CHAPTER 4

A REPORT ON THE FIELD STUDY CONDUCTED IN SELECT STATE-RUN SCHOOLS IN TAMIL NADU

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed in detail the background of young ESL learners in state-run schools in Tamil Nadu. It also traced the history of English education in India and also of the various language policies framed for teaching English as a second language.

4.2 CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

One of the major objectives of the present study was to analyze the efficacy and appropriateness of ABL in teaching English to young learners in state-run schools in Tamil Nadu. Four schools, two each from urban and rural areas were chosen for the study. The schools located in the urban areas were Kaveri primary school, (government-aided) corporation school, (Chennai) and in rural areas a panchayat union primary school in Paapagudi (Sivagangai district) and a municipal middle school in Manjalpattinam (Ramanathapuram district).

Classroom observation was chosen for collecting data since, it is one of the most significant methods for testing the hypothesis framed in chapter one. The observation provided an opportunity for the researcher to document the teacher-learner interaction that took place in the classrooms and
also the language practice and interaction opportunities given to young learners in the classroom. The observation helped the researcher gain insight into the constraints and challenges faced by the teachers in using the ABL methodology. The observation also focussed on important issues relating to input and teacher-learner interaction as they relate to classroom language learning. As Gaies points out, ‘The classroom is the crucible where teachers and learners come together and language learning takes place as a result of the reactions of the elements that go into the crucible’ (Gaies 1983).

It is quite common that the presence of an observer increases the anxiety of teachers and learners. This issue is of much significance, as teacher anxiety would not provide a congenial atmosphere required for classroom observation. Labov (1972) coined the phrase ‘the observer’s paradox’, by which he meant that by getting people to speak or to focus on their speech, researchers often trigger alterations in speech patterns. This change occurs because people adjust their speech, often in a more formal direction when they become aware of it. In order to tackle the problem to a certain extent, the researcher clearly explained to the teachers the purpose of his visit and assured that the data obtained would be used only in the research study.

One classroom session was observed in all the four schools. The following section presents a detailed report on the classroom sessions observed. The data obtained by observing the classes was used to analyse the ABL methodology, teacher-learner interaction, the different teaching patterns adopted by the teacher, learner involvement, participation and motivation levels.

4.3 THE COLT SCHEME

The Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT) (1985) was developed by Frohilch, Spada and Allen to enable researchers
compare different language programmes and also record and analyze the teaching and interaction patterns of teachers and learners in ESL classrooms.

Nunan (1993) describes the COLT scheme in detail. The scheme consists of two sections. Part A focuses on the description of classroom activities and has five sub-divisions: the activity type, participant organization, content, student modality, and materials. Part B lists seven aspects related to communicative aspects of language teaching and learning.

Table 4.1 gives the COLT scheme used for analyzing the data obtained in classroom observation sessions.

**Table 4.1 COLT scheme**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part A: Classroom activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1a. Activity type</td>
<td>Drill, role play, dictation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a. Participant organization</td>
<td>Is the teacher working with the whole class or not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are learners working in groups or individually?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If group work, how is it organized?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a. Content</td>
<td>Is the focus on classroom management, language (form, function, discourse, sociolinguistics), or other?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is the range of topics broad or narrow?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4a. Learner Modality</td>
<td>Are learners involved in listening, speaking, reading, writing, or combinations of these?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a. Materials</td>
<td>What types of materials are used?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How long is the text?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How controlled is their use?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.1 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part B: Classroom language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1b. Use of target language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b. Information gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b. Sustained speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4b. Reaction to code or message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5b. Incorporation of preceding utterance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6b. Discourse initiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7b. Relative restriction of linguistic form</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.1 Classroom Observation I

A government-aided elementary school (Kaveri Primary School, Saligramam, Chennai) was chosen for conducting the field study. The researcher was asked to observe an English classroom session on a particular date, a week later. The field study in this school was conducted in January 2009.

When the researcher entered the classroom, the class had already begun. There were approximately thirty-five learners in class I in the age group of five years. Different coloured cards for each class, with different logos printed on them were found in boxes. Red colour cards were meant for learners of class I and green colour cards for learners of class II.
Only learners from class I were seated in the classroom. They were in six groups in a moderately-sized classroom. Most of them were busy playing with the cards and some with their friends. There was a black board meant for the teacher but low-level writing boards meant for learners (mandatory in an ABL classroom) were not seen.

The researcher was informed by the teacher that the learners had been given the cards meant for English lessons. The researcher could observe that most of the learners in groups were totally distracted and some of them were running in and out of the class. The teacher had to seek the help of another child to bring them back to the class. She gave instructions in mother tongue (Tamil), (henceforth in thesis Tamil and not mother tongue will be used) and asked them not to play. Then she continued her instructions in Tamil and told the learners that they would be learning English letters with the help of cards.

Most of the learners were just looking at the teacher while the others seen were playing with their friends. After the interaction with the researcher, the teacher started teaching the letters of the alphabet to group I. She pointed at the letters on the card and called out each letter loudly and asked the learners to repeat after her. While the teacher was busy with one group, learners in other groups were playing and since the noise level was a bit high, it distracted the attention of the learners in group I. The teacher frequently stopped the teaching activity to tell the other learners to remain silent. After teaching the letters to one group, the teacher went to the next group and tried teaching them the letters. Since the class was too noisy, the teacher asked the learners in other groups to write the letters in their notebooks. This move was to bring some sense of order to the classroom. Most of the learners could not write and some were seen scribbling in their notebooks.
The teacher was unable to continue her teaching because the learners became restless and were unwilling to listen to her and the teaching came to an abrupt end. The teacher could only resort to asking the learners to maintain silence. The teacher then asked a learner to pick a card, which had rhymes and asked him if he had completed the card related to the rhyme. The child could not give a reply and simply nodded his head. Then the teacher called another learner and asked him to choose the respective card, which he was supposed to complete. The child picked the card with pictures of animals and the teacher asked him to go to the respective group. The child went and sat in a different group. The teacher could not take note of it as she was finding it quite difficult to maintain order inside the classroom.

The next ten to fifteen minutes was spent by the teacher in checking to see if the learners had completed their cards but a major problem she confronted was controlling the learners and ensuring that learning was taking place. This particular observation has a direct bearing on the quality of teaching and the extent of learning, an issue, which will be taken up for discussion later.

Moreover, it was quite apparent that the teacher in the class had not grouped the learners according to their ability (as how they are expected to do in the ABL classroom). The grouping of learners seemed artificial as if it had been done keeping in mind the classroom observation by the researcher.

In a bid to maintain discipline in the class, the teacher asked the learners to come together for reciting a rhyme. The teacher brought all the learners together and then asked them to recite rhymes in English. All the learners together recited the rhymes.

This and the other classroom observations are analyzed with specific reference to the criteria listed in the COLT scheme.
Analysis of classroom observation I (Based on COLT Scheme)

Classroom activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colt scheme</th>
<th>Observation by the researcher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity type</td>
<td>Teaching letters of the alphabet (drill type)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant organization</td>
<td>Some learners were in groups, teacher interacted with groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>No clear focus on one particular aspect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner Modality</td>
<td>Initially learners were asked to listen and then write (to maintain classroom discipline)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Classroom language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colt scheme</th>
<th>Observation by the researcher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of target language</td>
<td>No use of the target language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustained speech</td>
<td>Word, single sentence, utterances by learners were ultra minimal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaction to code or message</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse initiation</td>
<td>Learners did not get opportunities to initiate discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative restriction of linguistic form</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion on Classroom observation I

One of the major objectives of the ABL methodology is to create a learning environment conducive for group work and peer learning. Another core objective is to encourage young learners take responsibility for their learning as there is provision for learners to complete one lesson and proceed with another.

Grouping learners according to their ability is mandatory in ABL as it encourages peer learning and makes teaching/learning a joyful experience. During an informal interaction with the teacher of the class after the observation, the researcher asked the teacher whether the groups were formed according to their learning ability. The teacher pointed out that it was difficult to group learners based on their learning ability as most of the learners could not work independently and required the help and support of the teacher.

Though grouping learners is one of the main requirements in an ABL classroom, the scenario that prevailed in the actual classrooms observed was totally different. The groups did not adhere to the guidelines framed for effective implementation of the ABL methodology. All the teachers, whose classes were observed, pointed out the difficulty in grouping learners, as there were not many learners who could interact and contribute meaningfully in a group. The Headmistress of a government-aided school in Chennai pointed out that some of the bright learners were not always willing to help the slow learners, as they were only interested in completing the lessons and proceed to another lesson. This learner behaviour is so typical of Indian learners at all levels.

During the classroom session, the researcher observed that the teacher was trying her level best to engage all the learners. In all the classes
observed, the children, as is expected of children at the age, utilized the first opportunity to play with their friends or in extreme cases even ran out of the classroom.

The formation of different groups based on the ability of the learners is insisted in ABL. The basic idea was that peer-supported and partially teacher-supported groups would not depend too much on the teacher for carrying out their academic activities. But the classroom observation presented a totally different picture. The teachers pointed out that the learners could not be expected to work on their own as they were very distracted, which could be attributed to their background and age. Most of the learners were not willing to listen to the teacher. Moreover, from homes where the idea of giving and sharing is alien to them, learners taking responsibility for their learning is perhaps unrealistic. As Holliday points out,

Methodologies for teaching, for educating teachers, for designing curricula, and for designing and carrying out curriculum projects, continue to be refined, but without sufficient attention to, or knowledge of the people who will be involved (Holliday 1994)

During the observation, it was apparent that the teacher could not monitor the progress of all the learners and had to depend on some of the enthusiastic and proactive learners in the class to check whether their friends had completed the activities assigned to them. Some of the learners did not interact with the others in the group, while some others were seen seated in groups to which they do not belong.
Moreover it was apparent that learners required the help and support of the teacher. As Tickoo observes,

…the learner being a member of a formal and position-oriented system often looks at the teacher as the font of knowledge and is known to relate better to teacher-determined patterns of interaction and behaviour (Tickoo 2001).

The interaction between the teacher and the learners was very minimal. There was more of teacher-talk in the classroom (expected with a boisterous set of young learners). The teacher gave all the instructions in Tamil.

The target for the day was teaching the letters of the English alphabet. However, the teacher did not seem to be very successful, as she could not get learners proceed beyond first four letters of the alphabet, but she did make the class interesting with rhymes.

The analysis points out the widening gap between the designers of methodologies and the actual people involved in implementing them in the classroom. The methodology adopted by the teacher was not found to be very effective as most of the time the teacher was not in a position to monitor the performance of the learners.

The classroom session observed by the researcher provided an opportunity to understand the ABL methodology adopted for teaching and learning of English as a second language. It also enabled the researcher understand some of the difficulties faced by the teacher.

This observation clearly points out the inherent deficiencies in the methodology adopted for teaching English to young ESL learners in a government-aided school.
4.3.2 Classroom Observation II

The second field study was conducted in a corporation school located in Purasawalkam, Chennai in February 2009. There were approximately 40-45 learners in the age group of five to eight. All the learners from classes I-IV were seated in the same classroom (mandatory in an ABL classroom), which was quite spacious to accommodate all of them. The cards, which were to be used for teaching all the subjects, were kept in boxes. There was a low-level black board meant to be used by the learners, though throughout the time the researcher spent in the classroom, nothing was written on the board by the learners. There was only a single teacher to manage the elementary section, which comprised learners from classes I-IV. Initially, the teacher seemed resistant to the idea of the researcher observing her class but later agreed to it. After the teaching activity, she pointed out some of the difficulties faced in fully implementing the ABL methodology in her class.

A major problem that she faced, she said, (like most other teachers the researcher interacted with) was the inability to get learners work in groups.

The class was engaged by the teacher for about thirty minutes. The teacher used Tamil to instruct and communicate with the learners. The learners were asked to pick the cards meant for learning English. As in the other class, here too there was no order in the way learners picked the cards to start their learning activities. This led to a lot of noise and confusion among the learners, which meant that class time was primarily spent by the teacher in maintaining discipline in the class in a bid to lower the noise levels.

Most of the learners from classes III and IV were interested in interacting with the researcher and asked him the purpose of his visit, while some of them were interested in playing with their friends. The teacher then had to reprimand the learners to ensure discipline in the class. They were
asked to write the letters of the alphabet by the teacher. Most of the learners did not have a notebook and those who had clearly did not know or because they had no one to help them with their writing, just scribbled or drew pictures in their notebooks.

In this class also there were no groups that were working together as there was absolutely no sign of the existence of a fully-peer supported, partially peer-supported or fully self-supported groups. When asked as to why the learners were not working in groups, the teacher replied that it was not possible to group learners according to their learning ability.

The teacher took out some cards of flowers and animals and asked the learners of classes I and II to identify them. All the learners named the animals and flowers correctly in Tamil. The teacher gave the names in English and asked the learners to repeat after her.

This activity was followed by naming objects shown by the teacher. Here again the learners answered in Tamil and sometimes could not identify the objects shown to them.

Analysis of the classroom observation II (Based on COLT)

**Classroom activities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colt scheme</th>
<th>Observation by the researcher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity type</td>
<td>Learners were asked to repeat after the teacher (drill type)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant organization</td>
<td>Teacher interacted with the whole class, no group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Instructions in Tamil, no clear focus on one particular aspect of language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner Modality</td>
<td>Learners were asked to write, speak and listen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Classroom language**

**Colt scheme**
- Use of target language
- Sustained speech
- Reaction to code or message
- Discourse initiation
- Relative restriction of linguistic form

**Observation by the researcher**
- No use of the target language
- Discourse restricted to a single sentence or word, utterances by learners were ultra minimal
- Nil
- No opportunities for learners to initiate discourse
- Nil

**Discussion on Classroom observation II**

There were many similarities between classroom observations I and II. One of the main challenges confronting teachers in both the classes was grouping learners according to their learning ability.

The task of the teacher in this class was even more challenging compared with that of the earlier class, where the teacher had to manage learners from class I only.

The classroom observation showed that the teacher, like her counterpart in the other class, found it difficult to utilize class time effectively for teaching and learning and hence the regular interruptions by her to maintain discipline and order meant that neither she nor her learners knew what they were doing.
In some of the private, English medium schools in India, which follow the Montessori system, young learners follow mentoring. Even in these schools, children from four to seven years of age are placed in the same classroom. The idea behind placing learners of different age levels in the same class is that children would be less threatened and inhibited in such an atmosphere where school is seen as an extension of their homes. This system of mentoring is hugely successful in these schools largely because of the social milieu to which the children belong. In government schools, neither children nor a majority of the parents are aware of the need to aid successful learning as schools are seen as places where the child is being sent to for various reasons that lie outside the ambit of education. The wards suffer the most especially during the foundation stage of the learning process if, parents lack the right attitude to learning.

As pointed out by the teacher, the home environment of the learner population in the school was not conducive for learning or reinforcement of what was learnt in school. The learning ability and style of these learners cannot be compared with that of their counter parts in private, English medium schools, whose parents provide whatever support required, both in terms of men and material, and also evince keen interest in their academic performance.

The observation provided an opportunity for the researcher to understand some of the real constraints and challenges faced by the teacher. During the interaction, the teacher pointed out that it was highly impossible for her to manage learners from classes I–IV in the same classroom. While the teacher focused her attention on learners from one particular class, the other learners were seen playing or worse still not doing anything. The teacher tried different techniques to engage the learners. Initially she asked the learners to come and pick their cards and since there was lot of confusion
and noise, she instructed learners from classes I and II to come first and pick the cards. The cards were picked at random and the teacher could not check whether the learners had picked the appropriate card, which they were supposed to complete. The classroom situation was quite chaotic and resembled the previous class observed.

One of the requirements of the teacher in an ABL classroom is to maintain an achievement chart (refer Appendix 2), for each of the learner, which would give information on the number of lessons completed by a particular learner in each subject. The teacher is supposed to maintain charts for all the subjects. When asked of the specific method to monitor the progress of each learner, the teacher showed the achievement chart in which the names of learners were written and against each names there were tick marks in red and green colour. (The teacher told the researcher that red indicates the lesson not completed and green, the lesson completed by the learner). The teacher said that she is supposed to maintain this chart as it is to be shown to higher officials during inspection.

The teacher tried to engage the learners of classes I and II by showing flash cards of fruits and asked them to tell their names in English. As most of the learners named in Tamil, she gave their English equivalents. Even learners from class IV (though this particular teaching activity was not meant for them) too repeated after the teacher. The teacher did not make it clear for which group of learners this particular activity was intended. After asking a few questions, the learners were asked to read and write names of fruits in their notebooks. The teaching activity ended abruptly and the teacher started with another language exercise of asking, yes/no questions to learners.

A major problem faced by the teacher as in the previous class was grouping of learners, assigning a particular learning task, facilitating and monitoring learning. The advocates of the ABL methodology point out that in
a multi-grade classroom, the older child automatically becomes a guide and helps the younger learners complete their academic activities. However, the classroom observed presented a contrary picture. There were no groups and there was no mentoring by the older children, therefore it was quite challenging for the teacher to provide learning opportunities for learners of all ages. The teaching activity seemed to have little focus and the teacher was not very sure of the lesson to be taught to the learners.

Later in discussion with the researcher, the teacher pointed out that the methodology adopted to teach English was interesting but added that it was not very effective and appropriate for the learners in her class, since most of her learners were not yet ready nor did they have the sense of discipline to listen to instructions and carry them out. As most social researchers would point out, children coming from homes that are dysfunctional tend to be distracted and unwilling to listen to the teacher.

The purpose of the low-level board in an ABL classroom is to provide space for learners to write and also read the words and letters. However, nothing was written on the board in the class that the researcher observed. The teacher told the researcher that some enthusiastic learners write some words and also draw pictures on the black board and pointed out that it was practically not very feasible to allot specific space for all the learners in the class.

It should be pointed out that basic learner discipline was cited as one of the major challenges by this teacher, which she admitted was a reason for her inability to facilitate learning. This calls for a serious re-examination of the appropriateness of the methodology adopted to teach English in state-run schools ‘as much of what goes on within the classroom is influenced by factors within the wider educational institution, the wider educational environment and the wider society’ (Hollliday 1994).
4.3.3 Classroom Observation III

An English class in a municipal middle school in Ramanathapuram district, Manjalpattinam, was observed during the second phase of the field study in March 2009.

There were approximately thirty-five pupils, nineteen from class I and sixteen from class II. The learners were seated in a moderately sized classroom with the cards arranged in boxes. All the cards were neatly arranged in boxes and some of the sheets of paper in which learners had written and drawn alphabets and pictures were displayed on the walls of the classroom.

Prior to the classroom observation session, the researcher had an informal interaction with the teacher during which the teacher pointed out that the ABL methodology was quite successful and effective in engaging the learners in her school. She also said that the learners were enthusiastic and eagerly participated in all the group activities.

When the class started, the teacher asked the learners from class I to form a group. She then took the English ladder chart – class I (refer Appendix 3) and sat in front of the learners and told them in Tamil that they would learn the names of the logos given in the chart. Almost all the instructions were given in Tamil.

The teacher then pointed at the logo of a baby walker and said ‘baby walker’. The learners repeated the word after the teacher. This session lasted for about ten minutes. The researcher was informed by the teacher that the introduction of logos was the first session in any ABL classroom as the purpose of the session was to familiarize the learners with the names of logos. The teacher then pointed at the picture of a train and asked one of the boys to
tell the name of the logo. The child identified the picture and named it in English. The same pattern of teaching continued and almost all of them identified the logos without much difficulty.

The learners were asked by the teacher to pick the cards from the tray. All of them went near the boxes and picked their respective cards. Most of them had picked the cards with letters of the alphabet. The teacher then asked the learners to read the letters given in the cards.

This activity was for class I and those from class II were not involved. Some of them tried to participate in the introductory session conducted for class I learners. However, the teacher did not allow them to answer the questions and was very particular that the questions were answered only by learners of class I.

After completing this teaching activity, the teacher then asked the learners from class II to come to the front of the classroom. She told the researcher that the learners were quite familiar with the logos as they were in class II. She then asked one of the learners to pick a ‘baby walker’ card. The child came with the card which had ‘Greetings and Informal conversation’ printed on top of it. Questions like what’s your name? What’s your father’s name? and other questions relating to family were listed (refer Appendix 4). The teacher asked these questions to some of the select learners and they answered those questions without much difficulty.

The teacher then asked learners from both class I and II to listen to her and respond accordingly. She gave instructions and commands like ‘Touch your head’, ‘Touch your eyes’, ‘Take your note book’, ‘Raise your hand’, ‘Stand up’, ‘Sit down’ to all the learners. The teacher used gestures for some instructions to make the learners understand the meaning of the instruction. All the commands were carried out by most of the learners.
The teacher then asked ‘yes/no’ questions to all learners by using the objects available there. She showed them a pen and asked the learners what the object she held in her hand was E.g. This is a purse? (Teacher talk) The learners together replied ‘no’ and said it was a pen. The teacher repeated the task by holding up a pen, pencil, watch and a duster.

Analysis of the classroom observation III (Based on COLT Scheme).

**Classroom activities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colt scheme</th>
<th>Observation by the researcher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity type</td>
<td>Drill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant organization</td>
<td>Focus on function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner modality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Classroom language**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colt scheme</th>
<th>Observation by the researcher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of target language</td>
<td>Minimal, both by the teacher and the learner TL used for asking questions given in cards and giving instructions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustained speech</td>
<td>Discourse restricted to single sentences and words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaction to code or message</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse initiation</td>
<td>No opportunities for learners to initiate discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative restriction of linguistic form</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion on classroom observation III

The teaching pattern followed by the teacher indicated that she was prepared for the classroom session. There was constant interaction (in Tamil) between the teacher and the learners in the classroom.

The teacher of this class was very systematic and organized in her approach to teaching. The teacher was trying to help learners get familiarized with the logos, which was the first step in the process of teaching English through ABL. Though there were no groups working, the teacher somehow managed to get learners of a particular class listen and participate in the task meant for them.

Another striking feature of the classroom observed was that the teacher initially had learners only from class I. She completed the introduction of logos to them and later asked learners from class II to carry out the instructions/commands.

The first classroom activity was listening and responding appropriately to instructions and commands. In this classroom session, the teacher concentrated more on testing the listening ability of the learners. The interaction between the teacher and the learners followed a strict pattern or sequence. Most of the learners answered the questions without much difficulty.

The teacher in this class seemed successful in her teaching because to a large extent she used the conventional method of teaching (drill type) followed in most schools and not the play way method adopted in ABL. This is an indicator that perhaps Indian learners and teachers at all levels (consider CLT) are as yet unready for new, successful methodologies from the West because it goes against their perception of teaching and learning. This issue
must be seriously considered by ELT practitioners because they need to be more realistic and practical, since what works in one country may not be suitable for the other. As Holliday states,

. . . the designers of methodologies often come from very different backgrounds from the users, who are other people, from other societies and other cultures, who have different ways of doing things, thinking, deciding what is important in education, and of solving problems; and unless these ways are understood and acknowledged, methodologies are not going to work beyond the familiar domains in which they are created (Holliday 1994)

In her conversation with the researcher during the post-observation session, the teacher said that most of the learners were not willing to help other learners complete their lessons. She also expressed her difficulty in grouping learners, as almost all of them required her help to complete the task assigned to them.

4.3.4 Classroom Observation IV

This field study was conducted in a government-aided, elementary school in Paapagudi village in Sivagangai district in March 2009.

There were approximately forty five to fifty learners from class II seated in a small classroom. The size of the classroom did not allow easy movement for both the teacher and the learners. The cards meant for teaching all the subjects were kept in the cupboard. Other than the black board, there was a low level board meant for learners. Since the classrooms were partitioned with a flimsy material, the noise from the other classes distracted the attention of the learners in this class.
The teacher initially started the class with a listening activity in which the learners were given commands like ‘Raise your hands’ ‘Stand up’ and ‘Sit down’. The instructions were followed by most of the learners. All the instructions were given in Tamil.

The listening activity was followed by a question-answer session. The teacher asked some of the learners to give their names, names of their parents, brothers and sisters. The questions were comprehended and responded appropriately to by the learners. The teacher appreciated the learners for their correct response. The learners were then asked to say numbers from 1-10 and alphabets A-Z. The learners recited them together.

The oral activity was followed by a written activity. The learners were asked to write the alphabets on the black board. The teacher called six learners and asked them to write some of the letters of the alphabet. The learners were asked to write ‘A’, ‘C’, ‘G’ ‘O’ ‘W’ and ‘Z’. None of them had any difficulty in writing the letters. This writing activity was followed by a teaching session on names of fruits and their colours.

The teacher told the learners that they would be learning some names of fruits in the class that day. She then took the card in which ‘apple’ was printed with the name and showed it to the learners. She also used the black board to draw apple and asked the learners what it was. There was no response from them. She then said the name of the fruit and asked the learners to repeat it. The same exercise was repeated for three times. The teacher then asked the class ‘What are fruits?’ and then translated the question in Tamil. There was no response from the learners. Since there was no response, she translated the word ‘fruit’ in Tamil and asked them to repeat the word in Tamil and English. She then asked the learners the colour of the fruit and then said ‘Red’. The same pattern of teaching continued for teaching the names of some other fruits.
After teaching the word banana and the colour ‘yellow’, the teacher got a yellow colour bangle from a girl in the class and showed it all the learners. She asked the learners the colour of the bangle and almost all of them gave the right response. The teacher followed the same pattern of teaching for other fruits too and also tried to relate it with other things available in class of the same colour. She pointed at the picture of a mango and asked a learner to tell the name. The boy gave the correct response. The teacher then showed a picture of a leaf to the entire class and asked them to say the colour. Almost all the learners together said ‘green’. After teaching the names of fruits with their colours, the teacher showed the pictures of fruits at random and asked the learners to individually identify them. More than fifteen learners had an opportunity to tell the names of fruits. Almost all the learners gave the correct answers except one or two. The teacher appreciated the learners for their responses.

After teaching the names of fruits with their colours, the teacher then continued with the next task of language teaching. She told the learners that the next language function they would learn was to ask questions. (Where are they?) The learners were asked the meaning of the word ‘where’ by the teacher. Since there was no response from the learners, she explained the meaning in Tamil.

The teacher then drew three tables on the black board. In the picture of the first table, she drew three pictures of books and in the second table she drew a picture of a book, and inside the book drew two pictures of toys. In the picture of the third table, she drew pictures of books under the table. She then wrote the questions ‘Where are the books?’ ‘Where are my toys?’ on the board.

The teacher then read the questions and asked the learners to repeat after her. After this activity, she called out learners and asked them to read the
questions. All the five children read the questions. She pointed at the picture of books and said that they were on the table. Then she wrote on the board ‘The books are on the table’ and said the same. The learners repeated the answer three times after the teacher. The same pattern of teaching was followed for other questions too. The teacher said the answer in English and also translated it in Tamil to ensure her learners understood. After the teaching, she asked about ten learners to stand up and answer the questions individually and almost all of them answered in English. The teacher appreciated the learners for their correct response. The classroom session came to an end after the question/answer session.

Analysis of the classroom observation IV (Based on COLT Scheme)

**Classroom activities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colt scheme</th>
<th>Observation by the researcher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity type</td>
<td>Drill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant organization</td>
<td>No group work, teacher interacted with the whole class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Focus on function</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner Modality</td>
<td>Learners were asked to listen, write and speak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>Non-pedagogic (materials originally intended for nonschool purposes)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Classroom language

**Colt scheme**
- Use of target language
  - Fairly fluent (teacher)
  - Minimal (learner)
- Sustained speech
  - Discourse restricted to isolated words and single sentences
- Reaction to code or message
  - Nil
- Discourse initiation
  - No opportunities for learners to initiate discourse
- Relative restriction of linguistic form
  - Restricted use (the production or manipulation of one specific form, as in transformation or substitution drill)

**Observation by the researcher**

Discussion on Classroom Observation - IV

The classroom provided ample scope for the researcher to observe the teaching practices followed by the teacher and also learner behaviour. Since the beginning of the class, the teacher had a formal approach to the whole session. A teacher-centered approach was followed throughout the session.

Clear instructions were given by the teacher to the learners both in Tamil and at times in English. Most of the learners were given opportunities, both individually and as a group to respond appropriately. The teacher used the black board efficiently and also drew pictures of fruits. The teacher was creative and helped learners identify the colours of things rightly by showing them objects.
A fixed teaching pattern was followed by the teacher during the teaching session. The teacher first taught the names of fruits and then asked the learners to repeat them. In order to reinforce the items taught, the teacher continued with a question-answer session. The same pattern of teaching was observed while teaching prepositions to learners. The teacher followed the traditional chalk-and-talk method of teaching. She also used the cards and the objects to make the teaching/learning process more effective.

Most of the learners were more than just ‘passive spectators’. They were seen listening and simultaneously participating in the classroom activities.

As pointed out by the Headmaster and the teacher, no learner groups were formed in the class. They said it was not possible, as the size of the classroom would not permit activities that require group or pair work.

The teacher in this class ensured that she taught and checked to see if her learners had actually learnt by offering them opportunities to answer. The teacher reinforced by repeating and appreciating the correct responses.

Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) highlight the significance of the F-move in their analysis of classroom discourse. The F-move is the third move in the I-R-F exchange structure, where ‘I’ represents an initiating move, such as a question posed by the teacher, ‘R’ the response from an individual student and ‘F’ the ‘follow-up’ or ‘feedback’ move by the teacher.

The last teaching activity was to introduce and teach some of the common prepositions. The researcher observed a similar pattern of exchange between the teacher and the learner. The following interaction is analyzed below using I-R-F structure.
T: Where is the book? (I)
L: The book is on the table (R)
T: V. good. Yes, the book is on the table (F)

The teacher performed the initiating move by posing a question to the learner. The learner responded to the question and the teacher gave a follow-up comment, which provided the feedback to the response.

Cullen (2002) in his article ‘Supportive teacher talk: the importance of the F-move’ cites Nunan (1987) and Thornbury (1996) and states that the I-R-F exchange is criticized by the practitioners of (CLT) Communicative Language Teaching on the grounds that it fails to give learners the opportunities to ask questions themselves, nominate topics of interest to them and negotiate meaning. However, most of the teachers adopt I-R-F mode of instruction because it is perceived to be a powerful pedagogic device for transmitting and constructing knowledge.

In the class observed, the strategy adopted by the teacher for asking questions to learners was quite effective as it gave them the required practice in learning the language item taught. Most of the learners were attentive and responded to questions asked by the teacher. This classroom session was quite different from the other classrooms as the teacher demonstrated her ability to teach and reinforce names of words and also the function words such as prepositions, though she did not use the labels. This practice of getting learners to repeat and thereby ensuring learning would be successful since the learners in these schools, without the opportunity to use the language outside of the class are hugely benefited by this exercise. For learners from ‘language-acquisition rich environment’ this kind of an activity would mean merely reinforcing, whereas for learners from ‘language-acquisition poor environment’ it would mean two things- learning and reinforcing. This class,
like the previous one, helps to reiterate and re-emphasize the point that the individual, the social and the cultural environment contribute significantly in the learning process.

Allwright and Bailey (1991) discuss the nature of questions asked by learners during a classroom interaction. Display questions are used to enable the learners’ display their knowledge while referential questions, or ‘true information questions’ are those, which refer to actual information sought by the questioner. During the classroom session, the teacher significantly used display questions and sometimes also referential questions to learners. Unlike the other classrooms, where there was little opportunity provided to the learner to communicate in the target language or to hear themselves use it, this classroom provided learning and interaction opportunities for learners.

4.3.5 Classroom Observation: Findings

- There was clearly no grouping of learners in the classes observed. In classrooms, where there were groups, it was quite apparent that they were not formed according to the guidelines given in the ABL teacher’s manual. Most of the learners were not sure of their group members as some of them were seen in different groups at different points of time. The groups were not cohesive units as the learners merely sat next to each other in a circle but did not interact with the other. Since the groups lacked organization, there was absolutely no sign of group learning or peer learning, which indicated that the objectives of the ABL methodology could not be fully achieved. This is another powerful indicator that the Indian learners are still not used to the idea of collaborative learning.
Teaching activities seem to have little or no focus in some of the classes observed. In the first two classes, the teachers abandoned an activity and started another to maintain some discipline in the classroom. There was little or no planning of the lessons that were to be taught to the learners. Moreover, the time spent on effective teaching and learning was minimal and the activities were meant only to bring some sort of discipline in the classroom.

The use of English by teachers was minimal. English was used by teachers for teaching names of animals, birds and vegetables etc. It was not used by the teacher for interacting with the learners. Similarly, the use of English was minimal by the learners as almost all of them were seen interacting with the teacher and their friends in Tamil.

In two classes observed, the teachers were successful in helping learners learn a particular language item or a particular language function because they wisely combined ABL with the conventional teaching methodologies. This particular finding based on the class observation has to be considered in the correct perspective because, it has a lot of significance for the teaching of English in India. Going back to the Grammar-translation method or the drill type does not mean regressive but rather it means exploiting successfully the teaching methodologies that best suit the teaching/learning context.

The following section will discuss the questionnaire administered to teachers for eliciting their views on teaching and learning of English in classes I and II by using the ABL methodology.
4.4 FORMAT OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

A questionnaire, with nineteen questions, was administered to 114 teachers working in corporation and government-aided schools in urban (Chennai) and 108 teachers working in panchayat/municipal schools located in rural areas. (Refer appendix 5 -Teacher Questionnaire)

The questionnaire was meant to obtain information on the appropriateness of the teaching of English as a second language to young learners following the ABL methodology. The format of the questionnaire was the ‘closed-form’ or the ‘restricted type’, with provision for marking ‘yes’ or ‘no’, a short response, or ticking an item from a list of suggested responses. However, provision was also made for unanticipated responses, by including the option of ‘any other reason’. The closed-form type questionnaire was chosen, as it is easy to fill out and does not require much time. It also keeps the respondent on the subject and is objective. The data obtained in this format is easy to tabulate and analyze. The questionnaire was planned with a view to presenting the questions in a logical order, proceeding from general to more specific responses. This order is to help the respondent organize his/her own thinking, so that the answers are as far as possible, logical and objective. Some of the questions listed out in the questionnaire are given below:

a. The teaching of English is introduced at the first standard level. Do you think this is a right policy?
   Yes/No

b. Have you received adequate training to teach English through ABL?
   Yes/No

c. Can you modify the methodology according to the needs of your classroom?
   (a) Yes (b) No (c) To some extent (d) To a large extent
Questions 1-3 were framed to elicit the opinion of teachers of the introduction of English at the first standard level (Class I). Questions 4-6 were included to obtain information on the allocation of time for teaching English to young learners and their level of motivation to learn this language. The opinion of teachers on the training sessions conducted was elicited by questions 7-9. Questions 10-15 were framed to elicit the views of teachers on various aspects of the ABL methodology adopted to teach English as a second language to young learners in state run schools in Tamil Nadu. Questions 16-18 were framed to obtain information on the background of learners and the interest evinced by their parents in the academic performance of their children. Question 19 was listed to obtain information on the frequency of the parent-teacher meetings conducted in schools.

The following section presents and analyses the data obtained from the teachers’ questionnaire. The data have been presented in the form of a pie chart for better analysis and interpretation.

1. The teaching of English is introduced at the first standard level. Do you think this is a right policy?

Yes/No

![Pie Charts](a) (b)

Figure 4.1 Teachers’ response to question 1
The above pie charts, as given in Figure 4.1, present the opinion of teachers of the introduction of English to class I learners in state-run schools. 96% of the teachers in urban areas felt that the introduction of English was a right decision. There was a marginal increase of 1% in the number of teachers working in rural areas who expressed similar opinion.

2. If ‘Yes’ is it because:

   a. it is necessary to teach English from an early age
   b. learners find it easy to pick up English at an early age
   c. the learning of English provides young learners a better foundation to join institutions of higher education.
   d. all the above

![URBAN Pie Chart](a)

![RURAL Pie Chart](b)

**Figure 4.2 Teachers’ response to question 2**

As given in Figure 4.2, of the 109 teachers in urban schools, 76 of them (70%) felt that the introduction would benefit young learners for all the three reasons listed in the questionnaire. A similar response was obtained from teachers working in schools located in rural areas. Out of 105 teachers in rural schools, 77 (73%) opined that the introduction of English to learners from class I was the right policy because of all the three reasons. 19 teachers in urban and 16 in rural schools felt that the introduction would provide young learners a better foundation for higher studies. As the pie chart indicates, the other two reasons
were chosen by a few teachers however, there was no significant difference in the percentage of response given by teachers in urban and rural areas.

3. If ‘No’ is it because:
   a. it would be difficult for young learners to learn a second language at this stage.
   b. it will negatively influence the learning of the mother tongue.
   c. learners will not be interested in learning English at this level.
   d. all the above.

Only five teachers in urban areas felt that the introduction of English was not beneficial. Three teachers felt that it would be difficult for young learners to learn a second language very early, whereas two of them felt that it would negatively influence the learning of the mother tongue.

Only three teachers in rural schools felt that the teaching of English at class I was not beneficial and felt that it would be difficult for them to learn a second language at this level. Since the data obtained was very less, it was felt unnecessary to present it in the form of a pie chart.

4. How many hours per week are allotted for teaching of English?

The teachers’ response was that five-six hours were allotted for teaching of English. Since this is a factual question, there is no pictorial representation.

5. Is the time for the teaching of English adequate?

Yes/No
As given in Figure 4.3, a majority of the teachers, both in urban and rural areas, felt that the allocation of time for the teaching of English was adequate. However, a marginal difference in the response of teachers is observed as 96% of teachers in rural schools felt the time allotted was adequate, whereas 86% of teachers in urban areas expressed similar opinion.

6. Are your learners interested in learning English?
   Yes/No

The above pie charts, as given in Figure 4.4, provide information on the level of motivation of learners in urban and rural schools as expressed by the teachers. The level of motivation of pupils in rural areas is marginally higher than that of their counterparts in urban areas as 81 (75%) teachers in
rural schools felt that the learners in their classes were motivated to learn English while 76 (67%) teachers in urban schools felt the same.

7. Have you received adequate training to teach English through Activity Based Learning? (ABL)

Yes/No

![Pie chart for urban area](image)

![Pie chart for rural area](image)

**Figure 4.5 Teachers’ response to question 7**

As given in Figure 4.5, there is no significant difference in the opinion expressed by teachers working in schools located in urban and rural areas. 96% of teachers in urban areas felt that adequate training was given to them to teach English using Activity Based Learning (ABL) methodology. 97% of teachers in rural areas expressed a similar opinion and there is a marginal increase of 1% in the number of teachers from rural areas who expressed a similar opinion.

8. How many hours of training programme do you undergo in a year?

The response varied from 27-31 in both urban and rural areas. As the data was clear and direct, a pictorial representation is not required.

9. How would you rate the training sessions?

a. Excellent b. Good c. satisfactory d. some what useful
The above pie charts, as given in Figure 4.6, present the opinion of teachers in urban and rural schools about the effectiveness of the teacher training programmes conducted by the training institutes. Compared with teachers in the rural schools, their counterparts in urban areas felt that the training was effective as the percentage is almost twice than that of teachers who expressed a similar opinion in rural areas. 43% of teachers in urban areas felt the training was effective, while only 22% of teachers in rural areas felt the same. It should be observed that teachers in rural areas are satisfied with the training programmes since 46% of the teachers have chosen option 'c'.

10. Do you think teaching/learning English through Activity Based Learning (ABL) is effective?
Yes / No / To some extent
The pie charts, as given in Figure 4.7, present the opinion of teachers in both urban and rural areas about the efficacy of teaching and learning of English using ABL. 48% of teachers in rural areas opined that teaching English through ABL is not effective and a similar percentage (43%) of teachers in urban areas expressed the same opinion. More than 45% of the total number of teachers (both urban and rural) felt that the method was not effective for teaching English. However, there is no significant difference in the percentage of teachers from both areas who are of the opinion that ABL methodology is effective to an extent. 27% of teachers in urban schools felt that the method is effective, while only 20% of teachers in rural schools felt the same.

11. If ‘Yes’ is it because,
   a. it provides an opportunity for teachers to have a one-to-one interaction with learners
   b. it encourages group work and peer learning
   c. it makes teaching/learning joyful and interesting
   d. learners learn at a faster pace

   (other reasons, please specify) (choose more than one option, if needed)

**Figure 4.8 Teachers’ response to question 11**
In Figure 4.8, the opinion of teachers (who have chosen more than one option) has been denoted in the pie chart as X, Y, Z. In the pie chart that presents the opinion of teachers in urban schools, options ‘a’ and ‘d’ remain the same, as some respondents chose only that option. Teachers who have chosen both options ‘a’ and ‘b’ have been represented as X, ‘a’ and ‘c’ have been represented as Y, and options ‘b’ and ‘d’ have been represented as Z.

All the teachers working in rural schools who responded with a ‘Yes’ to the question have chosen more than one option. Teachers who have chosen options ‘a’ and ‘b’ have been represented as X, options ‘b’ and ‘c’ have been represented as Y, and options ‘a’ and ‘c’ have been represented as Z.

Of the 31 teachers in urban areas who responded with a ‘Yes’ to question 10, five (16%) of them were of the opinion that ABL provides an opportunity for one-to-one interaction and the same number of teachers opined that it encourages group work, peer learning and also helps pupil learn at a faster pace. No significant difference was observed in the percentage of teachers (32%) who felt that it provides an opportunity for teacher-learner interaction, peer learning and that of teachers (26%) who have chosen a different reason, that ABL makes teaching/learning a joyful and interesting experience. Three respondents (10%) felt that ABL allows learners to learn at a faster pace.

Of the 22 teachers in rural areas who responded with a ‘Yes’, 11 (50%) of them were of the opinion that ABL provides opportunities for teacher-learner interaction and also encourages group work and peer learning. However, there is no significant difference in the percentage of teachers who opined that the methodology encourages group work, peer learning and that of
teachers who were of the opinion that it makes teaching/learning joyful and interesting.

12. If ‘No’, is it because,
   a. it distracts the attention of pupils
   b. learners tend to easily forget what they have learnt
   c. group work and peer learning never take place
      (other reasons, please specify)

![Pie Chart](image)

**Figure 4.9 Teachers’ response to question 12**

Description of the pie chart: (URBAN) No. of teachers responded ‘No’ - 49

In Figure 4.9, the opinion of teachers (who have chosen more than one option) has been presented as X and Y. In the pie chart that presents the opinion of teachers in urban areas, option ‘b’ remains the same, as 37 respondents have chosen only that response. The opinion of teachers who have chosen both options ‘a’ and ‘b’ has been represented as X, and ‘b’ and ‘c’ has been represented as Y.
In the pie chart that presents the opinion of teachers in rural areas, option ‘b’ remains the same, as 42 respondents have chosen only that response. The opinion of teachers who have chosen both options ‘a’ and ‘b’ has been represented by X, and ‘b’ and ‘c’ has been represented as Y.

Of the 49 teachers in urban areas who have responded with a ‘No’ to question 10, 37 (76%) respondents felt that learners tend to forget the language items learnt through ABL. 14% of the teachers were of the opinion that learners tend to forget whatever is learnt and have also expressed the opinion that group work and peer learning never take place in the classroom. 10% of the respondents felt that learners get distracted very easily and also tend to forget whatever is learnt through this method. All the respondents have chosen option ‘b’ as a reason for their response to question 10.

Of the 51 teachers in rural areas who have responded with a ‘No’, 42 (82%) respondents felt that pupils tend to forget most of the language items learnt through ABL methodology. 6 (12%) of them felt the same combined with another reason that group work and peer learning never take place in English classes. 3(6%) of them felt that the learners tend to forget different aspects of language and also pointed out that they get distracted very easily. Both urban and rural teachers have chosen option ‘b’ as a reason for their response to question 10.
13. As a teacher do you face difficulties in fully adopting ABL methodology in your classroom?

Yes/No

![Pie charts showing teacher response to question 13](a) Urban: 91 (80%) Yes, 23 (20%) No. (b) Rural: 94 (87%) Yes, 14 (13%) No.

**Figure 4.10 Teachers’ response to question 13**

The pie charts, as given in Figure 4.10, present the opinion of teachers about the difficulties faced by them in fully adopting ABL methodology in their classrooms for teaching English. Out of the 114 respondents in urban areas, 91 (80%) expressed difficulties in adopting the methodology and out of the 108 respondents in rural areas, 94 (87%) felt that they have difficulties in adopting the methodology in their English classes. The percentage indicates that teachers in both urban and rural areas experience difficulties in adopting ABL methodology in the English classes.

14. If ‘Yes’, then the difficulties are to do with,

a. grouping learners according to their ability

b. maintaining classroom discipline

c. lack of adequate infrastructure

(please specify other reasons)
Figure 4.11 Teachers’ response to question 14

Description of the pie chart: (URBAN) No. of teachers responded ‘Yes’- 91

In Figure 4.11, the opinion of teachers (who have chosen more than one option) has been represented as X and Y. In the pie chart, ‘a’ has been chosen as the only reason by 21 respondents and ‘c’ by 13 respondents. The opinion of teachers, who have chosen both options ‘a’ and ‘b’ has been represented as X, and ‘a’ and ‘c’ has been represented as Y.

Description of the pie chart: (RURAL) No. of teachers responded ‘Yes’- 94

The opinion of teachers, who have chosen more than one option, has been represented as X, Y and Z. In the pie chart, ‘a’ has been chosen as the only reason by 24 respondents and ‘c’ has been chosen by 7 respondents. The opinion of teachers who have chosen options ‘a’ and ‘b’, ‘a’ and ‘c’, ‘b’ and ‘c’ have been represented as X, Y and Z.

Of the 91 teachers in urban schools who responded with a ‘yes’, 31(34%) expressed difficulty in grouping learners according to their ability and also felt that the infrastructure of the school was not conducive for adopting ABL methodology for teaching English to pupils. 21 teachers (23%) expressed difficulty in grouping learners, while 26(29%) felt that the difficulty was in grouping learners and also maintaining class room discipline.
13 (14%) teachers felt lack of adequate infrastructure as the only reason that acts as a stumbling block in fully adopting the ABL methodology.

Of the 94 teachers in rural schools who responded with a ‘yes’, 42(44%) expressed difficulty in grouping learners according to their ability and also lack of adequate infrastructure as impediments in fully adopting the ABL methodology. 24(26%) teachers felt that grouping learners as the only difficulty, while 12(13%) cited grouping learners and maintaining classroom discipline as reasons that impeded the effective implementation of the ABL methodology. 9 (10%) of them felt infrastructure and classroom discipline as reasons that posed difficulties in adopting the methodology. Of all the reasons, grouping learners and lack of infrastructure have been chosen almost by all teachers, both from urban and rural areas.

15. Can you modify the methodology according to the needs of your classroom?

a. yes
b. no
c. to some extent
d. to a large extent

Figure 4.12 Teachers’ response to question 15
The pie charts, as given in Figure 4.12, present the opinion of teachers of the flexibility in modifying the methodology according to the needs of their classroom. Teachers in both urban and rural areas felt that they could not modify the methodology as they were expected to follow ABL for teaching English. Out of the 114 teachers in urban areas, 68 (60%) teachers chose ‘no’ as the option and the same response was given by 71 (66%) teachers in rural areas. 21 (18%) teachers in urban and 23 (21%) in rural areas felt that they could modify the methodology to some extent. 16 teachers (14%) in urban and 9 (8%) in rural areas felt that they could modify the methodology while 9 (8%) teachers in urban areas and 5 (5%) in rural areas were of the opinion that they could modify the methodology to a large extent.

16. Do you think the home environment plays a crucial role in the academic performance of pupils?

a. Yes

b. No

c. To some extent

d. To a large extent

As given in Figure 4.13, teachers both in urban and rural areas felt that the home environment had a crucial role to play in the academic success
of learners. Of the 114 responses from teachers in urban schools, 110 (96\%) opined that the home environment had a significant influence on the academic performance of learners. A similar response was obtained from their counterparts in rural areas since 106 responses clearly indicated the influence of home background on the success of learners in schools.

17. The parents of majority of the learners in your class belong to

a. Low-income group

b. Middle-income group

c. High-income group

![Figure 4.14 Teachers’ response to question 17](image)

As given in Figure 4.14, most of the learners enrolled in both urban and rural areas belong the low-income group, as it was quite apparent from the response obtained by the teachers. 89\% of the teachers in urban schools pointed out that the learners in their classes belong to low-income group, and similarly 96\% of the teachers in rural schools pointed out the same. Since there was no response for option ‘c’, there is no representation in the chart.
18. Do parents show interest in their child’s academic performance?

Yes/No

![Pie chart showing urban and rural responses to the question on parent interest in academic performance.](image)

(a) (b)

Figure 4.15 Teachers’ response to question 18

The pie charts, as given in Figure 4.15, present the opinion of teachers of the interest evinced by parents in the academic performance of their children. The data points out that most of the parents, both in urban and rural areas are not very much interested in the academic activities of their children. 85% of the teachers in urban schools felt that parents are not interested to know the academic performance of their children in school. However, there is a decrease in the percentage of teachers in rural areas who expressed the same opinion. 15% of the teachers in urban areas expressed that parents were involved in the academic performance of their children and 26% of teachers employed in rural schools expressed a similar opinion.

19. How often are the parent-teachers meetings held in your school?

a. once a month

b. once in three months

c. once in six months
The data presented in the pie chart, as given in Figure 4.16, indicate that in both urban and rural areas, parent-teachers meetings are held every month.

4.4.1 Teacher Questionnaire: Findings

- Young learners in state-run schools are motivated to learn English as pointed out by a majority of the teachers.

- According to the responses given, teaching English using ABL was not found to be very effective by a majority of the teachers. One of the major reasons pointed out by them was the difficulty in grouping learners according to their language ability. The finding corroborates with the observation made by the researcher. It may be recalled that in some of the schools, there were no groups, and even in schools where there were groups, it was very clear that they were not formed based on the guidelines given in the teacher’s manual.

- Lack of adequate infrastructure as being a major impediment for effective implementation of the ABL methodology, specifically in government-aided schools.

- The methodology could not be modified by the teachers according to the individual needs of the classroom taking into
consideration their specific constraints and needs. However, some teachers modified the methodology to suit the needs of their classroom. This was quite obvious during one of the classroom observation sessions, where, the teacher used the cards for teaching the names of fruits and colours, though in the traditional chalk-and-talk method.

- Learners find it difficult to retain whatever that was learnt in the previous classes because of the lack of opportunity to use English outside of class.

One of the most significant conclusions from the teachers’ questionnaire was that the methodology was not found to be very effective by teachers in both urban and rural areas. Moreover, it was apparent from the data provided by the teachers that majority of the learners were from the most socio-economically disadvantaged background and hence it was difficult to implement ABL successfully in the classroom. The data obtained through questionnaires and classroom observation point out the inevitable link between the methodology and the social and cultural background of learners.

Another significant finding was that the infrastructure facilities were not adequate in some of the government- run and government-aided schools in rural areas for fully implementing the ABL methodology. During the field visit, it was observed that space was a major constraint in government-aided schools. The description by West (1960) vividly captures the physical condition of many Indian schools. He writes,

By “unfavourable circumstances” we mean a class consisting of over 30 pupils (more usually 40 or even 50), congregated on benches (not sitting at individual or dual desks), accommodated in an unsuitably shaped room, ill-graded, with a teacher who perhaps does not speak English very well or very fluently, working in a hot climate (West 1960)
The number of learners in government-aided schools was comparatively higher than that of learners in corporation/municipal schools as parents preferred aided schools to fully government-run schools. The most obvious reason pointed out by the teachers and the Head teachers (HM) of aided-schools was that the quality of education was significantly better in most of the government aided-schools. Another reason for the preference of aided-schools by parents was the existence of a private management that monitors the performance of learners and to an extent that of the teachers.

The classroom observation session and administration of questionnaires to teachers were followed by a listening and speaking skill test to learners of classes I and II. The tests were conducted a week after the classroom observation sessions. The questions were largely based on the course material (cards) used for teaching ESL to young learners. The skills based activities for learners in classes I and II were given in the teacher’s manual (Appendix VI- List of activities, ABL Teacher’s manual).

4.5 SELECTION OF LEARNERS

The researcher adopted a ‘random sampling’ method for selecting the learners from classes I and II for the study. This method was adopted to ensure that learners with different levels of language proficiency were included in the testing so that the data obtained would be valid and reliable. However, in two government-aided schools, one in urban and another in rural areas, the researcher was asked to administer the test in classes chosen by the teachers.

A discussion on the individual background of the learners was felt unnecessary as almost all the learners shared a similar socio-economic background. And again, a detailed discussion on the kind of learners in these schools has been presented in chapter 3.
4.5.1 The Speaking Test

Since one of the main objectives of the research was to study the quantum of language learnt by the learners to carry out basic communicative functions by comprehending (listening) and responding (speaking) appropriately to instructions and questions in English, it was decided to administer a listening and speaking skill test to the learners in all the four schools, where the classroom observation was conducted.

The test was designed, keeping in view the content taught and learnt by adopting the ABL methodology. The content that was taught during the classes observed by the researcher was also partially recalled in the test for reasons of familiarity and ease. As mentioned initially, the researcher visited each of the schools three times prior to the field study. During the second and the third visit, the researcher interacted with the teachers and learners, which helped the learners to approach the researcher in a manner that was friendly and free from fear. With the entire group present, casual conversations were held with the individual learners and the oral test was informally conducted.

The word ‘test’ was not used anywhere during the field study conducted with the learners. They were encouraged to give their answers in Tamil if they did not know the answer in English. The responses were audio taped in the presence of all the learners as it was felt that it would provide a non-threatening atmosphere for learners to interact with the researcher. It was for the same reason that the oral test was administered first to learners followed by the listening test.

The design of the speaking and listening skill test administered to the learners and the criteria followed to assess their ability to comprehend and respond to commands, instructions and questions in English are presented in
the following section. The results and the analysis of the listening and speaking skills tests are also presented in this section.

**Design of the speaking skills questions**

Two different types of questions were asked to pupils to test their ability to orally respond to questions asked in English. The questions were labeled as type I and type II (A) and (B) to help the researcher analyze learner responses better.

**Description of Type I questions**

Type I questions were those that were designed to get responses to personal questions asking them to tell the names of parents, brothers/sisters teachers, friends etc., These questions were asked to all the learners from classes I and II. Also questions relating to names of animals, fruits, vegetables, colours, the favourite pass time activities of the learners and the names of heroes whom they like were listed under the same category. However, all the questions were not asked to all the learners and also a ‘fixed sequence’ was not followed while asking the questions since the researcher had to change the order of the questions based on the response from the learner. Some of type I questions asked to learners are listed below. (Refer appendix 7 for all the questions)

What is your name?

What is your father’s name?

What is your mother’s name?

Do you have brothers or sisters?

Tell me his/her/their names

What is your teacher’s name?
Description of Type II questions

Type II questions were classified as Type II (A) and Type II (B). Pictures with names of animals, birds, vehicles, and general household things were used to assess learners on their ability to identify and tell their names in English. (Refer Appendix 8 for pictures) The picture-identification test was administered to learners in class I. These questions were labeled type II (A) for analyzing the responses of learners.

Pictures in which people perform actions were used to test the ability of the learners to identify and tell some of the action words in English with the required sentence construction. These questions were labeled type II (B) and were asked to learners in class II. A picture of a boy running was shown to learners and a question ‘What is the boy doing?’ was asked. (Refer appendix 9 for pictures). The learners were expected to say ‘The boy is running’ or just ‘running’ was accepted as being correct. As mentioned earlier, responses in Tamil were not totally discouraged; however, they were encouraged to say the action words in English, with the help of pictures and other clues.

4.6 ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

The assessment criteria framed by Kiely and Rea-Dickins (2005) for evaluating the oral communicative performance of young learners learning a Foreign Language were employed to assess the oral communicative performance of learners. However, some parameters were included by the researcher (for picture-based test) to assess the performance of pupils involved in the study. The following table presents the criteria employed for evaluating the oral ability of pupils in Type I questions. (Refer Appendix 10-Assessment criteria for the communicative test framed by Kiley and Dickins 2005). The following Table 4.2 presents the criteria for evaluating the oral communicative performance of learners in Type I questions.
Table 4.2  Criteria for evaluating the performance of learners (Type I questions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does not understand the question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understands the question with clues/prompting and responds in TL/MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responds in MT to a question asked in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responds in TL to a question after translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responds in MT after translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives linguistically acceptable response but the actual information is incorrect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives communicatively adequate but linguistically incorrect response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives communicatively adequate, linguistically correct response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeats the word in question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responds through gestures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeats the question</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The criteria for evaluating the performance of learners in Type II (A) questions in the picture identification task were modified by the researcher. The following Table 4.3 presents the criteria employed for evaluating their performance.

Table 4.3  Criteria for evaluating the performance of learners (Type II A questions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Can identify and tell the name of the picture in the TL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can identify and tell the name of the picture in TL with clues/prompting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can identify and tell the name of the picture in MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The criteria employed for evaluating the performance of pupils in Type I questions were partly retained and some modified by the researcher for evaluating the performance of pupils in Type II (B) questions, which require
the pupils to say the action being performed by the boy/girl in the picture. The following Table 4.4 presents the evaluation scheme employed.

**Table 4.4 Criteria for evaluating the performance of learners (Type II B questions)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicatively adequate and linguistically correct response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicatively adequate but linguistically incorrect response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responds in MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not respond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tells the name of the object/person in the picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tells the object/person in English but the action word in MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coins a new word/usage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.6.1 **Administration of the Test**

All the tests were conducted in classrooms with all the learners present. There were some distractions as the noise level by the learners was high sometimes. The teachers were very supportive in all the classes and managed to control the noise to some extent which enabled the researcher administer the test without much difficulty.

It was possible to conduct the tests during the fixed class hours. The teachers helped the researcher by permitting the learners from the regular classes so that they could take the tests. The tests were conducted between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. However, within this broad stretch of time, care was taken to give the tests in the mornings, usually between ten and eleven thirty. This, it was felt, would enable the learners to attempt the test during their most alert hours.

The qualitative and quantitative analysis of the performance of learners (Class I and II) in speaking skills test have been given in Appendix 13.
4.7 AN INTERPRETATION OF THE (SPEAKING SKILLS TEST) PERFORMANCE OF CLASS I LEARNERS

The responses of some of the learners in class I indicated their ability to understand and respond to questions related to their names, names of their parents, teacher and school. The questions were very basic and the learners were expected to respond to these questions without much difficulty. (In all the interactions, R denotes the questions asked by the researcher and L denotes the response given by the learner)

R: What is your name?
L: silence
R: Ok, What is your name?
L: silence

The above interaction between the researcher (R) and a learner (L) points out the inability of the child to understand the question and hence could not respond to it appropriately.

R: What is your father’s name?
L: Kaushika

Some of the learners guessed the meaning of the question with the help of words like ‘What’ and ‘name’, though the response was incorrect as in the interaction given above. The first question asked to her was ‘What is your father’s name?’ She anticipated the first question to be ‘What is your name?’ and accordingly gave the response ‘Kaushika’. This indicates two things, one that the child did not listen properly and two that she interpreted ‘What’ and ‘name’ quickly to give her name.
R : Ok, what is your teacher’s name?
L : silence
R : What is your school name?
L : silence
R : Do you watch TV?
L : silence
R : Who is your friend in this class?
L : Friend

The interaction given above points out that some of the learners could not tell the names of their parents, teacher or school and had difficulty in comprehending the questions asked to them. There was no response from these learners and some of them just repeated the word in question, which indicated lack of comprehension. During the oral interaction, the child displayed very limited ability to understand the questions asked in English. Though four questions were asked, none of them evoked a response from the learner and the repetition of the word ‘friend’ indicates lack of comprehension of the meaning of the word ‘friend’.

Similar responses were obtained from another child for words like ‘animals’ and ‘vegetables’.

R : Ok, tell me some animals…names of animals
L : Mm?
R : Animals… animals
L : silence
R : Tamizhla sollunga… animals (Tell me in Tamil…animals)
L : Animals
The researcher encouraged the child to respond in Tamil and even translated the structure of the question but not the word ‘animals’. The child repeated the word ‘animals’, an indication that he could not understand the meaning of the word.

The following interaction points out that the learners followed a fixed pattern in answering the questions, though the responses seem communicatively adequate. When asked her mother’s name, the child told the name of her teacher despite the researcher’s attempt to provide her with another chance to give the correct response. There were instances in which the interactions pointed out that the responses were a result of a recall or a mechanical way of answering. However, it should be pointed out that in the ABL methodology, the logo ‘baby walker’ (Greetings and Informal Conversation’ in pairs- refer Appendix 4) expects learners to have learnt simple ways of greeting people and participating in informal conversations and answering simple questions.

R : What is your name?

L8 : My name is V. Gomathi.

R : What is your father’s name…? Gomathi.

L8 : My father name is Venkatesan.

R : Ok, What is your mother’s name?

L8 : My mother name is R.Senthi Rajan (Teacher’s name)

R : Mm?

L8 : R.Senthil Rajan.

The responses from most children to the question ‘What is your father doing?’ were not satisfactory. Most of the learners could not understand the word ‘doing’ and could not respond even with the help of clues and
prompts given by the researcher. But according to the content, learners in class I should have acquired the ability to answer questions ‘What’s your father? What’s your mother? (Refer appendix 4). The following interaction points out the ability of the learners to comprehend the question only after translation. However, the response to the question was not in English.

R : What is your father doing?
L : Mother
R : Ok, where is your father working?
L : silence
R : Is your father working in office… or what is your father doing? (Teacher translates the question in Tamil)
P : engappa vandikku poraaru (Tamil) (coolie/casual labourer)

It is interesting to note that the word ‘TV’ was quite familiar to learners as it evoked communicatively adequate responses from them. For children from poor and disadvantaged homes, the TV symbolizes the last word in luxury and without having the money to spare for entertainment, the television is the only source of entertainment making them forget their otherwise sad lives. The question ‘Do you watch TV?’ provoked an enthusiastic response from learners. Though most of the responses were linguistically not correct or single word responses, the answers were communicatively appropriate. The following exchanges between the researcher and a learner illustrate the point.

R : Ok. Do you watch TV?
L : Sun TV (a private channel)
R : What programmes you watch on sun TV?
L : Vijay
Though the word TV was familiar, a related word ‘programmes’ was not known to most of the learners. In the above interaction, the child gives the name of a popular hero (Vijay) in Tamil Nadu, a response which signifies that the child likes to watch movies of Vijay. The response is valued for its communicative function. The following interaction points out that inability of the child to understand the meaning of the word ‘programmes’ despite the researcher repeating it a number of times.

R : Ok, do you watch TV?
L : Silence
R : Yes or no
L : Yes or no
R : Ok, which programme you watch?
L : Silence
R : What programmes you like? Cartoons or movies? What programmes you like?
P : Silence

The oral responses obtained from learners on questions relating to names of animals, birds, vegetables and colours were not satisfactory. Of the fifteen learners, eight learners could not tell the names of animals, birds, vegetables and colours even in Tamil. Four learners displayed the ability to give the names, though in Tamil, while three others gave one or two responses in English for questions on vegetables and animals. However, there were no responses for the question on birds.

The ABL methodology states that learners in class I should be given speaking opportunities to practice in pairs, names of animals, birds,
with their numbers and colours. (Refer Appendix 11A) Individual cards with pictures are made available to teachers to facilitate learning.

The following interaction was significant as the child says that he knows only God and nothing else in Tamil. His inability to understand the meaning of words ‘birds’ and ‘animals’ was apparent by his ‘silence’ to question on names of birds and an irrelevant response to question on names of animals.

R : Tell me some names of birds…
L : silence
R : Tell me some names of animals…
L : God than theriyum… God mattum than theriyum
    (Tamil) (I know only God)

As mentioned earlier, some learners had no difficulty in giving the names of animals in Tamil. The following interaction indicates that the learner has understood the meaning of the word ‘animal’ but could not tell their names in English. The learner was totally unfamiliar with the question structure but managed to say ‘cat’ in English.

R : Ok, have you seen animals?
L6 : singam, puli, yaanai, (Tamil) cat
R : Have you seen a cat?
L6 : Cat

The following interaction with a learner shows that he gave the names of animals and birds without waiting to listen to the question. (In some schools, the researcher was asked to come on a specific date, obviously to
coach the students). The response indicates that the learner, irrespective of the question asked, lists out the names of animals in English. However, the intervention of the teacher evoked responses only in Tamil. The learner was quite confused with the names of birds and vegetables, an indication that the learners were to an extent prepared for the test.

R : Ok, tell me some names of birds…

L12 : Elephant, tiger…tiger…

(teacher intervenes and says birds)

R : purah, kagam, kili, maram kothi (Tamil) (Dove, crow, parrot, wood pecker)

(teacher says in Tamil ‘Englishla sollu’ (Tell in English)

L12 : English theriyaadhu (Tamil) (Don’t know English)

R : Tell me one name in English…any one name…

L12 : Tomato, onion, eagle, peacock…theriyaadhu… (Tamil)

(Don’t know)

Since the responses were similar for colours and vegetables, it was felt unnecessary to discuss them individually. Most of the learners understood the meaning of the word ‘colour’ but only two learners gave the answers in English. The question ‘what is the colour of a parrot’ evoked a response ‘pachai’ (Tamil) (Green) from a learner and there was no response to the question ‘What is the colour of sky?’ from all the learners.

The response of learners in the picture-identification test provides a similar picture of the ability of the learners in identifying the names of animals, birds, vegetables, vehicles and general house hold things in English. Most of the learners displayed the ability to tell the names in Tamil while a few managed to tell them in English.
The interaction between the researcher and a learner in a picture-identification task has been given as an example:

**Question type II (A)**

R : I’ll show you some pictures …you tell me what they are…

R : What is this? (shows a picture of a lion)

L13 : yes

R : Ok, what is this? Name… name of the animal…

L13 : yes

(Teacher says ‘peru solluma’ (Tamil) (Tell the name)

R : What is this? (shows a picture of an elephant)

L13 : silence

R : Ok, what is this? (shows a picture of grapes)

L13 : thiraatchai (Tamil)

R : V.good. What is this? (shows a picture of a car)

L13 : Car

R : Car! V.good. What is this? (shows a picture of a tree)

L13 : maram

R : Mm?

L13 : maram

R : Can you tell me in English?

L13 : silence

R : Can you tell me in English?

L13 : Red
4.8 AN INTERPRETATION OF THE (SPEAKING SKILLS TEST) PERFORMANCE OF CLASS II LEARNERS

Most of the learners in class II had no major difficulty in answering the question ‘What is your name?’, but it is quite surprising to observe that almost all the learners had used the wrong pattern/structure to tell the names of their parents, and teacher. It may be recalled that these learners were in class II when the researcher interviewed them and though the learners were asked the same set of questions as for learners in class I, they were unable to respond appropriately.

Though the purpose of the oral test was to assess the extent to which young learners have developed their functional use of language, a discussion on the structure of the answer becomes necessary, as the learners who had been formally exposed to English for almost two years did not know how to answer appropriately for the questions. This indicates the discrepancy between the objectives of the syllabus and what the learners had actually learnt.

R  :  What is your name?
L  :  My name is Mukund Raj.
R  :  What is your father’s name?
L  :  My name is Kasi
R  :  your father’s name?
L  :  silence
R  :  What is your mother’s name?
L  :  My name is Ragini
That there was a wide gap between the level of learning planned for these learners and their extent of learning was clear from the responses obtained through the interaction. In the following interaction, when the researcher asked the learner in English to tell her father’s name, she could not respond and hence more processing time was given to her by repeating the question. But even then the response was not appropriate and finally she clarified whether she was asked to give her teacher’s name.

R : What is your father’s name?
L17 : Mm…
R : Father’s name?
L17 : Teacher peraa (Tamil) (Teacher’s name?)

Of the fifteen learners, only three learners gave the appropriate response, of which two of them just said the names of their parents. Only one learner used the structure taught in school and said ‘My father name is’. There was no response from four learners to the question and the response of other learners was communicatively adequate but linguistically incorrect.

Questions that required learners to name animals, birds, vegetables and colours evoked responses, which were incorrect. It would be appropriate to point out that the names of fruits, animals, flowers and vegetables are included in the cards prepared for learners in class I. The ‘ship card’ (examination card) for learners in class I has a picture of a mango, lotus, onion, monkey and grapes with the question, which reads, ‘Write the names of the following pictures. (refer Appendix 11B).

The results of the speaking skills test validate the data obtained from teachers that most of the learners tend to forget, within a short span of time, whatever was taught through ABL methodology. The methodology does
not ensure that learners retain information but in the traditional methodology, learners would be asked to repeat several times and therefore recall of information is easier.

Of the fifteen learners tested, only one learner gave correct responses in Tamil, while eight learners remained silent. The responses from other learners were not related to the questions asked. Some of the unusual responses have been presented and analyzed below.

The following response indicates the inability of a learner to understand the meaning of the word ‘animals’ as he gave the names of fruits rather than animals.

R : Tell me some names of animals…

L : Mango, apple, Dhraatchai (Tamil), Sathukudi (Tamil)

Some of the learners were helped by their classmates when they were unable to answer the questions. But some of the well-meaning learners themselves did not understand the question and therefore insisted their friends as the following interaction shows.

R : Ok, tell me some names of animals…

(one child asked her to tell what she eats)

L : saapaadu saapiduvaean (Tamil) (I eat rice)

R : Ok, tell me some names of birds…

L : silence

R : Tell me some names of birds…

L : silence

R : Tell me some names of vegetables…
The following interaction points out the ability of a learner to understand the meanings of words like ‘animals’ and ‘colours’. The learner immediately responded to the questions in Tamil and when the researcher persisted, he responded in English though not always successful.

R : Tell me some names of animals…
L : singam (Tamil) (Lion)
R : Can you tell me in English?
L : Silence
R : Tell me some names of colours…
L : karuppu (Tamil) (Black)
R : In English?
L : No

Some of the learners immediately responded to the questions asked in English, though not appropriate. The responses gain significance as they point out that some of the learners were a bit confused and said the names of colours, when asked to tell the names of birds and vegetables. The following interaction transcribes such an interaction where the learner has not understood the question in English.

R : Ok, Have you seen birds?
L : silence
R : Birds…like…what birds have you seen?
L : Green
R : Mm?
L : Green
R : Ok, have you seen vegetables?
L : Rose
R : Mm?
L : Rose

The above interaction clearly shows that learners have been taught something but in isolation and with no association with things that these learners are familiar with. As Cameron rightly points out that,

…children see the foreign language ‘from the inside’ and try to find meaning in how the language is used in action, in interaction, and with intention, rather than ‘from the outside’, as system and form. As a result, even if the syllabus they are taught is structural, children’s learning will be communicative, in the most basic sense of ‘communicative’, as being used with meaning and for action. Conversely, if teaching or materials do not enable children to find meaning in new language, learning will be stultified (Cameron 2003).

The following interaction between the researcher and a learner has been given as an example to point out the level of comprehension of English by learners in class II. The response from the child indicates that she could not understand even a single word in the question and hence asks a totally irrelevant question to the researcher.

R : Do you play games?
L : Mm?
R : What games do you play?
L : Bomma padamaa? (Tamil) (asks ‘cartoons’ in Tamil)

Similar inference regarding the ‘comprehending ability’ of learners in class II can be drawn as there was no response from a learner to the same question.

R : What games you play?
L18 : silence
R : What games you play?
L18 : Mm?

A question on ‘games’ was included assuming that as young learners they would be familiar with it. In the card (Baby walker) meant for learners in class II, a question on games has been included in the dialogue between teacher and learners (Refer Appendix 12). Teachers in ABL classrooms are expected to involve learners by asking simple questions in English and thereby facilitate second language learning. The classroom observation sessions showed that the teachers use English for giving one or two instructions to learners, while learners’ mother tongue is extensively used for teacher-learner interactions. As Cameron points out,

It is not easy to teach children effectively, and the reliance on oral language means that teaching children a foreign language may, in some ways, be more demanding at primary level than at higher levels. If children are to be kept attentive and mentally active, the teacher must be alert and adaptive to their responses to tasks, adjusting activities and exploiting language opportunities that arise on the spot. This requires a high level of fluency and a wide knowledge of vocabulary (Cameron 2003).
The inability of the learners to comprehend and respond appropriately to basic questions asked in English raises questions on the appropriateness of the methodology in use to teach ESL to young learners in state-run schools. The note mentioned at the end of the card, for teaching ‘Greetings and informal conversation’, reads ‘Children should practise in pairs’ (refer Appendix 12). It may be recalled that, during the informal interview sessions, most of the teachers expressed difficulties in grouping learners and making them work in pairs. It would be too idealistic to expect learners to practice in pairs or help their peers improve their speaking skills.

In the type II (B) questions, (action-word identification) the performance of learners was almost similar, which indicates the poor language skills of learners.

Of the fifteen learners, six learners could identify and say one action word in English. (The number of pictures shown to them was five and for some learners six). The other learners could not tell the name of even a single action word in English. Some of the significant responses have been analyzed below.

The following interaction with a learner shows that the child identified the action word rightly, though in Tamil, for a picture of a boy climbing a ladder. Another interesting aspect was the ability of a learner to combine water and the ‘ing’ form of the verb to say ‘watering’ when it should have been drinking.

R : Ok, what is this boy doing? (shows a picture of a boy climbing the ladder)

L : yaeani mela yearudhu (Tamil) (It climbs the ladder)
R : Ok, What is this girl…mm... boy doing? (shows a picture of a boy drinking water)

R : In English… try to tell me in English

P : watering

R : Mm?

P : silence

Some of the learners identified the object shown in the picture, though they could not tell the action word in English. All the learners said the word ‘ball’ though not ‘kicking’ or ‘playing’ to denote the action of a person playing with a football.

R : Ok, What is this boy doing? (shows a picture of a boy playing foot ball)

L : Ball

R : What is this boy doing? (shows a picture of a boy drinking water)

L : thanni (Water)

R : What is this boy doing? (shows a picture of a boy running)

L : Rain

A similar response was obtained from another learner who said the word ‘ball’ in English but the action word in Tamil.

R : What is this boy doing? (shows a picture of a boy catching a ball)

L28 : Ball… ball pudikiraan (Tamil) (catching the ball)
There were some instances in which learners merely said ‘boy’ ‘girl’ in English and also in Tamil. Their inability to identify and say the action word in English was quite evident from the interaction given below.

R : Ok, what is this boy doing? (shows a picture of a boy running)

L : paiyan (says ‘boy’ in Tamil)

R : Ok, what is this boy doing? (shows a picture of a boy climbing the ladder)

P4 : yeani (Tamil) (ladder)

R : What is this girl doing? (shows a picture of a girl praying)

P4 : Girl

The main purpose of the spoken test was to assess how learning meets the course requirements. Another purpose of the test was to find out the fluency in English of the young learners in state-run schools at the end of one and two years of formal exposure to English. The results of the tests highlight that most of the young learners have not acquired minimal language skills required to respond to questions asked in English. Even their vocabulary was not sufficient something that they would even otherwise ‘pick up’ in a country like India.

The speaking skills test was followed by a listening skill test. The listening test was carried out in one of the classrooms and learners were chosen as for the speaking test at random. All the instructions (the test content) were related to their immediate classroom environment as it was felt that it would enable the learners to carry them out without much difficulty.
4.9 LISTENING SKILL TEST

The aim of the listening skill test was to assess the extent to which learners have acquired the ability to comprehend and carry out the instructions, simple commands given to them in English. Since the listening ability of the learners was tested in the speaking skills test, it was felt that too many instructions would be unnecessary and hence it was decided to give only five instructions/commands to learners in classes I and II. However, the instructions were different for both the learners.

The following instructions were given to the learners in classes I and II.

**Instructions to class I learners**

1. Stand up
2. Sit down
3. Go to the blackboard
4. Take the English card
5. Take your note book/pencil

**Instructions to class II learners**

1. Open the door
2. Take the blue colour pen
3. Write your name on the blackboard
4. Take the English card
5. Give me a piece of chalk
The tick marks indicate (refer Tables A13.29 and A13.30) the instructions carried out by the learners. All the learners who participated in the test were in the same classroom. However, the instructions were not given in the same order and were shuffled according to the learner.

The results of the listening skills test were not qualitatively analyzed as it would be a repetition to discuss it in detail. The speaking skills test conducted provided ample opportunities for the researcher to assess the level of comprehension of the learners of class I and II. However, some of the important findings of the test have been presented in the following section.

The learners could not follow instructions given by the researcher. They expected the teacher to translate them into English. Some teachers used gestures to convey the meaning to the learners after which they were successful in carrying out the instruction. The results point out that most of the learners have not acquired the language necessary to understand the meanings of simple words.

4.10 SUMMARY

This chapter has presented a detailed report on the field study conducted in select-state run schools in Tamil Nadu to study the extent of language learning of learners in classes I and II. The data obtained from classroom observations and by administering questionnaires to teachers have also been presented. The following chapter, which serves as a concluding chapter to this study will highlight the major findings of the research. It will present the recommendations, limitations of the study and also identify areas for further research.