

# Positive Attitude and Adequate Confidence Level as Essential Prerequisites in Learning English as a Second Language

*Hiamthuiyang James and Laishram Bijenkumar Singh*

## ABSTRACT:

*The present study aims to show how a positive attitude and an adequate level of confidence are essential prerequisites in learning among students and determining their growth in gaining proficiency in the language. It focuses on finding the perspective of the learners and the prevailing status of ELT and learning among the higher secondary school students in Tamenglong district of Manipur, India. Through testing their LSRW skills, it is discovered that many students find it difficult in English because of MTI and the fear of making grammatical errors. However, they are confident that these difficulties and challenges could be overcome with the help of their teachers assisted by various ICT tools and modern gadgets. This positive attitude towards learning is verified to be the cornerstone of progress in ELT classrooms in Tamenglong.*

**Keywords:** ELT, Attitude, SLA, Confidence, LSRW, MTI

## Introduction

A positive attitude is required to acquire or learn any new language. As stated by Robert C. Gardner (1985), 'attitude and motivation' play an important role in the process of second language acquisition, and it is apt to say that having the right perspective towards the language and gaining an adequate level of confidence is required to learn English as a second language. This study is intended to find the prevailing status of English Language Teaching (ELT) and learning in Tamenglong and to see the learners' outlook towards the language. Their confidence level is checked through the tests conducted to analyse their listening, speaking, reading and writing (LSRW) skills.

## Background of the Study

Tamenglong is one of the 16 districts of Manipur, a northeastern state of India. It is bounded by Churachandpur district in the South, Senapati district in the East, Peren district of Nagaland

in the North, and the West by North Cachar Hills district of Assam (National Informatics Centre, 2023). It is the farthest district headquarters, located 147 km away from Imphal, the capital. The main tribes dwelling in the district are Zeliangrong Nagas (Zeme, Liangmei, Rongmei and Puimei) and Kukis besides minority Hmars, Chirus, and Khasis. Racially or physically and linguistically Zeliangrongs are Tibeto-Burman (Indo- Mongoloid) of the Sino-Tibetan family of the Mongolian race (Directorate of Environment & Climate Change, Government of Manipur, 2023).

The present research is delimited to the study of 4 blocks of schools in Tamenglong district, viz., Nungba block, Tamei block, Tamenglong block and Tousem block. Tamenglong is a block with 8 clusters. There are 33 schools in Tamenglong cluster, inclusive of all the government and private schools (List of Schools in Tamenglong, 2023). Only 7 schools offer education up to the Higher Secondary level. Their names are Christian

Heritage Institute, Christian Model English Higher Secondary School, Don Bosco Higher Secondary School, Eklavya Model Residential School, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, Tamenglong Government Higher Secondary School, and Trinity Public School.

### **Review of Literature**

Researchers have done many studies about Tamenglong district and its people, especially the Rongmei tribe but they are limited only to areas related to social sciences dealing with cultural aspects, and very few have dealt with ELT. The only existing work on the area is Nixon S. Ringmiso's 2013 research titled "Status and Problems of Primary Education in Ukhrul and Tamenglong Districts of Manipur", which talked about introducing primary education in the two districts. The researcher discussed the introduction of primary education and the role of Christian missionaries and other pioneers like Rev. William Pettigrew, Maj. General W.F. Nuthal and Sir James Johnstone in Manipur from 1872 to 1886, but not on the issues of English language teaching and learning. Guigongpou Gonmei (2010) also talked about the Rongmei language in his research titled "Typological Characteristics of Rongmei" which focused solely on the linguistic aspects of the Rongmei language and did not delve into ELT. Some other notable works have been carried out by historians and linguists on the history and language of the Rongmei like *Kabui Language: A Short Description* (1986) by P.C. Thoudam, *Genomic Profile of the Rongmei (Kabui) Tribe of Manipur, India: An Anthropological Genetics Study* (2012) by Sanjenbam Yaiphaba Meitei, and *The History of the Zeliangrong Nagas: From Makhel to Rani Gaidinliu* (2004) by Prof. Gangmumei Kabui. Other

available works include translations of the *Bible* and stories, hymn compilations, and dictionary compositions.

Although governmental and non-governmental organisations have conducted multiple studies on the condition of the schools through surveys, still no study has been conducted specifically to investigate the teaching-learning process at the higher secondary schools in Tamenglong. Because of this reason, the present study is truly relevant and significant.

### **The Rationale of the Study**

The present study attempts to know the predominant attitude of the students towards the English language and understand the current status of ELT at the higher secondary schools in Tamenglong. It tries to gain a full overview of the ELT classrooms in the district and to see the confidence level of the students in the English language. Through conducting a set of tests and classroom activities, their LSRW skills will be assessed.

### **Methodology**

The data are collected through questionnaires and another set of tests to check the LRSW skills of the students. The questions were framed in line with the quest to find their attitude towards English and their confidence level of competency in the English language. The other tests comprised listening to the audio file, speaking on a given topic, reading a selected story, and writing a paragraph on a given topic.

### **Sample**

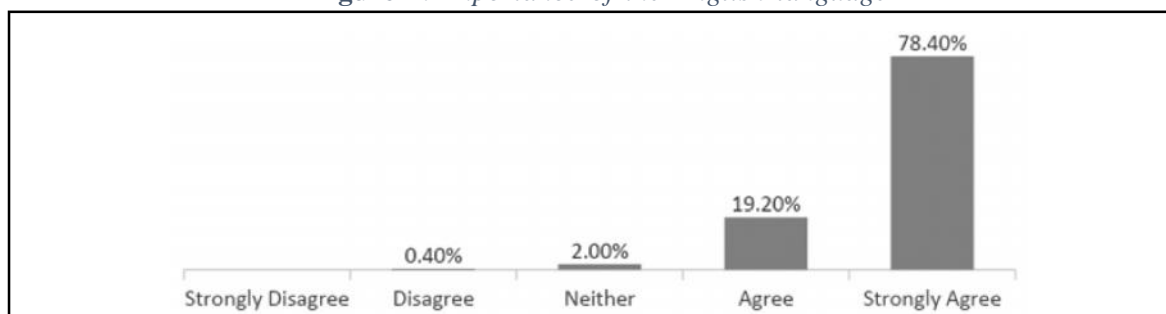
The sample for the present study comprised 250 students (87 males and 163 females) from 6 higher secondary schools in the Tamenglong cluster of schools. The respondents were

randomly selected from different streams of Arts, Science and Commerce. Although they are from different streams, they study English subject as one of the compulsory subjects. Moreover, all the schools adopt English as the medium of instruction and examination. It is worthy of mention that most of the students had been studying English for over 13 years already during the time this study was conducted.

### Data Analysis

The data are collected and analysed in the Excel spreadsheet and converted into graph presentations for easier and better comprehension of the findings. The results from the tests are analysed through qualitative research and description. The findings are summarised and described wherein the attitude towards the language and the confidence level in the language are manifested.

**Figure 1:** *Importance of the English language*

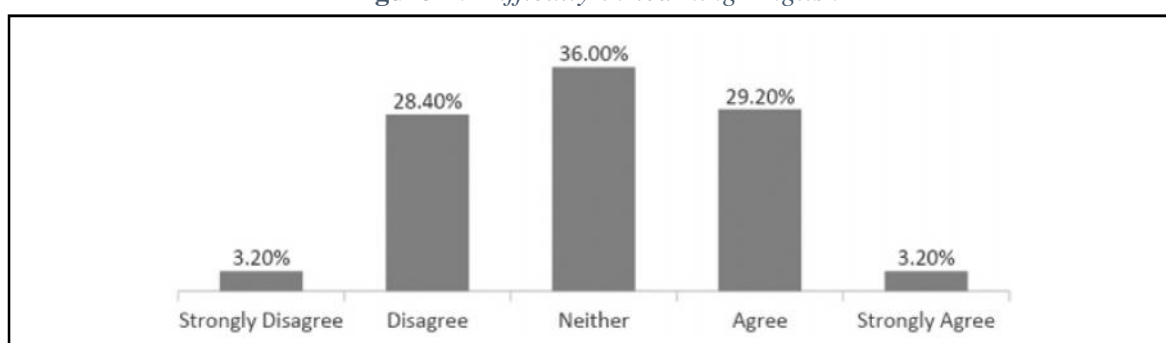


*Note.* The survey item reads as follows: “English is an important language in today’s world.”

It is seen from figure 1 that the students consider learning English as an essential aspect of life. They feel the necessity of English to thrive in the present era, to know about the happenings, and to communicate with citizens

from different nationalities; meanwhile, no one strongly disagrees regarding the same statement. This proves that the vast majority possess a positive attitude towards the English language.

**Figure 2:** *Difficulty in learning English*



*Note.* The survey item reads as follows: “English is a difficult language to learn.”

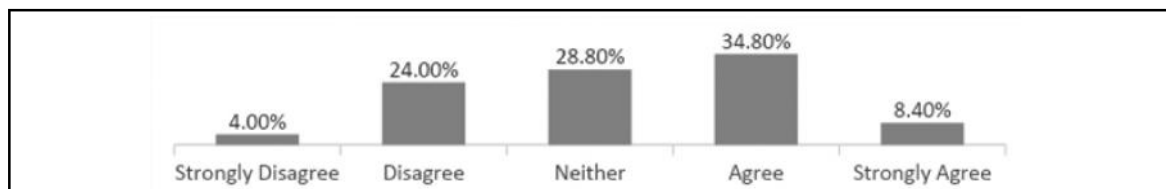
As observed from figure 2, there is a split of opinions as some students show a certain level of confidence in the language while some

consider it difficult to learn. They know the difficulty of learning any new language, but they do not perceive the English language as

too difficult and intimidating to learn. Confidence in self in learning the language is “the ability to continue unfazed and without disappointment” which is considered “the

mark of true spirit” (Thakur, 2021, p. 35). This attitude is necessary for learning a new language because they need to be confident in themselves and their ability.

**Figure 3:** *Difficulty in pronunciation*

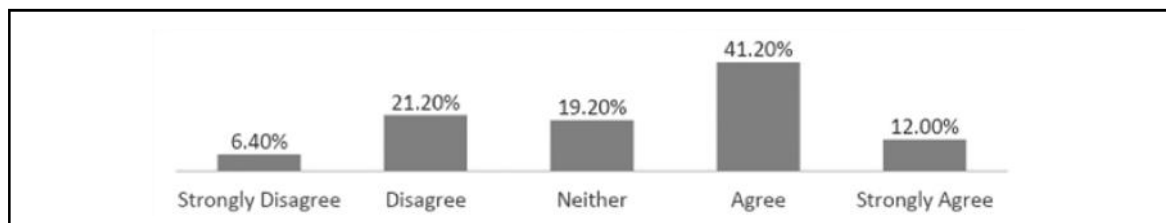


*Note.* The survey item reads as follows: “I find it difficult to pronounce English words.”

It is understandable for anyone whose first language is not English to find difficulty in the pronunciation of English words. There could be many factors affecting the pronunciation of the learners. As shown in figure 3, the

students have different opinions about the difficulty of pronouncing English words. However, it is right to state that most of them agree with the difficulty in the pronunciation of English.

**Figure 4:** *Hindrance of MTI in learning English*

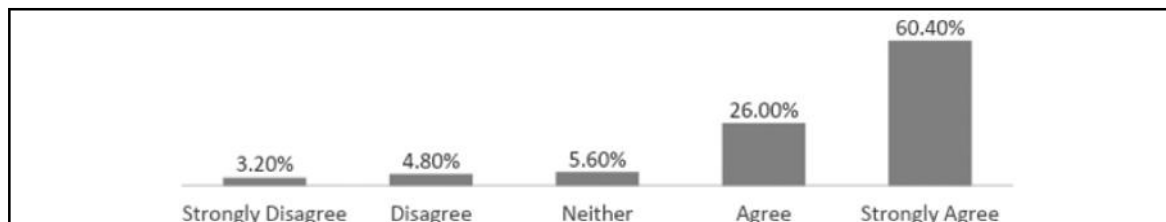


*Note.* The survey item reads as follows: “My mother tongue influence is the biggest hindrance in my English pronunciation.”

Mother Tongue Influence (MTI) is the most common factor that affects any person in the process of acquiring a second language. Shah (2019) regarded MTI as “the impact of the usage of our mother tongue on the second language”

(para. 5). As shown in figure 4, the students feel that MTI is the biggest hindrance to learning English. They feel that the accent and intonation of the first language have a heavy influence on the second language.

**Figure 5:** *Necessity of learning English from childhood*

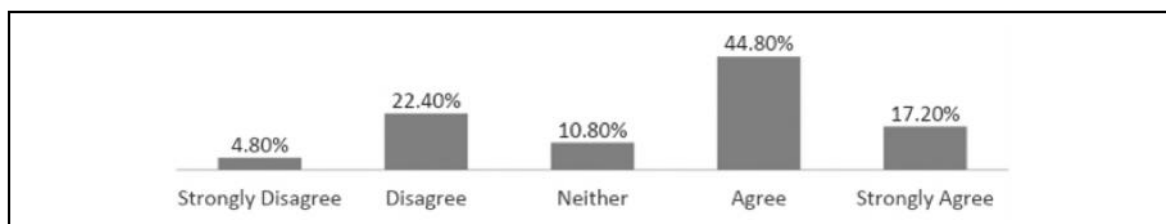


*Note.* The survey item reads as follows: “I should learn English from childhood in order to speak fluently.”

A vast majority of the students believe that one should learn the English language from childhood to gain proficiency and fluency in the language. Through the presentation in figure 5, it is assumed

that the students themselves think that learning the English language from a very tender age could result in a better performance by a student in securing superior mastery over the language.

**Figure 6:** *Need to use mother tongue in teaching English*

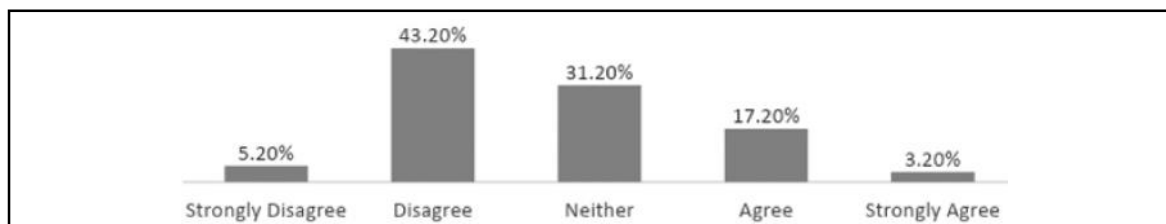


*Note.* The survey item reads as follows: “English should be taught with the help of mother tongue.”

Patel and Jain (2008) emphasised the use of the mother tongue and said that the learner would learn to express one’s thoughts and ideas better if he or she is “motivated by his teacher to learn English with the help of mother tongue”

(p. 16). It is concluded from figure 6 that the students value the importance of teaching English with the help of their mother tongue especially in understanding some difficult terms and concepts.

**Figure 7:** *Ability to express in English*

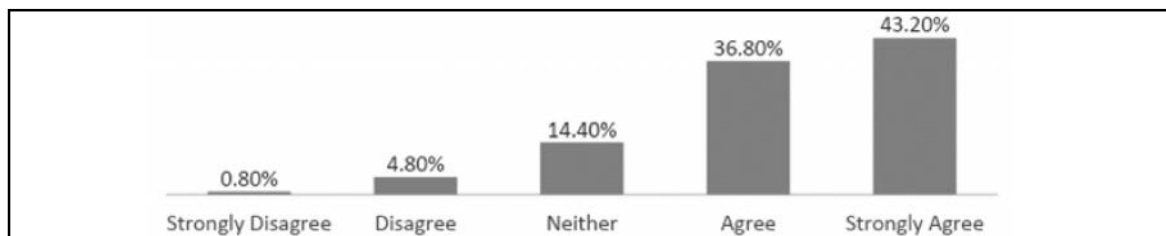


*Note.* The survey item reads as follows: “I can express my thoughts clearly in English.”

The students assume that they cannot express their thoughts and ideas clearly in English. Because of this lack of confidence as shown in figure 7, they tend to remain silent even on matters they are familiar with or hesitate to participate in group discussions. Thus, they often refrain from

expressing their valuable thoughts, ideas and suggestions because of low confidence in speaking correct English. However, they express the need to boost their confidence by working on small tasks to improve their proficiency and by communicating in English among peer groups.

**Figure 8:** *Need to use ICT tools in ELT classrooms*

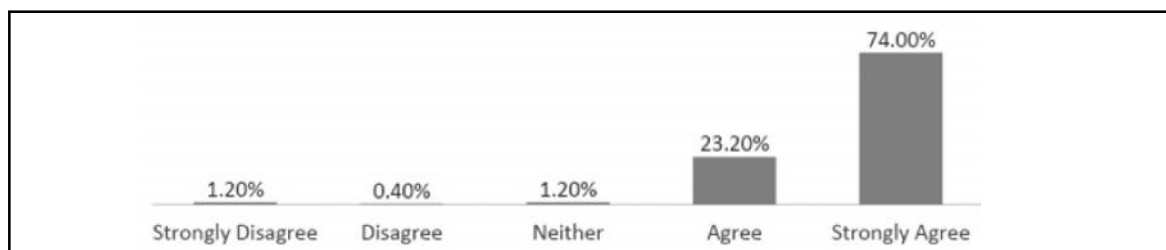


*Note.* The survey item reads as follows: “ICT tools should be used to teach English.”

With the advancement of science and technology, ELT classrooms have seen a rapid rise in the use of ICT tools. These tools are powerful means of disseminating knowledge.

From figure 8, it is evident that the students uphold the benefits of ICT tools and emphasise the need to use them in the course of teaching or learning English.

**Figure 9:** *Considering grammar as the most important task of learning*

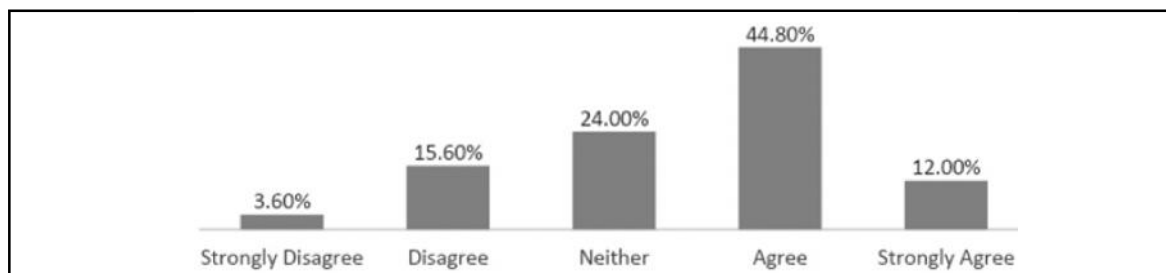


*Note.* The survey item reads as follows: “The most important part of learning English is the grammar.”

It is found that the students consider knowing grammar rules as the core element in learning the English language. As presented in figure 9, a greater

majority of them strongly agree on the need to learn English grammar and they consider it as the most important aspect of learning the English language.

**Figure 10:** *Importance of clarity in communicating ideas rather than good pronunciation*

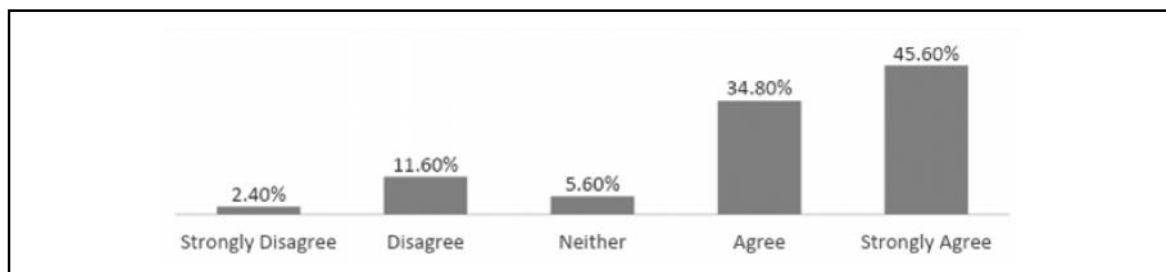


*Note.* The survey item reads as follows: “Communication of ideas clearly is more important than good English pronunciation.”

MTI is bound to affect the learners in speaking a second language. As observed from figure 10, it can be concluded that most students regard communication of ideas with clarity as more important than focusing on pronunciation. This view is in congruence with what Jeremy Harmer (2009) said about considering “intelligibility as the prime goal of pronunciation teaching” (p.

249). The students believe the ability to express one’s thoughts clearly is more important than trying to pronounce them like native speakers. Richards and Rodgers (2019) also talked about the changes in the goals of teaching English when they emphasised “a move toward oral proficiency rather than reading comprehension” (p. 1).

**Figure 11:** *Necessity of speaking English always to score better in examinations*

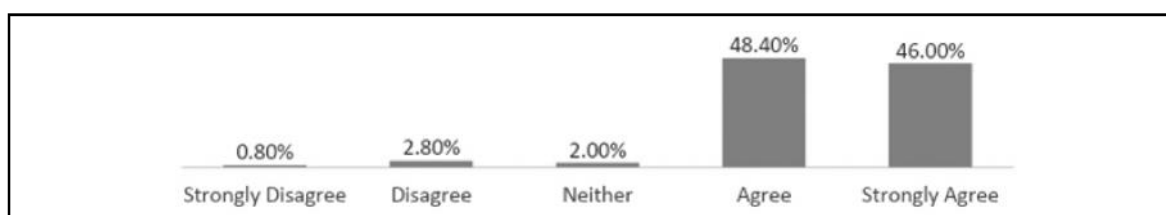


*Note.* The survey item reads as follows: “I need to speak English all the time to score better in examinations.”

While a good number of students believe in the need to speak English more often to score better in exams as presented in figure 11, it may be noted that this idea may be incomplete as

speaking English more often cannot guarantee good grades. However, it can help them organise their thoughts and construct their answers during examinations.

**Figure 12:** *Need to read more than the prescribed syllabus*

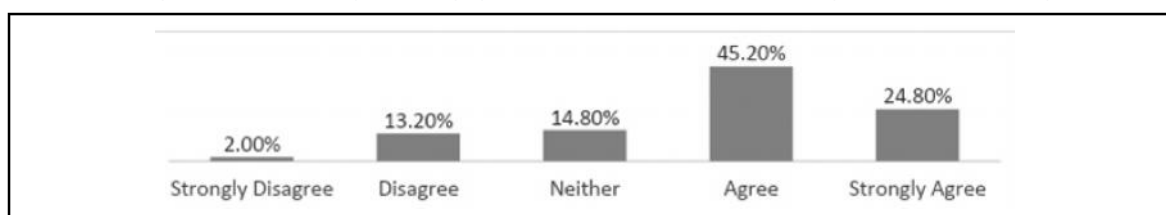


*Note.* The survey item reads as follows: “I should read more than the prescribed syllabus to learn good English.”

The students agree on the need to read more than the prescribed syllabus as presented in figure 12. They learn more from extra readings such as magazines,

novels, journals, story books and other allied materials especially to increase their vocabulary, phrases and idioms, and other usages of the English language.

**Figure 13:** *Fear of making grammatical mistakes leading to slow learning*

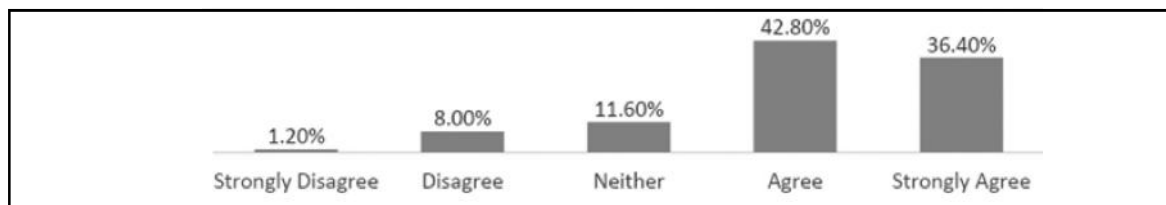


*Note.* The survey item reads as follows: “I am slow in learning English because of fear of making grammatical mistakes.”

They also show a high level of fear of making grammatical mistakes, as indicated in figure 13, which proves their understanding of English grammar rules as something technical and hard to learn. This results in their slow learning of

the English language. It may also be noted that because of this fear of making errors, the students refrain from group discussions in English even on matters and subjects they are well-versed.

**Figure 14:** *Acquisition of pronunciation from teachers*



*Note.* The survey item reads as follows: “I got my pronunciation mostly from my teachers at school.”

As indicated in figure 14, the students claim that they received their pronunciation mostly from their teachers. They learn by hearing the way their teachers talk to them or read the texts. Learning by imitation is common among the students and they say that they acquire their pronunciation by imitating the speech of their teachers.

### **Findings**

The current status of ELT and learning progress in higher secondary schools in Tamenglong district is analysed in this study. The general observation of the study is summarised in brief for a better comprehension of the attitude towards the English language and the scenario of the ELT classrooms in remote regions of India with particular reference to Tamenglong district of Manipur. The most significant findings acquired from the present study are presented below:

- i. It is observed that the positive attitude towards the English language and an adequate confidence level of the students serve as the most important prerequisites for ELT classrooms.
- ii. Trust of the students in the capabilities of their teachers is seen as necessary and significant in learning the language.
- iii. It is found that the students have a very positive attitude towards the English language while there is a need to boost their confidence level in using the language.

- iv. It is seen that they are well aware of the value and utility of the English language in the present world where the language is used in almost every sector.
- v. They possess a keen interest in learning English as they believe that having a strong ground in the language could provide them with better opportunities in life especially in securing jobs in the global markets where English is predominantly used in trade and communication.
- vi. The most difficult problems in learning English faced by the students relate to rules of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and writing full sentences with proper tense and correct spellings. These problems and difficulties are undoubtedly reaffirmed through analysing their performance in the tests in the LSRW skills.
- vii. Some of the measures they take when they encounter problems and difficulties in learning English are: clarifying doubts from the teachers, consulting a dictionary, repeated reading of the texts, practising reading and writing, revising the grammar rules, and using the help of mobile phones to learn the word meaning and correct pronunciation.
- viii. The students mentioned that they could learn better when the teachers employ ICT tools in teaching English. More use of ICT tools



and other teaching aids could enhance their learning in ELT classrooms.

## Conclusion

It is justified to conclude that the most significant prerequisites for learning a new language are a positive attitude towards the language and an adequate level of confidence besides other essential requirements. There is a scope for advancement among the higher secondary school students in Tamenglong in learning the English language because they have a positive attitude towards the language and willingness to adopt different measures to boost their confidence and proficiency. The fulfilment of these prerequisites serves as the basic foundation for learning English among the students in the remote Tamenglong district even amidst the lack of modern facilities and teaching aids. Also, knowing the importance of English for their future job prospects makes them enthusiastic about learning the language, and it motivates them to undertake different steps to increase their confidence and proficiency in English. Hence, it can be firmly concluded that a positive attitude and adequate confidence in learning the language are essential prerequisites in learning English as a second language.

## References

- Directorate of Environment & Climate Change, Government of Manipur. (2023). *Tamenglong District*. State Climate Change Cell, Manipur: <https://ccmanipur.mn.gov.in/en/tamenglong/>
- Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social Psychology and Second Language Learning: The Role of Attitudes and Motivation*. E. Arnold.
- Harmer, J. (2009). *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (4th ed.). Pearson Longman.
- List of Schools in Tamenglong. (2023). Schools in Tamenlong Manipur: <https://schools.org.in/manipur/tamenglong>
- National Informatics Centre. (2023). Tamenglong District: <https://tamenglong.nic.in/>
- Patel, M. J. (2008). *English Language Teaching: Methods, Tools and Techniques*. Sunrise Publishers & Distributors.
- Richards, J. C. (2019). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Ringmiso, N. S. (2013). Status and Problems of Primary Education in Ukhrul and Tamenglong Districts of Manipur. *Shodhganga*. North-Eastern Hill University. <hdl.handle.net/10603/169840>
- Shah, K. (2019, November 27). *How to Neutralise Mother Tongue Influence (MTI) while speaking English?* Aspire Square: <https://aspire-square.com/how-to-neutralise-mother-tongue-influence-mti-while-speaking-english/>
- Thakur, A. (2021). Language Learning: A Matter of Correct Attitude and Soft Skills. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 63(1), 32-37. <https://journals.eltai.in/index.php/jelt/article/view/JELT630107/524>

**Hiamthuiyang James**, Research Scholar, Centre for Naga Tribal Language Studies (CNTLS), Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema – 797004, Nagaland, India.

**Laishram Bijenkumar Singh**, Assistant Professor, Centre for Naga Tribal Language Studies (CNTLS), Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema – 797004, Nagaland, India.