3 Framework for curriculum theorising

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, it was mentioned that the study adopts an eclectic approach for theorising ESL curriculum (Section 2.12.1). In this chapter, I shall present the framework for curriculum theorising by explaining key concepts like ethnography, critical ethnography and critical social inquiry as exemplified in the naturalistic paradigm. The framework provides an eclectic combination of research methods by taking into consideration the context of research and main purpose of the research. It may be reiterated that the focus would be on curriculum theorising i.e., to understand and describe the curricular experiences and to generate critical curricular knowledge. The main thrust of this chapter is to establish the suitability of these methods for theorising ESL curriculum.

To begin with, I shall delineate the view of curriculum research adopted in the present study. This will be followed by a discussion of naturalistic paradigm, with particular emphasis on concepts that guide the empirical part of the study like fieldwork, data collection and analysis. The suitability of these research methods in the context of curriculum theorising will also be presented in this chapter. The description of salient
features of research is preceded by a thematic review of related research. It is intended that an overview of related research will help in initiating and preparing the reader to the use of ethnography in educational research, particularly in the context of ESL studies.

3.2 Curriculum research as interpreted in the study

The curriculum is institutionally and socially contained and historically confined. Any research called curriculum research must in some way acknowledge this. Few studies do. Few researchers possess the range of skills necessary to straddle such disparate territories as history, philosophy, sociology and psychology to name but a few relevant disciplines. It is the polymath not the expert that is needed, or may be it is the team approach that is needed...

(Taylor 1979:48)

Taking into consideration some of the points mentioned by Taylor, in the present study, curriculum research is interpreted as longitudinal inquiry aimed at understanding and reconstructing the curricular experiences. Empirically, the study is situated in the naturalistic paradigm, using qualitative methods like ethnography, critical ethnography and critical social inquiry. The methodology comprises the use of qualitative
research tools like participant observation, unstructured questionnaire and formal and informal interviews.

In the above interpretation, the term inquiry is defined as systematic action engaged in by researchers in the process of generating knowledge. This systematic activity extends to all phases of research such as

- Perceiving a phenomenon (here, phenomenon could be physical or social event/episode that takes place and can be explained/understood when placed in appropriate context)
- Framing the research problem
- Making decisions about research methods
- Collection and analysis of data
- Communication of interpretation/findings.

Before delving into a detailed description of naturalistic paradigm and the constituent methods, it may be useful to recapitulate the objective of the study. In the context of the study the objective of curriculum research is to understand and describe the curricular phenomena. This involves a thick description and analysis of various themes that emerge from the data and a critical reconstruction of the curricular site by studying the micro and macro level issues.
Having stated the objectives, I shall now discuss how concepts from naturalistic paradigm are adopted in the study.

3.3 An overview of the naturalistic paradigm

This paradigm is discussed by highlighting the philosophical assumptions, research methods and the types of tools for curriculum theorising.

It is generally noted that an orientation to research reflects the conception of reality and the corresponding modes of representing and reconstructing the notion of reality one espouses. Being situated in the naturalistic paradigm (Lincoln and Guba: 1985) it may be said that the study seeks an alternative to the traditional scientific or the positivist model of inquiry which views reality as single, tangible, observable and explicable. According to the naturalistic approach, there could be multiple realities that can be studied holistically. Hence, such an inquiry generally does not aim at predicting and controlling the variables because it strives to achieve some level of understanding by raising questions.
The philosophical assumptions that underpin this paradigm and methodological tools that operationalise its research methods are derived from the following factors:

- Ontological - these are issues pertaining to the nature of reality and existence
- Epistemological - these are issues related to theory of knowledge that explore the relationship between researcher and researched
- Axiological - these issues emanate from the theory of values
- Methodological - these issues related to the process of operationalising the research.

Naturalistic research lays stress on the subjective realities experienced by individuals, groups and societies. Often described as "numberless," naturalistic approaches stress exploratory and descriptive processes that examine the nature of human discourse, understanding, assumptions, and experiences. "Truth" is a relative term, formed and defined by innumerable social processes and interactions.

Naturalistic methods seek to examine these subjective experiences and the processes by which they operate. This genre of research often
involves field observation, intensive case studies, narrative analysis, and methods of constant comparison. It signifies an inductive approach to theory and knowledge building (grounded theory). Naturalistic methods use descriptions and categories. Some examples could be cited such as: open-ended interviews, participant observation, document analysis, case studies/life histories, descriptive and self-reflective supplements to experiments and other kinds of studies. Generally, the sequence of research could be described as follows:

1. Observe events/ask questions with open-ended answers
2. Record/log what is said and/or done
3. Interpret (personal reactions, write emergent speculations or hypotheses, monitor methods)
4. Return to observe, or ask more questions of people
5. Formal theorising [emerges out of speculations and hypotheses]
6. Draw conclusions

It may also be noted that the three kinds of data collection tools commonly used in naturalistic methods are interviews, observation, and study of documents. These tools produce three kinds of data: quotations, descriptions, excerpts of documents resulting in one product i.e., narrative
description of the phenomena. The Naturalistic methods are very
dependent on researcher as a person as he or she is the sole instrument
in carrying out the research.

At this juncture, it would be useful to get a quick overview of key
differences between qualitative or naturalistic approaches and quantitative
or positivist approaches. Positivist approaches that stress the existence of
objective, knowable phenomenon generally seek to describe, explain and
predict. The primary goal is to discover rules of causation. These
approaches utilize numbers as representations or classifications of reality
that are statistically manipulated to determine causes and effects,
associations between variables, and to rule out alternative explanations of
cause and effect.

Positivist approaches are considered to be *nomothetic*, based on
universal laws. This is contrasted with the *ideographic* nature of
naturalistic research, which is interpretive, and provides symbolic
representations of another's reality.

Now, I shall pick up the thread of discussion from the preceding
paragraphs where the features of naturalistic paradigm were described
and attempt at summarising the differences between positivistic and naturalistic paradigm as follows:

- Conception of reality could be fragmented into independent variables and explanation could be sought as a legitimate goal.
- The nature of reality (i.e., ontology) and the relationship between the knower and the known (i.e., epistemology) acquire a different interpretation.

Lincoln and Guba (ibid) bring out the differences between the positivist and naturalistic paradigm by highlighting some of the points of contrast. These points are illustrated in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Axioms about</th>
<th>Positivist paradigm</th>
<th>Naturalist paradigm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The nature of reality</td>
<td>Reality is single, tangible, and fragmentable</td>
<td>Realities are multiple, constructed and holistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The relationship of knower to the known</td>
<td>Knower and known are independent, a dualism</td>
<td>Knower and known are interactive, inseparable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The possibility of generalization</td>
<td>Time and context-free generalizations (nomothetic statements are possible)</td>
<td>Only time and context-bound working hypothesis (idiographic statements) are possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The possibility of casual linkages</td>
<td>There are real causes, temporally precedents to or simultaneous with their effects</td>
<td>All entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The role of values</td>
<td>Inquiry is value-free</td>
<td>Inquiry is value-bound</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Lincoln and Guba 1985)

From the table given above, the study adopts the following philosophical tenets of naturalistic paradigm:

1. Realities are multiple, constructed and holistic
2. Knower and the known are interactive and inseparable
3. Any effort at understanding the reality is context bound.

The assumptions listed above have crucial implications for the researcher operating in the naturalistic paradigm. The epistemological assumption that the knower and the known are inseparable implies that the researcher becomes the main ‘instrument’, interacting with the other respondents. This re-emphasises the need for a human instrument as a necessary pre-requisite to grasp the multiple nuances of reality and acquire tacit knowledge by interpreting the value patterns.
3.3.1 Implications for operationalising the research

Now I shall discuss the implications of naturalistic principles for the present study by focusing on operational issues.

When applied to the notion of research as exemplified in the present study (Section 3.2) this approach necessitates a context-sensitive and a holistic perspective to curriculum inquiry. Such an approach perceives curriculum as having scope for multiple interpretations and context-bound working generalizations (Section 3.3). In order to accommodate multiple realities as manifested by multiple curricular themes, a flexible and evolving research design is required. This will facilitate the capturing of a broad spectrum of issues by being sensitive to the cultural and sociohistorical context of the curriculum. This is achieved by relaxing the rigidities imposed by scientific tools and instruments in favour of more field sensitive approaches that bring out the richness and diversity of curricular experiences.

From the discussion in the preceding sub-sections, it can be gathered that the methods adopted for the naturalistic inquiry need to be adaptable, open-ended and flexible so as to accommodate multiple views thereby becoming more sensitive to the value system. This also
necessitates an emergent design and an idiographic interpretation of data. Furthermore, an emergent focus is suggested so as to permit the multiple realities to refine the focus, rather than the preconception of the inquirer. Setting the boundaries of research on the basis of an emergent focus is significant because

focus setting can be more closely mediated by the investigator-focus interaction; because boundaries cannot be satisfactorily set without intimate contextual knowledge, including knowledge about the mutually shaping factors involved and because foci have no meaning in any event in abstraction from the local investigator value systems (Lincoln and Guba 1985:4).

Also, the parameters for establishing trustworthiness assume different criteria. The conventional criteria of validity, reliability and generalisability may be inconsistent with the form of research. Hence the researcher defines new criteria and suitable operational procedures for applying them.

Thus, in order to compensate for the loss of humanistic element in the scientific approaches, and in order to capture the multiple realities in a more sensitive and a holistic manner, the rigidities imposed by scientific tools and instruments are relaxed in favour of more field-sensitive
approaches. This leads to a noticeable paradigm shift at the level of refining the tools and instruments and other conceptual categories. For this purpose I have found ethnographic methods to be particularly suitable as they provide scope for longitudinal observation and thick description with little or no disturbance to authentic settings. The micro-level study of the curricular site is conducted using various ethnographic methods. At the same time, insights from critical ethnography and critical social inquiry have been used for understanding the macro-level, sociohistorical context of the curricular site.

3.4 Eclectic approach to curriculum theorising

The section will delve into concepts of ethnography, critical ethnography and critical social inquiry as constituent methods of the eclectic approach adopted for operationalising the study.

To begin with, the following sub-section will describe the various aspects of ethnography. These include the concept of ethnography, the significance of culture in ethnography and the literary aspects of ethnography.
3.4.1 Ethnography

The concept of ethnography both as a research method and a genre has been of particular relevance to research in education. In its etymological sense ethnography refers to the study and writing about a particular race or ethnic group. And it is ethnography that the practitioners of anthropology do in order to study cultures. Generally, anthropologists hold the view that for understanding what ethnography is one has to first explore on what doing ethnography involves. In this connection, Geertz’s description of what ethnographers do deserves a mention. According to Geertz

... doing ethnography is establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary and so on. But it is not these things, techniques and received procedures that define the enterprise. What defines it is a kind of intellectual effort it is: an elaborate venture in, to borrow a notion from Gilbert Ryle, thick description (1973:p.6) (emphasis mine).

Here the reference is to the inadequacy of a ‘thin’ description as would a behavioural-scientific or quantitative account provides. Describing thickly involves processes like thinking, reflecting and communicating. For this purpose, an ethnographer observes, records and analyses cultural events and inscribes them as a social discourse. By doing this, she/he
'turns the passing event into an account which exists in its inscription and can be reconsulted.' (Geertz 1973:19) An ethnographer reconstructs the event in the process of grasping and rendering it to the reader.

The importance of 'local knowledge' (Geertz 1983) enables the ethnographer to gather or generate data that are purer and less conditioned. The process of analysis here would include sorting out the 'structures of signification' (like that of a literary critic) and 'determining their social ground and import' (Atkinson 1990) by applying frames of interpretation. Thus interpretation plays an important role in ethnographic analysis.

As a genre, ethnography refers to the product that emerges out of doing ethnography. It could be a written account (Malinowski in Clifford and Marcus 1986) or even a film based on the study of a particular cultural setting. This adds a literary perspective to this product.

Clifford and Marcus (ibid) further state that in an effort to 'make the familiar strange and the exotic 'quotidian', ethnographers resort to various literary devices like narrating, storytelling and textual analysis of the metaphors, symbols and other rhetorical devices. This enables them to
bring out the ‘evocative power’ of the text. In the same context they also describe the common traits of any ethnographic account. The oft-quoted parameters mentioned by them may serve as a plausible coherent framework for studying the textual concerns of ethnographic account. According to them, ethnographic writing can be determined in at least six ways: contextually, rhetorically, institutionally, generically, politically and historically.

Thus, the synonymity of ethnography with the study of culture could be perceived clearly from the foregoing discussion on ethnography.

The significance of culture gets further highlighted in the Weberian concept of culture, interpreted by Geertz (1973). Using Weber’s concept of culture, Geertz rightly observes that culture is a semiotic concept. Culture, for him, refers to all those ‘webs’ that human beings find themselves suspended in. Further, borrowing from Weber, he says that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he has himself spun. In addition, Geertz mentions that the analysis of culture is not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. This in other words, signifies a shift from the behavioural-psychostatistical approach to a socio-cultural-interpretive approach rooted
in the context of anthropology. Culture for anthropologists is a total way of life, the social legacy the individual acquires from his group; it is a way of thinking, feeling and believing (Kluckhohn in Geertz 1973: 4). In a similar vein, Goodenough (in Geertz 1973) says that a society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members.

3.4.2 Critical Ethnography

Anderson (1989) describes critical ethnography in the field of education as the convergence of two largely independent trends in epistemology and social theory. From the epistemological viewpoint, critical ethnography signifies the shift in paradigm from the quantitative methods to critical methods of inquiry. The sociological and anthropological aspects of critical ethnography lay emphasis on the 'native's point of view' (Malinowski in Geertz 1983) while acquiring 'local knowledge' (Geertz 1983). Thus critical ethnography, when used as a method in educational inquiry raises questions about the role of educational institutions in the social and cultural reproduction of social class, gender and racial ethnic prejudices (Anderson 1989).
From the cultural viewpoint, it may be reiterated that critical ethnography adopts a constructivist notion of culture (Lather 1986). According to this conception, the construction of culture implies an inherent motive and a deliberate effort towards a purposive action (Anderson 1989). Furthermore, the proposition that culture can be investigated and inquired into assumes that the persons involved in this activity are 'agents' (i.e., not merely actors who are playing a predesigned role assigned to them) who do not passively wait for the world to impinge upon them but actively interpret and make sense of it in any given social context (Lather 1986).

The objectives of critical ethnography could be gleaned from the six tenets of critical research formulated by Pierce (1995). These tenets could be rephrased and presented as following points:

- Critical research rejects the view that any research can claim to be objective and unbiased.
- It aims to investigate the complex relationship between the social structure and the human agency, without resorting to deterministic and reductionistic analysis.
It assumes that inequities of gender, race, class, ethnicity and sexual orientation produce and are produced by unequal power relations in society.

- It is interested in the way individuals make sense of their own experience.
- It is interested in locating the research within a historical context.
- It believes that the goal of educational research is social and educational change.

3.4.3 Insights from critical social inquiry

Critical social inquiry decries the overemphasis on scientific principles and strict adherence to objectivity. It argues for a critical reflective approach to understand social reality. It signifies a move towards incorporating those facts and features of human reality that do not lend themselves to observability or measurability, thereby acknowledging the existence of certain unconscious, tacit or hidden agenda underlying every human activity. This paradigm of inquiry not only contests the idea of interest free knowledge but claims that
the attempt to produce value-neutral social science is increasingly being abandoned as at best unrealizable and at worst self-deceptive, and is being replaced by social science based on explicit ideologies. (Hesse cited in Lather 1986: 257)

Of crucial import to this paradigm are the underlying assumptions about the nature of reality and role of human beings in shaping it. That the scientific paradigms denounced this aspect and assumed an objective view of reality that is inapplicable to human understanding is well established (Farganis 1993). Moreover, it is felt that such an objective view, in addition to laying stress on the reifying nature of relationship between the social agent and the socially constructed reality implied a passive notion of an individual. Gathering from this, it may be said that it is dubious to construe of an individual as an object who is generally acted upon by the given reality and whose behaviour is similar to a response to a stimulus which could be controlled, systematized and codified for the purposes of observation and explanation.

By way of substantiating the argument, it needs to be mentioned that critical social inquiry redefines the notion of a subject as a socially constructed entity, a cultural product devoid of any ‘natural’ or intrinsic
identity. The subject in this case does not behave in terms of mere observable parameters but does things and acts voluntarily and consciously. Thus, to attribute all the actions of the human beings to the notion of observable behaviour itself is a limited perception of the complex nature of action. Such a view subjugates the cultural and political dimensions which are in fact the crucial pointers at unearthing the hidden values that are essential to understanding any social setting. Hence, it would be a naïve understatement to describe all human action in simple terms as observable behaviour and reduce all social action into classifiable and measurable taxonomies.

From the preceding discussion, some of the points made about the types of research methods could be summed up by quoting the paradigms of inquiry conceptualised by Lather (1992). Lather conceptualises the proliferation of contending paradigms in educational research by adapting Habermas’s thesis of three categories of human interest that underscore knowledge claims by adding the non-Habermasian column of ‘deconstruct’ to the interest of prediction, understanding and emancipation. Her interpretation of paradigms of post positivistic inquiry can be depicted in the following table:
In the above table, it may be observed that I have highlighted certain terms under the columns “understand” and “emancipate”. This has been done with the intention of correlating the concerns of post-positivistic inquiry with my research goals. My reference to Lather’s conceptualisation is more for the purposes of re-emphasising that the study seeks to use “understand” and “emancipate” as two important goals in theorising ESL curriculum. In fact the eclectic framework, which is based on these concepts makes use of ethnography, critical ethnography and critical social inquiry as methods to operationalise the research. This has been discussed in Section 2.12.
3.5 Features of the framework for curriculum theorising

It was mentioned earlier that the empirical part of the study derives its framework from concepts of ethnography, critical ethnography and critical social inquiry. At this juncture, it may be appropriate to consider some of the characteristic features of the eclectic framework that have been incorporated in the research design of the study. Some of the features could be described as follows:

**Naturalistic** – The study does not believe in manipulating a situation. It watches the naturally occurring events but does not control them.

**Inductive** – Thematic categories emerge from observation and exploration of the data.

**Holistic** – The emphasis is on perceiving the phenomenon as a unified whole, by looking at total, complex system, seen from an overall perspective. The researcher tries to get larger picture, including the specific and unique context.

**Thick description** – The presentation of the study, particularly the details regarding the fieldwork are provided using the strategy of thick description.
Personal contact – The researcher tries to share the experience by not trying to remain an objective outsider. He or she must know people to understand them, and gain insight by reflecting on those experiences.

Dynamic – The research design has to be dynamic enough to accommodate the changing phenomenon and context. This may involve use of trial and error while designing and using certain research tools.

Context sensitivity – The emphasis is mainly on many aspects of social, historical, and physical contexts.

Empathic – The researcher tries to take a view of other persons via introspection and reflection, yet remains non-judgmental. This is achieved by studying how the reality appears to those who are being observed.

Flexible design – The design cannot be completely specified before research; it is partly emergent and needs to unfold. One needs to be able to tolerate ambiguity and use multiple methods, or many as feasible, as long as one gets better picture of what is happening and how it is understood.
3.5.1 How the concepts are used

As a research method, ethnography focuses on culture and meaning in everyday life in the classroom. The goal of ethnography is to provide a description of the lifeworld as perceived by those who live within that world. This implies an understanding of what activities mean to people (like teachers and learners) who perform them. The ethnographer seeks to provide an interpretive or thick description of this world. Particularly, as a research method in education, ethnography has been valued for its ability to provide penetrating insights into the everyday life of the classroom and the college.

By observing the everyday life, several insights into the culture may be gathered. The ethnographer goes beyond reporting events and details of experience and tries to explain how these cultural constructions represent webs of meaning in which we live. The emphasis is thus on allowing critical categories and meanings to 'emerge' from the ethnographic encounter rather than imposing these from existing models. An ethnographic understanding is developed through close exploration of three sources of data. These could be termed as:

**Participant Observation** – This refers to the long-term engagement in the field setting. Here, the researcher has a dual role to
play. He or she must become both a participant in the life of the setting while also maintaining a stance of an observer, someone who describes the experience.

**Flexible modes of data collection** – This involves the process of targeted data collection through interviews by asking specific but open-ended questions. The respondent can answer without being limited by pre-defined choices.

**Using other sources of data** – The ethnographer can collect other sources of supplementary data in the form of documents, articles, reports and so on.

### 3.5.2 Curriculum theorising in the eclectic framework

The eclectic framework drawn up by using concepts of ethnography, critical ethnography and critical social inquiry is suitable for curriculum theorising. This framework not only provides tools for thick description of the curricular events, but it also generates scope for critically reflecting upon themes and sub-themes as they emerge on the curricular site. The goal of composing a critique is accomplished by studying the *context* and understanding the *lived experiences* of the participants.
The framework is based on the view that when ethnography is used as a method in educational research, it aims to obtain a deeper understanding of the educational context. The ethnographer adopts an interpretative approach to data collection, data generation and analysis.

One of the basic tenets of ethnographic research is that individuals cannot be separated from context. Moreover, individual behaviour and experiences cannot be broken down into discrete variables to be measured. Hence, behaviours and experiences can only be described and understood only if they are viewed as a part of the context. When applied to an educational context, it signifies the various social, historical and cultural factors that influence the educational processes. The curricular experiences are in turn shaped by the context which can be studied at two levels: the local or "micro" context and the sociohistorical or "macro" context.

In ethnography, the lived experiences of the individuals as observed in their lifeworld or local settings, constitute the main subject of inquiry. Various methods are employed to capture these experiences as they occur in natural settings. This often involves the need for adopting a
sense of empathy for gaining an insider's perspective. When used in relation to curriculum theorising, the lifeworld of curricular participants constitutes the college, the classroom and the staff room signifying the local settings where the teachers and learners fulfil their roles. For the researcher who observes the curricular phenomena, he or she becomes a part of the context (directly or indirectly involved), observes participants and activities. To follow it up, the researcher describes and interprets the phenomena by looking for themes and patterns and provides examples to explain the interpretation.

3.5.3 Practical Knowledge

The salience of practical knowledge in the present study lies in the fact that it connotes the knowledge acquired by interacting with the actual curricular participants. As Connelley and Elbaz for instance, rightly assert that while constructing curriculum theories practical knowledge of the teachers should also form as a basis for theorising. The epistemological value of teachers' knowledge is convincingly established when they say, the work of teachers should not be viewed simply as a matter of application of theory. Rather, it should be acknowledged that teachers develop an extensive, important body of language to guide their actions as they consider the
particulars of the classroom situations. Teachers develop their own knowledge base of what to do, why things in their classroom seem to work as they do, what will happen if something is done differently.

(quoted in Klein 1992)

Besides a careful consideration of the teachers’ practical knowledge, the study accords a substantial amount of importance to the knowledge acquired from the learners. Thus, the ‘lived experiences’ of both teachers and learners occupy a significant role in the study. However, practical knowledge, devoid of the context in which it appears, does not make much sense to the inquirer. Hence knowledge about the social context is valuable in curriculum theorising.

3.5.4 The role of social context

Curriculum as a social phenomenon is understood in relation to society. Hence, the role of social context cannot be undermined in curriculum theorising. While discussing the issue of social context it is imperative to consider the processes of producing, legitimating and controlling knowledge. In other words, to understand these processes one has to probe beneath observable aspects of a curriculum and unravel the hidden dimensions. This implies that the social processes of constructing
curricular knowledge have to be studied critically. While highlighting some of the aspects discussed so far, Lundgren (1983) suggests the need for a critical approach to theory and research in curriculum, which according to him, must be the task for curriculum research and must be the basis for construction of curriculum theories. To substantiate this in his own words,

the social scientific research and theory construction that has value in the long run and survives ideological and economic junctures is always critical and seeks to encompass the ways in which social phenomenon are constituted in a given society.

The need for critical orientation as enunciated above gets reflected in the following questions formulated by Lundgren. These are:

- How are the goals for education established?
- How is content selected and organized?
- How are ideas about transmission developed?
- How do we think about these problems in relation to the constants given by the ways in which social production and reproduction are effected in a society? (p. 152-53)

To answer these questions, Lundgren very aptly asserts, the scope of research has to be broadened, work, within educational history, sociology, politics and education must be valued and used and above all
empirical studies must be carried out, so that concepts can be studied and explanations built. Further strengthening his argument he points out that any failure to consider such issues would make the curriculum a moribund field. Hence he says,

the social and intellectual tasks of curriculum research can be focussed on such issues and in such work the necessity of empirical studies with elaborated theoretical framework must be recognized (ibid.).

Likewise, another important aspect of curriculum that theorising should take into account is the exposure of hidden contradictions and possibilities. For Cornbleth (1984), while understanding the curriculum of any institution, complexity and mediation preclude neat laws and prediction. Hence she believes that explanations must be sought in terms of reasons. Modifying the term explanation, she says

explanatory inquiry would take into account historical processes, structural conditions, relationships, patterns of social activity and actions of individuals as they contribute to the perpetuation or alteration of social situation, specifically school experience. (p.34)

Cornbleth reiterates that the methods of inquiry (concepts and procedures) also need to be critical in order to question, to make
problematic those aspects of curriculum commonly accepted as normal and natural so as to reveal layers of meaning that are not usually part of our everyday awareness. What then is called for, is interpretive inquiry that is sensitive to context and contradictions (ibid).

3.6 Thematic review of related research

In this Section a review of research related to the study is presented by categorizing them thematically. Although the studies reported here are not directly related to ESL curriculum as envisaged in the present study, the insights offered by them are very crucial in conceptualising the research issues and formulating the research questions. Also, an analysis of the research methodology adopted in these studies proves to be immensely helpful in evolving the research design in the present context.

Research reviewed in this Section falls into three categories, these are: - studies in the field of Ethnography of Communication

- Ethnographic study of the ESL classroom

- Studies in the ESL curriculum

To begin with, communication studies carried out by Joseph (1986) and Mouly (1990) shall be reviewed. This is followed by a review of

3.6.1 Studies in ethnography of communication

The study conducted by Joseph (1986) offers an alternative model of scientific discourse to the earlier linguistic/discourse models. According to Joseph these models restricted their view of scientific discourse to its public variety such as science textbooks, popular science articles and so on. He also remarks that such an approach did not reflect the heterogeneity, complexity and systematicity of scientific discourse.

The study adopts a multidisciplinary approach to explore ethnography of scientific communication, to quote Joseph 1996, ‘by taking as its methodological starting point the identification of social units of the scientific community rather than the selection of samples of scientific texts’ Thus the research challenge the dominant notion that scientific discourse is monolithic and synonymous with public scientific
discourse and replaces it with a dialectical notion of the unity of private and public discourse.

Mouly (1990) studies the communicative patterns of a *Research and Development (R&D)* team in a government sponsored and funded research institute in Southern India. The study adopts an ethnographic framework and argues for a more qualitative approach to organizational studies in the Indian context.

This project focuses on micro-level descriptions of the interactions between the members of an R&D team and patterns of communication between them.

As an alternative to both macro-level sociological studies of Science and Technology (S&T) in India and organization based quantitative studies Mouly's efforts are directed at providing a 'thick description' of Indian R&D life. While doing so she brings out certain crucial aspects of the ethnographic methodology. Features such as longitudinal research involving ethnographic research procedures of participant observation, unstructured ethnographic interviews and the
importance of a flexible focus are well illustrated in a detailed account of the fieldwork and the research process.

Several tentative findings are reported by this study. For instance, the study offers fresh insights in understanding communication. It says communication should not be treated as a dependent or an independent variable but ‘as an element which is intricately nested in the other aspects of organizational culture and that the relationship between these aspects is complex and dynamic.’ (ibid)

The insights provided by these two studies, especially in the conduct of ethnographic fieldwork deserves a mention. Particularly, the processes followed by Mouly (1990), even though they are not directly related to the study, enlightened me on several aspects involved in dealing with participants on the research site.

3.6.2 Ethnographic study of an ESL classroom

Chintapalli-Tamirisa (1995) studies the communicative needs and circumstances of the Limited English Proficient (LEP) learners in the social context in which they learn or acquire a second language. She locates the study in the instructional context of the ESL class in Houston, USA, with
an intention to understand the ways in which these learners acquire academic and sociocultural competence.

The study investigates the ways in which the members of a high school ESL class actualized and negotiated the ESL curriculum. The focus is on aspects like the role of the teacher, the learning opportunities presented to the learners, the individual and cultural diversity in the class, the general learning support available in the larger context of the school.

The study adopts a multifaceted theoretical framework by including concepts from Second Language Learning and Instruction, Sociocultural and Sociolinguistic Inquiry and the Ethnographic Research Paradigm. The critical ethnographic research design is uniquely suitable to the study as it provides greater scope for an in-depth study of social and behavioural processes grounded in context. After a careful interpretation of the instructional context, the product of the research emerges as an ethnographic narrative of the teaching/learning behaviours observed in the ESL class. Some of the findings of this study are:

- The teacher and learners tacitly observed several norms about the self, the appropriate behaviour, relationships and negotiations with authority and language learning.
The teachers' instructional behaviour was influenced by numerous constraints and this was seen as a compromise between the demands of the programs and the constraints of the setting.

The varied backgrounds, experiences, expectations and attitudes of the students to the ESL class enriched the language learning context. This diversity promoted language use and communication in the class even where the approach did not provide for it.

In the case of this study, the framework provided some interesting insights. The issue of building in critical ethnographic perspective is of specific relevance to the present study.

3.6.3 Studies in ESL curriculum

Koul (1981) conducts a comprehensive study of factors influencing the development of ESL curriculum at the tertiary and Post-graduate levels. The study encompasses a wide range of issues that are typical of the English teaching-learning situation in India. Specifically while discussing problems at the pragmatic or the implementational level Koul highlights the constraints of a segmental and level-specific approach and argues for an inter-curricular-componental integration of issues. He also makes a thorough study of various historical aspects of English Language
Teaching (ELT) in India. Thus the concept of alternative curriculum is developed by taking into account all the factors that affect the implementation of the curriculum. This refers to an overall unified curriculum with proper co-ordination within various components viz., aims, content, learning/teaching, evaluation and so on. It is also claimed that this model would try to integrate the various components besides emphasising the consonance of objectives with evaluation.

Monippally (1983) analyses the role of language learning models for curricular purposes. The Structural, Notional-Functional and Communicative models are claimed to be inappropriate and insufficient for curricular purposes. He describes the concept of a model as an explanatory device and says that such a model is accepted or rejected primarily on the strength of its explanatory adequacy or logicality.

To overcome this deficiency of a logical model he proposes a holistic model with focus on individual, from an individual's perspective with an individual's contribution as a participant (as a learner) to classroom/communicative acts. Unlike the other models, which follow the sequence -language with conceptual emphasis, language learning theories, and curriculum development- the holistic model begins from the
learner to the classroom. Unlike the other syllabuses there's no pre-specification of content in this model, instead the focus is on creating conditions for language acquisition.

In a sharply focussed study on the Extensive Reading curriculum at the tertiary level Eapen (1985) brings out certain crucial aspects of the 'hidden curriculum'. Her focus is on the implementation of the curriculum, particularly various factors which obstruct the smooth transfer of curricular claims into classroom proceedings.

The tension between the 'ought' and 'is' factors is examined in terms of theory and practice. It is interesting to note that the study does not begin with pre-specified, clearly stated hypothesis, as is usually the practice in a case-study approach. The post-emergence of hypothesis proves to be particularly suitable to capture the multiple realities of the curriculum. As an example of 'illuminative research' the research design illustrates various qualitative techniques of data collection, including an active role for the researcher.

The relevance of the studies reviewed in this Section lies in the fact that all of them share a common concern. This is a concern for broadening
the field of ESL by incorporating insights from the field of curriculum studies.

3.7 Significant features of theorising

As a preliminary step towards reconstructing the curricular site at micro and macro levels, I shall now discuss the main features of theorising in the context of the present study. The following sub-sections elucidate some of the key concepts.

3.7.1 Thick description

An exceptionally important element in ethnographic narration is the first hand rendering of social site by the researcher who is, in fact, the major research instrument. The goal of thick description is achieved by narrating certain key events and episodes that are experienced on the site and also by reflecting on data (the subjective accounts) as reconstructed to provide an ethnographic narrative. The act of reconstructing the social reality, in this case, the curricular experiences, involves a holistic analysis and interpretation of the personal perspectives of the curricular participants and other related data. It is intended that such a narrative, while describing the actual cultural events, episodes and encounters (Atkinson 1990) through which the study proceeded, would also contribute
towards convincing the reader about the verisimilitude (Connelley and Clandinin 1990) of the researcher's experiences.

3.7.2 Role of the researcher

The researcher is the main instrument in naturalistic methods. Hence, the personal aspects of the researcher assume greater significance as the values, beliefs and the self of the researcher are all bound up with research (Woods in Carspecken and Apple 1992). For instance, the background, interests and values of the researcher play an influential role in selecting the topic of the research and executing the study. Examining this aspect more closely, Woods rightly observes that 'the fact that the researcher has a self, engages in interaction and interprets and imbues meaning, gives rise to a number of dilemmas in the researcher role' (ibid). The most crucial dilemma is to strike a balance between the objective and subjective positions held by the researcher, by maintaining a judicious mixture of distance and involvement in the research.

It may also be noted that the eclectic framework adopted in the study assigns a dual role to the researcher. In the context of an educational setting the researcher, in addition to performing the role of
data collector and interpreter, takes up the role of a social critic (Farganis 1993). To the extent that the researcher activates the perceptive faculties of the curricular participants in order to make them perceive and reflect on various aspects of the curriculum, the researcher assumes the objective role of a patient listener and a non-intrusive observer. But then, when the data is being processed in the mind of the researcher as he/she is still in the process of recording it, the researcher assumes a subjective role. This is the role of an educational critic (Eisner 1985) whose responsibility is to study and analyse the data by relating it to the wider social, political, cultural, historical and other forces operating in the context of the research. By reflecting on it, the researcher tries to highlight certain illuminative aspects of the data, brings out the relationship between various sources of data and problematises the emerging issues by relating them to the wider context.

3.7.3 Building up empirical rigour

In ethnographic study, as in any qualitative research, rigorous procedures are followed to maintain credibility and authenticity of the account. However, in the absence of any commonly agreed-upon norms, a variety of criteria, appropriate to the circumstances of the research are developed (Connelley and Clandinin 1990). The present study adopts the
principle of trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba 1985) while doing the ethnographic study and the principles of plausibility and persuasiveness (Atkinson 1990) while rendering it as an account.

The parameters for establishing trustworthiness include aspects of discipline and systematicity of the research procedures. This is built into the process of research itself- for instance, the concept of longitudinal study, the nature of data collected and generated, triangulation of various sources of data by using multiple tools of data collection, the process of analysis and interpretation and the nature of research findings- all these features add towards making the research procedure trustworthy.

To a large extent, trustworthiness establishes the plausibility of the ethnographic account. Nevertheless, it is crucial for the account to be persuasive, to be able to convince the reader about the plausibility of data and researcher's experiences while negotiating access to the research site and while carrying out the research. For this purpose, the process of rendering takes into consideration all the experiences the researcher lived by while doing the research. These involve a frank and true account of the problems faced, a plausible portrayal of the research site with all its conflicts and contradictions and a detailed rendition of the tools of
research as they were planned and improvised on the site. The aim of such an incisive rendering, along with a thick description is to provide the reader with a vicarious experience of the context and the lifeworld at the research site. This also helps the researcher in establishing authenticity and credibility of the account.

3.7.4 Process of data collection and interpretation

The process of data collection and interpretation is partly guided by the five stages of critical qualitative research outlined by Carspecken and Apple (1992). The first stage involves the use of various observation techniques with a minimum of interference on the part of the researcher. The data collected at this stage could be called monological (ibid.) as the researcher assumes a passive role. The second stage of 'preliminary reconstructive analysis' calls for a construction of a preliminary analysis of data. In the third stage dialogical data is generated as the researchers uses various interactive modes of data generation. These include open-ended questionnaires, interviews, and discussions, which help in triangulating the data. In the fourth stage the social site is analysed by differentiating between system integration and social integration. System integration refers to the investigation of relationships between the normative orders on diverse social sites.
It should be mentioned by way of clarification that the fourth and fifth stages are applicable for studies across sites. Hence, they are not relevant to the present study as it concentrates on one curricular site.

3.8 Drawing together

This chapter focused on elaborating the eclectic framework evolved for curriculum theorising by delineating the concept of ethnography, critical ethnography and critical social inquiry as adopted from the naturalistic paradigm. It also brought out the significance of the framework in dealing with curricular issues related to ESL by demonstrating the suitability of the eclectic approach in the context of ESL. Subsequently, a review of related research was presented in order to provide an initiation into ethnographic studies and curriculum related research in ESL.

Chapter 4 and 5 comprise an ethnographic reconstruction of the curricular site at the micro and macro levels respectively. Next, I shall present a micro-level reconstruction of the curricular site by providing a thick description of the fieldwork.