CHAPTER 7

The Intervention
Chapter Seven

This chapter will describe the details of the partial intervention process based on the newly created teaching model linking curriculum development and teaching methodology. The intervention aims to test the efficacy of the teaching methodology suggested in the model in improving the identified area of language deficiency for the population in the study.

Any teaching model needs to be tested within the population to see if the researcher’s contentions about its effectiveness actually prove to be true. The interventions described below are an attempt to practically apply the teaching model to a sample of the population and measure the effectiveness of the teaching methodology that has been applied in order to improve English proficiency.

The basic framework of the model begins with a needs analysis from which the subsequent sections are generated. On the basis of a needs analysis on a representative sample of the population, the input for an appropriate course design and teaching–learning process was mapped out. A partial intervention based on the model (See Chapter Five Figure 5.1) was implemented at two levels for two equally matched groups. The groups were chosen on the basis of the Business English Certificate Diagnostic Test 2006 (See Appendix C). Out of a total of 152 students who wrote the test, 72 students comprising the middle ranking order were taken for the intervention. After a gender-wise division they were divided through systematic random sampling into two groups of 36 students each to ensure that the groups were homogenous. The treatment in the experimental group differs from that in the control group only in the area of
teaching methodology. The methodology implemented in the experimental group includes a focus on vocabulary (the identified area of language weakness) within the context of a task-based methodology. The intervention for the control group is based on the conventional task-based methodology. The interventions have only been partially implemented as the purpose is to study the effect of the independent variable (teaching methodology) on the dependent variable (productive vocabulary) in each group.

7.1 Design of the partial intervention

The intervention has been designed exactly on the lines of the teaching model presented in Chapter Five. Needs analyses on two sets of respondents form the basis of the course design and the teaching-learning process. As the intervention is only partial, the last step in the model, namely assessment, has not been developed.

7.2 Course Design

Course design usually includes the formulation of a syllabus and the selection of material to be used. In order to do this it becomes necessary to frame the course objectives. These have been taken from the objectives framed during the creation of the model (See Chapter Five). As mentioned earlier, the scope of this experimental study is limited to the assessment of the third objective. The objectives have been restated below:

1. To gain proficiency in communication tasks
2. To strengthen the identified area(s) of language deficiency
3. To improve productive language skills
7.2.1 Creating the syllabus

To realize the objectives given above, the syllabus had to include two important elements:

- Strategies for dealing with the identified area of language weakness
- Communication Tasks

On the basis of the findings from the needs analysis at the level of business managers and management students the following inputs were generated for the course:

- **Vocabulary** was chosen as the language deficiency of the group on the basis of the dyadic analyses of the tools for managers and students. The findings indicate that there is a consensus as far as the dominant language weakness of management students is concerned. (See Chapter Five, Table 5.11).

- **Presentation** was chosen as the communication task from the list of high priority communication tasks from the analysis of the managers’ tool.

7.2.2 Course material

The next part of the process was to use material that would facilitate the main objectives outlined for the intervention. Reading passages were taken as input for vocabulary learning within context. This was in relation with the second objective, namely ‘to strengthen the identified area(s) of language deficiency’. Reading passages act as a major source of good language exposure to the students of a language proficiency development programme.

The reading passages were followed by supplementary notes, and together, they served as the resource for the communication tasks that followed. The communication tasks served as a means
to realize the third objective and were in themselves important to fulfill the first objective, namely ‘to gain proficiency in communication tasks’. (See Appendix E)

Exercises in productive language skills based on the reading passage came next and these were aimed towards fulfilling the third objective, namely ‘to improve productive language skills’.

7.2.3 Reading passages

Four reading comprehension passages were taken from the Common Aptitude Test (CAT) 2008, Management Aptitude Test (MAT) 2008 and MAT 2006 as these represent standardized passages meant for graduate students who wanted to enroll for a post graduate management programme. Macay et al (1979) speaks of the enhancement of vocabulary through the process of reading and the choice of course materials was influenced by this. The materials were purposely chosen from the entrance examinations for management programmes to ensure that the linguistic difficulty of the passages is adjusted to the learner’s capacity. As management students coming into a post graduate management programme need to be necessarily qualified at this level, we can assume that the difficulty level of the chosen passages correspond to the students’ level of understanding. In linguistic terms we could call it ‘comprehensible input’. Widdowson (1978) voices this concern and the same line of thought is reflected in Krashen’s (i+1) theory and in Vygotski’s Zone of proximal development.

7.2.4 Choice of vocabulary for the study

After the reading passages were chosen, the first task was to isolate the vocabulary items in the passages that management students would consider to be receptive vocabulary. As the objective of the experiment was to reduce the receptive –productive vocabulary gap, it was necessary to understand which words would be chosen as unknown and which words were familiar but not
used productively. Management students in the first year of the MBA programme were instructed to read the passages through and underline with a double line words that they did not know at all and with a single line words that they had encountered but did not use productively. After the task was completed they were asked to recheck and see whether there were any doubtful instances where they were not sure if they knew it productively. In case of such instances they were asked to carry out two simple tests mentally—firstly, to make a sentence with the word, and secondly, to say the meaning or a synonym for the word. The assessment of the correctness of the response was left to the judgement of the student.

The words underlined by the students were put down in two columns representing ‘Unknown Vocabulary (UV)’ and ‘Receptive Vocabulary(RV)’ respectively. The number of students opting for each word was also put down. Whenever a word appeared under both heads they were listed in both columns.

The total number of words marked by the students in RV was 115. The number of words to be used for the intervention was fixed at 60. This constituted 52.16% of the total number of 115 words.

The number of words under RV in each passage was listed. 52.16% of these were chosen from each passage separately in descending order of frequency. The lowest number of words chosen from a passage was 9 (out of a total of 18 words listed under RV) and the highest was 19(out of a total of 36 words listed under RV). The middle two had 16 words each and this totalled to 60.

These chosen words were highlighted in the materials used for the experimental group, as this was necessary in the context of the teaching methodology that harnesses the noticing skills of the candidates. They were not highlighted in the materials used for the control group who were following the conventional teaching methodology. (Refer Appendix E).
7.2.5 Content of the passages

The content of the passages ranged from history to economics to business. This was done to provide variety as far as the learner was concerned. However, they were also chosen because they lent themselves as examples for the communication tasks that followed them. For example, one of the communication tasks was the formulation of a presentation. The passage on the collapse of the Mayan Dynasty stood out as an example of clear-cut organization where the concepts of preview and labeling were well illustrated. Another passage and its supplementary notes lent themselves to graphical representations which are used to support presentations. Students learnt to create and explain from visual aids through these passages.

7.2.6 Supplementary material

Every comprehension passage was supported by supplementary material which could be used to provide content for the tasks and exercises to be carried out. This material was not tailored to fit in perfectly with the tasks; the students had to pick and choose what they needed from the material. This was done to provide plenty of opportunity for students to interact informally in task preparation. However, it relieved them from the tedium of searching on their own for content suitable for the tasks given to them. This helped to contain the learning activity within the stipulated class time without any carry over work.

7.2.7 Exercises for the passages

Speaking and writing exercises were provided after the passages. This was meant to increase language proficiency by putting language to productive use on the basis of the passages. However, here the exercises were different for each group as they were in tune with the teaching methodology applied for each group. While the experimental group concentrated on vocabulary,
and exercises were planned to help students use their noticing skills in dealing with the highlighted words in the text, the control group had exercises that tested comprehension. Exercises for both groups were aimed to help them gain in language proficiency through productive use of language.

7.2.8 Communication tasks

The second part of each unit consisted of a communication task which was common to both groups. This two-hour session was carried out in groups or pairs. As the final task to be achieved was a written presentation, the three tasks in the units preceding the final unit were component parts of a presentation. For example, the first unit contained a communication task to summarize a text into relevant points and then further reduce it by supporting it with visuals. The second unit’s communication task was to formulate a presentation where the points to be expanded and supported were given, and an appropriate introduction and conclusion were to be formed. The students were supposed to use the supplementary notes to find out examples and details to support these points. In the third unit, the communication task was the construction of a graph on the basis of data provided to be followed by an analysis of the data. These were the building blocks for the fourth unit’s task which was the formulation of a presentation with visuals. This also included the finer aspects of organization like preview, links, etc.

This partial intervention was designed to run for 16 hours for each group. It consisted of four units each and each unit had two parts. The first part consisted of one reading comprehension passage followed by supplementary notes. This was followed by speaking and writing exercises. The second part consisted of a communication task, either whole or part, where the passage and
supplementary notes would support the student’s need for content. Each part was designed for two hours.

7.3 The teaching-learning process

Between the course design and the achievement of objectives lies the teaching–learning process. However cleverly designed the course is, it is this section of the model that needs careful attention to ensure that learning takes place.

7.3.1 Teaching methodology used for the experimental group

The interventions for each group differed in the use of teaching methodology. For the experimental group, the task based teaching methodology was combined with a focus on receptive vocabulary, and exercises in speaking and writing were aimed to call attention to the highlighted words in the reading passage and put them into productive use.

7.3.2 Teaching methodology used for the control group

In the control group the conventional task based methodology was used where there was no focus on any area of language. Here proficiency was dependent on the interaction within groups supported by teacher input and input from reading passages. Productive language practice was achieved during the preparation for the skill practice and in the carrying out of the task.

7.3.2 Learning styles

The preferred learning styles of the respondents had been analysed using frequency tables and the styles adopted in the classes corresponded to this analysis. (See Chapter Five).

For the experimental group, vocabulary exercises used various methods. Guessing from context always preceded dictionary usage. Added to this, consultations on the word and its related uses
were encouraged as a part of improving proficiency through communicative interaction. The words for vocabulary improvement were highlighted in the text for the experimental group. Robinson(1995) has explained the significance of this on the basis of the psycholinguistic theories of activation. Quoting from Graf &Mandler(1984) he says that the presentation of a highlighted word makes it more accessible than the other words. However, this activation is not enough to determine recognition or recall operations which are dependent on the characteristics of the context in which the event first occurred. The methodology used here bases itself on these constructs where recognition and recall were further aided by encouraging the student to take the word out of the given context and use it in a situation that lies in his experience.

The interaction happened only in pairs and small groups and the process was entirely student centred.

Group leaders were given instructions to see that everyone took part in the discussions and the discussion time for each exercise was agreed upon beforehand. The teacher only involved herself when a doubt was directly addressed to her and when clarification was required within a group. She was mostly confined to the role of a facilitator.

Role plays and debates were often used in connection with the speaking exercises in the first part of each unit.

A limited form of assessment took place during the class where the assessment was done by teacher and student groups alike, in order to create further occasions for interchange of dialogue in meaningful situations.
7.4 The pre-and post tests

The pretest and the post test (See Appendix D) were formulated on the basis of the test designed by Webb (2007) where he used it to measure the effects of repetition on vocabulary learning. This particular test was chosen because this was the first time that more aspects of word knowledge were measured so that even partial gains could be measured. The test measures knowledge of orthography, association, grammatical functions, syntax, and meaning and form both at receptive and productive levels.

7.4.1 Departures from the original study

Webb’s study was to measure word knowledge that was acquired through incidental learning of the words in context. This study seeks to give an intervention at two levels: one where vocabulary is focused upon and the other where there is no focus on vocabulary. A before-after test for the experimental and control group were given to check for results. On the basis of this some of the departures from the original study have been outlined below:

1. The original study used controls for type of context in which the word occurred. Each context in this study was rated on the amount of information it provided about a target word’s meaning so as to control for the effects of context. The present study did not isolate effects of context as the before and after design would neutralize context effects.

2. The original study makes use of nonsense words to replace frequently used words in an authentic text. It ensures that participants have no prior knowledge of the target words. This is beneficial because whatever gains are made can be attributed entirely to the treatment. The present study uses authentic words in authentic contexts. As the objective of the present study is to measure the difference in the vocabulary levels found in the
pre- and post test, the effects of prior exposure to the words are not relevant. Webb himself raises some doubts about the use of nonsense words:

The disadvantage of using nonsense words is that there will always be some question as to the ecological validity of the results. Since replaced forms are not authentic words, we cannot be certain if they behave in the same way as real words—(Webb 2007)

3. The original study had only a post test as nonsense words were being used to measure learning from context. The present study uses the same test to formulate a pre-and post tests.

4. On the advice of experts, the names of some of the tests were changed to make it more appropriate to what was being tested. However no change was made to the format and content of the tests.

7.4.2 Designing the tests

Both the tests were based on the 60 words that were chosen for the study. For the pre-test 15 out of the 60 words were chosen through systematic random sampling method. For the post test, the 15 words used in the pretest were taken out of the original list of 60 words. From the 45 remaining words, 15 were chosen through systematic random sampling for the post test. 10 tests were formulated on the basis of the chosen 15 words—5 were receptive vocabulary tests and 5 were productive vocabulary tests. The order of the tests was retained as Webb had designed it. Details of the tests and the sessions have been given in the appendix.
7.5 **Pilot testing the inputs for intervention**

The whole material for the intervention was pilot tested and relevant changes were made on the basis of the tests before the final package was administered on the sample under study.

The pre-test and post test, as well as four units were pilot tested among management students. The timing for the tests was noted. Slight changes were made to the test exercises on the basis of how they had answered, to restate any ambiguous instructions. The opinions of experts were also sought in connection with these. On the basis of these, some of the tests were renamed more appropriately according to the component that was being tested. All the units were piloted and certain changes were made in the comprehension questions on the basis of the answers received. The tasks were pruned appropriately to fit in with the allotted time when the students could not complete it. There was also a need to implement a few changes in the requirements of the task when the provided material proved to be inadequate.

The details of each session have been included in Appendix F.