INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION:

English is an international language, spoken in many countries both as a native and as a second or foreign language. It is a West Germanic language originating in England and the first language for most people in Australia, Canada, the Commonwealth Caribbean, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. It is taught in schools in every country on this earth. It is a vibrant and a living language spoken by over 300 million people as their native language and an additional 100 million people use it fluently as a foreign language. Millions speak it as an additional language also. As a rough estimate, 1000 million or one billion people around the world have some knowledge of English, either as a native language, as a second language, or as a foreign language.

In India which has over 1000 million (over billion) people, English is the associate official language. Pakistan, Bangladesh, and many other nations which were ruled by Britain continue to use English both as an optional medium of instruction in their schools and as one of their official languages. The islands of the Philippines continue to use English as an important language for education, administration, and for mass media purposes. English is the chief foreign language taught in the schools of Europe, South America, Asia and Africa.

Modern English is sometimes described as the global ‘lingua franca’. A working knowledge of English is required in certain fields, professions and occupations. As a result, over a billion people speak English at least at the basic level.

English is also known as a progressive language because it has its past, present and future. It is a dynamic language because nearly half of the world speaks and understands it. In India English speakers outnumber those in all of Europe. In India, Indians speak English twice as many than the Britons in the United Kingdom. Not just that, India’s legion of the English-speaking is also
more than twice as large as the population of the United Kingdom. English is also a flexible language because its history has a chronicle of tremendous change in culture and language. However, a high percentage of school leavers leave the precincts of school as ignorant of English usage as they were when they entered the school first. Teaching of English is in a chaotic state today. Secondary English language learners especially face major difficulties in acquiring proficiency in using the English language. The modern trend in education and the complex nature in teaching and learning have made the role of the teacher more challenging. This new role does not only just involve the mere transmission of knowledge and information to the students but it also involves looking at the problems associated with learning and instruction in English.

According to Bloom (1956), oral ability is a necessity if a child is to learn in school. Ayodele (1987) opined that pupil’s inadequacy in the range and control of language is a dominating factor in educational failure. This deficiency in the students generates a vicious circle of difficulties which goes on increasing in magnitude as school life progresses.

While the demand of improving the proficiency of the language increases on the one hand, the quality of English language education in our state run schools, more particularly in rural schools, presents an abysmal picture. The ‘divide’ between the urban and rural is further contributed by the way English language education is making its way as a medium of instruction, Tickoo (1996). The paradox of demand and suspicious mentioned above could be further reflected through the paradox of access depicted by the report of the National Knowledge Commission (NKC 2007), India as it brings out rightly that “There is an irony in the situation. English has been part of our education system for more than a century. Yet English is beyond the reach of most of our young people, which make for highly unequal access. Indeed, even now, more than one percent of our people use it as a second language, let alone a first language ……. But National Knowledge Commission believes that the time has come for us to teach our people, ordinary people, English as a language in schools. Early action in this sphere would help us build an inclusive society and transform India into a knowledge society.”
Schools in different regions and systems operate in their own contexts. The state policy on language education, curricular statements and syllabi and materials for teaching-learning of English along with teacher inputs decide the quality of education in schools more so in rural schools. The basic aim of teaching English language is to enable the students to develop the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing English language. It is while speaking and writing that the problem of intelligibility and acceptability arises. Correctness based on internally accepted standards cannot be ignored by us. For today, English in India is a symbol of people’s aspirations for quality in education and a full participation in national and international life.

Various factors varying from place to place and situation to situation do exist and create difficulties in a teaching learning situation. Unmanageable student numbers, poor classroom conditions, poor motivation, lack of teaching competence, lack of support from home and society, pressure from unwieldy syllabus in other subjects, too many languages to be studied at the same time, unhealthy attitude of the authorities in many cases---- all these factors lead to the decline in the standard of teaching English language teaching in schools. Besides, there are certain teacher oriented factors that lead to poor English language learning.

1.2 MEANING AND PURPOSE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION:

Secondary Education is a vital stage in the overall scheme of educational training and its importance can never be belittled although the emphasis upon its aims and purposes has varied from time to time. This is the stage where education is given to the age group 13 to 16 years. The term ‘Secondary Education’ though simple, is not always precise. It has been understood in terms of role and purposes envisaged for it from time to time. According to Prof. Dent (1965), “Secondary Education is that stage of education necessary for all children expecting to become full members of a complex modern society which building on a secure foundation of primary education, attempts by providing for the adolescents a satisfying school life and by developing to their highest potential his ability, his healthy aptitude, interests and qualities of character to bring to the
threshold of adult life adequately prepared to enter upon that life as knowledgeable, active minded and sociable individual, a citizen aware of his privileges, rights, duties and objectives as a member of democratic society, and eager to take them all up and a worker sufficiently skilled to begin not only to support an individual life of his own but to make a reasonable contribution through his work to natural and spiritual wealth of his community and to know why he should do so and be satisfied with the reason”.

Problems regarding the teaching method have been discussed from time to time by different Commissions and many have given some suggestions also. But in most Indian schools these suggestions are not implemented in a true manner. Therefore, it is necessary to know the recommendations of Education Commissions regarding secondary schools before giving suggestions to improve the method of teaching English.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF SECONDARY EDUCATION COMMISSION (1953) REGARDING THE TEACHING METHOD:

Need of the Right Method:

Every experienced teacher and educationist know that even the best curriculum and the most perfect syllabus remain dead unless quickened into life by the right method of teaching and also the right kind of teachers. While building up a picture of the recognized secondary school, it is necessary to indicate the kind of method to be adopted and popularized. It is really the function of the Teacher Education Institutes (TEI) to introduce these methods in our schools through their trained teachers. The Commission has confined its attention to the most outstanding defects in this field and to indicate the general principles and approach to be adopted to eradicate these defects.

Objectives of the Right Method:

Good method of teaching should aim not only at the intellectual but also the social and moral implications; for whatever impact education has on one aspect of the personality tends to react on the other aspects too.
The highest value that all methods should try to inculcate is the love of the subject and the desire to do it with highest measure of efficiency of which one is capable. Education of the school students should try to develop a real attachment to the various subjects that they are doing in school and the will to put the best into it; without it, there can be neither education of the mind nor the character of the students. This attitude to educate the mind is not common amongst our students either in schools or in colleges.

SECONDARY EDUCATION IN THE 21st CENTURY:

In the 21st century, Secondary Education has been emphasized and certain recommendations were given by UNESCO (2008). These are as follows-

1. Secondary education should be given high priority.
2. The objectives and functions of Secondary Education need to be redefined for the 21st century.
3. Countries should be committed to the goal of mass Secondary education as a minimum in terms of policy and provisions.
4. Commitment to access to secondary education should be maintained with efforts to remove barriers and to build on strengths and opportunities especially for girls.
5. It also needs to address students’ needs in terms of realizing their full potential, especially in the context of rapid economic, cultural and social changes and gender based discrimination.
6. The emerging role of teachers (notably as facilitators), their status, integrity and commitment are essential for implementing life-skills education successfully.

Education is called a human activity based largely on the related process; known as learning and teaching process and informal system of education, the teacher imparts the education to the learners. So, teachers’ role in education cannot be ignored.
1.3 SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING AND THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM:

Teaching, like any other professions, is currently at a transitional stage and is experiencing a serious occupational crisis. Its knowledge base has expanded significantly and in the present century, but still there has been lack of clarity in public, in teachers themselves and in ministries of education, in teachers’ education institutions, regarding the professional identity, teacher empowerment, nature and needs of teacher education and the academic credibility of educational studies. Teachers are themselves uncertain as to the nature of their own occupation. They are unclear as to which category they belong- persons, professionals, trade persons etc. Dewey (1929), argued that “the problem of training teachers become species of a more generic affair- that of training professionals, a theme later taken up by others. Burke (1997) said that the problem with many teachers training programmes, both at pre-service and in-service levels, is that they are still training teachers rather than educating professionals.

Aims and objectives of teaching English in the Secondary School Stage:

Following are the aims and objectives of teaching English at the Secondary School Stage-

1) The student should understand English when spoken at the normal conversational speed.

2) The student should speak English correctly.

3) a. He/ she can read English silently with comprehension.

   b. He/ she can read aloud English pieces correctly.

4) He/ she can write English correctly.

5) He/ she acquire knowledge of the elements of English.

6) He/ she appreciate pieces of good English.

7) He/ she develop an interest in English.
Teachers all over the country are not clear about the aim of teaching English. They divide the time table into reading, writing, composition, translation and grammar and are satisfied as long as the students are kept busy and they do not get any trouble from the school authorities. It drives home the fact that in general, students are not found to be competent in English because of the language skill development in students is found to be not up to the mark.

According to Subramaniam (1979), a teacher’s target is to “prepare” the students for the examination and not to make the pupils competent in the use of the language they are learning. In reality, neither the student is anxious to learn nor the teacher anxious to teach English.

A diligent English teacher should continually learn new methods and techniques from his/her peers and also from the students as he/she interacts with them. The English teacher needs to know the new directions in teaching of English to the speakers of other languages. For this the teacher has to develop the competence and be comfortable with the methods he/she wants to deliver. For this the teacher needs to select different teaching strategies from different methods and blend them to suit the needs his students.

According to the National Curriculum Framework (2005), “The goals of a second-language curriculum are two-fold: attainment of a basic proficiency, such as is required in natural language learning and the development of language into an instrument for abstract thought and knowledge acquisition through (for example) literacy.” “The aim of English teaching is the creation of multi-linguals who can enrich all our languages; this has been an abiding national vision.”

If the teaching-learning situation of our country is to cater to the rural learners also, the curriculum in language education needs to:

i. Have a holistic approach to language planning where language education is perceived as whole in which English language education find its complementary and supplementary role.

ii. Use the languages of children as a resource for teaching-learning of languages and other content subjects (National Curriculum Framework, 2005). Adopting the multilingualism as strategy for learning of
languages and other subjects will help the rural learner finding their contexts and connecting their life outside the school with happenings of the classroom.

iii. Create (English) language environment in the classroom and attempt to enable the learner to explore finding the language in use outside the classroom. This requires bilingual proficient teachers, who are comfortable in the mother tongue(s) of children and in English. The activities and assignments that would demand children to move beyond the textbook and the classroom in finding to use the language. Newspapers, radio, television, audio-visual aids and Computer Aided Learning (CAL), could be exploited for the purpose. In short, English should be taught as a process oriented approach instead of content oriented approach.

For effective teaching to take place in the class, a good method must be adopted by the teacher. A teacher has many options when choosing a style and a method to teach by. The teachers may write lesson plans of their own, borrow plans from others or search online or within books for lesson plans. A teacher will need to consider the students’ background knowledge, environment and learning goals while deciding what teaching method to use. Teachers should know that all students learn and retain information in different ways. So, teachers should use techniques which cater to multiple learning styles to help students retain information and strengthen their understanding of the subject. A variety of strategies and methods can be used to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to learn. According to Rogers (1969), “The teacher should first forget that he/ she is a teacher. Instead he/ she must possess the skills of a facilitator of learning and genuineness, prizing and empathy”.

Thus, there is a clear necessity for effective English communication skills for students at Secondary level. It is observed that students do not gain the kind of proficiency demanded in present day context where communication is beyond the mastery of listening, speaking, reading and writing.
1.4 NEED OF THE STUDY:

The new insights gained into the process of language acquisition in the recent past have made the prevailing practices in language teaching look outmoded and redundant if not pernicious. Meaning based interaction, which involves hypothesis-testing, exploration and experimentation, is not regarded as indispensable for acquiring a language. In the changed perspective, the learners is seen as playing an active part in learning how to make meaning with the help of words, unlike the passive recipient of knowledge/ information about the target language, in the traditional language classroom. An active learner’s role has clear implications for a new approach to language teaching with a new role of the teacher.

It has been observed that there has been considerable deterioration in the standards of the teaching and learning of English at the school and college levels in the last twenty five years. Men, Methods and Materials are either individually or collectively responsible for this setback in standards. The professional training of teachers of English and their command of the English have been called in question. Yet one realizes that teaching or learning a language is a complex process.

Most researchers in this field agree to the fact that to a large extent language is a skill subject and the more the learner practices it in meaningful contexts, the better is the mastery of it. Rivers (1978) calls a language learning a ‘skill getting’ and ‘skill using’ activity. A language can be learnt without the learner being given a linguistic description of the language, whereas a content subject cannot be so learnt. Language is a set of skills and the teaching of it requires a certain amount of space. Corder (1966) says that language is learning through experience and science is learning through information. According to him, experiences could be acquired only through one’s own senses whereas “information is knowledge, not acquired through one’s own senses but through those of another person”.

Microteaching, which is a teachers’ training technique, is based on the principle that teaching can be analysed into limited and well defined components
called “teaching skills” that can be taught, practiced, evaluated, predicted, controlled and understood. However, its application in the training of teachers of English has so far not been tried out.

As an international language, English acts as a common language that enables people from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities to communicate on a more or less equitable basis. With the liberalisation and globalisation of the Indian economy, the rapid change witnessed in the scientific and technological world, and the general need to improve the quality of life and to reduce poverty, it is essential that the school leavers acquire a higher level of knowledge and skills that is provided in the 8 years of elementary education. Secondary education is therefore a crucial stage in the educational hierarchy as it prepares the students for higher education and also the world of work.

1.5 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

The basic problem undertaken for investigation in the present study is to examine the various methods of teaching English used by the Secondary School teachers and whether they have sound knowledge about the methods of teaching the subject, so that they can claim themselves to be competent. Hence, the study has been entitled as- “A STUDY ON THE METHODS OF TEACHING ENGLISH FOR DEVELOPING TEACHING COMPETENCE OF THE SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS OF ASSAM”.

1.6 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The objectives of the present study are as follows:

1) To examine the academic and the professional qualifications of the English teachers at Secondary level.

2) To study the methods and skills used by the English teachers in classroom situation.

3) To examine the competencies required of a teacher teaching English and how the competencies identified varied with the demographic variables of teachers i.e. (age, sex and educational qualifications) and with the contextual variables (urban and rural) of teachers.
4) To study the methods of teaching English Method at the Teacher Education Institutes.

5) To examine the perception of Secondary School students in learning English.

6) To investigate into the performance of the students in English at the Secondary School level.

1.7 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

a) The present study has been delimited to the Secondary (Assamese medium) School teachers teaching English in the Kamrup District of Assam.

b) The study considers teachers below the age group of 55 years.

c) The study has been delimited to the students studying in Class VIII, IX and X in Government/ Provincialised (Assamese medium) Secondary (Assamese medium) Schools of Kamrup District.

d) The study also considers teachers teaching English Method in the Teacher Education Institutes of Assam.