CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

5.1 Implications for teaching writing
5.2 Implications for testing writing
5.3 Suggestions for teaching and testing writing
5.4 Suggestions for Experts
5.5 Researcher's observations
5.6 Problems encountered
5.7 Suggestions for further Research
CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This chapter examines the implications of the findings and offers some suggestions to the people involved with the teaching and testing of written English.

The present study traces the developments in the area of teaching and testing written English, from ancient days to the present and devises effective techniques and materials which are suited to our situation. There is enough evidence to believe that the techniques used in the study (3.2.4.a to g) and the materials tried out (Appendix 7a and b) will be effective in secondary schools of Gujarat. However, to use these techniques and materials, teachers may require a certain amount of orientation and hence some of the observations made during the experiment are recorded in the following sections.

5.1. Implications for teaching writing.

1. The present study reveals that in the teaching of writing as it is done today, learners are engaged in the writing activities for the sake of writing, in other words, there is no specific purpose (1.3.2 and appendices 4 and 6). As against this, when learners have to write for a specific purpose (3.2 and appendix 9) the task generates a more genuine
response.

2. Composition work as it is undertaken today is mostly teacher controlled. Teacher assigns the topic, asks a certain number of questions based on the topic, makes the learner practice the answers to these questions orally and then makes him write a composition (1.3.1.c). Here according to the learners, the teacher is the intended reader. They are also aware of the responses expected from them by the teacher. The passages and even letters written by the majority of the learners match word for word (appendix 4a,b,c). As against this when learners are made to realise that one message can be conveyed in a number of ways and are made to think more of appropriacy rather than accuracy (3.2.4 f), they produce better pieces of written work (Appendix 9a).

3. When learners are assigned writing tasks like a 'Visit to a zoo' merely because there is such a visit described in the course book, learners produce write-ups which are reproductions of coursebook lessons (Appendix 4b and c). They mechanically write sentences like 'We enjoyed our visit to the zoo' even if they have not actually visited a zoo. Writing activities become more meaningful when the learners are set realistic writing tasks within the constraints of the classroom situation, like working
in pairs to collect information about each other and record it (Task 2) or writing letters to each other in class (task 6). When learners are given a chance to express their own ideas and feelings they reveal their ability to produce better pieces of writing which bear the stamp of variety and individuality (Task 7).

4. When learners are given questions in a particular order, the answers of which written in the same order go to make a paragraph (1.3) learners do not get practice in writing 'texts', wherein to form a meaningful passage, the graphic symbols, words and sentences need to be arranged properly and linked together. When learners are given a chance to think about the order of sentences given in a jumbled order (Task 1) and when they are made to jot down the points, organize them properly and write a paragraph (Task 5) they produce better paragraphs (4.2.2.e).

5.2 Implications for testing writing.

1. The analysis of the test papers at class IX and X level reveal that the learners are only required to reproduce from memory answers to questions based on the content of the coursebook lessons (1.3.2.b and appendix 6a and b). In this way of testing, learners'
ability to communicate through the written medium is not tested.

2. When learners are asked to write down a passage which is read out to them, they reveal their ability to process the language which requires understanding the meaning of the material. The errors committed by the learners in writing the dictated passage also reveal their lack of competence in particular areas of syntax (4.4.1).

3. When learners are given close passages, to reconstruct the textual message, learners have to understand key ideas and produce an appropriate word for each blank. For example, in the post-test administered to the learners in this experiment, learners were given a close passage which was a story (Appendix 8c). Learners had to understand the key story and supply appropriate words to fill in the blanks, keeping in mind the immediate context as well as the overall structure of the passage.

4. The one word prompts usually given in examinations for paragraph writing (Appendix 6a and b) is inadequate to test the competence of the learners in written expression. When learners are given a letter and are asked to write a reply to that letter, they reveal their ability to communicate through writing.
5.3 Suggestions for teaching and testing writing.

1. Some of the lessons given in their coursebook could be used to make the learners understand how the resources of the written language can be used to establish and maintain contact with the reader in order to get their meaning across (Tasks 4 and 6). Supplementary materials could also be prepared based on the theme of the coursebook lessons suited to the level of the learners (Task 5 and appendix 7a and b). Some of the coursebook lessons and supplementary materials could be used to make the learners obtain practice in jotting down points, organising them and presenting them in the form of unified paragraphs (Task 5).

2. Learners could be engaged in a pair-work activity where they have to collect information from their pair-partners (Tasks 1 and 2). In this type of activity they have to ask questions with a specific purpose to collect some information about the daily activities of each other and then they have to record this information carefully. The information that is
recorded is meaningful to both the pair partners since one has supplied the information and the other has collected it and recorded it. Besides though the basic framework is the same all the learners do not write paragraphs which match word for word. As against this writing about the daily activities of the Postman or the Washerman which are part of the coursebook lessons learners usually write the same information given in the coursebook (Appendix 4b).

3. If learners are given a chance to express their own ideas and feelings they would be able to select points which interest them and write an individual composition. In the present experiment even when learners were writing about a topic like 'My hometown', the points they included in the passage were not the same, although all of them belonged to the same town (Task 7). The points they selected and the reasons they gave for liking their hometowns were different for different learners. (4.2.2.f).

4. When learners are made to work in groups to discuss a topic, make a pool of ideas, select relevant points, organise them properly and present them as a unified paragraph using linking and sequencing words, they learn not only to write a paragraph but also some of the important processes of writing. Again when they learn to check each other's
works and help each other in editing and revision of the written work, they learn to read their own write-ups from the reader's point of view.

5. Learners present achievement level has to be taken into account while planning writing activities, for otherwise the transition from what they are used to do, and what they are expected to do, may be too sudden and hence not successful. In the present experiment a familiar activity like answering comprehension questions based on the coursebook lesson was used to familiarise the learners to patterns of interaction in group and pair work activities (Task 4).

6. When the learners are not used to doing a particular activity it is important to give clear, unambiguous instructions about what they are expected to do, probably in mother-tongue in the beginning. In the present experiment when learners were to ask each other questions and record the information collected, in addition to giving simple instructions, the activity was demonstrated by collecting information from a learner and recording it on the blackboard (Task 2). In the beginning stages of this activity a lot of writing was done along with the learner on the blackboard.

7. It is useful to set simple goals within the reach
of the learners to build up their confidence and then gradually lead them to more and more difficult tasks. In the present experiment learners progressed from completing a given framework (tasks 1, 2 and 3), to expressing their own thoughts and feelings and from writing for a particular reader (Task 6) to a general unknown reader (Task 7). Another aspect of progress was from a completely teacher controlled activity, i.e., merely rearranging the sentences given by the teacher or completing a given framework, to individual work with very little guidance from the teacher.

8. For testing writing simple tests like dictation and close items can be used which make the learner process language in context. The test items used in the present experiment are simple, easy to construct and score (Task 8b and c).

9. A simple letter for which learners have to write a reply has also been tried out in the present experiment. In this type of test item, learners and the intended reader get an idea of the message they want to convey and hence can give an indication of their ability to communicate through the written medium (Appendix 8b and c).

10. Multiple-choice items and other discrete items tests could be used to test learners' ability to
5.4 Suggestions for Experts.

(a) Syllabus Makers.

The course in writing may be prescribed in the form of broad guidelines and kept flexible. By specifying the topics in the syllabus, the freedom of the teachers as well as the learners is curtailed. The school boards further restrict both the learners and the teachers by making a list of topics like, the postman or the visit to a zoo, which are repeated year after year. Since these topics are based on the coursebook lessons, and since the learners are aware of what they are required to write, the whole activity becomes very mechanical, more often mere reproduction of the coursebook material. Both the learners and the teachers need freedom to choose topics which are interesting to them.

(b) Examiners and paper setters.

In the examinations, again, similar topics are inculced and learners are expected to write a paragraph based on the outlines provided by the examiner. These tasks do not require the learners to use language for purposes of communicating their thoughts and feelings. These composition topics and other manipulative exercises often used in
examinations do not give any indication of the level of achievement of the learners' language proficiency. It is desirable to replace these by tests which give an indication of the learners' competence in the language and which have practical utilitarian value.

5.5 Researchers' Observation.

1. When learners are interested in a particular activity they learn the method of working quickly and produce better pieces of written work.

2. When the goals of the beginning tasks are within the reach of the learners, they are encouraged by their success to attempt the succeeding tasks.

3. When the learners are not familiar with group and pairwork activities, the teacher has to spend some time in explaining the method of work in simple English and in learner's mother-tongue. Demonstrating an activity and giving an example forming a pair with one of the brighter learners gives a better idea to the learners as to what they are expected to do.

4. Pairwork activities also generate some confusion when the learners do not know who is to sit with whom, who is to ask the question first, who is to note down the points and who is to check whose work first. There is less confusion when learners do not change places. For pair-work two learners sitting in one bench change places and were asked to work
together, in the present study. All the learners in the first row were identified as As and all learners in the second row were marked as Bs. Similarly the third, fifth and seventh vertical rows became As and fourth, sixth and eighth vertical rows became Bs. The instruction was given that all As would ask questions first and Bs would give answers. Then it would be Bs turn to ask questions and As turn to supply answers.

5. Group work can also be done without changing the learners seating arrangement. In the present study for Group Work activities all the learners sitting in the front row benches were asked to turn back and sit facing the learners in the second row. Similarly the third and fourth horizontal rows sat facing each other. This way five or six learners of two rows formed one group. Clear instructions about what they were expected to do and how to go about the activity was given in simple English. In addition to this, the teacher moved around the class when the activity was in progress and cleared the doubts of individual groups.

6. Learners might use a lot of Gujarati during the first few group work and pairwork activities. In the present study learners were given instructions to talk in English while talking to group members and pair partners. But since they did not know how to
agree or disagree with others opinions, how to explain their own opinion, how to point out the mistakes in somebody's work, explain why it is wrong and suggest how it could be changed, they started using Gujarati whenever they felt their knowledge of English is inadequate to meet the requirements of the situation. To overcome this difficulty learners were taught simple sentences like:

I don't agree with you
I think that's wrong
Look here, change this
I think he is right etc.

In addition to this learners were instructed to take the teacher's or the other group members' help whenever they did not know how to say a particular thing in English. Whenever any group sought the teacher's help, whatever they asked for was put up on the blackboard so that all the other groups could also benefit from it. As the learners got used to working in groups and using English for discussion, the use of Gujarati lessened gradually.

7. When the learners are first introduced to group work they make a lot of noise which might disturb the other classes in the school. In the present experiment it was found that the noise level increased suddenly after the first few moments of
absolute silence. This was so because for the first few minutes nobody knew how to begin the activity. Then all of them started talking at the same time. After a few minutes of confusion all of them stopped talking and the class became silent once again. Then the learners were familiarised with patterns of interaction in group work activities. The bright learners were taught things like listening patiently when somebody is talking and waiting for their turn, expressing difference of opinion without raising their voice and giving others a chance to speak by keeping their own comments brief. The weaker learners had to be encouraged to talk without worrying about the errors they might commit in the process. As the learners obtained more and more practice in asking questions, supplying and collecting information, and participating in discussion, the noise level decreased. Further they were given specific instructions to talk in soft tones at the beginning of each group activity. In some classes the instruction was put up on the blackboard and whenever the noise level seemed to rise, the learners attention was drawn to what was written on the blackboard. As this was done a number of times, learners on their own began to look at the blackboard whenever the noise level increased. Gradually learners learned to carry on the
work with minimum noise possible. In addition to the difficulties that a teacher might have to overcome in class, a researcher trying out new techniques and materials in a class where he is not a regular teacher, has to face a number of other problems. Some of them are listed below.

5.6 Problems Encountered.

Some of the problems encountered by the researcher are listed here which could be helpful to others who intend to conduct similar studies.

1. The data collected through the questionnaire, to analyse the needs of the learners as well as the present way of teaching and testing written English, had to be supplemented with interviews and report writing. The data did not give a complete picture of the present situation. Hence the teachers were personally interviewed and some of them wrote reports on the procedures they adopted in class. Even this interview and report writing, was found inadequate to draw conclusions and hence certain other procedures like - observation of classroom teaching, analysis of learners' classwork notebooks and test papers were undertaken. The final picture obtained gives a fairly true picture of the present situation.

2. Equalisation of two groups for purposes of comparison involved a number of problems. Inspite of
the levelling test administered the intelligence level of the controlled groups in some schools were found to be better than that of the learners of the experimental groups. Besides a language test only shows the achievement level of the learners and not their interest and motivation to try new things. In all the schools the controlled group showed more interest in finding out from the learners of the experimental group the new way of teaching they were being exposed to. Urged by a sense of being deprived of some new experience and a competitive spirit they learnt a lot more than the experimental group which was supposed to benefit from the new techniques. Relying too much on statistical analysis alone cannot tell us whether the new techniques have been effective or not. Objective observation by the researcher or by a knowledgeable person should also be taken into account.

3. The plan of work needs to be written down in detail when the experiment is to be repeated in different schools by different teachers. This plan should also offer guidelines as to how to begin the work, how to estimate the present level of achievement of the learners which is important as the starting point for the gradual introduction of the tasks planned, and how to handle problems that might
crop up in classroom interaction resourcefully.

4. The problems involved in getting the suitable classes to try out new techniques and materials have to be considered when trying to interpret results. In some schools the teachers do not approve of their classes being taught in a new way which has some influence on the learners as well. Besides the researcher has to accept the classes given to her by the school authorities and the procedure of equalization do not help to match the two groups with respect to their motivation, interest and competitive spirit. These were just some of the problems faced by the researcher in this study.

This study has covered only certain aspects of written work in English and that too at the IX standard level. The field is however vast and several aspects of written communication can be studied. Some suggestions for further research are offered in the following section.

5.7. Suggestions for Further Research.

This study could be repeated with slight modifications at class VIII and X level. Similar studies could also be conducted at the primary and higher secondary levels. Keeping in mind the syllabus and coursebook used at the various levels a number of group work and pair work activities could be worked
out. The techniques like "Know your friend", "Ask and be organised", "Note down please", could be used at different levels and could be made simple or complex suited to the level of the learners. For example in 'Know your friend' learners have to work in pairs and ask each other questions to collect information about their pair partners. At the simplest level learners could ask questions like 'What is your name?', 'How old are you?', 'What is your father's/mother's name?' etc. At a more higher level they could ask questions about the likes and dislikes of the pair partners, what he wants to become later in life and why he likes that profession etc.

Similarly letter-writing and paragraph writing could be used at different levels with varying levels of difficulty. At class VIII level learners could write brief notes using simple sentences.

For example;

Dear Mahesh,

Meet me at 5. I have a new ball. We can play together.

Yours,
Ramesh
Dear Ramesh,

I will come at 5. Thanks for calling me.

Yours,
Mahesh.

At higher levels they can include more details in their letters according to their interest. They can play different roles and write letters from different points of view. They can write to their classmates about topics of common interest.

Research could also be carried out in other aspects of communication. This work is mainly concerned with written communication. Similar work has been taken up in the area of Oral communication and materials production in Gujarat. Other areas like reading could be taken up. The implications of this study points to the fact that a certain amount of teacher orientation is necessary. Hence further research could be conducted at the level of teacher education and software production for audio and video programmes.

The present study is a modest attempt to study certain aspects of written communication. The field is very vast and a number of other studies could be carried out.