CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Fifty years of independence has seen India shift its position primarily in economic terms from an underdeveloped to a developing country. An impersonal and objective view would show that this shift is significant because it has been achieved despite all the attendant problems of a country with the second largest population in the world. Sustained and uniform growth has been seen in fields which have received consistent funding and attention from successive governments both central, state and economic policy makers. However, certain basic fields have not seen uniform, all-round development. This has been primarily because of sporadic funding and therefore development in these fields has been erratic. Education barring professional education has been neglected in the first fifty years of Indian Independence.

Education was one field on which high stakes were placed when India became free in 1947. The founding fathers of modern India believed that an educated society was a crucial factor in achieving rapid economic growth. To achieve this end they formulated policies such as free and compulsory education for those below the age of 14 and adult literacy programmes. Higher education was to be made the prerogative of every Indian citizen depending on his fitness for the courses that he sought admission for. However, these lofty goals have remained largely unattained. Lapierre's moving account of the struggle by the economically backward sections of Indian society for basic literacy is a testimony to the above statement that policies on basic education have not percolated to all sections
of the society. He writes, "The most pressing desire of the inhabitants, the sustenance they sought was not directed at their children's frail bodies, but at their minds. The surveys all revealed that the primary demand was for the creation of a night school so that the children employed in the workshops and teastalls could learn to read and write" (India Today, 2000).

In the last 50 years no doubt educational opportunities have expanded in the sense that more schools and colleges have been started both by the government and private individuals in rural, semi-urban and urban areas. Access to education perhaps no longer poses a very big problem but the quality of education varies vastly between different institutions 'Good' schools and colleges continue to be affordable only for the rich and the affluent. In short, there is a yawning gulf between the education received by the rich and the poor. Apart from this major difference in terms of quality the education system in the country is beset with several other problems such as lack of infrastructure, funds, and a committed workforce at all levels. The policies formulated by education planners ensure short-term rather than long-term benefits and most governing bodies of universities and colleges are rigid and autocratic.

1.1 HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

All the three levels of education in India, the primary, secondary and tertiary are beset with problems. However, the problems at the tertiary level become critical and magnified because it is the last stage in the educational process. It is at this level that students acquire specialist skills that help them secure jobs. From the economic point of view a college degree helps individuals to become part of a skilled workforce that is very important for a growing economy. So far as tertiary education is concerned, the following three problems can be identified as major ones:
• The absence of or lack of implementation of progressive policies.
• The burgeoning student population.
• The role of English at the tertiary level.

**The absence of or lack of implementation of progressive policies**

The main problem with higher education in India is one of implementation. Successive Education Commissions have put forward recommendations most of which have been made in the interest of the people and the country. But very few of these recommendations have actually been implemented and many continue to remain mere recommendations on paper. The emphasis in higher education in recent years has been on professional education to the exclusion of all else. The professional courses and training in the country have attained international standards but the other subjects have been neglected. This has meant lopsided growth with very little funds allocated for other courses. Consequently, students who opt for these courses have a bleak future so far as their livelihood is concerned.

**The burgeoning student population**

The unprecedented increase in the number of students seeking admission into institutions of higher education began in the late sixties. From this period onwards there has been a steady increase in the number of entrants into colleges and universities in India. Two main reasons for this that can be cited in the context of a developing country like India are:

• Lack of a well-organised vocational sector.
• The socio-economic factor.
The lack of a well organised and well structured vocational sector is a strong reason for students to (even those disinterested in higher education) apply for admission to colleges because they are left with no other choice. The prospects of getting well paid and secure jobs with diplomas or with certificates of short courses continue to be discouraging and therefore students are compelled to seek admission into institutions of higher education. A strong and well organised vocational sector would mean that those students who are not interested in acquiring a college degree would opt for vocational courses soon after school education.

The socio-economic factor plays a major role in the growing number of students in higher institutions. The Open-door and the Reservation policy (The Reservation policy refers to a fixed number of seats reserved in all government and quasi-government institutions solely for those from the disadvantaged classes. The percentage of seats varies between different states in the country but the reservation or the quota of reserved seats is expected to be implemented if the university or college wishes to receive continued financial support from the government) adopted by the central and state governments has meant that today more than ever before the downtrodden both in rural and urban areas have greater access to higher education. For individuals from these classes education is the only way out of the morass that their lives are in. A basic college degree to them does not merely ensure a job but it symbolises social mobility and a dignified life as opposed to the wretched existence on the periphery of society which has been their lot for centuries. The only problem here is that though they have access to institutions of higher education their academic performance at this level when compared to those from the privileged classes is poor. Knowledge - gaining at this level for a majority of these students is a painful uphill task and they are unable to cope with the academic load.
This poor performance is directly related to the kind of education that students from the poorer classes receive in their formative years. The reservation policy does not cover primary and secondary education. Quality education was made the prerogative of every citizen in the country at the time of independence but it continues to be funded and accessed only by those from the rich and the affluent classes. The Sixth Education Commission (1964-1966) which till date remains one of the most comprehensive of all the education commissions set up by the government, spelt out very clearly this dichotomy in terms of the kind of education available to the poor and to the rich.

The existing educational system reflects the socio-economic differences between the well-to-do classes and the poor masses. It has a system of high quality good institutions at all levels which are used by the children of the rich and socially or politically important groups, while the bulk of the educational institutions provided by the state are of poor quality and are the only ones available to the vast bulk of have-nots or marginal people (Naik, 1982).

Schools which are owned by private managements and private individuals are first and foremost located mainly in the urban centres. These private (English medium) schools have their own set of criteria for admitting students all of which may not be related to academics. There is no independent governing body that could objectively regulate the admission procedures followed in these schools. Private schools score high over government run schools because of several reasons. As Bellarmine elaborates,

Practices in English medium schools such as systematic assignment of homework, close monitoring of progress in learning, use of challenging tasks, constant tests and
examinations, all these act synergically as a pace setter. These good practices stretch children's abilities until they realise their potential as well as know the limits of their potential (The Hindu, 1999).

Primary and secondary education are of vital importance because they help the students to formulate learning strategies which they can use when they join college. The poor performance of many of the students from the underprivileged classes in colleges is related to the kind of education they receive during their formative years.

Higher education in India as stated earlier is largely funded by the government and therefore the government has a greater hold over tertiary than secondary and primary education. In its attempt to iron out the social injustices and the gross indifferences between students at the secondary level the government (both Central and State) insists that higher educational institutions rigorously follow the Reservation policy. The difference among students in terms of their levels of knowledge absorption, awareness and motivation which have been the subject of any book on higher education in India is related to the kind of education available to students from different social classes. The disparity between private and government schools means that in a single classroom in colleges and universities in India we have students who are contemporaries, belonging to the same country and culture, but, inhabiting two different and disparate worlds in terms of their awareness, goals, aspirations, motivation and levels of knowledge absorption. The problem which germinates at the primary and secondary levels is the single major factor contributing to the irreconcilable differences between students in terms of their abilities. On the one hand, there are students from public schools who are well equipped to face the challenges of tomorrow (representing India) and on the other, there are students who are diffident about their capabilities and whose awareness of
the world around is unfathomably poor (representing Bharat). This division between Bharat and India seems to be widening everyday. Education planners need to change the existing system of education radically if they are to remove the present disparities among students.

• The role of English at the tertiary level

The next few paragraphs will discuss the role of English at the tertiary level and the problems faced by students from vernacular medium schools with the learning of English at this level. Given below are some of the reasons for which English is important at the tertiary level in India.

• It is the medium of instruction in a majority of institutions of higher education in the country.

• Acquisition of new specialist knowledge becomes a simpler task for the student when he is fluent in English.

• Academic performance is directly related to fluency in English. Universities and colleges in India out of consideration for students from the vernacular medium follow a two language formula for teaching but when it comes to testing English is the chosen medium.

• A college degree gives the promise of a career to most students but with the job market becoming highly competitive and selective fluency in English is essential to have that necessary edge over other job-seekers.

• With more multi-national companies setting up their offices in India it goes without saying that English will be the link language
in these offices and therefore fluency in English is necessary for students aspiring for jobs in these companies.

- English is important to participate effectively in group discussions, specially in job interviews.

- Students who wish to pursue their higher studies abroad have to be fluent in the language.

English has in recent years become the lingua franca for most people in India. The learning of English for practical purposes has gained greater value among Indians of all classes and ages because the power equations in terms of which Indian language should be chosen as the national language of the country are more fluid today than ever before. At the time of independence, Nehru and other like minded leaders agreed that English should be allowed to continue as the official and link language in the country until Hindi was accepted and spoken fluently by the non-Hindi speaking peoples in the country. However, even after fifty years of independence this tacit understanding among the leaders remains unrealised. As stated above the unacceptance of an 'Indian' language as the official and link language in the country has been to the great advantage of English. It has perpetuated the need by all people in the country to learn the language. Apart from this single reason which is peculiar to a multi-lingual, multi-racial country like India there is another reason which is common to all non-English speaking countries in the world. Every second and foreign learner of the language is conscious of, "the seminal importance of English as one of the significant cultural keys to 'success' in the world" (The Hindu, 1999).
The common people recognize the need to be able to communicate effectively in English considering its current position as the language of science and technology, information technology and trade and commerce. But official policies are committed to the promotion of the regional languages. This is because they wish to achieve two things: firstly, to protect the regional languages and secondly, to widen their roles in the Indian society. But this commitment seems rather lopsided from the point of view of the student community. On the one hand, we have the upper classes who have access to English medium institutions which means that at the tertiary level, given their aptitude and attitude to the course taken, their concentration needs to be focused only on acquisition of new knowledge. On the other hand, the poor who study in schools where the medium of instruction is the regional language are severely handicapped because they are not fluent in English. This is a serious problem because at a stage in the educational process where the language should serve as a means to the acquisition of specialist knowledge. One can only imagine the hardship that students from vernacular medium schools face in colleges and universities where they have to learn English and simultaneously use it to acquire new knowledge. This struggle is more pronounced in technical colleges and universities where the syllabus is demanding and requires a high level of fluency in English for a student to comprehend the subject. The dilution of standards and quality of student output which is deplored in almost all books on higher education in India is directly related to this disparity between students and their respective performances at the college level.
1.2 ROLE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER AT THE TERTIARY LEVEL

The English language teacher at the tertiary level has the unenviable task of:

• integrating students from English medium and non-English medium schools in a single classroom.

• equipping students, especially those from regional medium institutions with passable English that would help them improve their academic performance and also find good jobs eventually.

• making the best use of the prescribed syllabus.

• ensuring that language learning is actually taking place in the classroom.

In the Indian teaching context, for most language teachers it is an uphill task to achieve all or in some cases even one of the above listed duties of an English language teacher at the tertiary level.

1.3 PROBLEMS FACED BY ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS AT THE TERTIARY LEVEL

Some of the more serious problems faced by second language teachers are listed below.

• The problem of large classes which is compounded by the widely differing language abilities of the students in these classes.
Students' attitudes to English and English language teachers vary depending on their background. Attitudes of students from rural schools towards teachers of English is that they are, "...arrogant, unsympathetic, imposing and coercive in general, as such they are not suitable for guidance, advice or confidence - building" (The Hindu, 1999). This negative attitude towards English and those teaching it has a telling impact on the motivational levels of students which in turn affect classroom dynamics.

Rigid and unsympathetic managements which do not encourage active participation by language teachers in making decisions regarding choice of teaching materials, methodology, and evaluation.

Outdated English language syllabuses make the task of helping students develop their communication skills more difficult for the teacher. At the tertiary level the English course and its objectives vary between Arts and Science colleges and technical colleges. A perusal of the existing syllabus for the general English course in arts colleges would show that the textbooks prescribed for study are literature - based. In recent years new books that are aimed at developing the communication skills of students have been introduced but the syllabus continues largely to be literature oriented. The literature based syllabuses do not in any way help students become better communicators in the language. As Gautam points out,

The tendency at the college level is to rely mainly on literary texts. Books of any kind - should constitute only part of a language course, not the whole of it; a good course must be balanced. But when books are used, we must ensure that they are of the right sort, and have been carefully
planned and written for the purpose for which they are being used. Judged by this criterion, most of the books used for teaching English at the college level are unsuitable (Gautam, 1988).

- The methodology adopted to teach English in colleges is necessarily dependent on the syllabus. The present English syllabus in most colleges being predominantly literature oriented, language teachers have no choice but to lecture in the class or worse still paraphrase the text for the benefit of students from L1 medium schools. The outcome of this method of teaching is that very little of the language is learnt for communication purposes. The existing General English course in reality is English for no purpose at all. Both the teachers' and students' energies are focused on completing the prescribed texts but the 'learning' of a 'language' hardly takes place.

The above list gives some of the serious problems faced by second language teachers at the tertiary level. However, one cannot wholly absolve them of the responsibility of equipping students with passable proficiency in English. English language teachers in India suffer from serious handicaps like the following:

- They do not keep themselves updated on the latest developments in their field and they are content using outdated methods for teaching the language.

- They are diffident about innovating in their classrooms for fear of being labelled flippant in their attitude towards teaching. Any innovation in materials, methods and evaluation, if attempted at all, is done so without a rationale which means that neither they nor the students are benefited.
Most language teachers are victims of bad teaching themselves and they pass on their error-ridden English to their students.

Most teachers are incapable of facing the challenges when they confront them in the second language classroom. This is because of the lack of training of any sort given to college teachers in India. The English language teacher, "is often picked raw from the university, armed with a textbook, pushed into the classroom and ordered to teach, without any orientation or training for the task" (Gautam, 1988).

Second language teachers in India fall into two insular groups. One group is strongly inclined towards literature. ELT to them means a set of new-fangled and impractical ideas. The other group has a strong faith in the practicality of ELT and its relevance to the Indian teaching situation. The unnecessary wrangling between these two groups in many English departments around the country means that no positive and affirmative decisions are taken regarding the teaching and learning of English.

Most English teachers at colleges blame their counterparts in schools for the inadequacy or lack of proficiency in English of a majority of college entrants. But they little realise that their bitterness and frustration will not help them help their students. As Gautam observes,

The teacher at the undergraduate level cannot escape his responsibility by saying that the language should have been taught at the school level, and that if this has not been done, he can do nothing about it. He has now to do a part of the teaching which used to be done at school. The task is not infra - dig; on the contrary, it is an
important professional challenge that must be met (Gautam, 1988).

1.4 THE ROLE OF EVALUATION

The previous section discussed the role of English at the tertiary level in India and the problems related to the teaching of English as a second language. The next section will discuss the role of evaluation in education and other related issues which are listed below:

• The role of evaluation in education.
• The difference in meaning between assessment and evaluation.
• Salient features of a test
• Test usefulness
• Role of tests in the teaching and learning of a second or foreign language.

• The role of evaluation in education.

In general terms, evaluation is a process that takes place in every human encounter. The act of evaluating people or things is done all the time either consciously or unconsciously. This exercise of weighing the worthiness or otherwise of people or things we encounter helps us form judgements, opinions and most importantly decide on the future course of action in relation to the person or thing evaluated. Evaluation in an academic context has other implications as well.

(a) It is an estimation of students' knowledge at a given point of time.
(b) It helps the teacher base his instructional decisions on the evaluation made.

Evaluation in an academic context is of prime importance because it puts value on students. It is, "The systematic process of collecting,
analyzing, and interpreting information to determine the extent to which pupils are achieving instructional objectives" (Grounlund, 1985). Based on the evaluation, the language teacher may take decisions that relate to: appropriate placement of students in a particular course, decide on the need for remedial teaching for some students, rethink on the changes to made in the teaching methodology and alterations in the syllabus. Evaluation as Brown et al. states is "...the legitimate concern of those who learn, those who teach and those who are responsible for the development and accreditation of courses" (Brown et al., 1997).

Evaluation can be both formal and informal. Informal evaluation can be done through class observations, oral responses given by students in class, the time taken by students to complete a given task, the number of times a teacher is asked to explain a concept by students and so on. Formal evaluation on the other hand refers to the traditional paper and pencil tests and examinations. Formal evaluation scores highly over informal ways of evaluating or appraising student performance because it provides the teacher concrete evidence on which he could base his decisions relating to instruction.

Evaluation of student learning is an exercise that takes place within the school or college but its consequences ie. the decision-making process affects society at large. The consequences of evaluation are far-reaching because they significantly alter an individual's perception of his own capabilities and more importantly others' perceptions of him which in turn may limit or expand opportunities for him. In other words, at the micro level, evaluation affects teachers and students and at the macro level, the educational system and society. The importance accorded to evaluation varies between different cultural contexts. In a still traditional society such as the Indian society the outcomes of evaluation have a telling impact on a person's life. As Dave and Hill observe, "A person's standing in the
examinations affects many aspects of his life. Not only is it a basis of his economic success, but it affects his prestige in his family and his (or her) value in the 'marriage market'. The examinations thus form the basis of a kind of educational caste system, superimposed on the traditional caste system of the country" (Dave and Hill, 1974).

Evaluation is restricted not just to teaching and learning; it also includes courses prescribed for study and the syllabus. It is a dynamic process because although it is the last stage in the assessment process it signals the beginning because alterations and significant changes relating to methods and materials are made based on the evaluation of them.

The difference in meaning between assessment and evaluation

The terms assessment and evaluation refer to two dynamic processes that are intrinsically related to teaching and learning. They help teachers improve their teaching and learners enhance their learning.

These terms are frequently used interchangeably in testing parlance so much so that they seem virtual synonyms. But it is essential that the difference in meaning between the words though fine is clearly established. Whereas assessment is primarily pedagogical, evaluation is both pedagogical and non-pedagogical. As Rowntree puts it,

If assessment tries to discover what the student is becoming or has accomplished, then evaluation tries to do the same for a course or learning experience or teaching. Evaluation is an attempt to identify and explain the effects (and) effectiveness of teaching. Assessment, whether formal or informal, reveals to us the most important class of 'effects' - changes brought about in the knowledge and understanding,
abilities and attitudes of our students. A full evaluation will ... consider the effects of the course on people other than students on the teachers participating, on other teachers who have contact with the students, on parents, on employees, on other people in the community and on (Rowntree, 1987).

Assessment is made up of marks and grades that are awarded to students. Evaluation attaches a significance and gives value to the marks or grades awarded. It helps the teacher base his instructional decisions on the interpretation of the evaluation.

- **Salient features of a test**

A test or an assessment is a single incidence of assessing students' comprehension of what has been taught over a given period of time. The term assessment is more commonly used today than the traditional term 'test' because it is assumed to be more learner-friendly and it refers to an activity in which students collaborate. Students in the assessment culture are seen as, "... active participants in both learning and assessment rather than being the 'victims' of the assessor" (Birenbaum, 1996).

The importance of assessments can never be overemphasized in students' lives. As Brown et al., point out, "Assessment defines what students regard as important, how they spend their time and how they come to see themselves a students and then as graduates. Students take their cues from what is assessed rather than what lecturers assert as important" (Brown et al., 1997). Assessments give the teacher and the student feedback on both teaching and learning. A test helps the teacher and the student reflect on the teaching and more importantly on the learning initiated in the classroom. As stated earlier there are many different ways by which teachers can assess and evaluate their students’ learning but a formal test
is concrete proof of students' learning. As Grounlund points out, "Tests and other evaluation procedures simply are a means of obtaining more comprehensive, systematic, and objective evidence on which to base instructional decisions" (Grounlund, 1985). The crucial words in the above quote which describes the usefulness of tests are, comprehensive, systematic and objective.

Comprehensive: Comprehensiveness of a test implies that a test is an adequate sampling of what was taught and learnt prior to the test. Comprehensiveness is an important aspect of test design. If a test is to be a valid measurement of students' learning then it has to adequately sample what was taught and learnt over a period of time. As Carmen Basanta puts it, "We will test what we teach and in the right proportions" (ELT Forum, 1995). If a test lacks comprehensiveness then it will be an inadequate sampling of student learning and therefore may not be of use either to the teacher or to the student.

Systematic: 'Systematic' means working to a plan or schedule. With regard to testing this quality is related to three crucial stages of a test.

- Design
- Conduct
- Record of marks and grades

Being systematic at the stage of test design is related to the careful choice of test items by the teacher bearing in mind the purpose and focus of the test. The setting of the paper itself must be done well ahead of time so that the teacher is in a position to choose test items which are a representative sample of the learning and teaching done in the class. Hurriedly designed test papers mean surprises and shocks for students which ultimately will affect their performance. A test is a reflection of the
teaching and learning in the classes preceding the test and therefore by being systematic the teacher would be able to design a valid test. Only a valid and reliable test will give feedback on the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

**Conduct:** Due consideration must be given to the conduct of the test. Being systematic at this stage means that the teacher announces the test and the portions covered in the test well ahead of the conduct of the test. Students must be informed of the distribution of marks not necessarily for individual items but for main sections in the paper. If the teacher is planning to use specific criteria for marking answer scripts then students must be informed of this also.

**Record of marks and grades:** Teachers must be systematic both in the correction and the careful recording of the marks or grades awarded to students. Being systematic in the marking of students' answer scripts means that the correction is completed within a realistic period. Otherwise the feedback given by the teacher will be too late and will not help students change their learning strategies. The recording of marks must also be carefully done so that there are no mistakes (wrong marks awarded to students). It is not sufficient if the teacher just measures and records the marks for official purposes. He must also report it promptly to the other stakeholders especially parents and administrators. Testing is a process by which teachers can identify their students' strengths and weaknesses and take necessary steps to enhance the former and overcome the latter.

By being systematic in the design, conduct, marking and recording of marks, teachers can help students prepare themselves mentally and physically for writing tests. In countries like India especially where students write a number of tests at all levels, teachers, by being systematic, can help
students realise that tests are a normal and a natural close to a phase of teaching and learning.

Objectivity: Objectivity is to do with the teacher-tester's attitude towards testing. It is a virtue that ensures fair and accurate assessment of students' performance. Teachers with fixed notions of students' performance and strong prejudices in terms of students' social background, ethnic group and so on will never be in a position to mark such students' papers objectively and take judicious decisions based on their assessment. This means that the evaluation exercise is judgmental and not developmental as it should be. As McIntyre observes, "... although we spend an enormous amount of time and money on assessment, very little is obtained which helps teachers to teach. Instead, we give pupils marks or grades, that is, we concentrate on judging them, on saying how 'good' or 'bad' they are, on putting them in an 'order of merit'" (McIntyre, 1970). Teachers with strong biases are most likely, after a single assessment to form rigid opinions (the halo effect) about the capabilities of their students and place them in seemingly watertight compartments such as 'good', 'average', 'intelligent', 'weak' or 'middling'.

Once the students are branded then the teacher is unwilling to change his opinion about them. Changes in performance are not acknowledged and thereafter tests become a static exercise which can be very damaging to student's morale. The pernicious halo-effect which most teachers suffer from can ultimately ruin a student's career. Once the teacher is fixed in his opinion about a student, he will,

... take less notice of him, make fewer demands on him, be less patient with him when he finds difficulty in coping with a demand, take fewer pains in ensuring his understanding and be less concerned about it when he fails than he would with other children. Thus the child is likely to fall even further behind his classmates because he is
getting less teaching. And the further behind he gets, the more he confirms the teacher's assessment (and behaviour). In fact, the teacher's assessment is acting as a self-fulfillment prophecy (Rowntree, 1987).

The self-fulfilling prophecy can help a student grow, it can motivate him to stretch his potential or it can stultify and stunt his growth.

Objectivity in marking is desirable but the question is: 'How can objectivity be ensured in marking and evaluation ? The solution to this would be through training teachers. Training is crucial to help teachers unload their preconceived, rigid and inflexible notions regarding student performance. It will help them see the intrinsic value of testing in teaching and learning. Most teachers in India, do not receive training on testing practices and therefore are very unclear about testing and what it entails.

- Test usefulness

Since tests form the pivot of the instruction process, they are deeply embedded in the sub-conscious of teachers and students. The most important use of a test is the information that it gives both teachers and learners regarding the effectiveness of the teaching and learning that preceded the test. Because it provides this vital information feedback is termed as the life-blood of learning. Gipps elaborates on the importance of feedback stating that, "Feedback in the process of teaching, is considered to be important for two reasons: it contributes directly to progress in learning through the process of formative assessment, and indirectly through its effect on pupils academic self-esteem" (Gipps, 1994).

Feedback is important for a student because it helps him make more sense of the grades and marks obtained in a test. Therefore the
feedback from the teacher should be prompt and preferably in the form of verbal comments because this helps students understand clearly the highs and lows of their performance. It should be clear, purposeful and comprehensive, otherwise the whole exercise will be a waste. As Dweck et al., observe, "...frequent use of evaluative feedback for non-intellectual behaviour (for example, conduct and neatness of work) increases the ambiguity of that feedback and impairs its meaning as an evaluation of the intellectual of the child's work" (Dweck et al., 1978).

The feedback is also important for the teacher because it gives him information on how well he has taught. It helps the teacher review his teaching in the light of his students' performance. Every test provides clues which the teacher could use to interpret the effectiveness of his teaching.

* Role of tests in the teaching and learning of a second language

Assessment plays a critical role in language teaching especially second or foreign language teaching. Bachman and Palmer clearly spell out the role of language tests thus:

Language tests can be a valuable tool for providing information that is relevant to several concerns in language teaching. They can provide evidence of the results of learning and instruction, and hence feedback on the effectiveness of the teaching program itself. They can also provide information that is relevant to making decisions about individuals, such as determining what specific kind of learning materials and activities should be provided to students, based on a diagnosis of their strengths and weaknesses, deciding whether individual students or a class are ready to move on to another unit of instruction, and assigning grades on the basis of
students' achievement. Finally, testing can also be used as a tool for clarifying instructional objectives and, in some cases, for evaluating the relevance of these objectives and the instructional materials and activities based on them to the language use needs of students following the program of instruction (Bachman and Palmer, 1996).

Tests help second language teachers gain insight into their students' learning strategies, their aptitude for learning the language and using this information they can make the process of learning a second language especially at the tertiary level more easy and purposeful for young adults.

1.5 ESL TESTING PRACTICE IN INDIA AT THE TERTIARY LEVEL

The idea of examinations looms large in the minds of both teachers and students in India. The energies of both groups at all levels are directed towards the preparation for the all important annual or public examinations. In a system which is so examination-oriented teacher-constructed class tests become mere administrative exercises. Examinations are conducted with a lot of fanfare but the process ends there. They do not contribute in any significant way to teaching and learning.

In India, right from kindergarten to college, students write a number of tests and examinations. At the school level particularly, the academic year is divided into three phases each culminating in an examination. In between these examinations students write any number of unit tests. However, the frequency with which tests and examinations are conducted and written by students has not made the task of test taking any simpler or easier for them. Most Indian students have a strong aversion to
testing. It is not an exaggeration to state that for a majority of teachers and students in the Indian teaching context tests and examinations do not serve as eye-openers that well help improve teaching and learning. The concept of tests as having a washback effect on the teaching and learning that follows them is yet to take root in the minds of teachers and students in India.

Testing in India is not friendly either to the teacher to the learner. Tests and examinations are bound by tradition and are straitjacketed by a number of regulations. In such a situation testing does not exert a positive influence on teaching and learning. At the most, its influence is negative. This negative effect is apparent at all levels in the education process.

ESL testing practices at the tertiary level suffer from the general problems discussed briefly above in addition to specific problems related to language testing at this level, some of which are listed below.

• English at the tertiary level continues to be tested as any other subject in the curriculum - which means that communication skills in the language are not tested. As Gautam points out, "The outmoded system of examination... tests memory rather than control of language and makes it possible for students to 'pass' in English with the help of cribs, without having learnt the language" (Gautam, 1988). The washback effect of this kind of testing is that students memorise answers from bazaar guides.

• In recent years methods and materials for teaching English as a second language have received a lot of attention from teachers and researchers in the field. But testing practices have not received the same kind of attention.
English language teachers are also preoccupied with the final examinations like subject teachers and therefore do not view class tests as contributing in a significant way for improving both teaching and learning.

The existing examination system is both outdated and outmoded and therefore all radical changes in materials and methods are made null and void because the system does not complement these changes.

1.6 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The present study focuses on the use of class tests as teaching devices to help develop the writing skills of students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP hereafter). The study is based on the idea that tests can be used as teaching devices, if and when ESL teachers stop viewing the class test as isolated components divorced from the learning and the teaching that precede and follow it. As Pearson states, "The class progress test is a teaching device, its washback effect on teaching and motivation being important features" (Pearson, 1988). It is imperative that teachers view class tests as an opportunity both to measure the progress made by their students and also to evaluate the effectiveness of their own teaching and the materials used in the class room.

As stated earlier, students in India at every stage in the educational process write a number of tests besides the annual examinations. But there is no positive outcome issuing from this exercise. Class tests are conducted, papers marked and returned as a matter of practice with little significance attached to the testing process itself. The idea of the class test being used to help LEP students develop their language skills is a concept that is still new in the Indian teaching situation.
New materials have been used and new methodologies have been adopted to teach LEP students but little attention has been paid to the use of appropriate testing methods, measurement criteria and proper feedback in the classroom to enhance their language learning and to track and evaluate their progress within a given period of time. This means that all well-intentioned moves (changes in materials and methodology) to help these students have for the most part remained adhoc and temporary.

1.7 METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The present study is not speculative but practical in nature. The research design is primarily qualitative and not experimental. Some features of the case study approach have also been adopted. The number of students chosen as subjects for the study was small (eleven) and therefore each student was seen as a separate case and the tracking of each student's progress in the writing skill which is reported in the fourth chapter is done individually. This was felt necessary because though the students' chosen for the study were all severely limited in their use of English for communication purposes each of the student's progress was distinct from the rest of the group.

The primary focus of the study being tests and their role in enhancing learning by LEP students, teacher-constructed class tests were the basic tools that were used in the study. The study had a simple framework which is represented in figure 1.1.
Apart from tests the researcher also conducted informal interviews with the placement officer, a few subject teachers and some students in the university in order to get their views on the role of English at the tertiary level. These interviews helped the researcher gain greater insight into the role of English and the various activities for which students need it in the university. The views of the students chosen for the study on the usefulness of the present teaching-testing module employed in the study were also elicited after the second progress test. Apart from these major tools the researcher also used class observation to study LEP student's test behaviour.
The study was conducted in the first semester of the first year of the B.E., B.Tech engineering programme. The period of the study was four months (September - December). All together thirty one classes were taken during the four month period the duration of each class was fifty minutes. The study was conducted with the first year B.E., B.Tech. students at Anna University, Tamil Nadu. Eleven students were chosen for the study based on their performance in the placement test. All the eleven students were from mother-tongue medium schools and three were first generation learners.

1.8 REASONS FOR CHOOSING THE WRITING SKILL

The information age has foregrounded the importance of writing. Writing in the sense of using pen or pencil to ‘write’ on paper may be in the process of becoming an outdated skill. However, students are writing more today than they ever did before though electronically. Writing is a more difficult task than speaking because it is less spontaneous than speaking, and more deliberate and staged. If students are to become good communicators in writing then they must be taught how to work methodically at a piece of writing.

The writing skill is accorded a special place in the Indian teaching context. Students' intelligence and absorption of knowledge are tested only through writing. At all levels in the Indian teaching context they write a lot both within the classroom and at home. At the kindergarten level they are first taught to write in English before they are taught to speak in the language. They are taught to write individual letters in English, then to write small words and then in the primary classes quickly graduate to writing sentences. In the second language classes at the secondary level, students are asked to write extensively on both content based and general composition topics. Though they do a lot of writing at school a majority of
them are not comfortable communicating through this skill. The teaching of writing both at school and college does not help students develop their fluency in writing.

Second language teachers do not address fundamental questions related to writing such as "who am I writing for?", "Why am I writing?" and so forth. They are not taught for instance to follow the three steps essential for any one to communicate effectively with the reader, namely: planning, writing and revising. The emphasis is on grammatical correctness at the sentence level and on idiosyncratic features such as style and use of vocabulary to the exclusion of discoursal features that give unity, clarity and coherence to a piece of writing. Again, there is no comprehensive feedback given to the students by the teachers on their attempts to communicate through writing. A piece of written work by a student is 'corrected' but not evaluated for its communicative value. But feedback is essential for second language learners to improve their skills in writing because as Muncie states, "Feedback is vital to writing and in helping learners to improve their writing skills, and whatever form it takes, it can have the positive effect of producing in the learner a sense of reader awareness and of giving him or her an outside view of the text" (ELT Journal, 2000)

Second language teachers both at school and at college assume that their students will learn to write clearly and coherently automatically. This is alright for students who have a strong support system at home but for others communicating through writing is an uphill task. For LEP students writing is the most difficult task because their level of intelligence though unfairly continues to be judged based on their ability to express their learning through writing in English. It is for these reasons that the teaching of writing to LEP students was selected for the present study.
1.9 AIMS OF THE STUDY

Teaching per se or as an exercise of transfer of knowledge to students becomes valid only if the students are tested. The methods to be used for evaluating the extent of knowledge gathered by the student from the teaching done in class are bound to vary from one institution to another. However, the effectiveness of teaching and the amount of learning in class can be found only through testing. The basic premise on which this thesis rests is that testing is an effective teaching tool. The major focus of the study is on testing and how it can be used to teach writing to students who are severely handicapped so far as writing in English is concerned. The focus of the thesis is testing for teaching and not testing per se.

Major Aim

- To explore the possibility of using class tests purposefully to enhance language learning with specific reference to the development of the writing skills of Limited English students.

Minor Aims

- To make the class test both learner and teacher-friendly.

- To study the effect of continuous feedback on the language development of the students chosen for the study.

- To make LEP students take greater responsibility for their learning.
1.10 HYPOTHESES

a. Major Hypothesis

Teacher-constructed class tests can be used as effective teaching devices to help LEP students develop their LSRW skills in English, provided ESL teachers use tests purposefully and meaningfully.

b. Minor Hypotheses

- Students from mother-tongue medium schools do not have adequate English language skills to cope with the academic load at college.

- The language syllabus used for average and above average students do not help the ESL teacher achieve the targets of the prescribed language courses in colleges with respect to LEP students.

- Tests help teachers choose the right kind of teaching materials and methods that can be used to facilitate language learning by LEP students.

- Tests help the second language teachers form an unbiased opinion of the language proficiency of their Limited English students. This means that the language teacher can plan the remedial course and thus be successful in helping these students develop their communication skills in English.
1.11 CONCLUSION

Any realistic discussion on second language teaching in India should necessarily be undertaken in the context of the existing educational system in the country. This chapter, which serves as the introduction to the dissertation, has attempted to do this. It has also discussed the role of English at the tertiary level with specific reference to the teaching and testing of English at this level because the present study was conducted with the first year B.E., B.Tech. students at a technical university. The aims hypotheses, methodology and scope of the present study have also been discussed. The next chapter will review research on testing.