data collected. Serious consideration on the issues raised, with corrective policies and action plans will lead the entire educational system to a new level and standard.



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