INTRODUCTION
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The Context of the Project

The Higher Secondary English (Group B) course assumes a lot of potentials for full-fledged academic study. Ever since its first introduction in the state in 1976 the course has been undergoing constant revisions and changes to meet fast changing needs of learners. Another crucial cause behind it is the rapid and vast progress in English language teaching (ELT) research. Despite the utmost care on the part of West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education (Council), the success rate in English is not showing that proportional growth. This contradiction and the significance of the course in the overall education system had worked a powerful incentive for such an academic study as this. This intermediate stage of learning is alone to undergo the drastic change in structure as well as in contents. At the time of educational restructuring the former intermediate course of one years’ duration either in the name of P. U. course or Higher Secondary course (11-class), had been extended to a two-year course. All other stages were not so greatly changed. The temporal expansion of the course at least is a change-over from just one-year stop-gap preparation into a full-fledged sort of course with substantial weight added to it. On the other hand, the worldwide growth of English is so fast and vast with great progress in science and telecommunications and commerce, it becomes essential to pursue English with greater interest than ever before.

Both at the governmental and academic levels, special steps have been taken for adequate learner growth through policy changes and several curriculum reforms and syllabus re-structuring at close intervals. For instance, since 1982, the Government of West Bengal had taken measures to implement several significant policy changes in relation to English teaching in school curriculum. It had, at first, withdrawn English completely from Primary Education (from class I to Class V) in the State in 1982. The introductory class for teaching English was Class VI thereafter. Then, some other quick changes followed in next two
decades. Throughout the whole decade of the 1990s the State Government had appointed one commission after another in close succession to look into the position of English teaching and learning in state-run schools. In 1992 it is the Ashok Mitra Commission which recommended the re-introduction of English in Class V in place of Class VI. Next, following the Pabitra Sarkar Commission (1995) the Government had brought down the formal introduction of English to Class III. The Commission, however, suggested that it could be initiated informally in the second half of Class II. Then came the Ranjugopal Mukhopadhyaya Committee recommendation in December 2000 favouring re-introduction of English teaching/learning in Class I itself. Meanwhile, the Government-appointed US-based agency Mackinsey (2001) also submitted its report in favour of teaching/learning the language from Class I onwards. So from 2003 English is being taught right from class I in the primary education here.

Alongside these changes at the school level, there were some reforms in the Degree level too. In place of the Compulsory Additional English a fully compulsory half-paper of 50 marks in English was introduced in 1998. As a result of the changes in the Government policy mentioned before, the Council took steps to keep pace with changes implemented at earlier stages. Five years after the introduction of Functional-Communicative course in English at the Secondary level (1984) when its first group of learners is to get their entry into the H. S. course (1989), the Council announced some revisions through one of its publications:

The Higher Secondary stage being higher than the Secondary and serving as a bridge, a vital link between the Secondary Education and Higher Education, it has to provide something higher than what has been achieved at the Secondary stage.

(Approach: 1989-1990: 1)

At the H. S. level English has retained the status of being the only compulsory subject with two full papers of one hundred marks each all along. In continuation of the change of approach in teaching English at the Secondary stage, the method of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was introduced at the H. S. level. In view of the series of
Commissions mentioned above, the decade so engaged may be termed a decade of commissions and rapid policy shifts. Despite the measures taken, results in terms of learner performance in the H. S. Examinations remain far from satisfactory. The results of the learners in the earlier communicative syllabus (1991) are not very encouraging. In the results of the H. S. examinations (1992-1996) available with the Council have shown that learners' success rate in English (B) is around 60%. From the session of 2005-2006 a revised English syllabus (RS) was made operational.

The H. S. course however holds academically a very strategic position at the centre of the general system of education (Primary, Secondary, Higher Secondary, Undergraduate and Post-Graduate courses), and so carries a special significance for higher learning. This new + 2 course was introduced in 1976 replacing its earlier twins, Pre-University and 11-class H. S. courses following the recommendation of the Kothari Commission (1967). The addition of one more year to the Higher-Secondary stage of education signifies the additional weightage attached to it.

The overall teaching-learning situation in school-level education in general and the H. S. level in particular remains severely plagued by infrastructural drawbacks. The number of schools to accommodate students at the H.S. courses is scanty, just one-thirds of the total number of secondary schools. The teacher-students ratio in most of the cases is not anywhere near the European condition of 12-20 students per teacher. Although teachers are well qualified, the teacher-student ratio, as mentioned earlier, remains well beyond even the moderately workable one of 1: 40. Therefore, the contents of the syllabus demand a lot of efforts on the part of classroom teachers. There are other impediments as well, such as, limited number of classrooms and limited space therein, limited class hours available a day. But what appears to be more crucial and a cause of serious concern is the absence of any uniform teaching method followed in the classrooms.

The classroom situation still remains teacher-dominated instead of being learner-centred (Hedge 2000; Lucantoni 2002: 24), as required at the Intermediate or H. S. course, let alone its being 'learning-centred' (Cameron 2001: xi). The actual 'method' followed in the classroom has the objective of ensuring good results in examinations, and is not
concerned with actual learner performance both inside the classroom and without. Teacher's obligation in the classroom centres round covering 'topics' within the course schedule. Learners therefore are not properly equipped to cope with real-life situations outside.

Widdowson (1972) states with reference to countries like India that students with several years' formal learning of English, remain deficient in their ability to actually use the language and to follow its use in written or spoken mode.

So, all these have a negative impact on classroom English teaching. It is to be admitted that the H.S. level represents a crucial stage for several reasons; it is a transitional phase between the secondary and higher education. And therefore the need to conduct a proper study of the ground reality at this stage of the educational system is acutely felt. On the basis of such a study, and a stock-taking, we can move towards projecting a workable approach to and an acceptable methodology, if possible, for teaching English as a second language at the H. S. level. In order to achieve that objective a body of data from real-life situations (here the actual classroom and institutional contexts) has been gathered through a field survey among teachers and students of schools situated in several districts of the state. Then an attempt has been made to assess the context in the light of present ELT studies here and abroad before arriving at a workable approach to the teaching of the subject.

Relevance of the project

This dissertation deals with the issue of the approach to the classroom teaching-learning activities in relation to teaching materials (TM) and with relevant objectives of the course as a whole. The study seeks to look into the causes of high percentage of failures in English (Gr. B) in the Higher Secondary Examinations annually held by the Council over the years, as stated above (Samsad Parachiti). The results published by the Council year after year reflect little improvement despite regular course revisions and several attempts of reformulation of the assessment system such as merging the marks secured in English with those obtained in the first language paper, the learners' mother tongue (MT), the offering of grace marks or the inclusion of easy scoring items, such as text-based objective-type questions, short answer-type questions). It also involves abolition of more challenging items
like the Rapid Reader (RR for short), Longman Abridged Text (LAT) of Dickens' *David Copperfield*. Despite all these omissions and commissions, the success-rate in English papers remains lowest among most of the general papers.

The records of the results for some relevant years are studied to verify the learner plight in English in the main. The present study also examines this aspect with the help of interviews of practising English teachers, students of H.S. schools and experts in the field of ELT. It is a kind of a classroom-oriented research (Doughty and Williams 1998: 1) at the Intermediate level of state education. The results for five consecutive years after the adoption of CLT method of teaching in 1989 were studied in order to verify the general observation of a large-scale failure in the performance of ESL learners. The results in question were of those learners who were the products of the reformed method in English language teaching at that level. From the year 1992 H. S. results to that of 1996 the learner performance in English were well below expectation. In the language group results in English were further far below than those in Bengali, Hindi, Nepali, and Urdu.

The H. S. course is intended to serve as a gateway to higher education which is largely dependent upon English still today. It may better be termed ‘tertiary’, first, being part of higher studies, second, for literally being ‘third’ in sequence. It is more particularly so, as learners at this stage already set the target of future course of study through their selection of different streams, such as professional, vocational, specialist or general courses (‘Preliminary Notes’, Revised English - B, 2003: 1). At such a phase of education when future pursuits of learners are determined, English assumes a crucial role. While in the Madhyamik course English is of just 100 marks, in the H. S. course it consists of 200 marks. Yet, as in the Madhyamik, at the H. S. level too English is the only compulsory paper out of the total of 15 language papers in the entire curriculum (*Samsad Parichiti*, November – February, 1992-1993: 9).

English (Group A) has not been included in this study not because relatively a very small number of students pursue it, but mainly because the success rate in the paper is quite high – always well over 90 per cent. The learners try to pursue it as an L1, and aspire after a native-like competence. This highly motivated group of learners is well placed with their
teachers and time-proven teaching-materials, hardly needing much external help, and the direct method used there seems to be effective enough. By contrast, a greater number of learners choose to study English (Group B). And the rate of failure, as shown above, is quite alarming. In the context of lack of proper exposure of the students, and even teachers, to the language both at home and in school, the pedagogical aspects of English (Group B) assume an added importance.

In this dissertation the focus will be on what a teacher of English does in the classroom with his/her learners. It is because methods are the only means at an individual teacher’s disposal, and everything else – the language policy, curriculum development, syllabus design, teaching materials preparation, the selection of a particular set of learners, the class hours, the general framework of tests, etc. – is beyond his/her control (Pit Corder 1973, Cook 2001). In Corder’s triangular model of language teaching programme, the teacher stays at the bottom despite the fact that he/she alone acts as the interface between the superstructure and the ground-reality. The policy is prepared at the governmental level, curriculum is developed at the experts’ body, syllabus is framed by educational agencies and learners are selected by school authorities. And the teacher is ultimately put in the midst of them all.

To cope with this situation an individual teacher employs his/her own methods. The ESL teacher’s knowledge of the language and his/her language proficiency may, however, prove inadequate for such a challenging job (Brumfit et al. 1996: 86, 101). There is no bridge course (BC) or crash course (CC) even for low achievers for admission into the U.G. colleges (the English Honours and English Pass courses). The inadequacies of low achievers remain untackled and unassailed. That is why the revamp was felt urgently needed in the HS course, and the need for a methodology for teaching of English (Group B) with which we are concerned here cannot be ignored.

Why Methodology?

‘Method is the application of theory to practice’ (Carter 2001). But methodology is the science of how to handle the job in the practical field of action. It is
concerned with the way a classroom teacher renders his/her service to the actual achievement of learners through some text materials prescribed. Though, sometimes, it is prescribed by the authority for the teachers to follow, it mainly rests on individual teachers' knowledge, experience, choice and decision. The Council suggests an approach which is not very explicit. While it does not prescribe anything for literary texts included in the syllabus, it recommends a Functional-Communicative (FC) one for the language section, mainly grammar ("HS Revised Syllabus 1989", Samsad Parichiti; English –B Revised Syllabus, 2003: 46). This recommendation is in fact a natural extension of the method suggested for the secondary level of teaching English 'B'. This time however it is not specifically mentioned. At least the inclusion of learning items like 'communicative' skills, 'comprehension' skill (RS 2003/2005: 46) implies it to be so. With regard to this approach practising English teachers have had a long experience of over two decades both in the Secondary and H. S. course.

The actual classroom techniques of teaching assume a special significance for language teachers. The teachers are offered a set of textbooks, a select group of learners and specified hours for the final and actual implementation of the course. So, the teaching of language would largely depend on the practising teachers' handling of the whole context in the classroom itself. The success or failure of a teaching programme, however well- or ill-planned, depends largely on what and how an individual teacher does in the classroom. Any teaching course is bound to produce some results, however (Pienemann 1989, in Nunan 1989). This is because of the role a teacher plays to make the most out of it through his or her own ingenuity. He/she can make a sense of the whole set-up through his/her so-called 'training', experience and insights. Thus, the teacher's role, as a mediator, is very important. An ill-equipped, uninformed teacher can only make matters worse. Hence in this dissertation attempts will be made to search a suitable, optimal, scientific way for teaching English (Group B) course as an L2 in our school setup in general in West Bengal.

The Council's approach to and study on evaluation and modification of the syllabus does not usually address the need for an overall assessment and overhaul of the whole course, though the RS (2005) attempts a thorough and qualitative change of the course and
sylabus. Even then, it has its own inherent constraints. The reform is top-down as usual, and its feedback is rather restricted. It is basically processed, analyzed and implemented from the top. The necessary interaction between the ‘consumers’ of the course and the curriculum on the one hand and the policy making and their implementing authorities on the other, which is the pre-requisite of a positive reform in the true sense of the term, is considerably absent. Mathur (1995, Agnihatri and Khanna eds.) had complained of educational reforms being constantly plagued by factors like committee syndrome, bureaucracy, etc. Yet, when this work was undertaken in the mid-nineties, there was no sign of any plan for reform seen anywhere at this level. Now, when one such change has been brought in, the approach of the work has to some extent modified itself to explore the potentials if any in it. It has shown all the more strongly the need for such a project which had its origin much before such a revision was undertaken.

**Rationale of the Project**

It is of course an all-along poor show in the overall performance of learners in English (Group B) at the H.S. level, as already stated, that had worked as an urge behind this enterprise. While in science subjects like physics, chemistry and biology the success rate is very high – on an average above 90% at least for the period covered in the survey, in English (Group B) papers it remains just around 60%. English remains a source of great worry for all concerns. The success rate in a crucial subject like English ought to be much higher. And the second objective of this project is to suggest ways to raise the quality of English education at this crucial stage of education. There has been a general complaint in academic circle as well as outside about a lacuna in the sequence from the Madhyamik or Secondary level to the plus-two level. The H.S. stage shows itself a few steps ahead of the preceding Secondary one preventing a smooth transition from one to the other (Preface to ‘An Approach to the Revised Syllabus in English Group ‘B’” (Session 1989-1990), WBCHSE). The Council too has felt the need for a revision of the whole course along with the syllabus so as to mend the above drawbacks.

So far there has hardly been any major study on the problems specific to the H.S.
stage done either individually by someone or officially by some concerned agency like the Council. The Council had made some routine analysis and probing into the official data, but so far as my knowledge goes, no thorough, full-fledged and comprehensive work has been done so far. Further, the feedback received and studied by the Council from time to time is from teachers and teachers’ body, but never from learners themselves (‘Preface’ 1989-1990: II). This dissertation undertakes to cover the learner responses too through its survey. It intends at first to study learner needs, the actual problems faced by teachers in the classroom, and the actual teaching-learning situations prevailing at the institutional level. The Council-level studies done earlier are in most cases found to exclude the individual teacher position. This should positively form a part of any study in this area. It is this concern for the methodology of teaching that has prompted the present study.

Scope of the Project

The overall aim of the project is to look for the improvement of English (Group B) pedagogy at the H. S. level in West Bengal so as to serve, as far as practicable in the present situation, the basic needs of learners in the classroom context and outside. While doing so, this study will not venture out of the purview of the syllabus. The prescribed texts are content-based and mostly literary, and as such, the classroom teaching of these items generally tends to avoid their linguistic structures and tries to do justice to their literary appreciation and interpretation. The intended focus in this discussion would be on the way they are to be dealt with in the classroom to meet the objectives of the course. It should be more on how to transmit (the ‘process’) than what to transmit (the ‘content’), so that the practising teachers can meet the demand of communicative needs set forth in the syllabus using literary texts. And thereby this work would in no way put forth its demand for any particular type of materials that suit the teachers’ individual contexts. This is above all a classroom-based pedagogical approach to teaching from learners’ point of view. The selection of materials for a course of study actually belongs to curriculum designers.

The ultimate target in such a context is to help improve the teaching techniques through teacher awareness, which can support learner efforts adequately so that the development of independent readers or learners can be made possible. The methods, thus
evolved, are to address the particular problems of learners which arise from their poor command over vocabulary, comprehension as well as writing skills ('Prefaces' to *H. S. Selections*, 2006, without page no.). Such an overall framework for teaching strategies must be flexible to suit every possible teaching situation in the classroom.

The general aim is broken up into smaller segments, called 'objectives' or 'sub-aims'. Those aims need the teacher endeavours to address the needs of the learners. The needs are generally categorized into (a) formal (examinations and results) as well as (b) informal (like, everyday outdoor life, at public offices) types.

The principles of need analysis have prompted the survey undertaken for this dissertation among teachers and the taught. As a crucial part of the overall system of education the teachers' position needs to be assessed. For that purpose the responses from them are essential. Those should address their attitude to several relevant things, such as their attitude to professional education, their approach to and comments upon several aspects of the syllabus, their awareness of the needs of their own students, etc. The feedback from people involved in the job is a reliable process for the development of their own wares in their business. In this way, at least an individual can participate in the framing of even a general policy and other framework. Above all, it should include their suggestions in relation to their attitude to this all.

All this is meant to ultimately help one to meet the goals of the syllabus which are result-oriented this time. First, the reading comprehension is likely to be confined to a handful of selected texts (detailed and non-detailed) in the syllabus, and also some other relevant texts from outside, within a limited field. Otherwise, it would be difficult to engage learners' attention. So teachers of English can cull unseen passages from newspapers for the comprehension tests. A careful and sustained effort to cultivate a regular practice in this area would be highly repaying. Secondly, among all the four traditional language skills, writing, which is one of the two productive skills of language (the other one being 'speaking'), is much more needed and so rightly set forth in the syllabus as complementary to the receptive
skill of reading comprehension (‘Preface’ to ‘Selections’ 1976). Third, the metalinguistic knowledge of learners in their study of language is to be looked into by the teacher. Fourth, teachers’ language development ought to be a major issue in teaching; they must undergo the in-service training, apart from the professional degree. Just the training is considered to be insufficient for a teacher development in language. So Sunil Kumar (1995) in his essay, ‘Professional Development of Teachers of English: Issues and Concerns’, in his own words, studied the merits and demerits of training and even education now in fashion, and proposed for an improved model of ‘Teacher Development’. Fifth, Brumfit’s study found some actual shortcomings of practising teachers of English in a non-native background (Brumfit et al., ‘Teacher Language Inefficiency’ in *Teacher Awareness* 1996). So the teacher’s metacognition is to be improved through such studies. Finally, in the context of all these factors, a methodology or rather an approach may evolve, one which would incorporate in the teaching paradigm factors such as techniques (delivery, illustration, gestures, mood, movements etc.), attitude to English, attitude to the teaching of the language.

Two potential human resources in the teaching of English include teachers and students for their informed role to play in their contexts. Making a response to a questionnaire also indirectly involve the respondent in a cognitive as well as metacognitive activity regarding her/his position and role. Thus, answering a questionnaire functions as a consciousness raising activity.

The syllabus puts emphasis on teaching two communicative skills, reading and writing. But communicative competence is not easy to achieve by learners in the given situation. In the present-day L2 learning-teaching context, students in fact learn a particular variety of English from their teachers who are not native speakers of the language. So, the acquiring of communicative competence may be frustrating for our learners in many cases. Some scholars like Simon Andrews have started to find fault with the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method (‘Modern Language Master’ July 2005). The present time in the language teaching situation is regarded by some people even as a ‘post-method’ age (in Richards & Renandya eds. 2003). In this time of a vacuum the unique state of ELT
at the H. S. level can look for a fresh way out to overcome the loopholes in current teaching-learning process.

Such a plight can be looked at positively in a context where the ELT syllabus at the H. S. level is a rich amalgam to suit teaching-learning variables. Besides, the prevalent method of communication employed in the Secondary classes cannot be completely done away with. It can start from where scholars like Kachru, Sridhar et al. have set the trend for a change in our outlook of SL learners’ need of English, etc. And here we will try to find out which other approach(es) would apply to the context. Interestingly, the ‘new Englishes’ (Kachru 1997) has already gained its recognition, and it has emerged as a viable non-native variety in a world language context (Kachru’s ‘indigenisation’ 1997). A world language, as Julien Edge asserts, belongs to its users, not to its native speakers alone (Edge 1930). That is why, in order to be realistic and pragmatic so far as our learners’ needs are concerned, we may examine how far such an idea may have its impact on the communicative paradigm of the English language teaching situation. We may also examine how far the concept of ESP can play its role in the teaching-learning of English at the H.S. level.

Further the language teaching syllabus today has become lopsided to the side of language instead of literature (Mao Sihui, in Carter and McRae 1996: 168-169). Roman Jakobson had referred to the compartmentalization of language and literature in an academic curriculum as being an example of ‘flagrant anachronisms’ on either side. The post-nineties revisions of syllabuses, which try to keep a balance between the two, at least bring in the texts at the centre of teaching. Scholars are out to prove the importance of literary texts in the case of classroom teaching. This approach points out to the application of linguistic insights in the study of literary texts. Again, the current text-based attitude and approach prefers to use the texts as a means to the achievement of aesthetic linguistic skills. The texts provide the staple for the pedagogical treatment in the classroom. Doing things with texts leads us to the classroom activities which are very crucial for the involvement of the learners. Teaching a text does not mean the full explication of the text itself—it should leave the text as open-ended. This attitude would be quite appropriate from the perspectives of the
modern critical theory of literature study, particularly the Reader Response Theory (RRT). The major chapters hereafter would try to focus on it in some detail in relation to the text pieces in the RS.

The syllabus design happens to be a part of the planning phase of curriculum development which has two other follow-up stages of implementation and evaluation (Nunan 1996: 10). The practice of curriculum development is mostly preoccupied with syllabus framing, sparingly accommodating other two phases. The H.S. curriculum is hardly an exception. H.S. syllabus that makes no distinction between itself and its style of implementation or methodology. Only a very few teachers can get access to that stage of curriculum development (Bell 1983, cited in Nunan 1996: 7), let alone learners. Most of the teachers are just the dumb consumers of other people’s syllabuses (say, applied linguists, governmental agencies, etc.). The learner data has at last got the slightest place in the syllabus, not in the curriculum. The syllabus has just included a prose piece written by a student of 15 years of age, a secondary level one (one William’s ‘The School that I would Like’). Of course, this choice has got its own limitation. The piece is from a native speaker writing in the LI background, not from one in our L2 setup.

A common complaint that has been often levelled against the H.S. syllabus ever since its introduction in the state intermediate education is that there is a big gap between the H.S. and Madhyamik or Secondary stages. This finds an echo in the words of Kramsch (1993/2001: 130): “From the here-and-now communicative activities of the elementary levels to the more text-bound discussions of the intermediate and advanced, students feel a lack of continuity that is both disappointing and frustrating”.

The target of second-language learners has got a shift from an integral one to that of a ‘limited achievement’. Unlike the earlier approach to learning English for cultural identity (Shen 1988: 461, cited in Weigle 2002: 37), the second-language study by its very name focuses on its limited target. To have a realistic idea about the present-day situations including the teachers’ perceptions, learners’ attitudes, objectives, etc, along with a host of
other details, a survey conducted at the grassroots level on the teaching-learning activities will be helpful. Numerical data is the only reliable yardstick that can be used in this study. That is why a workable statistical method has been used in this study. Finally, the second language researches are used to take either a purely pedagogical or an orthodox theoretical approach so far, ignoring a balance between the two (Mitchell & Myles 1998: 79). This present dissertation is going to be based on an empirical approach with a good amount of theoretical support behind it.

Literature in the Field: An Overview

Reactions against the foreign language teaching paradigm which was based on Latin grammar could be found from the 1840s onwards (Richards and Rodgers 1986/2001:1-15). Even in the 18th century ‘modern’ languages made their bid for entry into the school curriculum in Europe using the same medieval framework. Incidentally, it assumes a special historical significance that the earliest textbook for the teaching of English in the ‘Third World’ namely The Tutor or A New English and Bengali Work by John Miller appeared in Bengal. The book was published in 1797 from Serampore (Howatt 1994: 69). It was in three parts, subtitled as ‘Well adapted to Teach the Natives English’.

In the 19th century the French educationist F. Gouin, one of the pioneering reformists, attempted to build a methodology for foreign language teaching following the model of child’s learning of its mother tongue. It gave birth to the ‘Direct Method’ (DM) in English language teaching. It was followed by the U.S. reformist like L. Sauveur (1826-1907, Boston in the late 1860s), the German F. Franke and the American Berlitz. The system later came to be known as the natural or classical method.

In spite of the great popularity of DM in Europe, in the 1920s some applied linguists like Henry Sweet felt that it lacked any methodological foundation. It was also felt that exclusive use of the target language (TL) in the classroom and the absence of non-native foreign language teachers are its limitations (Howatt 1984/1994). The German Grammar-Translation (GT) method, the offspring of German scholarship of educationists like Johann Scidenstücker, Karl Plötz, et al., which had dominated the school education in foreign
language teaching, was also found to be unpopular with learners and particularly with their teachers. A reformative trend in the late 19th century led to the development of new ways of teaching foreign as well as second languages, one after another.

In the early decades of the 20th century English education was spread into several British colonies and elsewhere where the Britishers had some political and commercial role to play. Michael West, who worked in Dacca University, studied the nature of non-native learners' problems in English education in Dacca and Hooghly districts. More or less the same situation was encountered by Harold E. Palmer who worked as a director in the Institute of English Education in Japan. In China it was Faucett who too worked in a similar situation. The findings of all these scholars and their perceptions and understanding of the problems of their L2 learners reflect a common trend. As they were concerned with teaching English as a foreign language (FL), they found vocabulary as a major impediment in their learners' way of learning English. The 1920s and 1930s saw some large-scale investigations of the second language vocabulary which paved the way for the foundations of some pedagogic principles (Richards and Rodgers 1986/2001: 32). According to Carter and MacCarthy (1988:1) the 1930s witnessed the beginning of what has come to be called the 'vocabulary control movement'. Richards and Rodgers noted two reasons behind those developments. First, the language teaching specialists like Palmer thought that vocabulary holds the key-role in the foreign language learning situations. Secondly, the foreign language studies began to put emphasis on reading skills in countries like India, and as a corollary of this vocabulary came to be considered the chief component of reading proficiency (Coleman Report 1923; Richards and Rodgers 1986/2001: 11, 32).

In the L1 teaching context in the US too, Thorndike first published *Teacher's Word Book* (1921) of 5000 commonest words on a frequency study of four-and-a-half million-word text (Bright and McGregor 1978). It marked the beginning of vocabulary control and selection applied in language teaching practice (ibid.: 17). Next, Horn published a 10,000-word writing vocabulary list (1926) on the basis of a straight frequency count of personal and business letters. The year 1931 saw Thorndike's enlarged edition of *Teacher's Word Book* of 20,000 words, followed by Carnegie's *Interim Report on Vocabulary Selection*
and Control (1934, 1935) authored by Faucett, Palmer, West, Sapir and Thorndike. In 1936 Michael West practically applied the principles in the compilation of a dictionary of 20,000-30,000 items defined within the limit of less than 1,500 words. Lorge’s Teacher’s Word Book of 30,000 words from the Lorge Magazine Count (LMC) came out in 1944 along with Thorndike’s ‘juvenile’ count based on the Terman-Lida List and Lorge-Thorndike Semantic Count. The preparation of all these lexical lists led to an objective framework for teaching basic vocabulary to foreign learners of English based on the principles of frequency of their occurrences in the written English. And this results in the emergence of a core area common to all these lists.

The 1930s encountered another prominent evolution towards the teaching of English vocabulary for everyday use through the work of Basic English Dictionary by C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards (Ogden 1930, 1968, cited in Carter and McCarthy 1986: 2). ‘Basic English’ with 850 words was a project designed to provide a basic minimum vocabulary for learning English. At the same time, it had made some contributions to such things as lexical syllabuses, core ‘Englishes’ for language learning purposes, etc. The development in word count came with the introduction of the technological help of computers in the development of Collins Co-build Dictionary (Carter 1987, in Carter and Nunan 2001). The system has made possible the calculation and processing of millions of words available in the everyday common English usage. The ‘corpus-based’, computer-driven lexical analysis has made it possible for the descriptions of vocabulary for their place in relation to grammar and patterns.

In the changed context of post-Independence India, it was again Michael West who started afresh the listing of vocabulary items by revising and updating it over the 1936 version, and brought out in 1953 an outstanding work, A General Service List of English Words (GSL). It had very scientifically selected and compiled 2,000 most commonly used words in English from a study of some 5 million ‘running words’ of written English (Gairns and Redman 1986: 58). Thereafter, some researchers went into the study of the learners’ lexical knowledge at certain levels in some parts of India. Very few of them made their studies in the context of the Intermediate level of education. Mention can be made of an on-
the-spot survey undertaken by Helen Bernard (1960-61, unpublished CIEFL) among the erstwhile Pre-University Course (PUC) students in Chhotonagpur, which offered some valuable findings pointing to our learners’ severe dearth of lexical knowledge in the target language (TL). The lexical achievement test was administered to more than 750 PUC students in Ranchi University in erstwhile Bihar (now Jharkhand). The feedback received was that the ‘average student’s recognition vocabulary can be put at about 1500 words’, let alone their productive vocabulary which always falls far short of the former. Another recent report on the performance of the Degree College entrants may be mentioned. In a paper Khanna (1995, in ‘Achievement Levels of English among College Entrants’ in Agnihatri and Khanna eds.) mentions that among other skills achievements vocabulary stands at the lowest of 41.22% as against the highest of 66.28% in reading comprehension, 53.29% in listening, 47.67% in writing. Even the score in grammar (50.16%) is much higher than that in vocabulary.

The above longitudinal tests mentioned by Khanna are relevant for this work as they are concerned itself with the PUC, equivalent to the current H.S. or +2 course to some extent which is under a scanner here. Second, the studies were undertaken at a state adjacent to West Bengal which is the focus of this study. They also covered a cross-section of students over an expanse of the region under a University system as this study covers the H.S. students all over West Bengal under the umbrella of WBCHSE. Another such field survey, in relation to a research on reading skill, on some 219 under-graduate college students in different Indian colleges by K. R. Narayanaswami (1968-69: 8) showed that “less than half a dozen students could be called good readers, judging from their average initial reading speed and comprehension scores in the first three tests”. Incidentally, the good reading speed means the capability of reading more than 250 words per minute (Pickett 1986; Nageswara Rao 1989).

In 1963 Randolph Quirk prepared a report on English teaching at some of the higher educational institutes in India, in which he pointed out the unsuitability of the texts
prescribed in the syllabus as these make a great a demand upon the backward learners. The ground reality in the country largely remains the same.

Apart from these, there is hardly any major work done at the the H.S. level in India, particularly on the curriculum of English as a Second Language. And in the case of West Bengal too there is no such study undertaken either at the behest of any government/semi-government organization or private agencies on the English 'B' pedagogy in West Bengal.

In such a situation the writer of this dissertation has to go through some works done on the actual English language teaching situations at several levels in places across the country. Some of those works may be still of some relevance to the case in question here, despite there coverage limitations.

A.L. Khanna's work on the achievement levels of English among college entrants who had passed Senior Secondary Examinations (Khanna 1983) presents a detailed profile of the varied levels of achievements of students of English for college admission on the basis of achievement tests on four skills, grammar and vocabulary on informants. The informants had a vernacular medium schooling in undergraduate college in Delhi. The results he projected in his paper, 'Achievement Levels of English among College Entrants' (Agnihotry and Khanna 1995) reflect similar learner plight in the whole country.

Pananghat's work at the school level brought out the loopholes of the structure-dominated English teaching in some regional schools, like the absence of the third phase of the structural syllabus, that is, the application of learned words in appropriate contexts (a study in a school in Andhra Pradesh). This lacuna in the practice is said to have been filled up by a good mix of both structural and communicative approach.

A massive project was undertaken under the title of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE)-ELT Project for its curriculum reform in the 1980s and 1990s. Of course, the status of English in the CBSE curriculum is different – it is learnt as the L1 or the first language. Kiran Bhatt, a project worker, was in favour of a thorough
overhaul of the course with a mix of the traditional and the instrumental reforms.

The CBSE-ELT project (1988-94) first revealed certain graver shortcomings in the then existing course. The course was of (i) a content-based type, with (ii) an emphasis on teaching formal grammar, and (iii) there was a blatant neglect of skills development and (iv) mechanically developed proficiency in written skills and their testing (S.K. Gangal 1997:316-317, in Agnihotri and Khanna eds. 1995). And the study proposed a number of reforms to be incorporated in the revised curriculum for the course to be effective from 1994 onwards.

Other studies exploring the needs of the learners of English were carried out mostly at the undergraduate level in the country. Following John Munby’s needs-analysis (1978) and Marrow’s (1981) improved approach, Mohammad Aslam did one such study among some undergraduate students in Kashmir in 1989. In 1990 the IIT, Kanpur, did a pioneering job in its needs study among its own learners of English, and it posts a more or less common all-India trend. The CDC-in-English report (1989: 162) suggests different courses for the Indian learners of English in terms of their basic needs. S. C. Sood studied the needs of some Indian undergraduate learners, and his ‘Needs of The Indian Undergraduate Learners’ (1995) calculated the responses of his subjects. Ten among learners (15.9%) feel the need for general lessons. For another ten of them it is general English (15.9%), and eight of them (12.7%) preferred vocabulary lessons.

All the above works on several areas of teaching-learning at diverse places across the country are rather severely restricted and limited in range, scope and in coverage. These studies are in many cases concerned with the teaching of English as a first language. But, as stated earlier, their findings may have some correspondences this study of +2 SL learners. They also in some way offer a framework for this project. The studies mainly depend on the theory of a cognitive approach through a communicative method as well as a direct method.

NOTES

1. H. S. Examination 1992: The success rate in English (B) - 56.50% (SP:Mar.-June 1992).
H. S. Examination 1993: The success rate in English (B) - 58.63% (SP: Mar.-June 1992*).
H. S. Examination 1994: The success rate in English (B) - 59.10% (SP: Jul.-Oct 1992*).
H. S. Examination 1995: The success rate in English (B) - 61.30% (SP: Nov.-Feb., 1993-1994*).

*The particular numbers of these issues were not published in time.

H. S. Examination 1996: The success rate in English (B) - 62.92% (SP: May-Aug. 1994*).

2. As an example the results of a rural co-educational school in Burdwan district show that out of 24 cases of subject-wise failures in the H.S. Examination 2000 the highest number is in English (16) as against 4 in History, 2 in Political science, and one each in Bengali and Philosophy. In the science stream the success rate is one hundred percent. All the 7 students cleared the examinations in the first division. They also got considerable success in English as an L2. The results of the H. S. Examination (2004) post a success rate of 62.60% against the previous year’s rate of 64.65% (Council Response 2005; total number of students appearing in the examination was 3,80,912). "English proved to be the sole reason of the undoing of nearly 1.73 lakh boys and girls who failed to clear the 2004 HS examination" ("The Council Responses," The Telegraph, Kolkata, 28-07-2004). The same newspaper report stated that the "results revealed poor English scores, especially of students of Bengali-medium schools, to be the reason for the lowest percentage of success in four years".


4. Cameron (2001: xi) presented the latest theoretical shift from ‘teacher-fronted’ to ‘learner-centred’ to ‘learning-centred’ finally thus, ‘... learning in the centre of the frame’.

5. Even after the full-fledged in-service professional degree is there, now termed Bachelor of Education, it is looked upon in the official circle as being just training. The Council’s official publication (‘Preface’ 1981-990: II, otherwise undated) also used the term.