CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the major objectives of the present study was to study the pedagogical value and appropriateness of the ABL methodology currently used in state-run schools for teaching English to young learners in classes I and II. The ABL methodology like CLT (Communicative Language Teaching), which is being currently used to teach English at the tertiary level, is radical in its approach to the teaching or rather the facilitating of language in the classroom.

The Hypothesis framed in Chapter one states that teaching English to young ESL learners in state-run schools would be successful if the teaching methodology and the learning materials are suited to the learning styles and the social and cultural background of the learner. The distinction drawn by Labov between a ‘lower class’ group and a ‘working class’ group is relevant as he points out that,

Lower class families are typically female-based or ‘matri-focal’ with no father present to provide steady economic support, whereas for working-class there is typically an intact nuclear family with the father holding a semi-skilled or unskilled job (Labov 1969).

The above description is true of learners, especially from urban corporation schools and those located near slums. Young learners in these
schools come from dysfunctional families and belong to the most disadvantaged sections of the society.

The field study conducted by the researcher and the findings of the study prove the hypothesis. The findings of the research study listed below validate the claim.

5.2 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

- The introduction of English to young learners in classes I and II has not facilitated the learning of English in state-run schools in Tamil Nadu. The appropriateness of the ABL methodology clearly needs a lot of re-thinking and reviewing. The class observation and the language tests show that there is a gross mismatch between the objectives of the syllabus and the teaching and learning within the classroom. The following interaction between the researcher and a learner in class II testifies the above finding.

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 interaction points out that language learning has not taken place as the learner who has sat in an ABL classroom for two years cannot understand and respond to simple questions asked.

- The ABL methodology presently used to teach English to young ESL learners is clearly inappropriate for both teachers and learners in state-run schools as it is alien to them and goes against their perceptions of teaching and learning.

The fact that CLT is unsuited to teach English to tertiary level learners in India has become clear to ELT practitioners and experts in the country only in the recent past. It is only now that ELT experts are waking up to the truth that a methodology or approach to language teaching in the West need never be a success unless it is suitably modified. Though ABL is homegrown (ABL, as stated earlier, takes its genesis from the teaching practice propagated by J Krishnamurthy) with a lot of resemblance to the Montessori educational approach, is not suitable for children from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds. Hence the objectives of ABL could not be achieved. However, such innovative methodologies are partly and fully followed in some good, English medium schools, where they have been a huge success because learners in these schools come from houses in which education is seen as a value addition and not as a means of livelihood.

- The ABL methodology aims to simulate or re-create the acquisition setting in the language classroom in order to facilitate the learning of English. This is clearly a failure because children in these schools do not come from ‘language-acquisition rich’ environments.

Krashen emphasized the importance of ‘Comprehensible input’ and hypothesized that target language data would promote learning only when it is
understandable by learners. Young learners need to be provided with appropriate target language input, which is responsible for progress in language acquisition.

Brown and Yule (1983) point out that conversational interaction and extended talk, the two major types of discourse can be developed in both first and foreign languages.

- Teachers are themselves not fluent to communicate effectively to young learners to facilitate ESL learning in the classroom. In the classes that the researcher observed, the language used by all the teachers for both explaining the content and giving general instructions was Tamil. The ABL methodology expects teachers to provide young learners with meaningful language input to improve their oral communication skills in English. Teachers with insufficient linguistic resources find it difficult to engage and use the methodology, which require them to be fluent in order to perform various communicative functions. They are ill-equipped themselves (both in terms of academics and training) to meet the challenges posed by the ABL methodology of teaching. In addition, they do not have institutional support or any major support outside of the institution.

A huge problem that seems almost insurmountable in India at all levels is the lack of proficiency in the use of English amongst English language teachers. The problem gets aggravated when teachers who lack the required skills do not get institutional support of any kind. Occasional training programmes do not in any realistic manner help the teachers upgrade their teaching practices and knowledge levels. Children from language acquisition-poor homes will learn precious little from a teacher who does not have the
required fluency in the language. The class observation session clearly details the fact that teachers find it difficult to use English for giving instructions and Tamil is used extensively for teacher-learner interaction. As Cameron rightly points out,

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-learning opportunities that arise on the spot. This requires a high level of fluency and a wide knowledge of vocabulary (Cameron 2003).

In the classes observed, the teachers did not have the required fluency to present the tasks.

Long (1983) proposed a model to account for the relationships between negotiated interactions, comprehensible input, and language acquisition. The model stressed on the primacy of conversation and its role in providing comprehensible input. Teacher talk is a valuable source of input to language learners and it needs to be modified in potentially important ways. The ABL methodology reinforces a learner-centric approach to teaching ESL to young learners. The approach, would no doubt, provide ample opportunities for learners to practise genuine communicative activities in a full range of functional moves or to negotiate for meaning. However, as the teachers’ level of proficiency in the target language is not adequate, both in terms of quantity and quality, the learners are unable to learn in the class and the English class seems much the same as any other subject class. As Tickoo rightly points out,
the EFL teacher is a non-native speaker of English with varying levels of competence in the language, normally uses a ‘local’ language in everyday communication and shares it with pupils and is a product of non-English medium schooling and of its product-oriented and textbook dominated ways of teaching, governed by the society’s and the system’s perceptions and norms of ‘good’ teaching and the expectations that go with them; values certain forms of classroom organization, learner attitudes, expectations and behaviours and upholds socially governed norms on classroom interaction (Tickoo 2001).

- The teaching activities have no clear focus and a considerable period of time and therefore much of class time is spent on bringing some sort of discipline inside the classroom. The classroom management techniques, which the teachers follow, reveal that learners could not be benefited from their classroom experience as both the teacher and the learner (in some of the classes observed) are not sure of what is happening in the classroom. Opportunities for learners to use the language for interacting with the teachers were very limited as the teaching materials and activities based on them cannot be exploited for pedagogical purposes, which play a significant role in SLA in children. As Cameron writes,

. . . If teaching or materials do not enable children to find meaning in new language, learning will be stultified. Good YL teaching will provide opportunities for children to construct meaning in the language they encounter by incorporating it in purposeful action and interaction (Cameron 2003)
• In ABL, learners have to be grouped according to their learning pace in the class. As mentioned earlier, the different groups based on learners’ ability were not seen. In all the four classes observed, there was absolutely no trace of the existence of groups of any sort as prescribed by the ABL methodology. In the questionnaire also, teachers pointed out the difficulty in grouping learners.

• Infrastructure and size of the class in most of the state-run schools are insufficient for the successful implementation of a methodology like ABL. Again the number of learners is a limiting factor (on an average in 30-35 in government-aided schools and 25-30 in government schools). Unable to maintain some semblance of order in class, teachers in these schools find it very difficult to follow any of the guidelines laid down in ABL.

In India, there are government and government-aided schools, which function without basic facilities like toilets, water, blackboards. The corridor-type of classrooms those are so common that one would not associate them with centres of learning. While discussing the lack of basic facilities in a government-run middle school in Chennai, Keerthana writes,

One should wonder if the ABL method of teaching implemented by Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in this school is a boon or bane! The method requires students to be seated in groups and learn from the flash cards that are displayed. With the space constraint, the system is practiced with great difficulty (The Hindu 2009)

On the contrary, a walk down the corridor of private English medium schools in India is a world so different; clean with spacious classes
on either side which gives a picture of clean, well-maintained institutions with all the facilities and with an ambience that promotes lively and meaningful interaction among students and between students and the teacher.

In order to ensure learning, especially among children from poor homes, the school must represent all the good and the positive aspects in life failing which, it would be seen only as an extension of the sad and dreary atmosphere of their homes and hence, needless to state, that it is impossible for the teacher to encourage them to learn.

- The training provided to teachers in ABL is clearly inadequate and does not really help them find appropriate solutions to some of the problems experienced in specific language classrooms by individual teachers. It may be recalled that teachers who were interviewed highlighted this problem.

The issue relating to teacher training raised by Cameron (2003) is very valid and relevant to the present study. She emphasizes that the continuing expansion of teaching English to young learners (TEYL) poses real challenges to the wider ELT field and points out that,

... the expansion of Teaching English to Young learners (TEYL) is a phenomenon that needs to be taken seriously by the ELT field. It is not a minor change that can be left to young learner experts, but a shift that will have knock-on effects for the rest of ELT, particularly secondary level of teaching and teacher education (Cameron 2003)

- The quantum of language learnt by the learners was very minimal as most of them could not listen and comprehend instructions given to them in English. They had difficulty in
comprehending and responding to simple, basic questions in English. Even the minimal amount of language learnt by some of the learners could not be used by them in different contexts.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The idea behind the introduction of English to young learners in state-run schools is indeed a noble venture by the government. But the learner population in these schools has not been considered. The methodology, an adoption of the one proposed by the renowned philosopher J.Krishnamurthy, is not suitable for learners from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds. The children are not yet ready for the methodology. The problem of inappropriate methodology, as stated earlier, is felt even at the tertiary level in India. Most of the language problems that students and the younger generation of English language teachers face are partly due to CLT and without adapting it to the Indian teaching-learning context. Another significant aspect that needs to be considered is that children in India are generally used to learning by rote and even if this methodology is not really suited for teaching and the learning of a language for communicative purposes, language teaching research in India needs to evolve a new methodology that will not intrude into the working of the brain and the general learning styles of young learners and students. The learning style, classroom participation patterns and level of motivation of learners are some of the crucial factors that need to be considered prior to the implementation of a new methodology.

- Several issues need to be considered and resolved before the implementation of ESL teaching to primary level learners in
state-run schools in Tamil Nadu. In view of the picture that emerges from the previous chapters, it would be more practical and realistic to re-introduce the practice of teaching of English from class five with competent teachers and an interesting syllabus. Instead of introducing English in class I and continuing to attempt teaching it the way it is being done at this level, it will be more relevant and useful if it is taught later with materials and methodology that best suit the learning context of these learners. What is attempted to be given over years of ineffective teaching can be packed in such a manner that these learners receive what they are likely to require when they leave school. These courses have to be taught by teachers who have the required language resource and training to successfully meet the heavy demands of an ESL classroom. This move would immensely benefit learners because at the age in which children are conscious of the great practical value in learning English they would be truly motivated. Therefore, ELT practitioners in India need to seriously re-think of continuing the practice of teaching English to these learners and also find right solutions to the problems that plague the teaching of English at the elementary level in state-run schools.

- It is undeniable that organizing and implementing a programme like this requires teachers who are able to tackle the challenges in offering a course in language learning to disadvantaged learners in the final stages of their general learning experience at school. However, considering the gains to be derived from this kind of an instruction, it is the responsibility of the state government to offer special training programmes for teachers who will be involved in this task of teaching English to young
learners in state-run schools. This is where DIETs (District Institute of Educational Training) and Regional institutes can play an indispensable role. English language teachers in India at the primary level need to be given frequent training and institutional support in order to be successful in implementing the ABL methodology in their classes. During the informal interactions, some of the teachers pointed out that training programmes only re-emphasize the guidelines relating to the successful implementation of ABL without addressing the specific problems they encounter in their teaching contexts. Hence the training programmes have to be localized with specific focus and without out being ‘melas’ (fairs) as they normally are in India.

- There needs to be an independent body that monitors teacher competence and provides the input to the government, which can organize programmes that will help teachers overcome their deficiencies. Continuous appraisal needs to be done to monitor teachers’ progress in teaching the language.

- An optimal number of students (an average of 15-20) in a class will ensure effective teaching and learning of English especially for children from disadvantaged background. In such classes, learners and teachers have more opportunities to interact and moreover, teachers would be in a position to supervise more effectively the groups and their working. For individuals who wish to enter the profession, an aptitude test can be conducted to assess their suitability for the profession.

- The teaching and learning materials need to be designed in such a manner that in the initial stages, the use of the target language
is minimal and limited to an exercise of reinforcing the borrowed items from the target language, which are in common, use in the learner’s L1. The initial module can be built on their reserves, by starting with what they are likely to be already familiar (especially content). Later, the quantum of L1 can be reduced and that of the target language increased, until in the final stages, the use of L1 is almost negligible. Such a framework of content is likely to be more helpful to learners coming from the kind of background state-run school children do, rather than one which concentrates from the first lesson itself on making learners work with a unit that is entirely in the target language.

- A common practice observed in good, private English medium schools located especially in cities is that the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) playing a proactive role by supporting and sharing the responsibility of helping a child learn. This aspect of parenting comes naturally to educated parents. They do not view teachers as individuals to be afraid of as it was some decades ago but as partners in the teaching-learning process. However, the uneducated poor people in India do not have the maturity when it comes to interacting with teachers as they view them as authorities whose ways are inscrutable. In order to overcome this problem to an extent, teachers can, of course, take the initiative and establish with parents, contacts of an active and permanent kind, thus involving them in their children’s learning experiences.
5.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Many research studies have been conducted in India, on issues that deal with the teaching of English at various levels. However, in comparison with the quantum of research carried out at the tertiary level, elementary level or research at the school level remains largely neglected. The present research conducted has highlighted some of the challenges that prevail in the teaching of English at the elementary level with special reference to the ABL methodology. However, more research is required to understand the setting better, the problems faced by teachers, the syllabus and the kind of learners.

The following points identify some of the research areas that need to be explored.

- Research studies can be conducted to study the language learning abilities of learners in higher classes who had been taught English in classes I and II through the ABL methodology to assess whether the communication skills of learners’ has improved because of learning English at the elementary level through ABL.

- A more detailed study on the various methods employed for teaching and testing the oral communicative abilities of learners at the primary and secondary levels can be carried out.

- A research study that focuses on the differences and similarities between the language learning styles and strategies of learners in good, private English medium schools and state-run regional medium schools at the elementary level can be carried out to suitably adapt the successful strategies followed in private schools.
• As part of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) many corporate companies provide human resources and study material to enable learners improve their academic performance in some state-run schools. A systematic study on the impact of such interventions specifically on the language skills of learners can be studied in detail.

• A comprehensive study can be carried out to assess the influence of teacher-talk on the language ability of young learners in both state-run and private schools. The study can also be carried out with specific reference to the oral communicative ability of teachers at both primary and secondary levels.

• Television and other modes of entertainment have a profound impact on young learners’ language skills. A formal study on the influence of such non-academic factors on the language learning abilities of learners in state-run schools can be carried out.

5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

• The study was conducted only in a few schools. Since time was a major constraint, more number of schools could not be included for the study.

• More comprehensive data would have been obtained if more classroom sessions were observed. It was quite challenging for the researcher to obtain permission from the Heads of institutions as some of them were not convinced that the study was conducted only for the purpose of research. In some
schools, though permission was granted to observe the classroom sessions by the Heads of institutions, teachers were reluctant to allow the researcher to observe their classroom sessions and hence cited different reasons expressing their inability to carry out their teaching activities for the day.

- Only one English classroom session was observed in each school. The data obtained would be more valid if the researcher had observed two or three classroom sessions in the same school.

- Parents, who are the important stakeholders in the education of young learners, were not included in the study. More valuable data would have been obtained if the researcher had held informal interactions with parents to elicit their views relating to English education.

- There were some distractions, such as disturbance from other classes and high level of noise caused by young learners, which interfered during the listening and speaking skills test.

- The presence of class teachers during the interaction with young learners was not always beneficial for the researcher during the field study, since at times they interfered and helped their learners to give correct responses to all questions.

It is time that ELT research in India shift its emphasis and focus on those issues that need a lot more insight and understanding than at present. Further research alone will help highlight such issues that need to be looked into and sorted out.
ELT research in the country must necessarily underline the problems related to the teaching of English to children from the poorer and disadvantaged sections in state-run schools. For these children, there is no greater liberating power than quality education. And realization of right education will be achieved only through research, patience and careful consideration and deliberation of the core issues. As the philosopher J. Krishnamurthy muses,

To study each child requires patience, alertness and intelligence. To observe the child’s tendencies, his aptitudes, his temperament, to understand his difficulties, to take into account his heredity and parental influence and not merely regard him as belonging to a certain category—all this calls for a swift and pliable mind, untrammeled by any system or prejudice. It calls for skill, intense interest and, above all, a sense of affection; and to produce educators endowed with these qualities is one of our major problems today (Krishnamurthi 1992).

The words ‘skill’, ‘intense interest’ and ‘a sense of affection’ are important, more so is the sense of commitment and dedication on the part of the teachers and other stakeholders. This sense of dedication will help children of India’s poorest walk with confidence beside their more privileged peers and, as years go by, help the country as adults, in its march towards achieving the dreams of the founding fathers of independent India.