CHAPTER 3

A SURVEY OF THE ATTITUDES AND PRACTICE OF TEACHERS AND STUDENTS IN A LECTURE BASED LEARNING SITUATION

3.0 Introduction

The present chapter is mainly a report of Survey 1 that was conducted as part of the research problem. It is not, however, a pilot study. The Survey attempts to investigate students' behavioural habits in the existing learning/teaching situation, precisely their study habits as observable in the classroom situation and from their responses regarding their problems in understanding lecture information and processing information for learning. The chapter does not attempt to test any hypothesis. The first section of the chapter presents an assessment of the existing situation. It deals with -

(a) the research design;
(b) the objectives of the survey;
(c) the sample; and
(d) the instruments used.

The second section of chapter 3 presents interpretations of the findings of the survey.
3.1 The overall plan of the survey

The main objective of the survey was to examine the instructional situation at the college level in final year B.A. subject classes in English medium. The specific dimensions covered were:

(a) the styles of presentation of lectures and if these varied with subjects,

(b) the activities students involved in like answering questions, participating in discussions etc.,

(c) students' note-taking and use of other strategies,

(d) problems students have in comprehending lectures or learning in a classroom situation.

Through the above mentioned variables, the study attempts to examine -

(a) the kind and degree of learning that took place and how much of it in different subject classes, and

(b) the contribution of the lectures to students' learning.
The survey utilized classroom observations, questionnaires, comprehension tests, evaluation of students' notes and examination of question papers to collect data. The study was conducted in a natural classroom setting. It was 'natural' in that, there was no change in the nature of instruction, activities of students (they took notes as they normally do) and in the overall classroom organisation. Also occasional tests formed an integral part of their classroom setting. Notes were collected at the end of the class to ensure that the teaching learning process was not disturbed. It was assumed that studies related to lecture comprehension and the use of learning strategies must be representative of the real situation if they are to be valid.

The survey in the present study did try to preserve the natural atmosphere or setting that prevails in most undergraduate classes in colleges. In this context reference could be made to the authenticity of the spoken discourse or materials that are presented through lectures. Most of the classes taken up for the study were subject classes, where topics and those included in their syllabus were taken up.

The survey was conducted in three women's colleges of Andhra Pradesh, which are considered to be of comparable standard, over a period of three months. The target population
consisted of undergraduate arts final year students from English medium classes. Three subject classes, English Literature, History and Economics were taken up for the study.

3.2 The instruments used

In order to collect the information needed to study the questions raised in the study, the following instruments were used:

(i) A schedule for classroom observation,
(ii) Questionnaires for the teacher and student,
(iii) A scheme for the analysis of students' notes and their use of notes in all the three subjects.

3.2.1 Schedule for classroom observation

A schedule for classroom observation was designed to record the following:

(1) The process (i.e., observable activities and reactions) of the teacher and the student occurring in a lecture situation. This would include -

(a) student participation or interaction in class;
(b) note-taking activities of the students;
(c) attentiveness or alertness of students in class.
(2) Lecture presentations and differences and similarities in presentations depending on the subjects, i.e., the (structure) styles of lecturing.

(3) Evaluation of students' performance in class.

The observation proforma consisted of four main sections (see Appendix 1). They were:

(1) features observed in the teacher,
(2) features observed in the students,
(3) features observed relating to topic or subject matter,
(4) features observed relating to major activities (use or practice, feedback) in the classroom.

Features to be observed in the teacher included -

(i) presentation and structure of the lectures;
(ii) style of presentation and fluency of language;
(iii) presentation of lecture in terms of content, organisation and purpose;
(iv) evaluation of students' work in class in relation to the nature, accuracy, level, scope, amount and relevance of the topic;
(v) teachers classroom management; and
(vi) initiation of student participation and discussion.

Under Section 2, features to be observed in the students were (a) attentiveness in class; (b) note-taking activity; (c) participation etc.
3.2.2 *Questionnaire for the student*

This questionnaire was intended to find out:

1. students' reactions to the present instructional setting, i.e., their opinions about the lectures and the presentation;

The main purpose was to find out their attitudes and perceptions, what they believe in, the way they express the facts;

2. their problems in understanding lectures;

3. their use of lectures, range and frequency of use;

4. background information related to the amount of exposure to English, percentage of attendance at lectures, etc.;

5. students' attitude towards and interests in their subjects and the problems related to their understanding of the subjects;

6. students' attitude towards immediate comprehension of lectures and taking notes in class;

7. need for the development of comprehension and students' opinions on their proficiency in these skills;
their views on the use of their notes, i.e., to what extent did they make use of their notes or benefit from their notes.

The four main aspects studied were the following:

(1) Background information.
(2) Classroom activities.
(3) Classroom lectures.
(4) Understanding of lectures. (See Appendix 2A)

3.2.3 Questionnaire for the teacher

This questionnaire was designed to find out

(1) the attitudes of the teachers towards the development of the strategies used for comprehension in the students;

(2) their opinions on the proficiency of the students in the use of these strategies;

(3) their opinions on the problems that students had in comprehending lectures and taking notes;

(4) their reactions to students' interests in lectures and in the subjects; and

(5) their perceptions on the kinds of strategies or techniques used by the students to learn from the lectures, i.e., 'What according to them were some of the study habits of the students?'
Two broad types of information were sought from teachers. Firstly, their views and reactions on the development of learning strategies and what in their opinions were the problems of the students in lecture classes, e.g., in comprehending information presented through lectures. Secondly, their understanding of course objectives in their field and the subject-specific skills (see Appendix 3).

3.2.4 Examination question papers

A scheme for the analysis of question papers was designed -

1. to study the standards that question papers aimed at the students in each subject;

2. to study the extent to which the questions required the students to actually grasp the main concepts and thereby structure of their subjects;

3. to find out the relationship between the examination questions and the lecturer's treatment of the subject in his/her lectures.

3.3 The sample covered

The instruments described in section 3.2 deal with a number of different types of variables related to different
informants and sources. The nature and size of the actual samples covered while using these instruments is presented below:

3.3.1 Classroom observation

Undergraduate final year classes (English medium) were observed in three colleges with the help of an observation proforma. The subjects covered were English Literature, History and Economics. In all 27 classes were observed, 9 in each subject.

3.3.2 Questionnaire for the student

The questionnaire was administered to the students of final year B.A. classes in all the three colleges. There were 96 students, 36 from Literature group, 24 from History, and 36 from Economics who answered the questionnaire.

3.3.3 Questionnaire for the teacher

The teachers of the three selected subjects, English Literature, History and Economics were each given two questionnaires. There were 18 teachers, six in each subject, who answered the questions.
3.3.4 Examination of question papers

In all 15 question papers were examined. 5 question papers for the years 1982-1986 for each of the subjects, Literature, History and Economics were examined using the scheme developed for this purpose.

3.4 Observations and findings

The information obtained through the various instruments from the samples indicated in Section 3.3 is presented here. Some comments and observations are added but the discussion and interpretation of these findings is reported in Sections 3.4-3.8.

3.4.1 Classroom observation

The main purpose of carrying classroom observation in the three subjects was to see if there were any similarities and differences between them in their style of presentation. The findings related to each of these subjects are given below.

3.4.1.1 Literature

About 9 Literature classes were observed in relation to the following aspects.
Presentation

(1) All the lectures were in the form of exposition of the text, i.e., line by line, except in the case of lectures on the History of English Literature. Students followed the text while paraphrasing went on.

(2) Seven out of the nine lectures began with an introduction on the poets or the authors, and review of all that was done at the end of a lecture.

(3) All the lecturers were to a great extent clear in their presentation and their lectures were delivered at a moderate speed. They were prepared with the focus on the content and not in relation to the needs of the students.

(4) Only 2 or 3 lecturers put any questions to the class. Most of the time explaining was done.

Student activity

(1) About 10% of the students took down notes voluntarily. Most of them simply listened to the lectures from the beginning to the end.

(2) All of them took down notes that were dictated to them. The few who took points on their own noted them down in their texts.
(3) There was no scope for any participation on the part of the students.

Time allotted

Except for about five minutes in the beginning, the rest of the 45 minutes were spent in explaining the content. This applied to all the classes irrespective of the topics, like plays, poems, selections of prose etc.

3.4.1.2 Economics

About 9 lectures in Economics were observed to find out the techniques of presentation adopted by the lecturer and student activities in response to the lectures.

Presentation

1. Lectures in Economics did not follow any text in the class. They were talks on different topics chosen for the day. The lecturers did not refer to any notes when lecturing. The lecture materials were well organised.

2. In 7 out of 9 lectures, a short while was spent on recapitulating what was done in the earlier classes.

3. Most of the lecturers made use of the blackboard to explain the concepts.
Student activity

1. About 10% of the students took down notes regularly, though most of the points put on the blackboard were noted down.

2. There was absolutely no interaction² between the teachers and the students.

Time allotted

Lectures usually lasted almost 40 minutes of the class time with 10 minutes set apart for reviewing the previous topic.

3.4.1.3 History

A total of 9 classes in History were observed to get information about the presentation technique and student activity.

Presentation

The form of presentation was the same as in Economics classes but less well organised. Most of them were long, monotonous talks. Teachers prepared their lectures only with regard to subject-specific content — factual information, rather than on the presentation of the structure of the subject matter in such a way that would direct
students' attention to it. This would involve focus on certain aspects of the topic being presented and understanding facts in relation to those aspects.

**Student activity**

10% of the students took down notes on their own.

**Time allotted**

Time allotted for the class was about 40-45 minutes.

3.4.1.4 The main findings: Classroom observation

Some of the major findings from classroom observations were the following:

(1a) The general mode of presentation was lecturing in all subjects with minor variations in the presentation style, which ought to be related to the basic nature of a discipline. Within the broad lecture framework, presentation of topics in different subjects varied to some extent. In History the style was more narrative in parts. In Economics some of the concepts were clearly presented on the board. In Literature, there was more of explaining references.

(b) Lectures were clear in their presentation in terms of language. If students had problems in understanding and taking notes, it was not because of the language
but the nature of the topic itself.

(2) Lectures were not prepared in relation to the needs of the students, and the utilisation of available resources i.e., requiring them to understand or grasp the nature of the subject through particular topics. This would call for students to comprehend important concepts, terms, grasp the relationship between different components, facts etc. They were prepared only in relation to the content of the subject i.e., for an effective exposition of the topic. The manner of presentation ought to have been different. Teachers were obviously not conscious of making students aware of the demands of different subjects.

(3) From the observations made, it did not seem that students made adequate use of the lectures. This could be linked to the following reasons:

(a) In a 45 minutes lecture class, all the information presented would be impossible to remember unless students engage themselves in some activities like taking down notes, answering questions orally or through written tests, assignments etc. 90% of the students do not take down notes voluntarily and are not checked on their comprehension by any other means.
(b) Students generally depend a lot on textbooks and guidebooks in preparing for the examinations. From observation it was evident that some students showed an indifferent attitude towards information presented in class. It is possible that they totally depend on guidebooks and other references for information. In such a situation it was doubtful as to how much of the information presented through lectures was being used for learning in the absence of systematic testing.

(4) About 10% of the students took down proper notes on their own, the rest did when asked to. Very rarely were they asked to prepare their own notes as in several classes they were dictated notes prepared by the teachers. Those who took notes probably thought that noting helped them in their comprehension.

(5) It was observed that students had problems making use of information presented through lectures. They were passive listeners in most cases, though this does not necessarily imply that they cannot make use of information at a later stage. Being passive listeners they failed to show evidence of any kind of involvement in the learning process. In a lecture situation, it is likely that it would not be possible to retain all the information presented. Therefore some kind of activity
in the form of noting points would probably give some clue of their ability to make appropriate use of information. Being able to adequately make use of information by retaining the same through passive listening is possible only with a handful of bright students in the given situation. It is also possible that they are not aware of the use of the strategies for making adequate use of the information later.

3.5 Questionnaire for the student

The analysis of the questionnaire was done in relation to -

1. Lectures;
2. Subjects;
3. Problems in comprehension;
4. Students' notes; and
5. Background information.

3.5.1 Lectures: findings

Features of lectures studied were in relation to:

(a) use of lectures,
(b) students' opinions and attitudes towards lectures and presentations, and
(c) problems in understanding lectures.
1. The findings were common in all three subjects. There were no significant differences found in their responses between discipline groups. Students obviously did not realize any differences related to presentation of lectures and problems in comprehension and noting abilities. Out of the 96 students who answered the questionnaire (all three subjects), about 94 of them, except 2 from regional medium background, thought that lectures were useful to them and helped them understand the subject matter better and prepare them for their examinations. They thought that lectures contained more information than in books.

2. They enjoyed and were interested in listening to live lectures rather than taped material or radio broadcasts.

3. About 45% of the students who answered the questionnaire had complaints against the speed of presentations and the subject specific expressions used. They also found some of the topics un-interesting. It is obvious they are not familiar with some specific expressions.

4. 80% of them preferred lectures followed by questions, assignments, discussions or some kind of post-lecture activities.

5. According to them the differences seen in their comprehension abilities during lectures were mainly due to the presentation and interest in the subject matter.
3.5.2 The subjects

1. Students found subject lectures difficult to understand mainly because of difficult topics and uninteresting and unsystematic presentations. Literature students did not have problems with the language, but more with the presentations.

2. 80% of the students found taking notes difficult for two reasons -

(a) unsystematic presentations, and
(b) nature of the topic or subject.

3. About 85% of them felt that practice in the use of the skills of taking notes and reviewing would help them grasp main and sub-points easily and in preparing for the exams. They agreed that they were not aware of the use of appropriate learning strategies.

3.5.3 Problems in comprehension

1. According to the students - 61 of them understood lecture information between 61%-80%, 16 of them understood lectures more than 80%. However, whether they could make use of the information for later use is doubtful. Understanding remains incomplete without appropriate use of it.
2. About 20% of them who tried preparing for lectures at home thought that the activity helped them in understanding information better in class.

3. 70% of the students expressed enthusiasm regarding getting feedback on their comprehension by engaging themselves in some classroom activities like being able to use their notes, take part in discussions, answer questions etc. From this it can be said that they are keen on some sort of interaction and participation in the learning process.

3.5.4 Students' notes

1. According to those students who take notes, they do so mainly because lectures provided more information than was found in books. Some thought that taking notes helped them in comprehending lectures better. There were a few who felt that by taking notes they had more materials for their exams and thus helped them score more.

2. 70% of the students agreed that taking notes helped them to be attentive but sometimes interfered with their immediate understanding. This could be one of the reasons why they did not take down regular notes.

3. It was found that students were interested in taking down notes than getting dictated, readymade notes.
4. 80% of them preferred taking down important, main points rather than detailed notes. This probably shows that they encode the information alright, but are not able to use the information later. Noting acted as an encoding strategy.

5. 80% of the students took down better notes when lectures were well organised.

6. According to them their notes changed with the nature of the topics and lecture presentations.

7. They had problems taking notes due to bad presentations and difficult topic or subject matter.

3.5.5 **Background information**

1. 70% of the students had adequate exposure listening to English in their school and college classes except those from regional medium backgrounds. It is evident from this that students should have no problems with the language but with subject specific concepts, principles presented in lectures.

2. 50% to 60% of them spoke and read English frequently.

3. 70% of the students were regular in attending lectures.
3.5.6 The main findings

The findings from students' questionnaire is mainly opinion based. The questionnaire revealed the following points:

1. According to 90% of the students lectures had something to contribute and they benefitted to some extent from the lectures. They said they relied on them but did not make as much use of the information as they ought to have due to various reasons. Regional medium students however thought that lectures did not help them much. One obvious reason is that they do not know how to make use of the information from lectures and therefore need training in making adequate use of the information.

2. Students agreed that they had problems understanding lectures and taking appropriate and systematic notes mainly because of three factors. They were —

(a) poor organization of lecture presentations,
(b) difficult topics, i.e., the nature of the subjects or topics, and
(c) low interest in the topics.

From the findings it can be interpreted that students have to be made aware of the structure (nature) of a subject, which will make the topics considerably easier to understand.
Though the study does not focus on instructional variables like presentation of topics, teachers will have to bring in the awareness of understanding the basic structure of a topic in their students as part of the training programme.

3. 80% of the students thought that practice in the development of study strategies was needed as that would help them understand lectures better.

4. About 20% of the students who took notes fairly regularly felt that having notes while listening and reviewing notes later, helped them in preparing for their examinations (see Appendix 2B).

3.6 Questionnaire for the teacher

The questionnaire for the teachers was analysed keeping in mind the following points. They were mainly related to:

(a) lectures, their contribution to students learning,
(b) student activities in the classroom,
(c) the extent to which presentation style in different subjects influence students' comprehension of information and taking notes from them,
(d) students problems in understanding lectures.
3.6.1 Findings

1. Out of the 18 teachers who answered the questionnaire, 16 of them felt that lectures were meant to contribute or help students a great deal in their course of study.

2. According to some, say about 8 teachers, students' poor performance in examinations was due to lack of proper understanding of the subject matter and according to some others, it was students' unwillingness to be attentive in class and depend on lectures. Students' unwillingness to be attentive can be due to -

(a) uninteresting presentation of topics;

(b) the negative effect of traditional examination questions. (They virtually require students to depend on information available in the 'guide' books. Those who solely depend on lectures, perform poorly.)

3. Students were occasionally asked to take down notes. They were not encouraged to participate in any other activities.

4. 17 out of the 18 teachers thought that some of the factors which made students' understanding of lectures difficult were -
(a) the presentations,
(b) teachers indifference,
(c) lack of concentration on the part of the students.

5. 16 of them seemed to think that students' notes differed in relation to the format of their notes. Content-wise they differed a little if they knew that they would not be given readymade notes. Therefore notes taken down seem to be more individualistic in relation to the format or layout which probably would be more meaningful to the student when used later. The teachers agreed that if readymade notes were given out, students paid no attention to what was said in lectures and therefore during those hours lectures were a waste.

6. All of them thought that conventional lecturing was the only way by which information could be conveyed to the students irrespective of the different subjects.

7. All the teachers totally agreed with the fact that students ought to be given training in the use of the study strategies.

8. 16 to 17 teachers felt that practice given to them in English classes would help students acquire subject information better by -

(a) improving alertness,
(b) helping differentiate between important and unimportant points,

(c) developing speed in taking notes, and

(d) improving expression.

3.6.2 The main findings - teacher response

1. About 15 of the teachers assumed that students were fairly proficient in understanding lectures. However this was not checked or evaluated immediately. When tested later, students probably performed fairly by reading up other materials. Therefore, how much of lecture information they really comprehended and used is not known. They felt that lectures contributed to students' learning.

2. They agreed that students had problems in taking down appropriate and relevant notes and use of other learning strategies and therefore need adequate training in the use of these skills. They felt the need to make students more self-reliant by giving them the scope for comprehending information and making sense of their own notes. They thought that lectures were a waste when students were given readymade notes. In such a situation students did not bother to listen to lectures.
3. According to them lectures were meant to help students acquire information better and were considered very important for the students. But some of the teachers felt that students did not depend on the lectures as they used dictated notes, texts and guidebooks in preparing for the exams. Even if the students did not make use of the lectures, this was not assessed.

3.7 Examination question papers

About 15 examination question papers in all the three subjects were examined.

1. The traditional essay type question which encourages reproduction from memory is still predominant in the system.

2. Many questions are vaguely worded and seem to call mainly for descriptions with a lot of detail put in as padding. However, there are a fair number of more clearly worded questions that demand structured answers — selection of relevant content and treatment with a given focus.

3. The teaching in the lecture classes which serve mainly to transfer factual information, does little to help students tackle the latter type of question. This is probably one of the reasons for learners' reliance on guidebooks which give answers to 'expected' questions.
3.8 General interpretations of the findings

1. Lectures in general were thought to be useful by the students, in the sense of preparing them for the examinations. Of the 96 students who answered the questionnaire, about 90% of them believe that lectures contribute to their learning. 70% of the total sample rely on them but do not make adequate use of the information due to various reasons. All teachers state that lectures are meant to help students organize information better and are considered very important for the students.

2. It was found that lecturing was the main mode of presentation, that is, the classes were devoid of interaction and student participation. There was very little variation in the presentation style. Since the subjects selected for study were different from each other in their nature, content, mode of inquiry etc., each of them demands different kind of treatment and presentation.

3. Lectures are prepared only in relation to the presentation of the content of a subject, i.e., presentation of facts and not in terms of the needs of the students and the utilization of available resources.

4. Students' questionnaire revealed that they were keen on some sort of interaction and activity after the lecture
presentation. This indicates that they were sufficiently motivated to participate in the learning process.

5. According to students, they did not have much problems in comprehending lectures but had problems taking down notes adequately. Of the 18 teachers who answered the questions, about 60% of them assume that students generally are proficient in understanding lectures. This however is not based on any systematic evaluation. They agree that students have problems in taking down relevant and adequate notes and therefore would need proper guidance in the use of this strategy. But comprehension without being able to use the information later remains incomplete. Students are unable to appropriately use the information later for lack of knowledge or skill of the use of the learning strategies.

6. From students' questionnaire it was evident that they have problems in understanding certain subject specific concepts and taking down relevant notes from lectures. In this context it is important that they are made interested in the topics presented by focussing on the nature of the discipline which makes certain specific demands for effective comprehension. Besides examination questions also require students have a broader understanding of the subject.
7. Both teachers and students thought that the strategy of noting while listening is important and felt they need to improve the skill through proper training. From observation it was seen that few took notes on their own. Of the 96 students 80% thought that instructions in the development of learning strategies is necessary (Appendix 2B).

8. Students preferred taking down important points instead of detailed notes. This gives evidence of their ability to encode information to some extent.


3.9 Conclusion

This particular section of the chapter attempts to present the findings from the first phase of the survey, i.e. Survey-1. The main findings are from classroom observation, student questionnaire, teacher questionnaire and examination question papers. The evidence from the data specifically relate to attitudes of students and teachers and practices of the existing teaching/learning situation. This phase of the survey shows no evidence of comprehension on the part of the students. It also reveals absence of any
systematic note-taking behaviour in students. An additional problem hypothesized from the survey data is that students have no grasp of subject structure which probably could help in concept formation.
NOTES

1. As the strategy of note-taking is the only major activity that takes place in lecture classes, the survey particularly focused on this activity.

2. 'Interaction' in the lecture context refers to student participation through answering questions, clarifying doubts etc. There is hardly any student participation in the existing lecture set-up.

3. Within the lecturing framework, presentation of topics in different subjects vary to some extent. In History the style is more narrative, where the lecturer narrates facts and events one after another. In Economics, the concepts are clearly presented on the board and therefore there is a different structure to it.

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