CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY
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The Implications of the Study

This concluding chapter looks back at the findings of the study and draws the implications of the findings for the design of courses in English at the post-graduate level in the University of Madras. The implications are generally in the nature of indicating further areas for exploration and research and projects for implementation of reforms.

The summary of findings relating to the specific problems investigated: The findings have already been stated in the analysis of performances in Chapter IV and are summarised below:

1. General proficiency in English does not entail abilities of reading literature but a low level of literacy goes with incomprehension of literature and incoherence in writing about it.

2. Prose and poetry seem to demand different kinds of reading ability.

3. Reading material with a native cultural background appears to be more accessible than that with an
alien background but this problem will bear more investigation if passages parallel in other ways could be found. But culture is such a permeating influence that it is bound to affect every aspect of a text and therefore finding parallel passages may not be too easy a task, if ever possible.

4. The ability to name or identify literary devices does appear to be an indication of literary competence from the examination of student scripts on Task VII as well as on items 7 - 10 in Task III. But the evidence is not conclusive.

Summary of findings from the questionnaire responses and their relation to performance on the test:

1. Reading escape literature is a popular activity. High achievers on the tests read a variety of material ranging from newspapers to other non-fiction material.

2. Similarly, high-achieving students seem to read for a variety of purposes.

3. The reading habits questionnaire has proved to be a gross measure. No finely distinguished set of
reading habits or preferences has emerged but the general trend is unmistakable and it is dismaying. The instruments have not shown up very special characteristics of high achievers other than what has been mentioned above.

**Development of the measure of prerequisite abilities:**

Analysis of the test has shown that abilities of responding to previously unseen literary work, analysing it and accounting for acceptability or lack of it are measurable. The measure as it is has shown a high equivalence reliability and demonstrated validity in content as well as a pragmatic validity in correlating well with the university model examination.

It is possible now to develop a refined measure by improving the items in the original test. In the re-modelled test Task II and Task IV may be dropped since they were included here mainly to check on certain expectations about cultural background and pattern of questioning preferred by students.
The general educational findings of the study:

1. Curriculum planners have by and large kept the requirements of the discipline of English in the forefront of their minds but missed the vital requirements of pedagogy in the subject. Consequently, syllabi tend to keep abreast of modern thrusts in Literature (not so much in criticism) but ignore the necessity to define specific educational objectives at different levels of teaching. Thus there are no defined abilities and knowledge, accomplishment of which can be said to qualify one for a basic degree or a degree at a higher level. Everything educational is left to the interpretation of the teacher, the student, the examiner, each from his own angle. Ironically, none of the three has a say in curriculum development. The analysis of the syllabus for M.A. English in Chapter III led to this finding. Apparently the situation is not much different in other parts of the world, as Widdowson argues in his presentation, "The teaching, learning and study of literature". However,

1. H.G.Widdowson made this vital distinction between discipline and subject in his *Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature* as referred to in Chapter II.

that is no cause for continuing the status quo.

2. There is no prior training demanded of teachers at colleges and universities. Hence teachers enter into classrooms for which they are not prepared. The lack of guidelines in the syllabus and the lack of training for teaching compound the problem. Their own education has probably developed in the teachers a certain relation to the subject. The teacher is now entrusted with developing his students' relation to the subject which is also to some extent dependent on his relation to them and his relation to the subject.

3. There is a poverty of intellectual nourishment for the students in the educational experiences provided for them. The IEA study found response to literature to be a learned behaviour, the learning of a "cognitive style", a way of thinking about literary experience, a way of ordering that thinking for discourse.³ If this behaviour is to be learned, the curriculum makers must

deal with the question of how it is to be learned. Through what kinds of activities, with what degree of independent action can the student learn it is a vital question. The lack of response to a number of tasks on the test, especially to Task VII and the inadequacy and hesitancy of most of the responses received, the general low level performance point to a pattern of learning stereotypes. When faced with untypical tasks the students make trivial responses. This pattern of stereotyped learning may have larger cultural ramifications. It reflects a tendency to stagnate and so degenerate - a tendency that is aggravated by the prevalent examination system.

Reading preferences show that light reading is undertaken mainly as pastime and newspaper and magazine reading for garnering information and knowledge about the world and its ways. Literature figures nowhere in the reading interests of this group of students of English literature who have studied it for nearly three and in some cases four years.

To a great extent, the blame for this lies with the educational environment where learning is expected
to happen through passive listening, where the
students' voice is either perceived to be threat-
tening or is devalued, and where writing is an
activity reserved for the examination (or for
punishment).

A radical change in the conception of the stu-
dent's role in his own education is required in curri-
culum planning as well as in contact sessions. A
ture student of literature, indeed any student, should
be helped to achieve an emotional and intellectually
aware engagement with the literary work and to dis-
cover himself in writing, organising and reflecting
on personal feeling and experience of the literary
work and on others' appraisals of it, in short to achieve
the fullest sense of literacy.

Some directions in which change can be effected
are presented in the following pages.

**GOALS OF STUDY**

It needs to be emphasised that without the develop-
ment of an overall framework any number of piecemeal
suggestions for reform, however sound and pertinent in themselves, cannot have any worthwhile impact. Such a framework is possibly available in the New Education Policy Statement as well as in the work of the various education commissions earlier. These attempted to make explicit the nation’s prior assumptions about the nature of education and its purpose. What is lacking is a perception of the relationship between these and the goals we have for the study of English Literature. The various study groups set up by the Ministry of Education that have gone into this question have failed to make an impact on curriculum planning, teaching and evaluation. In practice each of the three stages smacks of ad hoc decision-making and most decisions appear to be matters of statutory procedure whether it is deciding portions to be "covered" deciding/passmark or deciding the total percentage of passes in the final examination. In other words, what ought to be educational decisions get reduced to administrative procedure.

4. made by the Ministry of Education, Govt. of India.
Defining objectives for different educational levels:

What is clear from the syllabus (such as it is) is that a definite difference in ability and a wider reading is expected of the students at M.A. than at B.A. A student at B.A. could safely manage on general literacy abilities and some information on prescribed literature. At M.A. he needs more than that and lacking this extra leans heavily on the support of critical notes for examination exigencies. By himself he is unable to cope with the requirements. There are two probable reasons for this lack of fit between expected results and observed results. One is that quite a number of the students do not possess the pre-requisites for higher level literary study. The other is that the problems of transition from literary studies at earlier levels to those in post-graduate work find both students and teachers unprepared.

Suggestion for research:

One definite need that has come into focus as a result of the analysis in Chapter III of the present study (supported by evidence in Chapter IV from students'
performance in tests) is the need to undertake re-
search into identifying the nature of the problems
of transition from literary studies earlier to lite-
rary studies at the post-graduate level and exploring
ways of easing the process of transition. The basis
for such a study would have to be provided by dis-
tinguishing between the kinds of literary knowledge
and experience that are important for students at the
higher and the lower levels, i.e., differentiating
pedagogic objectives for the two levels. These would
have to be distinguished from the kinds of knowledge
that are significant for teachers.

The Syllabus as guideline for activities:

The syllabus must offer the teacher, the student
and the examiner much more than a mere list of books.
Suggestions on pedagogic procedures for different
types of texts would be useful. The commonest mode of
student activity seems to be listening, with sporadic
excursions into other modes. The need is for students
to be engaged in several kinds of activities with res-
ponsibility.
Listening, following instructions, obtaining information/clarification by questioning, classifying what is read, estimating, evaluating work, discriminating, getting information from written sources and from audio-visual material, discussing, negotiating are all activities through which the student can grow in intellectual responsibility and in literary experience. Awareness of all available resources and skills of drawing upon them need to be cultivated. Robert Protherough suggests a variety of ways to bring about participatory learning. Some sample activities for the analysis of style are reproduced below:

They train concentration on how texts work:

Cutting: A passage (in prose or verse) and another passage later in the same work are presented. Students discuss what the cut might have concealed and the evidence for their hypothesis.

Odd one out: Pairs are given a short passage with a marked style. They write it out adding 3 sentences of their own composition at different points, trying to imitate the original. The passages are then circulated, each pair

trying to discover the others' sentences.

Variant versions: Two or three stylistically different versions of a text are offered (Hemingway in long, complex sentences or Henry James retold in short, punchy ones). The group consider the different effects of each version.

Progressive comparisons: Two pieces on a similar topic for discussion are introduced. Then a third, fourth, fifth, when the first discussion seems to be finishing, not introducing all at once.

He also proposes useful student activities for dealing with criticism which are interesting in the manner in which criticism is itself subjected to critical treatment.

The bird's eye view: Cull a dozen or so assertions from different critics, attempting to take only a sentence from each. Ask students to read, mark those with which they agree and cross those they disagree with. Then ask them to compare responses in groups and use their reactions as basis for discussion.

They can't both be right: Take a disputed short text, discuss it, then circulate two contradictory critical explanations and discuss.

Different kinds of sense: Using selected extracts focus on the way in which different critical approaches can attempt to give different kinds of insight.
e.g., the Play scene in Hamlet, the Murder scene in Macbeth

Bradleyan character analysis
Wilson & Brown's emphasis on theatrical performance
Knight and Traversi's concern for images and Thematic patterns

Practical criticism of Criticism:
Passages from criticism to be subjected to close reading just as with literature concentrating on how well the case is argued, how good the critic is as reader, fact vs. opinion in the passage.

Retelling criticism; invite individual students to take an article or a chapter from a Case Book Series or Twentieth Century Interpretation and digest it, thus providing a working paper for the class to discuss.

Suggested area of research:
An exploration of ways in which students can be encouraged and required to take more responsibility for their own work would answer a deeply felt need.
In his unpublished dissertation for the PhD. on Teaching Literature at the undergraduate level P.N. Ramani offers a variety of activities culled from several different sources as alternatives to listening to lectures. A similar project could be undertaken for the M.A. level.
Teaching Methodology:

The methodology is as variant as there are teachers but the effect of the examination stereotype is strongly in favour of the transmission mode of teaching. The annotation question that accounts for 20% of the marks on each literature paper is prepared for with a great concentration on details and localized meanings and with short paraphrases of the texts. Barnes and Barnes remark in their discussion of literature teaching in English schools for A level examinations: "Our impression was that a great deal of literature teaching was irrationally narrow in its range, confined mainly to paraphrase and commentary on the local meaning of texts along with stylized account of theme and character." This remark appears to fit the condition of literature teaching in Madras University even at M.A. level. The scrutiny of students' responses to unseen poems and prose passages, especially to Tasks II and VIII confirms such an impression about our students already doing the post-graduate course or in the qualifying class. After nearly 3 - 4 years of learning to study English Literature they have little to

say when confronted with a new text. This is evident both from the percentage of students who have not attempted Question VIII as well as from the nature of responses of most of those who have attempted it. A few have learnt to "mouth" certain criteria for a good literary work but have not learnt to apply them.

**Suggestion for further research:**

Studies are required of teachers' perception and attitudes to literature, literature teaching, ways of learning to read literature, of their preparation for the profession, their preparation for the class. This is an area where there is need for systematically collected empirical data. This is not to condemn existing modes of teaching but to pinpoint similarities or preferred patterns in teaching and to make public those modes of teaching that have successfully achieved objectives of literature teaching. Only when a description of existing practices is available can alternatives be offered to complement or supplement or supplant them as necessary.
Examination Practices:

The construction of the university examination is based on a curious amalgam of a priori considerations of content and administrative sanction (which clearly do not have the same goals) in place of the empirical evidence that is accumulated for mere purposes of certification instead of being put to use for curriculum evaluation and improvement. The unembarrassed use of raw scores from answer papers is again a questionable practice. All critical values such as a pass mark (at 35% or 40%) are fixed right at the beginning and do not await analysis of empirical data. Dr. Benjamin Bloom observed after studying the University examination patterns and practices in India in 1961:

"An examination system has been created which has a powerful effect on all the students and teachers who come in contact with it. It has reduced learning to a part-time activity, teaching to the coverage of particular material, and education to a relatively drab and meaningless activity".  

7. "Some observations on Examinations in India", Evaluation in Higher Education: A report of the Seminars on Examination Reform organised by the UGC under the leadership of Dr. B.S. Bloom (New Delhi: UGC, 1961) 1-14 (14).
Assessment has generally been condemned as dominating educational aims and inhibiting good teaching and learning practice. This negative perception of assessment as the tail that wags the dog has to be corrected. The examination reform programme initiated by Benjamin Bloom should be taken up seriously. Alternatives to prevailing modes of assessment must be brought into use. Ways must be sought of setting up questions as issues to grapple with rather than as stereotypes with ready-made answers from bazar notes. Such questions can be formulated only by teachers who have developed their own perspective whether on teaching or on the particular text. A worthwhile project could be to have regular workshops where teachers can evolve questions on texts arising from their working experiences. Such questions may be tested and stored in banks and made generally available as models.

**Defining criteria of assessment**

To tackle the problem of defining or identifying criteria of assessment exemplar sets of the work of students at different educational levels and at different levels of ability may be assembled. Experienced evaluators may be asked to arrive at a set of criteria
for assessment and then to comment on each bit of student work. These sets with accompanying commentary may be circulated to the various institutions for notice, comment and streamlining of evaluation on their courses.

The contribution of the study:

The results of the study are of two kinds.

1. One is the possibility of deriving a refined measure after weeding out ineffective items. The test has discrimination power and the sub-tests can be said to test distinct abilities of reading to literature, i.e., reading prose fiction as opposed to reading poetry and being sensitive to different aspects of poetry. Thus, the test can discriminate between the different abilities in a student as well as between students. This makes it an important tool which can be used in selecting students for the M.A., making use of the individual's aggregate score on the test. If selection, pruning or elimination is not the purpose, the test can still be used as a diagnostic device to find out the strengths and weaknesses of the students and give them suitable
advice or treatment. In such a case it would be appropriate to use the profile of performance on the sub-tests rather than the aggregate score.

2. The other result that emerged even while the study was in progress can be summed up as

a. the need to establish a continuing process for re-appraising and re-shaping

1. the modes of interaction and practices in teaching;

ii. the content and structure of syllabus and their theoretical warrant;

iii. criteria and modes of assessment.

b. the need to involve as many teachers as possible in the process mentioned at a.

The necessity for the above was strongly reinforced by the findings of the tests themselves.