Chapter 5
Conclusion

5.1 Introduction:

Multilingualism in India has existed from the beginning of her recorded history and has been perceived as a very natural phenomenon of life. Existence and maintenance of cultural, linguistic, religious or ethnic diversity have always been a part of Indian tradition and culture. Earlier India was not geographically united in the sense we mean today, but even then “she has always remained culturally and linguistically united while maintaining her linguistic diversity” (Srivastava, A.K.)\(^1\). India has been able keep her linguistic diversity intact, despite the several invasions and long colonial rule of the British Empire when English was imposed through the formal education system to create a class of elites among Indians to serve the purpose of the British. Migration of the linguistic groups from one part of the region to another never adversely influenced the maintenance of their languages. Rather, these languages spread by reciprocal interactions with the local languages giving birth to newer languages, which further enriched the multilingual base of India.

Indian multilingualism is very well distributed and even to the district level of every state minority speech communities exist and they also maintain their languages. According to the 1961 Census, India has 1652 mother tongues, between 200 and 700 languages belonging to four language families, and 22 major Indian languages recognised as official languages. To add to this variety, more than 58 languages are used in school curricula, 87 languages are used by the press for publication and 71 languages for radio transmission\(^2\). Scholars have rightly called India a “sociolinguistic giant” (Pandit, 1972), with multilingualism being the soul of this giant.

To discuss anything related to the learning and teaching of languages in India, the sociolinguistic angle must be considered. This view will help in providing a sound analysis of the entire teaching and learning scenario in India.

In a multicultural country like ours where multilingualism is well distributed up
to the district level, the teaching and learning of a second language, especially En-
glish, cannot take place without the workings of the microsocial and the macrosocial
factors. To consider the crosslinguistic influences that hamper or facilitate the learn-
ing of English, it becomes essential to understand the social factors. In the second
chapter the social factors had already been discussed.

The topic of this study—"A Critical Study of the Crosslinguistic Influences on
Learning English in the Regional Medium Schools in Assam"—was selected to get a
picture of the English language learning scenario in Assam with the specific aim to
see which linguistic component of Assamese language act as a hindrance in learning
the target language (English) the most. The purpose is also to see whether the knowl-
edge of Assamese helps in the learning of the target language or the second language.

For the empirical dimension of the study, a survey had been conducted in two
phases. In the first phase a pilot survey was conducted in several schools in the Kamrurp
district. Schools of both urban and rural background were selected at random. All the
schools are regional medium (Assamese) government run and provincial schools.

The second phase of field study was conducted in 9 districts of the Brahmaputra
valley; the 4 regions of Upper Assam, Central Assam, Lower Assam and the North
bank are covered. We have selected the schools on a random basis and two schools
from the urban and two schools from the rural background are included from all the
districts.

The Upper, Central, Lower regions and the North Bank of the Brahmaputra valley
are the areas where most of the government run and provincial schools have Assamese
as the medium of instruction. As the study plans to look into the cross-linguistic
influences from Assamese into the learning of English, the districts selected will
justify the purpose. Another rationale behind the selection of the districts is that,
these districts fairly represent the Brahmaputra valley.

For collection of data from the field, a three stage simple questionnaire was
designed. The first stage of the questionnaire was related to the demographic data
pertaining to the informants. The second stage was for collection of data about the
awareness about the learning process of the second language and in the third stage it
was attempted to assess the knowledge of English grammar and comprehension. Over

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and above this questionnaire, another set of questionnaire was also designed to collect data from the teachers who have been teaching English in higher classes of the schools.

The data that had been collected with the help of the questionnaires have been converted into tables and all these tables are presented in the third chapter.

5.2 An overview of the Study:

For an overview of the study so far, it is necessary to revert back to the previous chapters.

The introductory chapter introduces the topic of the study—"A Critical Study of the Cross-linguistic Influences on Learning English in the Regional Medium Schools in Assam". In trying to do so, we first give the statement of the problem. The objectives of the study are given very specifically here. The objectives of the study are followed by the research questions. The objectives and the research questions are the guiding dimensions on the basis of which the hypothesis is formulated.

This is followed by the hypothesis of the study. It is on the basis of this hypothesis we are going to begin our research. The hypothesis is followed by the review of literature. The review of literature helps in the finding the knowledge gap that exists in the domain of English language learning and teaching in Assam.

After the review of literature, the introductory chapter gives a description of the research methodology that has been adopted to conduct this particular research.

The description of the selected methodology is followed by the chapterization. The chapterization in this chapter briefly describes the contents of the five chapters.

The introductory chapter concludes with the statement of the justification of the study. It is an echo of the rationale behind the study—what new knowledge is it going to add to this branch of study. It states how the study would help in the English language teaching-learning scenario in Assam.

In the second chapter we are going to deal with the existing theories of Teaching and Learning of English. The teaching and learning of English fall within the domain of Second Language Acquisition. Hence, we need to get acquainted with those theories of Second Language Acquisition which are associated with the learning of English.

The theories and hypotheses which have received considerable attention in second language research will be discussed in brief in this chapter. Before the theories are discussed, this chapter will highlight the definitions required to be clarified before
the study begins like- Second language acquisition and learning, bilingualism, cross-linguistic influences, to name a few.

Among the hypotheses mentioned above, the **Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis** and the **Error Analysis** are most relevant for us. These two hypotheses would be dealt with in detail. Our study would be especially based on the findings of Error analysis conducted on various study groups.

One important objective of this study is to see the sociolinguistic factors that influence the learning of English in Assam. To analyze this objective the sociolinguistic theories and the microsocial and macrosocial factors also needs to be discussed in this chapter on theory. The sociolinguistic theories that gets importance in this study are Ethnography of Communication, Social Psychology, Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory, Accommodation Theory, Interaction Hypothesis, and Schumann’s Acculturation Model.

Most of the theories dealing with the teaching and learning of English are Eurocentric in nature, having their origin either in Europe or America. Hence, through them we get a perspective of the teaching of English as a second language in the international canvas. In this chapter, we plan to deal with the international scenario in English learning and teaching. Also, the framework for the interpretation of the study would be framed in this chapter.

In the **third chapter** the entire study conducted from the beginning till the formulation of the tables would be discussed in detail.

In other words, the study of the cross-linguistic influences would be applied from the conceptual level to the empirical level.

The chapter begins with the elaboration of the methodology adopted to conduct the study. This is to be followed by the presentation of the statistical reports that were prepared with the help of a statistical package. This presentation of the quantitative study has been analysed with tables and diagrams.

The **fourth chapter** concentrates on the elaborate analysis of the data that had been collected from the two phases of the survey conducted for the study.

The chapter would first present the reading of the findings. These findings would then be analysed on the basis of the theoretical frameworks that had been adopted for
the purpose of the study.

By the time this study reaches the fourth chapter and analyzes the data, this study assumes a level where the objectives selected in the beginning seems to be fulfilled. The research questions that formed the basis of the study have also been answered in the process of analyzing the causal relations in the fourth chapter.

The fourth chapter and its causal interpretations are significant in another way. The hypotheses with which this study made its headway are proved in the fourth chapter. The difference in the two tense systems help in the negative transfer causing the cross-linguistic influences from the first language Assamese to surface when the target language English is learned. A positive influence of the first language in the learning of the second language English has also been proved. Majority of the learners have expressed that they use the first language Assamese as a support base or a scaffolding device to conceptualize and learn the second language English.

5.3 The social perspectives:

Many scholars have contributed towards the social perspective of language learning. Lev Vygotsky’s Sociocultural theory is one such important theory which has been accepted as a basis for the framework of this study. It claims that interaction not only facilitates language learning but is a causative force in language acquisition. All learning is seen as essentially a social process which is grounded in sociocultural settings. The sociolinguistic framework that has been adopted for the interpretation of this work comes within this ambit.

Lev Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory has already been described in the second chapter that deals with the theoretical frameworks and definitions. Vygotsky’s theory deals with the role of interaction in second language acquisition. This approach is based on the fact that interaction is the genesis of language learning. Interaction facilitates language learning and it is a causative force in acquisition of any language. According to the Sociocultural Theory, learning is essentially a social process which is grounded in sociocultural settings. The main perspective offered by this theory is that learning occurs when simple innate mental activities are transformed into “higher order” more complex mental functions. This transformation from simple innate mental activities to complexed mental functions involves symbolic mediation. Symbolic
mediation is a link between a person’s current mental state and higher order functions that is provided primarily by language. Vygotsky considers this as the usual route to learning; no matter what is being learned is language itself or some other area of knowledge. Learning through mediation help learners acquire heightened awareness of their own mental abilities and more control over their thought processes.

The Sociocultural theory considers both interpersonal and intrapersonal interaction. Interpersonal interaction includes communicative events and situations which occur between people. Such interpersonal interaction between learners and experts (teachers or knowledgeable learners) is one context for symbolic mediation. The level where symbolic mediation occurs the most is called by Vygotsky as the Zone of Proximal Development or ZPD. This Zone of Proximal Development is “an area of potential development, where the learner can achieve that potential only with assistance” (Saville-Troike, 2010).

From the interpersonal interaction perspective of the Sociocultural Theory, mental functions that are beyond an individual’s current level must be performed in collaboration with other people before they are achieved independently.

Intrapersonal interaction is communication that occurs within an individual’s own mind. This phenomenon is also viewed by Vygotsky as a sociocultural phenomenon.

Through his Sociocultural theory, Vygotsky pioneered the notion that children learn within communities, rather than strictly as individuals. His discussion of the zone of proximal development establishes that children learn more with the support of adults around them.

The empirical responses of the learner respondents of this study bring to light the Vygotskian perspective that all learning is essentially a social process which is grounded in sociocultural settings. It is seen that the social context of the learner do influence the learning of a second language.

The utility level of English is accepted by all respondents in this study. 96.55 percent of the learners believe that English is an important language. The most popular reason among the learner respondents to consider English as an important language is that this language is essential for the growth of their future career and will help in getting a job. This is the view of 60.50 percent of the learner respondents.
These facts prove that in this study the learners’ preference and acceptability level towards the English language is very high. The acceptability of English as a necessary language in this society acts as a motivating factor to learn the language.

At several points this study proves the high level of acceptability of English. It is a different issue altogether that the crosslinguistic influences are evident in learning English as a second language in spite of the popularity of the language. Analysing the language environment of Assam and the utility of English in the state certain factors seem to surface. The major factors for the acceptability of English in Assam are given below.

5.3.1 Factors for the acceptability of English in Assam

Global and National Status of English:

The acquisition of a second language is influenced by the power and status of the learners’ native and target languages at the global and national level. This is either stated overtly in official policies or covertly realized in cultural values and practices. In India, the global status of the English language is highly valued. This is also the state of affairs in Assam. Even though Assam is linguistically heterogeneous from time immemorial, English has managed to enter every sphere of language use in Assam, as in the rest of India. It first came as the language of the British rulers and now, at this present juncture, it occupies the position of an official language and is learnt as a mandatory second language right from the elementary school level up to the undergraduate level. Hence, the English language enjoys a dual status in India—the global and national status. This position of dual significance makes the English language a powerful presence in the sociolinguistic mosaic of Assam.

High utility value of English:

Today English is the language of international communication. With the liberalization and globalization of the Indian economy, the utility value of English has been further strengthened. At present, India boasts of housing more than a million speakers of English who use the language as an L2 or second language; even though the level of proficiency varies. Considering the utility value of English in India, Krishnaswamy and Sriraman had identified three long-range goals of teaching English in the country. They are:
• Mobility (that is, the utilitarian function of English as the language of opportunity)
• Modernization (that is, the interactive function of English as the ‘window on the world’ and as an instrument of change)
• The projection principle (that is, the interpretative function of English as an international language to project our identity and values and to promote better human understanding).

These goals better define the use of English in India and act as a factor for the wide acceptability of the language in the country.

**Institutional forces:**

All nations and communities have certain social institutions or systems that are established by law, custom or practice to organize and regulate the life of people in public domains like religion, politics, and education. These systems generally involve power, authority, and influence. The acquisition of a second language is also influenced by these institutional forces and constraints. From the sociolinguistic perspective, the forces and constraints that are of real concern are language related social control, determination of access to knowledge, and other instances of linguistic privilege or discrimination.

The three language formula adopted in India is an instrumental force that influences the learning and acquisition of English as a second language in the country. The central government has officially recommended the “Three Language Formula” (as recommended by the Kothari Commission, 1964) to be adopted by all the secondary schools in India. According to it, all secondary level school children must learn three languages as a part of their curriculum. It is a policy meant to foster feelings of national pride (through Hindi), a sense of group identity (through the regional language), and induce technological progress (through English).

The three language formula makes the learning of English compulsory from the pre-primary level up to the undergraduate level in Assam. This institutional force has made this global language even more acceptable in the entire state.
According to Muriel Saville-Troike, in some of the newly independent nations like India and Nigeria, English remained as an auxiliary or official language even after the British colonial rule had ended. In India, English was selected as the official national language along with Hindi because it was widely used and accessible in all parts of India. Saville-Troike is of the opinion that since English is not the native language of any language community, it has attained the present level of acceptability. Since it is ethnically neutral to all the regions it has gained a near-native acceptance.

The various factors mentioned above have contributed towards the wide acceptability of English in the region. The global and national status enjoyed by English, the high utility value of English, the three language formula adopted by all school curriculum, and the ethnic neutral status of English in Assam,— these are also the factors that adds to the high motivation level in learning English. Motivation is one factor that helps a second language learner in attaining proficiency in the second language. English enjoys a high level of acceptability in the social milieu in Assam. To add to it, the learner respondents in this study admits that English is an important language to be learned because it will help them secure their career and help them in getting jobs in future.

In other words, it could be deduced that the learners of English in Assam receive a high level of motivation, both extrinsically and intrinsically, to learn the language. Here emerges a question- If motivation is high from the social point of view then why do learners not achieve the desired proficiency level? The empirical data of this study provides certain factors that explain the cause of inequality in the proficiency level of the learners in learning English, even though the level of extrinsic motivation is socially high in the language learning scenario in Assam.

5.3.2 Acquiring the desired Proficiency level:

The circumstances of learning a second language also influence the acquisition of the same. This is a macrosocial factor that comes under the ecological context of second language learning. For a learner, language learning starts prior to his or her formal educational experiences begin. As such, the circumstances of learning form a part of the larger social context within which second language acquisition takes place.
Learning begins with children’s basic experiences with the family into which they are born, the communities to which they belong, and the cultural environment within which they live. When children reach the age of five or six years, they begin their formal education. But by this time they have already internalized the basic values and beliefs of their native culture, learned the rules of appropriate behaviour that are considered proper for their role in the community. They also must have started learning how to learn. The cultural values that the learners have imbibed from the sociocultural and linguistic environment form a part in the cognitive strategies applied by the learners to learn the second language.

In Assam English is learnt as a second language. Assam is a state which is ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous. Assamese is the dominant language in the Brahmaputra valley but other languages belonging to the ethnic and social groups are used by them. The presence of eight different home languages in this small study group of 174 respondents is a very prominent landmark presenting the multilingual and multicultural mosaic of Assam. In Assam, there are more than 80 social groups who either have their own languages or speak varieties of some other languages.

The multicultural and multilingual mosaic of Assam enriches the learners with the cultural values and beliefs prevalent in the society. This social and cultural knowledge of their native linguistic environment get transferred to the target language that they are learning. Lado (1957: 2) also expressed in a similar line in his discussion of ‘transfer’. He expressed that ‘individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture’.

In the discussions and causal interpretations given in the fourth chapter it has been established that crosslinguistic influences from Assamese are evident in the process of learning English. It has also been established that the crosslinguistic influences, to be more specific, the differences, form one of the root causes of the learners’ production errors in writing. The composition task given in the worksheet along with the learners’ schedule prove that majority of the learner respondents have not achieved the desired level of proficiency. This desired level is that state of proficiency when the learners can express their thoughts correctly in grammatical
sentences. The learner respondents of this study from the nine districts of the Brahmaputra valley need to be concerned mainly about the academic competence in the writing skill. This is because the regional medium schools in Assam follow the Board of Secondary Education Assam (SEBA) curriculum where the end exam is the High School Leaving Certificate Exam or the H.S.L.C. In this exam the writing skill is primarily tested. The learner respondents are not proficient enough to express the knowledge that they have acquired through their receptive skills. Most of them have produced ungrammatical sentences and the major error type discovered is the confusion with the tense system.

Coming back to the discussion on the reasons for the unsatisfactory level of performance by the learner respondents, it is seen that the macrosocial ecological factor involving learning circumstances is primarily responsible for the poor proficiency level. This factor is further enhanced in the discussion that follows.

In the linguistic environment of Assam English is a language which is available even in the remote rural areas. (Of course, one cannot expect the near-native forms of pronunciation.) English is not an alien language in any region of Assam. In fact, many English words are widely prevalent in the language environment. Even illiterate persons are commonly seen using many English words like pen, plate, cup, bed sheet, bell, gate, light, chicken, bag, bottle, glass, etc. instead of the counterpart words found in their mother tongue. These words seem to have supplanted the native language equivalents. This is because common English words have managed to seep into the lives of all people living in our society. It is interesting to see that majority of the hoardings on the road are in English. In this study, 89.09 percent of the learner respondents admitted that they use English words in their conversations or when they are talking in their mother tongue.

It is intriguing to find that with such a ready availability of English in the environment learners are not able to achieve the desired level of proficiency in the language. Seeking a causal analysis it is found that though the presence of English is common in the language environment, the context in which it is learned is that of a foreign language. In the second chapter these differences are given. A foreign language is that language which is not widely used in the learners’ immediate social context. The foreign language might be used for future travel or other cross-cultural communication situations, or studied as a curricular requirement or elective in school.

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It has no immediate or necessary practical application for the learner. In this study the response of the learner respondents have established that even though English is a compulsory element in the curriculum, yet it is learned in the context of a foreign language.

The learners were asked through the questionnaire about the sources where they can listen to and take part in English conversations. Several responses were recorded and many learners named single sources and many learners named dual sources. Few of them named three sources also. But the largest responses are from the single source group and 95.83 percent of them named the English teacher in the English classroom as the only source where they can listen to and take part in conversations in English\textsuperscript{10}. This proves that even though English is prevalent in the society yet the teaching and learning of this second language or the target language English take place in the context of a foreign language. The presence of the language is felt but the inadequate context of teaching and learning is also felt. When a second language is learned it becomes necessary that the learner get ample chance for interaction. Interaction is a microsocial factor that facilitates and causes language learning. It is the causative force in the acquisition of a second language. This is related to what had been said earlier about Vygotsky’s Sociocultural theory of language learning according to which interaction is the genesis of language learning. The learner respondents of this study do not get the proper environment for interaction in the target language English. And, as such, it could be deduced that their language environment do not provide them with opportunities to interact in English for which they are not able to acquire the language to the desired level of proficiency.

The other sources of listening to English that came up are the television and friends. With the television shows or programmes only the receptive skill of the learners could be targeted. But what they require is the writing skill.

While learning a second language it is very essential to have a clear focus on the actuality of the learners’ needs. For the learners of a second language mere linguistic competence is not enough. **Linguistic competence** includes the knowledge of the specific components and levels of a language that a learner need to have in order to know the language. The notion of linguistic competence, from the social perspective, is not enough to account for what is being acquired in any language that is going to be used for communicative purposes. Hence, the concept of **communicative competence** has gained ground in the field of Second Language Acquisition and
language teaching. Components of linguistic knowledge include vocabulary, morphology, phonology, syntax, and discourse. These components are part of the communicative competence which has become popular in the second language acquisition studies.

**Communicative competence** is the knowledge and competency that a learner possesses with the help of which he or she can communicate appropriately within a particular language community\(^1\). Communicative competence involves knowledge of vocabulary, phonology, grammar, and other aspects of linguistic structure along with the knowledge of language discourse - when to speak, what to say, to whom and how to say it appropriately in any given situation.

Considering the overall characterization of communicative competence it becomes necessary to distinguish between knowledge that must be learned in order to fulfill academic functions and knowledge that is required for interpersonal functions. Hence, communicative competence can be divided broadly into academic competence, interpersonal competence and pragmatic competence.

**Academic competence** includes the knowledge needed by learners who want to use the L2 primarily to learn about other subjects, or as a tool in scholarly research, or as a medium in a specific professional or occupational field.

**Interpersonal competence** includes that knowledge required by learners who plan to use the second language primarily in direct contact situation with other speakers. The knowledge that is most important for interpersonal contexts is that knowledge which enables the learners to participate in listening and speaking activities.

**Pragmatic competence** is the ability to use language appropriately. It includes what people must know in order to interpret and convey meaning within communicative situations.

Second language communicative competence involves both knowledge of linguistic elements and the knowledge that is required for appropriate L2 use in different contexts. In this study the learners need to acquire the desired level of competence and proficiency in the domain of academic competence. In academic competence the priorities for L2 activities in order of importance is such - reading comes first, then comes listening, which is followed by writing and then comes speaking. These skills or activities can be again classified as receptive and productive skills. Receptive skills include reading and listening and productive skills include writing and speaking. Since the learner respondents are registered in the regional
medium schools in Assam which come under the Board of Secondary Education Assam (SEBA), their academic writing skill only will be tested. As such they need to acquire proficiency in the domain of academic competence only, and to be more specific, in the productive skill of writing.

To acquire proficiency in the productive academic skill of writing, vocabulary is the most important component of language knowledge. Vocabulary or lexicon is the most important level of L2 knowledge that all second language learners need to develop. For both academic and interpersonal competence, vocabulary must be developed by the learners. Along with vocabulary, the context of use of vocabulary also is necessary. For effective use of context for vocabulary learning certain types of knowledge contribute effectively. They are:

**Linguistic Knowledge:** It includes syntactic information, constraints on possible word meanings, patterns in word structure, and meanings of surrounding words.

**World Knowledge:** This type of knowledge includes the understanding of the concepts which the words represent. World knowledge includes the familiarity with related conceptual frameworks, and also awareness of social associations.

**Strategic Knowledge:** Strategic knowledge includes control over cognitive resources.

That second language learners are influenced by the crosslinguistic influences when learning an L2 is proved in this study. The third and the fourth chapters include a detailed analysis of it. It has also been proved that the social and cultural context of learning cause the crosslinguistic influences to surface. A model presented by B. Spolsky (1989) supports our argument further.

Spolsky talked about a model of Second Language Learning. According to Spolsky, the starting point of second language learning is the social context in which the second language learning and teaching takes place. It is this social context that leads to formation of various kinds of attitude. The varied attitudes prevalent in the society get converted to motivation or it appears as motivation among the learners. The other personal characteristics like age of learning, personality of the individual learner, capabilities of the learner, and previous knowledge on various aspects including the target language, work upon the level of motivation of the second language learners. The personal traits of the learners mentioned above along with motivation depend on the learning opportunities, formal and informal, that are available in the learning situation. The kind of use that the learners make of the available learning opportunities
act as interplay between the learners and the learning situation. This provides us with the linguistic and non-linguistic outcomes of the learner.

5.3.3 The model of B. Spolsky in a diagrammatic form.

Factors affecting second language learning

Spolsky (p28) presents the following model of second language learning.
Spolky’s model of second language acquisition comes within the sociolinguistic framework applied for the interpretation of this study. The learning of a second language starts with the social context that involves the social and cultural knowledge of the native linguistic environment of the learner. This social and cultural knowledge gets transferred to the knowledge of the foreign language that the learning is trying to acquire. This view has already been elaborated by Lado (1957), and it had been mentioned in the discussion above.

This social perspective of language knowledge “involves the social and cultural knowledge speakers are presumed to have which enable them to use and interpret linguistic forms” (Saville-Troike, 2010).

The study so far has been establishing the social and cultural context involved in the process of second language learning and how these contexts exert their influences in the learning of English in the form of crosslinguistic influences. It would be incomplete if the causes for the unequal success rate in attaining the desired level of proficiency is not analysed.

Learners of second language, while learning English in a heterogeneous linguistic environment like Assam, are able to acquire different levels of proficiency. Some acquire “near-native” or “native-like” competence, some remain at the average level of proficiency while many remain scores away from the desired level of proficiency. The empirical reports of this study prove the varied levels of acquisition of English language skills among the learner respondents. The set of questionnaire for the learners had a worksheet with five different questions. The first four questions were meant to test the knowledge of the learner respondents on the linguistic category of verbs and the English tense system and the fifth question was a composition task meant to test the academic writing skill of the learners.

The score table that shows the scores secured by the learner respondents in the last task, that is, Q.5) of the worksheet could be seen in Chapter 3. The above mentioned table brings out a reading which is surprising. In a few of the previous exercises some respondents scored full marks also. But in this task majority of the respondents scored below 3 (that is, 3 out of 5 marks), which constitutes 80.46% of the total respondents. Among these, the largest group, 38.51%, scored zero (0 out of 203).
5 marks). The second group, 24.13%, scored 1 out of 5 marks and this is followed by the next group, 17.82%, scoring 2 out of 5 marks. There is a group of 16 respondents (9.20%) who scored 4 out of 5 and a very tiny group of 3 respondents (1.72%) managed to score full marks (5 out of 5).

It is seen that the learner respondents have scored well when they are asked to identify the verbs in a sentence. The problem arises when they are asked to change the verbs into another tense (past tense) or when they are asked to rewrite the sentence using another appropriate modal verb or when they are asked to select the correct form of the given verbs. With the unguided composition exercise also the respondents showed problems in the use of tense.

The above report shows the variegated level of success among the learner respondents. A causal explanation is attempted to examine the reasons of the difference in the success level of the learners.

5.3.4 Difference in the success level of learners:

Social Context:

Social context is the most relevant factor that influences the learning of a second language. The features of social context that affect the degree of success in different learners include the status of the L1 and L2, boundary and identity factors within and between the L1 and L2 speech communities, and institutional forces and constraints. These factors are the prime macrosocial factors that influence L2 learning because they create much impact on the attitude and opportunity. These factors also determine whether the L2 is being learned as a second language, a foreign language, as an auxiliary language or as a language for specific purposes.

In this study too, it has been evident that social context influence a good amount of impact on the learning of the second language English. In Assam, as in the rest of India, English is learned as a second language. The global and the national status of English are widely accepted in the heterogeneous linguistic environment of Assam. The social context in Assam from the macrosocial viewpoint is congenial for the teaching and learning of English. But for most of the learner respondents of the study, English is not the language that is readily used in the learners' immediate social context. Even though the learners admit that English has necessary practical application, yet because of its inaccessibility for interpersonal interaction, for most learners it
becomes a language that is studied as a curricular requirement. Another important revelation of this study is that, for majority of the learners the English language teacher in the English classroom is the only source where they can listen to or interact in English. In other words, even though English has a high acceptability in the societal parlance, yet for most learners in this study English is a foreign language that is to be studied only for academic purpose.

• Social Experience:

Social experiences determine the quantity and quality of L2 input and interaction and these exert significant influence on the ultimate success in the learning of the second language. The interpersonal interaction that is provided by the varied social experiences is helpful in the learning of English.

• The distance between L1 and L2:

At any point of an L2 learner’s second language learning career, he or she has the knowledge of the first language in store. The knowledge of the first language is an important component for attaining L2 competence in the initial stage. The genetic, typological, and historical relationships of L1 and L2 will yield differential possibilities for positive transfer of parameter settings and surface-level features, including vocabulary and writing system.

This study is about the crosslinguistic influences that are seen in the process of learning English in the regional medium schools in Assam. The empirical data from the worksheets of the learner respondents prove that the previous knowledge of Assamese help in the crosslinguistic influences to occur in the composition tasks. By applying error analysis it was found that the learners showed a similar pattern of error in the tense system of English. Contrastive analysis between the Assamese tense system and the tense system in English prove that there is considerable difference among them. This distance in the L1 (Assamese) and the L2 (English) tense systems is a major cause for the learner errors in this study.

• Age of introduction of the second language:

Because of their brain plasticity younger learners have an advantage in learning a second language. Younger learners are advantageous for another reason- they get more time to learn the second language before their ultimate proficiency is judged. But
older learners have an edge because they have better learning capacity, analytic ability, pragmatic skills, greater L1 knowledge and real-world knowledge.

- **Aptitude:**

  All second language learners differ in their natural ability in acquiring the target language. Their capacities differ in discriminating and processing auditory input, in identifying patterns and making generalizations, and to store linguistic elements in memory. The natural aptitude of a learner to learn a language can predict the differential success in L2 learning.

- **Motivation:**

  To be successful in learning a second language, learners need to put in the desired amount of effort required for the learning process at various stages in their L2 learning career. This level of effort is determined by the motivation level in the learners. In this study the viewpoints offered by the learners and teachers in the questionnaires highlights the fact that there is high level of motivation among the learners. Most of the learners (96.85%) admit that English is an important subject and they need to learn it in order to have a successful career and a job. In an earlier discussion the reasons for the high level of motivation to learn English was discussed.

- **Cognitive devices:**

  Language learning is a cognitive device along with being a linguistic device. As such, learners use certain cognitive devices to learn the target language. The cognitive strategies are the most popular strategies that learners adopt in order learn the second language English. This fact is revealed in the statistics of this present study. The cognitive strategy adopted by the learner respondents is translating from the L1. The learners first conceptualize the idea in their L1 (Assamese) and then try to translate it into the target language English. Thus the L1 (Assamese) forms a scaffolding device in learning the L2 (English).

  The statistics of this study reveal that to understand English 95.40 percent of the learner respondents take help of Assamese or their first language (L1), and 82.18 percent admit that they need support of their L1 to understand the target language English. For activities like translations 66.18 percent respondents say that they first conceptualize the idea in their L1 Assamese and then translate it into English. An-
other group (it is a large group of 88.57%), who gave dual response to the question of translation strategy, admits that they also first conceptualize the idea in Assamese and then attempt to translate the sentence word by word.

This device of using the first language as a support base to learn the second is termed by educational psychologist Bruner as a scaffolding device. In an earlier study (by the researcher of this study) this topic of using the L1 as a scaffolding device has been thoroughly discussed¹.

- **Instruction:**

  In formal contexts of L2 learning the quality of instruction clearly makes a difference in the learning process. The various linguistic, psychological, and social perspectives on second language acquisition do not support the use of any one instructional approach over another. Empirical studies by researchers on the social circumstances and individual learner factors suggest that there can be no one "best" method to teach a second language. But the personal care and efficiency of the teacher goes a long way in making things easier for the learners to learn the target language. In this study an attempt has been made to learn the level of efficiency of the teachers through the questionnaire meant for the teachers. Through this questionnaire the level of education of the teachers, their specialization, trainings, their use of teaching and learning materials, and their attitude towards the learners were assessed. It was found that among the group of 64 teacher respondents, only 36 teachers (56.26%) had English as the main subject in their BA or MA courses. The rest are from social science background.

  In the Table-B, Q.c, Chapter 3, the training status of the teachers are shown. It may be observed from the table that all the teachers are not trained to teach English. Only 62.50 percent of the teacher respondents (40 teachers) have undergone training of some kind. The rest, 24 teachers (37.50%), answers in the negative regarding trainings.

  The Table C with Q. d) in Chapter 3 gives us a detail of the type of training attended by the teacher respondents of English. Among the 40 trained teachers, 11 attended the 1 year training programme, and 4 teachers attended the 30 days programme, and only 1 attended 15 days programme. The rest 17 teachers attended trainings with
very short durations. 7 teachers did not mention about attending any trainings.

Another inadequacy noticed from the teachers’ responses is that very few teachers use any reference material. Most of the teachers use only the prescribed texts. The few teachers who use reference books consult books on grammar and composition. This revelation points out that learners are not trained to comprehend other materials in the English language apart from their academic texts.

Moreover, for most learner respondents in this study, the English teacher in the English language classroom is the only source of listening to and conversing in English. In an average routine there are around five to six English language periods per week of 45 minutes duration. This is not a very adequate length of time to learn a second language especially if the learners have no other scope of conversation in English. In such a state of affairs, the teacher must be trained enough to exhibit his/her charisma to facilitate maximum learning.

5.4 Findings of the study:

The causes for the differential success of the learners have been analysed above. It would make things clearer if the major findings of the study are considered here.

Assamese is the dominant language in the Brahmaputra valley according to this study group. There are respondents from eight different language backgrounds. They are-Assamese, Goalporia, Bihari, Adibasi, Tea-tribe, Bengali, Mishing and Nepali. Among these linguistic groups respondents from the Assamese language are the highest and they constitute 68.96% of the whole lot. Though these languages are present in our study group, yet the respondent students are proficient enough in the Assamese language which is the ambient language. Being the ambient language, Assamese is accessible in the sociolinguistic environment and these respondents get ample scope to interact in the same. The learner respondents being regular students in the regional (Assamese) medium schools are a proof that they possess native-like proficiency in both receptive and productive skills in the Assamese language. Hence, their presence in our canvas is logical.

It may be observed from the table that as many as 89.08 percent students admitted using English words while speaking in mother tongue. Even though English is a foreign language, yet this language is not alien to our culture. Many English words
supplant the native words. This is so in all spheres of language use. But it is learnt in a foreign context.

**Difficulties in learning English:**

The majority (50.91%) preferred to say that their problem is, ‘they do not understand the language well’. Followed by the group who have ‘problem of writing in English or fear to write in English’ (20.91%). Another prominent group is the one who find it ‘tough to understand English grammar’. When a learner respondent from class 9 or 10 says that he or she finds difficulty in understanding the language (target language-English), that too after learning it for a minimum of six to seven years, it brings forth many issues related to the English language learning and teaching scenario in Assam. Like the level of introduction in the pre-primary level or “Ka-Shreni”, Curriculum designed, training of teachers, to name a few.

**Difficulty in writing:**

Writing is a productive activity. To attain proficiency in the writing skill, the learners must know how to construct correct sentences both grammatically and semantically. The productive activities for language use require some processes that need prior knowledge in certain areas. Comprehension is one production activity that all learners need to be adequately proficient in order to show satisfactory academic performance. In production activities, especially for comprehension of written or spoken language, prior knowledge of certain features become essential prerequisites. They are: vocabulary, morphology, phonology, syntax, and discourse structure to access words and combine them into phrases, clauses, and longer units of text. When an L2 learner’s knowledge in these areas of the target language (English) is too limited, he or she faces problems in production as well as interpretation of meaning.

To attempt a causal analysis of the problem of learners’ difficulty with grammar, a brief description on the components of language knowledge is necessary. Traditionally, linguists have divided language into five components for purposes of description and analysis. The “human accomplishment” of learning languages, according to Saville-Troike (2010), is a remarkable feat when we consider the list of the areas of knowledge which every L1 or L2 learner must acquire at the different levels. The levels or components are (Saville-Troike, 2010):

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Lexicon (or vocabulary): word meaning, pronunciation (and spelling for written languages), grammatical category (part of speech), possible occurrence in combination with idioms.

Phonology (sound system): Speech sounds that make a difference in meaning (phonemes); possible sequence of consonants and vowels (syllable structure); intonation patterns (stress, pitch, and duration); rhythmic patterns (pauses and stops).

Morphology (word structure): parts of words that have meaning (morphemes); inflections that carry grammatical information (like number or tense); prefixes or suffixes that may be added to change the meaning of words or their grammatical category.

Syntax (grammar): word order; agreement between sentence elements (for example, number agreement between subject and verb); ways to form questions, to negate assertions, and to focus or structure information within sentences.

Discourse: ways to connect sentences, and to organize information across sentence boundaries; structures for telling stories, engaging in conversations, and so on; scripts for interacting and for events.

The word ‘grammar’ that has been mentioned above is actually the language component called ‘syntax’. The acquisition of the syntax of another language is an issue of internalizing new construction patterns, generative rules, different parameters for innate principles, or collocational probabilities and constraints. The language learning process, especially the second language, “begins with recognizing that sentences are more than just combinations of words, and that every language has specific limits and requirements on the possible orders and arrangement of elements” (Saville-Troike, 2010:145). The problem with grammar that the learner respondents mentioned in this study also include these above mentioned aspects.

- Most difficult aspect in the curriculum and the area of preference: It has been found from the empirical statistics of the study that speaking in English, grammar, and writing in English are the most difficult areas. But when their preferences regarding the curricular subjects were asked, grammar is their first preference and also the writing tasks. This data seems to be contradictory but it is not impossible. Learners may like grammar and at the same time find...
it difficult also. At the receptive level, the learner respondents seem to be proficient enough to understand the lesson that is being taught by the teacher. But difficulty arises when their productive skill is being tested. The same lesson becomes very difficult.

- For majority of the respondents, (80.77%) the only source of listening to English conversation is their English classes. In most of the cases only one session a day covering 45 minutes is marked for English classes and that is the only time they listen to English conversation. Some 7.69 percent of the students get chances to listen to English conversation by watching TV.

- The learner respondents were asked whether they take help of their knowledge in Assamese while understanding English. 95.40% percent of the respondents replied positively.

- 66.18 percent respondents admitted that while translating Assamese sentences to English they first conceptualise the answer in Assamese and then only translates it to English.

- 82.18 percent learners need the support of mother tongue in English classes and they believe that their knowledge of their mother tongue helps significantly in learning English.

- 96.55 per cent of the students consider that English is really an important subject. Majority i.e. 60.50 per cent stated that it is required for 'having a good career and getting a job'. 32.78 per cent stated that it is required for being able to 'speak and write English well'.

- The utility angle associated with the English language makes it important in the society. Right from the days of its introduction in India, the English language always had a higher position in society. It may be due to its position as the language of the rulers, the British. Later on, after India’s independence, this language became the language of higher education and administration. For all these and various other reasons English has gained a stature of great social importance.

- When asked about the three most favourite subjects to the respondents, the answers came in different combinations. But in all these combinations
English is common. This is a clear sign of the positive attitude developed by the learners towards the subject. It can be inferred that the global status of English, the institutional compulsions to learn the language, and the career options that become easily available with their competence in English, gives the language a high level of acceptability and preference among the learners.

- The teachers' schedule or questionnaire highlights the point that Grammar is the area of difficulty, both for teachers and learners.
- The worksheet attached with the learners' questionnaire proves that the most common error type is 'confusion with tenses'. Since all respondents show this same error type, it is taken as a crosslinguistic influence from Assamese.
- Contrastive analysis of English and Assamese tense systems done in the fourth chapter highlights that the presence of inflections in both the tense systems makes them vary greatly.

This study is the first of its kind in this region. Few researchers have gone into the matter of crosslinguistic influences in learning English. Dr Padmini Bhuyan's thesis is on language transfer studies and the influence of Assamese in learning English. But the canvas of her study is very limited. This study dwells on a much larger canvas including 9 districts of the Brahmaputra valley, 36 schools, 174 learner respondents, and 64 teacher respondents.

This study claims to be unique as the empirical data has been collected from both urban and very remote rural areas also. As such the study is based on solid empirical data based on the ground realities of the teaching and learning situation in the Brahmaputra valley in Assam.

The uniqueness of this study also lies in the fact that along with the quantitative study, the qualitative aspect has also been given weightage. The quantitative study helped in proving both the hypotheses and it had been established that the crosslinguistic influences from Assamese are a source of the learner's errors in learning the tense system in English. The second hypothesis has also been proved that the knowledge of the first language is a help in learning the second language as the first language can act as a scaffolding device. The two hypotheses have contributed to the rubric of crosslinguistic studies in Assam. The qualitative study from the sociolin-
guistic perspective for the interpretation of data has been able to contribute to the
domain of second language studies in Assam.

5.5 Limitations of the study

Every researcher attempts to do a near perfect study but certain factors crop up
that sets certain limitations to the same. The factors that delimit the scope of a study
are: time, finance, context, utility, gender.

This study also is not devoid of limitations. The limitations of this study are
discussed below.

- It would have been better had the canvas been larger. This study includes the
  Brahmaputra valley in its canvas and attempted to see the English language
  learning scenario within this region. For the purpose pilot survey was done in
  the Kamrup district and 9 other districts have been selected for the actual
  study. The upper Assam districts are Jorhat, Sivasagar, and Dibrugarh. The
  central Assam districts are Morigaon and Nagaon; the lower Assam districts
  are Barpeta and Dhubri and the districts of the Northern bank of the Brahmaputra
  are Dhemaji and North Lakhimpur. Thirty six schools were included in the
  study both from rural and urban settings. The total number of learner
  respondents are 174 and there are 64 teacher respondents. It would have been
  a more elaborate study had all the districts of the Brahmaputra valley been
  included, with more number of schools, more learner respondents and more
  teacher respondents in the canvas. But this would have been physically
  impossible to cover all the districts of the Brahmaputra valley in this study as
  it would involve much time and the cost of conducting the study would soar to
  an unmanageable level. As such, this study only accommodated the
  Brahmaputra valley, leaving the Barak valley untouched.

- To study the crosslinguistic influences from Assamese in the learning of
  English, only the linguistic category of verbs, and the English tense system
  was tested in this study. The study would have been more comprehensive had
  other linguistic categories and other components would have been tested also
  like Nouns, Relative Clauses, and so on.

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The transfer effects that have been studied are the effects of substratum transfer only. According to Terence Odlin (Odlin, 2003), substratum transfer "involves the influence of a source language (typically, the native language of a learner) on the acquisition of a target language, the 'second' language regardless of how many languages the learner already knows" (Odlin, 2003:12). This study involves the influence exerted by the previous knowledge of Assamese on the learning of English. As such the effects of borrowing transfer have been left out on purpose. Borrowing transfer refers to the influence of a second language on a previously acquired language, especially the native language.

The communicative competence regarding the academic proficiency in the writing skill is dealt with. The reason is that, the regional medium schools in Assam follow the SEBA curriculum and the end exam is HSLC. The tests are summative and only the writing skill in English is tested. But a recent circular of SEBA (year 2012) has included oral tests also in the class 10 syllabus. As this circular was not in effect when the study was done, the oral or the interpersonal competence of the learners have not been tested in this study.

This study deals with the rubric of crosslinguistic influences from the sociolinguistic point of view. The interpretations and causal analysis have been given from the sociolinguistic perspective. The interpretations could have been dealt with more elaborately if the study would have included the psycholinguistic point of view also. But that would need series of tests with different groups of learners. The focus of this work is to see the societal influence on second language learning and the framework of social psychology and sociocultural theory of second language learning have been considered for the interpretation of data.

We intend to deal with these limitations in future time through other study projects. The limitations of this study would open avenues for further research and provide newer scope in this area.

5.6 Suggestions

To make the learning of English effective, it is necessary to reduce the
negative impact of the crosslinguistic influences. Through this study it has been proved that the negative influences from Assamese act as a hindrance in the learning of English and the learners are not able to reach the desired level of proficiency. To reduce these crosslinguistic influences in the learning of English learners must be equipped with the language components in both the languages, Assamese and English. The language components are: vocabulary, phonology, morphology, syntax and discourse. Learners must have clear concepts of both the two languages, leaving no space for any confusion. For attaining clarity in language concepts the learners must have clear knowledge of the language components right from the beginning. In a multilingual setting like Assam, the age of introduction of the second language is of much relevance. The learner must be given ample space and time to develop the first language.

Every learner has a home language and when this learner joins school for receiving formal teachings he or she encounters a conflict with the medium of instruction at school. For example, a child whose home language is the lower Assam dialect of Assamese joins school and finds that it is a different version of the same Assamese language that is being used as the medium of instruction. Slowly he/she learns that the written form varies from the variety that is being spoken at home. The learner gets ample time to get settled and comfortable if he/she is allowed to develop the first language for the first few years of his/her formal education; in this case both the varieties of Assamese are referred to.

But the present language learning situation at the pre-school level does not allow this luxury to the learners. Along with the first conflict, another conflict is encountered by the learners when English is introduced at a very early level. The child learners hardly get time to settle down and get comfortable with their first language when English is introduced. Field experiences show that the result of such experimentations leads to the learners getting confused with their second language acquisition and learning. Consequently, they can hardly become proficient enough to produce correct sentences in English even after learning the language for ten to twelve years.
• The use of the L1 in the second language classroom would act as a scaffolding device to learn the target language English. Educational psychologist Jerome Bruner in 1978 introduced the concept of scaffold in education. Educational psychology considers learning as a process which is in tune with the cognitive maturation of an individual (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1985). What interests educational psychologists like Vygotsky and Bruner is the process of learning itself along with the factors that are involved in facilitating this learning. Language learning is also one dimension of learning. Bruner believes that with the help of the Language Acquisition Support System (LASS) along with the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) a learner is able to learn a language (Bruner, 1985).

According to Vygotsky, the Zone of Proximal Development is an area of potential development, where the learner can achieve that potential only with assistance. It was Vygotsky who pioneered the notion that children learn more with the support of adults around them. At this point, Bruner's concept of "scaffold" gets duly justified. He claims that: "the tutor's general task is that of scaffolding- reducing the number of degrees of freedom that the child must manage in the task. She (tutor) does it by segmenting the task ........to the level that the child can just manage, even to the point of shielding his limited attention from distractors" (Bruner, 1985: 29-30)

In the paedagogic context, the role that L1 plays in the learning of a second language is through transfer of ideas (to identify, recall, organize, summarize, analyze and apply them in academic tasks in L2). Transfer across two languages occurs both at a linguistic level as well as a cognitive level. This dual mode of language transfer helps learners to consciously use L1 knowledge to perform better in L2 tasks. Susan Gass opines that learners look for correspondences in their first language as their initial hypothesis and adopt a meaning based strategy.

• Learners would be more benefitted if the classrooms become learner centred. Conventionally, in Assam, all classrooms have teacher-fronted arrangements. In second language teaching-learning situation it is a rigid setup and learners tend to remain passive. Teachers must be trained to adopt the learner friendly methods so that they can learn the needs of all the learners

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Knowing the learners personally would help the teachers do a need-analysis of the learners. This approach of teaching will help build a rapport between the teacher and the learners and the former can facilitate the process of learning better.

Major portion of the English syllabus must be unseen. Until recently, the content portion of the syllabus got more weightage. According to the recent circular of SEBA, the class 10 question paper consists of both grammar and composition and the content that is prescribed. A portion is set for oral test also. The content portion carries 22 marks out of 80 and the grammar and composition part carries 20 marks and 18 marks respectively. 20 marks are set aside for the oral test. Earlier it was inadequate and very limited to test both grammar and composition within that marking. But the recent changes in the syllabus and marking pattern is a pleasant change. The Assam Higher Secondary Education Council has adopted a satisfactory division of marks (for classes 11 and 12) and the syllabus has also been designed in a systematic way where grammar is tested in one year and composition is tested in the second year.

The task-based paedagogical approach needs to be adopted for teaching English. The task-based approach is specifically appropriate for the teaching of grammar and composition. This approach would be of much help in the language activities of reading, writing, listening and speaking. But the tasks must be designed in such a way that the learners get involved to the optimum extent possible. Introduction of workbooks would be a positive step in this regard.

Continuous teacher trainings must be made a regular feature of the teaching process of English. This study has proved that for majority of the learners the English teacher in the English classroom is the only source where they get the chance to listen and speak in English. In such a state of affairs, the teachers must be continuously trained to become facilitators of learning in the real sense of the term. Continuous training sessions would help the teachers
develop a positive attitude towards the teaching and learning of English.

• Use of reference materials by the teachers, other than the text books must be encouraged. The teaching and learning materials (TLM) must be designed and made in such a way that they involve the learners to a great extent.

• In a multilingual state like Assam, language planning must be done very meticulously so that learners speaking different home languages get a chance to begin their formal education in their own mother tongue. This is a provision provided by the constitution of India. Several other bills like right to education and the NCERT developed National Curriculum Framework 2005 and 2011 have highlighted on this point. But with a very large number of home languages present in the linguistic scenario and environment in Assam, it becomes difficult to decide which language is to be selected as the medium of instruction. This kind of decision involving the sociolinguistic domain needs the support of good language policies based on sound empirical and pragmatic research. But unfortunately, the language policies are very vague in Assam. As such, meticulous and elaborate language policies based on proper language planning is necessary so that learners from all language communities get the scope to learn their first lessons in their first language and thus make the constitutional right a reality in the true sense of the term.

The multilingual mosaic of India is a feature that facilitates the learning of languages in society. Like any state in India, Assam also can boast about the presence of diversity and tolerance in the linguistic arena. In fact, Assam’s linguistic environment is more variegated than the rest of India. The diversity present in the environment promotes interlinkages and intermixture at various levels between different language groups and communities and thus bringing different languages in contact. This presence of several languages in the immediate ambience helps in the informal learning of languages from the environment itself. It is often felt that among so many languages learning another language English would be difficult. But the societal acceptance of the global status of English has made things easier. The social prestige associated with the proficiency and competence in English in India goes a long way in motivating learners to acquire the desired level of competence in the language.
Presently, it is mandatory to learn the English language for every school-going child from the pre-primary level up to the undergraduate level in Assam. In the teaching-learning scenario of English in Assam, many challenges act as impediments. Not only the teachers but also the stake-holders in the education scenario like the education policy makers and curriculum designers get equally baffled with these problems. The education policy-makers are concerned about accommodating the mother tongues as media of instruction. The curriculum designers are worried about reducing the load on the learners which gets increased with the three language formula being adopted by the central government. The teachers are always on the run to find a magic approach of teaching second languages which will help in better facilitation in the English learning process. With so many stake-holders continuously pondering over the same teaching-learning process of the English language, one can be sure that things will definitely improve for the better in the near future.

English is not at all an alien language to the learners in Assam. Many English words, both nouns and verbs, have supplanted the native counterparts. The social acceptance of English is also very high as all learners are aware of the high utility level of English. Then, why do learners find it difficult to acquire the desired level of proficiency in English? In other words, why are learners unable to achieve the communicative competence (both academic and interpersonal) in English? Things get easily placed in the proper perspective when one comes to know that English is learned in Assam in a foreign context. For most learners English is not a language that is found in their immediate environment. For most of these learners the English language teacher in the English classroom is the only source from whom they can hear the spoken form of the language directly, or the English teacher is the only person with whom they can converse in English.

In this foreign context, if English is introduced as a second language right from the first pre-primary level of formal education, confusion would surely prevail. The conflict with the medium of instruction and the home language along with the introduction of English at a tender age would be instrumental in creating certain grave confusions for both the learners and teachers. These confusions could have negative impact not only regarding the learning of the second language but also regarding the
proper development of the first language. The cognitive development of the learners also would be affected. It would be an obvious assumption that these confusions would help the negative effects of crosslinguistic influences to emerge, thus hampering the proper acquisition of both the first and the second languages.

All the stake-holders of education in Assam, the teachers, education policy makers, the curriculum designers, second language study researchers, academics, and those associated with education, must all take the issue seriously. Their integrated planning and effort can go a long way in creating a healthy educational environment in Assam which can promise to create better learners.

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2 Ibid.
3 See Chapter 3, Question 22, Table A.
4 See chapter 3, Question 23, Table B.
8 Refer to the tables in Chapter 3.
9 See the table attached to question 16, Chapter 3
10 See Question 14, Table-B, Chapter 3.
11 Language community: A group of people who share knowledge of a common language.
12 The components of language knowledge are vocabulary (or lexicon), morphology (or word structure), phonology (or sound system), syntax (or grammar), and discourse (or ways to connect sentences and organize information).
15 In actual language use, all these levels (lexicon, phonology, morphology, syntax and discourse) of language must interact and function simultaneously.