CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION
CHAPTER I

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1.1 General

Language is important in our lives dominating our social and cognitive processes. Life without language is unimaginable.

Language is at the centre of human life. We use it to express our love or our hatred, to achieve our goals and further our careers, to gain artistic satisfaction or simple pleasure. Through language we plan our lives and remember our past; we exchange ideas and experiences; we form our social and individual identities (Vivian Cook, 2001, p 1).

Emphasising its all pervasiveness, Robert Lado (1971) claims, "It is used for work, worship, and play by everyone, be he beggar or banker, savage or civilized" (p 11).

Language is perceived to be the chief mode of communication. "Our entire elaborate social structure is mediated through language, and it is inconceivable that we could have constructed so complex a social interaction if we had not had spoken and, latterly, written language at our disposal" (D A Wilkins, 1974, p 1). It plays a powerful role within us and between us. Learning languages has become a practical necessity and the ultimate aim in learning a language is to achieve the automaticity and creativity of the native speaker in the production of the language.
1.2 Language Learning

In a world, where people tend to use more than two languages, the acquisition and use of second languages are of paramount importance to millions of people for the furtherance of their careers and possible futures. The advantages of learning more than one language are aplenty. Learning more languages activates the areas of brain that are not normally used, thereby sharpening the intellect. Learners of languages not only acquire geographic and cultural knowledge of the rest of the world but also learn to have empathy and understanding for others. They feel more at ease in travelling outside their country and become more self confident as they augment proficiency in a skill which had hitherto been alien to them.

1.3 Language Teaching

Language is the fulcrum of education, functioning as the medium of communication between students and teachers and, students and textbooks. Language teaching is a multi-dimensional, interdisciplinary activity which aims at helping students acquire the basic language skills – Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing (LSRW). The purpose of all effective language teaching is to usher students into the world of confidence making them competent users of the language. For this, they need to be goaded to move on from a level of context-governed performance to that of context-free competence.

Teaching and learning may be considered as two mutually defining aspects of the same process, for the teacher is not just a giver but also a receiver and the learner is not just a passive recipient of made-to-measure
packages of knowledge but also an active participant. Looked at from this point of view, teachers and learners are both participants in an interactional activity which has been traditionally called teaching - learning. Teaching and learning take place all the time.

Language teachers have always been seeking methods for improving both content and methodology in their chosen field. They are interested in presenting the facts of language they are teaching in socio-cultural contexts, thereby helping students increase their competence to use and understand the language. Contrastive analysis (CA) and Error Analysis (EA) can help teachers categorise errors, locate source and organize remedial teaching.

“... a radical shift is taking place away from a view of language teaching as an aspect of literary and cultural education towards a view of language teaching as the imparting of practical ability in using the language” (Peter Strevens, 1968, p 25). The former aims at leading students to appreciate literature while the latter aims at enabling students to become competent users of all the language skills.

The ever widening gap between the time available for instruction and the ever increasing demands of a hyper-technical civilization has thrown into relief the weaknesses in teaching today, above all in the teaching of languages. One of the grievances against the present system of education is the existence of a lack of co-ordination between the academic study of language and the teacher training received. The courses do not give sufficient practical teaching experience. Apart from a one-year course in teacher training for school teachers, no formal teacher training is given to new recruits or practising teachers. Language teachers in primary schools
receive little or no training, be they native speakers or enthusiastic primary school teachers. At the secondary level, teachers usually have a University degree, or its equivalent and some teacher training. Teachers at the college are deprived of even this kind of meagre training. With a Post graduate degree, they become eligible to become teachers at the college. There are of course orientation courses and refresher courses for teachers in general, but no course deals with ELT.

Moreover, the examination system is more achievement oriented rather than performance oriented, leading to an emphasis on grades and positions rather than issues of fluency or proficiency. Indirectly, the teacher remains in many classrooms even today, the facilitator of examinations rather than of linguistic or communicative proficiency.

1.4 Role of English in Present Day India

English has remained in India long after its speakers left its shores. English is now an indispensable instrument most necessary to stake a claim to being one of the rapidly developing nations of the world. It has made possible the dissemination of knowledge, inter-state communication and communication between States and Centre. English language is viewed as the national and international link language as well as the library language. Without English language both official and private communication between many parts of the country will be completely cut off. It also occupies a unique position of being the language used by the largest number of people in the worlds. As books on all branches of knowledge are available in English, it can also be rightly regarded as the key to the storehouse of knowledge.
The sweeping changes that have come by way of increased industrialization, massive economic restructuring and the new demands made in terms of job requirements - post globalization, have made it highly essential for imparting instruction in a second language. There are quite a number of languages that occupy the centre stage in business transaction, exchange of ideas, promotion and propagation of Science and Technology. Among, the second languages in use, English has come to occupy the first place in terms of importance and the number of users.

English language continues to play a predominant role both in our educational system and our national life. The liberalisation of the Indian economy has opened innumerable avenues of job opportunities for those in possession of English language skills, a hitherto unrealized potential. There are now call centres that need trainers to equip their employees with communication skills, there are multinationals who have been recruiting marketing staff who needed to be taught spoken English, there are medical transcription centres which need efficient translators and reporters. Those desirous of immigration to the west needed professional help for clearing tests like the IELTS. Hence, the avenues where ELT came to be required in India are unlimited today.

From a much - hated language and a symbol of oppression, English has evolved into the language of the educated elite, a status symbol for many. The transformation, the language underwent was felt in the ELT paradigm which had also, by the turn of the century, undergone a whole gamut of modification. The emergence of English as a global language has spurred a sudden surge of interest in the language which got reflected in the
newer methods employed for teaching and learning the language in the classrooms.

1.5 Review of English Language Teaching

The process of teaching and learning of a second language has enticed and enthralled students, teachers and researchers alike for well over several decades now. The history of language teaching methods beginning from teacher - centred classroom methods of instruction and its gradual shift to learner oriented methods via the content based exposition has been a long one, which however is more exciting than rewarding. The pendulum has swung back and forth.

The urgent necessity to achieve and maintain high standards in the teaching of English at all levels in the immediate future seems imperative. The objective of teaching of a language is not simply to market the language learners’ language skills but to enable them to play their communicative roles effectively. One possible view of the aim of second language teaching is to prepare the learners to perform a specific set of roles in a new language and culture.

Learning English as a second Language means mastering the use of English in a variety of contexts. Language poses a potential problem to the extent that it impedes student’s acquisition of knowledge and skills. The objective of teaching English in India has to be formulated taking into account our multilingual setting at both our national and individual levels. At the national level, English serves as the window on the world - as the language in which all contemporary knowledge is available. As the language
of science and technology, trade and commerce etc., English is important for industrial and economic development. Our scientists, technologists, scientists, doctors, economists must be able not only to have access to professional literature in English but also be able to contribute to it and communicate with their counterparts in other parts of the world.

It is important to identify the English requirements of various groups of students precisely, and try to provide for each such group, the pattern which will be relevant to the needs of learners. It may be useful to produce a variety of need-based, topic oriented short courses designed to meet the demands of a variety of learners in India today. This is because not all students will need English to the same level of competence. It is also important that special opportunities are made available to help the weaker sections of our society to acquire adequate competence in English so that they do not remain forever disadvantaged in areas of higher education and in terms of upward social mobility.

Knowledge and skills will not emerge on a casual first reading. Regular and persistent review and exercises are necessary to help internalize knowledge and to develop analytical skills to the level of automatic responses. Fulfilling the goals of English instruction becomes particularly important in a world growing in technological complexity and social diversity whence the classroom will change dramatically in the diversity of the students.
1.6 ELT Methodology in India

The developments that have taken place in ELT methodology in the West took some time to reach Indian classrooms. The evolution of ELT in India, as in any other EFL country is linked with factors that are not pedagogic alone. Only around the year 1980 did English achieve adequate attention from policy makers, administrators and teachers.

ELT in India has come a long way from year 1880 when only 60% primary schools used English as the medium for teaching. Upto 1940, the grammar-translation method flourished and the spread of English remained confined to education and office circles, yet again in a haphazard manner. By 1970, structural linguistics started making its presence felt in Indian classrooms in the shape of drills and exercises. Around this time, all professional courses began to be taught in English, which had also become established as a library language and a subject for independent study. As compared to its establishment as an autonomous subject in other English-as-first-language countries around 1940, ELT emerged as an autonomous subject in India as late as 1980.

Similarly, the language laboratory also became a part of the ELT paradigm around 1985 as compared to the 1940 of these countries. CALI or Computer Assisted Language Instruction reached most classrooms in 1960 but it came to the Indian classroom around 1985; at present, in some places it has evolved into CALL or Computer Assisted Language Learning. Both CALI and CALL have not been adopted widely due to the obvious constraints of finance and the typically Indian mindset that learning cannot take place without the presence of a human teacher.
Communicative Language Teaching reached both regions (India and the West) between the years 1970 - 1980, with the difference that the Indian context was not ready for CLT. Hence, it took around two decades to gain acceptance among learners and teachers. Language-literature integration gained recognition among teachers around the same time. India after 1995 has made up for the slow elephant years by broadening the apex of the ELT cone with a generous mix of so many methodologies that come under the generic category of the Communicative Approach. It is true that mostly this Communicative Approach is practised in the institutes that belong to the third category above but the ripple effect created is gradually reaching the ELT classroom.

Most institutes that target the language users who need proficiency in a hurry or who need to clear certain examinations invest heavily in teaching materials. Since all materials published in such places of repute are state-of-the-art in terms of methodology, teachers and learners are in a position of maximum benefit. Moreover, teachers at these centres are usually young postgraduates who are receptive to novelty and innovation. They borrow heavily from their materials and often create a methodology of their own by using combinations of audio lingual or situational or functional or interactive or task-based or communicative - or even the direct method language teaching. All these approaches and methods could be spread through a course or could even be used in one class, depending upon the learner's response. This pedagogy is still Communicative Approach oriented even if not restricted to one approach. Again teachers - especially the younger ones - are increasingly moving towards increasing the extent to which lessons are centred around Communicative Approach. The most significant impact of
this approach is its sensitivity to learner’s needs and responses. This sensitivity is what has been lacking in the academic aspect of ELT in India.

The whole academic process is so unwieldy that it fails to respond to learner needs; learner response is too often ignored. In spite of the slower rate of evolution, English Language Teaching in India has been widening in its approach and methods. At its own eccentric pace, ELT in India is today in step with the rest of the world. Where the issue of methodology is concerned, ELT seems to be in three transient stages according to the different levels of the paradigm and its demands:

1. The first level is that of the institutions run by the government, mainly primary, secondary and high schools. Since the primary goal of these institutions is to provide education at affordable and subsidised levels to the public, ELT teaching cannot be placed at the widest end of the cone for the basic reason that the teachers there do not have much access to latest research and materials for reasons economic as well as geographic. Most of these institutions are the sole providers of education in rural and remote settings where they can fulfil adequately the basic requirements alone. In the urban locales the planning bodies are now moving towards up gradation through teacher training, syllabus modification and improved resources. In another decade or so, this level of ELT should be more communicative in nature with language and literature fully integrated.

2. At the second level are those institutions that are semi-government or are run by private managing bodies, assisted through government funds. These also include undergraduate colleges and postgraduate universities. Growth and development can be seen here in spurts. In some classrooms, teachers
have reached the widest end of the cone, are aware of learner needs and adjust methodology accordingly and use a judicious blend of interaction and communication in the class. In others, an observer feels caught in a time warp with pure talk-chalk lectures that are mostly teacher-centred. The positive observation is that there are practising teachers between these two poles, who are trying to change their teaching practice and are looking at alternate methodology. Just as there is a mixed bag of teaching practice, the institutions also range from indifferent to proactive. While there are places where even a small audio player is not accessible, there are administrators who have invested heavily in state of the art, perfectly equipped language laboratories.

3. The third level comprises pure private sector academies that undertake to make learners proficient English users within a stipulated period, of course by charging a fixed amount of fee. Since time means money for them, they are equipped with the latest materials like interactive, multimedia software. Jobs in the academic area are few and far between, so an increasing number of qualified teachers find their way to these places. The teacher profile gets younger and younger, resulting in increasing amounts of innovation and experimentation where methodology is concerned. While teachers belonging to the first level are content to remain followers, the second level is being influenced by the third. When learners are in a rush as they need part-time employment or have an International English Language Testing Service (IELTS) to clear, they often join academies in addition to their undergraduate classes. This creates a ripple effect and the ripples can be felt in three ways:
After attending interactive classes at the academy, learners search such stimulation in their regular classes too. This is a radical change, especially if one looks into the past. When communicative language teaching was introduced in India in the 1980s, it was a dismal failure for the first few years because of the lack of the right context. This context stands established in India today, so learners are receptive and are actively encouraging more learner-centred classes.

The context of the whole teaching situation started changing around the year 2000. Socio-economic factors played a major role in this change that is dynamic even today. The liberalization of the Indian economy led to the entry of many international brands into the learners’ mindset. Call centres, shopping malls and trade fairs, all need young personnel, fluent in English. There is a mushroom growth of institutes and academies of the third category above, offering the whole range of proficiency in English from clearing the IELTS to speaking fluently. The Internet has played a major role in creating a resource-rich environment by giving a wide range of exposure to English. Becoming web-savvy has emerged as the need of the day and this is possible only through English. These are just a few of the factors that have created a panacea for the deadlock that CLT had found itself in.

Today, in India, a whole new generation is coming up; a generation that travels a lot in countries where English is a first language, works in places where English is the lingua franca and as a result, carries home to other generations the same English as a medium of communication. Hence, the empowerment that looks forward to for teachers in times to come has come sooner due to changes in the context of the complete teaching paradigm. Unless the context is supportive of upgrading English
performance of the teacher which should be inclusive of communicative competence, no teacher training or upgrading of methodology can be productive and fruitful. This is a significant conclusion that can be drawn from the Indian situation.

The results of all the changes listed above stand reflected in the classrooms where CLT is still practised. The whole process of curriculum change is riddled with cumbersome and time-consuming procedures in India, so in spite of the limited success of CLT, it has not been removed from courses. This, in the long run, has been for the better because while on the one hand, the teachers have been able to familiarize themselves with its approach and methodology; on the other hand, the changed and changing context has encouraged its growing success today. Since learners are a part of the whole context, they are aware of the growing need for proficiency, both linguistic and communicative, in English. Today, more and more students take up part-time work (that requires fluency in English) along with their studies, this was earlier an aberration, now is the norm.

1.7 Importance of Vocabulary Learning

Different approaches to language learning, each with different perspectives on vocabulary learning, have been introduced from time to time. Sometimes, vocabulary has a good place in language teaching methodologies, other times it was completely neglected (Carter and McCarthy, 1988; and Schmitt, 2000). The method of language teaching has been changing from grammar translation to direct method and then to communicative approach. But it was only during the communicative approach that the prominent role of vocabulary knowledge in second or
foreign language learning has been recognized by researchers in the field. The current popular communicative approach of language teaching has emphasized meaningful interactive activities over form.

Most people who have learned a foreign language and attempted to use it for their daily tasks are painfully aware of how an insufficient repertoire with regard to nouns and verbs can become a severe handicap in practically any interaction - even trying to place an order in a restaurant. In academic texts, when students need to demonstrate their understanding of assignments and readings, and in addition explain their ideas on the subject matter, the shortfalls in their lexical repertoire often turn into great obstacles.

Both in reading and writing, many learners are faced with either having to look up numerous words in a dictionary or make do with the lexicon accessible to them. If they elect to look up words, translating dictionaries often provide "matching" items that can render a student's text incomprehensible, while working with English-English dictionaries may take an inordinate amount of time - again due to the simple fact that one needs to have a solid lexical foundation in place to be able to understand distinctions between partial synonyms provided in dictionary entries.

Research on L2 written academic text shows that most Non Native Speakers students, whose time is limited and who deal with large amounts of weekly reading and writing assignments, fall back on the lexicon immediately accessible to them or found in the reading at hand. Although many books for teaching vocabulary can be found on the market, students often find the task of learning thousands of new words daunting. The laborious processes of vocabulary teaching and learning are further
constrained by the fact that many teachers and teacher trainers believe that mere exposure to L2 and reading texts at the level appropriate for students' proficiency eventually results in vocabulary acquisition sufficient for academic studies in colleges and universities. However, several recent investigations in students' reading, writing, and text demonstrate that even advanced learners do not have the vocabulary range requisite in their degree studies.

One of the tasks teachers of writing face is trying to build up students' vocabulary and to provide them with tools for survival in academic courses and writing tasks. Although today, it is widely known that memorizing lists of academic vocabulary is not particularly useful in the long run, other options for learning and teaching vocabulary and lexicalized features of nouns are available. Teaching techniques discussed in this chapter focus on expanding contextualized vocabulary for lexical substitutions, essential and foundational vocabulary for university reading and writing (the University Word List), singular and plural constraints on nouns and changes in their meanings, increasing the range of gerunds and abstract nominalizations, and compound noun phrases.

The reasons that something should be taught are useful not only for teachers, but for students as well. Experience has shown that explaining to students why something is taught and how the material and teaching techniques can improve their writing and, consequently, grades in academic courses usually creates a more willing and receptive audience who have their self-interest in mind. In addition, such explanations can improve the teacher's credibility and give the impressions of efficiency, preparedness,
and professional competence (assuming that the teacher wants to make such impressions).

When they write assignments for university classes, students often have a familiar noun or two that they use repeatedly in similar contexts. Such overuse of nouns results in redundant text constructions that create an impression of lexical paucity and awkwardness.

An important advantage of teaching vocabulary in semantic and contextually applicable clusters is that students see its immediate uses and practicality. Another important consideration when providing students with lexical alternatives is that they are essential in maintaining text cohesion by means of lexical substitutions simply because non-native speakers rely on a severely restricted lexical repertoire.

To write papers in the disciplines, students need to know key terms used in each domain of studies. Usually discipline-specific terms are heavily emphasized in courses, lectures, and textbooks, and most students learn them as a part of their coursework.

Research on the vocabulary range needed to write basic academic text has shown that a foundation of 2,000 to 3,000 words can go a long way toward a successful production of assignments and essays in many disciplines. In fact, according to some studies, 95% of all academic texts at the undergraduate level can be understood and written within this lexical range (Nation, 1990). It is important to note, however, that words commonly found in academic texts are different from those used in casual conversation. Therefore, academic vocabulary and grammar need to be explicitly taught.
In general, the importance of noun usage in academic prose cannot be overestimated.

Another important distinction should be made between what has been typically called productive and passive vocabulary. Productive vocabulary refers to the vocabulary items that learners can use in speech or writing, and passive vocabulary represents the words that learners are familiar with and understand in listening and reading. In written text production, one of the most important instructional goals is to increase the writers' productive vocabulary range.

1.08 Review of Literature

To develop the theoretical foundation for this thesis, an attempt was made to review the published work related to the following areas:

- Approaches and Methods of ELT in India
- Vocabulary Teaching and Learning
- Receptive Productive Vocabulary
- Vocabulary Learning Strategies
- Error Analysis

A brief account of the review of the earlier works related to English Language Teaching in general and the teaching/learning of vocabulary in particular is given below:

S. Kothainayaki (1994) in her doctoral dissertation entitled “Classroom Interaction and Language Use – A Case Study of English Teaching in Selected Standards (A Linguistic Study)” analysed the
interaction between the teacher and the student in the course of teaching prose and grammar to the students from schools where the medium of instruction was English and the teaching of prose to students from the schools where the medium of instruction was Tamil. The study was undertaken with particular reference to students studying in sixth, seventh and eighth standards.

K Nisha (1995) dealt with the relationship between the process of second language acquisition and the extent of communicative competence among the tamil medium students of first year degree class in her Ph.D thesis “Second Language Acquisition and Achievement of Communicative Competence in English – a Case Study of First Year Degree Class Students”. It highlights the various compensation strategies the second language learners adopt in order to fill in the structural and lexical gaps in the process of communicating their ideas.

Robert Schmitt (1997) in his work “Vocabulary Learning Strategies” analysed the available Vocabulary Learning Strategies and conducted a survey on a large sample (600) of four groups of Japanese learners – junior high school students, high school students, university students and adult learners to understand the learners attitude towards strategic learning of vocabulary. The most used and the least used strategies were understood administering a questionnaire which consisted of 40 strategies.

Rob Waring’s (1999) thesis entitled ‘Tasks for Assessing Second Language Receptive and Productive Vocabulary’ highlights the special characteristics of a new task, State Rating Task (SRT) developed as a plausible alternative to standard vocabulary tasks for assessing receptive and
productive vocabulary. The SRT, was designed to assess the interaction of Understanding (listening and reading) vocabulary and Use (speaking and writing) vocabulary in a self-report task.

P.V. Ravi (1998) identified and brought to lime light the aspects that motivated students from sixth, seventh and eighth standards to learn English as a second language along with factors that induced teachers to teach English as a second language in the most effective manner in his dissertation “Study of the Motivational Problems with Reference to Teaching – Learning English as a Second Language”. Education, Linguistics and Psychology were the three parameters taken into account for analysis and presentation of ideas.

A Chandran (1999) in his thesis entitled “A Study of Productive skills with Special Reference to Communicative Ability in Speaking English of the Higher Secondary First year students in Coimbatore District” examined the errors committed by the students while using the language in speaking and writing. The predicament of the eleventh standard students and the hurdles that they encounter while attempting to communicate in English were sketched in the thesis.

Chaya Mittal (1999) analysed in detail the problems encountered by the students, at the higher secondary level, from schools where the medium of instruction was Hindi while trying to converse in English. The mother tongue influence and interference in the learning of the language was highlighted in her dissertation “Second Language Learning with Reference to Communicative Skills: A Case study of Hindi Speakers of English in Coimbatore District".
V.M. Subramanium (2002) in his thesis “Evaluation of the Language Skills of Graduate Students in English” probed into all the four language skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing (LSRW) of students who have graduated from the arts colleges.

S. Kalaiselvi (2004) focused on the obstacles and the difficulties that challenged the students in arts colleges while learning English in her dissertation entitled, “A Linguistic Study of the Problems of Learning English at Collegiate Level”. The grammatical and lexical errors committed in the process of second language acquisition had been graphically presented in the thesis.

The thesis entitled “A Linguistic Assessment of the Writing Skill of Graduate Students in English Composition” K. Kamala Suganya Kumari (2005) assesses the writing skill of the college students, probes the difficulties experienced in producing compositions, and analyses the lexical choice and use to suggest remedial measures to tackle the problems of teaching/learning the target language in general and the writing skill in particular.

A Chandrabose (2005) explored the problems faced by the students at the high school level, while learning the modal auxiliary verbs in his thesis, “The Problems in Learning Modal Auxiliary Verbs at High School Level”. The hitch highlighted here was the inability of the students to understand the proper use of the modal auxiliary verbs in addition to the incomprehension of the purpose of using them.
Nancy Serena (2009) investigated the nature of errors in written and spoken English committed by the students pursuing first year Computer Science and Engineering course at a private engineering college located in Hyderabad in her work, “Assessment of the Nature of Grammatical Errors in Written and Spoken English: A Study of Engineering Students in Hyderabad”. The errors identified were analysed to find out the different sources which affect the students in making errors. Cloze tests were administered to identify the grammatical and lexical abilities of the students.

From this, it becomes clear that the problems in the acquisition and proper use of lexical items have not been taken for a fullfledged analysis. Lexical items, as has been pointed out earlier, provide the user of a language with fairly sufficient arms to face the world with his/her verbal encounters. An individual well armed with a rich lexical repertoire would be able to face the world with confidence and courage. In the globalization context therefore, a graduate in general and an Engineering graduate in particular has to have a rich stock of lexical repertoire that would enable him/her to interact with confidence in his/her professional pursuits. This study, in consideration of this fact, has made an attempt to study the problems of engineering students in the acquisition and learning of vocabulary items.

1.9 Aim of the Study

Blue chip companies which come to the engineering institutes for campus recruitment identify vocabulary as one of the problematic areas for the students. Most of the tests administered either for the recruitment or for admission to higher studies have units to test the language aptitude and technical knowledge. The percentage of marks allotted is in the 60:40 or
50:50. It has also been found that problems encountered in the language comprehension relates mostly to vocabulary. Lexical error/inaccuracy is the major problem for incomprehension rather than grammatical inaccuracy. Engineering graduates have two options before them when they complete their course: a) Placement and b) Higher Studies.

For both of these they have to communicate either in the spoken or written form or in both. Oral or written communication or both are of vital importance if they have to express their ideas to get placed or go for higher studies. In order to express ideas they need the right words at the right time and hence it is of prime importance for the Engineering graduates to have a sound vocabulary. Understanding this need a sample survey was done to analyse the vocabulary of engineering students to see the level of their vocabulary and understand the strategies adopted and check their validity and sufficiency. What methods and strategies could be adopted to enhance their vocabulary in case of any defect/deficit is the aim of the study.

1.10 Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are listed below:

- To assess the level of students’ receptive and productive vocabulary
- To find out if the students adopt strategies for learning vocabulary and their usefulness
- Assessing the skill (receptive or productive) in which students are well equipped and quantifying the level achieved by the students in this respect
- To understand what kind of lexical errors do students commit
• To establish the relationship between vocabulary learning and the variables like socio-economic status, gender, locality, impact of schooling and reading habits of the informants
• To understand the problems in the teaching/learning of English vocabulary items and to suggest some remedial measures

1.11 Nature and Scope of the Study

This study has made an attempt to analyse the vocabulary level of the engineering students at the undergraduate level. It has probed the techniques employed by the students to improve their vocabulary and also the steps taken by them to bring their lexical repertoire to their active vocabulary. The errors committed by them in the active use of language have been studied in detail. The scope of the study is limited to the students within the geographical jurisdiction of Anna University, Coimbatore doing undergraduate programme in Engineering. The informants chosen for this study do various programmes such as Computer Science and Engineering, Information Technology and Mechanical Engineering. Since no attempt has been made to compare the performance of students in different colleges with varying background doing various courses of study, informants were chosen from only one engineering college located near Coimbatore.

1.12 Hypothesis

1. The high frequency words are known before low frequency words
2. Recognition of words is better than recall
3. Students adopt various strategies for learning vocabulary
4. Girls have a much better vocabulary than boys
5. Students from city schools outsmart students from rural background
6. Students know more words of the target language than they actually use them

1.13 - Methodology

A brief description of the methodology adopted for the study is presented below:

1.13.1 - Method used

The principle and methodologies provided by two of the major offshoots of linguistics namely, contrastive linguistics and descriptive linguistics have been widely employed in this study. The errors committed by the students have been compared and contrasted with their L1 and the causes have been identified. The errors have been described using the principals of descriptive linguistics.

1.13.2 - Collection of Data

Data was collected by means of administering questionnaires and tests. For assessing the students’ receptive vocabulary levels, the Receptive Vocabulary Levels Tests (RVT) at the word frequency levels of 2000, 3000, 5000, 10,000 and Academic Word List (AWL) Levels devised by Nation and revised by Schmitt was administered. To collect details regarding their productive vocabulary levels, Nation and Laufer’s (2001) Controlled Productive Vocabulary Levels Test was used for five levels 2000, 3000, 5000, 10,000 and University Word List (UWL) levels. In each unit of the RVT, there were 30 units comprising a total of 150 test items, whereas there
were only 50 items altogether for PVT, with each section composed of just 10 test items. Another test, which consisted 20 sections was administered to sort out the errors committed by the students to assess and rectify problems related to lexical issues. In addition to these tests, two questionnaires were administered to elicit demographic information and information related to their use of strategies. The questionnaire for strategy use was an adapted version of Schmitt’s (1997) questionnaire.

1.13.2.1 Preparation of Questionnaire

The questionnaire on strategies was based on Norbert Schmitt’s questionnaire. The battery of tests was framed with test items chosen from the textbook prescribed for study in the First year of the Engineering course. The Vocabulary Levels Tests were based on Nation’s and Laufer’s tests mentioned earlier.

1.13.2.2 Pilot study and Finalisation of Questionnaire

A pilot study was made with a sample of 20 students from a particular section of students pursuing Engineering. Based on the results obtained a few modifications were made in both the tests and the questionnaires. Since there were a good number of students who did not attempt to answer certain test items in PVT, the number of test items in each section had been reduced from 18 to 10. In the other test originally there were 25 sections with each section consisting of either 5 or 10 test items. As the students felt that it was too laborious to answer all the questions, the number of sections had been reduced to 20. Likewise in the questionnaire on strategies too instead of the earlier version of 40 strategies, the later version, with 58 strategies were
used to get a comprehensive picture of the strategy use. In addition to this the students had to also answer another questionnaire to garner demographic information.

1.13.3 Selection of the Sample

The subjects under study were first year Engineering students. 209 first year students pursuing four year engineering course were the subjects in the study. They form four complete classes at a private Engineering college in a rural in south India. The proficiency level of these students ranges from elementary to upper intermediate. The study was a within-subjects design measuring an individual's own receptive and productive vocabulary and thus there was no need to test for exact proficiencies or prior knowledge. Of the 209 students selected for survey, 115 students (55%) were boys and 94 (45%) of them were girls. The composition of the subjects is as follows:

Table 1.1 Profile of the Informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>No. of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) A</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) B</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Information Technology (IT)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering (ME)</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1 shows that the four groups of students were from three disciplines, namely Computer Science and Engineering (CSE), Information Technology (IT) and Mechanical Engineering (ME). To do a comparative study on the performance of the students from various branches it was
decided to take the circuit and the non-circuit branches. The choice was made from the Computer Science and Engineering and Information Technology from among the circuit branches and ME from the non-circuit branches. As the IT industries are on the boom and as numerous recruitments are from these sectors it was decided to test the computer-based branches to see how they fell in line with the basic requirements. For purposes of study only students from these three groups were included in the analysis.

1.13.4 Elicitation and Processing of Data

The data obtained from the two questionnaires, the vocabulary levels tests and the battery of test were tabulated and analysed with the results are presented in the respective chapters. The data was computed and statistical information was obtained. The explanation for the results obtained and the implications based on the results obtained are also proffered in the related chapters.

1.13.5 Significance of the Study

The present research is significant since this may provide some guideline for teaching vocabulary to students in colleges. The aim of the research is to derive empirical evidence to substantiate that despite learning the language for more than 13 years, the students enrolled in Engineering colleges do not possess the mental lexicon in English language most necessary for them to proceed with confidence in day to day interaction with others in English. The strategies employed by the students if any, are probed into, to initialise the idea of creating an awareness among the students.
regarding the vocabulary learning strategies and then teaching and training how to employ those strategies so that they do become autonomous learners rather than teaching words and their meanings in the classrooms. The purpose of this study is to arrive at some concrete decisions regarding the teaching of vocabulary.

The present study is significant since it would enable the teachers to identify the problems that students encounter in the learning of vocabulary so that they can try different methods and approaches to help students improve their lexical competence.

1.14 Plan of Presentation of the Report

The Thesis comprises of six Chapters and the information contained in each of the chapter is detailed below:

1.14.1 Chapter I - Introduction

Chapter 1 describes the need for the study highlighting the importance of vocabulary learning and teaching and the teaching of vocabulary learning strategies. It also details the relevance of ELT in India. The objectives and the hypotheses of the study, various tests administered and the methodology adopted to prove the hypotheses, the subjects involved and the significance of the study in the current scenario are also touched upon in this chapter.

1.14.2 Chapter II – Vocabulary Size

Chapter 2 delineates the Vocabulary Levels Test for both productive and receptive vocabulary, explains the reason for the administration of the test, the result and the explanation of the outcome. An attempt to define the
concepts receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary their origin and other’s opinion regarding them are briefly sketched in the first section of this chapter. It also gives a succinct account of the reasons for assessing vocabulary knowledge and vocabulary size. The different tests available for assessing vocabulary are dealt with special reference to the test formats of Nation’s and Schmitt’s Passive Vocabulary Test and Laufer’s Active Vocabulary Test. The selection of subjects, the study undertaken with the analysis and the presentation of results are also articulated along with suitable suggestions based on the analyses.

1.14.3 Chapter III – Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Chapter 3 depicts the strategies employed by the students for learning vocabulary, how useful and effective they have been. This chapter provides the background of language learning strategies (LLS), delineates the issues in LLS and defines it. It sketches the factors influencing strategy choice and highlights Schmitt’s taxonomy of VLS. The analyses of the strategies employed by learners and how it correlates to their success are also expounded in addition to the teacher's role in strategy training to make the learners more effective language learners.

1.14.4 Chapter IV – Analysis of Lexical Issues

Chapter 4 denotes the battery of tests administered to find out the errors made by the students to help understand the areas where students require more help. The fourth chapter, the core of this thesis, entitled ‘Analysis of Lexical Issues’ discusses the problems faced by the informants
in the process of building up their vocabulary and the strategies, if any, adopted by them in building up the lexical repertoire.

1.14.5 Chapter V – Sociolinguistic Variations

Chapter 5 entitled “Sociolinguistic Variations” has attempted to correlate the performance of the Engineering students (in respect of their vocabulary level) with their social parameters such as place of domicile, generation of education, medium of instruction at the school level and sex. The possible influence of these parameters on their performance in English (with special reference to lexical skill) has been probed in detail and conclusions have been drawn in this section of the dissertation. This chapter designates the sociolinguistic impact in the study of vocabulary.

1.14.6 Chapter VI – Conclusion

Chapter 6 forms the conclusion and designates the implications for teaching and learning. The conclusions arrived at, in this study are listed in the final chapter of this dissertation. Along with the conclusion presented, is the scope for study in the future in this direction.

The sixth chapter is followed by the section Bibliography which lists books, papers and websites referred to in this study. The questionnaires used in this study are appended to the report.