CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 MAJOR CONCLUSIONS AND INFERENCES

English language teaching has been going on for centuries. However, nothing credible has been achieved as far as the methods and materials to be followed for teaching the language are concerned. Fortunately or unfortunately we were governed by the English people for well over 200 years. English language has been taught to students for 12-14 years in schools. But majority of them do not seem to have learnt English adequately. They are not able to use English effectively. They are not able to write and as well as speak in flawless English. Where lies the problem? Who is to be blamed? : Teachers, students, curriculum, teaching methodology or evaluation patterns? Those who studied engineering in the 1950s say that they can write well and speak very well. They had good teachers to teach English. During 1950s they had to read many non-detailed textbooks prescribed in their engineering English syllabus. They were also taught Shakespeare in classes through lecture mode. However, they could write and speak English fluently without mistakes. They take the younger generation to task for not being able to speak and write well.

It is common knowledge that the best of brains in India are drawn today to technical fields not for any idealistic reason but for better job opportunities, money and status. By the time students make it to an engineering college, they are already fiercely competitive and achievement
oriented. We must remember that the professional world of engineers and scientists has greatly widened in recent years as the accent on management grew and added new dimensions to technical education. It has generated new jobs and created a new need for competence in English. Even the demand for higher studies has increased manifold in recent years and going abroad is not a prerogative of the few any more. But to achieve all these one needs to have acquired the necessary linguistic competence to use the language effectively.

We can readily see that in spite of the politicians’ anti-English drives, the premium on English has steadily increased in India. The products of the English medium schools are regarded as ‘privileged’ by their Mother-Tongue background counterparts because the former are more articulate in English. The mushroom growth of the so-called English-medium schools at every nook and corner of the country clearly indicates which way the wind is blowing and what the parents are after. There are many lures associated with an English medium education: polished behaviour, better discipline, smart appearance, good pronunciation, fluency in spoken English – all of which, people generally believe, result in getting better jobs, coming through competitive examinations, going abroad and eventually having more status and money. Learners are well aware that it is necessary to have a good command over English for a successful performance in various kinds of management jobs, pursuing higher studies or a career in teaching research. The success of any educational programme depends on the learner’s acquired ability to use efficiently the language that is the medium of instruction. Chitra Dutta also comments that “at each stage the students need to be made aware of the various functions of language in making communication in the academic field a success” (Chitra Dutta, 1980).
Any English language teaching course meant for technical students should include the teaching of oral communication as an integral part of the curriculum. Emphasis should be shifted from teaching passive language skills (comprehension) to active language use skills (communication). Students seem to be more worried about speaking abilities. To develop their confidence in speaking and improving their listening comprehension we can suggest measures like Group Discussions, Debates, Speeches, Quizzes, Presentation of Seminars, Brain storming sessions, Question-Answer sessions and Conversation classes during class hours. Group discussion and seminars increase students' confidence in speaking and improving their English. There is a clear indication from the frank comments of the students that their concern for English is strongly related to their concern for career. Apart from their general preference for need-based English courses, they identify specific areas indicating how their career-expectations are intrinsically connected with training in English. They want to be trained during the course for the preparation of competitive examinations such as GRE, GMAT, TOEFL, etc. and prepare them to face the interviews with confidence.

It is also possible to improve the present ELT situation in India by changing our attitude, contexts and methodology in classroom teaching. Private coaching centres, which are mushrooming, are minting money by using concrete and interesting materials and teaching methodology. Students are ready to pay Rs.3000-5000 for GRE, TOEFL coaching and for developing communicative skills in spoken English classes. Students will feel happy and get benefited if the same kind of coaching is given in the college itself. As it is difficult to teach large number of heterogeneous group of students, it is better to identify weak students through a proficiency test administered at the beginning of the course as it is done in REC Trichy and Anna University. Students with proficiency in English can be given
advanced language training like TOEFL and GRE. Weak students can be given a foundation course.

While catering to their professional needs, the course content and the teaching method should be totally pragmatic and based on identified professional needs. Simulations of real situations like interviews, group discussions, interpersonal relations through role-playing and audio visual aids should be tried out wherever possible to generate confidence in active language use. To achieve participation from the students the approach of the courses should be changed from drilling through written exercises to developing individual skills and sub skills through task based activities and the approach of teaching should be changed from lecture based classes to discussion based classes (seminars) and action dominated classes (simulations).

Courses should be developed with such tasks that demand students' active participation in the class. There should be variety in textbook content. Samples of free/structured writing, case studies, projects, seminar papers, business reports, general purpose articles and scientific texts can be used as sources to develop writing abilities in students and a number of other activities can be arranged to increase the power of their verbal expression. According to Fraida Dubin and Elite Olshtain,

a good syllabus or text book should provide learner-readers with a variety of materials and with a variety of reading strategies. A current, changing attitude of learners has been expressed in this statement: ‘Such and Such students only need to read English to be able to understand technical or scientific writing, so we will only instruct them in how to cope with one kind of material. They could not possibly want to read Time, Newsweek or Playboy since their purpose is reading to learn (Fraida Dubin and Elite
This comment, more than anything else, aptly sums up the urgent need for students to be taught. "Language appropriate to the interests of the pupil and the situations in which he might possibly use his linguistic competence" (Antony Howatt, 1974).

The important factor is that students should read for a specific reason. However, to read well they must be interested in what they read. Therefore, an important consideration of a course writer should be the choice of a wide range of suitable topics to provoke him into reading and encourage him to continue to do so. Interesting science fictions can be prescribed in the syllabus as supplementary readers. Universities should form a Committee for syllabus design and reform. Classroom teachers and students, working engineers and their employers, parents and administrators must be involved in it. As the students and teachers are the real users of syllabus, their suggestions should be considered as an important input in designing a syllabus. Hitherto syllabuses have been designed by administrators who have not taken the needs and interests of students, seriously enough. Finding of the M.Phil study of Nirmala also reveals that,

- Teachers want to be involved in the framing of the syllabus because they knew the learners’ needs better than anyone.
- Learners are aware of what their requirements are from a general English course.
- Teachers and learners want the autonomy to choose and select the items to be taught and learnt in the class.
- Learners need training about their role and responsibilities in an interactive or communicative English teaching classroom.
Regional medium students have expressed their desire to have a separate English course and tutorial to spoken English (Nirmala, 1995).

Revision of grammar should be taken care of as a part of LSRW activities. The learner must develop the ability to produce and understand grammatical utterances; he must know when to select a particular grammatical sequence appropriate to the context and situation. How to teach grammar and what methods and materials can be used to teach during this course for technical tertiary level learners is the big question. Students have been learning grammar for more than ten years and yet they are not able to use English effectively. The same situation is prevailing throughout the world. Rutherford also asks the same question. “The question then is not whether to impart to the learner knowledge of the language system but rather how we might go about it” (Rutherford, 1988). Grammar must be taught within a communicative context but not in isolation. Learners should not be taught to memorise grammar rules but to recognise and apply language patterns and conceive language rules for themselves.

After judging the linguistic capacities of students who join colleges, college teachers blame schools and school teachers for not giving students a thorough grounding in English grammar. Hence, they have to re-teach the basics of grammar. College teachers, who are supposed to teach advanced English language to students with high proficiency, now teach basic structural patterns and language functions to the students who are yet to use language effectively. A bridge course can be arranged before the weaker students are put along with others on equal footing to be able to do well as students of engineering.
English language syllabuses followed in schools (VI std. to XII std.) were reviewed by this researcher and found well designed. Syllabuses give an inventory of grammatical categories of language functions to be learnt and practised by students from standard VI. Almost all grammar topics are listed in school syllabus. When compared to school syllabus, college syllabus looks very much inferior. High school and Higher Secondary syllabuses have been very well designed with clear aims and objectives. Sivaraman in his Ph.D thesis comments on “the mismatch between students’ actual English language abilities and their desired levels of proficiency in English on first entry to college, together with the changes introduced in the syllabus” (Sivaraman, 1998). It is the high time something was done to set right this mismatch between school and tertiary level syllabuses.

The Committee set up by the Tamilnadu Government to reform the curriculum also noted, with reference to the English syllabuses in schools that “In standards 9 and 10, there need be no structural grading in the language of the text, for it is the stage at which the learners should be exposed to natural English” (Report of the Committee for Curricular Reform, 1987).

The real problem lies in the teaching of English in Tamilnadu schools. English language teaching in schools needs radical change. Children have been wasting 12–14 years without learning English in schools, as there are no properly qualified English teachers to teach the language. In most of the private schools and in almost all Government schools, only science, history and mathematics teachers are teaching English. They make teaching and learning difficult and help develop only an aversion to English among learners. But somehow, students pass examinations by memorising answers. They just need a pass mark in this
subject and these marks are not considered for Professional Entrance Examination. Only mathematics and science subjects are tested and considered for Professional Entrance Examination and admission. The Government must take steps to improve this situation by appointing English teachers to teach English from the primary stage and insist on certain level of proficiency in English as the requirement for Tamilnadu Professional Course Entrance Examination. Otherwise we cannot expect any improvement in the present ELT situation even if a syllabus is framed satisfying the expectations of students.

The entries in the questionnaires establish beyond doubt that students have an awareness that English is a language that can be considered indispensable for flourishing in the different types of careers that the technical students go in for. They are very keen to improve their communication skills in English and they want to do it during their college years. Since technical education is a profession-specific, all the possible professional needs, which definitely include linguistic needs, should be taken care of by the syllabus. The engineering students, their English teachers and working engineers have clearly stated that the English syllabus followed in engineering colleges is not at all helping the students adequately. Hence, syllabus designers should recognise the students' English language needs and provide ample scope for developing the required skills. It should be a student centered syllabus as students are the real audience.

6.2 AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Quite a few research scholars have been interested in recent years in doing research on Syllabus Design and analysing specific needs of learners pursuing technical courses. The present study is an attempt to identify the needs of the learners of the B.E / B.TECH. Degree courses of
252 Engineering colleges in Tamilnadu. This study has its own limitations as it has taken only 3500 students from thirty five engineering Colleges affiliated then to ten universities (now affiliated to Anna University, Chennai), as the survey population. A nation-wide survey of learner needs can be carried out so that if tenable a National syllabus can be framed to cater to the needs of all the learners who join Engineering courses all over India.

Not much has been done to produce relevant course materials for the students of Science and Technology. It was commonly felt that students of science needed a subject specific English and consequently materials have to be designed to meet their particular language requirements. A research can be carried out to construct materials, which can develop, listening comprehension and speaking skills of engineering students. It is firmly believed that the most important requirement of the engineering student is the ability to read advanced technical literature. As the students have to learn to answer their examination questions, besides preparing project reports and technical papers, they must properly be trained to develop their reading and writing skills with the help of suitable materials.

A research on teaching, learning and evaluation process in schools can be carried out. A research on finding and developing the learner strategies of regional medium students will be very much useful in developing suitable syllabus materials for them. A more systematic, detailed and comprehensive study can be done on assessing learner reaction to methodological classroom procedures like group work, pair work, role play and determining the roles of teachers, learners and texts in the learning process.