

"Bridging the Vocabulary Gap: Effective Strategies for Vernacular and English Medium Learners"

A Dissertation submitted to the Department of English in Partial Fulfilment for the award of the Degree of Masters in English



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GUIDE'S CERTIFICATE

This is to acknowledge that the term paper is entitled **Bridging the Vocabulary Gap: Effective Strategies for Vernacular and English Medium Learners**, Joysri Kumar (Roll No: ENG-34/23), Yesmin Begum (Roll No: ENG-36/23), Urnima Saha (Roll No: ENG- 52/23), Momi Begum (Roll No: ENG-45/23) and Shabnaz Marzia (Roll No: ENG-12/23) submitted it is the product of their own research which has been conducted under my direction at the English department, Guwahati Unit, Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya. The students have completed all the requirements to the awarding of the degree of Master of English.

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DECLARATION

This dissertation is declared by us Joysri Kumar (Roll No: ENG-34/23), Yesmin Begum (Roll No: ENG-36/23), Urnima Saha (Roll No: ENG-52/23), Momi Begum (Roll No: ENG-45/23), and Shabnaz Marzia (Roll No: ENG-12/23) of 4th semester, Department of English, Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya, Guwahati Unit.

The paper is titled, **Bridging the Vocabulary Gap: Effective Strategies for Vernacular and English Medium Learners**, is a piece of our own original work and is our own academic work done under the guidance of Dr. Bibha Devi, Department of English, MSSV, Guwahati Unit.

We have given due credit and references to all the primary material (documents and authors names), whose works have assisted this research. We state we have not violated any copyrights.

We also state that we have not submitted this term paper to MSSV, or any other university, in obtaining any other degree.

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List of Abbreviations and Glossary

Term / Abbreviation	Full Form / Definition
Assamese Medium	A school where Assamese is the primary language of instruction.
Content-Based Instruction	Teaching language through subject matter (e.g., science or history in English).
Contextual Clues	Hints within the surrounding text or visuals that help learners infer the meaning of unfamiliar words.
Contextual Vocabulary Learning	Learning new words by encountering them in meaningful, real-life contexts.
Dumb Charades	A non-verbal guessing game where students act out words to help peers guess vocabulary.
ELL	English Language Learner – A student who is learning English in addition to their native language.
English Medium	A school where English is the primary language of instruction.
Fill-in-the-Blanks	A written exercise where students complete sentences or stories using appropriate vocabulary.
Formative Assessment	Informal or low-stakes evaluation conducted during learning to monitor student progress.
Inclusive Pedagogy	Teaching practices are designed to accommodate and support diverse learner needs and backgrounds.
Interactive Learning	A method where learners actively participate through discussion, problem-solving, or group activities.
L1	First Language or Mother Tongue, the native language spoken by the learner (e.g., Assamese).
L2	Second Language, a language learned in addition to one's native language, often English in India.

Language Proficiency	A learner's ability to use a language effectively in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
Multilingualism	The use of more than one language by an individual or within a society or classroom.
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training – National agency that develops textbooks and educational resources.
NEP 2020	National Education Policy 2020 – India's education reform policy emphasizing multilingual, inclusive, and competency-based learning.
Odd One Out	A categorization game where students identify which word does not fit in a given group.
Peer Support	A learning strategy where students help one another understand or use new vocabulary.
Practice Teaching / Internship	A period during teacher training where students teach real classes under supervision.
Productive Vocabulary	Words that a learner can actively use in speaking or writing.
Receptive Vocabulary	Words that a learner can recognize and understand when heard or read.
Retention	The ability to remember and use vocabulary after initial learning.
SCERT	State Council of Educational Research and Training – The state-level authority for curriculum and teacher training.
Scaffolding	Support provided by a teacher or peer to help a learner perform a task until independence is possible.
SLA	Second Language Acquisition – The process of learning a language beyond one's first language.

Spy Game	A vocabulary game in which one student pretends to blend in with others who have the same word, encouraging inference and discussion.
TBLT	Task-Based Language Teaching – An approach where learners acquire language through real-life tasks.
Vernacular	The regional or native language spoken by a community (e.g., Assamese).
Visual Aids	Images, videos, or diagrams used to enhance vocabulary learning and retention.
Visual Literacy	The ability to interpret, analyze, and make meaning from images or visual aids.
Word Web	A vocabulary activity where students brainstorm related words around a central concept.
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development – A concept by Vygotsky describing the difference between what a learner can do alone and with support.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Theoretical Insights

1.1 Abstract

India's multilingual education system offers both valuable opportunities and notable challenges, especially when it comes to learning English. One of the key issues that arises in this context is the vocabulary gap between students studying in vernacular medium schools and those in English medium institutions. This gap tends to become more visible as students advance through primary school and begin to interact more deeply with academic materials in English.

This study centres on Class 6 students, typically aged between 11 and 12, whose first language is Assamese and who have had limited contact with English beyond the classroom environment. In a state like Assam, where Assamese is commonly spoken at home and used in many schools, students from vernacular backgrounds often find themselves with little opportunity to engage with English in everyday life. This limited exposure makes it harder for them to retain vocabulary, pronounce words correctly, and use English confidently. On the other hand, while students from English medium schools may hear and use the language more frequently, they too encounter difficulties, especially when it comes to applying vocabulary in real-life situations.

Even though English holds a central role in education and international communication, a large number of students still struggle with using vocabulary in meaningful and functional ways. The problem is twofold. Students from vernacular backgrounds face structural challenges, such as reduced exposure and fewer language resources. Meanwhile, many English medium students tend to rely on memorization without fully understanding how to use vocabulary in appropriate contexts. Learning a word is not enough—it's about knowing how to say it correctly, when to use it, and having the confidence to express it in real situations.

Traditional teaching methods often emphasize definitions, rote learning, and writing exercises. While these methods have their place, they don't do enough to support active usage, long-term retention, or contextual understanding of vocabulary. Emotional and psychological factors—such as fear of making mistakes, anxiety in front of peers, and low self-confidence—also hold students back, particularly in vernacular settings. Tackling this challenge calls for more than just updating curriculum content; it requires a rethinking of how English is taught, practiced, and experienced in the classroom.

This project seeks to explore these challenges more closely by identifying and implementing effective, interactive, and inclusive strategies to help narrow the vocabulary gap. Drawing on task-based language teaching (TBLT), principles of socio-cultural learning, and techniques that lower the affective filter, the study incorporates classroom games and engaging activities that encourage students to actively build and use vocabulary. The focus is not just on remembering words, but on using them meaningfully in real-world situations and through collaborative learning.

At its core, the project aims to make English language learning more equitable by supporting vocabulary growth among students from varied linguistic and educational backgrounds.

Specifically, the objectives are to:

- Identify the specific vocabulary challenges faced by vernacular and English medium learners.
- Examine the psychological and academic impact of vocabulary deficiencies, including reduced confidence and reluctance to participate.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of existing vocabulary instruction methods across both mediums.
- Propose innovative, game-based, and bilingual strategies to improve vocabulary learning.
- Introduce tools and assessment methods for ongoing measurement of vocabulary progress.
- Recommend learner centered classroom practices in alignment with NEP 2020's emphasis on inclusion, skill-based learning, and multilingualism.

While this project focuses on a specific age group and geographic location, the patterns observed are reflective of broader systemic issues in Indian education. It must be acknowledged that the sample size is limited, and results cannot be generalized across all vernacular or English medium schools. However, the insights gained from classroom-based interventions and student responses provide a valuable microcosmic understanding of vocabulary gaps and pedagogical opportunities.

Additionally, the project is limited by time and resource constraints. Long-term vocabulary retention, impact of continuous exposure, and improvements over academic cycles could not be fully explored in this brief intervention. Nonetheless, the short-term changes in learner behavior, confidence, and engagement point to the transformative potential of more interactive and inclusive language teaching methods.

1.2 Introduction

Language serves as the foundational medium through which knowledge is transmitted, ideas are articulated, and learning is realized. In a country as linguistically diverse as India, where hundreds of languages and dialects coexist, the role of English in education has been both empowering and challenging. English, often regarded as a global language of opportunity, plays a central role in academia, governance, media, and employment. However, access to English language proficiency particularly vocabulary development is not equitably distributed among all learners.

The disparity is most prominent when comparing students from vernacular medium schools with those from English medium institutions. While English medium students are often immersed in the language across subjects and school activities, vernacular medium students frequently encounter English only as a subject, and not as a medium of instruction. The uneven access to language resources leads to a growing gap in vocabulary, which doesn't just impact how students speak or write—it also influences their academic performance, self-esteem, and long-term opportunities. In Assam, where Assamese is the mother tongue in most homes and the language of instruction in vernacular schools, this issue is especially noticeable.

As students move on to higher classes, particularly from upper primary to secondary level, they're expected to read textbooks, complete written assignments, and participate in discussions in English. Unfortunately, many students from vernacular backgrounds struggle with the English vocabulary needed to fully grasp classroom material or clearly communicate their thoughts. This often results in a quiet battle, where students with potential are held back simply because they lack the right linguistic tools.

In response to this pressing concern, a group of postgraduate students from Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Vishwavidyalaya (MSSV), Guwahati Unit, took on a project as part of their Master's programme in English. The purpose of the study was to examine the underlying causes and visible effects of the vocabulary divide between learners from English medium and vernacular medium schools, and to explore possible solutions. To better understand the real challenges students face, the team carried out a field study with Class 6 students from both Birubari Rupnagar High School (Assamese medium) and YWCA Senior Secondary School (English medium).

The project involved a series of interactive, student-focused, and activity-based tasks designed to assess learners' vocabulary retention, pronunciation accuracy, ability to use words in context, and overall confidence in expression. The structure of the activities was shaped by modern approaches to second language learning, drawing particularly on Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, and the framework of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). These methods reinforced the importance of creating a supportive, engaging, and inclusive learning environment to help students build their vocabulary effectively.

The project gains added significance when viewed against the backdrop of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which places strong emphasis on multilingualism, inclusive practices, and competency-based education. By designing classroom interventions that reflect these principles, this initiative not only adds to academic understanding but also complements ongoing national efforts to reform education. At its heart, the study challenges the idea that English vocabulary is a privilege—it presents it instead as a basic educational right that should be accessible to every learner, no matter their language or socio-economic background.

The following sections of this report present a comprehensive overview of the project's planning, implementation, key observations, and broader implications. The hope is that this

study will offer meaningful insights and practical support to teachers, education professionals, and policymakers working toward a more just and effective approach to English vocabulary learning.

1.3 Rationale

India's diverse linguistic environment creates both opportunities and challenges in the classroom, especially in the context of English language teaching. Vocabulary acquisition remains a key area of concern, particularly when comparing students from English medium and vernacular (Assamese medium) backgrounds. This project was undertaken to explore the vocabulary gap between Class 6 learners of these two mediums and to develop strategies that can help bridge it.

As part of our research, we visited both English and Assamese medium schools and interacted directly with Class 6 students through a set of carefully designed, interactive activities. The goal was to gain a firsthand understanding of their vocabulary skills and the specific challenges they encounter while learning English. The students, mostly between 11 and 12 years old, came from Assamese-speaking backgrounds and had differing levels of exposure to English.

During these school visits, we organized a variety of engaging, student-focused activities that encouraged active participation and offered insight into their vocabulary use, confidence, and comprehension. These included:

- Odd One Out – to test vocabulary categorization and meaning differentiation
- Matching Activity – to assess word-picture or word-meaning associations
- Word Train – to encourage quick recall and word-linking
- Worksheet-based tasks – to test written vocabulary usage and understanding
- Guess the Picture – to build vocabulary through visual clues and descriptions
- Along with earlier tasks like Spy Game, Name-Place-Animal-Thing, and Dumb Charades

These activities helped us analyze student engagement, pronunciation, recall, comprehension, and confidence in using English vocabulary. Interestingly, even students from English medium schools faced difficulties when it came to using vocabulary spontaneously, which challenges the common belief that they are naturally more fluent. The motivation behind this project stems from a desire to understand how factors like language exposure, teaching methods, and the medium of instruction affect the way students learn and retain vocabulary. We aim to promote inclusive, task-based, and bilingual strategies to support all learners, in line with NEP 2020's emphasis on multilingual and competency-based education.

1.4 Project Objectives

1. To identify and assess vocabulary challenges among Class 6 students in both English medium and Assamese medium schools.
2. To compare vocabulary performance between the two groups, focusing on pronunciation, recall, contextual use, and confidence.
3. To explore the role of exposure and teaching methods in shaping vocabulary acquisition in vernacular and English medium learners.
4. To implement interactive vocabulary-building activities, including:
 - Odd One Out
 - Matching Activity
 - Word Train
 - Worksheet Tasks
 - Guess the Picture
 - Spy Game
 - Name-Place-Animal-Thing
 - Dumb Charades
5. To evaluate how these activities impact vocabulary recall, learner motivation, and participation, particularly in reducing anxiety and encouraging active use of English.

6. To recommend effective, bilingual, and context-based strategies for vocabulary instruction that catered to diverse learner needs.
7. To contribute to pedagogical practices aligned with NEP 2020, promoting inclusive and learner-friendly approaches in language education.

1.5 Theoretical Frameworks

Krashen's Theory of Affective Filter Hypothesis

Summary of Theoretical Bases –

The Affective Filter Hypothesis developed by Stephen Krashen assumes that a number of emotional factors including anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence play an important role in the language learning process.

A high affective filter which is caused by fear, stress or low self-esteem does not allow language input to be processed effectively. Minimizing the affective filter will help to understand better and engage in more successful language acquisition.

Use in the Project:

Initially, there was a sign of hesitation and lack of confidence among the students who had a vernacular-medium background especially in oral activities.

The researchers used interactive, fun and non-threatening games like Dumb Charades, Spy Game and Guess the Picture to create a supportive learning environment.

To reduce the feeling of anxiety and boost the confidence of the learners, the use of visual aids, bilingual cues, and peer motivation were carefully incorporated during the learning process.

Students therefore showed more engagement, better retention and enthusiasm, which means less affective barriers and more learning readiness.

The Theory of Sociocultural Development Vygotsky

Summary of Theoretical Bases-

Vygotsky emphasized the centrality of social interactions in promoting cognitive growth. It is critical to note that Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) recognizes the fact that learners perform better with the assistance of more knowledgeable people.

Scaffolding or the use of temporary support allows learners to move through activities that they can perform without any help to those that they can perform with adequate guidance.

Use in the Project:

The team was quite active in encouraging peer support and collaborative learning with the help of interesting activities such as Word Web, Matching Worksheets and Word Train.

Learners received advice and examples of good practices and explanations, showing students how they can interact effectively in the Zone of Proximal Development.

Group work in vocabulary also proved to be very helpful and students with a higher level often helped their colleagues who needed more help.

This approach was an indication of the belief that Vygotsky had on the importance of social interaction and culturally appropriate support on the development of language acquisition.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

Summary of Theory:

As a communicative approach, TBLT teaches language using meaningful tasks that are real-life-like. Authentic communication is stressful, not any isolated teaching of grammar or vocabulary. It normally proceeds in three steps: pre-task, task performance and post-task reflection.

Use in the Project :

The researchers came up with useful vocabulary-based activities i.e.:

Odd One Out

Guess the Word

Place, Name, Animal, Thing

Worksheet Fill-ins

These activities made learners apply vocabulary in the context which promoted acquisition by doing it instead of memorizing. Active participation and vocabulary reinforcement were possible through interactive games and discussion in groups.

It was designed along the TBLT format, including pre-task demonstrations, task performance, and post-task feedback. The learners particularly those with vernacular backgrounds became more confident, active, expressive with the English language.

CHAPTER 2

Methodology and Literature Review

2.1 Methodology

The study followed a qualitative needs analysis approach, supported by task-based classroom experimentation. By conducting interactive vocabulary activities in a real classroom setting, the researchers gathered firsthand data on student performance, behavior, and learning preferences. To explore the differences in vocabulary development between vernacular and English medium learners, a comparative approach was used. The aim was to better understand the vocabulary gap through direct classroom engagement, observing how students from different educational backgrounds respond under similar conditions. The research was grounded in theories of second language acquisition, educational psychology, and inclusive teaching practices.

The study took the form of a classroom-based needs analysis, using methods such as observation, informal assessments, and reflective inquiry. Rather than focusing on rote memorization, the research prioritized real-world language use, in line with the principles of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). The goal was to create a relaxed, supportive environment where students could showcase their vocabulary skills through purposeful and interactive tasks instead of traditional tests.

This approach enabled educators to assess vocabulary competence in more natural, communicative contexts. It also provided insight into students' emotional reactions and behavior during language use. The methodology placed value on the learning process itself—highlighting how students approached word recall, recognition, and usage in context—rather than judging them solely on correct answers or test scores.

To ensure a well-rounded understanding of students' vocabulary skills and challenges, the following tools were employed:

- Preliminary assessments to establish a baseline of vocabulary knowledge.
- Classroom observations during task-based learning activities, capturing spontaneous language use, engagement levels, and communicative behaviors.

- Informal surveys and interviews with students and teachers to gain insight into learner attitudes, confidence levels, and perceived vocabulary challenges.

The methodological framework of this study also reflects the vision outlined in India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes several key principles, including:

- Competency-based learning over rote memorization
- Multilingual and inclusive education
- Interactive, skill-focused pedagogy
- Use of mother tongue for conceptual clarity

By integrating these principles, the study not only adds to ongoing academic discussions but also aligns with national educational goals focused on promoting equitable and inclusive language development.

2.2 Literature Review

In a linguistically diverse country like India, the language of instruction plays a crucial role in shaping how students learn and use English—particularly when it comes to vocabulary. This is especially evident in states such as Assam, where many students receive their education in their regional language. As English continues to dominate higher education and professional domains, students from vernacular backgrounds often find themselves at a disadvantage. Several researchers have examined this gap in vocabulary development and its broader implications for students' academic success and self-confidence. This section reviews existing studies related to the challenges faced by vernacular and English medium learners, and how different teaching strategies have sought to address these issues.

A recurring theme in earlier research is the influence of the medium of instruction on vocabulary growth. Pandey (2015) compared learners from English and vernacular schools and found that those in vernacular institutions are typically exposed to far less English vocabulary. In such schools, English is usually treated as just another subject, rather than being integrated across the curriculum. This limited exposure reduces opportunities for students to naturally acquire and use new words. These findings closely align with our own

classroom observations. For example, during a simple vocabulary game like Name, Place, Animal, Thing, students from vernacular backgrounds often found it difficult to recall or spell basic English words.

Another important strand of research focuses on interactive and game-based learning as a tool for vocabulary acquisition. Wright et al. (2006) emphasized the value of using games in the classroom to improve word retention and make the learning experience more enjoyable. According to their findings, games help reduce anxiety and encourage students to use words in meaningful contexts. In our own sessions, activities like Dumb Charades and Spy Game clearly illustrated this point. These games not only revealed what students already knew but also offered insight into how they processed language and communicated their understanding. Even those with a limited vocabulary were more willing to engage when the learning environment was fun and non-judgmental.

Laufer (1998) made a useful distinction between two types of vocabulary knowledge: receptive and productive. Receptive vocabulary includes words a student can recognize and understand, while productive vocabulary refers to words they can actively use in speech or writing. This distinction was clearly visible during our fieldwork. Many vernacular medium students appeared to grasp the meaning of certain English words when they were acted out or explained, but they struggled to use those same words correctly in spoken or written form. The gap between knowing and using vocabulary is crucial in language development, and it was very clearly seen in our classroom experiences.

Emotional factors also play a huge role in how students engage with English vocabulary. Gardner (1985) and Dörnyei (2001) both discussed how confidence, motivation, and anxiety affect language learning. In our study, vernacular medium students often hesitated, relied on peers, or avoided speaking up. They showed signs of anxiety, especially during competitive activities. On the other hand, English medium students appeared more confident and independent. These differences suggest that emotional comfort in using English plays a big role in vocabulary growth and needs to be considered in any teaching approach.

The studies discussed above make it clear that the vocabulary gap between vernacular and English medium learners is shaped by many factors—language exposure, teaching methods, environment, and emotional readiness. While English medium students benefit from greater and more natural exposure to the language, their vernacular peers often rely heavily on the

classroom, where instruction may not be sufficient or engaging. Earlier research supports the idea that fun, interactive activities and emotionally supportive learning environments can help close this gap. Our project builds on this understanding by using classroom-based evidence to show how playful strategies like games can help vernacular learners engage more confidently with English vocabulary. Bridging this gap is not just a matter of teaching harder, but teaching smarter—with empathy, creativity, and inclusion.

CHAPTER 3

Contextual Background and Need Analysis

3.1 Participating Schools

To carry out a comparative needs analysis of vocabulary acquisition among vernacular and English medium learners, two schools in Guwahati, Assam, were selected as the main field sites. These schools were chosen based on their differing mediums of instruction, ease of access, and willingness to collaborate with the research team. The cooperation and support extended by both institutions played a vital role in the smooth and successful execution of the study.

1. Birubari Rupnagar High School (Vernacular Medium)

Birubari Rupnagar High School is a government-run upper primary school situated in Ward No. 18 of Guwahati. The school serves students from Classes 1 to 8 and follows the Assamese medium of instruction. As a vernacular institution, it provided a valuable setting for examining the vocabulary-related challenges experienced by students who have limited exposure to English in their daily academic routine.

The headmistress, Mrs. Lina Mishra, was instrumental in facilitating the research process. Her consistent support, along with the cooperation of the teaching staff, created a welcoming and respectful environment for engaging with the students. The school generously provided access to its projector room, which helped create a more interactive and engaging atmosphere for the vocabulary-based activities.

The students at Birubari Rupnagar High School were enthusiastic and cooperative. Although many initially showed hesitations when working with English vocabulary, their openness to participate and their curiosity made the sessions lively and inclusive.

2. YWCA Senior Secondary School (English Medium)

YWCA Senior Secondary School, located in Chattribari, Guwahati, is a private English medium school affiliated with the state education board. The institution offers education from classes 1 through 12 and maintains a structured academic environment with a strong focus on English language instruction.

The principal of YWCA Senior Secondary School, Mrs. Champa Das, played a key role in facilitating access to the school and creating a supportive environment for the research activities. With her guidance, the school staff extended their full cooperation, making classrooms available and ensuring that all necessary arrangements were in place for the sessions to run smoothly. The welcoming atmosphere fostered collaborative learning and helped the student researchers build a comfortable rapport with the learners.

The students at YWCA were confident, courteous, and actively engaged throughout the activities. Their genuine curiosity and respectful behavior made the sessions productive and enjoyable. Their willingness to participate and express themselves offered valuable insight into the vocabulary learning habits of students in English medium settings.

Overall Experience

At both schools, the experience was overwhelmingly positive. The students were disciplined, cooperative, and eager to interact with the research team. Their warm and respectful approach greatly contributed to the open, collaborative atmosphere that is essential for meaningful language research. The encouragement and hospitality extended by the principals and teaching staff reflected a shared commitment to improving education and promoting equitable access to English language learning.

3.2 Language Needs Analysis

Introduction:

- In multilingual education systems, especially within countries like India that has diverse linguistic areas, such as in the state of Assam, we observe a significant vocabulary gap in the English language that often exists between students from vernacular medium schools and English medium schools. The difference is not only seen in the academic performances of the young learners, but it also affects their confidence, participation, and long term educational outcomes. English medium learners often enjoy greater exposure to a wide array of vocabulary through their

curriculum and everyday environment. In contrast, vernacular medium learners typically struggle to develop a comparable vocabulary due to limited opportunities and instruction in English. This gap becomes especially noticeable in secondary education, where English usually serves as the medium of instruction. As a result, students from vernacular backgrounds often face disadvantages when it comes to comprehending academic texts, expressing themselves clearly in writing and speech, and keeping pace with their peers. This disparity not only affects their learning potential but also has long-term implications for their future opportunities.

This report aims to pinpoint the core challenges experienced by both groups of learners, delve into the root causes of their vocabulary discrepancies, and suggest practical, inclusive strategies and activities to support vocabulary development for everyone.

Objectives:

- To identify the specific vocabulary challenges faced by both vernacular and English medium learners.
- To examine the impact of the vocabulary gap on academic performance and learner confidence.
- To analyze current teaching methodologies and their effectiveness in vocabulary development across different mediums.
- To explore successful vocabulary-building strategies and tools that cater to diverse learner backgrounds.
- To propose assessment methods to measure vocabulary growth and program effectiveness over time.

Methodology:

In order to understand the vocabulary proficiency levels of vernacular medium students better, and to evaluate the effectiveness of informal, game based learning strategies, we added three interactive activities that were conducted with a group of class 6th learners. These activities were selected to engage students in dynamic and low pressure settings while assessing their vocabulary memory, word formation skills, and their ability to communicate in English.

The activities included:

1. Name, Place, Animal, Thing.

Objective: To build writing skills and boost vocabulary.

Materials needed: Paper and Pen **Preparation:**

- First, we will distribute the papers to the student.
- Second, each student will get one paper.
- Then we will instruct the students to draw four columns, name/ place / animal / thing on to the paper.

Rules of the game:

- We will announce a random letter example-B
- Then the students will have to write one word per category within 2-3 minutes. • For example, for the letter “B”, they might write: Bijit/Brazil/Bear/Balloon.
- The students will have to stop writing after the time is up.

Discussion:

- After the game ends we will discuss the answers with the students.
- We will ask all the students to share their answers with the class.
- Then, we will see where the students are lacking or got stuck in the middle of the game.

2. Dumbcharads

Objective: To evaluate the present level of proficiency in using English.

Materials Needed: Flash cards that contain words from their syllabus English book.

Preparation:

- First, we will divide students into two groups. These two groups will be boys and girls.

- Second, we will take one of the student from one of the groups and give them a flashcard with a word.
- Then the student will act out the word without speaking.

Rules of the game:

- The students will not be allowed to speak or write.
- The actor cannot even make a sound.
- They are only allowed to use gestures.
- The actor will use body language and facial expressions to act out the word.
- The time limit for each group will be atleast 3-4 minutes to guess the word.

Discussion:

- The time limit added excitement and encouraged quick thinking.
- We will evaluate how the students associate new words with actions.
- Each group who scores will get 5 points.

3. Spy Game

Objective: To evaluate their present level of proficiency in vocabulary use.

Materials needed: Flash cards that contain words from their syllabus English book.

Preparation:

- We will divide students into groups, each group will consist of 4 members
- We will choose one student as the “spy” with a different word.

Rules of the game:

- All students in a group (except the spy) get the same word.
- The “spy” must blend in with a different word.
- The “spy” listens and gives a fitting description.
- After everyone speaks, the students will vote for the person they think is the “spy”.

Discussion:

- Their ability to explain the meaning of the word will be observed.
- We will see how students analyzed clues to identify the spy.
- The role of listening skills in understanding and responding appropriately will be observed.

Reward system:

- The students will get 5 points for correctly identifying the spy.
- 5 points if the spy remains unidentified.
- The winner will be rewarded award badges like “Master Spy”, “Super Listener” or “Creative Thinker”.

Discussion and Analysis:

The vernacular medium group displayed varying levels of engagement and skill. During the Name, Place, Animal, Thing game, many students struggled with instant recall of English vocabulary. While they understood the concept of the game, forming complete, accurate English words proved challenging. Several students paused for long periods or resorted to using words in their native language, unsure of their English equivalents. Spelling errors were common, particularly with place names and animals. In Dumb Charades, students were more enthusiastic and expressive. Despite limited vocabulary, their body language and creativity in acting were well put. However, they frequently misinterpreted the words they were supposed to guess, indicating gaps in their receptive vocabulary. The game revealed that while oral communication and understanding can be supported by gestures and context, actual word recognition remains underdeveloped. The Spy Game proved to be the most telling in terms of language processing. Many vernacular medium learners had difficulty identifying synonyms or drawing associations from clues. They required repeated hints and often needed help from peers or the teachers. This reflected both a limited internal vocabulary bank and underdeveloped analytical skills related to language. At the same time, an interesting trend emerged. A small sub-group of students within the same vernacular medium school students excelled across the games. These learners were confident, quick to respond, and demonstrated advanced word knowledge. Their success was often attributed to external

influences such as access to English media (TV, internet, books) or additional English coaching outside of school.

Findings:

<u>Vernacular Medium</u>	<u>English Medium</u>
<p>1. The first gap founded in Assamese medium students is the difficulty in understanding and writing English language.</p> <p>For example, in the activities like “Name, Place, Animal, Thing,” students from vernacular medium often struggled to write English words correctly even though they could pronounce them.</p>	<p>1. But the students in English medium easily grasped everything taught by us.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While the English medium students were able to pronounce as well as write the words correctly.
<p>2. They had great difficulty in understanding or guessing the vocabulary words given by us during our activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For example: - while playing a game — ‘Dumb Charades’, vernacular medium students struggled to act out the words using more than one action. Many used only one simple gesture which made it hard for others to guess the word. 	<p>2. They were more successful at interpreting clues or guessing the vocabulary related things during our activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While the English medium students could easily act out many actions, which helped their team to guess the word.
<p>3. An important observation was the difference in students’ capacity to think critically and be creative in English.</p>	<p>3. Some of the English medium students were able to give indirect clues to hide their identity as the spy</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For example, in the activity of “spy game”, students of the Vernacular medium found it harder to describe the word without giving direct definitions, which often revealed their identity as a spy 	<p>and proved to have better control over the language.</p>
<p>4. They had major mistakes. Many of them even didn't know about the meanings of simple words like 'sea', 'old man', 'digging' etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For instance, in most of the activities students could not even pronounce the words correctly. It was difficult for them to spell the complex word structure. We had to read out the words to them. 	<p>4. Mistakes were often minor, and self-identified.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> English medium students, however, were not only able to pronounce the complex words structure but also say the meaning of the words.
<p>5. Low level of confidence has been noticed in the students for which they got more anxious.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For the Assamese medium students, the students mostly relied on peers for support in activities, indicating their lack of confidence. 	<p>5. On the other hand, English medium students were confident and preferred to work on tasks on their own.</p>
<p>6. They were very respectful and at the same time they were enthusiastic to participate in the activities with us.</p>	<p>6. Although they were respectful, they had less enthusiasm than the Assamese medium students.</p>
<p>7. They were a bit less disciplined but however they were the most</p>	<p>7. They were very disciplined.</p>

cooperative ones.	
8. Students of vernacular medium often found it difficult in expressing ideas subtly or creatively in English; and depended on direct explanations.	8. English medium students were more flexible in the use of language and were able to use indirect expressions or creative descriptions when required.

Conclusion:

The analysis reveals that students belonging to vernacular and English medium background often have a massive gap in their vocabulary that hampers their ability to understand as well as use English, especially while studying. We have to concentrate on strategies for vocabulary building, contextual learning and link what students already know in their language to English. However, fixing this problem, we can increase their language skills in general and make the learning environment more inclusive and more efficient. Vernacular medium students have very poor exposure to English vocabulary and struggle to understand classroom instruction and textbook or engaging tasks. This gap not only affect their confidence, it also prevents them from participating in classroom discussions and other academic activities. Teachers can fill this gap by using digital objects and fun activities that expand students' existing knowledge. Bridging this gap can provide equal opportunities for students from any backgrounds to achieve success in English medium schools.

3.3 Language Teaching

1. The Multilingual Landscape and the Role of Language Teaching

Language teaching in a multilingual country like India which has many tongues, is heavily affected by regional linguistics. English is both helpful for uniting people and difficult to

learn in states with several languages such as Assam. Apart from grammar and syntax, language teaching, when it comes to English, supports access to education, social advancement and being able to interact with others worldwide. Because of these conditions, educators must do more than teach language, they must also help their students grow and change in different parts of the world.

2. Inequality in Language Exposure

It is a major problem in language teaching that some schools provide more access to English than others. English is used in English medium classes through books, classroom conversations and computer resources. Vernacular medium students are taught English like a subject, rather than having to use it in everyday life. Because of this difference, English medium learners slowly increase their vocabulary and get more comfortable with language, but vernacular learners need to be taught more directly.

3. Vocabulary as the Core Deficit

The main reason for this gap in education is difficulty with acquiring new vocabulary. Language is often taught in vernacular settings by emphasizing rules and drilling which means students rarely learn to use the language naturally or add new words. For this reason, students can write grammatically right sentences but can't communicate their ideas clearly enough. Because of the limited vocabulary, their understanding of texts, how they write and how they speak become more restricted in school which is mostly taught in English.

4. Psychological Effects on Learners

Learning difficulties because of poor vocabulary and insufficient English skills are not only found in education. The way language is taught (or not taught) has important effects on learners' minds. Those who use the vernacular medium tend to feel less confident speaking up, are afraid of taking part and think they are less able than other students in classes where more than one language is used. The limits of the language which make it hard for students to express emotion, make it harder for them to be confident when using the language and learn faster.

5. Systemic Consequences in Secondary Education

The vocabulary and language gaps that students have can be seen more clearly as they enter secondary education. English most often becomes the main teaching language in Indian schools after high school. Children raised in vernacular schools have difficulties with the language as well as with learning science, history and math. As a result, those with fewer abilities are limited and the goals of bringing everyone into education are compromised. So, early and effective language instruction is very important.

6. The Need for Inclusive Language Pedagogy

Teachers should use an approach that is willing to include students from all backgrounds and that takes each culture's needs into account. Just using grammar exercises and books from a textbook does not suit all students. A good approach to language teaching looks at students' past experiences, how much English they have learned and the culture of their environment. It ought to try to establish a space where English is taught and practiced, with a major emphasis on learning new words and being able to communicate well.

7. The Future of Language Teaching in Diverse Contexts

The bottom line is that language instruction in multilingual environments should change from just teaching to building personal and professional power. Strategies teachers can use should help students understand new vocabulary, feel confident and take part in the language in a meaningful way. The difference in outcomes between English and vernacular medium learners will probably increase further if the reforms are not implemented which could affect their learning as well as their future chances in society and at work. So, language teaching is very important for creating a future where everyone has equal access to different languages.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis, Outcomes and Pedagogical Implications

4.1 PROJECT FINDINGS:

INTRODUCTION

Language is the main way students connect with knowledge, experience and ways of expressing themselves. For students just starting out, especially in vernacular medium schools, getting new words is the main part of learning language. Still, those who learn in an English medium often have a lower vocabulary than those who study in their mother tongue and this is clear in their academic work, their ability to speak, their confidence and how involved they are in class activities.

The project was designed and carried out to fix this issue in a way that helps students in school. It was over five days that the project focused on students in Class 6 from English and vernacular schools. Students in the study were between 11 and 12 years old and English medium students got to practice English in daily life and schoolwork, but vernacular medium students did not have much English exposure at home or elsewhere. Because of this gap, their memory for vocabulary, how they say words, ability to remember things and desire to speak in English were influenced.

The chosen method was straightforward but had a big impact: students learned vocabulary by doing fun activities in class, not only by memorizing. The idea was to give students more than new words; we wanted to support their interactions, use of, recall of, descriptions of, visualization of and connections with these words. The goal was to make students engage more, boost their confidence and participate in learning, regardless of their style.

The chosen activities included word categorization, word chains, guessing games, visual interpretations and creative fill-in-the-blank worksheets to help students work with vocabulary using thinking, speaking, listening, reading and writing. Students did well on these tasks since they weren't evaluated and instead were asked to explore, share ideas and talk about their ideas.

Each section after this explains in detail what to do each day, including the preparation, how to lead the class and how to close it thoughtfully. The tasks were useful for learning and fun which helped even quiet students become more active in school.

DAY 1: ODD ONE OUT – Word Grouping & Concept Differentiation

- **Pre-Activity:**

The teacher showed the students how to group similar things and find out which one is different. A couple of examples were shown using the whiteboard and students were asked to watch and take part.

Try asking your child: “Sun, Moon, Star, Apple – which one is not correct?” Because of this, people became more interested and started replying.

- **While-Activity:**

Students grouped together and each group was shown four words. They were asked to find the unusual case and talk about why it was different.

Drama, novel, poem, dictionary

Flour, flower, petal, bloom

Hot, warm, cold, boiling

Fox, crow, swan, pigeon

Happy, joy, sad, excited

Water, juice, milk, bread

Mango, banana, apple, pillow

School, college, university, medical

Dog, cat, cow, leaf

Each group was given a short time to write down their answers with reasons.

- **Post-Activity:**

The teacher chose a group at a time to show one of their answers. Others might accept or disagree with it by giving a reason. People were helped to say words correctly or ask what they meant kindly. The students repeated after the teacher the word and what it meant.

Example: Why is “pillow” the odd one? → Because it’s not a fruit.

Findings

English Medium Students:

- Showed better familiarity with types of books, emotions and food. But some students had difficulty telling apart **hot, cold, boiling and warm** and this caused them to answer these words incorrectly.
- Some people found it easy to spot the odd one, but it was hard for them to say why.
- A problem with semantic similarity is that people might say “poem” is odd rather than “dictionary”.

Vernacular Medium Students:

- Initially hesitant but improved with peer support and translation help.
- Difficulty occurred when trying to tell apart abstract categories (such as emotions and temperature).
- Easier for children to remember things that are concrete such as animals and fruits.
- Needed to be taught how to pronounce some words that are easy to mix up (e.g., flour vs flower).

DAY 2: WORD TRAIN – Vocabulary Building through Letter Linking

- **Pre-Activity:**

The class was told they would play a game where one word leads to another. The last letter of one word becomes the first letter of the next.

Teacher demonstrates: “Hat → Tree → Elephant → Tiger...” Students were excited and ready to try.

- **While-Activity:**

Students sat in a circle or in rows. One student would say a word, and the next had to think quickly and say another that started with the last letter of the previous word.

Sample chains included:

World → Brave → Egg → Green → Need

Hungry → Yellow → Water → Red

The challenge was to think fast and remember vocabulary.

- **Post-Activity:**

The longest chains were written on the board. Students clapped for each other. Teachers discussed new or difficult words and helped students spell them correctly. A mini competition between groups added fun.

Findings

English Medium Students:

- Very enthusiastic and competitive.
- Displayed good spelling recall and fast connections, though sometimes made up words to keep the chain going.
- Knew more words but lacked accuracy at times. They made spelling mistakes.

Vernacular Medium Students:

- Took longer to respond and often paused between turns.
- Faced difficulty recalling words that begin with tricky letters (e.g., “e”, “y”, “w”).

- Peer encouragement helped boost their confidence. By the second round, several students confidently volunteered, showing active word recall and a visible improvement in participation
- They retained commonly used words better (e.g., red, dog, boy).

DAY 3: GUESS THE WORD – Clue-Based Description Game

- **Pre-Activity:**

The teacher began by describing words and giving short hints.

“He teaches in school” → Teacher and “It gives us milk” → Cow Students guessed the words aloud and got excited about what was coming.

- **While-Activity:**

Each student were given a word and teachers gave clues to the student (in English or Assamese). The students had to guess the word based on the clues.

Sample words: blackboard, nurse, rain, mango, shoes, frog, blanket, river, doctor

Students had fun using body language or gestures too, especially if they were shy to speak.

- **Post-Activity:**

The teacher wrote all the guessed words on the board. Students repeated them loudly. Then they chose three of those words and made their own simple sentences orally or in their notebooks.

Findings

English Medium Students:

- Responded confidently in English when giving and guessing clues.
- Some were able to guess longer and more descriptive clues, like “You use it in rain, it keeps you dry.”
- Knew most vocabulary words but struggled when switching to abstract concepts (e.g., describing patient or nurse in context).

Vernacular Medium Students:

- Actively used Assamese first, then attempted English with teacher prompts.
- Gave creative and funny clues, showing engagement.
- Improved their confidence in front of peers.
- Struggled with words like “window” and “blanket” at first but remembered them later in the post-activity.

DAY 4: WORD WEB – Vocabulary Clustering by Theme

- **Pre-Activity:**

The teacher wrote a central word on the board and asked: “What do you think of when I say ‘food’?”

Students responded: “rice,” “burger,” “apple,” “potato” ...

They were then told to build their own word webs.

- **While-Activity:**

Each group received a sheet with a central word:

Food

Transport

Season

Clothes

They created webs with as many related words as they could think of.

For example:

Clothes → Shirt, Frock, Jacket, Jeans, Cotton

Transport → Car, Bus, Bike, Train, Boat

• **Post-Activity:**

Each group presented their web. The teacher added any missing words. Students copied the new words into their notebooks.

Findings:

English Medium Students:

- Creative pairing of meanings, for example: under transport → “aeroplane,” “tank.”
- Organized vocabulary thoughtfully under each theme
- Slight spelling mistakes were common (e.g., plan for plane.), but understanding was solid.

Vernacular Medium Students:

- Engaged confidently in the word web task and displayed a good grasp of the categories, though made several spelling mistakes.
- Gave everyday examples: under food → “dal,” “burger,” “brinjal.”
- Some had difficulty understanding broader terms like season but managed well after examples.
- Group discussion encouraged idea-sharing.

DAY 5: GUESS THE PICTURE + WORKSHEET – Visual Vocabulary and Word Use

• **Pre-Activity:**

At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher explained the theme which was, “Let the picture speak!” Teachers told students they would see a range of pictures and needed to say the right word to match each one.

Pictures were shared with the English group by using a laptop, but the Assamese group had images displayed on the projector. They were told by the teacher to observe what is in the image and pick words from their vocabulary that describe it.

The teacher modeled the first image: “What is this? (Image of a mountain with smoke) — Yes, that’s a volcano!

This created an atmosphere of curiosity and excitement.

- **While-Activity:**

One by one, a series of images were shown. Students had to:

Look carefully.

Guess the English word.

Say it aloud.

If needed, describe what they saw in simple terms.

Sample Images and Expected Responses:

Toaster – “Used to heat bread”

Excited – “Facial expression of happiness”

Ropeway – “Hanging cable car”

Tornado – “Spinning windstorm”

Igloo – “Snow house”

Bakery – “Place where bread is made”

Pyramid – “Triangle-shaped building”

Astronaut – “Person who goes to space”

Telescope – “Used to look at stars”

Findings

English Medium Students:

- Most students were quick to recognize images like volcano, astronaut, telescope, and pyramid shown on the laptop.
- They could often guess the correct word, but some had difficulty pronouncing or spelling few terms.
- Some students could not recognize the exact words like pyramids. They guessed other related words like “Egypt, Mummy, etc.”

Vernacular Medium Students:

- Showed great interest and attention due to the visual appeal of projector images.
- Required initial guidance or clues, especially for unfamiliar words like bakery or telescope, but were able to recall and repeat them confidently by the end.
- Few needed initial support but quickly caught on through hints in Assamese.
- Words like toaster, pyramid, telescope, though new to them, few could actually pronounce the words correctly.
- A lot more students got involved because they found the game fun and they used both English and their first language to figure or explain answers.

Matching worksheet

- **Post-Activity 1: Matching Word with Meaning**

After guessing what the picture was, students were split into three teams (A, B and C). Every group got five words to match with the correct meaning.

Groups were formed and students talked in pairs about the different meanings. Some hints or examples which the teacher gave to me orally.

Here’s how each group’s task was organized:

Group A Words:

1. Honest
2. Journey
3. Discover
4. Curious
5. Patient Meanings:
 1. Being truthful and sincere
 2. A trip from one place to another
 3. To find something new or unknown
 4. Wanting to learn or know about something
 5. Able to wait calmly without getting upset **Group B Words:**
 - i. Courage
 - ii. Clever
 - iii. Shadow iv. Whisper
 - iv. Proud

Meanings:

- i. The ability to face danger without fear
- ii. Quick to understand and think
- iii. The dark shape made when light is blocked
- iv. To speak very quietly
- v. Feeling good about what you or someone else has done **Group C Words:**
 - a. Adventure
 - b. Creative
 - c. Respect
 - d. Generous
- vi. Explore Meanings:
 - a. An exciting or unusual experience
 - b. Having the ability to make new and original ideas
 - c. Polite behaviour showing regard for someone
 - d. Willing to give or share freely

e. To look around and learn about something new

- **Post-Activity 2: Group Sharing and Reinforcement**

Each group presented one word and its meaning. The teacher encouraged peer correction if needed. All groups repeated the correct word and its meaning together. Students noted these new words and meanings in their notebooks.

To reinforce retention, the teacher conducted a short quiz:

- “What do we call the person who explores space?”
- “Which word means ‘able to wait calmly’?”
- “What is the meaning of ‘courage’?”

Students responded confidently, showing clear understanding of the vocabulary.

Worksheet Activity

The teacher briefly explained to the students that the worksheet was going to have a short story with empty parts and a list of words for them to use.

Students were told the words should be easy to recognize, because they were introduced in the previous days’ activities (odd one out, word guessing and picture vocabulary).

Students heard and discussed a number of example sentences to learn how to pick the appropriate word by reading the words around.

Example: “I was feeling very ____, so I ate a sandwich.”

→ Students guessed: “hungry”

- **While-Activity: Guided Worksheet Completion**

Students were given handwritten worksheets that were filled with a passage that needed students to complete missing words and they had a list of words at the top to help them. Students were told to read the text silently and then go ahead and fill in the blanks using words from the box.

The teacher moved around the classroom, watched students work and helped those who got stuck by reading the sentences and highlighting the clues.

In some groups, students could talk quietly with peers to help with learning together.

Students often paused to ask meanings or confirm spellings, which became natural vocabulary revision moments.

• **Post-Activity: Discussion & Reflection**

The teacher then read the complete passage again, this time saying the correct answers and had students check what they had written.

Students struggled with tough words were explained once more and everyone in the classroom repeated them to get their pronunciation right.

Findings

English Medium Students:

- Were able to read and understand the passage independently.
- Several students correctly completed most blanks using contextual clues, especially for common words like happy, hungry, milk, and school.
- Common vocabulary was used appropriately.
- However, spelling errors were frequent, especially with words like university, medical.

Vernacular Medium Students:

- Students paid attention and tried to do the work seriously.
- Required support for more abstract or academic terms, but many were able to guess meanings based on story.
- Group support and teachers reading improved their confidence and accuracy.

4.2 Project Impact

The vocabulary project had a clear impact on students' word recognition, recall, and contextual usage. Through engaging activities like clue games, word webs, and worksheets, students became more familiar with new vocabulary and were able to remember and use them across different tasks. Words introduced on earlier days were successfully applied in later activities, especially in the worksheet, showing improved retention.

One of the most notable changes was in student confidence, particularly among vernacular medium learners. Many who were initially shy or hesitant began participating actively when allowed to use both Assamese and English. This bilingual flexibility helped reduce fear and made English feel more accessible. English medium students also became more expressive and confident in explaining their word choices.

Students' self-esteem improved and this was most noticeable with vernacular medium students. Many who were at first unsure started joining in the talks once they had the option to use both Assamese and English. Because I could switch between languages so easily, I felt less afraid and English became easier to use. Because of their lessons in the English medium, students were more comfortable and clear in saying why they chose specific words.

All the different activities kept students interested during their visit. They were able to relate words to what happens in life by playing picture guessing and making the word web. English medium students remembered things more quickly but made more errors in spelling and sometimes had too much confidence in what they knew. Students using their native language improved slowly but consistently and thought more deeply.

The project mainly reduced the vocabulary gap by motivating students to engage, study from the environment and collaborate with others. English medium students focused on their ability to use language and the vernacular students improved in their access and sense of confidence. It was shown that vocabulary is best learned when lessons are interactive, offer support and have meaning for students.

4.3 Development of Core Language Skills

Reading, Speaking and Listening

• Reading Skills

Definition:

Reading is a receptive skill which involves the ability to decode written text to get meaning. It is as low as being able to recognize words to very complex understanding.

Observations:

At the word and phrase level, students were involved in reading. The students using English medium read fluently though at times without depth; whereas vernacular students read at a slow pace but with care.

Strategies Used:

Purposeful reading was encouraged by activities such as Odd one out, word web, and worksheet Fill-ins. Word recognition and building of meaning were facilitated through visual cues. The group activities enabled the learners to read together and to help one another.

Outcomes:

Students demonstrated more confidence in the decoding and recognition of vocabulary. Reading was no longer a means of decoding letters but learning. There was better understanding and retention of meaning of words, more so when matched with pictures or games.

• Speaking Skills

Definition:

Speaking is the productive oral skill whereby the learners employ language to communicate about ideas, opinions, and thoughts through an oral presentation. It entails fluency, pronunciation, grammar and proper vocabulary.

Observations:

Learners of Vernacular medium turned out to be reluctant in speaking English as they were not confident and fluent. The learners who used the English medium spoke more fluently yet they misused words or were not clear.

Strategies:

Real life communication was possible through interactive activities such as Guess the Word, Spy Game, Dumb Charades and Name-Place-Animal-Thing. Group activities promoted speaking peer to peer in planned and spontaneous forms. Speaking anxiety was decreased by bilingual cues and facilitating conditions.

Outcomes:

- There were more improvements in fluency and use of vocabulary, particularly in vernacular learners.
- Learners became less hesitant to speak, even in cases when they were not certain. Speaking was the normal act of taking part in tasks, not a distinct performance.

• Listening Skills**Definition:**

Listening is the receptive skill entailing comprehension of utterance. It involves sounds recognition, meaning identification and corresponding reactions.

Observations:

- A lot of students (particularly the vernacular medium) depended quite a lot on visual or bilingual aids to comprehend oral instructions.
- It was necessary to listen when playing games, working on a group task, or in the course of an interaction.

Strategies:

- Clear verbal instructions in English, sometimes, Assamese translation.
- Listening was facilitated by multisensory stimulus during projector-based classes via audio-visual supplements.

- Games also involved students listening to the clues, prompts and other peers.

Outcomes:

- Students became better at contextual understanding of spoken English.
- They would be more attentive and would need less repetitions as days passed.
- Listening assisted many learners to fill the gap in reading and speaking.

4.4 Feedback from the English Teachers

Our teaching journey across both Assamese medium and English medium schools offered a unique opportunity for us as university students to step into the role of educators and bring fresh perspectives to vocabulary learning. From the very first day, teachers in both schools were not only welcoming but also deeply appreciative of the enthusiasm, creativity, and innovative teaching strategies we introduced. Teachers from both schools responded positively to the activities we conducted, noting that exercises such as Word Train, Odd One Out, Matching Words with Meanings, Web Words, and Guess the Picture brought a fresh energy into the classroom. These tasks sparked curiosity and enthusiasm among students, creating a learning environment that was engaging for both learners and teachers.

At the Assamese medium school, teachers specifically appreciated our use of visual aids and digital tools. Activities like Guess the Picture, where we projected images on the screen, were particularly effective in helping students grasp the meaning of new vocabulary in a more concrete and visual way. According to the teachers, these methods successfully captured students' attention—especially those who often struggled to stay focused during traditional lessons. Activities like Word Train and Matching Words with Meanings encouraged students to think creatively and make connections between words, which the teachers saw as a meaningful extension to their usual teaching methods.

The teachers also appreciated our patient and inclusive teaching style. Giving students time to think and encouraging participation without pressure helped create a relaxed and supportive atmosphere. Many students who were typically hesitant or shy in English classes began to show more confidence and interest during our sessions. Teachers remarked that this shift in attitude was one of the most rewarding aspects of the activities. They also commended the

smooth and organized flow of each session, noting that the balance of discipline and excitement helped maintain classroom order while keeping students fully engaged.

At the English medium school, the feedback was equally encouraging. Although the students were generally more confident in using English, teachers observed that the interactive nature of our activities pushed them to think more creatively and apply vocabulary in unfamiliar ways. Exercises like Web Words and Odd One Out were highlighted as particularly effective in promoting critical thinking and problem-solving. Teachers appreciated that even the high-performing students were challenged, which helped sustain their interest and deepened their learning experience.

Teachers appreciated our use of digital tools, particularly during activities like Guess the Picture, where the integration of laptops and projected images made the lessons feel more dynamic and relatable for the students. They noted that the use of technology added an exciting visual dimension to learning, capturing students' attention more effectively than traditional methods.

Another aspect that received positive feedback was our emphasis on group work. By encouraging students to collaborate during the activities, we created a more social and interactive learning environment. This collaborative approach not only made the sessions more enjoyable but also allowed quieter or less confident students to participate more freely. Teachers observed that working in groups gave these students the reassurance they needed to share their ideas and engage more actively.

Across both schools, teachers consistently commented on the thoughtful balance between structure and creativity in our teaching style. While we made sure to give clear instructions and set simple rules for each activity, we also encouraged students to think independently and explore language in fun and imaginative ways. Teachers felt this mix made the sessions more memorable and helped students develop a deeper understanding of vocabulary and its usage.

A particularly encouraging observation came from the English teacher at the Assamese medium school. She noted that a few students, who were usually disengaged during English lessons, became noticeably more vocal and even took the initiative to help their peers during the Word Train activity. Similarly, a teacher from the English medium school shared that while her students were generally comfortable with English vocabulary, they found the interactive activities refreshing. The opportunity to use words in new, unfamiliar contexts helped them develop a stronger grasp of meaning and word relationships.

CHAPTER 5

Recommendations and Conclusion

5.1 Recommendations

Based on our teaching sessions and the outcomes observed in both the Assamese and English medium schools, we propose the following strategies to enhance vocabulary learning and help bridge the gap between these two groups of learners:

1. Integrate Interactive Vocabulary Games

Incorporating fun, language-based activities such as Name, Place, Animal, Thing, Dumb Charades, Spy Game, Word Train, Odd One Out, and Matching Words with Meanings can significantly boost student engagement. These games foster an enjoyable and low-pressure learning environment, making vocabulary acquisition more natural and less intimidating.

2. Make Use of Digital Tools and Visual Aids

Using digital resources—such as displaying images through projectors or laptops—proved effective in supporting vocabulary learning. Visuals help students connect new words with real-world meanings and improve recall. Teachers can build on this by incorporating multimedia elements like educational videos, image-based quizzes, and interactive word games to make lessons more visually stimulating and informative.

3. Focus on Pronunciation and Word Meaning

For Assamese medium students in particular, targeted pronunciation drills and clear explanations of word meanings are essential. Teachers should regularly include guided pronunciation exercises and reinforce understanding through examples and context-based discussions. This helps build a strong foundation for both spoken and written English.

4. Foster a Supportive Classroom Environment

Creating a positive and encouraging space for language learning is especially important for students who feel less confident in English. Teachers should focus on encouraging participation, acknowledging effort, and normalizing mistakes as part of the learning process.

This kind of environment helps students feel safe to experiment with new words without fear of judgment.

5. Encourage Peer Support and Team Collaboration

Collaborative learning can be a powerful tool. Activities that involve group work or peer teaching give stronger students the opportunity to assist others, fostering a sense of teamwork and inclusiveness. Such interactions not only reinforce vocabulary for all students but also build classroom unity and mutual respect.

6. Differentiate Instruction

Recognizing that students come with varying levels of language ability, teachers should adapt vocabulary tasks to meet individual needs. For example, simpler activities like word matching can be offered to students who are still building foundational skills, while more advanced learners can be challenged with guessing games, word webs, or creative sentence- building tasks.

7. Use Contextual Learning Strategies

Introducing new vocabulary through familiar themes or real-life contexts helps students connect words with their everyday experiences. When words are taught in relation to topics students understand—such as home, school, or festivals— they are more likely to retain and use them confidently.

8. Conduct Regular Vocabulary Assessments

Short, informal assessments like the Fill in the Blanks exercises used in our sessions are effective tools for tracking vocabulary progress. Regular check-ins allow teachers to identify areas where students are struggling and adapt their instruction to better support individual learning needs.

9. Promote Independent Learning

Encouraging students to explore English beyond the classroom can greatly support vocabulary development. Teachers can suggest age-appropriate English books, cartoons, or mobile apps to make learning more accessible and enjoyable. This kind of self-directed practice helps students build vocabulary at their own pace and reinforces what they learn in class.

By adopting these strategies, teachers can foster a more inclusive and supportive learning environment—one that empowers all students, regardless of their language background, to strengthen their English vocabulary and succeed in their academic journey.

5.2 Conclusion

The findings of this project highlight the ongoing and significant vocabulary gap between learners from vernacular and English medium backgrounds. While students from English medium schools generally showed greater familiarity with English words and a higher level of confidence in using the language, their understanding was not always deep—particularly when it came to abstract or unfamiliar vocabulary. On the other hand, students from vernacular mediums faced more visible struggles with pronunciation, spelling, and word recall. These challenges are often linked to limited exposure and the way English is taught in vernacular settings.

However, the project also offered promising evidence that these disparities can be addressed through learner-centered, game-based, and bilingual strategies. Activities such as Guess the Picture, Word Web, and Spy Game not only improved vocabulary retention but also encouraged participation and boosted the confidence of students who were initially hesitant to engage with English.

One of the key takeaways from this study is that vocabulary learning should go beyond rote memorization. It thrives best in classrooms that are interactive, supportive, and sensitive to the students' linguistic realities. Tools such as visual aids, contextual learning, peer collaboration, and digital resources made a noticeable difference in making vocabulary more accessible and engaging for both groups of learners.

Importantly, the project aligns with the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes competency-based education, multilingualism, and inclusive pedagogy. These findings support the need for adaptive teaching strategies that acknowledge and address the diverse needs of students in India's multilingual classrooms.

Ultimately, bridging the vocabulary gap is not just about improving English proficiency—it is about ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, have equal opportunities to

succeed in their academic and personal journeys. With thoughtful, inclusive, and creative approaches, both vernacular and English medium learners can develop a strong and functional command of English vocabulary, laying the groundwork for greater confidence, active classroom participation, and long-term educational success.

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Appendices

Project Team

This project, titled “**Bridging the Vocabulary Gap: Effective Strategies for Vernacular and English Medium Learners,**” was carried out as part of the academic requirements for the Master’s degree programme in English at Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Vishwavidyalaya (MSSV), Guwahati Unit. It was undertaken by a group of five committed postgraduate students from the Department of English under the course M.A. ENG 04-401: Term Paper.

The research was planned, implemented, and analysed collaboratively, with the shared goal of exploring inclusive, learner-centered strategies for improving vocabulary in multilingual classroom settings. Each team member played an active role throughout the process—ranging from coordinating with schools and facilitating classroom activities to collecting data, conducting analysis, and compiling the final documentation.

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This collective academic endeavor represents the team's commitment to contributing meaningful insights toward inclusive English language education, especially for students navigating the linguistic divide between vernacular and English mediums. The team expresses sincere gratitude to the university faculty, school authorities, and students who made this project possible through their support and collaboration.

Survey

Responses from English Medium English Teacher:

1. How would you describe the overall vocabulary proficiency of your students?

Their receptive vocabulary understanding is good, but many struggle to use words fluently in speaking or writing.

2. What strategies do you use to teach vocabulary efficiently?

I use word maps, weekly vocabulary themes, and integrate new words into daily lessons.

Technology help sometimes.

3. What are the common vocabulary challenges that the students face in the class?

Even though they recognize words, they often can't use them appropriately. Some overuse common words and avoid academic vocabulary.

4. Do you include interactive activities to make vocabulary learning engaging?

I try to include interactive activities like games and group tasks to make vocabulary learning engaging, but time limitations and a packed syllabus often make it difficult to do so regularly.

5. How do you handle students who struggle with vocabulary retention?

I usually revisit difficult words during regular lessons and encourage peer support or group discussions to help struggling students recall and retain vocabulary.

6. Have you noticed improvements in students' vocabulary over time? What are the improvements? Can you mention some?

Yes, I've seen improvements in students' vocabulary over time. They are now a bit better, if not all, in using new words in sentences, show better understanding during reading tasks, with spelling mistakes here and there.

7. What are the biggest obstacles in teaching vocabulary to middle school students?

They get distracted easily. Also, they rely too much on autocorrect or translation tools and don't internalize vocabulary.

8. How does students' first language impact their English vocabulary development?

There's some interference, especially in pronunciation and literal translations, but overall exposure to English gives them an edge.

9. How can parents support their children's vocabulary development at home?

Reading habits matter a lot. Parents can encourage them to read novels, watch documentaries with subtitles.

10. What advice would you give to new teachers struggling with vocabulary instruction?

Focus on context and application, not just lists. Be creative and make learning relevant and fun as much as you can so the students remember what they enjoy.

Responses from Assamese Medium English Teacher:

2. How would you describe the overall vocabulary proficiency of your students?

Most students have very limited vocabulary. They understand basic words but struggle with sentence formation and using new words independently.

3. What strategies do you use to teach vocabulary efficiently?

I use bilingual word lists, translate meanings in Assamese, and rely on repetition and drills.

4. What are the common vocabulary challenges that the students face in the class?

Pronunciation issues, lack of word recall, and hesitation to speak in English are the main challenges. Many depend too much on rote memorization.

5. Do you include interactive activities to make vocabulary learning engaging?

No, I haven't included interactive activities for vocabulary learning in class. The teaching mostly followed traditional methods due to time and resource constraints.

6. How do you handle students who struggle with vocabulary retention?

I revisit words frequently and use simple sentence-building exercises. I also encourage group work so that peer support helps them recall better.

7. Have you noticed improvements in students' vocabulary over time? What are the improvements? Can you mention some?

Yes, I've noticed gradual improvements in students' vocabulary over time. Regular revision, group activities, and repeatedly using simple words in different contexts have helped students remember meanings and use them more confidently in class.

8. What are the biggest obstacles in teaching vocabulary to middle school students?

The biggest issue is lack of exposure to English outside school. They don't have access to English media at home, and there's pressure to stick to textbooks.

9. How does students' first language impact their English vocabulary development?

They often translate directly from Assamese, which leads to incorrect structures. Also, they avoid English because they're more comfortable in Assamese.

10. How can parents support their children's vocabulary development at home?

Even if parents don't speak English, they can encourage reading picture books or watching English cartoons with subtitles. Regular reading at home helps a lot.

11. What advice would you give to new teachers struggling with vocabulary instruction?

I'm not entirely sure, but I believe starting with simple, everyday words and using visuals or real-life examples might help. Encouraging students to speak without fear could also build their vocabulary over time.

BIRUBARI RUPNAGAR HIGH SCHOOL



THE TEAM WITH PRINCIPAL MA'AM



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FUN MATCHING ACTIVITY**



**WORKSEET ACTIVITY TO APPLY
LEARNED WORDS IN CONTEXT**



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PRINCIPAL MA'AM**