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## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY, OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSION

An experiment in research gains validity from an existing problem that the researcher seeks to find a solution to. The present study began with one of the problems that adults in our country are confronted with in their social and vocational life, a solution to which can be of immense educational and social value, effecting national integration in its stride too. The research problem reads DEVELOPING LANGUAGE SKILLS IN ADULTS ATTENDING ENGLISH IMPROVEMENT COURSES. The study was undertaken with the following basic assumptions:

- (i) Indian adults who have been exposed to English (whatever may be the extent of exposure), desire to develop communication skills in English.
- (ii) Indian adults engaged in various vocations require a reasonable command of English in order to discharge their duties satisfactorily and to further their prospects.
- (iii) The existing facilities whereby adults may develop their English language skills are inadequate. Instructional material which suit Indian adults' need of communication in English are non-existent. The method of teaching employed by teachers of adult learners of

English are not adequately suited to their age level. Advancements in teaching technology haven't been explored and optimally utilized for the said purposes.

- (iv) A communication skills-course for adults should pursue an integrated approach. Adults by the very nature of their adulthood would be required to employ the various language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) at the same time. For this reason, a course for adults should focus on all the above skills simultaneously. This would involve suitable materials and appropriate techniques which will provide scope for developing their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in English.
- (v) Adults are busy people; they haven't much time to spare. So a course for them has to be of a short duration (as short as possible) ensuring maximum gain.

The above assumptions are not mere hunches; they include research findings and valid observations. With a view to developing English language skills in adults, the present study was undertaken. The broad objective of the study may be stated as development of instructional material and adaptation of appropriate techniques, which put together would make the final gains on the part of the adult learner statistically significant. Instructional materials have been prepared, techniques sequenced and experimentation carried out for the validation of the course. Results show that

the adults gained significantly in terms of their achievement on the tests which followed each of the three teaching units and the comprehensive test at the end. The study as reported in six chapters is being summarised below.

The first chapter opened with the general aims of education : the transformation of those being educated into well-integrated personalities capable of discharging their various duties responsibly and efficiently. Any hindrance in the process of education can not only hinder a person's advancement in life, but ultimately contribute to the disintegration of a society's and a nation's life. In the process that we call 'education', language plays a very significant role. As social life will be impossible without the help of a language, education also will not be possible without this much needed tool-language. In early life, a child can thrive with mastery over just its mother tongue, but adult life, with its many demands on individuals necessitate the mastery of more languages other than one's own language. In this context, it will have to be agreed upon generally that to an Indian adult, English is a very valuable tool for communication with the outside world. Two reasons may be pointed out: (1) English is spoken and understood by people of all countries; and (11) We in India have had the advantage of a good amount of exposure to English for the past one hundred and fifty years. English is not a totally new language to us in this country. At all stages our students receive instruction in English to certain extent.

But confidence and correctness in the use of English, appropriateness and fluency in communicating through English remain still a pipe-dream to many educated Indian adults. Their needs have to be assessed and they should be provided with need-based, result-oriented courses. With the advances in science and technology, with the world closing in around us, with emigration having become both true and necessary, such a course is overdue.

The second chapter presents an extensive picture of relevant literature which are related to the present investigation, both Indian and Western. To place the problem at hand in its right perspective and to point out the relevance of the present study such a review of research literature is necessary. The literature thus reviewed are placed under four titles, each subdivided into two sections, namely Indian and Western studies. The titles under which studies appear are:

- (i) Communication Skills in English for Adults (general)
- (ii) English Language Skills for Special Purposes
- (iii) The use of different Media for Language Development
- (iv) Auto-instructional Programmes in English.

A review of related literature further revealed the need for a study like the present one for lack of any sustained endeavour thus far in our country in this direction. In the West such literature abound which cater to adult needs in English. Specialised courses for immigrants is a very common feature in both the United States and the United Kingdom. General

courses and courses which focus on specific needs of people are plenteous in the West. In comparison there is very little help made available for adults in India who are desirous of improving their communication competence in English. What ever is available by way of research literature (or otherwise) focus on specific areas : English for Commerce, English for Law, English for Business etc. Such courses can only benefit certain small sections of educated adults. Competency in communication is besides their intent, in fact utilization of ESP courses, imply prior mastery of the language; vocabulary typical of an area of specialisation is their concern besides a stress on the writing skill. A review thus, strengthened the need and relevance for a study on the line of the present one.

The third chapter states the research problem, objectives and hypotheses. A definition of the terms in the title, the tools used in the collection of data and their relevance and the scope and limitations of the study are presented. The design of the experiment, the nature of the sample, statistical techniques used in the analysis of the data are also presented in the same chapter. Procedural details of the entire study in its four phases are also reported.

The fourth chapter that follows contains details regarding the preparation of software material for the course. Development of programmed learning material, support material, points for structured lectures, points for discussion, assign-

ments for practical work and criterion tests for the three units constitute the instructional package. The manner in which individual try-outs were carried out and field testing was conducted are also reported in the same chapter.

The fifth chapter reports the conduct of the experiment describing the nature of the sample, the manner in which tools were administered along with the results. Apart from evaluating the cognitive development of the adult learners, their reactions were also studied. Results prove that the developed course in terms of adults' achievement and their reactions was suitable to the adult-learners. Apart from studying the cognitive and affect aspects of the learners, some of the student characteristics were studied in relation to their achievement through the course. Intelligence measured by Raven's Progressive Matrices, socio-economic status level measured by Kuppuswamy's urban SES scale and prior academic qualification were treated as intervening variables. Results show that while intelligence did not act as an intervening variable in the learning process, the other two aspects (SES level and academic qualification) did affect achievement through the present course. Higher the socio-economic status level, greater was the gain; greater the extent of exposure to formal education, greater the gain. However all groups irrespective of their level of intelligence, socio-economic status and academic qualification gained significantly through the present course.

The sixth chapter contains a summary of the entire study as reported in the earlier chapters along with some general observations based on the findings of the study. A few suggestions for further research are also made. The chapter concludes urging the need for such systematised courses for adults which can render non-formal education both relevant and effective in our country.

#### 6.1 OBSERVATIONS

Psychologists and linguists have attempted to formulate general theories of language learning and language use. Some have argued that learning is entirely the product of experience and that our environment affects all of us in the same way; others have suggested that everybody has an innate language learning mechanism which determines learning identically for each of us. Although either view may have implications for English language teaching, it is only the environment that would lend itself to manipulation in teaching. And so manipulation of the learning environment has to be optimally exploited for language acquisition to be effective. The present study has taken into account the following six principles which are well recognized in linguistic circles in exploring and exploiting the learning environment to suit the purpose at hand-development of English language skills in adults. They are discussed in the following six paragraphs with reference to the present study which has greatly drawn from these principles trying to incorporate them in designing the course.



(i) Teaching of a language has to be considered as the imparting of skills than as the provision for information about the forms of a language. Traditionally foreign languages were considered as subjects for extended study rather than acquisition of linguistic skills. The methods employed in teaching followed the methods used in teaching the classical languages, Latin and Greek. Literary subject matter was preferred over competence in communication. Today, because of a general change in world conditions, the aim behind the study of a foreign language like English for instance is utility. Communicative facility is the motive behind majority of foreign language learning endeavours today. Realising this general utilitarian trend, the present course was designed in such a manner as to cater to adults' communicative competence.

(ii) Integration of skills

Even though a particular exercise may focus on a particular skill or ability, the approach to foreign language teaching should be an integrated one. This should be specifically so when the population receiving instruction is a group of adult learners. This argument is not totally novel, but a very logical approach in language skills development. The process we call communication or language usage in itself is an integrated phenomenon. Listening, speaking, reading and writing are so closely related that an exclusive imparting of one skill at a time is neither relevant nor possible.

Speech for instance involves listening and writing very often results in reading or is the result of it. In Widdowson's (1978) opinion, any approach directed at achieving competence should avoid treating the different skills and abilities that contribute to competence in isolation from each other. Conventional pedagogic practice has tended to move in the opposite direction. Language teaching courses commonly consist of units in which comprehension, grammar and composition appear as separate sections and language practice books tend to be based on the same distinctions. Such an approach should give way to integration.

In the present course, although three different units are distinctly given the titles, 'Conversational English', 'Reading' and 'writing', the skills have been imparted simultaneously: with adult learners listening, interacting, reading and writing through all the three units. Such an approach apart from being linguistically sound, has been reacted to favourably by the adults themselves.

### (iii) Functional Grammar

Generally what goes on in the name of English teaching, in our country at all levels is the teaching of formal grammar. But as Dixon (1960) states, "... formal grammar may have little utility for the foreign student. But functional grammar, laying stress on the elementary structures of the language is as essential as the study of vocabulary, pronunciation, reading or any other phase of language." Realising

the truth and strength behind this argument the present study tackled the grammar hitches of adult learners through the use of support material in the most untraditional manner. Tenses, prepositions, types of sentences, transformation of sentences, capitalisation, punctuations and articles are the grammar items which were considered to be presented through support materials.

#### (iv) Individual Differences

English Improvement Classes for which the course is mainly intended constitute a highly heterogenous group of adult learners as mentioned earlier in the third chapter. In terms of their age, academic qualifications, intelligence level, socio-economic status level, and occupation, they vary. To cater to the language needs of such a divergent group of learners and to provide for efficient learning, individual differences have to be taken cognizance of. The present study to a considerable extent has succeeded in making provision for individual differences by employing various techniques like PLM, tape recorder, lecture, discussion, practical work and support material, some of which are known for their efficacy in dealing with individual differences in the learning process. Remediation, and enrichment were possible through self-paced learning materials.

#### (v) Need-based, Result Oriented Short Courses

As mentioned many times earlier, the present course for adults was prepared after a thorough study of adult needs as

expressed by the learners themselves, their teachers and the investigator's own observations. Criterion tests after each of the three instructional units and a comprehensive test administered prior to, (pretest) and repeated at the close of the entire course (posttest) provide for both formative and summative evaluations which enable adult learners to see their own rate of progress both periodically and at the close of the course. Such a result-oriented approach is essential particularly when the learning group is a highly motivated voluntary group of adults. For reasons discussed earlier both in the first and third chapters, a course for adults, of necessity has to be short. Adults being busy, individuals should be ensured maximum gain during minimum duration. The course prepared as the result of the present investigation requires only eight weeks for its completion.

(vi) Active Methods of Teaching

Bolinger (1968) points out seven conditions for learning a second language. His suggestions stress the need for small groups for conversation practice, constant exposure to the target language, trained and skilled teachers, drilling as essential as in athletics, the use of a language lab, a homogenous group and the language material presented within as nearly authentic a cultural setting as can be managed. Underlying many of his suggestions is the idea of the learner's active involvement in the learning process. If we accept the principle that the approach to language teaching

should be primarily oral, active involvement of the learner is a necessary aspect of the instructional process and an efficient one at that. PLM, discussion and practical work make learner-involvement in the learning process maximal.

The present course, thus designed, developed and modified through individual and group trials, has been validated through an experiment, the results of which statistically establish the significant gains the adults have been able to achieve through the experimental treatment. Since feasibility and efficiency of a programme depends greatly on the attitude of the learners towards a certain instructional programme, the investigation attempted a study of the learners' reactions towards the course in general and each instructional technique in particular. As presented in tables 5.4 to 5.9, the entire course in general and each of the instructional techniques employed in the instructional process have been favourably reacted to by the majority of the group.

Thus it may be seen from the unit test results and the results obtained on the comprehensive test that learning environment manipulated from various angles which are expected to influence learning outcome, can yield considerably significant results. However it can be observed that mastery level, which is the ultimate goal of systematised courses has not been achieved due to some unidentified variables. A larger sample and a comparative study (consisting of an

experimental and a controlled group) can arrive at results which would have greater generalisability.

## 6.2 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Based on the findings of the study and the general observations made during experimentation, the following suggestions may be considered for further research:

- (1) The sample for the study being small, for more conclusive findings and greater generalisability, the course should be tried out on a larger sample.
- (2) A comparative study consisting of two groups (control and experimental) should be undertaken and achievements compared as measured by a posttest, to study the effectiveness and feasibility of the present course as compared with traditional instructional techniques. Such a comparative study could yield such results as would establish the efficiency of one teaching method over another.
- (3) Variables like motivation, age and language aptitude of the learners should be studied and learning gains compared between groups belonging to different levels based on the above mentioned factors. Such studies could provide scope for arriving at conceptual frame works which would help in designing more need-based courses in English or in any useful foreign language.

- (4) Research in the area of employing different visual and auditory media like radio and TV for learners of foreign languages can be of immense practical value.
- (5) Graded courses that can take adults with no schooling or very little schooling from the elementary level to competence in the use of different language skills can be useful in the non-formal system of education.
- (6) Remedial programmed courses should be prepared with the prescribed syllabus in focus at every level, based on items which necessitate remedial treatment and made available to slow learners. Cheap publications of such programmes can benefit the economically weaker sections of society.
- (7) Programmed courses which take the advanced learners' particular needs into consideration should also be prepared and cheap publications made available for wide use. Such courses should be able to take the advanced learner to creative writing from just writing for utilitarian purposes and from ordinary conversational level to the level of public speaking.
- (8) Language aptitude tests should be constructed and standardized for different age and academic levels.
- (9) Tests should be constructed and standardized to measure speech skills and oral reading skills, for different age and academic levels.

- (10) Apart from educational, linguistic and psycho-linguistic researches, socio-cultural and socio-linguistic studies also should be undertaken. Since the socio-cultural component is essential to language-learning, a theoretical frame-work is necessary to identify and select appropriate cultural data relevant to the learning and use of any language.

### 6.3 CONCLUSION

There are no simple answers to language teaching inspite of decades of innovation and research; the continuous questioning of our efforts and the persistent dissatisfaction among learners are still with us. Fanaticism about methodology should give way to enquiry. Empirical studies of language acquisition should be undertaken in order to do justice to the complexities of the language problem. We need to determine what aspects of language are to be taught, their relative importance, when and how they can be taught most effectively and how to adequately test them. Attention needs to be focussed particularly on the learner with an eye to adapting teaching to his specific needs. Language learners differ in their objectives and specialized needs. Therefore the range, objectives and techniques of language will vary in accordance with specific requirements. With these observations in focus the present study began with two research queries for which it sought answers. They relate to the content and methodology



aspects of an English course which should enable adult learners to develop their communicative facility in English.

The findings of the study highlight the fact that a course designed following assessment of adult needs through a preliminary investigation can yield satisfying results. A comparison between the pre and post test scores of the experimental group shows that the gain in achievement was significant (see table 4.1).

A scheme which is no more than the contents of an English text-book deserves to fail and such schemes are all too common. Something more stimulating, more flattering to self-esteem and more clearly related to the needs of everyday life is what would sustain adult interest.

Besides, considering individual differences, variety in content as well as learning experiences should be ensured. Poetry, prose, biography, drama, science fiction, and books of travel and discovery should all be incorporated into the content. Learning experiences may be in the form of listening to lectures, pre-recorded dialogues, recitations, model readings etc., or in the form of discussions, debates, seminars, practical work and library work. Such a variety of techniques used in the instructional process besides providing for varied tastes, sustains interest on the part of the adult learners and avoids monotony. By alternating techniques, it is also possible to do justice to the integrated approach to teaching different language skills. There should be a proper balance

between ear-training (listening) and production of speech (speaking). There must be opportunities to ask for information, to state opinions, to describe experiences, to argue, to disagree, to persuade and to persist. Reading and writing should be made integral through all learning activities. As shown in tables 5.4 to 5.9, the group that underwent the experiment favoured such an integrated approach to skills development.

Systematisation of instruction, then, calls for attention to atleast three specific areas; need-assessment, content determination and selection of teaching techniques. To improve the quality of instruction, systematisation can achieve much more than focus in a single direction (on either content or technique). If systematisation can vouch for better learning prospects, and if better learning is the goal of research in education, there should be more research endeavours in every field of education, which can ensure maximum learning outcome. Such systematised courses can render non-formal education relevant and effective.

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