Chapter 4
The Research Tool and Collection of Data

The research tool used was a 30-item Checklist-cum-Questionnaire for teachers of English designed to measure their understanding of the finer aspects of testing practices.

The tool required them to give a short description of a standard Question Paper in English (Compulsory) at each of the three levels where they taught English in their institution. It asked them to rank order a list of given objectives as per their choice so as to represent their priorities.

They were asked to help identify the objectives involved in the testing of English (Compulsory) at the undergraduate level from a list provided on the strength of the pre-validated tool. The respondents were asked to give their opinion on why major emphasis is laid in the testing on the attaining of refinement of writing skills from a set of options given beneath the item. Since the testing of written expression or composition takes into account certain basic skills, the respondents were asked to rank order based on their relative importance a list of skills.

Giving a list of items like appropriate content demonstrating coherence, cohesion and acceptable style, for example, they were asked to identify two items that they feel must form a part of the answers the examinees write. They were given a list of statements referring to the criteria for the selection of questions and they were asked to check whether or not language tests in use take care of at least some of them. There were other items that asked for more details with regard to the other aspects of testing.
It was not possible to get hold of marked answerscripts of earlier years because universities jealously guard these and do not part with them, irrespective of why these might be required, except of course when there is a diktat from the courts requiring their submission for scrutiny in case of disputes. Even this is a rare occurrence.

Hence, after ascertaining the teacher-respondents' knowledge of testing practices, we had to do the next best thing. We compared the question papers set at the last examinations with the contents of the syllabi of four universities: Sardar Patel University, Gujarat University, Saurashtra University, and South Gujarat University because these are older universities in the state, and represent all the four regions of Gujarat. Although we had approached 500 teachers of English, we could collect complete data from only 200 of them despite several reminders for reasons best known to them.

**Items on the Standardized Checklist-cum-Questionnaire**

Item 1 on the tool required them to write for us a short description of a standard Question Paper in English (Compulsory) at each of the three levels (FY, SY, and TY) in the faculties (Arts, Commerce, and Science) in which they taught English in their institution.

Item 2 listed some statements that represent the major objectives in the testing of English as a foreign language, which they were asked to consider and to rank them in the order they chose to represent their priorities. The statements were (a) To check the general progress of the students; (b) To evaluate one's own effectiveness as a teacher; (c) To fulfil the institutional requirements for promotion; (d) To help in grouping students according to their respective levels for group work; (e) To identify problem areas for remedial work and for
designing strategies for improving upon the quality of teaching and learning; (f) To measure
the impact and effectiveness of the course as a whole; (g) To ensure reinforcement of
student-motivation and learning; (h) To test the attainment of the level of a
predetermined linguistic competence fixed externally; and (i) To verify the level of
linguistic competence attained.

Item 3 was in the form of a request made to help us identify the objectives involved in the
testing of English at the undergraduate level from those given below. The objectives listed
were (i) To decide upon the candidates’ eligibility for using English as a library language;
(ii) To judge the suitability of candidates for a specific job or a few jobs requiring certain
language skills; (iii) To measure the level of language proficiency the candidates might have
attained; (iv) To examine for ourselves whether or not the candidates have aptitude for
higher studies; and (v) Others not listed here.

Item 4 asked them to identify the reason why testing of English, in their opinion, laid major
emphasis on the attaining of refinement in writing skills? They were asked to choose any/as
many options as they liked from those given to indicate their response. The options were:
(1) Writing, the concretised realisation of knowledge on paper, is a slow process indicative
of progress; (2) Writing assumes freedom from any immediate context and subsumes
expertise in several skills at the same time; (3) Writing involves a systematic organisation of
content that helps ensure clarity, correctness and appropriateness; and (4) Writing has no
false starts like those of speech and implies the ability to make informed judgements.

Item 5 was in the form of a statement that the testing of written expression or composition
took into account certain basic skills involved in the process, and they were asked to rank
these in the order of their preference in terms of their relative importance to them. The options were (a) Graphic or visual skills involving the use of script, spelling, punctuation, and format; (b) Grammatical skills demonstrating the correct and felicitous use of function words and sentence patterns; (c) Expressional or stylistic skills involving the use of appropriate vocabulary and idiomatic expressions; (d) Rhetorical skills demonstrating the ability to use devices of cohesion like the connectives, ellipsis etc; and (e) Organisational skills involving the sequencing of ideas and the ability to accept or reject information.

Item 6 asked them to specify which of the two items from the following they felt must form a part of the answers examinees have to offer in their language papers. The options here were (i) Appropriate content demonstrating coherence, cohesion and acceptable style; (ii) Lucidity and clarity of expression; (iii) Evidence showing sufficient understanding of the text; (iv) Demonstration of a sound linguistic competence involving felicitous use of language; (v) Inclusion of all the necessary information on a given topic; and (vi) Responses suggestive of independent thinking and offering evidence of the candidate’s ability to choose appropriate words and structures.

Item 7 noted how most of the statements below referred to the criteria involved in the selection of questions, and the respondents were asked to check whether or not our language tests in use today take care of at least some of these criteria. The options in this case were (1) All questions should be clearly worded and unambiguous; (2) Short answer-type of questions should have limited scope of answer; (3) Instructions, irrespective of whether these precede the questions or are built into them, should be clear and unambiguous; (4) Each question set must be related to an important content area and must cover abilities like analysis, synthesis etc; (5) Both the tester and the testees should be able to interpret the
questions in the same way; (6) Objectivity in marking should be made possible in short-answer type of questions; (7) No question should depend on another for its meaning. All questions should have their own independent meaning; and (8) There should be no overlapping of questions in the test paper.

Item 8 requested them to tick the appropriate items from those below to give their assessment of the fulfilment or otherwise of the objectives in the testing practices in vogue. These included: (a) None of the is framed with any clear sense of purpose; (b) There is obviously no correlation between the objectives of the course and the actual test based on it; (c) Not a single test makes a serious attempt at helping assess linguistic competence; and (d) The tests are framed haphazardly as a matter of routine.

Item 9 asked them to tick any or as many of the following statements that appeared to represent their reason/s for the response they might have given to Item 8 above. The statements were (i) No test measure what it purports to measure; (ii) These tests are reliable measures of linguistic competence; (iii) There is hardly any element of challenge in them as they lack proper planning and administration; (iv) Most of these tests would lead to the same scores on repeated use as those secured by the testees on their first administration; (v) All tests partially measure the extent of learning that might have taken place and show the teacher in poor light; (vi) Obviously, teachers lack the necessary training in the framing of language tests; and (vii) The tests provide irrefutable evidence of the lack of pedagogical orientation on the part of the teachers who might have set them.

Item 10 requested the respondents to check one of the following statements that they felt helped bring out the distinction they made between the terms test and examination. The
statements under this item were (1) A test measures the skills acquired by the learners, whereas an examination measures their skills of practical application; (2) A test concerns itself with a part of the course, while an examination takes into account the whole of it; (3) A test implies a selective probe making a diagnosis of problems in learning, whereas an examination implies a deeper and wider probe to measure attainment; (4) A test subsumes a certain degree of objectivity in evaluation, while an examination, though broad-based, cannot escape a subjective element; (5) A test involves competence in a single skill, whereas an examination must obviously involve the testing of competence in all skills; and (6) A test can be administered in a classroom situation, while an examination requires a massive mobilisation of manpower and money.

Item 11 asked them to specify the reasons for the general belief among the teachers of English that the testing of English as a foreign language had failed, using options given below the item like (a) Almost the whole lot of our testing material is outdated and irrelevant to our present needs; (b) One finds evidence of a lot of guesswork or irrelevant responses in the answerscripts in modern times; (c) Most of the answers are written hopelessly and show a serious attempt on the part of the examinees to mislead their examiners; (d) Massive copying on the part of the examinees, and hurried assessment, on the part of either the examiner/s or the university have contributed to making a mockery of the exercise as a whole; (e) Our tests betray a certain lack of originality and sincerity on the part of those who are given the responsibility of setting them; and (f) Stress is laid on content to the detriment of expression.

Item 12 required them to react to act a statement that essay-type questions were an indispensable part of the language tests at the undergraduate level because, and they were
expected to use the following options: (i) they are the only valid test-tasks for assessing the necessary competence to communicate in written expression on the part of the examinees; (ii) they are helpful in measuring the genuine worth of the students as they provide the examiner/s with an overall idea of the examinees' linguistic competence; (iii) they are useful in testing coherence and cohesion as well as the lucidity of thought and expression; (iv) they help determine the examinees' ability to think, and present their ideas logically; and (v) they encourage the examinees to be creative in the expression of ideas and enable the examiner/s to measure the extent to which learning might have taken place.

Item 13 began with a note that there was a strong feeling among teachers today that we need to introduce objective-type of questions in the testing of English in a big way. They were asked to state how they thought this would help, but also gave them the option of moving on to the next item in case they did not subscribe to such an idea. The options they could use to respond were: (1) Although objective-type questions are difficult to set, they are not only easy to assess but also help ensure objectivity in assessment; (2) Objective-type tests help evaluate the candidates' first-hand knowledge of the text and experience in the use of language; (3) Objective-type tests discourage the tendency on the part of the students to be selective about the topics in their syllabi in their preparation and revision for a test or an examination; (4) Objective-type tests are useful in evaluating the overall attainment of the students; (5) Objective-type tests ensure a wider coverage of the syllabi in the papers set for an examination; and (6) Objective-type tests ensure the same answer to a given question.

Item 14 asked them to identify the steps we could take to tackle the possibility of guesswork and copying becoming easier in case we were to switch over to objective-type tests (to whatever degree it might be) as some sections among the teaching profession fear.
options they were given to choose from were: (a) A carefully panned seating arrangement with some gap between two seats would help; (b) The entire quantum of the syllabi, not just what are popularly called important questions, should be covered in the test papers set; (c) Multiple-choice questions should have distracters chosen carefully so as to avoid giving any clue, either in terms of individual items or those set on a passage for testing reading comprehension; (d) At least two invigilators should be assigned the job of supervising the conduct of examinations per block so as to help reduce the possibility of copying; (e) A viva-voce aimed at ascertaining whether or not the response of a given student matches with his or her knowledge of the subject would validate our examinations; and (f) Essay-type tests also involve guesswork and their prevalidation before administration would help a good deal to make these reliable.

Item 15 asked them to say what they thought was the logic behind the fact that test papers set in English (Compulsory) in all faculties showed a heavy tilt toward text-based questions. The options given were (i) The prescribed text is the only means of understanding language in practical use in day-to-day life; (ii) No learning of language takes place if there is an element of guesswork involved; (iii) Papers in English (Compulsory) must obviously focus on linguistic competence rather than the learners' literary competence for students other than those offering English (Special); (iv) Dependence on stray sentences to test linguistic competence is undesirable, and the need for a context increases dependence on the text; and (v) Linguistic competence is tested better through contextualised situations and passages.

Item 16 requested them to help us identify the nature of questions to be incorporated into a paper set in English (Compulsory) so as to test adequately the learners' linguistic competence. They were asked to feel free to choose as many alternatives from those below
as they think will help reflect their response, and these alternatives were (1) Questions aimed at testing both the learners' linguistic competence as well as their familiarity need to be set; (2) Questions that are neither too long nor too complex to be easily understood by even our average learners are ideal; (3) Only such questions need to be set as are unambiguous and as are based on a significant part of the content; (4) Questions that have only one possible, though differently worded answer, are very useful indeed; (5) Setting questions based on quotations need to be avoided because such questions are non-questions in real terms; (6) Questions that are clearly worded are our best bet for reliable testing; and (7) Simple Wh- questions are ideal for testing language content in ESP courses at the undergraduate level.

Item 17 asked them to say how they would react to the charge that our language tests do not fulfil the criteria of validity, reliability, usability, administerability, and scorability. The options to choose from in responding to this were (a) Our language tests do fulfil these criteria; (b) The tests in vogue may be valid, reliable, and usable but are neither easily administerable nor scorable; (c) Since most of our tests in use today are essay-type, these criteria are inapplicable; and (d) The language tests in vogue are neither valid nor reliable.

Item 18 asked them to identify whether it was possible to make the test material for testing of English fulfil these criteria by ensuring that (i) they measure what they are designed to measure; (ii) they cover the entire quantum of a syllabus on a given course; (iii) they limit themselves to the testing of one skill at a time; (iv) they are used repeatedly at regular intervals with identical results; (v) they are made easy to administer by dividing them into smaller sections; and (vi) they are not too costly to administer, and are not either too long or too difficult or too complex to be scored.
Item 19 asked them to choose any/as many from amongst the statements given that they felt would help curb lap-up-and-vomit exercise that goes on in the name of examinations. There were four alternatives given to choose from: (1) We need to ensure that our tests should help measure all skills without depending heavily on the writing skill; (2) Giving tests at regular intervals would keep the students alive to the need to be prepared all the time; (3) A viva-voce given toward the end of the examination process would help examiner/s to measure the real extent of learning that might have taken place; and (4) Dependence on stereo-type questions needs to be done away with as so does the treatment of a given structure of the question paper, treated as sacrosanct.

Item 20 required them to specify the standard procedure involved in the testing of English (Compulsory) today at the undergraduate level in their university. They could choose from options like (a) A question paper of three hours' duration with a maximum possible score of 80 marks at the university examination, and an internal evaluation system with a weighting of 20 marks make up a total of 100 marks per paper\(^1\); (b) A question paper of three hours' duration with a maximum possible score of 80 marks at the university examination in theory, and a viva-voce or practical examination also as a part of the university examination with a weighting of 20 marks make up a total of 100 marks per paper\(^2\); (c) A question paper of three hours' duration with a maximum possible score of 70 marks at the university examination, and an internal evaluation system with a weighting of 30 marks make up a total of 100 marks per paper\(^3\); and (d) A question paper of three hours' duration with a maximum possible score of 100 marks per paper at the university examination.\(^4\)
Item 21 wanted to know from them as to which of the reasons listed in the alternatives they felt were responsible for the failure of the existing system in language testing. The alternatives were: (i) more or less a formality, it has ceased to influence the final marking; (ii) it has been encouraging adventurism and risk-taking behaviour among the students; (iii) our question papers normally stick to a predictable pattern with hardly any attempt at innovating them, making them leaked papers in essence; (iv) courses are obviously kept limited, or are manipulated to be kept so with the result that the testees find it easy to anticipate the type of questions that are likely to figure on the question paper; and (v) there is a feeling among the students in institutions affiliated to universities continuing with the system of internal evaluation that the deficiency in the internals can be made up in the university examination or in reassessment thereafter.

Item 22 dealt with suggestions, and they were asked to choose any of the following suggestions they thought would help set right the anomalies in our language testing. The options were: (1) Each test paper should be thoroughly objective; (2) Testing should be a continuous process, not limited to a day or a few days; (3) Test papers should be structured and set in such a way as would prevent the testees from preparing only selective portions of the syllabi; (4) The test set should have a provision for negative marking to penalise testees hazarding a guess; (5) The tests should carry clearly worded and unambiguous questions requiring pinpointed answers; and (6) The test papers should contain instructions insisting on relevance, preciseness, and correctness of responses.

Item 23 sought their opinion on the reasons for variance in the way the answerscripts in English (Compulsory) are marked by two or more teachers of English acting, and they were asked to feel free to choose any or as many as would suit their purpose. The alternatives
given were: (a) Malpractice; (b) Diffidence or indifference; (c) Individual differences; (d) Changes in perception; (e) Lack of training in testing; (f) Lack of moral uprightness; (g) Carelessness; (h) Social pressures; (i) Interference from administration; (j) Lack of common understanding; (k) Lack of a common marking scheme; and (l) Monetary considerations.

Item 24 wanted to know from them in what way a common marking scheme given by the paper-setter/s or agreed upon by the examiners makes a difference. The options given were: (i) It would ensure uniformity in evaluation; (ii) Examiners’ individual prejudices can be kept out effectively; (iii) Evaluators would get a clear idea about what the paper-setter/s expect/s of the examinees; and (iv) Impartiality and fairness will be maintained in evaluation.

Item 25 wanted them to tell us what points out of the list given they thought the examiners should keep in mind as they evaluated the answer-scripts in English (Compulsory) Paper, and they were asked to feel free to choose any or as many as would suit their purpose. The list contained items such as (1) Grammatical correctness; (2) Appropriateness of vocabulary; (3) Correct use of cohesive devices; (4) Adequacy of the content; (5) Appropriateness of style; (6) Proper organisation; (7) Punctuation and mechanics of writing; and (8) Felicity of expression.

Item 26 required them to help us identify the ratio of marks out of 100 for content and expression that they felt was ideal. The alternatives given were: (a) 70:30; (b) 60:40; (c) 50:50; (d) 40:60; (e) 30:70; and (f) None of these.
Item 27 presented them with a statement, "we need to make our language tests in English (Compulsory) more reliable", and asked them to specify these from the options give thereafter. These options were: (i) A common marking scheme would certainly help a great deal; (ii) Objective-type questions should have the provision for negative marking; (iii) Equal emphasis should be laid on content and expression; (iv) Coherence, logical argumentation, and lucidity of thought and expression should be given more weighting; (v) The tilt toward grammar or composition must be checked, and a judicious mixture of all the elements needs to be insisted upon; and (vi) All of language testing should be based on contextualised paragraphs.

Item 28 required them to state what they expected from the examinees in English (Compulsory) Paper at the undergraduate level irrespective of the faculty involved. The alternatives they could choose from were: (1) A fair knowledge of the text prescribed for study; (2) Linguistic competence and maturity of thought; (3) The ability to organise, argue, and cohere one’s ideas; (4) All of these; and (5) Others including these. In case they had other expectations, they were requested to list these in the space provided for the purpose.

Item 29 asked them to identify what they thought was wrong with the compilation of marks in test papers related in English language. The options given here were: (a) The total performance of the candidate in the whole of the academic year is not taken into account; (b) It is based on unequal proportion of marks set aside for internal and external examinations; (c) Most of the times, it is done too hastily to be foolproof; and (d) Fears and occasional evidence of tampering and manipulation seem to render the outcome null and void.
Item 30 requested them to mark the statements that they thought would be helpful in making the testing of English a reliable barometer of linguistic competence. The alternatives given were: (i) By bringing in a judicious mixture of all types of questions; (ii) By changing the pattern of questions frequently so as to encourage the use of reference books; (iii) By ensuring the inclusion of questions on specifics rather than generalities; (iv) By figuring out and nullifying the chances of hazarding a guess; (v) By giving the testees a chance to express themselves freely without any fear or favour; (vi) By introducing a viva-voce as a part of the testing practices so as to aid formal testing; (vii) By making the tests fulfil the objectives of the syllabus; (viii) By providing necessary training to the teachers in the art of language testing; (ix) By stressing upon the ability of the testees to write independently and effectively; and (x) By using objective-type tests in a big way.
Notes

1. South Gujarat University uses this format.

2. Bhavnagar used this format in the 1990s, especially in Paper VI at its TYBA Examination in English (Special).

3. This is the format in operation in Sardar Patel University for more than a decade now.

4. Saurashtra University has been using a format of this kind all through the preceding years as much as it uses at present, and so does Bhavnagar University.