4 Micro-level reconstruction of the curricular Site

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is exclusively dedicated to describing the curricular site by observing and analysing the micro level context, constituting the autonomous college. It attempts to provide an account of the fieldwork carried out at the curricular site along with the tools used for collecting and generating data. The process of data collection is guided by a set of generic themes which exemplify the context, the content and the participants on the curricular site (Section 2.4.1 and 3.5.2). The main thrust of the empirical study is to explore the themes using various research tools such as study of documents, participant observation, questionnaire and interviews.

The data thus collected is analysed and interpreted by using a thematic approach. The analysis is carried out at two levels: initially relevant portions of data are highlighted and themes and sub-themes are identified. Subsequently, the demarcated chunks of data are interpreted depending on their contextual appropriacy and thematic relevance. The interpretations are presented under each category of generated data in the form of thematic discussion. This scheme of analysis is found suitable
as it facilitates a thick description of the curricular site, by incorporating multiple perspectives and in depth analysis of the views of the participants.

4.2 The thematic approach

The provision of a detailed account of fieldwork, a distinctive trait shared by all ethnographic studies, signifies an overall attempt at representing curricular action by reconstructing it textually in the form of thematic discussion of curricular events. In the present study a thematic approach is evolved in order to theorise the data that was collected and generated on the curricular site and present it in the form of thick description. Now, a word about how the distinction between the process of data collection and generation maintained in the study. Collection of data implies that the data/information already exists in some fashion. It could be in the form of documents or actual process of teaching-learning in the classroom. Such data is collected using tools like observations and reports. In contrast, generation of data refers to the interactive processes of using unstructured questionnaires, interviews and discussions as tools for obtaining the relevant information.
The empirical study began by studying the general themes derived from the goals of research for studying the curricular site (Section 2.12). Following are the themes that were considered as the starting points for reconstructing the curricular site at the micro level, through the empirical study:

- The context (autonomous college, the department of English, the staff room, the classroom)
- The content (ESL syllabus, textbooks and teaching methodology)
- The participants (teacher and learner roles)

It may be noted that these themes are derived from the broad research goals of understanding and describing the curriculum as the events unfold on the site (Section 2.4.1). The autonomous college provides the context for curriculum theorising using ethnographic methods. Here, context is constituted by an interplay of factors such as social, historical, political that influence decisions pertaining to education. Within this context, there are significant events that take place while implementing the curricular processes such as designing the syllabus, selecting the teaching materials, teaching in the classroom and conducting examinations. Each of these events involves a certain amount of decision-
making on the part of teachers, learners and other participants in the educational endeavour. The act of decision-making also signifies an attempt at exercising control of the processes of defining the content of the curriculum. At the macro level this relates to the politics of knowledge creation and dissemination in an organized educational context. The role of key participants – teachers and students – has tremendous potential as a theme for study. This theme is intended to unravel the scope for teacher and learner empowerment with regard to the role they are expected to 'perform' in and outside the curricular site.

Thus, the objective of the empirical study (understanding the context and the content by relating to the experiences of the curricular participants) is translated into an exercise for gaining multiple insights that represent the experiences and opinions of all the key participants by providing a thick description (Sections 3.4.1 and 3.7.1). This involves:

- Looking for connections between themes and identifying sub themes that evolve as I observe and interact with the participants.
- Weaving the themes together by linking up various strands to reconstruct the curricular site as a textual representation.
4.3 Emerging questions

In the process of delineating the issues involved in theorising ESL curriculum on the site, several questions emerged. These questions throw light on various problematic concerns that surround any ethnographic study. In the present study, as a preliminary step towards identifying more themes, the process of reflecting on the main themes was take up. This exercise involved a generation of as many questions as possible that would help in exploring the curricular issues on the site. The presentation of these questions (in Appendix 1) does not follow any logical sequencing. I have retained the random order of questions to maintain the authenticity of this exercise.

4.4 A summary of research tools used

This section presents a summary of the tools used in order to collect and generate data. In retrospect, it may be said that the initial phases of fieldwork made use of monological (passive) modes to collect or gather data that was obtained from observations and responses to questionnaires. This is illustrated by CR Observation, SR Observation, St-script, T-Report and St-quest. In the later stages, the emphasis was on dialogical (interactive) generation of data through interviews as suggested
by *St-int* and *T-int*. The following table describes the tools used along with their purpose and outcome.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research tool</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Observation</td>
<td>Understanding the pedagogic proceedings by observing teachers and students while interacting with the textbook and make a note of strategies adopted by the teacher in the classroom</td>
<td>Observations in the classroom <em>(CR Observation)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff room Observation</td>
<td>Get a feel of the interaction that takes place among teachers and to make general observations about how they prepare for the classes</td>
<td>Observations in the staff room <em>(SR Observation)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discussion /brainstorming</td>
<td>Eliciting general opinions of the students on the English curriculum and corroborate their views with findings from CR Observation</td>
<td><em>St-Script</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective reports</td>
<td>Eliciting more focussed information on the classroom experiences in relation to the pedagogic strategies and to reflect on their reports with findings from CR Observation, SR Observation, and St-Script</td>
<td>T-report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students' questionnaire</td>
<td>Eliciting further information on some specific aspects of the curriculum and to use these responses (by corroborating them with CR Observation, St-Script and T-Report) for framing questions for student interviews</td>
<td>St-quest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Interviews with the teachers</td>
<td>Seeking clarification and substantiation of some specific points before framing questions for teacher interviews</td>
<td>Fieldnotes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Formal Interviews with teachers | Consolidation of teachers experiences by making them reflect on certain key issues | T-int

Formal interview with students | Consolidation of students experiences by making them reflect on certain key issues | St-int

From the overview of the research tools presented above, it may be gathered that the study used a combination of tools for data collection and data generation. In the case of the former, observation was the commonly used tool, whereas in the case of the latter, interactive sessions and interviews were used to facilitate self-expression and reflection. The outcome of the tools has been indicated in the third column of the table presented above. The outcomes are depicted as: CR Observation, SR Observation, St-Script, T-Report, St-quest, T-int and St-int. The detailed description of fieldwork in the sections to follow, adopts these categories of outcomes to classify data under each one of them. Such categorisation is intended to present the thick description of the site by reconstructing the site using the thematic chunks of data.
4.5 Thematic organisation of data analysis

The thematic approach as mentioned in Section 4.2 necessitates a flexible research agenda to accommodate the emerging sub-themes. In the process of building in this flexibility there are chances that the data may get misplaced or lost if it is not placed under different categories. To avoid any loss of data and to keep track of the number of themes, I maintained separate files of each category of tool. The data was placed under their respective files and this eased up the process of analysis and interpretation. It may be useful to obtain an idea of the various themes by mapping with the tools and the category of outcome. Following is an outline of the themes classified under the category of research tool and the corresponding outcome:

Tool: Classroom Observation (outcome: CR Observation)
   a. The preferred method in classroom
   b. Impact of class size
   c. Text in the classroom
   d. Classroom management

Tool: Staff room Observation (outcome: SR Observation)
   a. Appropriacy of textbooks
b. Syllabus and extra work

c. Team spirit and leadership

Tool: Discussion/brainstorming with students (outcome: St-script)

a. English is a language not a subject

b. Relaxation in English classes

c. Classroom activities

d. Extensive reading

Tool: Teacher Report (outcome: T-report)

a. Strategy for creating interest

b. Timetable, planning, organising

c. Large classes

Tool: Student questionnaire (outcome: St-quest)

a. Perceptions about the textbooks (questions I a, b and II).

b. Pedagogic procedures adopted by the teachers (question III)

c. Reflections on their activities in the classroom (IV and V).

d. Desirable topics in the textbooks and activities in the class (question VI a and b).
Tool: Student interview (outcome: St-int)
   a. Textbooks and teaching method
   b. Perceptions about autonomy

Tool: Teacher interview (outcome: T-int)
   a. Framing the syllabus
   b. Teaching language and literature
   c. Curricular innovation
   d. Autonomy
   e. Perceptions about students

To follow up with the retrospective outline of the themes mentioned in this section, I shall now move on to presenting the details of the fieldwork. It may be noted that the account of fieldwork presented in the following section: signifies an attempt at reconstructing the curricular site by analysing the micro level themes.

4.6 An overview of the fieldwork

The site chosen for empirical study constituted an autonomous college for women in the city of Hyderabad. The study was spread over a period of one academic year approximately. The initial phase of the
fieldwork was carried out during the first semester of the academic year. During this period, I tried to learn as much as possible by acquainting myself with the college environment, its culture and key curricular participants i.e., teachers and students. I visited the college at least three times a week, spent about three hours each day, observing the routine activities and occasionally interacting with the students. I spent a considerable amount of time talking to the teachers, informally seeking information about the college and its culture.

However, I deliberately remained a passive onlooker, often observing the curricular participants and making notes from the documents pertaining to the college and the department of English. Apart from the College Prospectus and the ESL syllabus, a host of other sources provided valuable information about the curriculum, these included the textbooks, students’ assignments, question papers of various exams, time table and attendance registers (Appendix 45).

Gradually, I began to notice that my presence was causing some curiosity among teachers and students. I decided to introduce myself to some of the students and teachers and develop a rapport that would break the ice and dispel any fears of intrusion into their professional lives. It may
be pointed out that this was not an easy task, especially in the case of teachers, as they took quite some time to overcome apprehensions about an external researcher probing their lifeworld. The students were quite enthusiastic about my research plan, though the plan was not disclosed to them in detail.

For most part of this phase, I remained a passive observer, watching the curricular events as they unfolded. I maintained a diary for recording the events and classifying them under the broad themes of 'content', 'context' and 'participants' (Section 2.4.1). These events comprised sample classroom observations and staff room observations. Apart from these formal settings, I also made notes of some interesting observations on the corridors and canteen (Appendix 3).

These initial observations helped me in identifying and exploring other themes that emerged from the day-today events. I wound up this phase with personal meetings with groups of students who had volunteered to attend the brainstorming session I had organised. The purpose of this session was to capture the students’ experiences of learning ESL in the form of short notes called 'St-script'. At the same time, I organised a meeting with the teachers and asked them to share their
experiences of teaching ESL. The outcome of this exercise is called 'T-report'. The themes generated by St-script and T-report were further classified and set aside as agenda for the second phase of my study. Additionally, the data generated during this phase formed the basis for me to reflect upon and come up with a list of questions that guided the later part of the study. This is discussed in Sections 4.10 to 4.15 in this chapter.

The second phase of the study was carried out in the second semester of the academic year. During this phase, my efforts were directed at seeking focused information on the curricular themes identified in the first phase of the study. I noticed that the teachers were slowly changing their attitude towards me by becoming friendly and showing interest my research. Some of them would even offer suggestions for effective interaction with students. It was quite encouraging to note this change in the teachers' attitude and it helped me in administering the questionnaires and conducting informal and formal interviews more freely. I conducted both informal and formal interviews with teachers and students. However, in the case of the students, I had administered a questionnaire before conducting the interviews in small groups. This helped me in collecting individual opinions before meeting them in groups. This is discussed in Sections 4.16 to 4.19 in this chapter.
4.7 The process of data collection and analysis

The aim of this section is to provide a detailed account of the process of data collection and analysis along with a description of the tools used for the study. In ethnographic method, as in any qualitative approach the process of data collection and analysis cannot be separated using rigid parameters. In the present study, it may be noted that as the broad curricular themes were explored and relevant data was collected to substantiate them, I took up the parallel activity involving the analysis of data while trying to identify various sub-themes for further study.

This crucial feature of the study can be explained by relating it to the concept of emergent design as enunciated in Section 3.3.1. Due to the flexibility in the design of the study it is possible to carry on the activities of collecting and analysing data simultaneously. In fact, the insights provided by data at each stage were used as a basis for conceptualising the future course of study. For instance, the data collected by way of observations made in the staff room and the classroom proved to be very helpful in designing the questionnaire for the students and the guidelines for the report from the teachers.
4.8 Gaining access and providing information

During the initial phase, my visits to the college were brief but frequent. I would spend about two to three hours trying to get acquainted with the environs of the college and get a feel of typical events and routine activities. After obtaining permission from the head of the department to conduct the study, I met the principal to brief her on my research plan and its specific empirical concerns. The principal was glad to know about my project when I informed her briefly about the aspects of curriculum I would be studying. She granted me permission instantly on the condition that my work does not disturb their academic schedule. I expressed my gratitude and assured her that I would not be interfering or causing any disruption to their normal curricular programmes.

The head of the department in consultation with her colleagues decided to give me some of their classes for 'doing the experiments'. However, as my intention was not to conduct any experiment, I had to clarify my research objective and provide some information regarding my research plan. An interesting observation about the teachers’ perceptions of the researcher deserves a mention. The fact that I was from CIEFL made the teachers assume that I would be interested in 'carrying out experiments' in the classroom, perhaps to try out new teaching methods.
When I briefed the teachers on how my research agenda is different from their notion of classroom research, particularly the 'classroom kind of research', they began to understand the differences and appreciate my efforts.

At this juncture, I encountered a peculiar problem regarding the amount of information I should be providing to the teachers about my research. In fact, some of the issues I confronted are common to most qualitative research projects. The questions that troubled me were quite similar to the points raised by Mouly (1990) while addressing the issue of providing information. According to her (ibid.) the specific questions that a researcher faces include:

- What aspects of the research should be made available to the community being researched?
- What is the level of generality or specificity to be aimed at?
- Should the research techniques being used be spelt out?
- Should possible outcomes be projected?
- Should the use of research findings be discussed? (1990: 76)
After a thorough consideration of these among other questions, I decided that I should tell the teachers about my research in such a way that they do not become overly conscious of my presence and that they retain their natural way of doing things. I put in my best efforts to develop the kind of trust and rapport that encouraged them to relax, be 'natural' and go about their everyday business in my presence in their usual way (Woods in Carspecken and Apple 1992). Sometimes, I could feel that even the most positive uses of words like classroom observation and interviews would make the teachers feel a little unsettled as they thought any such data would 'reveal their weak points'. In order to avoid such unintended misapprehensions, I decided 'to be honest, but vague or imprecise' (Bogden and Taylor in Mouly 1990:77). On this issue I was guided by Bogden and Taylor who observe that the researchers need not explain their substantive or theoretical interests or their specific techniques in great detail. Also, it is not advisable for the researchers to volunteer elaborate details without any strong reason (ibid).

For instance, very honestly, I told them that my observations in the classroom were not aimed at finding faults with their teaching methods or measure the interaction that is generated in the class. I also told them that my intention was not at studying the merits and demerits of autonomy and
evaluate the performance of their department. Perhaps it was ‘natural’ for the teachers to become apprehensive because they felt that they were being observed, studied and evaluated by an external person. However, even if my aim was to evaluate their performances I could have revealed or withheld my ‘findings’. But this not being the case, I decided to be truthful and tell them that my main interest was to describe the curricular events as they occur in the college and study them by adopting an ethnographic approach. In other words, I made it very clear that my interests lay solely in studying the curricular processes and events as they take place by observing, eliciting and interacting with the participants.

As a conscious effort at gaining their trust, I also informed the teachers that it was for the purpose of a critical study of the General English curriculum that I solicited their cooperation. On various occasions I requested them to take an active part in the research processes devised for the study. However, at times I must have sounded somewhat ambiguous and imprecise while spelling out the details but this ‘strategy’ helped me in easing the initial tension I experienced while briefing about my research agenda. All the while, my assurances about maintaining confidentiality about the information were doubly emphasised.
4.9 Briefing the students

As a major number of the participants in my study included the students, I decided to spend some time with the students; briefing them about the kind of help I would need from them. While briefing them about my study, I told them that I was interested in knowing their experiences in the General English classroom. Again, I resorted to being deliberately vague with the students, as any specific detail such as participating in an interview or filling up a questionnaire would make them evade my questions. But, contrary to my fears, I found that the students were more than willing to help me with my study. Most of the girls were quite expressive and perceptive; they had no inhibitions in voicing free opinions. This eased the process of gaining trust and building relationship with the students.

In fact, some of them volunteered to involve more students, look for a suitable place for holding discussions and offered to help me in every possible way. It was indeed very heartening to be received by the students in such an amicable manner. The enthusiasm and characteristic warmth of the students not only encouraged me tremendously during the preliminary stages but it also the feeling of lukewarm response I received from the teachers. Perhaps, the teachers' attitudes towards me were influenced by
that I was an outsider who was 'trying to intrude' into their professional space by observing them in the classroom.

In retrospect, it can be said that the preliminary stages of my fieldwork were an odd mixture of assorted experiences: there were moments when I felt that I was getting all the cooperation I needed from teachers as well as students, there were occasions when I was received warmly and that made me feel a part of the department. This notwithstanding, there were certain sensitive instances where I had to make a conscious effort in not being too inquisitive with the teachers, especially when they discussed matters pertaining to their colleagues or problems related to the management. These were generally issues related to salaries, issues related to their colleagues and new rules and regulations implemented by the management.

4.10 The curricular site

This Section focuses on describing the curricular events as they were observed on the site. The term site is used here in the sense of a specific, local institutional situation which forms the local context - of the ethnographic study (Sections 3.4.1 and 3.7.1). The following sub-sections provide a thick description of the ESL curriculum as observed and
experienced on the curricular site. To begin with, I shall present a general overview of the autonomous college which constituted the curricular site in the present study.

4.10.1 The college

In the present study, the college signifies an organized institutional setting meant for providing educational experiences at the tertiary level. The autonomous college where the fieldwork was carried out is located in Hyderabad, the capital city of Andhra Pradesh, a southern state in India. It was founded in 1959 as an undergraduate college for girls, affiliated to the Osmania University in Hyderabad.

The UGC conferred the status of autonomy in 1988 and since then the college has been functioning as an affiliated-autonomous college. This meant that the college, while remaining affiliated to the Osmania University, has autonomy in matters pertaining to the design, implementation and evaluation of its own courses of studies. This status also granted flexibility in framing its own rules for the admission of students. According to the prospectus of the college the autonomous status is intended to help the college in attaining its academic and social objectives successfully. Some of the efforts made in this direction focus on
encouraging students to think clearly, critically and creatively and to express themselves fearlessly. This was helpful in bringing out the best in every student by individualizing the teaching learning process as far as possible.

Also, closer contact between teachers and students was expected to contribute towards the building up of well-knit, friendly and responsible academic community. This would enable the student to use her talent for personal growth and common welfare through social action. As a result, besides striving for excellence, the college aimed to enhance employability of graduates by providing them with knowledge and skills relevant to local and national needs.

The curricular programmes of the college were restructured after the grant of autonomy. This was done as per the revised guidelines of the UGC which defines restructuring as ‘the reorientation of existing courses in subjects to the needs of the region and also introduction of some relevant, applied subjects to basic subject groups’ (College Prospectus: page 2).
Thus, going by the UGC guidelines, the college took a major step towards reorienting its courses to suit the specific needs of its students. Several major changes ranging from a reforming of the syllabus to a complete restructuring of the evaluation scheme were effected. Thus, the General English curriculum too was reformed in response to the same directive.

4.10.2 The Department of English

The college has several departments, the department of English being one of them. It is among the oldest departments in the college. The department comprises five teachers with varying years of experience. In course of my interactions, I learnt that only one of the lecturers had undergone formal training in teaching English. For ease of identification, I shall name the lecturers as T1, T2, T3, T4 and T5.

The most senior of them T1, who heads the department, has been teaching in the college for the last twenty-eight years. She is the head of the department. Her immediate junior T2 has joined the college seven years ago and she had been a student of the same college. The other three lecturers T3, T4 and T5 have had eighteen, eight and five years of
teaching experience respectively. They joined the college after it was conferred autonomy.

The Department of English offers courses in General English (the two-year compulsory course in ESL), Communicative Skills course for the first year B.Com (professional), first year B.Com (computers) and the Optional English (the English Literature elective). The department has framed its own syllabus and designed these courses after the grant of autonomy. In addition, it has the responsibility of maintaining attendance records along with the personal teaching diaries of the teachers. It is also in charge of conducting the internal assessment exams (IAs), setting the question paper and evaluating the answer scripts. These apart, the department plays an active role in organizing several extra-curricular activities such as conducting literary competitions, inviting guest speakers, putting up plays and holding exhibitions and seminars.

4.10.3 The ESL syllabus

According to the syllabus document, the restructuring of the syllabus was aimed at incorporating ‘the changing trends in English Language Teaching’ by giving ‘equal weightage of marks for the textual
components and language components’ for the purposes of evaluation. In terms of pedagogic objectives the syllabus lists the following:

a. To foster abilities of analysis, interpretation, comprehension, writing and critical evaluation.

b. To inculcate aesthetic values in life

c. To help students prepare for competitive examination

d. Wherever possible, to include different forms of prose and poetry.

The following are the contents of the first and second year syllabus respectively:

**Syllabus for the first year B.A., B.Sc. and B.Com (regular):**

Prose units from the book *Selected Prose Models* edited by A. E. Augustine and selected poems from the book *The Siren’s Song* edited by David Murdoch.

The language component of the syllabus comprises synonyms, antonyms, prepositions, tenses, confusing pairs of words, identification of errors, letter writing, essay writing and paragraph writing.

Evaluation scheme for the first year: (marks: 100)

- One essay answer out of three from Prose units of 300 words (10 marks)
- One essay answer out of three from poetry of 300 words (10 marks)
- Critical appreciation of poetry – (three extracts out of five) (15 marks)
- Paragraph answers from prose, three out of five (15 marks)
- General essay of 300 words (10 marks)
- Letter writing (10 marks)
- Paragraph writing (5 marks)
- Language items – multiple choice objective type tests
  (25 marks)

Syllabus for the second year B.A., B.Sc. and B.Com (regular):


The language component of the syllabus comprises synonyms, antonyms, prepositions, tenses, confusing pairs of words, identification of errors, business letter writing, report writing and Minutes of the Meeting.

Evaluation scheme for the second year: (marks: 100)

- One essay answer out of three from Prose units of 300 words (10 marks)
- One essay answer out of three from poetry of 300 words (10 marks)
- Critical appreciation of poetry – (two extracts out of five) (10 marks)
- Paragraph answers from prose, three out of five (15 marks)
- Report writing (10 marks)
- Business Letter writing (10 marks)
- Minutes of the meeting (10 marks)
- Language items – multiple choice objective type tests
  (25 marks)

**A note on deletion of topics from the prose textbooks:** When I noticed that some lessons were deleted from the portions, I tried to find out the reasons for such exclusion. I was told that after selecting the textbooks, it was found that some of the topics in the first and second year textbooks were too difficult because of their content and style of presentation of ideas. Moreover, the second year textbook had some topics which were already taught at the Higher Secondary level. Hence, it was decided that these units should be deleted and more emphasis be given to language exercises.

4.11 Analysis of the syllabus

From initial interactions with the teachers, I gathered that the department of English had restructured most of its activities in accordance
with the specifications made in the syllabus document. While I was in the staff room, often I could hear the teachers discussing the syllabus specifications, when they were designing the question papers for the mid term and end of the term exams. This was because the syllabus provided a detailed scheme of evaluation for each course. There were two different syllabuses for General English (regular and professional). As the study is solely focused on General English (regular stream), I looked up the syllabus meant for General English, which was divided into first and second year courses.

The syllabus document stated some generic objectives (Section 4.10.3) that can in fact be termed as the micro level goals of ESL curriculum in the context of the college. It was interesting to note that the syllabus aimed at incorporating the changing trends in ELT but it did not specify how this was planned to be achieved in the classroom. When mapped with the typical requirements of a syllabus, I perceive this to be a major gap as it does not inform the teachers and learners about what trends and how the teachers are expected to revise their methods to suit the trends.

The statement of very broad and generic objectives is another problematic issue in the syllabus document. It has too many objectives
ranging from comprehension to inculcation of aesthetic values, assumption being these objectives are attainable through the prescribed textbook.

Preparation for competitive exams is another objective that was included in the syllabus after the college was granted autonomy. To realize this objective a language component was added to the syllabus in the form of vocabulary and grammar. The pattern of examination was accordingly modified to test language items. The second year syllabus lays stress on written communication exercises as apart of the language component.

Moreover, the demarcation of syllabus into text and language components was also marked by the fact that for the textual part, a set of textbooks and lessons were prescribed and for the language components there was no prescribed textbook. Perhaps, this could be the main reason for the teachers to put in extra effort to collect material for teaching language items in order to make up for lack of exercises in honing language skills. This made it more challenging for the teachers to prepare the students for realising the objective of competitive exams, which formed the basis for 50 per cent of the questions in the exams.
4.12 Classroom Observation

During the initial phase of the fieldwork, I decided to take up classroom observation as the first step towards understanding the curricular events. Though classroom provided a familiar setting in terms of student behaviour and teaching methodology, I sat through some of the General English classes and observed typical classroom proceedings, like the actual teaching-learning process, the use of textbook in delivering knowledge and skills, students' interaction, classroom management by the teachers and so on. Thus, I began to explore the familiar setting of the classroom in order to identify themes that captured the actual teaching-learning experiences within the institutional framework of the college.

At this point, it would be appropriate to clarify the purpose of using classroom observation as a research tool in the present study before describing the actual classroom interaction as observed on the site. It may be noted that the objective of my classroom observations is quite different from the goal of observing the language classroom for the purposes for studying the interaction that takes place in the class, predominantly from the perspective of second language acquisition. Normally, in classroom interaction research projects one records the interactions by making observations. Such observations pertain to measuring the student-teacher
interaction by applying certain parameters. For instance, it may include processes like coding and categorising of interaction for the purposes of identifying the turns taken by students carried out with the intention of analysing how the amount and quality of interaction affects the process of language learning.

To some extent, the teachers also felt that my intention was to record the interaction in the class, as is usually the case in language acquisition research. Hence, they were very keen that I should be observing only those classes where students are more interactive than the other classes and they were hesitant to allow me into all the classes indiscriminately. After making a clear statement of my intentions to the teachers, I observed ten classes over a period of two weeks. These included six first year classes and four second year classes. As the present study is specifically aimed at studying and understanding the curricular experiences in the classroom I had to use a different set of parameters to observe and analyse the classroom events. The parameters will be listed in the following paragraphs. In the first six observations my efforts were focused on understanding:

- The pedagogic strategies used by the teacher in teaching the unit
- The students' response to the content being 'taught'
The ways in which the students participated - by reading, writing, responding to questions, seeking clarifications, disturbing other students.

To study the above-mentioned issues I adopted parameters like:

- Content and source of teaching
- Teacher participation
- Student participation

The following table presents chunks of data from classroom observation. This table is prepared using the field notes made during classroom observation. In the table given below, certain important activities under the columns ‘teacher participation’ and ‘student participation’ are indicated by highlighting the text in italics.

**Class 1: First year prose unit I Tremble to Think**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher participation</th>
<th>Student participation</th>
<th>My observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| *Begins by discussing* the concept of thinking, asks the students as to when and why they think.* | *3 out of 69 students contribute to the discussion by answering the teachers questions* | *Teacher follows the method of reading and explaining by simplifying.*  
*Questions are used as a device to catch the attention of the students.* |
Explains some difficult words that are not found in the vocabulary and picks up the phrase 'as cool as a cucumber', asks the students if they have come across any such phrases, explains the concept of a simile by contrasting it with a metaphor.

Students come out with phrases like as brave as a lion, as red as a rose.

- Students need constant monitoring by the teacher, as they don't show much interest in the lesson.

| Makes the students read the unit paragraph-wise and explains it by using simpler language. | A major group of students do not pay attention and they disturb the class by talking among themselves. | The students become attentive and start paying attention to that is being done in the class. |
| In order to maintain silence and involve all the students the teacher call out the names of the students in random and asks them to continue reading from where the previous student had stopped. | Class 2: First year prose unit The Values of Science |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher participation</th>
<th>Student participation</th>
<th>My observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recapitulates what was done in the previous class</td>
<td>Listen to the teacher in rapt attention</td>
<td>Perhaps the content being a little complex, the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Goes to page 62 reads the paragraphs and explains | One of them complains that there are too many references in the lesson and it is difficult to follow them | Students pay attention and take down notes as the teacher explains the lesson.

| Works out answers for the questions on comprehension and composition. | While answering the question the class becomes too chaotic, as a result very few are able to express themselves clearly. |

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**Class 3: First year language work class from the unit Student Mobs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher participation</th>
<th>Student participation</th>
<th>My observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Makes the students do the exercises on page 48 and 49 on their own</td>
<td>Begin to discuss among themselves creating a lot of noise</td>
<td>There was lively interaction in the class, probably because the students were doing practical language exercises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solves the exercises by eliciting responses from the students</td>
<td>Very few students find meanings for the words and make sentences on their own.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Class 4: first year poetry unit London**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher participation</th>
<th>Student participation</th>
<th>My observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduces the poem by talking about great cities</td>
<td>Name some great cities of the world</td>
<td>• Normally students respond to the teacher's questions in groups. • Frequently asking questions indicates the teacher's effort</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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162
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher participation</th>
<th>Student participation</th>
<th>My observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduces the poet in great detail</td>
<td><em>Disturb the class by making a lot of noise</em></td>
<td><em>Whenever a difficult concept is explained students</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Class 5: Second year poetry unit My Last Duchess**

- Read the first stanza and asks the students to describe the picture of London portrayed by the poet.
- Sadness, weakness, pain and suffering of people in the cities; these are some of the phrases mentioned.
- Reads the next stanza and asks students to pick out important words, explains the meaning of 'mind-forged manacles' in great detail.
- Makes a student read the next stanza and asks if there're words which are not understood.
- Reads and explains the last stanza by highlighting crucial words throughout the poem.
- Seek explanation on the concept of chimney sweeper and 'blood on the palace walls'.
- Take down notes.
- Makes some students read the poem aloud and asks questions to test their comprehension, talks about the poet and his times.
- Read the poem aloud.
- Answer the questions.

- at involving the students in the lesson and testing their comprehension.
- Sometimes teacher makes the students read the text.
Spends about 15 minutes explaining the concept of dramatic monologue

Makes the students read the first half of the poem
Asks if they have got an idea of the poem

Reads the poem line by line explains it occasionally soliciting questions

Take down notes on dramatic monologue

Few of them read the poem others disturb the class

Almost all take down notes some of them answer the question posed by the teacher.

Teacher participation | Student participation | My observations
--- | --- | ---
Dictates words which are not from the textbook (words related to current events picked out by the teacher) Thirty words are dictated | Take down dictation with occasional requests to repeat the words | • In language classes the students show interest and take part in the activities.
• They were quite eager to correct the dictation and check their performance.

Writes the correct spellings on the blackboard and asks the students to correct by looking at them | Correct the words by checking on the blackboard |  

Ranks them according to their marks | Begin to get excited about the marks |  

Asks the students to make use of these words in sentences | Very few make sentences with the words |
The substance of the above excerpts from classroom observations can be summed up as following points:

a. The most commonly used method in each class is 'lecture' method where the teacher reads the text, explains by simplifying it

b. Students are generally passive in the class, except when the teacher asks them some questions

c. Students ask doubts and seek clarification when they find difficult words or concepts

d. Language exercises create some interest in the class when students perform the exercises

e. Teachers use examples and analogies to create interest and illustrate the content

In the next four classes, I sought permission to record the classroom proceedings using a tape recorder. At the sight of this device the students became curious and at least on two instances I could not help feeling that it invoked over-activity on the part of the students, especially those who constituted 'the brighter lot of the class.' Confirming my hunch on this aspect, the teacher told me that the students were 'unusually' active in those classes, and she even commented that one of
them had donned an 'artificial accent' while speaking. The following are two excerpts from recordings of a prose and poetry classes. In the excerpt below 'T' denotes the teacher, 'S' stands for student and 'SS' denotes group of students. Certain important observations that are highlighted in italics are taken up for discussion later in this section.

Excerpt from the Prose class:

T - We are in the middle of the lesson come to the page, page 43. Quickly girls please settle down.
   Give me the spelling of procession.
SS - possession
T - p–o
SS - s-s-e-
T - single 's' or double 's'
SS - double 's'
T - okay girls, 'religious'
SS - religious
T - Some got it wrong, one voice said 'gous', so 'I' is very important here, okay, come to the text now which is the main characteristic feature that perhaps describes India on the Indian attitude.
SS - freedom from rancour
T - how does he exemplify it?
SS - non-violence
SS - that we don't have any ill-feelings or hard feelings
T - *that's a very general statement.*

SS - we don't make enemies.

T - with reference to the British can you go a little further?

SS - we made them leave the country without any humiliation.

T - *That’s the point, that was the uniqueness, the British left the country without any disgrace, humiliation,* the next point that rises

S - Gandhiji is the only leader who is not only respected in his country but in the whole world.

T - that's a very good point – that Gandhiji ------ what's the word?

SS - benefactor

T - Who is a benefactor?

SS - Who does some good.

T - next paragraph, non-violent revolution-characteristic Indian accomplishment. What do you think of this strategy? Do you think it's relevant today?

SS - No ma'am

T - why girls so unanimously you're saying 'no'. *Have you lost faith in non-violence.*

SS - No ma'am, it's the society, they don't have faith in non-violence.

T - I don't know what you have in mind, but why are you saying this, you're the people, you're the society. Perhaps because politics has become
such a dirty game today that non-violence and all such values have no values have no relevance, serve no modern purpose.

Excerpt from the poetry class:

T - Last class we finished at these lines, now, I told you, that there was a breakup of the theme, what as this breakup that we discussed last time?

SS - (girls discuss among themselves)

T - one girl please, remember.

S - First he asked the question...

T - Yes, he queries in the first half of the poem and he expressed his debates, there was a lot of introspection in the first half of the poem, and then you have the solution.

T - the second sonnet is very similar to the first one now, what was the problem in the first one.

SS - discuss among themselves

T - what is the nagging problem in the ...

S - that he had the gift of writing poetry but he couldn't.

T - Yes, the gist, the talent which might go waste, because he's blind. So he questions God, as to how he could be given a talent and deprived of eyesight for him to fulfil the talent.

T - But then in the latter half of the poem he comes to the conclusion that God is not so severe but he's
modest and what he expects from every human being is only what ..

SS - accepting the challenge

T - accepting the challenge and he expects a lot of patience and humbleness, okay.

T - Now let's go to the second poem, I'd like you to read the poem in two parts. One of you will read the problem other one will the solution.

SS - (hesitant) ----- a student reads

T - what do you think the problem is?

S - youth

S - his age

T - okay

S - his age is progressing

T - He's losing his youth, the time is passing but there is something else that is nagging him, not only the passing of time.

S - quotes some lines from the poem

T - [Quotes from the poem, "inward ripeness"], what is this inward ripeness?

SS - maturity

T - yes, maturity right, you've got it.

T - [explains, paraphrases] We'll go through it line by line.

T - [reads lines, glosses words, for example: what is 'time' here?]

SS - age, personified.

T - age, yes.
but he refers to time as a bird, explains how time passes, subtlety of passage of time

maturity at the spiritual level, his inner maturity, not only do I look younger but even my spirituality is not upto my expectation, says the poet, right...

The main points from the above excerpts from prose and poetry class observations can be summed up as follows:

a. Lessons (prose or poetry) are generally taught by explaining difficult words and meaning

b. There are some interesting points from the students but the teacher does not take them up for further discussion

c. Usually the teacher wraps up the discussion by conveying her meaning as the meaning of the text

It was interesting to note how each class represented an instance of learning as defined in the college culture. Learning mostly meant comprehending or understanding the content whether it was prose, poetry or grammar as prescribed in the textbook. There were hardly any instances where the teachers tried to go out of the bounds of the prescribed lessons and try out new type of content or new teaching methods. To this extent all the classes had a uniform protocol as far as the teaching learning procedure is concerned.
I find it important to present some of the strategies used by teachers in a detailed manner. I observed that as soon as the teacher enters the classroom, the students stop shuffling their things and settle down to receive the lesson. Sometimes there are pleasantries exchanged along with the usual greetings. But generally, the teachers get down to marking the attendance which normally takes about ten minutes. One could hear a lot of murmur and whisper as the attendance is being marked. While the attendance was being marked, I noticed that often teachers would make repeated requests the students to be silent, sometimes they would also engage the students by asking them to silently read the lesson in the textbook. In some classes, I observed that some students quietly slipped away from the class after answering the attendance. When I reported this to the teachers they said that they try their best to avoid such indiscipline and one of the strategies was to delay the ritual of marking attendance to the end of the class or somewhere in between. This would make it mandatory for all the students to sit through the whole class.

The size of the class posed serious problems while the teacher tried to make the students attentive and receptive while the lesson was
being taught. Often they had to shout at the students who were not cooperative and threaten them saying “I’ll not give you attendance for today’s class”. Immediately the students would become alert and pay attention to what was being taught. For the teachers each class posed a different challenge in terms of using their vocal chords, as they had to be very loud and clear to be audible in such large classes. I often wondered how the teachers managed to sustain their stamina for all the classes in a day. Some of the teachers told me that occasionally they avoided too much of physical strain by assigning written work in some classes.

Another important strategy used in classroom was to ‘catch them unawares’ while reading the lesson. Reading aloud was a common activity that was followed in all the classes. The teacher would make the students read a paragraph from a prose unit or a stanza, if it was a poem. Often when someone in the first row was reading, students in the last rows would make lot of noise. Then suddenly the teacher would point at someone in the last row and ask her to continue where the previous student had stopped. It was no doubt difficult for the students who were not attentive to pick up and read further, but at times they were helped by their friends who provided them a clue regarding which paragraph to continue from.
The vocabulary and grammar classes were interesting to observe. These classes were in striking contrast to prose and poetry classes when I noticed that the teachers did not have to resort to making fervent appeals to maintain discipline and silence. The students too were quite receptive and interactive as they completed the exercises and asked for clarifications. They seemed to like the exercises in vocabulary and pronunciation. This was evident from their enthusiasm in vocabulary exercises like taking dictation, checking for spellings and using words in sentences of their own.

Most of the teachers followed the procedure where they read the text (both prose and poetry) and explained it by giving examples, analogies and illustrations. When students were made to read the text they were asked to suggest the implied meaning, what the author or the poet is trying to convey through the text. It was observed that, often, any effort at involving the students resulted in lot of noise as other students would voluntarily come up with more meanings. It was encouraging to observe that the students evinced a keen interest in the topic but at the same time their participation was not encouraged, as it would disturb other classes, thus making it unmanageable for the teacher.
I also observed that teachers always encouraged students to ask questions while they were explaining the text. However, seldom it was found that the students initiated the discussion. This resulted in a very passive role for the students. The teacher did most of the talking. Perhaps due to constraints such as lack of time and maintaining discipline teachers often ended up conveying their meaning of the text as *the meaning* depriving a chance for the students to question it, debate it or suggest alternatives. In fact, in most cases, the text as interpreted by the teacher was reinforced as the expected interpretation for the examination purposes. Thus, comprehension and reproduction of the meaning acquired great significance in the scheme of classroom procedures.

From the above discussion, four themes could be identified for further analysis. These are:

a. The preferred method in classroom

b. Impact of class size

c. Text in the classroom

d. Classroom management
4.12.1 Preferred method

Lecturing i.e. reading the text aloud and explaining, interspersed with some questions to the students formed the most commonly used method for teaching General English. Perhaps, this traditional method is still popular because the content is Literature-based where the emphasis is on explaining what the author or the poet was trying to say or what the text meant. The task for the students is to comprehend the text and demonstrate their comprehension by being able to answer questions. In addition, the lecture method ideally suited large classes as almost all the teachers found it easier to manage the students by taking control of class in terms of maintaining discipline and silence. It also enabled them to take an authoritative stand in teaching the lesson by interpreting the meaning for the students. Nevertheless, teachers would encourage students to ask questions and seek clarifications but such instances were very rare as hardly any students expressed their doubts and sought clarifications. In some cases it was observed that the teacher herself tried to limit the scope of discussions emerging out of such questions for want of time to complete the lesson.
4.12.2 Impact of class size

It was noteworthy in most classes that post-autonomy changes in General English syllabus did not seem to result in any corresponding changes in reducing the number of students in each class. On an average, each class had 80 to 100 students belonging to Science, Commerce and Arts streams. Apart from handling such large classes the teachers found it difficult to introduce any new pedagogic techniques that required interaction between students and teachers. There was no doubt that the students liked to perform language tasks and other activities as it was a welcome break from the monotony of listening to the 'lecture'. As I noticed in one of the classes where the teacher tried out a role play based on the lesson 'On Being Hard Up', the class started off very well, but slowly the teacher seemed to lose control over the students as there was too much of interaction resulting in noise and disturbance for other classes. This made her abandon the activity half way through and get down to exercises provided in the textbook.

4.12.3 Text in the class

In almost all the classes, teaching was done within the scope of the textbook. The text played a crucial role by providing the base material for teaching. The time-table adopted a genre-wise classification of the
textbooks into prose, poetry and non-detailed reading (Section 4.10.3). It was mandatory for the students to have their own textbooks and bring them to the classes regularly. Certainly, it would be an almost impossible task to imagine a class of 80 without a text book, however, sole dependence on explaining the prescribed prose and poetry made the classes very monotonous and boring. If the prescribed lessons were supplemented with some other kind of content that interested the students, perhaps something from contemporary events, the classes would have become more lively and engaging for the students.

4.12.4 Classroom management

It was observed that the teachers spent a considerable amount of time trying to make the students pay attention to what was being taught in the classroom. In fact, there were instances when the teachers had to 'threaten' them by not giving attendance when the students refused to cooperate. To me, such behaviour on the part of the students indicated a strong dislike towards the content and the teaching methodology. This could have been because the lessons were not suitable and that the students were forced to sit and listen to the lecture. Perhaps, the students wanted more language practice, interactive lessons and discussions in the class. It may also be suggested that if the content was relevant and
interesting, probably the teachers could have reduced their efforts at 
policing the students.

4.13 Staff room Observation

The description of the staff room provided here is based on the field 
notes and diary maintained during the study (Appendix 3). The following 
paragraphs provide an account of the staff room by describing a typical 
day in the staff room. The staff room was a large, spacious room located 
on the second floor of the building. The room was neatly organised. The 
walls were adorned with motivational posters on one side and an enlarged 
copy of the timetable on the other side. One could find a set of quick 
reference books, attendance registers, piles of papers that included the 
students’ answer sheets and assignments. The room was also used for 
conducting meetings and discussions. Occasionally one could find the 
students dropping in to enquire about classes.

Sometimes, I was greeted by teachers with questions like, “you 
didn’t come yesterday?” or “so today what do you plan to do, may be you 
can meet our BSc 2B students, they are very receptive in class.” On few 
occasions, the head of the department would share with me some 
interesting piece of news regarding new developments in college.
Initially, my interactions with the teachers were very minimal. For instance, when I spent time with the teachers in the staff room I listened actively to the conversations the teachers had in relation to their classes and made a mental note of them. Later, I converted my observations, as faithfully as possible, into field notes by highlighting the key words and phrases that occurred repeatedly in their discussions although, sometimes, I resorted to making quick notes in the presence of the teachers (Section 3.7.1). Generally their discussions focused on issues like division of classes to share their workload, planning for classes, correcting assignments, sharing some interesting experiences from classes and so on. There were certain occasions when the staff room turned into hub of extracurricular activities like planning for plays, seminars, and guest lectures organized by the Department of English.

One of the general observations I made in the staff room pertains to frequent complaints about the nature of topics in General English textbooks. Often I heard the teachers commenting on the first year prose book, "what kind of a text is this, most of the units are so long, and the language is difficult." To this, T4 not only agreed but also added, "yes ma'am, next time when we make a change we should be very careful."
Why can’t we have a simpler book?” Thus, most of the time, unmindful of my presence as it seemed, the teachers expressed their dissatisfaction with the textbook.

At times, I tried to find the reasons for their frustrations with the textbook. While elucidating the problem, the head of the department told me that the choice they made regarding the textbook was not appropriate and that the second year textbook was simpler than the first year textbook. When she said this, T2, who was about to leave for a final year Literature class, felt that she should immediately add to what the Head had just mentioned. She said she would not mind going late to her class and expressed her frank opinion on the first year syllabus. She was critical of the idea that the poetry syllabus was equally problematic, as the book was badly annotated and contained neither any Indian poets nor any language exercises. Moreover, according to her, the number of poems could have been reduced as this made them extend their classes till the last working day while others (i.e. teachers in non-autonomous colleges) would promptly finish their portions and relax. Imbued with a deep feeling of resentment, the reaction of T2 aired the frustration she had experienced with the textbooks.
While trying to make sense of the problem regarding selection of textbooks, I could instantly find some conflicting views. Of particular interest to me, was the contradiction between freedom in making their own choice as a result of autonomy and the resultant disappointment with the syllabus and the textbook. What surprised me most was the latent wish to go back to the common-core university textbook which according to T1, was much easier to be dealt with in the class. By going back to the University textbooks she felt, "we can unburden ourselves of the unnecessary workload we’ve saddled ourselves with." The very thought of going back to the Common University syllabus seemed not only defeating the concept of autonomy but also it meant less work for the teachers. Such reactions may also be considered as feedback on the choice of textbooks.

Following themes could be gathered from the staff room observation:

- Appropriacy of textbooks
- Syllabus and extra work
- Team spirit and leadership

4.13.1 Appropriacy of textbooks

I noticed that most of the teacher-talk revolved around sharing their frustrations with the textbooks. Apparently, the realisation that the
textbooks were not suitable came in after prescribing the books. Now that the textbooks could not have been changed for a mandatory period the teachers would have felt helpless and wished that there were alternative solutions to the problems they faced while teaching the lessons. It made me feel a bit curious to know the reason for sense of regret over the decision to choose the right textbooks (Section 4.10.3). I also felt that, perhaps, the students' lack of interest in classes (Section 4.12.3) could also be attributed to the problem with the textbooks.

4.13.2 Syllabus and extra work

According to the teachers, the most significant change in syllabus was the weightage given to the language components in order to prepare the students for competitive examinations. As there were no prescribed teaching materials to teach language items, the teacher had to put in extra effort by referring to other books. This would have added to their workload, as they were already 'burdened' by the correction of assignments and internal assessments as a result of autonomy. This could have prompted teachers to feel that their counterparts in non-autonomous colleges are relieved of the extra work and additional responsibilities.
4.13.3 Team spirit and leadership

Though there were no specific instances of the head of the department overtly bossing over her colleagues, it was evident that the Head closely monitored the teachers by observing their punctuality, adherence to timetable and so on. However in the case of T3, I noticed an exception. She would not spend as much of her time with the teachers in the staff room as she would with the students. Often, she was seen talking to the students in the corridors of the college. At times, I began to feel that she would do so as she did not share a friendly relationship with the Head and her other colleagues.

To share another interesting observation, most of the socializing in the staff room was dependent on professional discussions varying from seminars and meetings to regular pedagogic problems, management related issues and news from other departments. However, sometimes it was a welcome break to get a glimpse of non-professional talk. It could have been a chat on recent movies, TV serials, latest news that I could hear while having lunch with the teachers.
4.14 St-script

St-script is an outcome of the initial interactions I had with the students. Using the technique of brainstorming, I collected the students' perceptions about the General English course at a very broad level. The students who participated in this activity belonged to the second year. I decided to meet the second year students as they would have completed one academic year of General English and they would be able to express their opinion in a substantial manner, by relating to the experiences they have had in the first year of their course.

To collect their general opinion, I decided to meet a few second year students representing the faculties of arts, science and commerce. On the request of their teachers, 38 students assembled in a room. I asked them two questions and I wrote the same on the black board. The questions were - how did they find their General English classes, and what kind of activities they would like to have in these classes and why? These questions were used as prompts for brainstorming. The students were given 10 minutes to think about these questions. They discussed among themselves and some of them wrote down their responses on pieces of paper. Actually, I had planned to record the outcome of this session by writing the points on the blackboard or by taking down notes from the
points expressed by the students. But, as the session progressed, I noticed that the students were very enthusiastic in expressing themselves, so I told them to write down their points and hand it over to me.

The scripts of the students were numbered by making a note of the class they belonged to. I shall now present some of these responses by highlighting (in italics) the important issues raised by the students. While explaining her point that “English is a language and not a subject”, S 10-(B.Com 2), says

> teaching should be oriented towards the grammar and the sentence patterns and not the facts in the lesson -- practical grammar can be introduced like telegrams, giving short notices, responding to advertisements etc.. *English is a language not a subject.*

Another student, S 38-(B.A 2), agrees with this view when she says, “I think English should be taught specially through grammar.” However, for S7-(B.SC2), “*English should be sort of a relaxation for all the science students.* All in our classes we should have open discussions and not monotonous lecturing by the English lecturer.” And when S24-(B.Com2) reiterates the view “in English period we can relax our minds a
little bit", she also spells out the kind of books that would make them relax when say adds, "if there are short stories it is fun to read and enjoy them."

Unlike other students, S11-(B.A 2) compares the textbooks with the intermediate textbooks which according to her are a perfect blend of topics and asks, "if we were to question the authorities or the syllabus setters I just cannot imagine how would they could justify their work." Also reflecting on the nature of topics for study S 29-(B.SC 2) feels that

the chapters should be in such a way that we have a greater chance to come out with our views. The chapters we have presently have not got much to discuss about. So I think that group discussions or discussion with the teacher is very important to improve our language.

Besides providing scope for discussions in the class, some "general language work" is also deemed essential.

According to S15-(B.A 2),

In classes they just teach us prose and poetry but if they make us to do some sort of general work about English, then English would be interesting. Sometimes lecturers should get books concerned about English other than the syllabus books and make us read.
However S 23-(B.Com 2) differs on this issue when she says, "the lecturers try to make the class as interesting as possible although the textbook is too boring." The view expressed by S 6-(B.Sc 2) is quite different from others. Considering the fact that not all the students are at the same level, she asserts,

as someone said in the discussion the standard of prose textbook should be raised, I don’t agree with it. *For a few students who are very good at English might feel that way but for many others that itself may be difficult.* The textbooks we have are not so interesting ... I want stories or literature by well-known Indian writers.

The views expressed by the students reveal several important aspects about their General English classes. One of these aspects pertains to the need to perceive the GE classes differently wherein they could “relax their minds a little”, as it was pointed out by some of the students. Also noteworthy, is the fact that students are aware of the nature of differences that exist between a subject class and a language class. Thus, as a preliminary tool, St-script provided some illuminating insights from the students’ point of view which could be probed further for a thick description of their curricular experiences. These perceptions of the students were taken into account while designing other modes of data
collection such as the student questionnaire (St-quest) and student interview (St-int).

Following themes could be gathered from the staff room observation:

  e. English is a language not a subject
  f. Relaxation in English classes
  g. Classroom activities
  h. Extensive reading

4.14.1 English - a subject?

When one of the students pointed out that English is a language and not a subject she seemed to hit the nail on the head. She stated that the emphasis should be on teaching language and grammar unlike the present practice of explaining the content as if it was a 'content' subject like History or Economics. Her remarks indicate a strong desire to learn English as a language for functional purposes in contrast to learning it genre-wise like prose and poetry lessons as it was being taught at present.

4.14.2 Relaxation in English classes

Some of the students felt that English classes should provide them the much-needed respite from heavy optional subjects pertaining to their area of specialization. They expressed the need to have light-hearted content
that would help them unwind and relax while enjoying the classes. Hence, they are dissatisfied with the present set of textbooks that have 'heavy' content in the form of lessons that need explanation. Also, for some of the students the topics are 'too simple' when they compared to the challenging lessons in their Intermediate/Higher Secondary English textbooks.

4.14.3 Classroom activities

The need to supplement classroom activities with discussions and seminars would certainly make the classes more relevant and useful. As some students had pointed out that at present, they did not have occasions to express themselves and improve their spoken language. According to the students, this should be in addition to the general language work carried out as a part of their regular classroom lessons.

4.14.4 Extensive reading

Most of the students perceived the need to have supplementary, extensive reading as a pleasurable activity. They would like to have short stories and novels as a part of the syllabus for extensive reading.
4.15 T-reports

The observations made in Sections 4.11 to 4.13 serve as the basis for framing guidelines for specific classroom reports from the teachers. The aim of these reports is to gather in-depth information by making the teachers reflect upon micro level issues such as strategies adopted in the classroom, modifications made to their original plans and the response of students in the classes. As T3 did not volunteer to participate in this exercise, I managed to have only four teachers prepare the reports. I also informed the teachers by way of clarification that they do have to address these points in the 'guidelines' in the form answers to questions. Furthermore, I told them that the order in which they had to prepare the reports need not conform to the order in which the points were listed. However, a limit of two pages was specified as the upper limit for the report. The guidelines for the qualitative report were as follows:

- Class .................. strength of the class ..................
- Content of teaching - name of the teaching unit – prose/poetry/non-detailed text/grammar/or any other material
- Planning the lesson- criteria adopted while planning- did the class go according to the plan? What were the changes you had to make to your original plan?
- Did you supplement the unit in the textbook with other language exercises, reading materials, personal anecdotes or any other language activities? If yes, why did you feel the need to have such additions/ improvisations?

- Describe the pedagogic strategies employed while teaching the prose/poetry/non-detailed text/grammar – some of your strategies could be- reading aloud and explaining- making the students read before /after explaining, remedial/incidental teaching of grammar etc.,

- How did the students participate in the class, describe their activity in detail.

- Were you satisfied with the class, could it have been better? What were some of the unforeseen problems that came up during the class?

- Any other comments/remarks?

4.15.1 Analysis of T-reports

This Section presents an analysis of T-reports by highlighting the key phrases and sentences that convey the experiences of the teachers.

Report 1

The report made by T1 is based on B.Sc. 2C and the number of students present in the class was 68. The interesting features of this
report include the flexibility of her plan and the discussion generated in the class. Following are some of the excerpts from the report:

My unit of teaching was from the prose text. It was the last session on A Devoted Son, a short story by Anita Desai. There were several interesting aspects of the story that generated lot of discussion while I was teaching the story. So, I decided to take them up in the last class. Normally I don't spend so much of time on any story but this being very 'relevant and interesting' as the students put it I felt it is worth spending more time.

....However, the discussions could not be extended to the whole class as the vocal students dominated, as always. This is the only fact which was not satisfying; I wish I could involve the whole class, or may be silence those who are always active. But the number of students was simply intimidating.

Report 2

This report is prepared by T5 based on a first year Arts Class: B.A IB and the number of students present in the class was 61. She believes that the nature of the content in the textbook is crucial in sustaining the interest of the students. Providing a detailed account of the class she says:

At first I read the essay, Can We Afford to Keep Open Minds by Bertrand Russell paragraph-wise. I could finish only half the essay, in fact not even half as the content was quite serious and
not very absorbing. I could make this out from the expressions on the students' faces. I tried to make it as interesting as possible by giving them several examples and analogies.

In fact I began the class by reading aloud myself, but as the students began to talk among themselves I decided to make some of them read aloud. Somehow I was not satisfied with this class of mine, in fact it is the same feeling I get whenever the students don't show any interest in the topic being taught. Half the textbook contains such topics. I prefer to spend more time on doing grammar exercises by referring to other books.

Report: 3

T4 produced a comprehensive account based on general procedures adopted by her to teach prose units. She recounts,

I can't describe anything specific about any class but I would certainly like to tell you, in general, about the classes that I handle. At first I read the essay in paragraph and explain the contents of the same. Since the glossary is provided, they are encouraged to find out the meanings of difficult words. If there is a difficult concept the glossary may not be sufficient the same. Therefore, I then, explain the difficult concept with references to examples and practical life situations.

Generally, the participation of the students is average because, may be, the kind of lessons prescribed do not sustain
their interest levels and they are not required to apply their critical capacity to respond to the text.

Report 4

This report made by T2 is similar to the previous one as it brings out several general aspects of classroom strategies and efforts. It is based on B.A I (literature group) which has a strength of 38 students on that day. While making several general observations and also commenting on a specific class, she says:

As it was literature group I started the lesson with a brief introduction of the essayist with a general exposure of his background. Students were then asked to supplement the details with their own information, based on any of the writings of the essayist they were already familiar with. This, I find, always stimulates their interest in the work at hand and, more importantly, instills in them the much-needed sense of participation. If, at times, they are unable to come up with relevant details, I try to fill in the gap as much as possible.

One cannot often go by an ingenious plan because at various stages, one deviates into other relevant areas of information and interests. Incidents, anecdotes, juxtapositions and references to the other reading material are resorted to time and again. This helps not only to sustain the interest of students but,
more importantly, helps to broaden their understanding of the lesson. Reading aloud not only the prose lesson entirely, but also reiterating significant lines and areas aids in the deeper understanding of the subject.

Sometimes if a particular idea is complex or perhaps slightly controversial, they seek clarifications on the point. *In an attempt to provide the correct answer the students are taught to analyse the subject and thereby exercise their critical faculties.*

Participation in the learning process could be increased to some extent if they are motivated to do more reading. I think their motivation level is not sufficient.

**Report 5**

In this report T5 narrates exhaustively the efforts she made to make the teaching unit interesting. Based on *B.A I* year class which had 59 present in the class, the report states the following:

The poem I taught was *Death* by John Donne. I started by giving an *introduction of metaphysical poetry* with special reference to Donne's poetry- the major themes, love, death, immortality etc., then a question was put across to the class- what does the title of the poem 'Death' imply – the answers poured in by saying – end of life, to die, an antonym of life, man's journey on earth has stopped etc. *I felt the response was great.*
In fact when I began the poem I asked them if we should do the poem Death. they all exclaimed, "Oh, no it will be boring", but toward the end of the poem their reaction changed drastically.

**Report: 6**

This report is prepared by T2 based on the first year Class, *B.Com 1A*, which had 63 students in the class. Though the poem she taught was same as mentioned in the previous report, the difference in approach is note-worthy. Giving a detailed description of the class she says:

The poem I was teaching was John Donne’s *Death*. I hadn’t originally planned to teach the poem in that month but the circumstances made me take it up. I mean, it was such a coincidence, two eminent people had died in the same month. I’m talking about Princess Diana and Mother Teresa. The topic of death was relevant and Donne’s interpretation of death was so appropriate in this context. My students found the poem very absorbing and this helped me in turning a serious theme into a lively and engaging class.

In another instance I was doing this poem, Three Years She Grew by Wordsworth. It is not a difficult poem to teach, in fact it is the most simple of the Romantic poems but in order to make it relevant I made the students to think of the present system of education and contrast it with Wordsworth’s views. This way the notion of Pantheism was easily explained to the students.
Thus, whatever I teach, my emphasis is usually on explaining the poem with reference to the contemporary events. Sometimes when the poems don't lend themselves to such treatment I try to do some reference myself and bring in other relevant information. My idea is not only to teach the poem but also to make enjoy it, remember it forever.

Report 7
Prepared by T4, this report is based on B.Com IB which had a strength of 72. To quote procedures adopted by her in a language work class:

I find that the language work in the textbook is just not sufficient. And the poetry text contains no language work. I give a lot of importance to vocabulary and pronunciation. Hence for some time I made it a point to give five new words in every class and ask the students to find meanings and use them in sentences. This exercise proved to be quite useful but when it came to discussing those words in the next class it would take a lot of time. I began to lag behind in completing the portions.

The students too found this exercise very useful but I had to discontinue it because of time, I shall start it again when we are relatively free towards the end of the year, or may be at the beginning of the year. Sometimes I dictate problematic words and give them some kind of a spelling test. This helps them in preparing for the competitive exams which is one of our goals.
The topic being discussed in this report is similar to the previous one, as it narrates the experiences of T5 in a language work class. This is based on B.Sc 2B which had a strength: 70. In the words of T5,

One of the main drawbacks of the present syllabus is the lack of proper grammar exercises. I like teaching grammar. The class becomes very attentive and there's some practical activity. Also, when it comes to teaching composition like, letter writing, precis writing, paragraph and essay writing we do not have good material in the textbooks. So I do a lot of reference, consult books like *Strength your Writing* by Narayanaswami and Thomson and Martinet's books on Practical grammar and devise exercise for the classroom. As far as possible I contextualize these exercises. This makes the students more aware of grammar rules and conventions of writing.

However I come out of the grammar classes feeling that all was not well as don't get a chance to correct their writing and check grammar, how I wish the class had fewer numbers.

Following are the common, recurring themes that get discussed in T-reports:

d. Strategy for creating interest 

e. Timetable, planning, organising
f. Large classes

4.15.2 Strategy for creating interest

From the teachers’ perspective, it was necessary that they needed to spend more time in making the lessons in the textbook interesting. For this purpose, they had devised strategies that could create and sustain the interest of the students throughout the course. The teachers, as it may be observed from the Reports, used a variety of examples to make the content interesting. Sometimes they would provide illustrations from sources other than the prescribed lesson. Usually such efforts were well appreciated by the students (Section 4.15.1).

4.15.3 Timetable, planning, organizing

The genre wise distribution of classes as mentioned in the timetable, provided a convenient framework for the teachers to plan for timely completion of syllabus. Going by the reports, one gets a feel that the teachers maintained a certain amount of flexibility in their plans leaving room for the unforeseen and the unexpected. However, what remained uniform over all the classes was the process of explaining the text and validating the students’ comprehension by asking questions.
4.15.4 Large classes

In almost all the reports the class size averaged between 65-70 students, comfortably managed by the teachers. It is noted from the Reports that the discussion could not be extended to the whole class as some of the 'vocal' students dominated, denying a chance for others to express themselves.

4.16 St-quest

After a contrastive study of the data collected through CR Observation, SR Observation, St-script and T-Reports a questionnaire was designed for the students. The objective of this tool was to collect more data on some of the issues raised by the students and teachers in St-script and T-Report. This was done in order to substantiate and verify perceptions and problems associated with the textbooks, language learning needs as perceived by the students, the teaching methods, the participation of students in the classes. In the following Section, the responses to the questionnaire shall be analysed by grouping the questions into thematic categories.

A total of 32 second-year students across the faculties of Arts, Science and Commerce volunteered to respond to the questionnaire (see
Students questionnaire St-quest in Appendix 2). They were asked to assemble in the same room where I had the first formal meeting with them. In fact, 26 of them had attended my previous session where I elicited their views in the form of St-script. After administering the questionnaire I told them to take at least 15 minutes to think about the questions before getting down to answering them. Some students asked me if they could respond to the questions jointly. I allowed them to do so, as my purpose was not so much to focus on the individual but get a representative estimation about their experiences in the classroom. Moreover, to a considerable extent, my intention was also to corroborate some of the views expressed by the students in St-script and use the findings from the questionnaire for framing questions for interviewing the students. The questions included in the questionnaire can be grouped into four Sections:

   c. Perceptions about the textbooks (questions I a, b and II).

   d. Pedagogic procedures (question III).

   e. Reflections on their activities in the classroom (IV and V).

   f. Desirable topics and activities (question VI a and b).

The following sub-Sections discuss the data generated using the questionnaire:
4.16.1 Perceptions about the textbooks

The list of contents of the first and second year textbooks are provided in Appendix I. Gathering from the responses to the questionnaire it can be seen that there are a variety of reasons for which the students liked a particular unit in their prose books. For instance they liked the unit *On Being Hard Up* because:

- of the humorous touch
- it has taught us to live with little money and also to adjust to different classes of society
- it is humorous style is very simple and humorous and also easily understandable
- more relevant to students. Unlike topics like *Free and Thinking People* which couldn't get their message across easily and were vague and absurd.

According to some students Nirad Chaudhari's *Eternal Silence*..., apart from being "humorous and interesting", it had a critical analysis of the Indian society which helped them to understand India in a better way. One of the students liked *The Secret of Work* because "it shows a deep insight into human psychology and depicted the beauty of Indian tradition and culture." Some students appreciated *Matches* because "even though it was an uncommon subject to be written about, it was explained and presented in an interesting and convincing manner." Some of them liked
Reading for Pleasure and Can We Afford to Keep Open Minds “because these are very relevant and thought-provoking topics.”

Alongside this, a considerable number of students reiterated that “in comparison with the first year prose textbook chapters in Spectrum are awfully dull, repetitive (some of the units they had already done in the Intermediate English classes) and uninteresting.” Whereas a good number of units from Selected Prose Models were enjoyable, units like Pleasures, On Being Hard Up, Student Mobs were “light hearted and related to life. They were topics which we would think on and could to our lives”, said the students.

Units from the Poetry textbooks:

In general most of the students found poetry to be reasonably challenging and thought-provoking. This was also because of “the lecturer’s way of teaching.” Besides, “it created an aesthetic sense in us”, they said. It also helps them in understanding the real feelings of the poet.” In particular, Shakespeare’s Seven Ages of Man and The marriage of True Minds appealed to them because:

- they are simple, yet profound
- very reflective, they give insights into the depth of life
- Simple and easy to understand and it has a beautiful comparison between drama and life
- fairly simple, interesting and it has made an impact on our lives
- gave us a deeper insight into the phases of human life

John Donne’s *Death* is appreciated for the following reasons:
- it gives a chance to think, think about life and future which is very crucial to us at this stage
- it brings out a new dimension towards death and helps us to think on a philosophical
- because of my teacher she did a great job in explaining it.

Apart from these poems, *Ozymandias* by Shelley “gave an interesting historical account, which holds for all ages and stages of human nature.” Tennyson’s *Ulysses* is appreciated because of its “optimism and the protagonist’s love for learning new things in life, the poem is very expressive.”

The perceptions mentioned above show that most of the students found the first year prose challenging even though some units did not capture their interest. In contrast to this, the second year textbook was unanimously found to be quite simple. Some of the poems included in their syllabus were simple and interesting. But there were an equal
number of poems that were difficult to understand. They found the non-detailed text to be simple and not very interesting.

4.16.2 Pedagogic procedures

A considerable number of students said that while teaching poetry the teacher usually explained after reading the poem and sometimes made them read and then explained. Sometimes, teachers asked for their points of view while paraphrasing the poem. Whereas, most of the teachers while teaching prose read and explained the text by giving meanings of difficult words. They also did all the exercises in the textbook.

4.16.3 Reflections on classroom activities

Some of the activities in the prose classes included reading aloud or silently and doing the language exercises in the textbooks. In poetry classes, the students took down notes and sometimes discussed with the teacher. However, in response to question V, the students said that sometimes, some of them read at home and do the exercises. They attend classes for more explanation, for attendance and for the science students the English classes gave them a break.
4.16.4 Desirable textbooks and activities

Almost all the students voiced the need for including language skills, especially communicative skills and grammar activities in the textbooks. With regard to desirable topics, their choice was quite wide-ranging. It included humorous writing, journalistic writing and articles from the newspapers, magazines, short stories, topics from current affairs, fiction and classics. As far as activities in the class were concerned they wanted exercises in creative writing (like dialogues, speeches, stories), seminar presentations, debates, and interviews.

4.16.5 Some observations about the students

Before moving on to presenting the student interview analysis, I find it useful to share some of my general observations about the students that were formulated during the course of interactions. Following is a representative set of observations pertaining to a cross-section of students:

a) The students seemed to be quite knowledgeable about learning English and they could express their learning needs. But apparently, they are never given a chance to take part in decision-making processes. In fact, the authorities do not
consider them matured enough to decide what they want from their English courses.

b) The students are keen that English should be treated as a language and not a subject. This implies that they should be given opportunities to practice language skills and apply them in real life context. Such an approach is not being practised now as the teachers regard English as a subject that can be taught using the lecture method.

c) The students did not appear to be overly conscious about their exams. But they are quite aware of the fact that the teaching process and syllabus is guided by examination pattern. In fact, they sounded rather sceptical that the present textbook would help them in preparing for the competitive exams.

d) The students represent the typical spirit of young adults who are eager to learn. But they do not like the passive ways of teaching that reduced scope for interaction and discussion with teachers and peers in the classroom.
4.17 Student Interview

In the present study, interview is major tool as it signifies an attempt at acquiring in-depth knowledge from the points of view of the teachers and students through a *dialogical* mode, by interacting with them personally. It may be recalled that in qualitative studies it is difficult to separate processes of collecting and analysing data, as described in Section 3.5.2. In fact, in the present study the processes of collecting and analysing data ran through the whole interview as I began to generate data by interacting with the participants. The questions for the interviews emerged from the analysis of data gathered from other sources mentioned in the preceding sections (Sections 4.10 to 4.16). In order to build up flexibility in the process of interviews I made use of questions as prompts and cues rather than neatly formulated questions.

For the students, I framed a set of questions that emerged out of a consolidated study of the themes generated using the earlier tools. These questions centred on issues like specific instances of problems with the textbooks and the teaching methodology. In addition, the students were asked to reflect on the issue of autonomy in the context of the college. In fact, this was the first opportunity for them to voice their opinions and narrate their experiences of being in an autonomous college.
The students were interviewed in groups of 3 to 4 and each interview lasted for about 40-60 minutes. Although they were in groups, the students were made to answer the questions individually. Thus, only after all of them had completed responding I moved to the next question. The interviews were flexible enough to accommodate views which were not planned for earlier. Thus, the questions were not rigidly designed and there was enough scope for accommodating other information. For instance, to quote an advantage of using flexible design, when I asked them to narrate their experiences with the lessons prescribed in their textbooks they began to link up this issue with other aspects like comparison of their present textbooks with the textbooks they studied in their schools (Section 3.3.1).

The data from student interviews are categorised into two broad themes. The first theme captures their perceptions about the textbooks, the teaching methods and other issues related to classroom pedagogy. The perceptions of the students on these aspects of the curriculum are presented under the theme of text in the class. Apart from this, the students also expressed their opinions on the concept of autonomy and
related problems. A collection of these views is presented under the theme *being in an autonomous college*.

As the interviews were held in groups, I recorded the data by adopting a group-wise classification of the views by highlighting (in *italics*) some of the important and interesting sentences and phrases that contribute to the thematic analysis. A preliminary analysis of the data from student interviews is presented in Appendix 5.

I shall now pick up some relevant parts of the interviews to support the students' perceptions of the following themes:

- Text in the class
- Autonomous college

### 4.17.1 Text in the class

Following are some of the perceptions of the students related to the lessons in the textbooks, teaching methodology and examination-oriented syllabus. The excerpts presented below have some text in *italics*. This indicates the important points conveyed by the students.

S1 - *When we seen the competitive exams question paper we can’t identify the words... some very specific words, these textbooks don’t help.*
S4 - Truly speaking our question paper is set according to the competitive exams model... but the vocabulary is confined to our textbooks.

S2 - We are not asked to improve our vocabulary in other ways...like by reading, referring to other books etc....

S3 - The discussions that we can have like, something that is happening in today's world.

S4 - In interviews etc., we have to speak, speaking is important, we become nervous...conscious about our speech...so when you start speaking in the class you'll learn how to speak elsewhere.

S3 - Some girls, they can write well, but they can't speak, it's a very big disadvantage.

S1 - ...English is an important language in all the exams.... MBA entrance, Bank exams...

S4 - Unless you read something unknown to you it doesn't become very interesting.

S1 - Not, unknown. It should be novel to you.

S3,S4 - Teachers should not read line by line, it's explained to us as if we don't understand English.

S4 - But we get put off, you can't enjoy a chapter like that, they [teachers] should make it interesting for all of us.

S4 - Actually from science point of view, English class is a welcome break.

S2 - It's a period here we usually relax a little.

S1 - I feel the degree level textbook is just not existing. Why can't we have stories where human relations are shown,

S3 - we should be able to intricately examine things, explain it from our point of view.
S2 - Language should make us think, like in our school English classes our teachers would show a picture and ask us to write, we think critically and write... This is different from spoon-feeding, here you are analysing chapters that have already been explained by the teachers. This doesn’t help in thinking or writing, expressing...

S1 - S2 - [from the point of view of a commerce student] Communication skills, we being commerce students, if we take up some profession later on in life, like finance side we need to communicate with so many people, so our ideas and expression should be clear, very simple... and diplomatic.

S1 - I think our teachers can’t do much about the syllabus and textbooks.

S2 - We’d like something light-hearted... something we should be able to relate to the lesson...

S1 - And they should get out of the idea that they should have lessons [with a lot of emphasis on the word] in the prose book, it can have articles from newspapers, like we read articles in newspapers that are quite enlightening but they aren’t used in teaching, some good speeches can also be included.

S3 - knowing that it’s a girls’ college, they should include something that’ll encourage, help us later in life, like personality development... Topics that’d help us overcome fear ...

S3 - Especially in poetry, there can be so much scope for discussion in poetry, we can disagree with the poet.

S2,S3-We need a lot of activities, connecting the topic we’re covering, this’ll make the classes more interesting. May be when we’re doing some lesson, they can invite somebody connected with it...
4.17.2 Autonomous college

Following are some of the perceptions of the students related to autonomy and its impact on their studies. The excerpts presented below have some text in italics. This indicates the important points conveyed by the students.

S1 - It is different, the pattern of question paper is completely different, I like the model, it related to our future exams [the competitive exams], I'd say this way it's better.

S1 - We've lots of extracurricular activities in English, debates, poetry recitations...

S2 - In fact, autonomy should be made a general aspect of other colleges also. The students will have the opportunity to develop themselves, like we have here, like extra-curricular activities are necessary.

S1 - We feel bad because we have exams when others don't have.

S2 - Students from other colleges. They don't study much but they get more marks.

S1 - In other colleges [non-autonomous colleges], they have 50% choice, for them there's no need to study throughout the year, but they can get better marks.

S1 - The idea of autonomy is good, but we suffer with our marks when we go out of the college, others [from other colleges] get better marks.
S2 - Another thing is external correction- if we have autonomy, we should have total autonomy ... because of autonomy, the expectations from our external examiners are very high and it is difficult to meet them.

S1 - In fact, you can compare the quality of our questions, we have question on critical appreciation, like analyse critically. They are literature types of questions [meaning that usually such questions are asked to literature students].

S2 - Our teachers should mark our paper, they know our standards, they'll mark us accordingly, the external examiner will only have high expectations [because of the standard and reputation of the college.]

S3 - Here (in the autonomous college), we're more involved with the subject, this is not there in other colleges, we have project work and seminars... there isn't much last minute work. We work throughout the year.

The perceptions of the students as expressed in this Section could be captured as following points:

- The dissatisfaction of the students with the present General English course emerges very strongly when they say that the present set of textbooks fail to engage their attention.

- The contents of the textbooks were found to be uninteresting and simple as the students express their desire to have topics that are relevant and contemporary.
• The need to broaden the scope of classroom activities is suggested by the fact that the students are quite aware of what would be of help in improving English.

• The students are remarkably perceptive in expressing their objectives of attending the English classes. They posit a need for enhancing the usefulness of these classes by making them socially relevant.

• With regard to autonomy, they seem to be proud of the fact that they are in an autonomous college where they share a different relationship with the teachers. However, when it comes to exams, they find that the marks awarded to them are quite lower than the student from other colleges. This is because of the practice of an external examiner who has high expectations from them. Some students also express their displeasure at the idea of having too many Internal Assessments.

By way of consolidating the discussion so far, I shall now summarise the important points before proceeding to the next Section. According to the students, the classes do not really prepare them for the competitive exams as vocabulary is confined to the textbook. There is a need to go beyond the textbook and include activities that facilitate
language development, like debates, elocution. Some students are quite satisfied with the fact that they participate in extracurricular language activities conducted by the department of English. The Commerce students specifically needed language skills that will help them in their professional growth. Some of the girls have also suggested that they could have topics that are of particular interest to girls and that would eventually help in personality development. Most of them find the prose units very preachy and serious dealing with themes like philosophy, spiritualism and patriotism. They felt that they have already been exposed to a lot of writing by Nehru and Vivekananda. The concept of lesson itself was being questioned by some students. They felt that ‘lessons’ could be replaced by articles from magazines and newspapers that expose them to contemporary and relevant topics.

Perhaps, this has also got to do with the way in which these textbooks are taught. As discussed earlier, generally teachers read and explain these lessons line-by-line, thereby adding to the dreariness involved in the whole process. Most of the students strongly feel that their teachers should adopt different teaching methods in order to bring variety in class. They should avoid reading line-by-line and involve the students in the process of meaning making, thus giving value to their ideas and experiences.
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4.18.1 Syllabus and textbooks

The syllabus and textbooks were changed after the college was granted autonomy. Assuming that the teachers had an important role to play in syllabus and other course related decisions, I ventured to find out more about the rationale for designing the syllabus and the choice of textbooks. This theme touches upon various aspects of decision making such as defining the objectives and selecting the content.

This is a broad theme which includes issues related to changing the syllabus as a result of autonomy. It is interesting to note how this theme has got interpreted differently by the four teachers. For T1, changing the syllabus is equated with changing the pattern of question paper. She derives the rationale for the change by stating that the earlier evaluation scheme was more content-based, and that would not have helped the students in their competitive exams. Some of the views expressed by T1 in this regard are as follows:

"Privilege of decision making... examination oriented approach going by the pattern of question papers... need for language skills, cannot have a paper full of language without any text...have to be on par with others, so some amount of text based questions and more of language... hence change the question paper and go for a textbook that is readily..."
available in the market". Following are the points that emerge as crucial issues for consideration:

- Language items vs text
- Examination based approach
- Commercial value of English
- Redesigning the question paper
- Decontextualised, objective type
- Itemized approach to teaching language

T2 did not have a say in decision-making as she had joined the college after the changes were made. But she is aware of the fact that the second year textbook is inappropriate and hence it needs a change. It may be noted that contrary to the issue of availability as reiterated by T1 as the criteria for selecting a textbook, T2 discloses some hidden aspects involved in the prescription of a textbook. Her mention of yielding to ‘subtle pressure from the members of the Board of Studies’ deserves a serious attention. In the words of T2:

"Second year textbook was inappropriate...needed a change, the book was selected under 'pressure', it was proposed by the Board of Studies, they yielded to the subtle pressure, they (the board members) had helped in several ways, in retrospect it was discovered that the book was not up
to the mark.” Following are the points that can be taken up for further analysis:

- Role of Board of Studies
- Authority and power to influence decision making
- Teachers’ role in such a context
- Serious implications of a faulty decision

T3 adds a new dimension to the aspect of decision making by saying that the textbooks were decided upon by the Head of the Department. It may be noted that T1 has continued to be the Head since the time the changes were made. She further states that the scope provided by autonomy is not fully utilized and comments on the choice of the textbooks by saying, “the textbooks were decided by the Head...scope of autonomy is not fully realized, the books are outdated, not contemporary ... if I had a chance the entire thing would go into a dustbin, radical person...” following points can be gathered from the view of T3:

- Extreme views
- Emotional outburst
- Against the Head, resistance
- being radical, could be impractical
According to T4, "once the textbook is chose for three years, it cannot be changed... commercial propositions of prescribing the textbooks". Following points can be gleaned from her view and taken up for further analysis:

- Philosophy for selecting the book
- What does the textbook signify?
- Compiling their own textbook for private circulation
- Management has promised support
- Compile a book that caters to the specific needs of the students
- Commercial aspects of selecting a textbook

Again, the problematic nature of the second year textbook, Spectrum gets highlighted as T2 voices her dissatisfaction with the book. Although she did not have a role to play in selecting the book, she is aware of the need to change textbook. According to T2 she would, "Refuse to accept a book that I haven't read... the second year book was chosen in the wrong way... they were under pressure to accept the book, it has a major cultural gap..."

- Flawed process
- What about the students

"Because of cultural gap we concentrate on content and not on language skills... no Indian poems, they didn't want to take up experimentation in a big way, they preferred doing it in a gradual, phased manner, so they tried
to follow the University model wherever possible... the levels of textbooks are wrong, the first year book is challenging and demanding, second year book is of low level...” Following points sum up the concerns of T2 regarding the textbooks:

- Content vs language skills
- Teaching genres of literature
- ESL – a low priority subject as against Optionals
- Movement against English

T3 stresses the need for dynamism at the higher levels when she says that,

“Need for dynamism at higher levels is certainly there, because so much can be done, that depends on who is heading it.” Here views can be summed up as follows:

- Expresses her resentment at the Head
- Blames her for lack of initiative and dynamism

### 4.18.2 Teaching methodology

While agreeing with the idea that there is a difference in planning and preparing for literature and language classes, the teachers articulated their views by describing the individual efforts made in this direction. One
of the main reasons for adopting a different approach in teaching language was the number of students in the class. The distinction between the goals of literature and language classes, for T¹ lies in the fact that

"Goals are different for both language and literature teaching, large numbers in language classroom...don't go deep into the subject, in literature it's more personalized...scope for criticism, discussion, interpretation, interaction..." Views expressed by T¹ throw up the following issues:

- What is defined as Literature
- It's a literature-centered department
- Teaching literature is easier than teaching language
- There is the idea that anything goes in language classes

T² finds the lecture method the best as the number of students in a language class is very large. Her sense of regret is clearly brought out when she expresses the possibilities in a language class in the second paragraph of this excerpt. In the words of T²,

"Lecture method is the best because of the number of students, but there are lots of possibilities of making the language class interesting and
relevant, right facilities are to be provided, senior lecturers teach Literature”. Following are the points that suggest plausible areas

- Lecture method is not recommended
- Management does not support group work
- There could be problems of logistics if language exercises are developed for instance, providing handouts and so on
- Language can be taught by juniors, inexperienced teachers

Expressing her preference for teaching literature, T3 says that when she has to teach language she focuses on vocabulary. T3 prefers,

“not to teach language... literature oriented person, but when I teaches it, I use games, reading exercises, for generating enthusiasm...literature classes provide more scope for creativity, personal preferences, questions the decision makers for an overly functional focus of the syllabus...” Following points can be gathered for further analysis:

- Literary vs functional language
- Question of best method to teach
- techniques in the classroom
- Going beyond the scope of the lesson
- Sanctity of a lesson plan
- Lack of seriousness towards English
- Fear of examination
- Keep the students engaged
• Sustain interest by asking questions

• Explain and summarize that suffices the exam needs

The goal of generating enthusiasm is achieved by T3 when she follows her own method of teaching literature is apparently quite different from the methods followed by other teachers. To elucidate on this she says,

"Prepare question from competitive exams perspective...text based questions are more of recollection from the textbook and language based are more creative use of language, train them for exams, have objective type questions, setting the question paper is a collective exercise..."

4.18.3 Managing curricular changes

When it comes to managing curricular changes T1 says that:

"Present set of textbooks have a problem...no class can be completely language based, as we do need certain base for interaction and discussion...the gap between the first and second year books, its' from inexperience, we are learning, Now if we say to the Board that we want to cut down, it will convey wrong signals, might think that the college is misusing autonomy..." These view indicate the following issues:

• Wrong perception about teaching language

• Power structure in decision-making
4.18.4 Perceptions about autonomy

In general, most of the teachers feel that autonomy has increased the workload. It is also hinted that in the absence of monetary incentives it is difficult to expect the same amount of involvement from other teachers. The Head related lack of motivation to salaries because she was the only one who was receiving UGC salaries. Teacher feel that as a result of autonomy, students have become more committed, but they seem lose out on competitive spirit, may not be able to face the competition outside once they leave the college.

4.18.5 Perceptions about students

Almost all of them are from English medium background. They are good at conversational English. But their writing is poor, especially, spellings and grammar. Some teachers felt that the students are incapable of deciding on what is required for them in terms of language skills, because of their age and inexperience.

4.18.6 Managing change

Only major change was with respect to redesigning the question paper and changing textbooks. The teachers felt that they were able to achieve substantial improvement in terms of evaluation pattern where the focus was equally divided between language and text. But regarding the change
of textbooks they expressed dissatisfaction particularly in the case of second year textbooks they felt that they are learning from the mistakes in deciding upon the textbooks. Though they were convinced that the textbooks needed to be changed, they were apprehensive about approaching the Board of Studies as it might convey wrong signals. They might think that the teachers are misusing autonomy and that they are trying to reduce their work.

4.19 Analysis of Teacher Interviews

Since both students and teachers found the textbooks problematic (Sections 4.12.3 and 4.13.1) I decided to probe more into the criteria for selecting the books. Though availability of the books was cited as the main reason, I could find a ‘hidden’ reason for choosing the second year textbook.

It may be inquired that, if the book was selected and prescribed as they wished to please the Board of Studies members, at what cost was such a favour being done? Even the students felt that the first year textbook was more challenging than the second year textbook. Teachers
also realized that there were serious problems with the textbooks but they felt helpless. The books were prescribed for a period of three years.

The process of prescribing the textbook did not involve any effort at involving the students and seeking their opinions about the textbooks. As the Head of the Department in one of her conversations mentioned that she did not feel that the students would not know what is good for them. So it was for the teachers to decide on what would best address the learning needs of the students. But going by what the students had to convey about the textbooks, their perceptions certainly carry weight in making decisions about the textbooks. By ignoring the students' voice the college seems to lose out on an important pool of ideas for textbooks. As young adults, the students would have found themselves respected if their ideas are sought while making curricular decisions.

The decision to have competitive exams as a basis for syllabus design was not backed by any study of learner or needs analysis. As stated by the teachers they decided to have the competitive exams as a goal as many students would appear for these exams after the completion of their graduation. The question paper was redesigned in order to give a feel of these exams to the students. 50% of the questions were based on
vocabulary and grammar; these were aimed at testing the students' competence through objective type questions. But the students felt that the goal of preparing for competitive exams could not be realized through the prescribed books, as they did not offer ample opportunities for language practice.

Going by what T3 had to say, it was evident that she was not comfortable with the decisions taken in the past, especially regarding the textbooks and examination pattern. It was gradually becoming obvious that she was not on goods terms with the head of the department. To me this teacher and the Head represented sharply contrasting personalities. T3, who had joined just two years ago was very popular among the students, she had several years of experience in drama and performing arts. She used a powerful body language while teaching and her classes were entertaining for the students. She also showed a keen interest in extra-curricular activities and organized several events in the college. She was the most popular teacher in the department. Her primary interest lay in teaching Literature.

Reading and explaining the text, the lesson....This was how the textbooks was being taught. Whether it was prose or poetry, teachers
always read the text line-by-line or made the students read the text, then explained it to the students, simplifying and paraphrasing it, giving examples, providing illustrations from contemporary life. There was no doubt that the teachers did it with the best of intentions. But it was difficult for them to break the monotony resulting from such an approach. The students found it too passive as there was very little interaction between them and the teacher or their peers. Apart from lack of interaction, this approach curbed the students’ expressions as they could not participate in the process of decision making.

The issue of increased workload was considered to be crucial fallout of autonomy. When compared to the teachers of university college, in autonomous college teachers have to put in more effort in terms of marking answer sheets, Internal Assessments, designing courses and other activities. Teachers often felt that they had a lot of additional work that increased their responsibilities. They were not motivated to perform these additional tasks, perhaps because there was no corresponding hike in their compensation. Apart from this, they were also keen that there should be appropriate recognition for their contributions and initiatives.
4.20 Drawing together

The primary concern of this chapter was to reconstruct the curricular site by identifying the micro level themes for analysis. For this purpose, first an overview of the fieldwork was presented. This was followed by a description of the tools used for the study along with the type of outcome. It was discussed that the study made use of tools like participant observation, questionnaire and interviews to understand the micro level issues in ESL on the site. Subsequently, a detailed description of the excerpts from data and the thematic analysis was presented. This presentation, which was in the form of thick description, was organised according the sequence in which the research tools were used.

It may be noted that this chapter has considerably dealt with micro level themes such as syllabus restructuring, selection of textbooks, use of pedagogic methods and evaluation schemes. It has also discussed the generic theme of autonomy as point running across various themes.

After a micro-level reconstruction of curricular issues as attempted in this chapter, I shall present the macro-level reconstruction in the next chapter. The macro context is built up by adopted a sociohistorical perspective to study the curricular issues.