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A survey of language use patterns among undergraduate students in Nagaland

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Many languages around the world are at different levels of endangerment due to varied reasons. The situation in Nagaland is no different, as all languages spoken by the Nagas are categorised as Vulnerable. The present state is a result of the rapid changes in Naga society over the past 150 years, pushed by education, urbanisation, and modernity. Nagaland is a state in north east India, inhabited by about 20 tribes speaking different languages. Today, in addition to their respective mother tongues, English and Nagamese are widely spoken, with Hindi used occasionally in certain domains. Hence, Nagas have become a truly multilingual society. Given the complex situation, it is important to examine the use of language in various domains, which will help one determine the status of these languages. In this paper, I examine the language use pattern among 2,984 undergraduate students of Nagaland in the home domain (parents, grandparents, siblings, and relatives); informal domain (friends and markets); and the formal domain (institutions, offices, and churches); and their knowledge of the mother tongue. The survey shows that while the use of one's mother tongue is strong within the home domain, it is strongest between respondents and (grand)parents, while the use of English and Nagamese is increasing between respondents and siblings at the cost of the mother tongue. This points to a generational difference in the use of the mother tongue. This is corroborated by the survey involving respondents and friends (within the same tribe) where use of mother tongue is strong but Nagamese is not far behind. An interesting result is the high usage of English and Nagamese in churches, a formal domain where the mother tongue has strong status. New domains such as social media have not helped the situation, which are heavily dominated by English. The generational difference and use of mother tongue in fewer domains is reflected in the respondent's level of knowledge of folktales, folksongs, proverbs, and idioms, and specific terms related to flora and fauna, address terms, traditional ornaments, weaving/basketry, and agriculture, which is far from satisfactory. The paper advocates strengthening of mother tongue education by all stakeholders in a major way, failing which, our mother tongues will lose to English and Nagamese.

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1. Introduction[1]

Nagaland, the sixteenth state of the Indian union, was formed in 1963 along ethno-cultural lines, unlike the other states in the Indian Union, which were organised on linguistic lines. With a geographical area of 16,579 sq km, fifteen Naga tribes inhabit the state: Angami, Ao, Chakhesang, Chang, Khiamniungan, Konyak, Lotha, Phom, Pochury, Rengma, Sangtam, Sumi, Tikhir, Yimkhiung, and Zeliangrong. In addition, four other non-Naga tribes (Kuki, Garo, Karbi, and Kachari) are recognised by the government of Nagaland.

Figure 1. Map of Nagaland (not to scale)[2]

Since the creation of the Naga Hills district in 1866 by the British, and the arrival of Christian missionaries in 1872, Naga society has changed by leaps and bounds in just over 150 years. One major factor has been the introduction of education, teaching the Nagas how to read and write in their own languages. However, it is alarming to see that the tables have turned on these Naga languages in the last 150 years, with all of the languages facing the threat of endangerment, and perhaps extinction. As per the UNESCO Atlas of World's Languages in Danger[3] (Moseley 2010), all the languages spoken in Nagaland (India) are listed as Vulnerable.

Till the time the Christian missionaries and the British administrators came in contact with the Naga tribes in the late 19th Century, I believe that the Nagas had very limited contact with other communities and language groups, establishing monolingualism as the norm. In exceptional cases, villages could become bilingual due to annexations of entire villages or migration of entire clans to other villages for various reasons (Coupe 2022). However, this is mostly seen in the border areas, and does not imply the entire population to be bilingual. Among the Ao, bidialectalism was very common in many villages, where Jungli and Mongsen coexisted, and most people were fluent in both dialects. Today, there are only three Ao villages – Longkhum, Sungratsü, and Mopungchuket – which have Jungli- and Mongsen-speaking populations. However, it would be wrong to label them as bidialectal, as not all can speak both dialects.

[1] I am grateful to the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) for the award of a minor research project 'Language Loss and Socio-Cultural Change in Nagaland (No. 02/5/2021-22/ICSSR/RP/MN)', which has made this study possible. I am thankful to two anonymous LD&C reviewers, whose comments and feedback have shaped this paper. I am also grateful to Bianca Nongkynrih and Sayanjyoti Gogoi for their help throughout the study, to all the principals, vice-principals, and faculty members of colleges, without whose help and co-operation, this study would not have been possible. And lastly a big thank you to all the students who took time off to participate in the study.

[2] Adapted from https://tourism.nagaland.gov.in/districts/ (retrieved on 21 June 2023)

[3] Updated information on the World Atlas of Languages can be found at https://en.wal.unesco.org/en/discover/languages

Today, in addition to their respective mother tongues (which can be more than one variety or dialect), English and Nagamese are widely spoken, with Hindi used occasionally in certain domains. The Nagas were known to come down to the plains for trade and barter with the Assamese and Ahoms (1228–1816), and this must have been the beginning of Nagamese as a pidgin. While it is difficult to ascertain the period of origin, Sreedhar (1985) notes that the earliest mention of Nagamese can be found in the tour diary of Lt. Biggs (1841), well before the missionaries set foot in the Naga Hills or the British annexed the region. While Nagamese must have been used in the bordering areas with the Assamese and Ahoms, its use within Nagaland among the tribes is probably a more recent phenomenon. This can be associated with the establishment of British administration, and the official status of Assamese in the Naga Hills, which was under Assam. According to Sreedhar, the setting up of paramilitary forces such as the Assam Rifles; and the General Road Engineering Force, government offices, and the Marwari business community, contributed to the widespread use of Nagamese. Despite its widespread use, Nagamese has always been considered as a market language and a non-Naga language by Nagas, with little or no prestige associated with it. Sachdeva (2001:5) notes that Nagamese is "the most used and the least liked language" in Nagaland.

On the other hand, English, another non-Naga language, has gained much acceptance and prestige among Nagas by virtue of it being the official language, and used as the medium of education in educational institutions.

Hence, Nagas have become a truly multilingual society. Given the complex situation, it is important to examine the use of language in various domains, which will help one determine the status of these languages.

Earlier studies (Aier 1996; Sachdeva 2000) have shown the healthy state of the mother tongue in almost all domains, with the use of English encouraged in domains like the home and school by parents and teachers. Temsunungsang (2022) in a recent study of 73 students concludes that except for the home domain, the use of a mother tongue is very low among Ao-Naga students of Shillong. In this paper, I examine if there are any changes in the patterns of language use at present by analysing the language use patterns among undergraduate students of Nagaland in various domains and their knowledge of the mother tongue. This study is part of an ICSSR project on Language Loss and Socio-Cultural Change in Nagaland.

In §2, the language situation in Nagaland is explained. In §3, the aims of the study and the research questions are presented. In §4, a brief literature review is given, while in §5, the research methodology is laid out. In §6, the two independent variables – place of upbringing and parent's level of education – that are relevant to the study are discussed and in §7, the language use patterns in different domains are presented. In §8, the results related to level of knowledge in one's mother tongue is presented. In §9, I examine whether there is any significant difference between groups, based on two independent variables. §10 concludes the paper with a brief summary of the findings.

2. Language situation

As per the Census report of India (2011), the total population of Nagaland stands at 1,978,502. A look at the census report will show the complexity of the data with regard to mother tongue spoken by individuals, as different names are returned in the census. These different names are rationalised in the census, and the final report is on 22 scheduled languages and 99 non-scheduled languages. The 99 non-scheduled languages are those with more than 10,000 speakers. Groups with less than 10,000 speakers are categorised as 'others'. The number of speakers for each Naga tribe in the state of Nagaland[4] is given below, which is collated from the 2011 census data.

[4] This is specific to Nagaland state. One should note that there are also All India figures given in the census.

Table 1. Number of speakers according to tribe

	Tribe	Number of speakers
1.	Konyak	244,135
2.	Ao	231,084
3.	Lotha	177,488
4.	Angami	151,883
5.	Chakhesang (includes Chokri & Khezha)	143,147
6.	Zeliangrong (includes Liangmai, Zeliang, Zeme & Kabui)	82,455
7.	Sangtam	75,841
8.	Yimkhiung (includes Tikhir)[5]	74,156
9.	Chang	65,632
10.	Khiamniungan	61,906
11.	Rengma	61,537
12.	Phom	53,674
13.	Pochury	21,446
14.	Sumi/Sema	8268
	Total	1,452,652

The number of languages spoken by these tribes outnumbers the tribes themselves, as each tribe may speak more than one language. For example, the Ao tribe is composed of the Jungli (earlier known as Chungli), Mongsen, and Changki groups. Likewise, Chakhesang comprises of the Chokri and Khezha groups, and Zeliangrong comprises of the Zeme, Liangmai, and Rongmei/Inpui/Kabui groups. Each group is known to speak a distinct language, and each group or tribe may further have several dialects and varieties. In addition to the above languages, there are 28,413 speakers of Garo, Kuki, and Kachari (Bodo); 234,781 speakers of one of the 22 scheduled languages; and there are also a large number of speakers (241,257) in the 'others' category. One anomaly noticed is the number of Sema speakers (now known as Sumi), which returned only 10,802 speakers across India though the 2001 census reports 103,529 speakers. While I assume that the change in name from Sema to Sumi may have led to the reduction in numbers, it is surprising that the new name Sumi finds no mention in the non-scheduled list.

As one can see in Table 1, there is no one single tribe which dominates in terms of speaker population, and Nagamese, a commonly spoken pidgin, has never been accepted as a language belonging to the Nagas. Therefore, English was chosen as the official language of the state, leading to its usage in all formal domains, including education, where English is the medium of instruction at all levels. In addition to the official language, the languages of the fifteen Naga tribes and three non-Naga tribes are recognised by the Government of Nagaland for use in schools. While it is true that each language has several dialects and varieties, the standardised dialect/variety is used for developing teaching materials. As Sachdeva (2001:4) rightly points out, "Nagaland is, undoubtedly, one of the most complex sociolinguistic settings in the entire world."

[5] Tikhir was still a part of the Yimkhiung tribe in the 2011 census and hence is shown together. In 2021, Tikhir was recognised as a separate tribe by the state government of Nagaland.

3. Aims and research questions

Given the many changes in Naga society in the past 150 years, the study aims to examine the status of the mother tongue and other languages spoken by undergraduate students. This is achieved by looking into their patterns of language use and their knowledge of the mother tongue. The study aims to provide answers to the following research questions:

(1) What is the pattern of language use among students in different domains?

(2) Is there a dominance of English and Nagamese at different levels in the Naga society?

(3) What is their level of knowledge of specific terms related to culture, flora and fauna, address terms etc. (based on self-evaluation)?

(4) Is there any difference in language use with respect to independent variables (parents' level of education and place of upbringing)?

4. Literature review

In multilingual speech communities, language choice is mainly determined by the different domains or settings that the speaker is in. These domains include the topic as well as role relation which have a high impact on language choice. There are other factors that also play an important role in the language choice of an individual in a multilingual setting. These are language proficiency or knowledge, ethnicity, and gender, as well as language attitude. A lack of proficiency in a language can lead speakers to shift from one language to another. Studies have shown that ethnicity and language choice as well as gender and language choice are closely related (Genemo 2021).

In various language vitality assessment frameworks and models (Fishman's GIDS 1991; Krauss 2007; Lewis & Simon's EGIDS 2010; Lee & van Way's LEI 2016; UNESCO 2003), language use in different domains plays an important role. The study of domains in language use is usually attributed to Fishman (1965). Fishman (1971:8) defines 'domains' as "major clusters of interaction that occur in clusters of multilingual settings and involving clusters of interlocutors."

However, Fishman refers to Schmidt-Rohr (1932) as the person who first worked on the concept of domains among German settlers who were in contact with many different non-German speaking communities, creating multilingual settings. As per Schmidt-Rohr's recommendations, there are nine domains: the family, the playground and street, the school, the church, literature, the press, the military, the courts, and the governmental administration. Fishman notes that Schmidt-Rohr's concept of domains is very similar to 'spheres of activity' advanced by anthropologists, social psychologists, and linguists. In this study, the relevant domains that are included are: home, friends, college, church, marketplace, and government offices.

Given a setting, it is necessary to understand how best one can systematically group and organise that setting. In sociology, in-group and out-group is a common distinction, attributed to Henri Tajfel et al. (1971). In our multilingual setting, the in-group will be applied to the tribal population, thus necessitating the sub-categorization of the in-group into intra-lingual and inter-lingual. Intra-lingual would be those speaking the same tribal language, while inter-lingual will refer to those speaking different tribal languages.

Given the large number of studies on language use and domains in various languages across the world (Pasfield-Neofitou 2011; Sabba Mushtaq 2013; Valentino et al. 2013; Acharyya & Mahanta 2019 among others), this section focusses on earlier studies based on the state of Nagaland.

One of the earliest comprehensive studies on language use in the Naga context is that of Aier's (1996) PhD thesis. The study involved 316 students belonging to 17 tribes and 106 community members from different walks of life. While the focus of the thesis is in ascertaining the level of English proficiency among learners and analysing the factors that impede or promote English learning, one of the aims of the thesis is in critically describing the language situation in Nagaland, involving the mother tongue, English, and Nagamese. In the study of the domain and patterns of language use, Aier identifies three levels of interaction – intra-tribal, inter-tribal and out-group (non-Naga) – and examines 7 domains: family, playground and street, school, church, literature, press, military, courts, and administration (based on

Schmidt-Rohr 1932). While the study on the language situation is based on two questionnaires and interviews, the analysis on domains and language use seems to be mostly based on her experiences and observations. Nevertheless, interesting observations are made with regard to the usage of mother tongues. Except for the military, the mother tongue is used in some form or other in all other domains. For instance, though English is the medium of instruction in schools, the mother tongue is used in recreation and entertainment. In courts and administration, the oral aspect is usually covered by the mother tongue. And in literature and press, the mother tongue is considered to be emerging.

The second work is a paper by Sachdeva (2000), which is based on three studies labelled S1, S2, and S3. While S1 and S2 were conducted in 1992–93, covering 38 and 171 Naga respondents respectively (mostly teachers but also including interested students), S3 was a study conducted by State Council of Educational Research and Training, covering teachers and students of Class XI–XII. The period of study is not clear with respect to S3. In the choice of language use within the tribe (Ingroup intra-tribe), the mother tongue is preferred, irrespective of the level of education. Among Nagas, across tribes (Ingroup inter-tribe), English and Nagamese are used. The conclusion is that there is "some form of demarcation of communicative roles of code" (Sachdeva 2000:37). With regard to use of language at home, "a majority of the parents demand rather strongly that their own languages be encouraged at home, many also feel [not so strongly though] that English should also be encouraged" (Sachdeva 2000:53). Nagamese is not encouraged but tolerated to some extent.

A more recent study is that of Temsunungsang (2022), involving 73 Ao-Naga students studying in Shillong, Meghalaya. The study examines the use of Ao in different domains: home, market place, office, church, meetings, and social media. The study also examines their language skills in terms of fluency and frequency of usage, their attitude towards Ao, and their familiarity with specific semantic domains such as folksongs, folktales, names of plants/trees, bird names, animal names, traditional ornaments, terms relating to weaving, basketry, agriculture, and their ability to count. The results from Temsunungsang (2022) are comforting within the home domain, with most respondents using Ao at home with parents and grandparents and, to an extent, with relatives. Outside of the home, domains such as friends; formal programmes and meetings; marketplaces; and offices show a marked decrease in the use of Ao. In new domains like social media, the use of the mother tongue is less. The paper concludes by claiming that if the present trend continues, the future may not be very bright for Nagas and their languages.

5. Methodology

For the study, questionnaires were the main tool used. Based on the aims and objectives, two questionnaires were designed – one for students and another for teachers. However, in this paper, I present and discuss only selected questions from two sections of the students' questionnaire, pertaining to language use and respondent's knowledge of one's mother tongue. Though not discussed in detail, some teacher responses are presented where necessary.

Most questions in the questionnaire are based on a five-point Likert scale, whose values are *Always*, *Often*, *Sometimes*, *Rarely*, and *Never* for questions on language use, and *Almost all*, *Many*, *Some*, *Few*, and *I know only English terms* for respondent's knowledge of the mother tongue.

Initially, the questionnaire was circulated as an online questionnaire (Google Forms), through WhatsApp groups. This mode was chosen as the pandemic had led to creation of WhatsApp groups in every class. However, in most colleges, the response was not satisfactory despite repeated reminders and requests to students to participate in the study. Hence, hard copies of the questionnaire were also distributed in the colleges.

5.1 Target group

The target group chosen for the study is the undergraduate students of Nagaland, studying within Nagaland. According to the Statistical Handbook of Nagaland (2020), there are 13 government and 43 private colleges (excluding Bachelor of Education programs) offering undergraduate courses spread across Nagaland. Most of the private colleges (35) are located in the two major towns/cities – Dimapur and Kohima, accounting for 70% of the total enrolment, which is approximately 25,000 (for the year 2018–19).

The study covers 15 colleges: 2 private colleges each from Dimapur (Tetso College and Unity College) and Kohima (Baptist College and Sazolie College), and 11 government colleges (Dimapur Government College, Kohima College, Kohima Science College, Peren Government College, Phek Government College, Pfutsero Government College, Wangkhao College in Mon, Sao Chang College in Tuensang, Fazl Ali College in Mokokchung, Yingli College in Longleng, and Mount Tiyi College in Wokha).

5.2 Sample size

Since sampling of students based on independent variables such as age, gender, tribe, or urban/rural divide was difficult, voluntary response sampling was applied and the questionnaire was made open to all students in the college, with a plan to apply systematic sampling to choose a specific number of respondents from each college. However, as noted earlier, the online mode was not very successful, and it was not possible to give hard copies to all students. Hence, random sampling was used to choose the number of respondents in each college. From the total number of students (approximate) in the college, a sample size was arrived at, taking a confidence level of 95% and a 5% margin error.[6]

Table 2. Sample size from each college

Sl.no	College	Approximate enrolment	Sample size
1.	Dimapur Government College	1600	310
2.	Kohima College	1400	302
3.	Kohima Science College	1500	306
4.	Peren Government College	160	114
5.	Phek Government College	250	152
6.	Pfutsero Government College	300	169
7.	Wangkhao College	570	230
8.	Sao Chang College	640	241
9.	Fazl Ali College	1200	292
10.	Yingli College	190	128
11.	Mt. Tiyi College	277	161
12.	Tetso College	1800	317
13.	Unity College	1600	310
14.	Baptist College	1400	302
15.	Sazolie College	400	197
	Total	13287	3531

Of the 3,531 respondents, duplicates and students who had not responded to questions related to the independent variables were removed, since non-response was problematic for the statistical analysis. Responses from students belonging to communities from outside the state of Nagaland were not included since the study is primarily targeted at

[6] Online sample calculators were used to arrive at the following numbers for each college. (https://www.calculator.net/sample-size-calculator.html; https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/sample-size-calculator/)

students belonging to the tribes in Nagaland. The final number of respondents on which the study has been conducted is 2,984 students. Of the 2,984 respondents, 41% of respondents were male while 59% were female. This is not surprising, as girls outnumber boys in many of the classrooms.

The respondents belong to the following Naga tribes: Angami, Ao, Chang, Chakhesang, Khiamniungan, Konyak, Zeliangrong, Sangtam, Lotha, Phom, Pochury, Rengma, Sema or Sumi, Tikhir, Yimkhiung, and other Naga tribes inhabiting other parts of Northeast India. Some respondents also belong to the non-Naga tribes such as Kuki, Kachari, and Garo, inhabiting Nagaland and recognised by the government. The tribes that have the most representation are the Konyak tribe represented by 13.2% of the respondents, Ao by 12.63%, and Chakhesang by 11.66%. The tribes that have the least representation are Tikhir with 0.33% and Pochury with 0.9%.

In response to tribe, tribe names were rationalised to the 15 officially recognised Naga tribes by the Nagaland state government. For example, the tribe Chakhesang is composed of the Chokris and Khezhas and hence the responses returned were Chakhesang, Chokri, and Khezha. As it was not possible to identify whether the Chakhesang respondent belonged to Chokri or Kezha, all three responses were rationalised as belonging to one tribe. In addition, two more categories are added to include non-Naga tribes recognised by the state government and other Naga tribes outside Nagaland.

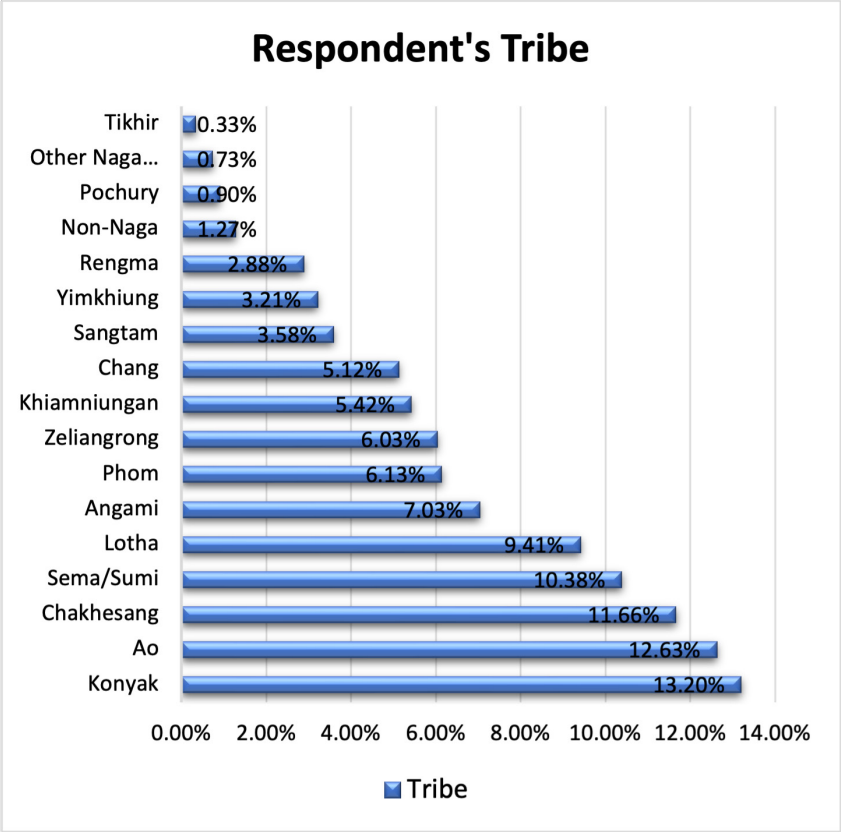

Figure 2. Tribe-wise distribution of respondents

5.3 Analysis of data

In the analysis of data, the percentage method is used to describe the distribution of responses across variables. All percentages are rounded up to the nearest whole number. Based on the descriptions, the outcomes and observations are presented.

6. Independent variables

In this section, two independent variables that are relevant to our discussion are presented: respondent's place of upbringing and parents' level of education.

6.1 Respondent's place of upbringing

In response to their place of upbringing, there were more than 600 names of places. Since the objective was to look at differences in terms of rural and urban settings, the responses were rationalised to just two categories: urban and rural. Urban includes all of the sixteen district headquarters: Kohima, Dimapur, Mokokchung, Wokha, Chumoukedima, Longleng, Tuensang, Kiphire, Noklak, Shamator, Mon, Phek, Pfutsero, Peren, Niuland, and Zunheboto. Rural includes all the other places not included under urban. It must be noted that though there are 39 Urban Local Bodies (ULB) (which includes three municipalities and 36 town councils), there is a large difference between these towns, in terms of population and composition. For example, Longleng town has a population of only 7,613 persons whereas Tuensang town has a population of 36,774 persons (2011 census). Likewise, Longleng town is mostly inhabited by Phom tribe whereas Tuensang town is inhabited by many different tribes. This is one reason why only district headquarters have been chosen as urban areas.

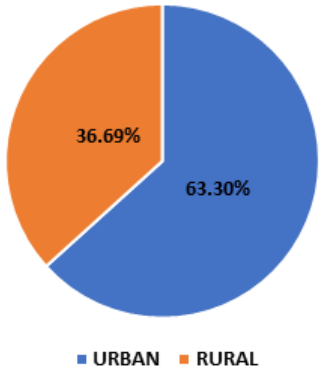

Figure 3. Respondent's place of upbringing

Of the 2,984 respondents, 63% of them were brought up in *urban* areas, while 37% of respondents were brought up in *rural* areas of Nagaland.

6.2 Parents' level of education

The responses to parents' level of education ranged from illiterate to highly educated, and were initially rationalised into five categories. However, in order to examine whether there is any difference based on parents' level of education, a separate variable (*educated* vs. *less-educated*) was introduced. *Educated* includes those respondents where at least one parent is a graduate or above graduation, while *less-educated* refer to both parents' level of education being below graduate.

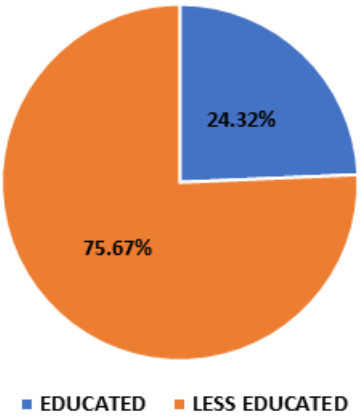

Figure 4. Parent's level of education

Of the 2,984 respondents, 76% of respondent's parents are *less-educated*, while 24% are *educated*.

7. Language use patterns

In this section, the language use patterns in the following domains are discussed: home (§7.1), informal domains which include friends and marketplaces (§7.2), formal domains which include teachers, office, and church (§7.3), and social media (§7.4).

7.1 Home domain

Under the home domain, language use with parents, grandparents, siblings, and relatives are included. This is the only domain where the mother tongue is used extensively. More than 84% of respondents use the mother tongue with everyone within the home domain (Table 3).

Table 3. Use of mother tongue in the home domain

Use of mother tongue	Father	Mother	Grandparents	Siblings	Relatives (intra tribe)
Always	79%	83%	86%	72%	76%
Often	8%	7%	4%	12%	10%
Sometimes, rarely, and never	13%	10%	10%	16%	14%
Total responses	2933	2942	2953	2938	2940

For parents, 87% and 90% of respondents use their mother tongue with their father and mother respectively *always* or *often*. Similarly, 90% of respondents *always* or *often* use their mother tongue to communicate with their grandparents. When it comes to language use with siblings, the use of mother tongue is still high, with 84% of the respondents *always* or *often* use their mother tongue. With relatives who are from the same tribe, 86% use their mother tongue *always* or *often*. The results show that the use of mother tongue is strong and stable within the home domain.

The use of English with parents and grandparents is not very prevalent among respondents, though the numbers are much higher for siblings (Table 4).

Table 4. Use of English in the home domain

	Use of English	*Always*	*Often*	*Sometimes*	*Rarely*	*Never*	*Total responses*
a.	Father	4%	13%	32%	24%	27%	2717
b.	Mother	3%	9%	26%	26%	36%	2689
c.	Grandparents	1%	3%	8%	14%	74%	2673
d.	Siblings	13%	31%	42%	9%	5%	2784
e.	Relatives (intra tribe)	5%	17%	42%	18%	18%	2725
f.	Relatives (inter tribe)	17%	23%	39%	13%	8%	2778

With parents (Table 4: a, b), 17% and 12% of respondents use English *always* or *often* with their father and mother respectively. With grandparents (Table 4:c), it is still low at 4%. However, when it comes to communication among siblings, 44% *always* or *often* use English to communicate (Table 4: d). A similar number of participants (42%) use English *sometimes*.

With relatives from the same tribe (Table 4: e), 22% of respondents *always* or *often* use English, with a larger group using English *sometimes* (42% of respondents).

With relatives belonging to other tribes (Table 4: f), 40% of the respondents *always* or *often* use English, and 39% use it *sometimes*. The numbers are slightly less than expected. However, this can be attributed to the higher usage of Nagamese, with 74% of respondents *always* or *often* using Nagamese with relatives from outside the tribe (Table 5: f).

Surprisingly, after the mother tongue, it is Nagamese that is used more than English in the home domain (Table 5). In Sachdeva's (2000) study, 84% of respondents encourage the mother tongue at home, 71% encourage English at home, while only 13% encourage Nagamese. This is perhaps indicative of some degree of acceptance of Nagamese in the home domain, as Nagas' attitude towards it has not been very positive in the past.

Table 5. Use of Nagamese in the home domain

	Use of Nagamese	*Always*	*Often*	*Sometimes*	*Rarely*	*Never*	*Total responses*
a.	Father	13%	16%	29%	20%	22%	2743
b.	Mother	11%	14%	29%	21%	25%	2736
c.	Grandparents	5%	5%	15%	16%	59%	2684
d.	Siblings	20%	24%	34%	13%	9%	2789
e.	Relatives (intra tribe)	18%	22%	35%	14%	11%	2803
f.	Relatives (inter tribe)	49%	25%	18%	5%	3%	2902

The use of Nagamese with parents (Table 5: a,b) *always* or *often* is at 29% and 25% for father and mother respectively, almost double the percentage of English usage. Also, the percentage of respondents using Nagamese *sometimes* with parents (Table 5: a, b) is quite high at 29% each for father and mother. With grandparents (Table 5: c), 10% of respondents use Nagamese *always* or *often*. This is again more than double the percentage for English. With siblings (Table 5: d), 44% *always* or *often* use Nagamese, which is almost the same as English. With increasing inter-tribal marriages in Naga society, Nagamese and English are the choices available for communication. However, as almost 90% of the respondents had parents from the same tribe, inter-tribal marriage may not be the only reason for the increased use of Nagamese and English.

With relatives from the same tribe (Table 5: e), 40% of respondents *always* or *often* use Nagamese, while another 35% use Nagamese *sometimes*. On the other hand, a high number of respondents (74%) *always* or *often* use Nagamese with relatives outside of their own tribe (Table 5: f). The results clearly show Nagamese to be the second-most used language within the home domain.

Two generalisations can be made within the home domain. Firstly, there is a generational difference in the use of mother tongue: the younger generation's (siblings) use of Nagamese and English is higher. Secondly, the use of Nagamese is higher than that of English, except with siblings, where it is equal.

7.2 Informal domains

The study also provides insight into the languages the respondents use when communicating with friends, and the use of language in market places. These are placed under the informal domains.

Similar to language use with relatives, language use with friends is distinguished between intra-group and inter-group, as respondents can have friends from different communities (represented in Table 6). With friends from the same tribe (intra), mother tongue usage is still dominant at 53% (*always*) and 18% (*often*). However, Nagamese usage among friends (intra-group) is not far behind at 39% *always* and 28% *often*. For English, 22% of respondents claim to use it *always* and 32% claim to use it *often* with friends.

Table 6. Language use with friends

Language use with friends	**Mother tongue**	**English**		**Nagamese**		**Hindi**
	intra	***intra***	***inter***	***intra***	***inter***	***inter***
Always	53%	22%	42%	39%	60%	7%
Often	18%	32%	30%	28%	24%	9%
Sometimes	17%	37%	24%	23%	12%	28%
Rarely and Never	12%	9%	4%	10%	4%	56%
Total responses	2878	2824	2881	2838	2893	2707

To examine language use with friends from outside the tribe (Table 6), three options are given: English, Nagamese, and Hindi. The use of English and Nagamese increases significantly under this domain. Similar to the high percentage of respondents using Nagamese with relatives outside the tribe, a majority of 84% respondents *always* (60%) or *often* (24%) use Nagamese to communicate with friends who belong to a different tribe. The number of respondents using English with friends (inter-tribe) is also high with 72% of participants using it *always* (42%) or *often* (30%) . The use of Hindi is comparatively much lower (16% for *always* or *often*).

In both the intra and inter-groups, Nagamese usage (*always* and *often*) is higher than English. College teachers are also of the opinion that students interact more in Nagamese outside the classroom.

To examine language use in market places (Table 7), four options are provided: mother tongue, English, Nagamese, and Hindi. It is clear that Nagamese dominates this domain (Table 7:c) with 74% of respondents using it *always* and 18% using it *often*. This is a total of 92% of respondents using Nagamese to communicate in the market place.

Table 7. Language use in market places

	Language use in market places	*Always*	*Often*	*Sometimes*	*Rarely*	*Never*	*Total responses*
a.	Mother tongue	17%	13%	25%	20%	25%	2731
b.	English	4%	10%	34%	29%	23%	2689
c.	Nagamese	74%	18%	6%	1%	1%	2952
d.	Hindi	10%	16%	33%	21%	20%	2712

The mother tongue is a distant second (Table 7: a) with only 30% of respondents using the mother tongue *always* or *often*, closely followed by Hindi (Table 7: d) with 26% (*always* or *often*), and lastly English (Table 7: b) with 14% of respondents using it *always* or *often*.

In the informal domain, it is observed that while mother tongue use is healthy among friends, a comparison of Nagamese and English shows that the use of Nagamese is higher than English, whether among friends or in the market places.

7.3 Formal domains

Under the formal domain, I examine the language use of students with teachers in the college, and language use in offices and churches (Table 8).

With teachers, it is no surprise that English usage dominates, with 92% respondents using English *always* with teachers, and 6% using it *often*. This is a total of 98% respondents using English *always* or *often* to communicate with teachers. The use of Nagamese *always* or *often* (11%), Hindi (6%), or the mother tongue (5%) with teachers is extremely low. It is also observed that more than 50% of respondents never use their mother tongue (56%) or Hindi (51%) to communicate with teachers. These results are corroborated by results from the teacher's questionnaire, which shows that 100% of teachers teach *always* or *often* in English, 98% of teachers interact with students in English *always* or *often* in the classroom, and 95% of teachers interact with students *always* or *often* in English outside the classroom.

In offices as well, English is the dominant language. 56% of respondents claim to use English *always*, with another 26% using English *often*. This is a total of 82% using English for communication in an office in Nagaland. Nagamese is also commonly used, with 67% of respondents claiming to communicate *always* or *often* in Nagamese in an office. The use of Hindi is least at 17% (*always* or *often*).

Table 8. Language use with teachers and in office

Language used ...	**Mother tongue**		**English**		**Nagamese**		**Hindi**	
	Teachers	**Office**	**Teachers**	**Office**	**Teachers**	**Office**	**Teachers**	**Office**
Always	3%	5%	92%	56%	3%	37%	2%	6%
Often	2%	8%	6%	26%	8%	30%	4%	11%
Sometimes	13%	23%	2%	15%	33%	25%	17%	28%
Rarely	26%	28%	-	2%	30%	6%	26%	27%
Never	56%	36%	-	1%	26%	2%	51%	28%
Total responses	2637	2653	2962	2922	2684	2820	2642	2673

As the Nagas are predominantly Christians[7], I also examine the language use pattern in churches as part of the formal domain (Table 9). The first question is on language used in the church. As expected, 83% use the mother tongue in church *always*, and another 9% use it *often*. What is unexpected is the high use of English and Nagamese (*always* or *often*) at 38% and 32% respectively, as a majority of churches are established along tribal lines. As such, the language of communication in most churches, including hymns and prayers, is the mother tongue. A personal observation is that, in recent years, English songs have become very popular in these churches, especially in youth gatherings. Also note that a larger number of respondents (45% for English and 37% for Nagamese) use these languages *sometimes* in church. The use of Hindi is negligible.

Table 9. Language use in church and youth meetings

Language used …	Mother tongue		English		Nagamese	
	Church	Youth meetings	Church	Youth meetings	Church	Youth meetings
Always	83%	67%	13%	28%	14%	20%
Often	9%	16%	25%	32%	18%	21%
Sometimes	4%	11%	45%	33%	37%	37%
Rarely	2%	3%	12%	5%	19%	13%
Never	2%	3%	5%	2%	12%	9%
Total responses	2934	2921	2777	2835	2754	2762

Apart from the churches, Nagas are also known for the large number of Unions, Associations, organisations, and civil societies in every city, town, and village. Many youths are actively involved in such unions and church bodies. Hence, I also examine the language use in such gatherings, which are formal in nature (Table 9). The mother tongue is still dominant in this domain, with 67% of respondents using it *always*, and 16% of respondents using it *often*. This is a total of 83%. English is also used widely, with 28% and 32% of respondents using it *always* or *often* respectively, which is a total of 60%. Very close to English is Nagamese, with 41% claiming to use Nagamese *always* or *often*. However, a large number of respondents use English and Nagamese *sometimes* (33% and 37% respectively). Use of Hindi is again negligible.

Based on the responses, two different patterns of language use can be observed in the formal domain. In colleges and offices, it is English that is dominant. In churches and unions, it is the mother tongue which has the upper hand. However, unlike in colleges where the use Nagamese is low, its use in the church environment, along with English, is quite high. This is a source of concern for the near future.

7.4 Social media

In today's world, social media is one domain that is rapidly growing. Under this domain, the results show that English is the main language used (Table 10:b), with 97% of respondents using English *always* or *often*. Comparatively, the use of Nagamese (Table 10:c) and mother tongue (Table 10:a) is not very high at 42% and 21% respectively (for *always* or *often*). A good number of respondents (35%) use these languages *sometimes*.

[7] As per the 2011 census, Christians account for 87.93% of the total population, while 8.75% are Hindu and 2.47% are Muslim. The indigenous religion, which is miniscule, is not represented separately, and may be included in Hindu or 'other religions.'

Table 10. Language use in social media

Language use in Social Media	*Always*	*Often*	*Sometimes*	*Rarely*	*Never*	*Total responses*
a. Mother tongue	8%	13%	35%	24%	20%	2733
b. English	88%	9%	2%	0.5%	0.5%	2964
c. Nagamese	18%	24%	35%	15%	8%	2759
d. Hindi	5%	8%	25%	28%	34%	2694

The lower usage of Nagamese and mother tongue in social media is interesting, given its widespread usage in most domains. However, it must be noted that the question on use of language in social media is restricted to the written form, as the question was particular to SMS and social media posts. Given that Nagamese is not taught, and mother tongue education has not made much of an impact, it is not surprising that respondents prefer to use English, as that is the language they are most comfortable with, especially in the case of writing. Even if respondents want to use their language for writing, they are not able to since they have not been formally taught. On the other hand, the oral use of Nagamese, and also the mother tongue to some extent, is quite high on platforms like YouTube. Hence, the lack of writing skills seems to be the main reason as to why English is the preferred choice of language.

It is clear that the mother tongue is strongest in the home domain and in churches, though English and Nagamese are gaining ground even here. Given the use of the mother tongue in such specific domains, it is not surprising that there is a decrease in the mother tongue knowledge of respondents. In the next section, I examine the level of knowledge respondents have in the mother tongue with respect to certain semantic domains in the language.

8. Knowledge in one's language

This section analyses the responses on one's knowledge of folktales; folksongs; proverbs; and idioms, and vocabulary of flora; fauna; traditional ornaments; address terms; and terms associated with weaving/basketry and agriculture. The responses show that knowledge of folktales, folksongs, and proverbs/idioms is not very high among the respondents as very few have good knowledge (*almost all* or *many*) of these semantic domains (Table 11).

Table 11. Knowledge of folktales, folksongs, proverbs and idioms

In my mother tongue, I know the …	*Almost All*	*Many*	*Some*	*Few*	*I know only English terms*	**Total responses**
a. … folktales of my tribe	7%	21%	42%	27%	3%	2928
b. … folksongs of my tribe	4%	12%	41%	38%	5%	2906
c. … proverbs and idioms of my tribe	3%	11%	37%	36%	13%	2852

When it comes to knowing one's folktales (Table 11:a), only 28% of the respondents know *almost all* or *many* folktales. The scores for knowledge of folksongs and proverbs/idioms are much lower. Only 16% know *almost all* or *many* folksongs of the tribe (Table 11:b), and only 14% of the respondents know *almost all* or *many* proverbs and idioms of the tribe (Table 11:c). What may be seen as encouraging is that many still know at least *some* folksongs, folktales, and proverbs/idioms.

With respect to knowing vocabulary items of various semantic fields associated with flora, fauna, traditional ornaments, and terms associated with weaving/basketry and agriculture (Table 12), the results are slightly better but not very encouraging, as less than 50% of respondents have good knowledge of these domains.

Table 12. Knowledge of some semantic domains

In my mother tongue, I know the …		*Almost All*	*Many*	*Some*	*Few*	*I know only English terms*	Total responses
a.	… names of plants, shrubs, and trees	10%	32%	34%	20%	4%	2907
b.	… names of birds and animals	12%	36%	33%	16%	3%	2919
c.	… names of traditional ornaments	9%	24%	38%	25%	4%	2904
d.	… terms associated with weaving/basketry	6%	15%	36%	36%	7%	2887
e.	… terms associated with agriculture	12%	25%	36%	23%	4%	2905

The highest score of 48% (for *almost all* or *many*) is for knowledge about names of birds and animals (Table 12:b), while the lowest is 21% for knowledge about terms related to weaving and basketry (Table 12:d), skills which are on a decline among the Nagas. 42% of respondents are familiar (*almost all* or *many*) with vocabulary related to flora, 37% with terms related to agriculture, and 23% with terms related to ornaments. The fact that there are many respondents (50–70%) who know *some* or *few* of the terms/names in the above discussed semantic domains shows that the knowledge has not completely disappeared.

The study also examines whether respondents know how to address their elders by using the appropriate address terms in their mother tongue. This is important as such knowledge requires an understanding of the clan and kinship system. It is heartening to see that of the 2962 respondents, 88% of respondents know the appropriate terms, while 11% are not very sure.

9. Independent variables

In this section, a comparative analysis of groups within the two independent variables-parent's level of education (*educated* and *less-educated*) and place of upbringing (*urban* and *rural*) is presented. The focus is on the two highest values – *always* and *often*. Wherever there is a difference of more than 8% between two groups, t-tests were conducted to examine if the differences were statistically significant. The t-test analysis shows all the differences to be significant ($p < .001$ and the t-value is higher than the critical value of 1.96 at 95% level of confidence). However, due to space constraints, only a descriptive account is given in this paper.

9.1 Parent's level of education

A look at the *educated* versus *less-educated* variable tells us that education plays an important role in the use of language, as respondents who have *educated* parents tend to use more English than respondents who have *less-educated* parents. Within the home domain (refer to Table 4 above) the use of English by respondents who have *educated* parents is significantly higher, with parents (Table 13), siblings, and relatives (Table 14), though not with grandparents.

In the use of English by respondents with fathers *always* or *often* (Table 13: a, b), there is a 12% difference between *educated* and *less-educated*. In the use of English *sometimes*, the difference is 8%. Likewise, in the case of respondent's use of English with mothers *always* or *often* (Table 13: c, d), the difference between *educated* and *less-educated* is 14%. Use of English *sometimes* is 8%.

Table 13. Use of English with parents- Educated > Less-educated

English with father	*Always*	*Often*	*Sometimes*	*Rarely*	*Never*	*Total responses*
a. Educated	6%	20%	38%	22%	14%	666
b. Less-educated	3%	11%	30%	25%	31%	2051
English with mother						
c. Educated	5%	18%	32%	24%	21%	659
d. Less-educated	2%	7%	24%	26%	41%	2030

In respondent's use of English with siblings *always* or *often*, the difference between *educated* and *less-educated* is 11% (Table 14: a, b). With relatives (both intra and inter), the difference between *educated* and *less-educated* is 8% (Table 14: c, d) and 13% (Table 14: e, f) respectively (for *always* or *often*). Clearly, respondents whose parents are *educated* use English more often than those respondents whose parents are *less-educated*.

Table 14. Use of English with siblings and relatives- Educated > Less-educated

English with siblings	*Always*	*Often*	*Sometimes*	*Rarely*	*Never*	*Total responses*
a. Educated	18%	34%	35%	8%	5%	680
b. Less-educated	11%	30%	45%	9%	5%	2104
English with relatives (intra tribe)						
c. Educated	7%	22%	39%	18%	14 %	665
d. Less-educated	5%	16%	42%	17%	20%	2060
English with relatives (inter tribe)						
e. Educated	22%	27%	31%	13%	7%	683
f. Less-educated	15%	21%	42%	13%	9%	2095

The higher use of English by respondents with *educated* parents is also seen in the informal domain, where the use of English with friends from the same tribe *always* or *often* is 9% higher for respondents with *educated* parents (Table 15: a, b), and with friends from different tribes, 8% higher (Table 15: c, d).

Table 15. Use of English with friends- Educated > Less-educated

English with friends (intra tribe)	*Always*	*Often*	*Sometimes*	*Rarely*	*Never*	*Total responses*
a. Educated	29%	33%	29%	7%	2%	691
b. Less-educated	20%	33%	39%	6%	2%	2133
English with friends (inter tribe)						
c. Educated	51%	26%	18%	4%	1 %	710
d. Less-educated	38%	31%	27%	3%	1%	2171

9.2 Place of upbringing

Examining the responses based on the place of upbringing – urban and rural – the only difference where rural scores over urban is in the use of mother tongue with friends from the same tribe (Table 16).

Table 16. Use of mother tongue with friends (intra tribe)- Rural > Urban

Mother tongue with friends (intra tribe)	***Always***	***Often***	***Sometimes***	***Rarely***	***Never***	***Total responses***
a. Urban	49%	19%	18%	8%	6%	1832
b. Rural	60%	17%	14%	5%	4%	1046

77% of respondents brought up in rural areas use the mother tongue *always* or *often* with friends (intra tribe), as opposed to 68% of those from urban areas. The difference between the urban and rural respondents is 9%.

Those brought up in urban areas appear to do better in the use of Nagamese and English. Compared to those growing up in rural areas, the use of Nagamese *always* or *often* with fathers, mothers and siblings is about 10% higher for those respondents who have been brought up in urban areas (Table 17).

Table 17. Use of Nagamese with parents and siblings- Urban > Rural

Nagamese with father	***Always***	***Often***	***Sometimes***	***Rarely***	***Never***	***Total responses***
a. Urban	14%	18%	27%	20%	21%	1751
b. Rural	10%	13%	31%	22%	24%	992
Nagamese with mother						
c. Urban	13%	16%	28%	21%	22%	1748
d. Rural	7%	10%	32%	21%	30%	988
Nagamese with siblings						
e. Urban	23%	25%	29%	13%	10%	1775
f. Rural	15%	22%	41%	13%	9%	1014

The difference between urban and rural in the use of Nagamese *always* or *often* with fathers is 9% (Table 17: a, b); mothers 12% (Table 17: c, d); and siblings 11% (Table 17: e, f).

In youth meetings (Table 18), 10% more respondents of urban upbringing (64%) use English *always* or *often* than those respondents of rural upbringing (54%).

Table 18. Use of English in youth meetings- Urban > Rural

English in youth meetings	***Always***	***Often***	***Sometimes***	***Rarely***	***Never***	***Total responses***
a. Urban	30%	34%	30%	4%	2%	1804
b. Rural	24%	30%	38%	5 %	3%	1031

While the use of Hindi in all domains is not widespread, it is observed that 29% of respondents brought up in urban areas use Hindi *always* or *often* (Table 19), which is 8% more than those brought up in rural areas (21%).

Table 19. Use of Hindi in the market place- Urban > Rural

Hindi in market place	*Always*	*Often*	*Sometimes*	*Rarely*	*Never*	*Total responses*
a. Urban	11%	18%	32%	22%	17%	1730
b. Rural	8%	13%	33%	21%	25%	982

From this section (§9), it is very clear that there are significant differences observed between groups within each independent variable.[8] Comparing *educated* and *less-educated*, respondents with *educated* parents use more English. In comparing urban and rural, respondents from rural areas use more mother tongue, while respondents from urban areas use more of English and Nagamese.

10. Conclusion

Language and society are intricately linked, and a change or shift in language use is bound to affect the community in varied ways. Based on the description, analysis, and interpretation of the responses, this study, which is based on a total of 2,984 undergraduate students from 15 colleges across Nagaland, clearly shows the dominance of English and Nagamese among the younger generation in most domains, confining the mother tongue to the home and formal domains. This has also led to a loss of knowledge and understanding of one's own culture and tradition. The findings from this survey confirms the *Vulnerable* status of the languages spoken in Nagaland, as reported by Moseley (2010). Some of the findings are summarised in conclusion.

Within the home domain, it is the mother tongue which is strongest. However, use of English with siblings and relatives is quite high even in this domain. What is alarming is that Nagamese is the second-most used language in the home domain, after the mother tongue. In the informal domain, the mother tongue is still strong among friends (intra tribe), but Nagamese remains in second place. In market places, it is Nagamese which is dominant. In formal domains such as college and government offices, it is predominantly English, while in churches and youth meetings, the mother tongue is largely dominant. However, it is a cause for concern that a large number of respondents use English and Nagamese in church and youth meetings. One must remember that Nagamese was never accepted by Nagas as a proper language, fit only for the market place. In social media, English is much further ahead of the other languages. A generalization can be made that English and Nagamese dominate in marketplaces, offices, and college. In the other domains, it is the mother tongue which is dominant. However, what is worrying is that except for social media, in all the other domains (home, friends, church, youth meetings), either Nagamese or English is a close second to the mother tongue.

When it comes to level of knowledge of specific terms related to culture, flora and fauna, address terms etc., the results are not very encouraging as less than 30% of respondents have good knowledge of folktales, folksongs, and proverbs and idioms. With respect to knowing vocabulary items of various semantic fields associated with flora, fauna, traditional ornaments, and terms associated with weaving/basketry and agriculture, the results are slightly better but still disappointing, as less than 50% of respondents have good knowledge of these domains.

If one looks at the analysis based on the independent variables, it is very clear that there are significant differences in the two variables. Firstly, there are significant differences between respondents who have grown up in *rural* versus *urban* areas, and secondly, significant differences between respondents who have *less-educated* versus *educated* parents. Respondents brought up in *rural* areas and respondents with *less-educated* parents seem to do much better in terms of

[8] It is also observed that respondents who have been brought up in rural areas have better knowledge of folktales, folksongs, terms related to flora and fauna, traditional ornaments, weaving, and agriculture. Likewise, respondents with less-educated parents have better knowledge of names of fauna, and terms related to ornaments and agriculture. However, the details are not discussed in the paper due to space constraints.

mother tongue use and knowledge of language. This is a clear indicator that such parents still have the knowledge, which is imparted to their children. In other words, those from *urban* areas, and with *educated* parents, are the ones who use their languages less and have less knowledge of their culture and language. These two variables are closely linked to urbanisation and modern education. In today's world, it is not possible for any community to resist urbanisation and education. Hence, the only solution lies in teaching the cultural practices and language along with modern education in the urban areas. It appears that the pace of modernisation and urbanisation so far outweighs the efforts made in teaching the language, cultural and traditions of the community.

Aier (1996) notes that despite the use of English and Nagamese, mother tongue maintenance is quite strong, which she attributes to Naga tribes living in "compact homogenous territories where mother tongue usage is sustained" (Aier 1996:231). Aier concludes that there is growing awareness on the importance of the mother tongue, suggesting a shift in attitude that involves focus on both English and mother tongue, with growing demand for the mother tongue to be compulsorily taught in schools and colleges. Twenty-five years down the line, rapid urbanisation has led to more heterogeneity among the Nagas. Likewise, the focus on both English and mother tongue seems to have favoured English, with mother tongue education failing to compete with English education.

In the present survey, of the 2984 respondents, only 32% had had some level of mother tongue education in school. A comparison of these two groups shows that those with mother tongue education can read and write much better than those without mother tongue education. If these languages are to survive the century, mother tongue education in the state needs to be strengthened on a war footing at the school and college level and must be made compulsory in both private and government institutions, equipping a new generation that will feel comfortable reading and writing their mother tongues. This will entail materials development in all languages and the training and recruitment of teachers. Civil societies need to be engaged if this is to be successful, since all tribal unions have literature boards, and the government must work with all stakeholders for the teaching of mother tongues in schools and colleges. One example of tribal bodies making an impact is the enforcement of compulsory teaching of Ao in all schools (government and private) under Mokokchung district by the Ao Senden, the apex body of the Ao tribe.

This is extremely important because without formal education, our mother tongues will not be able to compete with languages like English and Nagamese, the two major languages that are dominant in the market places, college, social media, and with friends, and that are quickly intruding into the home and formal domains.

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