

English Language Teaching Needs an Overhaul

Hakeem Rouf

Besides engagement of trained and competent language experts, there is an urgent need to put an end to archaic and ineffective methodology of English language teaching in our schools.

Recently, I had an interesting interaction with the kids of my cousins at a social gathering. It was not a mere interaction but a good learning experience as well. I was startled by the proficiency and confidence with which the kids were conversing in English. The adequate language skills of these kids, enrolled in a not very renowned private school, not only fascinated and gladdened me but also left me pondering over how a few years at a school instilled in them an exemplary confidence and imparted such an impactful fluency in English language. I also pondered why students enrolled in less prestigious institutions lack the ability to converse and write in English without making grammatical mistakes. A bit more inquisitive interaction with these kids made me ascertain/gauge that the school does not have any magic wand to make the students effective speakers in a short period but adopts effective and applicative way of imparting English language skills. I realized the importance of the axiom, "Language is caught not taught" after getting to know that the school lays main focus on practical conversation activities by giving students

ample opportunities to participate in real communicative activities besides routine class room teaching. The kids informed me that teaching of English language goes beyond the class room which helped them to acquire basic communication skills. They are motivated and encouraged to converse in English language outside the class room which instilled in them the confidence and attained fluency without much laborious efforts.

Teaching language by making students practice real life conversation is undoubtedly an effective way of imparting spoken English skills but unfortunately this way of teaching is rarely adopted in most of our schools. I am in teaching job for last couple of months, I have been observing that English language is taught as a subject but not as a skill both in elementary and higher classes. It is taught in a way that hardly enables the students to use it for communicative purposes though it makes them capable enough to pass the written examinations in the subject English. Instead of engaging kids in practical conversation activities/sessions, the students are bombarded with complex grammatical concepts from the very beginning of their educational journey which makes language learning a cumbersome and a boring process. In other words, most of our schools adopt grammar centric

approach and English language teaching is confined to the class room and text books. Grammar centric language teaching is ineffective, kills creativity and obstructs free expression.

English as second language is taught through literary texts to develop one's communication skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in addition to developing literary taste. It is quite upsetting that English texts like short stories, dramas and poems and other genres of writing are taught in a way that neither helps our kids to develop communication skills nor develop literary taste. The objective can be achieved only when the students are given opportunities to use the language. Instead of encouraging them to participate in practical communicative activities and creatively discuss and express the texts on their own, most of the schools both private and government, make learners passive listeners. Students are fed with sentence-wise word by word meaning of the texts in urdu, Kashmiri or any other regional languages. This doesn't serve the main purpose of imparting communicative skills. However, this is not true of all schools. There are schools, though small in number, which teach English language in a way the students acquire language skills.

English has become the language of opportunities. Having a good command over English Language is not only pivotal for the academic progress of a student but for

employability prospects of the students. A good command over this language has now become a prerequisite for almost all jobs in government and corporate sectors. Poor communication skills is one of the major challenging issues that confronts our education system. Lack of proficiency in English among the students is a matter of serious concern which remains neglected. Lack of linguistic proficiency is one of the reasons for their abysmal academic performance in other subjects, that hampers the overall academic performance of the students and puts impediments to their career development.

The stark reality of communicative incompetence among the students reflects that the way language is taught in schools is quite archaic and moribund which needs urgent revamp. To address the issue of poor language skills among the students, there is an urgent need to overhaul the methodology of English language teaching especially in elementary classes, the stage when the kids possess innate capability of imitating and grasping things. Besides ineffective way of teaching English language, dearth of trained language teachers and inappropriate testing methods can be attributed to as the other reasons. It is necessary to engage competent teachers and provide periodical training to them. The evaluation of language skills should not be confined to testing knowledge of grammar rules but test communicative competence

through novel and realistic testing methods.

To conclude, our policy makers, educationists and the people who are at the helm of the department of education should take the issue of inadequate and pathetic language skills among students with utmost seriousness and take appropriate remedial measures to address it.

Government needs to employ and engage qualified and well trained language trainers in schools to impart English language skills and also make it mandatory for the private schools. This will not only significantly uplift the educational standards of our schools but also ease teaching learning process, enhance job prospects of students and also open vast opportunities for them.

Dear member,

Have you used any of the following digital platforms (or any other also), for promoting online discussions among your students?

Course Management systems

Moodle, Edmodo, Collaborize classroom

Social networking/Discussion sites

Ning, Facebook, Google+, Google groups and Yahoo groups.

Online Discussion Apps.

Collaborize classroom and Subtext

If yes, please send your paper, giving an account of your experiences in using them . and also with what effect, to <eltai_india@yahoo.co.in> cc to

Dr. Xavier Pradeepsingh at pradheepxing@gmail.co

All selected papers will be given cash awards and also published in our E Journal— Journal of Technology for ELT (Impact factor:4.530

S. Rajagopalan, www.eltai.in