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CHAPTER III

3.1 The Problem

English education is important in Meghalaya. Teaching English today means teaching effective communication skills and life skills which would help students meet all odds to survive – English being not only a language of education and technology but also in the context of globalisation - a language of survival.

Concerned academicians and research scholars have notably brought out the importance of teaching and learning English, along with challenges faced inside and outside the classroom, the learners’ problems in language learning and so on. There are in addition, many other situations in which English teachers encounter in the daily transaction of the teaching and learning process. Some of these situations present themselves with problems to be solved; others provide impetus for action research. It is crucial to note at this juncture that the English teachers and learners are non-native speakers of English and hence, the challenges posed by these circumstances bring out several problems.

A region which boasts itself as the ‘educational hub’ of the state of Meghalaya, Shillong prides itself with having the best English schools and colleges and of churning the brightest students who have made their mark nationally as well as internationally, in many academic centres and professional areas of different fields.

However, current realities seem to overshadow this view, showing the actual concerns that are perennial in the education system. The system of education becomes more complex when one ponders at the situation that one sees in our state today. The nature and quality of our education system sees a considerable slump in academic and professional development. There appears to be a gap in foundation and development as students are less sensitive to their own academic needs, professional needs as well as society’s needs.

There seems to be quite a number of underlying problems in the training of English teachers in the State, particularly in the East Khasi Hills. Some of these problems have been spelt out in the State Education Policy for Meghalaya which was approved by the Cabinet on January 19, 2009.
Firstly, the policy reported that till January 2009, more than half of the primary school teachers and nearly two-thirds of upper primary and secondary school teachers in the State are untrained. This is one of the State’s concerns.

Secondly, in terms of the Development of Languages, it is clearly pointed out that the quality of English language teaching (ELT) and proficiency in English among the people of the State is limited to the urban centres mainly. The quality of English language teaching is still a far cry in the rural areas.

- It is also noted that good English language teachers are very few. (There is indeed a dearth of trained English teachers which constraint the teachers and students in the teaching-learning process)
- So therefore to meet the requirement of a large pool of English language teachers, it may be necessary that graduates with high proficiency in English and good communication skills are to be inducted without teacher training qualifications.

This report clearly highlights the nature and quality of teaching in the State and the problems that plague the education system in terms of untrained teachers, and most significantly the dearth of competent and trained English teachers. The policy in its report recommended the appointment of highly proficient English language speakers in the educational institutes to meet the larger pool of English language teachers. This suggestion is really debatable since a glance at the daily English and regional newspapers in the list of vacancies for English teachers, requires that at least a minimum qualification of B.Ed is needed. The whole idea then, of undergoing training is disproved.

Some of the goals of education outlined in the Meghalaya Educational Policy (2009) are to enable students to think for themselves independently and critically; to seek, extend and apply knowledge for the solution of human problems; to become agents of needed social change in their own situations.

It is observed here that since a strong emphasis is placed on the use of English in the school and college curriculum, one has to be equally confident in using the English language so as to meet these goals with greater success.

In the words of Bamon, there are common instances where English teachers have been allowed to practise even without a course in the theory and practice of pedagogy. Qualified teachers in a different discipline are allowed to teach subjects they have had no professional training at all. (p.23)
As rightly put by Azim Premji Wipro mogul in an article in The Economic Times, dated September 5, 2006 in *Significance of Education For Democracy and Inclusive Growth* “...the ground reality in schools is disturbing. Autocratic classrooms, mechanical rote learning, negligible intrinsic motivations, uninspired and uninspiring teaching, learning divorced from reality, characterize with few exceptions, the vast majority of our schools. If today’s schools mirror tomorrow’s society, we need to be alarmed”.

In an article in *Constructing 21st century Teacher Education*, Linda Darling-Hammond identifies certain lapses which hinder the growth of quality teacher education. These are “…inadequate attention to practical concerns such as classroom management, technology use, and literacy development; limited use of pedagogical strategies and modeling in courses; little articulation between courses and clinical work; and little connection between theory and practice”.

As the main concern of this study involves English language teaching, the researcher feels that the delivery English education has not met the expectations of the urban and rural populace as a whole. Its delivery has only been a cover to protect one from being isolated and alienated from the rest of the world. Its importance has not been seriously recognized and implemented in the actual discourse of teaching and learning English in schools and colleges.

Aspects of English teaching lay emphasis on both teaching literature and teaching language. Though both literature and language are important, one is inclined to believe that one aspect is given more importance than the other. In this case, more prominence is given to teaching different genre of pure literature like prose and poetry than teaching the basics of English language communication.

Prof. Verma in his paper titled *The teaching of English in India: Focus on Functions and Objectives* added that “... for quite some time the teaching of English in India has not been successful primarily because the learner’s experience of English has been confined to only literary-text based contexts, very few role-relationships and a limited number of speech functions. They have been exposed to ‘classroom English’ and ‘text book English and no attempt has been made to help them exploit the possibilities of what they bring with them – their knowledge of formal grammar, their exposure to literature, their ability to memorize and their ability to handle their first language”.

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In an editorial in The Shillong Times (2007), an insightful observer and noted columnist expressed that “one of the evils of the education system is that teachers are never, ever evaluated. Once they are appointed it is taken for granted that they are able to teach and that their teaching prowess improves with every passing year. While this may be true of a few teachers it is not so for the rest.”

Teacher evaluation which should practically be an ongoing process in gauging the teachers’ performance and development circles around stagnation rather than active implementation.

The observer further lamented on the condition of schooling in the rural hinterland where “teachers get by with minimum effort and students suffer.”

Our education system, she asserts, “especially the government run one does not permit induction of the most qualified teachers. An appointee passes through several layers of tests which include his/her tribal identity, political connections and religious affiliation. The criterion that matters leasts are the teaching skills and personal and academic accomplishments of the teacher. Naturally you have a mediocre teacher producing thousands of mediocre students over a thirty year span”.

Furthermore, she states that “the prevailing condition in the education system of our state seems to be the outcome of -a growing number of lapses in the educational structure. First, the structure of the state school curriculum have frequently been criticized for being ‘unimaginative, refusing to look beyond the clichéd, and lacking in dynamism’. Second, the growing number of teachers with a corresponding lack of training in specific teaching skills has adversely affected the condition of the learners and their future”.

Quality in English teaching implies a demand in the teacher’s teaching quality and competence in interpersonal communication.

Teaching is a profession for which aspirants have to be prepared through rigorous education and training. It is often emphasised that teachers need to be prepared through effective pre-service, followed by periodical in-service teacher education, to develop and update in them the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes and values.

A teacher is like an anchor that provides support and safety to those involved in learning and in acquiring the skills, knowledge and concepts of value-based education.
In India, various commissions and policies have time and again stressed on the need for a systematic teacher education programme, both pre-service and in-service, which is essential for the qualitative improvement of education. Emphasis on the importance of English besides other home languages has also been highlighted.

The kind of training that student teachers get in training colleges seems to be more product-oriented rather than process-oriented as the focus is on completing the prescribed syllabus. A shift is needed to attend to current realities of a process-oriented approach that would satisfy future needs in the development of global English communication.
3.2 The Rationale of the Study

The quality of school education is the consequence and outcome of the quality of teachers and the teacher education system. Quality improvement of our teacher education programme is one of the indispensable needs.

There is a growing feeling that teacher education is not effective in turning out efficient teachers and this concern is adequately reflected in the National Policy of Education (1986) and the Programme of Action (1992).

The contemporary model of teacher education though has grown manifold over the decades but is overshadowed by severe criticism for being static and unresponsive to the emerging challenges of the present time.

The Educational curriculum in the Hills gave due importance to English as it is the official language of the State, and it is the compulsory second language in the schools. English is the main language of instruction through which other subjects are taught and delivered. However, it is to be noted that there appears to be a slow growth in the acquisition of language skills among students even at the high school level. In the later stage, this case is revealed in the low accessibility to employment opportunities in areas that demand proficiency in the mastery of the English language.

The reasons could be attributed to the individual differences, interests and motivations of learners and also to the effectiveness of the teacher’s training and experience.

The mere fact that we now have private English language institutes and centres in the city to enhance improvement in communicative English language skills is to realize that there is a dichotomy between theory and practice in our educational system particularly in the teaching and learning of English.

This is further illustrative of the fact that English language teaching in schools do require serious investigation, research and effort especially on the part of the teachers, teacher educators, scholars and the like, to help initiate effective English language skills at the school level. The Teacher Education system therefore needs to address this issue.

It is also relevant to consider genuinely the present English language teaching scenario at the school level where there is more emphasis on literature rather than on language and linguistics. The focus seems to be more inclined towards the assessment
of the course content rather than on developing the communicative and creative abilities and skills of the students. Moreover, there is a dearth of trained English language teachers which constraint both students and teachers in the teaching-learning process.

As the study would investigate the nature of the English language teaching in the teacher-training institutes in the East Khasi Hills, it is important in the field of ELT.

In the light of the information provided by this study, it may perhaps facilitate teacher educators, teacher-trainees, textbook writers, syllabus designers and administrators, modify their approach towards the objectives and purposes of the English language teaching in terms of education policy making, course and curriculum planning, material designing, professionalization of teaching and proper assessment of educational programmes.
3.3 The Objectives of the Study

A majority of studies related to English language teaching in teacher education colleges have been carried out in different contexts and under different situations. The studies have not been directly relevant to the teacher training colleges in the East Khasi Hills.

The aim of the research study includes

- An outline on the historical development of B.Ed programme in the College of Teacher Education (PGT), St. Mary’s College of Teacher Education and IGNOU; and the PGDTE programme of the English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), Shillong.

- A study of the course outline of the English syllabus offered by the respective teacher education colleges.

- A study of the profile of the English teacher-trainees and English teacher educators.

- A study of the English teacher trainees’ preparedness, satisfaction towards the duration of the programme, methods of teaching, materials and development of competencies.

- The overall aim and objective is to find out the beliefs of teachers and trainees towards English language learning and teaching.

- Finally, suggestions would be given to assist in the understanding and improvement of English language learning-teaching.
The interpretation of the findings of the study was based on the framework of a null hypothesis.

Garret (1996) states that "A null hypothesis is ordinarily more useful than other hypothesis because it is exact. Hypothesis other than null, can, to be sure, be stated exactly but it is difficult to set up sure precise expectations in many experiments. For this reason it is usually advisable to test against a null hypothesis, rather than some other, if this can be done".

Based on the suggestion of Garret, a number of null hypotheses were formulated for finding out the perceptions of the English teacher trainees and the English teacher trainers towards the various factors that involve English language teaching. The following are the null hypotheses formed for the purpose of the study.

There is no significant difference between the opinion of the English teacher trainees and the English teacher trainers towards the
1. Duration of the teacher education programme
2. Relevance of the English course content for the teaching profession.
3. Effectiveness of the English teaching materials in meeting the professional needs of the English teacher trainees'.

There is no significant difference between the beliefs of the English teacher trainees and the English teacher trainers about the teacher education programme's focus on the
4. Form of the language
5. Teaching of vocabulary.

There is no significant difference between the English teacher trainees and the English teacher trainers perspectives on
6. Enabling learners to use the language appropriately'.

There is no significant difference on the opinion between the English teacher trainees and the English teacher trainers towards
7. The importance of the language skills'.

There is no significant difference between the English teacher trainees and the English teacher trainers opinions on the
8. Characteristics of a good teacher'.
9. Conditions necessary for language learning'.
11. Effectiveness of teaching procedures for English in the classrooms.
12. Effective methods of teaching English; and the
13. Role of practice in English language learning.

The null hypothesis that is formulated for finding out the perceptions among
the English teacher trainees on the basis of the Mode of teacher training, the Course
and Gender towards various aspects of the English teaching programme is outlined
below:

i. Regular mode and the Distance mode English teacher-trainees

ii. B.Ed and PGDTE English teacher-trainees

iii. Male and Female English teacher-trainees.

1. The duration of the teacher education programme does not satisfy the
English teacher-trainees professional needs.
2. The teacher education programme does not equip the English teacher-trainees
with the necessary skills of teaching English in their respective classroom.
3. The English course content of the teacher education programme is not
relevant for the teaching profession of the English teacher-trainees.
4. The objectives of the English teaching materials are not sufficiently
effective to meet the professional needs of the English teacher-trainees.
5. The teacher education programme does not develop the competencies of
the English teacher-trainees.
6. The English course content of the teacher education programme does not
focus on teaching the form of the language for the English teacher-trainees.
7. The English course content of the teacher education programme does not
focus on teaching vocabulary for the English teacher-trainees.
8. The teacher education programme does not equip the English teacher-trainees
’ to enable learners to use the language appropriately.
9. The English course content of the teacher education programme does not
emphasize on the importance of the language skills for the English teacher-trainees.
10. Beyond providing the necessary qualification, the teacher education programme does not enhance teacher efficiency for the English teacher-trainees.

11. The teacher education programme does not provide the English teacher-trainees' with information about the conditions necessary for language learning.

12. The teacher education programme does not specify the purposes of language teaching and learning for the English teacher-trainees.

13. The teacher education programme does not examine the effectiveness of teaching procedures for English in the classrooms for the English teacher-trainees.

14. The teacher education programme does not provide the English teacher-trainees with information about the effective methods of teaching English.

15. The teacher education programme does not emphasize on the role of practice in English language learning for the English teacher-trainees.
3.4 Profile of the trained English teachers and English teacher trainees

The respondents to the Questionnaire were trainees of the selected Teacher Education colleges, who have English teaching as their method paper or as their area of specialization. The questionnaire was distributed to trained teachers of English and trainees of English teaching of the specified colleges of teacher education.

The investigator identified a number of schools and colleges in Shillong and through a formal introduction with the heads of school and college she was able to meet English teachers who had pre-service and in-service training. The investigator also contacted and met trained English teachers through friends and acquaintances.

Out of approximately one hundred and eighty questionnaires that were distributed, one hundred and twenty questionnaires were statistically analysed for the study. Not all the questionnaires could be collected because few respondents fail to give their responses, as well as reply and return them. Some questionnaires had to be rejected because the input gathered from the statements contradicted with others and mainly because the responses lacked clarity and consistency. Out of the total strength of B.Ed trainees that were enrolled in the teacher training colleges of St. Mary’s, PGT and the School of Education IGNOU, only about one-fourth take English as their subject specialization.

3.5 Profile of the English teacher trainers and educators

In colleges like PGT and SMCTE, the English department is usually a one-teacher department. Data was collected from two English teachers in PGT. One was a retired part-time English teacher and another was a newly appointed full-time English teacher. In SMCTE, the English department is managed by a teacher who also heads the institute’s undergraduate college called St. Mary’s College. During the data collection SMCTE had also appointed a part-time English teacher who gives remedial English classes to the institute’s trainees.

The PGDTE course in EFLU, unlike PGT, SMCTE and IGNOU, has more than one teacher with different areas of specialization. Data was collected from three
teachers in EFLU. One teacher preferred not to give her responses to the questionnaire and the investigator had to respect the teacher’s decision.

In IGNOU, there is only one Academic counsellor for B.Ed teacher-trainees. Since the course in itself is a distance education course, trainees mainly rely on the prepared and comprehensive study materials. Therefore the presence of the English language teacher does not arise. Trainees who have English as their subject of specialization are expected to read and study on their own and at flexible timings.

3.6 The Methodology of the Study

One of the most common methods of data collection in second language (L2) research is to use questionnaires of various kinds. (Dornyei, 2003).

To elicit primary information for the purpose of the research study, information about the trainees and trained English teachers were obtained and collected in the form of a close-ended questionnaire. This ensured first hand responses and information from the participants.

According to Dornyei (2003), the choice of a close-ended questionnaire makes the coding and tabulation straightforward as it leaves no room for rater subjectivity.

The English teacher trainer’s questionnaire is a combination of open-ended and close ended items. Dornyei (2003) p. 47, argues that “open responses can offer graphic examples, illustrative quotes, and can also lead us to identify issues not previously anticipated”. He also states that “…sometimes we need open-ended items for the simple reason that we do not know the range of possible answers and therefore cannot provide pre-prepared response categories”.

The research study, employed the Likert Scale scaling technique - which consisted of a series of statements all of which are related to a particular target - and the continuum of the scale indicate different degrees of frequency, quality and opinion of the English teaching methodology and English teachers’ beliefs.
Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with these items by marking one of the responses ranging from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’.

Original Likert scales contained five response options, but subsequent research has also used two-, three-, four-, six-, and seven- response options successfully. (p. 37) Variations in Likert Scales exist. Dornyei (2003) stated that, ‘Likert scales use response options representing the degree of agreement. This standard set of responses (i.e., strongly agree -> strongly disagree) can be easily replaced by other descriptive terms that are relevant to the target’. (p. 38).

The questionnaire used the set of responses to determine the degree of satisfaction, preparation, relevance, effectiveness and development, besides measuring the degree of agreement.

Distribution of the Questionnaires covered the English teacher-trainee population of all the selected training institutes and the concerned English teacher educators. Data collection in the form of interviews also forms an important adjunct to the survey findings.

### 3.7 The Statistical Tools

An analysis of the data and its interpretations was conducted so as to ascertain the extent to which the present study can contribute towards a better understanding of English Language Teaching situation in the teacher training colleges.

Certain variables were selected to look at the respondents’ view of the English teaching programme and their beliefs about language teaching and learning. For this, the Statistical procedures used were Descriptive Statistical procedures which gives the Frequency distribution to calculate the Measures of central tendency (Mean, Median and Mode) and the measures of Dispersion (Range and standard deviation); and Inferential Statistics which finds out the significant difference between the means of respondents’ according to the variables. For this the T Test was used.
3.8 Limitations of the study

The small population of English teacher-trainers in the Teacher-Education colleges under observation is a limitation to the present study. The population could not be expanded by any means since the given population reflects the present scenario of the number of English teacher trainees and trainers in teacher-education colleges in the East Khasi Hills.

3.9 Scope of the Study

The focus of the study in the area of English Language Teaching in the teacher education colleges would enable teachers, teacher trainers, teacher trainees and research scholars to gain a better understanding of the various teaching and learning aspects involved in the current teacher-training programmes in the region of Shillong in particular and the North East India in general.

The study, it is hoped, would contribute to reveal new insights and perceptions about various issues concerning the English teaching programme in the teacher education colleges.
Works Cited


Journal Article


Reports

