List of Abbreviations used in the Tables

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<td>NGU</td>
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Chapter 1

Introduction

A Project based on empirical research, which this investigator had completed successfully in Language Testing in the year 1995-96 which his current research guide Dr Javed Khan had supervised, provided him with the germ idea for this doctoral research work. An empirically-based Project was until a year ago an obligatory part of the course requirements in the Elective Course VIII A at the MA (Final) in Sardar Patel University that was called English Language Teaching at the time when this researcher was doing his MA, but was subsequently renamed English Language Teaching in Higher Education a few years ago. The course has all through these years focussed on issues related to the teaching profession on the handling of the teaching and testing of English in Higher Education.

During the course of his training, it became clear to this researcher that Language Testing is one area in English Language Teaching in India that continues to be a virgin area despite the fact that many academicians in this country have tried to concentrate on it. Hence, the choice of the topic of this doctoral work, “A Critical Evaluation of the Efficacy of the Testing Practices in English (Compulsory) at the Undergraduate Level in Some of the Universities of Gujarat”, was already made by the time he completed his postgraduate studies and entered the teaching profession.

The reason was simple. Most of the courses in English (Compulsory) offered under the university system aim at helping students reach a fair degree of linguistic
competence so as to enable them to follow other courses in various areas of specialisation that are taught through English as the medium of instruction. Nevertheless, the efficacy of the test-tasks used in the testing of English at the undergraduate level in the universities of Gujarat has been the subject of a lot of criticism for a very long time now due to their apparent failure as reliable and valid measures of the learners’ linguistic competence. Also, a critical evaluation of the efficacy of the testing practices in English (Compulsory) at the undergraduate level in the universities of Gujarat has been long overdue.

Traditionally, language testing at the undergraduate level in Gujarat, as is the case elsewhere in the country, is seen and used as an instrument of measuring achievement and, to a certain extent, proficiency in English language. This is true in case of the students who might be planning to specialize in English language and literature. In case of the others, it does not seem to matter really whether or not students can write their examinations in any subject of specialization, which they may be following, in correct English. So much for the level of proficiency in English then! There have been complaints that testing of English, and more so English (Compulsory), suffers the serious handicap of testing memory rather than the extent of achievement or the level of proficiency.

This raises some important research questions: (1) Are the reasons listed in the above the only reasons for the test papers and test-tasks not being efficacious? (a) If ‘yes’, then what can be done about them? (b) If ‘no’, then what could be the other reasons? (2) Do the format of the test papers and the structure of the test-tasks included pose problems contributing to their inadequacy? If ‘yes’, then what can be done to solve
these problems? It was clear to us that answers to these questions would prove vital in
tackling the problem of efficacy of the testing practices in vogue in English
(Compulsory) at the undergraduate level in the universities of Gujarat. Of course, we
had a clear rationale in our mind when we decided to word the topic as we have.

Rationale

As noted earlier, a lot of criticism has centred on the efficacy of the test-tasks used in
the testing of English (Compulsory) at the undergraduate level in the universities of
Gujarat for a long time now because these have failed as valid and reliable tools for
measuring learners’ linguistic competence. Also, as has been noted earlier, a critical
evaluation of the efficacy of the testing practices in English (Compulsory) at the
undergraduate level in the universities of Gujarat has been long overdue. Add to this
the fact that no study has ever covered such a wide area anywhere in this country so
far to the best of our knowledge and belief, and that would explain why we have
chosen to work on this topic.

In spite of the unavailability of studies of this kind, we found that there are some
studies dealing with certain limited issues conducted at the Master’s and Doctoral
levels. Research work quite unrelated or tagged to degrees offered by universities also
exist, one of them especially on this subject, quite path-breaking like, for example,
Khan (1987) who made an attempt in this area in the form of a Mini-Research Project
that he carried out in Sardar Patel University with the financial support made
available by the UGC, New Delhi. Unfortunately, the report has remained
unpublished even after 15 long years that have elapsed after its submission.
We are not yet clear about the status of English in India though our Constitution recognises it as the Associate Official Language of this country. The National Policy of Education 1968, which was our first Education Policy after independence, stated our resolve as a nation to lay special emphasis on the study of English and other international languages. It argued that “knowledge in the world kept on growing at a tremendous pace, especially in science and technology”³ and, as a nation, India “must do its bit by keeping up with this growth of knowledge” as well as “make her own significant contribution to it.” It noted that the study of English deserved to be specially strengthened even if it were only for this reason. The National Education Policy of 1986 only reiterated what the Education Policy of 1968 had to say. It noted that “the earlier policy had examined the question of the development of language in great detail” and, therefore, “its essential provisions” could hardly be “improved upon”, relevant as they were even at present. However, admitting that that part of the policy had been uneven because “it had not been properly implemented”, it expressed the nation’s resolve to implement it “more energetically and purposefully”. In other words, English was to continue to be taught as “a library language”

**English (Compulsory) or English as a Library Language**

This question whether we consider the teaching and testing of English as English (Compulsory), or English as a Library Language has little relevance, for English is taught as a foreign language in this country.⁴ Our nation has consistently followed the policy of the teaching and testing of English as “a library language”. A language is said to be “a library language” if and only if it were to be used as “a language for academic purposes”. English has always been a library language in India. The
emphasis on reading and writing in our English syllabi in various faculties, as if these were the only language skills that needed to be mastered, is the evidence, if any evidence were needed at all to prove this point.

If we accept that English is a library language in our educational set-up, then it is safe to assume that the teaching of English is indeed English for Academic Purposes [EAP], ie English “required for study purposes in formal education systems”. A noting on EAP in McArthur (ed) (1992) states that it is “English taught to foreign learners who intend to follow courses of higher education in English”. It goes on to state that “instruction and practice” is provided to students on EAP courses in (a) comprehending lectures, (b) taking and/or making notes, (c) participating in seminars, (d) using libraries and research facilities, (e) writing essays and dissertations, and (f) engaging in computing and word processing.  

*Comprehending lectures and taking notes*

A lecture, a technique of listen and say/listen and write in an institution of higher education, is a method used to cause a class of students to learn about a subject related to a course, by passing information related to the topic in hand, offering explanation on points that require to be made clear to the group etc. In trying to comprehend lectures on an academic course, students need to listen with understanding what the speaker has to say. This is necessary even for the purpose of note-taking and note-making for the purpose of academic work. Learners need to ask questions if they like to seek more information, data, and clarification from the speaker, and learn to take good notes.
Participating in seminars

A seminar is a method of teaching and learning used in higher education. The teacher has to take on the role of an expert, and has to meet a group of learners in order to train them by taking up a study of a subject for presentation and discussion. The teacher may either present a paper on a problem related to the topic, or join the learners in listening to the papers they may present on various aspects of a problem in hand, offer his/her comments on the subject to ensure clarity. This also requires listening and note taking, asking questions for repetition, for clarification and for information, besides answering questions or explaining, agreeing/disagreeing, stating points of view, giving reasons, interrupting politely, speaking with/without notes, presenting a paper or making an oral presentation, initiating comments, responding, analysing and interpreting data etc.

Using libraries and research facilities

Students need training so as to be able to locate information making use of library facilities. They need training in the use of dictionaries and thesauruses so that they could look up words and usages that they do not know. They need training in skimming and scanning information available in the books, journals, encyclopaedias etc for the purpose of cross-reference. They need training in taking notes from books using the subject index provided in these. Thus, they need training in reading efficiently with comprehension and speed, understanding and analysing data in the form of graphs, charts, diagrams etc. They need training in summarising and paraphrasing texts both big and small. Having said that, this researcher would like to ask himself and fellow teachers of English if this is what we actually do in our English (Compulsory) classes. There is no doubt in this researcher's mind that the
answer would be in the negative. What we teach is grammar and usage, comprehension – based both on a prescribed text and on an unseen passage – as well as composition, and then rest content that we have done our bit in teaching English as a library language. Also, we evaluate our students on the same aspects. Composition offers us the scope for testing of academic writing.

*Writing essays and dissertations*

Academic writing calls for the use of very sophisticated skills. One is required to apply one’s mind to the topic in hand and represent one’s thoughts in precise and logical language. There is a difference between journalistic writing and creative writing, and this needs to be clearly understood. Journalistic writing normally caters to a wider audience as it exploits topics of importance at any one given point of time. The focus is on the fulfilment of immediate needs created by the topic of debate. Creative writing requires originality of expression and thought. Hence, only those with a literary bent of mind indulge in it. Students need training in organisational skills. That is why comprehensional and expressional skills are also included in the syllabi even if we teach English as a library language. Unfortunately, training in such skills is hardly ever given in our institutions of higher learning or even tested in our University Examinations. We need to give our learners training in other related skills like computing and word processing.

*Engaging in computing and word processing*

Computing and word processing have become important skills and a person who does not know how to compute and word process in this era of information technology is considered to be illiterate even if he/she were a literate otherwise. Probably, that is
why good institutions of higher learning have embarked upon setting up of facilities for teaching computing and word processing. The trend has gathered pace after 1995 in the wake of liberalisation and privatisation in this country.

To return to the topic of this research work, let it be known that it has focussed on some universities because the work would have otherwise become unwieldy. However, due care has been taken to ensure that all the regions of Gujarat are represented in the study. This way, we have Gujarat University and Sardar Patel University covering central Gujarat; Saurashtra University taking care of the Saurashtra and Kutch regions; North Gujarat University covering the areas in northern regions of Gujarat; South Gujarat University accounting for the areas in southern part of Gujarat.

**Terminology Used**

The topic of this research is “A critical evaluation of the efficacy of the testing practices in English (Compulsory) at the undergraduate level in some of the universities of Gujarat.” We seek to define and delineate terms like Critical, Evaluation, Efficacy, Test, Testing, Language Testing, Practices, Testing Practices, English Compulsory, and Undergraduate Level in order to be very specific about what we mean when we use them in this thesis.

**Critical**

An adjective, the word critical, is taken to mean (1) making severe judgments about someone or something, and often unfairly; (2) important, even very important because what happens in the future depends on it; (3) dangerous/uncertain because a sudden
change to a better or a worse condition is possible; (4) *making fair judgments*, providing careful examination of the good and bad characteristics of something; (5) at a *stage* when someone or something is on the point of collapse; and (6) *to look at something with a critical eye*, ie to examine it carefully in order to judge its good and bad qualities. We use the word *critical* in the sense indicated in (6), (4) and (2) above and in that order. Our attempt here is aimed at (a) examining the efficacy of the testing practices in English compulsory at the undergraduate level in some of the universities of Gujarat very carefully in order to under their good and bad qualities, (b) ensuring that we make fair judgments on the efficacy of the testing practices in English compulsory at the undergraduate level in some of the universities of Gujarat; and (c) treating it as important because the future of these testing practices in English (Compulsory) at the undergraduate level in the Universities of Gujarat depends on it.

**Evaluation**

Evaluation, in general terms, is the act of considering something carefully so as to decide how useful or valuable it is. Among the synonyms for the words, we have assessment, estimate, appraisal, valuation, estimation etc that come closer to defining the process that goes under the name evaluation. Evaluation involves a careful consideration of a piece of work in hand in order to be able to decide upon its usefulness/utility so as to fix a value. That is how it is an estimate/estimation. What is done is an appraisal is made. An evaluation is a balanced point of view that takes into account both the strong and weak points in a given scheme of things. It cannot be one-sided because that would defeat its purpose. It is another matter that a decision has to be reached in fixing its value using a well-defined calibrated measure in the form of a standardised test, because only such a test can stand the test of its efficacy as a test.
Efficacy

Efficacy is a noun that is used formally to refer to “the quality of being able to produce the result that was intended”. One doubts whether we can honestly consider our testing of English (Compulsory) to have this trait. In the terminology of testing, there are two key words that define the entire exercise, validity and reliability which are the characteristics of any good test. Validity and reliability are crucial tests. A test is said to be valid and reliable if and only if it tests what it has been designed to test. Here lies the efficacy of the test tasks and the test as a whole. Thus in order to understand what testing is, one needs to understand the meaning of the word “test”.

Test

One of the meanings of the word “test” is an exam, or “a set of questions, exercises or practical activities to measure someone’s skill, ability, or knowledge” in a sub-branch of some branch of knowledge. In the medical profession, it means (a) “a short medical examination on a part of our body to find out what is wrong with it”, and even “equipment for carrying out a medical test”. The term is also used to mean, “a process used to find out whether equipment works correctly, or whether something contains a particular substance”, especially in the sciences. Another meaning associated with it is that of “a situation in which the qualities of someone or something are clearly shown.” It is associated with strength as in the case of the phrase “to stand the test of time” and it is in this sense that it is used to refer to a standard or a benchmark. In its use as a verb, the word “test” has many meanings. To test is to examine, ask someone questions orally or in writing, or to make the examinees complete a practical activity in the form of a test task with a view to
finding out what they know about a subject. Activities and processes are involved in a “test” are a part of “testing”, and these are often referred to as “testing practices”.

Testing

“Testing” is a process involving the measurement of an individual’s knowledge in a subject area in terms of skills mastered. Institutions of higher learning including universities administer tests to assess the extent to which their students have been successful in mastering certain skills. Testing not only allows the paper-setters and/or Examiners also to ascertain the gaping holes in learning so as to plug them through remediation.

Language Testing

Language Testing is the name given to a type of test designed to measure the linguistic competence of the learners. In layman terms, language can be divided into sound, grammar, and meaning. Sounds in the form of pronunciation in oral expression falls within the scope of two sciences that study them: phonetics (the science of articulation of sounds) and phonology (the science of sounds that studies production and distinctive features of sounds in a language, stress, rhythm and intonation etc). Their equivalents in written expression are graphetics (the science of formation of graphemes) and graphology (the science of graphemes that studies production, manipulation, and distinctive features of graphemes in a language, punctuation etc). Grammar can be subdivided into four parts: lexes, syntax, morphology including word-compounds, and even etymology. Meaning is governed by two sciences: semantics (the science of meaning that is logic-based) and pragmatics (the science of meaning in a social context). Linguistic competence involves all these, and any good
test of language skills would take a holistic view of these present simultaneously. We tend to measure competence through performance on tasks set around points of grammar and usage, comprehension, composition and so on. Unfortunately, oral expression does not figure on testing packages used in University Examinations except on professional courses like BBA, BCA, BE (IT), MBA etc.

There are three major features that characterise any test including a language test: (1) validity, (2) reliability, and (3) practicality. Validity is determined on the basis of the extent to which a test measures what it has been designed to measure and this is where lies the efficacy of the test. The reliability of a test lies in the production of same results every time it is administered. A test should not require a lot of effort, because otherwise it is not considered practical. This gives it its practicality as a test. However, we need to understand that it is easy to establish the validity and reliability of a language test only when it involves objective-type of items, either open ended or in multiple-choice format.

Most of the language tests that are used by institutions of higher learning are achievement or progress tests because institutions use the results from these to make “pass-fail” decisions taken for the purpose of promotion or detention. Achievement tests do not help us test general ability for learning but the amount of learning that has taken place whatever be the branch of learning. Much depends on the testing practices involved. However, we need to understand the meaning of the word “practices” first.
Practices

The word *practice* in a sense means "a skill" with reference to a "regular activity" aimed at improving a particular and thus also "a period of time" spent in training in order to improve one's skill/s "in doing something". Another sense in which it is used is "custom", i.e. a way of doing things simply because these are dictated by one's religion or society. It is in the sense that "practice" means something that is often done in a particular way. It is used also to refer to "the usual and accepted way of doing something". We use the term in the sense of the term meaning all these put together.

Testing Practices

"Testing Practices" are a reference "regular The word *practice* in a sense means "a skill" with reference to a "regular activity" aimed at improving a particular and thus also "a period of time" spent in training in order to improve one's skill/s "in doing something". Another sense in which it is used is "custom", i.e. a way of doing things simply because these are dictated by one's religion or society. It is in the sense that "practice" means something that is often done in a particular way. It is used also to refer to "the usual and accepted way of doing something". We use the term in the sense of the term meaning all these put together.

Major Research Questions

Two major research questions arise out of the discussion above and these are proposed to be answered as a result of this research exercise:

1. Are the reasons listed in the above the only reasons for the test papers and test-tasks no: being efficacious? (a) If 'yes', then what can be done about them? and (b) if 'no', then what could be the other reasons?
2. Does the format of the test papers and the structure of the test-tasks included in them pose problems contributing to their not being efficacious? If 'yes', then what can be done to solve these problems?

It is clear that answers to these questions are essential in order to tackle the problem of efficacy of the practices in vogue in the testing of English at the undergraduate level in the universities of Gujarat. This, then, provides the rationale for the proposed research.

Rationale

Apart from what has been said in the section above, another reason for making such a proposal is that a study covering such a wide area has not been undertaken anywhere in this country so far to the best of our knowledge and belief. Some studies touching upon certain limited issues have been conducted at the Master's and Doctoral levels. Research work quite unrelated or tagged to degrees offered by universities also exist, one of them especially on this subject, although quite preliminary in nature like, for example, J H Khan (1987) who made an attempt in this area in the form of a Mini-Research Project that he carried out in this university with the financial support made available by the UGC, New Delhi. Unfortunately, the report has remained unpublished even nine years after its submission.

Methodology used

A checklist-cum-questionnaire was used for collecting the relevant data. Universities are very secretive about testing and despite making attempts to get marked answerscripts of the earlier years, we were told that we could not have them. The research tool was already validated through a pilot study with teacher-respondents chosen at random from the colleges in Gujarat by Khan (1987). This instrument was then administered on two different occasions at an interval of a month to a randomly selected group of 150-200 teachers of English working in the colleges in Gujarat.

The variables include (a) the urban and the rural segments, (b) low and high-performance institutions, (c) colleges using vernacular and English as the medium of instruction etc. Simple statistical analysis was carried out in order to arrive at some definite conclusions, which we hope will help define and shape our future testing packages that will be extremely reliable. The research work involves a descriptive and a quasi-experimental format.
Importance of this Research

As stated in the section providing the rationale for this research work, one of the major reasons for making such a proposal is that no study covering such a wide area has been undertaken anywhere in this country so far. Khan (1987) has done some work in this area covering Gujarat on a Project for the UGC, New Delhi. Since it is neither a doctoral work nor has it has been published, it is necessary to undertake concrete research in this area if only because it is the need of the hour in view of the changing economic environment and the funding policies of the State with regard to education in this country today.
Notes

1. That work was titled “A Comparative Study of the Students’ Response to the Test-tasks used on Papers VI and IX at the TYBA (English) Examinations of Bhavnagar and Sardar Patel Universities respectively”.

2. The research experience that this researcher came in handy during the time he was working on this thesis.

3. Ibid., p. 666.

4. This part of the chapter forms a part of a paper titled “Re/thinking Concerns of English Language Education in India” at a Seminar on the subject of the same organised by Jasani College, Rajkot from 16 to 17 February 2002. It has been published in one of the recent issues of University News.


7. Dr Javed Khan, my Supervisor and Guide for PhD and one of the Resource Persons at a UGC-Sponsored Refresher Course in English organised by the Department of English, Sardar Patel University in November 2001, had made a pointed reference to this in a lecture titled “Towards defining Teaching”, delivered on 26 November 2001.

8. Ibid.

9. See Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English

10. Ibid.