CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

We have tried to argue in this study that reading is an important skill and must remain the goal of teaching English in our country. This does not mean that other skills are not to be taught; it only means that the main emphasis shall be on teaching reading. However, the survey we conducted shows that today our students want to learn English for a variety of reasons: academic, social, economic and personal. Therefore, it is very essential for us to strike a balance between students' "wants" and their "needs" if we want to succeed in our goal.

While reading is an important skill, we found that it is also one of the most neglected skills in language teaching, particularly, in ESL, both in our schools and colleges. Teaching reading is a well-researched area in language teaching/learning but all this research has not even touched the classroom teaching in our institutions. Teachers still resort to "reading aloud and paraphrasing" or "free translation" at college level and "read-respond-check-responses" at school. "Skimming" and "scanning" are terms heard in ELT seminars and workshops but teachers by and large do not know what they signify, why they should teach them and how to frame exercises to teach these skills.
Textbooks and Readers are not of much help to the practicing teacher as these, too, still follow the old tradition. Reading passages are preceded by a list of "new words", details about the author and his works and followed by a glossary, reading comprehension exercises consisting of multiple-choice, true-false and short-answer questions based on the taxonomies reading research has tried to establish, such as the one advocated by Bartlett (1965). Finally, there are long-answer questions followed by language/grammar exercises and composition writing. We have pointed out the shortcomings of these reading exercises and argued that these may be good for testing reading but not for teaching reading skills and strategies.

Reading inevitably involves two factors: the reader and the text, and the interaction between the two. There is, however, another important factor, that is the writer. Reading research has studied the former two, viz. the reader and the text and their interaction but not much work seems to have been done on this third element involved in reading, the absent writer and the context in which he puts his message in print.

Focus on the reader and the text and their interaction have led to teaching reading as "decoding"—reading as a bottom-up process.
Interaction has also been defined as interaction between the reader's background knowledge and the input. Investigation into the role of reader's background knowledge has been made. A major revolution in the teaching of reading was made when Goodman (1967) suggested that reading is "predicting-sampling-verifying"--reading as a top-down process.

In recent years, interaction has been defined in this sense, viz. interaction between bottom-up and top-down strategies--reading as an interactive-compensatory process.

Teaching reading as interaction between the writer and his absent reader(s) has obvious advantages over teaching reading as "decoding" or teaching reading as "prediction-sampling-verifying". It focuses reader's attention on language as a social event which the latter fail to do.

Both spoken and written languages, in spite of their differences, serve the same goal and share many features in common. Both are interactive although written communication is non-reciprocal. The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of an awareness of this peculiar nature of the written communication on adult EFL learners' reading comprehension ability. The findings of this study suggest
that learners' knowledge of reading as interaction between the writer and his prospective reader(s) facilitates reading comprehension.

The findings of this study naturally have implications for teaching reading skills and strategies: implications for writing/selecting reading materials, methodology and classroom teaching. We have suggested some activities which we think can be usefully exploited for teaching reading as interaction between the writer and his reader(s).