CHAPTER – IV

METHODOLOGY

1. Introduction

In order to study the effectiveness of employing the strategies in descriptive writing, the researcher has adopted the experimental method as this type of research comes closest to scientific research. The hypothesis is to be scientifically verified through this experiment under laboratory conditions, with special emphasis on cause and effect relationship. Thus, what will occur under carefully controlled conditions can be described and analysed, so that it may be applied to wider population.

2. Title

“Developing Strategies to teach Descriptive Writing to Undergraduate Learners of English as Second Language”.

3. Objectives

Objectives in any kind of research pave a way to the researcher to develop a clear and systematic approach to research and to determine the scope, direction and method of study.

Objectives are the different aspects of intention. The aspects are purpose, process and outcome.

For these, the researcher has to

1) Select students most likely to achieve them.
2) Decide what content to teach so that they achieve them for sure.

3) Choose and design the best strategies to use in order to achieve the objectives and

4) Assess whether the students have achieved them. The objectives are identified by examining their various class test answer papers in part II English [English taught as a subject]. The objectives of the researcher are

   i. To find the present level of skill in descriptive writing of the students.

   ii. To identify, design and implement appropriate strategies to enhance the skill in descriptive writing of the students.

   iii. To measure the effectiveness of the strategies implemented in enhancing the skill in descriptive writing and

   iv. To make the students write better descriptive passages using the principles of paragraph construction and linking devices.

3. a) **Scope of the Study**

   The overall goal of this study is broad enough to comprise the various linguistic skills that are essential for the development of
writing skill. At the same time, the focus of the topic is narrow enough to limit the attention to descriptive writing.

4. **Definition of key terms**

1) The term ‘descriptive writing’ means writing about people, objects, places and actions etc.
2) ‘Strategy’ means the art of handling or managing any affair to the best advantage. In other words, it means ‘methods’ or ‘techniques’.
3) ‘Undergraduate learners’ are students who are in the final phase of the 10 + 2 + 3 pattern.
4) ‘Second language’ means language other than the mother tongue taught separately as a subject.

5. **Hypothesis**

‘Hypothesis’ is a possible solution to the problem before conducting the experiment. It offers only tentative solutions. There are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ solutions, only relevant ones to a particular problem to a particular group at a particular point of time in a particular place.

The formulated hypothesis on the basis of the intuition, experience and observation of the researcher is

“There will be a significant development between the post test and pre-test scores in descriptive writing because of the application of the strategies”.

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6. Variables

Variables are the conditions or characteristics that the researcher manipulates, controls and or observers.

In this experiment, the various backgrounds of the students like the sex, age, residence, and family background are independent variables, as the researcher has no control over them.

The test scores, time taken both by the researcher and students for various reasons during the experiment are dependent variables as the researcher has control over them to change, reduce or extend.

7. Delimitations

The researcher has restricted himself to the two sections of 1 year B.Com students for the following reasons:

i.) The students of both groups (Sections) are of the same level – their marks in English in + 2 exams and marks in English in regular class tests reveal this.

ii.) Opportunities for the researcher to devote more teaching sessions regularly are more, as these students do not have practical sessions (lab) for their subjects.

iii.) Since they are in their second semester, the pragmatic side of their learning through the experiment can be evaluated systematically for a considerable period of time, i.e. four more semesters (two years). Thus their ability to retain, retrieve and improve upon the skills they have developed can be evaluated.
iv.) The possibility of learning is more among these groups. They are potential groups with adequate prior knowledge and willingness to learn.

v.) These students represent both Science and Arts groups. They study Commerce with Statistics. So the researcher is convinced that these two groups from Commerce represent all the students (Arts and Science). As a result the findings may have wider application.

The time taken was 25 teaching sessions, each comprising two hours and a half. Study holidays and subsequent University semester examinations are the time-restricting factors. The target skill is restricted to descriptive writing as most of the concepts, ideas, things and situations that the students learn and write are mostly in the descriptive form. However, they are given adequate exposure to other forms of discourse – Narration, exposition and persuasions argumentation whenever an opportunity arose to compare and contrast. In the same manner, though writing is in focus, other skills, namely speaking, listening and reading are also developed simultaneously and discretely.

8. Experimental Design

The researcher proposed to use parallel group pre-test, experiment, and post-test design. In order to assess the entry-level behaviour of the students, a pre-test over their skill in descriptive writing was conducted. After the completion of the experiment, a
post-test over the students' skill in descriptive writing was conducted. The achievement difference between the post-test and pre-test has provided a measurement of the effect of the strategies on enhancing their skill/ability in descriptive writing. Parallel group experimental design is selected so that the development can be measured accurately and more effectively by comparing these two groups at various stages.

9. Threats to experimental validity

Internal threats

i.) Maturation: both biological & psychological. Since the experiment is conducted within a shorter period of time, this threat is avoided.

ii.) Incidental learning: This also is minimum as the researcher himself is the regular teacher of English language to the students.

iii.) Anxiety: The anxiety of the students is minimum as tasks are well designed after consulting other teachers. Discussions reduced anxiety. Help from other teachers minimised the anxiety of the researcher.

iv.) Testing: Tow eminent teachers, with considerable exposure to new trends in English Language Teaching one from a different college and the other from the same college are requested to correct the answer sheets. Both corrected all the answer
sheets of both groups. The average is taken for data analysis. Since the difference in scores between these two teachers is minimum this threat is avoided.

Thus, these internal threats are successfully encountered. Since these two examiners, along with other teachers, helped the researcher at various levels, other internal threats like unstable instrumentation is avoided. The +2 scores and scores of periodical monthly tests in English show that homogeneity exists between both groups. Thus, ‘human statistical regression’ is avoided.

2) **External threats**

The external threats to experimental validity are successfully encountered as follows:

*i.*) ‘Interference of prior treatment’ is non-existent as this is relevant only to single group experiments.

*ii.*) ‘Artificiality of experiment’ setting is avoided by real life atmosphere generated by the researcher inside the classroom while conducting the experiment by using real life situations for the tasks, informal discussions etc.

*iii.*) By disclosing the purpose of the experiment to the students, the threat of ‘interaction effect of testing’ is avoided.

*iv.*) Since all the students of both groups are selected for the experiment, leaving none, the threat of, ‘interaction of
selection treatment’ is avoided. There is no place for ‘random samples’ at any stage of the experiment.

v.) Since two qualified and experienced teachers have done the work of correcting the answer sheets themselves, the threat of ‘teacher bias’ is avoided.

Thus, both internal and external threats to experimental validity are overcome.

10. **Selection of samples**

The researcher has selected all the students of the two sections of I year B.Com students for his study (60 + 60). The researcher believed that the application of the strategies would improve their skill in descriptive writing, which would help them at varying degrees in tendering learning other subjects. The researcher selected all the 120 students from two sections, leaving none. Each section (group) has 60 students. With this adequate sample size, he implemented his design. The researcher has felt that both groups have untapped potential. He selected one group as experimental group for his study. The other group (control) is left only with formal teaching, without the treatment of beneficial learning.

11. **Tools**

1) Worksheets

2) Formal and informal tasks with learning

3) Field notes.
11. a) Tasks

Two simple descriptive passages, the first piece describing a person and the other describing a process (The Verger, The Breathalyser).

Task implementation: Stage by stage.

Task being broken into 5 stages

i.) reading and grasping the central idea, tone and attitudes presented in the given passages.

ii.) nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs being taken down. Their synonyms taken from a dictionary.

iii.) each sentence in labelled in accordance with its type and structure.

iv.) elements like subject, predicate, object, complement (subject and object) are also marked.

v.) linking devices are marked and listed. Their respective synonyms are also taken down.

The first passage focuses on a person (suggestive description) and the other one focuses on a process (technical description).

Both passages contain the following aspects:

i.) Description of a person – a verger in trouble and an alcoholic.
ii.) Description of a place - city, church, roads and roads, a police station, a laboratory.

iii.) Description of a process – dismissal from service, starting a business and detecting an alcoholic with the help of a device.

iv.) Description of objects – dress, church, and the Breathalyser.

These aspects are found in an elaborate manner in both passages. So teaching logical development on the basis of cause and effect relationship as well as sequential order can be possible. So the students can exploit these details to their fullest advantage.

b) Task Implementation

This is only for the experimental group.

a) The students are asked first to read and grasp the central idea, tone, and attitude of each passage separately.

b) The students are asked to identify and mark sentences according to their functions (describing an object, scene, person, place, event, process, etc.).

c) Then nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs in these passages are taken down, grouped and labelled. (adjectives of quality, distributive and demonstrative adjectives etc). Their synonyms are taken down.
d) The tense, voice of each sentence are labelled. Phrasal verbs and prepositions are grouped.

e) Each sentence is marked according to its pattern. (SV, SVO, SVO_{IDOD}, etc.).

f) Link words are grouped and their synonyms are taken down. Similarly other forms of connectives (repetition of a clause) are also taken down.

Validity of the Tool

"Validity" refers to the 'ability' to measure what is expected to be measured. It is, "the extent to which the procedure actually accomplishes what it seeks to measure". Test scripts of the pre-test, progressive, combined levels and post-test are corrected and are given scores by two experienced and efficient language teachers. Suggestions for changes and improvement are received from them as well as by other language teachers and teachers who teach other subjects. Thus, the content validity of the tool is being established.

Reliability of the tool

By the application of test-retest method, the reliability of the entire test is established.

Tests

There are ten tests to each group (control, experimental groups). They are
1) Pre-test

2) L1 (Testing nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs)

3) L2 (Testing grammar – tense, subject-verb coordination, prepositions, and phrasal verbs).

4) L1 + L2

5) L3 (Structures)

6) L1 + L2 + L3

7) L4 (Linking devices)

8) L1 + L2 + L3 + L4

9) L5 (Logical Development)

10) L1 + L2 + L3 + L4 + L5 (Post-test)

The students are tested using the following types of drills.

For example, in level 1, a) Fill in the blank, b) Match the following and, c) Multiple choice questions are given.

Then they are asked to rewrite the given passages replacing the nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs with words taken from the dictionary (synonyms). This is L1 test.

In the same manner L1, L2, L3, L4, L5 tests are conducted.

When L2 is over, the students are asked to replace the nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs in addition to the change of voice, tense, etc. without changing the ideas, tone, and attitude in the original passages. This is L1 + L2.
In the same manner, \( L_1 + L_2 + L_3 \), \( L_1 + L_2 + L_3 + L_4 \), \( L_1 + L_2 + L_3 + L_4 + L_5 \) are carried out.

All the tests are conducted to both groups simultaneously. The control group is not given any kind of special training in these levels.

The test scripts are corrected by two teachers, one from the same College and an other from a different College. Grading is done on the basis of lexical items, correctness of grammar, and proper use of the cohesive devices, implicit and explicit knowledge and fluency.

**Scheme of Data Analysis**

Mean, S.D., Computation of ‘t’ value, and ‘r’ values are used for Data analysis.

**12. Phases of Experiment**

The experiment has the following phases

**Phase 1.** Two groups are selected. One functioning as the control group and the other one as the experimental group. Both groups are parallel groups. Both groups are the two sections of I year B.Com students. The students of these groups scored marks in English in +2 examination with least difference. Their marks in English in their first semester degree examination also have little difference. Thus these two groups with more homogeneity are selected. However, all the 120 students differ on the basis of sex, residence and educational level of parents.
Phase 2. Two lessons from their current English text are selected for the experiment. Both groups are asked to write these lessons in their own words. This is taken as the pre-test. The lessons are *The Verger* by Somerset Maughm and *The Breathalyser*.

Phase 3. Then; Teaching of the five levels, namely

a) Nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs

b) Tenses

c) Sentence Structures

d) Link words and

e) Logical development, are complete.

When the first level is taken, it is taught for 5 teaching sessions, each comprising 2½ hours only to the experimental group, after which, a progressive test is conducted to both groups. In the meantime, the control group received formal teaching of the same lessons. Thus, each group is tested in all the five levels.

Phase 4. After the completion of each progressive test, the levels already taught are clubbed with the level just taught and a test is conducted to the experimental group to test their skill in these levels in a combined form. This is also conducted for the control group at the same time.

Phase 5. A posttest was conducted for both groups. The same lessons are taken and the students are asked to write on these topics in their own words.
Phase 6. The performance of these two groups is compared by analysing their test scores at various levels. Both inter and intra group performances are measured by data analysis.

13. **Hurdles during the experiment**

Since the operations are already designed in the sequential form, the students are able to execute them easily and effectively. However, the following obstacles are encountered and removed.

Some students are eager to learn but are lazy and passive. They are motivated by presenting interesting and novel situations in which they are placed and are asked to respond. (Ex. Self-portrait).

Apart from this, no other obstacle has been encountered. Full co-operation from the Principal, language and subject teachers along with the students has been ensured. Since the tasks were capable of invoking prior knowledge, predicting, and mentally visualising situations, they were helping to designing questions and in removing the possible obstacles.

14. **Data Collocation and Analysis**

Tests were conducted at the following levels to both groups:

1) Pre-test  
2) Progressive test  
3) Test in the levels taught put together and  
4) Post-test.

Data analysis has been done by making use of mean, standard deviation, computation of ‘r’ value, and ‘t’ values.