CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION: READING AS AN IMPORTANT ACTIVITY

Reading forms an important activity in both the first and the foreign language classroom. It constitutes one of the major components of the syllabi in language. In fact, reading has to be done across the curriculum. A learner has to do reading both inside and outside the classroom. Much of the reading has to be done by a learner on his own without the help of his teacher or peers outside the classroom. He has to do his homework tasks, assignments and prepare for his tests and examinations and for these he has to read his texts, note-books and additional help books at home or in the library. Lunzer and Gardner (1979) have reported a series of studies of pupils aged 10-15, who were average or above-average readers. They found that "a sizeable vein of reading ran through many subjects, such as English and humanities (1979:34). The data obtained from their studies revealed interesting facts about reading. They found that more time was spent on reading in each subject area at secondary levels than in the junior classes. The study revealed that 22 and 29 per cent of lesson time in English (14 and 15 per cent for all lessons) at first- and fourth- year secondary level was devoted by pupils to reading which was next only to listening (33 and 42 per cent}
for English and 26 and 29 per cent for all lessons). One of these studies was also designed to establish the extent and kind of reading required as part of homework tasks. The results showed that continuous reading was a frequent part of the homework tasks. Taken as a whole, the studies indicated that reading formed an appreciable component in homework assignments at the secondary levels, especially in English and the social studies, and that 70-80 per cent of homework assignments involved continuous sustained reading in long chunks.

Reading is an equally important activity in a second/foreign language teaching situation. In many parts of the world a reading knowledge of a foreign language is often important to academic studies, professional success, and personal development. This is particularly true of English as so much professional, technical and scientific knowledge is published in English today. English, as they say, is a 'window' on the world. A reading ability is all that is needed by learners of English as a foreign language. This is not to say that learners do not want to speak or write English as well. What it means is that more emphasis is to be laid on teaching reading ability to meet this specific need of the learners.

Reading has been recognised as the most important skill
and accorded priority over other skills even in the history of foreign language teaching programmes for older learners.

In a foreign language teaching programme for older learners the principle of "reading first" has been advocated both on grounds of methodology and usefulness. Claude Marcel (1973-1876) was perhaps the first to advocate the primacy of "reading" over "speech". APR Howatt (1985:152) rightly says that "if Marcel's work is known to us at all, it is because of his proposal to make the teaching of reading the first priority in foreign language teaching."

Marcel's principal work was a massive two-volume study of the role of language in education called Language as a Means of Mental Cultural and International Communication published in 1853. His "reading first" proposal derived from a complex and carefully thought-out methodology of language teaching. Marcel advocates his principle of "reading first" on a primary distinction between what he calls impression and expression which together "constitute the double object of language and mark the principal subdivision and order of study" (cited in Howatt 1985:152). Marcel argued that impression (or "reception" as it would be called today) psychologically and pragmatically preceded expression (production).

Marcel was not unaware of the Natural Method of
language learning in which speech has primacy over reading. In fact, he himself asserted that "the method of nature" was the "archetype of all methods, and especially of the method of learning languages." However, he believed that the "method of nature" gave a model for the foreign language classroom provided the learners were under the age of twelve, though some older learners might benefit as well.

If Marcel suggested "reading first" on ground of methodology, Michael West proposed it on account of its "surrender value" (a term he invented). Michael West's project was written up in a report called Bilingualism (with special reference to Bengal) published in 1926. The Bengal project was born as a result of West's protest against the imperial education system then prevalent in India. This education system, as Howatt (1985:245) points out, had, up until the First World War, pursued an educational policy known as "filtering", that is trying to ensure that the best students were "filtered" through the system to end up, preferably, with a British university degree, in government employment of some appropriate kind. West reacted against this system and pointed to the enormous educational wastage it entailed. According to the report some 32 per cent of Class 3 pupils (eight-year-olds) never even reached Class 4 and as many as 82 per cent dropped out before the end of school in Class 10. This being the case, West opined that
each year in school had to be treated as a separate educational experience in its own right, not merely as preparation for the next year that large numbers of the children would never reach. He defined "surrender value" as the "proportionate amount of benefit which will be derived by any pupil from an incompleted course of instruction." (Howatt, 1985:245). West was of the view that training in spoken English took far too long to have any useful surrender value for the majority of school leavers. Basic literacy skills in English, on the other hand, could be acquired much more rapidly, particularly if the children were already literate in their mother tongue. These skills could, moreover, be used in later life whereas spoken English was a useless skill for most Bengalis away from the major centres of imperial influence. West also completed a needs-analysis survey ("An analysis of the Bengali's need of English") stressing his interest in "all Bengalis, not merely a few selected individuals of the upper classes" (West, 1926:107). He contended that teaching spoken English along Palmerian lines was not likely to bring much benefit unless the majority of children stayed at school long enough to gain from an English-medium secondary education, and West knew this was not going to happen. Reading was the obvious alternative. He also investigated the notion, which was popular at the time, that translation into Bengali would ultimately solve the problem of access to information rather
than a reading programme in English and arrived at the conclusion that "the outlook is not hopeful."

Faced with the evidence of the importance of practical informative reading and the need to provide worthwhile learning at each stage of the school, West decided that the teaching of reading must have first priority, even if this meant the relative neglect of the spoken form of language.

The position with regard to English teaching in India has since changed at all levels. The status and the role of English in India, the characteristics of teachers and learners, and the system of education all have undergone major changes particularly in the post-independence period. However, in spite of all these changes, effective reading skill still remains the major important need of our learners of English.

English occupies a unique place in India. It is something more than a foreign language and something less than a second language. According to Strevens (1980:72) "where English is taught as a foreign language, English has no special status in the community." Brian Harrison (1973:17) states that "English as a foreign language means precisely that English is a foreign language." What he means is that it is not used for any national purpose but used for only international purpose. He further clarifies
that when we speak of English being a second language, it is indicated that English occupies a place, greater or less, increasing or decreasing, in the national environment. English as a second language indicates that English has a special status in the country. This special status may take any of several forms for example, accepted as an official language in administration or the courts of law; the medium of instruction for some parts of the public education system; given major time allocations in local broadcasting system; etc.

The Constitution of India confers on English the status of the associate official language of the union of India. Today it is the language of administration, business and commerce: the language of higher level technical and professional education in institutions of national character; the language of opportunity for higher level jobs both in public and private sectors; and the language of the law courts in India. In this multilingual country English also acts as the link language between the Union and the States and among the educated and the elite of the country. Besides, English is associated with social prestige and power. Moreover, English being a world language, is a window on the world for all professionals.

The role of English in administration, banking,
commerce and industry, and higher education leads to increasing demand for English education. The fact is that the question of demand for English education both at school and university levels is closely bound up with the question of national opportunities in the fields of education, employment and business and profession. To cater for this demand for English education private expensive English medium schools exist side by side with almost-free regional language medium schools run by government or the local bodies. Those who can afford it send their children to receive English education imparted by these expensive English medium private schools. The demand for English education has, of late, led to a phenomenal growth of private English medium schools, particularly in the urban areas. Several traditionally charitable educational and religious bodies, who used to run free regional language medium schools more out of missionary zeal than for profit, have also now joined in this "English medium school" race.

The unique status of English in India also determines learners' perception of their needs and priorities. A survey of student "wants" regarding English was conducted in a few local colleges in Srinagar (Kashmir) by the faculty teaching at the Summer Institute in English held at Kashmir University in June 1988. There were 49 learners. They were asked to complete the statement, "I would like to learn
English in order to ...", and for this they were provided 26 possible reasons for wanting to learn English. The responses received are summarised in Table I.

The sampling is too small to arrive at any broad generalizations but it does reflect to a fair degree students' perception of their needs and also indicates that they want English for its social prestige, academic value, and personal and professional needs. It also enables us to conclude that in India today English has many more users, and many more uses, than a foreign language has.

Table I
Order of Priority of choices according to the number (percentage) of respondents who selected an item (N=49).

I would like to learn English in order to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order</th>
<th>Choice</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Read English newspapers and magazines</td>
<td>46(93.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Pass degree examination in English</td>
<td>43(87.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Face interviews for jobs successfully</td>
<td>41(83.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make better use of the library</td>
<td>41(83.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Pass degree examination in other subjects</td>
<td>36(73.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Listen to radio programmes in English</td>
<td>34(69.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Read for pleasure in my spare time, e.g., novels</td>
<td>32(65.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Watch English programmes on TV</td>
<td>32(65.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Write job applications</td>
<td>29(59.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>See English movies</td>
<td>28(57.1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10. Listen to lectures on other subjects
12. Write letters to friends
13. Take notes from lectures
14. Face interviews for scholarships
15. Pass competitive exams for banks
16. Converse with tourists
16. Read books on subjects like history
18. Pass competitive exams for IAS, IPS, etc.
19. Converse with other Indians in social situations
20. Read official notices
21. Pass competitive exams for State and Central Govt./private jobs
22. Pass competitive exams in general
23. Pass competitive exams for management courses
23. Find a suitable marriage partner
25. Pass competitive exams for Engineering college entrance
26. Pass competitive exams for medical college entrance

Note: The sign (=) is used to indicate that the number of students choosing this item was the same as for the previous item.

Reading skill has assumed great importance in the present context when there is a major shift towards distance education all over the world. We in India, too, have embarked upon imparting education through this mode on a large scale. Practically, every university in the country
has started large number of courses through this mode. Besides, we now have a National Open University. Thousands of learners have been enrolled in different courses for education through correspondence and distance education system. One of the characteristics of these learners is that they are miles away from the teachers. Their primary contact with their teachers is only through print media for most part of the year. Printed text is also one of the main media of imparting education through this mode and will remain so for some years to come at least in a country like ours where audio-visual aids are as yet beyond the reach of an average learner. Ability to read effectively is, hence, the most important skill that learners must be given if we want distance education to be successful.

The education officials in India are not unaware of the need for English of our average learner. Their perception of learners' need for English is voiced in many documents and reports prepared by the University Grants Commission (UGC). The weightage given to reading is also seen in the recommendations of the UGC National Workshop on Syllabus Reform in English 1976-77 and the Report of UGC Curriculum Development Centre for English 1989. The latter in its recent report has suggested distribution of marks for compulsory General English course for BA/B.Sc./B.Com. as under:-
PART A

(Final Exam.)

1. Reading Comprehension
   Review Unit. 40%  Communication Skills Unit Level-I 30%  Communication Skills Unit Level-II 30%  Advanced Unit 30%

2. Writing
   40%  40%  40%  40%

PART B

/Internal/External Assessment

3. Reading of extensive readers
   (Oral & Written test or project)
   10%  10%  10%  10%

4. Listening & Speaking
   10%  20%  20%  20%

The importance of reading skill is also reflected in our universities' syllabuses for teaching English and the scheme of examination at the undergraduate level. In Delhi University, for example, the syllabus for English for B.A.(Pass) attaches more importance to reading than to any other skill as can be seen from Table II.

That reading is an important activity for an average learner in a foreign/second language classroom, such as we find in India, is also confirmed by the findings of a survey we undertook as part of this study.

In these learner-centred-approach days, one cannot afford to neglect the learners and keep them out of one's study for long without the risk of inviting accusing fingers. It is alleged (Altman, 1980:1) that hitherto language teaching was based on objectives worked out on theoretical and assumed data and the language needs of the learners were fixed and determined by institutions or their representatives without any reference to, and often without sufficient relevance to, the learner. In recent years, this trend has been reversed. If one glances at many of the journals and books on foreign language education today, words or phrases such as "learner-centred", "personalized", "individualized" and "humanized" appear as the most frequent modifiers of classroom instruction. In the past few years, many books written on the topic of foreign language teaching
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Paper I</th>
<th>Paper II</th>
<th>Paper III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(i) Essay</td>
<td>(i) Exercise in Analysis and Comprehension</td>
<td>(i) Texts: Drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 marks</td>
<td>40 (Unseen passages)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) Precis</td>
<td>(ii) Prescribed-texts</td>
<td>(ii) Poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 marks</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(iii) Literary texts</td>
<td></td>
<td>(iii) Prose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 marks</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*********</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weightage for Reading</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ENGLISH COURSE 'B'*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Paper I</th>
<th>Paper II</th>
<th>Paper III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(i) Grammar</td>
<td>(i) Grammar</td>
<td>(i) Exercise in Analysis &amp; Comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>(unseen passages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) Comprehension</td>
<td>(ii) Composition</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(iii) Vocabulary</td>
<td>(iii) Precis</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(iv) Composition</td>
<td>(iv) Prescribed texts</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>***</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weightage for Reading</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: University of Delhi Scheme of Examination and Courses for Reading for B.A.(Pass) Examination.

* Course 'A' for those who have passed English upto Class XII
* Course 'B' for those who have passed English upto Class X
and teacher education have sought to place the learner squarely in focus.

This shift in focus obliges us to acquire a better understanding of the characteristics, capabilities and resources of the target groups concerned, in order to identify their needs and select the objectives, content and curricula which will satisfy these needs. As Richterich (1983) puts it, "the identification of language needs thus becomes a sine qua non of all learner-centred teaching."

There are two things we always need to know in all learner-centred language teaching: (1) what the essential characteristics of the members of the target group are; and (2) what we should offer them so as to give them language ability in conformity with their aim. In other words, from a linguistic angle, what the target group is and what it wants to become.

With a view to studying our learners and their needs for English, we made a survey of the current practices of teaching reading in English in undergraduate courses in some colleges in Delhi. A questionnaire was designed for eliciting students' responses (Appendix I). In addition, personal interviews and informal discussions with teachers and students were also arranged to check the data received. The survey throws light on the learners, their personal and
social backgrounds, their needs and expectations, and the learning-teaching situation with particular reference to the teaching of English at the undergraduate level in Delhi colleges.

The questionnaire reveals that what has changed in India in the post-independence period is not so much the role and function of English, as the context of English teaching, the learner and the learning teaching situation.

The first thing we notice is that today we have in our colleges students from all strata of society and that they present a very wide spectrum of abilities in English. There are learners (both boys and girls) from the elite, middle and upper-middle classes as well as from socially and economically backward classes; children from well-educated families and also first-generation learners; city-dwellers with excellent learning environments as also students from rural and semi-urban areas; those who had schooling in well-equipped privately managed expensive English medium schools as also those from regional language medium schools maintained by local bodies or the government.

Various factors have contributed to this heterogeneous character of our learner but universalization of education and lack of a uniform language teaching policy are mainly responsible for it. After independence the Government of
India adopted a policy of universal education through the medium of regional languages. There was a tremendous expansion of education at all levels. The number of educational institutions in 1982-83 increased to 6.9 lakhs from a mere 2.3 lakhs in 1950-51. The magnitude of the educational explosion after independence can be gauged from the following figures:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Middle schools</th>
<th>No. of High/ Sec./Sr.Sec./ Inter colleges</th>
<th>Enrolment in High/ Sec./Sr. Sec. Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950-51</td>
<td>13.4 thousand</td>
<td>7.3 thousand</td>
<td>12.2 lakhs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982-83</td>
<td>123.3 thousand</td>
<td>52.3 thousand</td>
<td>94.9 lakhs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Challenge of Education, Min. of Edn., 1985)

The number of degree colleges in 1983 was about 5,000 affiliated to about 120 universities.

The major increase in the enrolment of students was in the 50's and the 60's. This increase in enrolment cannot be attributed solely to increase in population because population during this period did not show corresponding increase. The fact is that education in free India is not the sole prerogative of the middle and higher classes. We have been now getting more and more students from the lower strata of society and from rural areas.
Universalization of education brought with it some problems too. There was expansion of education without corresponding increase in infrastructural facilities. Large classes, lack of well-qualified teachers, heterogeneous character of learner, ill-equipped schools some of which lacked basic facilities such as libraries and reading rooms, playgrounds and even chalk and black-board and sometimes even a building— all these became very common. Academic values gave place to political considerations for opening new colleges and universities.

What complicates the knotty problem is the fact that education is a State subject. Hence there is no uniformity in language teaching policy amongst the different States. In some States English is taught as a subject from Class I, others teach it from Class III, some from Class V and many from Class VI. There is also no uniformity in the time allocated to teaching English. Also English is no more a compulsory subject at school. Because of the mounting concern caused by an alarmingly high percentage of failures in the subject, it was decided that "success in English should no longer be considered essential for admission to the undergraduate courses at the university" (Report of the Study Group, 1969). Hence in our undergraduate classes today we have students who have passed English upto Class VIII, Class X and Class XII.
The two other factors I can think of which give rise to the varied abilities in English of our learners are the dual-school system and the introduction of two different types of courses in English at school stage.

On the recommendations of the Study Group on the teaching of English in India appointed by the Ministry of Education in 1964, it was decided that the study of English at the lower secondary and senior secondary levels would be at two levels—a higher and a lower-level—which have since come to be known as Course A and Course B or Elective and Core. In Course A the emphasis is on "the study of literature in the language rather than on the grammar or structure." In Course B the emphasis is on the grammar and structure of the language being studied.

We also have, what I would call, a dual-school system—popularly called public schools and government/government-maintained schools. Our education policy permits expensive private English medium schools to exist side by side with virtually-free regional language medium schools run by local bodies/government for public. Those who can afford it send their children to receive English education imparted by these expensive English medium private schools because of the prestige and value that English still commands in India.
The government itself maintains different types of schools with varying standards of English teaching. In Delhi, for example, there are five different types of government/government-aided schools:

1. Central Schools: Maintained by Central government for its employees in transferable jobs. These schools teach English as a subject from Class I (6+) and may have separate English and regional medium sections.

2. Government Model schools: These are maintained by Delhi Administration/local bodies and teach English on Central School pattern.

3. Government-aided schools: These schools are managed by private charitable trusts etc. with financial aid from government and they teach English as a subject from Class I (6+).

4. Government schools: These are run by Delhi Administration. These are purely regional language medium schools and teach English as a subject from Class VI (12+).

5. Navodaya Vidyalayas: These are maintained by the Central government on the Central School pattern but are opened in rural areas for the benefit of gifted children from these areas.

It is possible for our school-leavers to have had 2 to 15 years of exposure to English teaching depending upon the type of school he comes from as shown in Table III.

It is because of this sort of English language teaching policy in India that we have today in our undergraduate classes learners with a very wide spectrum of abilities in English. The two extremes of these learners can be represented by (1) the learners from highly expensive
### Table - III

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of school</th>
<th>Medium of instruction</th>
<th>Introduction of English as a subject</th>
<th>Total exposure to English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private English medium schools</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Pre-primary (3+)</td>
<td>15 yrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central/Navodaya/aided/Model schools</td>
<td>English/Regional</td>
<td>Class I (6+)</td>
<td>8-12 yrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delhi Admn. Schools</td>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>Class VI (12+)</td>
<td>2-7 yrs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
English medium private schools, and (2) learners from regional language medium government schools meant for general public. The learning-teaching environments of these different types of learner both at home and at school/college are vastly different. Consequently, their needs for English and expectations from teachers of English are also very different.

The questionnaire was fed to cover both these extremes of learner in two different types of colleges—one which showed the highest and the other which produced the lowest pass percentage in Delhi University annual examination held in April 1988. For our study we took only co-educational colleges into consideration so as to cover both boys and girls. The sampling was done only among students appearing in B.A.(Pass), B.Com.(Pass), B.A.(Hons.) and B.Com.(Hons.). The study was confined to these courses as a large number of students appeared in them.

Those reading through English medium are students from upper middle class families; their parents are well-educated and well-placed in life, mostly in service. These learners have had their schooling in English medium private schools of differing reputations. They started learning English as a subject when they were only 3+ and have had about 15 years of exposure to English as a subject at school. They get enough reading material at home in the English language,
such as newspapers, magazines and journals. They are also members of or have access to libraries in the city (for example, American Centre, the British Council, Delhi Public Library, etc.) and on an average borrow two or more books in English per month from these libraries including their college library. They regularly watch/listen to programmes in English on their TV/radio sets.

Students at the other end of this spectrum come from socially and economically backward classes and are more or less first generation learners. They are the ones who had their schooling in regional language medium government schools where they started learning English in class VI(12+). They have 2-7 years of exposure to English as a subject in school. A vast majority of them do not get any reading material at home in English. Even when they do receive newspapers, magazines and journals at home, these are in regional languages. Unfortunately, even these they do not read regularly. They are not members of any library other than their own college library and generally do not borrow any books in English for extra reading either for their course or for pleasure. Hence they have not imbibed reading habits in English and they are also very poor in English. At home these learners have poor learning environment. They have no proper place/atmosphere at home for their studies. There is none at home to guide them and
help them with their studies. Many of these learners have very little time to devote to their studies as they have to help supplement their parents' income. A large majority of these learners do have television/radio sets but do not watch/listen to programmes in English simply because they do not understand them.

We found a strong correlation between students' present level of achievement in English and their own perception of their needs for English. There are some students who think that they already know enough English to meet their present and future needs. These are generally English medium students who have scored high marks in English and also in the aggregate. There are still others who candidly admit that they do not know enough English to meet their present and future needs. This broadly is the picture of English medium learners. Regional language medium learners, on the other hand, need teacher's help to meet both their present and future needs. However, on cross checking the responses to various items, we find that even the minority who feel that they already have enough language do say that they want their teacher of English to teach the way he has been teaching, i.e. read and explain or paraphrase. The teachers are also of the opinion that these learners, too, need help
in reading, especially with regard to what might be called 'background knowledge'.

The survey reveals that both English medium and regional language medium learners need teacher's help. The difference lies only in the nature of their needs: the former need what has been termed 'reading to learn' while the latter need to be taught 'learning to read'—even the mechanics of reading. Roughly, this is the position at the two extremes. In between these two extreme points lie a large number of learners who need help more in 'reading to learn' than in 'learning to read'.

Responses showing learners' needs and attitudes to English are summarised in Appendix II.

One may point to the wide gap between students' perception of their needs (see Table I) and officials' perception of the learners' needs. However, there is no contradiction between the two. Students' perception of their needs is based on the functions and role of English in India today and that of officials' on the role of English in India in some distant future. Today, an average learner needs to be able to read, write, speak and listen to English with a fair degree of comprehension. And the planners are also aware of it. This is evident from the reports of the various committees appointed by the UGC since
1961, and the syllabuses for teaching English suggested by them. All these committees have recommended in one form or the other the teaching of listening and speech skills at our undergraduate level. The report of the CDC for English 1989, in fact, also recommends the testing of these skills. While this is true today, gradually it may be that with the development of our national language, the learner will not be required to communicate through English quite as extensively as at present, at least for national purposes. He will then need English only as a foreign language, that is, for international purposes. In short, the skill of reading in English is likely to remain important for all educated Indians for a very long time to come. The principal value of English, when it has ceased to be a language for communication within India, will lie in the fact that much of what constitutes knowledge in the contemporary world, is available through English. Even when English is completely replaced as a medium of instruction in higher education, our learners at higher technical and professional levels would still need to be able to read books and periodicals relevant to their discipline written in English. A reading knowledge of English is, therefore, an important educational objective.

While reading is an important skill, the teaching of it is far from satisfactory in our country. After six years of
learning English as a subject at school and two to three years of compulsory English at college our average graduate cannot read a daily newspaper. Teachers, parents, examiners all complain of our learners' poor reading skill in English.

We have already described above in some detail the poor learning environment at home of those learners who need help most. Exposure to written language, it has been shown, improves children's literacy skills. Lack of this exposure at home in the early years deprives these learners of this useful resource of learning reading and writing. Several educators and researchers suggest that children who are well-read-to by parents implicitly learn a "book language" and become familiar with lexical choices and linguistic structures which tend to be specific to written language (Butler & Clay, 1979; Genishi and Dyson, 1984; Holdaway 1979) and this helps them in learning to read as learning to read involves learning to process written language effectively and efficiently (Purcell-Gates, 1988). But many of our learners do not have the benefit even of this as they are, by and large, first generation learners or their parents are too busy to find time to read to their children.

If the atmosphere at home is not conducive to learning to read, the environment at school/college is no better either. Our education system, large classes, insufficient time, dearth of easily accessible interesting reading
material, unsuitable material, first generation learners, poor learning environment at home, learning a foreign language, syllabi and examinations—a number of such factors can be enumerated to account for the poor achievement level of our learners. Some of these are facts of life and little can be done to alleviate their effects. But we cannot ignore the fact that English in India occupies a prominent place and the motivation of our learners to learn English is very high. This is clearly evident from our survey. Many of the learners reading through English medium and almost all of those who are poor in English and are reading through regional language medium responded that they would still opt for English even if the language were made optional at the undergraduate level. Also we cannot ignore the fact that six years of English at school as a subject is not all that short a period. In view of this we undertook an investigation into the current practices of teaching reading comprehension in our undergraduate classes in Delhi and found that much of the blame for poor reading ability of our learners lies with our methodology.

It is really disheartening to note that in spite of the volume of research in the field, the teaching of reading in our schools/colleges has continued on the traditional pattern, that is, read and translate into the mother tongue,
read and paraphrase or, at the most, read-respond and check responses for correctness.

There is a tendency to teach the textbook for its content rather than to use it as a tool for teaching reading. Teachers tend to think that their sole function is to convey the content and hence they resort to translating, paraphrasing or interpreting the text for their learners as thoroughly as they can. Each thought is analysed, each reference explained and each word is glossed irrespective of whether a text is meant for detailed or non-detailed study. The practice is deeply entrenched in our system even at the school level and our survey reveals that even students gradually come to expect this of their teacher. The response received to the item, "How do you want your teacher to teach you?", in our questionnaire was an under:

(N=61: Total Responses=90)

a. He should read and explain in Hindi 20 22.2%
b. He should read and explain in English 37 41.1%
c. He should ask us to read and then ask questions 27 30.0%
d. Any other (please specify)= 6 6.7%
   As at present; give notes; use blackboard, give word meanings, dictate important things; remove our difficulties; etc.
Even authorities tend to associate teaching with lecturing and reading aloud by the teacher.

The teacher does all the "work" in the classroom while the learner is a passive recipient. When the teacher has completed "teaching", he is expected to give questions expected in the examination and often also to dictate "notes" to his students which they can memorise for their examinations. Teaching the text becomes mere "telling" the content. While it might help the learner answer questions based on the text, it does not result in his learning to read for himself.

When a prescribed lesson from a textbook has to be "taught", the teacher frequently begins by delivering an introductory lecture on the background of the author, his life, his works, the age in which he lived, even when all this information is given in the text book by the author/editor himself. Teachers believe that such an introduction helps their students understand or appreciate the text better. It is true that at an advanced level of literary interpretation, background information can certainly contribute to a better understanding of a text. But most of our learners are not at that level and hence do not benefit from such introductory lectures.

In some cases there is no evidence of planning or
preparation on the part of the teacher. Some do not even remember what unit is to be taught on a particular day. It is not uncommon to find a teacher asking his students immediately after the roll call, "O.K., where did we leave the last time?", then trace the line in the text and begin his "read and paraphrase" routine. Or he may begin, "O.K., now open your books at page so and so. We'll read this story/poem today", and thus begin his day's work by delivering an introductory lecture.

Various methods are employed by our teachers to convey the "content". Many teachers insist on reading the text aloud. The teacher reads aloud himself and asks his students to listen to him and follow the matter in the text or repeat after him. Some of the teachers may select a student to read aloud from the text while he (the teacher) paraphrases and corrects errors of pronunciation.

Both these practices might be useful initially when the learner is still learning to read but are not helpful for teaching reading to learn. When the teacher reads aloud the students just listen to him passively and hence they themselves do not get any practice. On the other hand, when a student is selected to read aloud it is practically only that learner who gets practice and that, too, in reading aloud, while others listen to him passively or repeat after him mechanically. Reading aloud might have its benefits but
it is not a training for reading in real life situations. Reading in real life is a private activity; it is done either for pleasure or for getting knowledge and is done silently and without the help of teacher and the speed also varies depending upon the purpose of reading. The kind of reading we ask our learners to do in the classroom should eventually lead them on to this stage of reading.

The other method of teaching reading found in our classrooms is, what we have called above, "Read-Respond-Check response for correctness". Students are asked--rather they are assisted--to read a text with the help of a given glossary and at the end they are expected/required to answer a variety of comprehension questions. This technique of teaching reading is based on the reading research that focussed on the "product" of reading. Traditionally, reading researchers focusing on the reader have attempted to analyse the reading skills into a series of sub-skills. Attempts have been made to discover if reading is composed of different sub-skills that might relate to one another within a taxonomy of hierarchy of skills. Many different taxonomies or lists have been drawn up over the years varying in content from the famous three--literal, inferential and evaluative--with which practically every teacher of English is familiar, to the outstanding 36 drawn
up by the New York City Board of Education (Reproduced in Lunzer & Gardner, 1979:42).

Typical of such taxonomies or lists is that of three levels of comprehension, usually called literal (on the line) comprehension, inferential (between the lines) comprehension, and critical (beyond the lines) comprehension. Somewhat similar is that of Barrett (1968) who gives a list of five skills: literal comprehension, reorganization of the ideas in the text, inferential ability, evaluation, and appreciation. Davies and Widdowson (1974) come up with a similar list of types of reading comprehension questions, relevant to the testing of reading ability: direct reference questions, inference, supposition and evaluation questions. A longer list of feasible levels of questions is exemplified by Adam-Smith (1981) using the Bloomian taxonomy. Typically, textbooks purporting to teach reading in a foreign language consist of a variety of texts with a set of questions (often in multiple choice format) which aim to test learner's ability to understand the text at various levels which research has established.

These two techniques of teaching reading have been attacked on various grounds. It is pointed out that neither of these can be called the teaching of reading. If the former is called "telling the content", the latter is a form of "testing".
The distinction between different levels of reading comprehension was useful because it divided the whole world of comprehension into manageable categories. But there are many problems with trying to define reading as consisting of a series of subskills in this fashion.

Firstly, educators began to think linearly about these different levels, assuming that they represented these (three, four or thirtysix) different levels of difficulty. It was assumed that these different levels were hierarchically ordered and that literal comprehension was easier than inferential comprehension which, in turn, was easier than critical comprehension. Recent research has failed to find evidence for the separate existence of these skills. Lunzer and Gardner (1979) report an attempt to identify a hierarchy of skills by creating questions on passages aimed at different levels of meaning. The researchers failed to prove that the different questions called upon different subskills: they did not find people who could answer "word-meaning" questions but not questions higher-up the hierarchy; or readers who could make inferences and do lower level tasks but could not make judgements about what they were reading.

Lapp and Flood (1978) also point out two major objections to this different-level classification scheme:
1. It is assumed that there is a linear progression of difficulty in these levels of comprehension and that tasks that measure comprehension can be correctly labelled as literal, inferential or critical.

2. This scheme only takes the source of comprehension into account. It does not take into consideration the dynamic active process of comprehension in which the reader participates. The operations of the learner during the reading process are ignored in this scheme.

They have shown that it is quite difficult to label questions as literal, inferential, or critical. They prove that while the source for the answer to a question may be in the text thereby making the questions appear to be a test of literal comprehension, yet the exact answer may not be in the text, and that in order to answer such a question the reader may be called upon to perform certain arithmetical operations beyond the text or may have to operationalise his previous knowledge. They, therefore, conclude that we should be investigating the processes involved in answering the question (in comprehending) and that we may be wasting our time by fighting over inappropriate and misleading labels (Lapp and Flood, 1978:229).

Similar objections have been raised in recent times by
other researchers. It is pointed out that doing a comprehension test and actually reading are probably not the same thing. For instance, a learner once admitted, "I got 100% on the questions but I didn't understand the passage". Moreover, it is said that establishing the level of understanding that a learner has achieved, may be a relevant and worthwhile occupation for a tester, but it is not obvious that such an activity is relevant to teaching, since knowing what a student has understood does not, of itself, help one decide how he has or has not understood this, and cannot provide information on how the learner might be helped to understand at a higher level if he has failed to achieve that level. (Alderson & Urquhart, 1984:xvii). Again, researchers point out that this scheme is based on the assumption that texts have predictable meanings which can be extracted if only the reader is sufficiently skillful which is not true since, as Widdowson (1979) points out, texts do not have meaning but have potential for meaning. This method tends to give a wrong notion that there is only one meaning as the research shows that the product of reading varies from reader to reader depending on several factors, particularly the background knowledge and the purpose of reading.

Widdowson (1978:96) further calls into doubt this time-honoured procedure of teaching/testing comprehension by
asking learners questions after they have read a text, particularly when the questioner already knows the answer. Grellet (1981:9) also echoes this point.

Many factors are responsible for this neglect of teaching reading at our undergraduate level. We have already referred to some of these. Our survey reveals quite a few other causes. Some teachers blame the learners. It is said that they are poorly motivated or that their failure to learn English in school has killed their spirits and they seem to have accepted defeat. Some blame the school teachers for not doing their duty well. It is claimed that teaching reading is the duty of school teachers and not of college teachers. We also discovered that many teachers were simply ignorant of how to teach reading. They were completely unaware of any research in this area of language teaching. A few teachers who have had exposure to linguistics, language teaching and other allied subjects or who have attended refresher courses or summer institutes in English, admitted that they did try to put their knowledge into practice but could not succeed for one reason or the other and hence, reverted to the traditional mode of teaching reading.

We also feel that "speech first", which has been emphasised in second language pedagogy throughout this century, also is partly responsible for poor reading skills
of our learners. There were, it appears, just two small attempts to promote reading-based approach in foreign language learning programmes during this century: one by Michael West in India in 1926 and the other by Coleman Committee in America in 1929. We have already made a reference in this chapter to the attempts made by Michael West to teach English to Bengali speakers in India. However, as APR Howatt (1985:249) points out, "West's departure from India after the Bengal Report and his emergence as one of the world leaders of English Language teaching, meant that his specialist interests in the teaching of reading did not develop in the way he had planned while he was writing the Report."

The recommendation of the Coleman Report to adopt reading-based approach in foreign language teaching in American schools and colleges was based on practical considerations. Like Michael West, the Coleman Committee also felt that the goal of trying to teach conversation skills was impractical in view of the restricted time available for foreign language teaching in schools, the limited skills of teachers, and the perceived irrelevance of conversation skills in a foreign language for the average American college student (Richards and Rodgers, 1986:11). The result was that reading became the goal of most foreign language programmes in the United States. This emphasis on
reading continued to characterize foreign language teaching in the United States until World War II when the need to give fluency in foreign languages to army personnel had a significant effect on language teaching in America. Army Specialized Training Programme (ASTP) was established in 1942 to teach foreign languages to military personnel. The success of this programme coupled with research findings in structural linguistics, contrastive analysis, and behaviour psychology led to what came to be known variously as the Oral Approach, the Aural-Oral Approach, and the Structural Approach.

Excepting for these two minor attempts to evolve a reading-based approach to foreign language teaching, the emphasis in language teaching throughout this century has been on finding a pedagogy for teaching speech. If there is anything common among the various approaches and methods advocated during the century, it is their emphasis on teaching foreign language ability through speech.

The different current approaches and methods in language teaching are explicitly or implicitly derived from at least three different theoretical views of language and the nature of language proficiency. These are: (1) the structural view, (2) the functional view, and (3) the interactional view. Of the three, the structural view, that
language is a system of structurally related elements for the coding of meaning, is the most traditional. The Audiolingual Method and such contemporary methods as Total Physical Response and the Silent Way embody this particular view of language. The functional view considers language as a vehicle for the expression of functional meaning. The recent communicative movement in language teaching subscribes to this view of language. The interactional view sees language as a vehicle for the realization of interpersonal relations and for the performance of social transactions between individuals. Language teaching content, according to this view, may be specified and organized by patterns of exchange and interaction.

Whatever their differences all these approaches emphasise the teaching of speech. One of the main characteristics of the Oral Approach developed by Palmer, Hornby and other British applied linguists from the 1920s onward was that "language teaching begins with the spoken language" (Richards and Rodgers, 1986:34). Speech was regarded as the basis of language and structure was viewed as being at the heart of speaking ability under this British "structuralism". "Oral practice" of structures was their principal classroom activity (Pittman, 1963:179). They believed that automatic control of basic structures and
sentence patterns was fundamental to reading and writing skills, and this was achieved through speech work.

The American Audiolingual Method developed in the 1940s shared many things with the British Oral Method including its emphasis on speech. The structural theory of language constituted the backbone of this method and an important tenet of structural linguistics was that the primary medium of language is oral: speech is language; that we learn to speak before we learn to read or write. It maintained that language is "primarily what is spoken and only secondarily what is written" (Brooks, 1964). Therefore, it was assumed that speech had a priority in language teaching. Since speech was held to be primary and writing secondary, it was assumed that language teaching should focus on mastery of speech and that writing or even written prompts should be withheld until reasonably late in the language learning process.

Teaching oral proficiency has been the aim of some recent methods as well. James Asher's Total Physical Response is a "Natural Method" as he sees successful adult second language learning as a parallel process to child first language acquisition. As Richards and Rodgers (1986:91) point out
The general objectives of Total Physical Response are to teach oral proficiency at a beginning level. Comprehension is a means to an end, and the ultimate aim is to teach basic speaking skills.

Similarly, Charles A. Curran's Community Language Learning is "most often used in the teaching of oral proficiency" (Richards and Rodgers, 1986:119).

Spoken language has received all the more attention from the proponents of Communicative Approach, a title claimed by almost all the methods which have developed as a reaction to the Structural Approach and aim to focus on meaning rather than form. Communicative Approach starts with the theory of language as communication. Learning a second language is viewed as acquiring the linguistic means to perform different kinds of functions. The aim is to give the learners an ability to use language in real-life situations. But there is no unanimity on how it is to be given. There are numerous ways of labeling the major functions expressed in language. Wilkins (1973, 1976) lists eight, van Ek (1980) distinguishes six main functions of communication, and Finocchiaro uses five broad categories (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983:65). Some have preferred to specify tasks and activities (See, for example, Prabhu, 1987).

It is very difficult to define what Communicative
Approach is for, as Richards and Rodgers state (1986:66), "there is no single text or authority on it, nor any single model that is universally accepted as authoritative." However, there is some consensus on the principles of communicative theory:

The principle of the "genuine" information gap has, of course, become enshrined as a central element in communicative theory, along with other factors such as unpredictability, freedom of choice concerning what to say and how to say it, meaningful context and the purposeful use of language.

(Clarke, 1989)

These characteristics form the basis of language learning activities though the range of exercise types and activities is unlimited.

Finocchiaro and Brumfit rightly comment (1983:143) that "little has been said about reading in articles and texts on an F-N curriculum (except for advanced English for Special Purpose courses)." On the other hand, the types of classroom activities and material suggested by different advocates of the communicative approach effectively promote oral proficiency:

The overall impact of the communicative approach has been to enrich and extend the traditions of language teaching initiated by the reformers at the end of the last century. The spoken language, for example, is promoted with more determination now than at any time since the Reform Movement.

(Howatt, 1985:289)
We feel that this emphasis on "speech" is not compatible with the need for English of an average learner in India.

Our aim here is not to question or belittle the results of Communicative Approach. But there are dangers of over-enthusiastic promotion of packaged methods originally devised for quite different circumstances. The Functional-Notional Approach arose primarily out of the work commissioned by the Council of Europe founded in 1949 for cultural and educational cooperation among western European countries. With the increasing interdependence of European countries came the need for greater efforts to teach adults the major languages of the European Common Market and the Council of Europe. Education was one of the Council of Europe's major areas of activity. Its aim was to enable adults to communicate and interact with speakers of other languages either in a foreign country or in their native land. The adult learner included future workers in foreign countries, tourists, or people engaged in academic, cultural, technical, or economic activities. In their interaction with foreigners they needed to perform primarily through speech such functions as those proposed by the Council of Europe. When Functional-Notional Approach was attacked precisely on those grounds on which it had criticised the Structural Approach, others came up with
alternatives to functions and notions such as situations, tasks and activities to achieve the same objective, that is, to give learner communicative competence in speech in real life situations. The Bangalore Project, too, was conceived with the same objective in mind. This, we have already pointed out, is not the need of an average learner of English in India.

Moreover, we may not be able to create conditions necessary for the success of the communicative approach. The communicative approach requires that the performance abilities of the teachers must be of native or near-native standard.

In the words of Howatt (1985: 288), the demands made on teacher's sociolinguistic competence can be very heavy. The Bangalore Project, it is said, could prove a great success in the hands of Prabhu. But we do not have many teachers like Prabhu to make it a success. Again, in the area of teaching reading the results of the Bangalore Project have not shown any major gains over the traditional method of teaching (Beretta & Davies, 1985). Besides, one needs a second party, another interlocutor, to practise language use through communicative activities. Most of our learners cannot, therefore, practise language outside the classroom. Reading, on the other hand, can be practised by a learner
without another interlocutor as he can interact with the absent writer through the book in hand. In addition, we can also cite the reasons given by Michael West and the Coleman Reports, since they are all valid in our case too, in favour of a reading-based approach for teaching English. But our chief reason is the difference between the spoken and the written languages. We would not dwell on this point here since we would take it up for detailed discussion in a subsequent chapter. It should suffice here to say that since spoken and written languages are two different things, it is not necessary that one who has learnt to comprehend the spoken language will automatically learn to comprehend the written language as well. It has been our experience that even learners who are good in oral communication, may often lack the skills and strategies needed for comprehending a written text.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have tried to argue that reading is an important activity in second language learning situations particularly such as we find in India where English occupies a unique position. Reading, in fact, has to be done across the curriculum both in the first as well as in the second language. It is all the more important in the distance education system which has been receiving great attention.
lately. While reading is an important activity, the teaching of reading skills has remained neglected in our schools and colleges for various reasons. One of these is the emphasis on 'speech first' laid in all second language teaching methods and approaches advocated during the century. We feel that oral-based approaches require a certain type of environment for their success which we do not have and cannot provide in the near future. Hence a reading-based approach to teaching English will be more suitable in our circumstances and for this we must teach reading in its own right, rather than merely as an adjunct to the teaching of oral skills, and find effective means for improving teaching reading in our classrooms.