CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

Modern age is the age of printed word. An enormous amount of literature in the form of books, journals, periodicals and other materials is published every year in different parts of the world. This literature is a source of both information and pleasure and thereby of a rich and informed life. An access to it, however, requires the ability to read, and the better the ability, the greater the benefits derived.

The value of the ability to read is not confined to the mother tongue. The benefits of efficient reading in the second or third language can be even greater if the language in question has something better and more vital to offer as in the case of English in India. In fact only a small minority of the thousands of students learning English in Indian schools and colleges today will require the speaking or writing ability in English, but all of them can avail themselves of what English has to offer them in terms of its vast literature and hundreds of journals and magazines on a variety of subjects, provided they are proficient in reading. Both while in colleges and universities as well as in professions they can use for up-to-date information books and journals pertaining to
their subjects in English even if English is not the medium of instruction or examination. Even those who discontinue their studies after the secondary stage would have equipped themselves with an efficient tool of knowledge and device for getting joy if they have acquired reading proficiency in English. The use of this ability for getting information regarding jobs and various other activities of life hardly need any mention.

It was thought worthwhile therefore to develop through the present research a Course that would increase the reading proficiency in English of the students who have completed their high school stage. Clearly stated, the problem undertaken was as under:

The Problem:

Development of a course for increasing the reading proficiency in English of the post-high school students of Gujarat.

Need for Research:

Looking to the role English has now to play in India, namely that of a library language, and what is stated in the earlier paragraphs, it should be imperative that in the programmes of teaching English development of the reading skill receives prime importance and the students are enabled to read with maximum efficiency. However, what
is found in actual practice is that training in this skill receives very scant attention in the class-rooms, with the result that the learners do not acquire the skill of efficient silent reading that even their knowledge of English would permit. Seen in this light a reading proficiency course prepared and validated through research could serve a very useful purpose.

The skill of silent reading can be taught once the learners have acquired a knowledge of some of the sentence patterns and vocabulary of the language on the one hand, and the ability to associate sounds and symbols so as to recognise and comprehend these on the other. However, it would not be a pedagogically sound idea to isolate the skill at this very elementary stage. In teaching the beginners silent reading could be taught only occasionally, keeping the approach a multi-skill one. Courses could be designed and the skill could be taught at later stages also, including the tertiary stage because in the skill of efficient silent reading there is always scope for attaining higher levels, and even college students would gain substantially from a course in reading proficiency.

However, in this research the stage for which the course was to be designed was the stage when the learners have done their high school level English, and even if they have continued their education, they would be in the
early stages of post-secondary education. The importance of designing a course for this stage is manifold. In the first place the learners would have some grounding in the language for learning the silent reading skill in it. Secondly, they would be mature enough to gain the insight into the constituents of the reading act contemplated to be conveyed to them through the course. Thirdly, unlike at later stages where a better idea would be to have separate courses for different disciplines, this course prepared for pre-college and pre-specialisation stage would be general in nature, and that would increase its usefulness much more than a course prepared for a specific discipline. Further, the students entering a new stage of education, if they continue their studies, would be highly motivated to acquire a skill useful in further studies.

The value of the proposed course also lay in the fact that it was to be a self-instructional course and though its use in the classroom under the guidance and supervision of a teacher was not to be forbidden, it was contemplated to be taken by students on their own thus eliminating the inevitability of the teacher, and making the learners self-reliant.

Further, in the course to be developed through this research, the aim was not just to give practice through exercises but also to create an insight in the learners as
regards the constituents of the reading process, give
taxtive in each constituent factor, and ultimately to
gi practice in continuous reading approximating life
situations. The approach visualized thus was an analyti-
synthetic approach resulting in insightful learning, which
would make it possible for the learners to transfer the
proficiency acquired through this programme to the enhanced
knowledge of the language that they may acquire later on.

Objectives of the Research:

The following objectives were kept in view while
carrying out the research:

(i) To select the components of reading in English as a
foreign language relevant to the post-high school
stage.

(ii) To prepare and try out auto-instructional materials
for developing proficiency in each component and in
the act of reading as a whole.

(iii) To prepare pre- and post-tests for evaluating the
outcomes of different units in the course.

(iv) To prepare a pre-test and a post-test for evaluating
the outcomes of the course as a whole.

(v) To fix the range of applicability of the course in
terms of marks obtained by the learners in English at the New S.S.C. Examination.

(vi) To study the reactions of the pupils regarding the Course.

Scope and Limitations:

The present research aims to develop the reading proficiency of the students of Gujarat who have studied through the Gujarati medium and successfully completed their high school education with a minimum of three years' study of English at the high school stage. There being no separate streams of those doing English from Std. V or VI and those beginning English from Std. VIII, no distinction is found necessary to maintain between the two categories.

The Course developed through this research aims to increase the reading proficiency of the learners on the basis of the knowledge of English they have when they take the Course. The teaching of the language in terms of either structural items or vocabulary is not aimed at. However, it is expected that proficiency in reading acquired by the learner with the knowledge of English they have when they take the Course will be transferred to the enriched linguistic equipment that they may acquire later.
While conducting the research out of the numerous variables related to learning, one which has a direct bearing on the subject, namely, the linguistic equipment of the learner, has been kept in view. Consequently, the sample taken for the try-out purposes is not from different geographical areas such as urban and rural. Nor is there a deliberate selection of students on the basis of sex or socio-economic status. The sample has been selected on the basis of marks obtained by the students in English in the New S.S.C. Examination held by the Gujarat Secondary Board of Education.

The skill of reading comprehension can be developed at different levels. The present research aims to teach the skill at the level relevant to the post-high school stage and attainable with a limited knowledge of the language as well as an extremely limited contact with it on the part of the students. Thus, for example, there is no attempt to teach critical reading which can be more easily taught in the first language before it is attempted to be taught in a foreign language.

Since the clientele of the Course are boys and girls studying through the medium of Gujarati, the notes, the instructions accompanying the exercises etc. are in Gujarati though the target language is English.

The Course designed is an autoinstructional Course.
This fact restricts the variety of exercises because in an auto-instructional course students' responses have of necessity to be short and definite, and lending themselves easily to self-checking. Practical considerations of time to be spent on the Course and the cost involved also have not permitted inclusion of certain kinds of reading materials such as maps or graphs.

Definition of the Terms:

The following terms used in the title are defined with a view to clarifying the connotation in which they are used in the present research.

Course: The term 'Course' as used in this research indicates an intensive, auto-instructional course with its constituent units teaching different components of the reading skill and therefore to be done in close succession, and the material so designed that the learner can do it without the help of an instructor.

Reading: By reading is meant silent reading and not oral reading or reading aloud.

Proficiency: The term 'proficiency' is used to indicate that entity which is different from ability in that it is not so much innate as acquired. Further, proficiency is supposed to be acquired not through mere practice but
through insight, training and meaningful exercise.

**English**: The term 'English' is used to designate that language which is taught as a foreign language on a voluntary basis in the upper primary classes and on a compulsory basis in the high schools of Gujarat, where the regional language is the medium of education.

**Post-high school students**: In the new pattern of secondary education in Gujarat that came into effect from the year 1976-77, the tenth standard was the termination of the high school stage, the two subsequent classes being included in the higher secondary stage. The term 'post-high school students' as used in this study therefore indicates those who have completed their high school education up to Standard X.

**Procedure**:

The most basic issue in the research was to decide the components of the reading skill in which training should be imparted and insight should be developed to increase the reading proficiency of the learners. For this purpose the deficiencies of the students in reading in English were listed in consultation with colleagues and experienced teachers in the field as well as from the researcher's own observation. On the other hand an in-depth study was made of relevant literature including past researches and
published courses. On the basis of all this the component skills and sub-skills to be taken care of in the material were selected. The selection was made in view of (i) the most crucial difficulties experienced by the students while attempting to read in English; (ii) relevance of the component skill or sub-skill for the level concerned; (iii) the feasibility of including a particular component in the situation; and (iv) the scope of the present work. The linguistic component of the Course was decided through a close study of the high school syllabus of lower level English then in force in the state.

The selection of the skills and sub-skills and the study of the high school syllabus were followed by designing the auto-instructional Course with different units on different components, and ancillary materials as part of it. The details of all the materials including notes in the students' mother tongue, exercises, instructions etc. were then developed taking care that they provided adequate learning experiences. Before giving the materials the final shape they were tried out in parts on three to five students on an individual basis to find out the workability of the materials in terms of difficulty level, interest and format. Necessary changes were made in certain parts in the light of their performance and opinion. The ancillary materials of the Course, Unit-wise Pre-tests and Post-tests for evaluating the outcomes of the Units, as also
Overall Pre- and Post-tests for evaluating the outcomes of the Course as a whole were constructed. The tests and the Course materials were then submitted for review to ELT experts and refined on the basis of their comments.

The Course thus prepared was tried out on a representative and sizeable sample of 118 students. The results obtained of the Overall and Unit-wise tests and the students' performance in the Course exercises were then studied. A study was also made of the reactions of the students obtained through a Response Sheet.

Modifications in the materials were made and the final version of the Course was prepared in the light of the empirical data obtained of the try-out. The modified version of the Course was then tried out on a larger sample of 233 students with a view to checking the efficacy of the material. In both the try-outs the functioning of the material at various achievement levels in terms of marks in English at the S.S.C. Examination was studied so as to fix the range of marks above and below which the Course may not be used with much significant gain.