CHAPTER 2

A RE-VIEW OF RESEARCH IN LANGUAGE TESTING

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Research in English Language Teaching in the later part of the nineties has become largely introspective. Introspection is a good sign because it signifies a period where researchers and practitioners in the field would be taking stock, re-viewing, and revising the developments in the three major areas of language teaching namely materials, methods and testing, and their impact on the learning and teaching of the language in the classroom. Given below are some of the broad developments in the field during the nineties.

- Greater interest in the use of computers and their various facilities to help build a virtual language classroom and thus make the process of ESL and EFL learning a self-paced and an individualized experience.

- There is a notable shift in focus in language research; the notion of the importance of the language classroom and its importance in any worthy research has been foregrounded. Researchers have come to realise that the language classroom is the testing ground for any innovations in the field. The primacy of the language classroom as the focal point of valid research has been realised by researchers worldwide and this means that language research in
the future will work in tandem with what is "... practised in the very arena of educational development - the classroom (ELT Forum, 1997).

• Even in countries like India where English for General Purposes (EGP) courses continue to be designed for learners, there is a growing awareness and acknowledgement of the lack of practical use of EGP courses because they do not address the real language needs of ESL learners. There is a gradual though perceptible move in colleges and universities in the country to design language courses that address the special language needs of learners.

• There have been remarkable changes in the three basic areas of English Language Teaching: methods, materials and testing. The notable change in methods of teaching English has been the movement beyond the communicative methodology. Communicative Language Teaching no doubt continues to reign supreme but researchers and practitioners are more realistic in their appraisal of this methodology today than in the past. Some of the elements of language teaching that were sidelined by the over emphasis on fluency (the message over form theory) have regained some of their lost importance. Today language teachers the world over recognise the need to teach grammar without restricting it to the sentence and without decontextualising it especially in the formative years so that at the tertiary level both teachers’ and students’ energies could be focused on improving their communication skills in the language.

• In the area of materials-production there is a growing dependence on the World Wide Web to find materials for the language classroom. Materials which are suited to different levels of learners
are more readily available and can be easily accessed by the teacher. Today the issue of cultural acceptability is considered as an important criterion that needs to be addressed by language teachers in their choice of teaching materials. There is a growing need felt to design materials that are as Tickoo puts it, "faithful to the ecology of the soil" (Tikoo, 1999).

- The field of language testing today is characterised by a more humanistic and democratic approach to writing tests, administering them, marking of answer-scripts, analysing the washback effect of tests, providing feedback and evaluation of students' performance in a test. There is a significant change in thought and attitude in the definition of progress and progression in terms of students' learning of English in a formal set-up especially students with limited English skills. Research has emphasized the need to accommodate the differences amongst students in terms of their proficiency levels in English and for teachers to be conscious of this when assessing students' answer scripts. It would not be an exaggeration to state that language testing is in the process of becoming more learner-sensitive because it is being increasingly felt that just as materials and methods have been revised to suit the needs of learners, so also testing procedures need to be suitably revised to keep pace with the changes in the other two fields.

- The teaching of English to young learners has also received the attention of researchers in the nineties. The interest in the teaching of a second or foreign language to young learners has been highlighted because language learning skills can be taught to them at an early age which they can build upon in later years. The learning of English can be made enjoyable at this stage and this
will enhance their learning skills and also help them develop a more positive attitude towards the learning of the language.

- Research in the west especially in a mixed racial country like America has become sensitive to the different stratifications in society and therefore the need for language research to be sensitive to the vast differences between students. Language research has become sensitive to the social, ethnic, and economic background of students. This has made both researchers and practitioners more sensitive to the reasons why some learners continue to be 'slow' in the learning of a language though materials, methods and testing are congenial to optimise language learning in a formal set-up such as a school or a college.

2.1 A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE HISTORY OF LANGUAGE TESTING

The developments in the field of language testing are generally studied under three main headings such as,

- The pre-scientific era.
- The Psychometric - Structuralist era.
- The Psycholinguistic - Sociolinguistic era.

The pre-scientific era in language testing as the name signifies was primarily characterised by an unscientific approach to language testing or rather by a lack of theory in language testing practice.

The paragraphs that follow will discuss the two more significant phases in language testing research namely the psychometric - structuralist and the psycholinguistic - sociolinguistic era.
• The Psychometric - Structuralist era

The Psychometric - Structuralist approach to language testing was popular during the 1960s. Just as the Structuralist approach to language teaching broke down language into individual items (discrete-points) and graded them from simple to complex structures, the testing of proficiency in English during this era concentrated on discrete - points of language which were objectively scored. The basic assumption behind this particular approach to testing was that students' performance in individual tasks was a good indicator of their ability to communicate effectively in real situations. Discrete - point testing is basically an indirect assessment of language proficiency as it tests the linguistic competence of students. This type of testing continues to find favour and is extensively used by language testers the world over because,

• The data obtained from these tests can be easily quantified.
• Assessment of a wide range of language skills is possible using these tests.
• These tests are very reliable because they are objectively scored.

Discrete-point tests are a very convenient and an easy way of testing language proficiency but they do have certain defects. Language is de-contextualized in this kind of testing and therefore it does not assess natural language behaviour. To communicate effectively in terms of appropriate language behaviour in real life situations it is not sufficient if learners know the rules of language but they must also know how to synthesise individual items of language into a coherent whole. Discrete - point tests fail when it comes to the assessment of communicative competence. A holistic assessment of language proficiency should assess the
ability to function appropriately in a specified socio-linguistic setting. As Oiler elaborates,

Discrete-point tests necessarily break the elements of language apart and try to teach them (or test them) separately with little or no attention to the way those elements interact in a larger context of communication. What makes it ineffective as a basis for teaching or testing languages is that crucial properties of language are lost when its elements are separated. The fact is that in any system when the parts interact to produce properties and qualities that do not exist in the parts separately, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts... (Oiler, 1979).

• The Psycholinguistic-Sociolinguistic era

In the seventies and in the early eighties research in language testing was dominated by the cognitive approach. The test that was favoured during this period was the integrated or the global test. This new type of test, the strong votary of which was Oiler, was a reaction against the atomistic assumptions of discrete-point tests. Oiler distinguishes the main difference between discrete-point and integrative tests thus,

The concept of an integrative test was born in contrast with the definition of a discrete-point test. If discrete items take language skill apart, integrative tests put it back together. Whereas discrete items attempt to test knowledge of language one bit at a time, integrative tasks attempt to assess a learner's capacity to use many bits all at the same time, and possibly while exercising several presumed components of a grammatical system, and perhaps more than one of the traditionally recognized skills or aspect of skills (Oiler, 1979).
Through different studies, Oiler showed that there was a single global language proficiency factor that underlay all language skills. The theoretical justification for his assumption lay in an internalized grammar, a capacity which he believed underlay all language performance. Oiler proved his standpoint on the basis that a single language proficiency discredited the need for several tests to assess the language ability of learners. This formed the basis for his pet theory which he termed as Unitary Competence Hypothesis. The importance of the Unitary Competence Hypothesis to the development of language testing and research in the field cannot be disputed. Oiler's theory attracted the attention of several language testing experts though much of it was critical. Later studies questioned the concept of a single general proficiency underlying all language skills.

The cloze and the dictation were the two types of tests that were popular during this period. These two types of tests were chosen by Oiler because he assumed that they assessed learners' ability to perform under real-life constraints and therefore they were good predictors of language proficiency. An added incentive was that these tests were economical to construct, easy to administer and could be objectively scored. Though the cloze and the dictation expected the learner to 'integrate' diverse language skills simultaneously they were, like discrete - point tests, an indirect assessment of language ability. Neither the cloze nor the dictation offered opportunities for spontaneous production of language. They measured the knowledge of the language system and not so much the ability to utilize this knowledge or the underlying competence in authentic settings. A major drawback in using these tests was the harmful washback effect that they had on teaching. Learners could be trained specifically to develop their proficiency in indirect tasks rather than develop their communication skills by completing realistic, problem-solving, language tasks.
Discrete-point and integrative tests however, continue to find favour among language teachers, testers, and administrators because the results obtained on these tests can be easily quantified and more importantly, generalised. The testing of grammar for evaluating the overall language proficiency of students is highly favoured by language teachers and testers because they feel that knowledge of the rules governing the use of the language could be considered as a good sample of the ability to employ the rules appropriately in authentic settings. As Davies points out, "...what remains a continuing argument in favour of linguistic competence tests (both discrete-point and integrative) is that grammar is at the core of language learning.... Grammar is far more powerful in terms of generalisability than any other language feature" (Davies, 1978).

Research in language testing in these two major periods was not sensitive to the multiplicity of learning environments, cultures of specific teaching contexts where English was being taught and learnt and more importantly of the learners themselves. Therefore it would not be an exaggeration to say that research in language testing during these periods was in a sense parochial.

2.2 COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

In the seventies Dell Hymes proposed the notion of communicative competence. He said: "There are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless" (Hymes, Dell, 1972). This statement of Hymes was a revelation to language experts and researchers at that time because it forgrounded the notion of communicative competence as against linguistic competence. After Hymes many researches developed the notion of the communicative approach to language learning notably, (Brown, 1987; Brumfit & Johnson, 1979; Richards and Rodgers, 1986; Littlewood, 1981 and Yalden, 1983). Hymes' definition led to a revolution in English Language
Teaching specifically in the teaching of ESL and EFL. The new methodology that evolved out of this idea and termed Communicative Language Teaching placed emphasis on fluency in English than accuracy.

The basic idea of communicative competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately both receptively and productively in real life situations. Communicative competence is a two-dimensional model comprising a linguistic and a socio-linguistic element. It refers to the students' ability to form grammatically correct sentences and to use these sentences appropriately in real settings.

The communicative approach to language teaching has been in vogue now for almost over two decades. However, teachers, applied linguists and testers are still grappling with the notion of communicative competence and what it entails. They are still unclear about the difference in meaning between the terms 'competence' and 'performance' in this approach to language teaching and testing. Ever since Chomsky distinguished between the notions 'competence' and 'performance' and before him Ferdinand de Saussure between 'langue' and 'parole' there has been a continuing debate on the right interpretation of these terms. Language teachers in countries like India where a significant number of them are as yet untrained in the use of this methodology are still unaware of what constitutes competence and performance and therefore are confused about what should be the focus of their teaching: should it be the development of competence which Chomsky defined as a knowledge of the language system? or, should it be performance which is an externalisation of the rules of the language learnt?

The language teacher who places more emphasis on competence will wish to equip his students with all the rules governing the language with the hope that in course of time the students will learn to use these rules effectively in real life situations. On the other hand, the teacher who
lays emphasis on performance will wish to equip his students with the necessary skills that would help them become better communicators: the emphasis in his classroom would be on fluency as against linguistic accuracy. It is naive however to oversimplify the complex relationship between competence and performance. No empirical research has shown clearly the superiority of the one over the other either in teaching or in testing. The two concepts are interdependent. A skilled learner of the language will be thorough with the rules and will at the same time employ these rules correctly to form appropriate utterances in the language. Carroll extended Hymes' assertion by stating that, "There are grammar rules without which the rules of use would be inoperable" (Carroll, 1980). The communicative approach to language teaching has been successful to the extent that it has shifted the spotlight from linguistic correctness to linguistic appropriacy. It has shown that the criterion for success in communication lies not merely in formal correctness but in communicative effectiveness as well.

2.3 COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TESTING

The communicative approach to language testing signifies the point of departure from the earlier, primarily linguistic approaches to testing language proficiency. The earlier approaches to language testing worked under the assumption that knowledge of the grammatical structures of a language guaranteed knowledge of the whole and therefore it was sufficient to construct language tests that assessed the learners' knowledge of individual linguistic components. The communicative approach to language testing similar to the communicative approach to language teaching aims at assessing learners' ability to combine the individual components of language into meaningful discourse in real life contexts. It is basically context-specific. Context specificity influences the choice of tasks to a great extent which means that the selection of tasks is not on linguistic grounds alone. This
approach to language testing is a natural offshoot of the communicative approach to language teaching, as Bachman observes, "... the development of 'communicative' language tests has been informed by the perceived use among language teaching professionals and other language test users for language tests that incorporate features of communicative language use, as these have been described by applied linguists... " (Bachman, 1990).

2.3.1 Distinguishing features of communicative language tests

Don Porter (1991) identifies the following three characteristics as being typical of communicative language tests.

• Tests will be based on the needs (or wants) of learners. It would be unreasonable to assess a learner's ability to do through English something which he has no need or wish to do.

• Tests will be based on language use in the contexts and for the purposes relevant to the learner.

• Tests will employ authentic texts, or texts which embody fundamental features of authenticity.

Besides the three characteristics identified by Porter, the following point could also be included as another characteristic feature of communicative language tests.

• The marking process is largely subjective but this does not give rise to problems of reliability. Multiple-scoring is possible and band descriptors help assessors judge fairly and accurately the language level or the level of language proficiency of a learner.
2.3.2 A brief critique of communicative language testing

A fundamental problem with communicative language testing is the one that continues to plague communicative language teaching. As Porter states, "There is no widely accepted overall model of communicative proficiency used as a basis for this approach to testing" (Porter, 1991). If the communicative approach to testing has been mired in problems it has been so primarily because notions regarding what constitutes competence and performance as yet remain unresolved. As Harrison observes, "Does it mean assessing the linguistic behaviour of the student in an imitation of a real-life setting, or assessing the skills which are considered essential for this kind of behaviour?" (Harrison, 1991).

Applied linguists themselves are still unclear about the practicality and generalisability of a learner's communicative competence or performance as the case may be through a few sample tasks. Any test does, or rather should, adequately sample a learner's proficiency in a language which would help predict the candidate's performance in non-test situations. A communicative test requires the specification of performance tasks which are closely related to the learner's domain of interest, in other words to the communicative situations he would most likely find himself in. The test itself will, for practical purposes, use only a few tasks, thus creating the problem of generalisability of the chosen tasks. Context-specificity also gives rise to problems. It is very difficult to devise separate tests for very specific pattern of needs. Then there would be as many tests as there are needs. To overcome the problem of context-specificity Carroll proposed the two-tier test model which incorporates both direct and indirect assessment of language proficiency. He stated,

It should therefore be possible to device a basic, wide coverage test to assess linguistic competence in terms of usage, deriving on generally-needed
language skills and contexts and used as a basic first-tier instrument for the establishment of comparability between groups with varying communicative needs. A test of this type ... must be supplemented by tests specifically designed to assess the skills and content areas needed (Carroll, 1980).

A major drawback with the communicative approach to language testing is that there is no cohesive body of theorizing of 'communicative' ability that test developers could fall back on. Again, there is no substantial body of literature on what actually constitutes communicative competence. With the major aims of communicative language teaching supplanted as it were on testing communicative competence or performance as the case may be both test developers and test experts are at a loss to delineate very clearly the fundamental principles underlying this approach to testing. Tall claims seem to have been made and expected before empirical research could prove them so. Analysis of the credibility of this approach to language testing seems to have begun even before the theorising ended.

Despite some of the obvious drawbacks of communicative language testing, this approach has definitely revolutionised perceptions regarding the purpose of language testing. Just as the communicative approach to language teaching radically changed the then existing notions on the teaching of English to speakers of other languages. So also, communicative language testing has made test developers and teachers reconsider on the following issues.

- Should tests focus only on the assessment of learners' competence in the language? or should they assess those aspects of language that would provide evidence of the ability of learners to use the language appropriately in non-test situations?
It has reiterated the positive washback effect that tests can have on the teaching-learning process. A well designed communicative language test validates the communicative approach to language teaching. This has emphasized the idea that teaching and learning suffer infinitely when they are at cross-purposes.

It has highlighted the need for research especially empirical research in the field of language testing.

It has stressed the need for tests to be a valid assessment of students' learning. Language tests must assess the ability of learners to use all the skills learnt during a course.

Communicative language testing is basically an approach to testing keeping in mind the needs of learners. Tests are concrete proofs of learners' ability in using language successfully. This approach to testing has encouraged the construction of tests which match closely the objectives and purposes of second and foreign language courses. As Harrison remarks,

Perhaps the most important point about assessment, and one which is constantly slipping away under considerations like prestige and intellectual ability, is the fact that we are trying to assess individuals and that in the final analysis, we are doing it in their interest. It is therefore vital that they should be given the opportunity to be individuals, to be as creative as they can be with the task we have asked them to do (Harrison, 1991).

Communicative language testing is a significant step towards the assessment of language (both usage and use) that is relevant to the learner.
Communicative language testing can be viewed both as an evolution and a revolution. It is an evolution because it is an offshoot of the communicative approach to language teaching just as the earlier approaches to testing were also based on the different learning theories popular then. It is in one sense a revolution because it is a clean break from the past approaches to language testing. The focus in this approach to testing is on those aspects of language skills that are relevant to the learners. Communicative language testing attempts to assess language in a way that reflects its use in real situations. If more communicative tests are designed it will only mean that they will have a positive effect on language learning.

2.4 MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS IN LANGUAGE TESTING

Research on Communicative language testing is still incomplete but it has led to the investigation of hitherto unanswered questions in the field. It has made language test developers seriously reconsider the traditional approaches to testing. One significant development related to communicative language testing is testing of English for specific purposes. Apart from the development in the testing of English for specific purposes there has been significant progress in related areas such as, test method effects, advances in statistical, analytical, and methodological techniques and a renewed interest in the class test and its role as a catalyst in the learning of English within the classroom. The following paragraphs will discuss each of the above listed issues separately.
2.4.1 Testing of English for specific purposes

ESP testing is generally viewed within the context of the communicative approach to testing because ESP testing takes into account learners' needs as far as English is concerned. The ESP test tasks to a great extent are predictive in nature because they elicit the kind of language behaviour which learners are most likely to use in their work place.

John Munby's book *The Communicative Syllabus Design* (1978) has been very influential in the construction of ESP tests because his list of needs analysis facilitated the identification of specific needs areas where learners needed to use specialised language. The information obtained from the analysis helped in the design of tests that were linked in a fairly obvious way to the performances that needed to be predicted. ESP tests do not face the confusion over whether to test competence or performance since the relationship between tests based on needs analysis and the language behaviour to be assessed is direct and transparent. As Carroll observes, "Those who make decisions based on information from language tests will be better guided and motivated if they can see in the test features which they themselves see in the jobs being tested for" (Carroll, 1983).

Some of the early ESP tests were designed by Carroll (1981). He proposed a set of test specifications for the design of proficiency tests to assess whether prospective foreign students at British Universities would be able to cope with the language demands of their studies. These specifications became the basis for the widely used ELTS test. The ELTS is a two-tier test. The first test, assesses the general language proficiency of all the learners irrespective of their field of specialisation. The second test, on the other hand, is specific in the sense that candidates can choose from six given areas the one that is related to their field. The ELTS test was a very practical solution to the problem of testing English for specific
purposes. However, there were problems underlying the rather arbitrary specificity of the test. Skehan (1989) in his review article identifies the following two points as major drawbacks of the ELTS test.

a) The Munby model which formed the basis for the test did not help in deciding which specific discipline can be tested by a more general test say for eg. engineering. It did not in other words answer the question 'How specific is specific?'

b) The ELTS test was not based on any empirical research which had proved in clear terms that the ELTS test content was a representative sample of the required language behaviour. Later research on testing has shown that issues such as: speed of presentation in lectures, use of subtechnical and colloquial vocabularies, the capacity to understand and interpret visually presented information are some of the aspects of English that pose difficulties to non-native students pursuing their higher studies in the UK. These issues were not represented in ELTS.

More recently, within ESP, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has been the major source of interest for test developers. The TEEP (Test of English for Educational Purposes) developed by Cyril Weir (1983, 1988) is an improvement on the ELTS test because it has extended the range and scope of the test. Besides written passages this test includes graphs, charts, non-verbal diagrams etc. Being a thematic test the TEEP test is closer to the kind of situations university students are most likely to encounter. ESP testing is basically a test of the learners' language performance in context-specific situations. The fundamental problem relating to ESP testing is the issue of specificity: within what degree of specification should ESP test developers operate? Allied to this question is the grouping of testees whose professions require similar language functions. A careful categorisation of
job specifications is essential if language testing in an ESP context is not to lose its validity.

2.4.2 Test methods and their effects

Recent research in language testing has showed that test methods significantly affect test performance. In the 1980s test methods were generally seen on a continuum with discrete point tests on one end and integrative tests such as the cloze and dictation on the other.

Later research showed that the test method factors do affect the reliability of a test. Bachman (1990) conducted research with the oral interview method. He showed in his study that the oral interview can vary in a number of ways such as: the time duration, the number of participants, the tasks the candidates are required to do and the topics included in the interview, the gender of the interviewer and so on.

Studies have proved categorically that test methods have a telling influence on the language performance of test takers. These studies are an indication that test method is an important factor in language test performance that needs to be considered both in the design of tests and in the interpretation of the scores that they yield.

2.4.3 Statistical and analytical techniques

In language testing significant progress has been made in the development of standard statistical and analytical techniques for reliability assessment and test validation. So far as reliability assessment is concerned the most noteworthy development has been the development of the Item Response Theory (IRT) or what is also referred to as Latent Trait Measurement. The item response approach has aided language testers in
several ways. For one, it has made it possible to measure item difficulty and learner ability on the same scale provided that two tests are linked together for some items. Two, it helps in test administration, since test items can be refined and retained more accurately and each item can provide information which relates to the scale as a whole. This in turn helps in the selection of items that are related to the test taker’s ability. This technique also helps in item banking, new items can be tried out and drawn on as needed by the test developer.

Notable progress has also been made in the study of how test validity can be established. The first of such developments has been the use of the convergent - discriminant approaches. Earlier, validation of a test was done using an approach which was a combination of correlational and exploratory factor analysis. Correlational analysis looked for high positive correlation between a test and another measure of language performance (usually another test), later studies showed that it was not only necessary to establish convergent validity but also divergent validity which means predicting what the test will correlate with. The convergent and discriminant approaches have been formalised in the Multitrait - Multimethod Paradigm (MTMM). The MTMM approaches have been used frequently by researchers to explore the relationship between test formats and test methods. Bachman and Palmer (1981) for instance used this approach to show that some test formats were less confounded by method influences than others.

An alternative to the MTMM approach is the Confirmatory Factor analysis. This technique requires the investigator to formulate a hypothesis regarding the analysis that is to be carried out and evaluate the hypothesis against actual results. Using this approach alternative models can be specified and then the one that suits the data best can be selected. However, if such a powerful technique is to yield dividends it is important that greater
insights are gained into the structure and development of language proficiency.

2.5 CLASS TESTS

The nineties were a period in language testing research and practice that saw the resurgence of the language classroom. So far as language testing is concerned at least in countries like India there are wide and seemingly irreconcilable differences between examinations and class tests. There is a virtual tussle between the two with examinations getting all the attention of teachers, students, administrators and other stakeholders. Though students write a number of class tests both in school and college they fail to have a significant washback effect on teaching and learning in the classroom.

What are class tests? A definition of a class test is quite simple. Class tests are those the construction, conduct and marking of which are left entirely to the discretion of the teacher concerned. The teacher assumes the role of paper-setter, administrator of the tests and assessor of students answer scripts. Since class tests are conducted at periodic intervals, they are formative in nature because they offer ongoing feedback to the teacher and students about their teaching and learning.

Class tests are as important, if not more, than examinations because they provide vital diagnostic information that teachers could use to either restructure the syllabus, or reorient their teaching in order to help students with their learning. Classroom tests also provide teachers with information regarding psychological or physiological defects their students are suffering from and which are impeding their progress in learning. These tests are perhaps the only means available to teachers to identify problems with their teaching and their students' learning.
The importance of class tests both from teachers point of view and from students point of view is listed below.

Class tests help teachers to:

- increase the effectiveness of their teaching by rethinking and if possible changing the teaching methodology in order to suit the needs of their students.

- diagnose the specific difficulties faced by students in the language (grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation etc.) and based on the diagnosis prepare suitable remedial teaching materials.

- gain further insight into the language that is tested. This will help the teacher enormously in improving his skills in teaching.

- be sensitive to the heterogeneous nature of their class in terms of proficiency in the language. An awareness of this will help the teacher take into consideration the different groups present in class and if possible plan the teaching and group the students into suitable teachability groups so that each of their problems in the language are addressed.

From the students' point of view class tests:

- give them a sense of accomplishment, the scores or grades obtained in a test symbolise their proficiency or otherwise in the language.

- make them more aware of their strengths and weaknesses in the language.

- inform them about the effectiveness or otherwise of their learning strategies.
encourage them to set their own goals and introspect about their learning and the progress made in communicating in the language.

2.6 CONCLUSION

As stated in the introductory paragraphs to this chapter, the nineties were significant so far as language testing research was concerned because they heralded the innovation and experimentation of newer and more learner-friendly methods of testing language learning. This renewed interest in language testing led to a 'rethink' on the role of testing in language teaching and learning. The centrality of testing in teaching and learning has come to be accepted by all the stakeholders in the educational process definitely not for the superficial reasons for which testing was considered important earlier but for the intricate relationship that exists between testing, teaching and learning. Though most teachers suffer from the 'teaching to test' phenomenon they view testing and learning as two distinct, unrelated activities. The traditional assumption has always been that testing follows learning and therefore decisions regarding teaching and learning are taken independently of testing. Recent research has shown that testing significantly influences both the teaching and the learning initiated in the classroom.

The nineties were also important because they signalled the shift in focus both in research and practice from an examination to a testing culture. The words 'testing' or 'assessment' signify a move away from examinations as all-powerful, single instances of testing learners' knowledge, to simpler, participatory and multiple instances of assessing student learning within the classroom itself. Phil Race (1999) discusses at length the innovations in testing which have come about because of the dissatisfaction with the traditional tests and unseen examinations. This shift in focus has led to the development of new testing procedures some of
which are listed by Hancock (1994) such as: performance assessment, authentic assessment which includes self and peer assessment and portfolio assessment. There has also been a rethinking notably in a multi-racial country like the United States on progress testing and the construction of tests suitable for students with limited proficiency in English. The need for alternate assessment procedures has been felt because of the growing diversity amongst student groups in schools and colleges all over the world and more importantly of the diverse needs for which these students need the language.

Alternative testing procedures, offer greater evidence of the quality of students’ learning and the validity of their qualifications. In India perhaps it will be sometime before these innovations in language testing become a regular practice in schools and colleges in the country. However, before large scale use of these innovations is made, small and timebound research must be carried out to gain insight into their suitability in the Indian teaching context. Portfolio assessment is one innovation that seems promising in the context of the second language classroom in India with specific reference to students with limited English skills.