

Full Length Research Paper

Teaching of English to Arab Students: Problems and Remedies

Asghar Ali Ansari

Umm -al Quara University, University College, Makkah, Saudi Arabia

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Because of the social and cultural backgrounds of his students a teacher of English faces a lot of problems while teaching English to Arab students especially in Saudi Arabia. There are many reasons for this. The first and the most important reason is that the Arab students have no knowledge of even basic English although they are taught English in schools. Perhaps the school teachers do not pay proper attention towards the teaching of English. Whatever may be the reason for this but the teacher who teaches those students in higher classes suffers the most and faces a lot of problems while teaching them a prescribed book or course in higher classes. On the other hand students look towards their teacher with great hope. They consider the teacher the most competent and think that their teacher would make them learn English very soon Thus a teacher's responsibility towards his students is doubled. As a result many English teachers are fade up and disappointed and so leave the assignment in the middle of their contract. But if the teacher has a little patience and is competent and intelligent he would handle the situation easily and achieve his goal. The plans, strategies and methods of teaching English to these students have been discussed in details in the main research paper.

Keywords: EFL, ESL IE (Integrated English), Practical approaches, Direct Method.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching a second language is not easy. But it can be taught effectively with patience and hard labour with the help of self-invented methodologies suitable for one's students. For this a teacher has to, first of all, study the problems and difficulties faced by his students in the process of learning English. Once the problems and difficulties are found out, the task of teaching becomes easy for an intelligent teacher. A competent, intelligent, hard working and co-operative teacher is necessary for learning a second language. A learner is lucky if he gets a competent teacher while learning a second language. When he starts learning a second or foreign language, a student faces a lot of problems. At this stage his teacher comes for his rescue. He tries to understand his student's problems, solves them and saves the students from depression. He frames Curriculum suitable for his students, selects reading materials for

them and creates a suitable environment for learning English in the class-room. While learning a second language, a student faces a many fold problems like socio-cultural problems, unfamiliarity with the subject, different style of writing from his mother tongue, pronunciation problem, problem in recognizing the alphabets etc. The socio-cultural background of a student plays a vital role in learning the second language. His culture is totally different from the culture of the language which he is learning.

This unawareness of the culture confuses the student. At this crucial stage his teacher comes for his help. The teacher tells him something about the culture, the way of the living of the people, and the linguistic nature and style of the second language. He also makes his student familiar with the subject through the class-room practice. He teaches alphabets, words and finally gives short familiar topics to write on and to read the selected passages, in order to improve students' linguistic knowledge.

*Corresponding Author E-mail: prof6610@yahoo.com

Process of Learning

It is true that learning a language is a long process but it is not tiresome. It is enjoyable but the condition is that there should be a highly qualified and competent teacher. So, while appointing a teacher to teach EFL, the appointing authority should be careful.

They must be choosy in appointing a teacher because the learning of EFL totally depends efficiency and competency of the teacher. If a teacher is found incompetent he should immediately be replaced by a competent teacher. It does not mean that there should be any restriction on the teacher. In fact a teacher should be free in adopting a style of teaching in the class-room. Every teacher has a different style of teaching in the class-room. If a student fails in learning or improving his linguistic knowledge, it does not mean that his teacher is not good or incompetent. We can, utmost, blame his style of teaching, not the teacher himself.

Tasks of an EFL Teacher

There is a number of methodologies for teaching of English. These methodologies keep on changing with the passage of time. For some one method of teaching may be fashionable while for other the same may be out of date. So it is up to the teacher to choose a methodology of teaching according to the need of his students. The main aim of a teacher should be to develop the linguistic knowledge of his students. To achieve this goal, a teacher has to take the following steps:

- a. A teacher should encourage students to learn new vocabularies and their usages.
- b. He must tell them how to consult a dictionary.
- c. He must teach students the parts of speech. It means that students must know either the words, which they are learning, are verb, noun, adjective, or adverb.
- d. The teacher should make students use the words in sentences. The sentences should be small, simple and of daily uses.
- e. If, in the beginning, students use translation method in framing sentences, it is not bad. They should not be discouraged. It means if they think in their mother tongue and then translate into English, it is not bad but after some times this method should be discarded and direct method should be applied.
- f. To make the correct sentences, students should be taught structural patterns. It means they should know which parts of speech should come first, second, third and so on so forth. For this students should

be given a structure and asked to frame a sentence based on the structure. For example:

- a. Subject + Verb + Object
He reads a book.
- b. Subject + Verb + adverb
He walks slowly
- c. Subject + verb + adjective + noun
She is a beautiful girl

To learn the structures takes time but it makes students perfect in writing. Unless students learn structure they will not be able to write correctly. Once they acquire the knowledge of parts of speech and grammatical structure, they would start enjoying their learning of English language.

In the class-room students become bore and do not take interest in learning language due the following reasons:

1. They do not know the basics of the language taught.
2. They do not have sufficient vocabulary power to express themselves in English.
3. They do not know the grammatical structural pattern.

Because of all the above mentioned reasons students feel shy in learning the language and so, gradually, lose interest in the language. Therefore, it is the foremost duty of an EFL teacher to create interest among his students to learn the language. The teacher can easily achieve his goal by enriching students' vocabulary power, teaching them the structural patterns and encouraging them to use new words in their sentences.

Background of the students:

The EFL teaching is always affected by socio-cultural factors. Many Arab students, attending the EFL classes, come from the background where English is unknown. Of course they are taught English in their primary and secondary schools, but they are taught English only as a formality. Teachers as well as students take EFL lightly. They only need marks to pass the examination and they even pass the EFL examination by memorizing the answers without learning any English. Consequently they spend their valuable years in schools without learning anything of English language. But when they come to college or university or take admission professional courses like medical, nursing, computer science, engineering etc, they need English language because they have to study everything in English. At this stage English becomes a problems for them.

At this problematic stage only an intelligent and competent teacher may come for their rescue. If, unfortunately, a student does not get a competent teacher, his interest in learning English will disappear forever.

Teacher's Activities in the Class-room:

An EFL teacher should not be afraid of handling of these students in the class-room. If he handles these students carefully and patiently, he can achieve his goal. Actually to teach English to students who do not have any English is a very difficult task. The teacher who teaches such students, has great courage and patience. In a class of 25 or 30 students, if 75% of students do not know English or have no interest in English, the following things happen:

- a. The students do not understand anything what the teacher says or teaches.
- b. They lose their interest in EFL class.
- c. They think that it is the wastage of time.
- d. So, they do not respect the teacher.
- e. They start talking among themselves and even making noise during the class.
- f. Finally the teacher is fade up and gives up teaching. It means he surrenders which is not good for his profession.

A teacher can overcome all these problems and handle the class successfully if he takes the following points into consideration:

1. Forget that you are teaching a higher class.
2. Step down from your level.
3. Start teaching the students from the lower level, even from A B C D.....and go to high level step by step.
4. Teach something about the basics of English grammar and language.
5. Ask short and simple questions on what you taught them.
6. Encourage them to learn new words by explaining the meaning of the words or even by translating the meaning of the words into their language, if possible.
7. Tell them to use the words in their own sentences.

These methods will be the most effective in the case of the above mentioned students. Within a fortnight the result will be before you. 80% of your students will imbibe interest in learning English and start attending the classes regularly with interest. You will become the most respected and sought after teacher for them. If you are successful in imparting knowledge to your students, you will become their ideal.

Language Skills

When we say language teaching or language learning, we are concerned with the four language skills.

- a. Reading

- b. Writing:
- c. Speaking
- d. Listening

All these four skills are very important and so all of them should be taught with equal emphasis. All the four skills are related with one another. We cannot say that one particular skill is more important than others. In fact we cannot separate them from one another. Of course the method and the style of teaching of all the four skills are different.

Teaching of Reading

To teach Reading skill for an Arab student, a teacher should apply the following methods:

- a. Forget the prescribed syllabus for sometimes, say one or two weeks and teach students whatever you think necessary for your students.
- b. Make them revise the alphabets of English. Teach them capital and small letters and then jingle words.
- c. Dictate and encourage them to write words.
- d. Tell them to read, first silently and then loudly, what they have written.
- e. Collect all the papers from students and then distribute them among the students tell them to correct the paper of their class-mates.
- f. Finally, collect all the papers and correct them and indicate their mistake.
- g. After words, make them write small sentences and gradually move towards longer and complex sentences. Apply the above mentioned method in reading and correcting the sentences.

In this way students will be encouraged to read and write. This systematic way of teaching will create interest in them to learn English. As a teacher it is our foremost duty to make the subject easy and interesting for students. If we apply all these methods in class-room teaching, our subject will become easy for students and they will have a zeal to learn English.

Teaching of English Writing

Teaching English Writing to EFL students is not easy. It is a challenging job. While teaching an EFL a teacher faces a lot of problems. More than 50% of students do not know how to write English. Most of them are unaware of the cursive writing. To solve the problems we have to take practical approaches while teaching an EFL class. Before you start teaching of English writing you should do the following things:

1. Teach them how to use the right stroke while writing anything in English. Wrong strokes make the writing slow and ugly.

2. Make them learn cursive writing. Most of Arab students do not know cursive writing. Two or three lectures should be devoted to this task.
3. Dictate them to write sentences ---simple, short and then long sentences.
4. Dictate some words and tell students to use them in their own sentences.
5. Encourage them to learn more and more words with correct spelling.
6. Students should be given a lot of class-work as well as home work on writing because practice makes the students good writer.

Teaching of Speaking

In the process of teaching of speaking, a teacher is very important because he is a model for his students. It is from him that students directly listen the spoken English. Many of the students do not find opportunity to hear English from the mouth of a native speaker. It is the teacher who directly speaks to his students in English. This is the first-hand experience of spoken English for students. So a teacher, automatically, becomes a model for his students. What and how he speaks becomes the final word for students. So, a teacher should really try to be a real model for students. For this a teacher has to do something to improve his ability as an English teacher so that he may become a really good model for his students. Thus, we see that a teacher has double duty. One is how to teach spoken English to his students and the other is how to improve his own speaking ability.

While teaching Spoken English, a teacher should do the following things:

1. Have confidence in your speaking ability
2. Have confidence that whatever you are teaching is good English.
3. You must have a spirit of self—improvement.
4. Always be ready to correct the mistakes made by your students.
5. Give special attention towards the pronunciation of a word by students.
6. Try to expose your students to other sources of spoken English. For this make them listen to radio, tape recorder, show them CD on T.V and also bring other people to the class—room who can speak English before the students and discuss with them.
7. Give a topic and tell your students to prepare a representation. Tell them to speak on the topic one by one before the class. It should be followed by a question—answer session and discussion. This will improve the speaking power as well as listening ability of the students. This programme should be held twice and thrice in a week.

8. Check the students' speed of speaking. If they are speaking slowly, it means they are lacking confidence. Make them confident and train them to speak fast without caring any grammatical or any other mistakes. Once they gain confidence, they will start speaking better.

Teaching of Listening

Listening is another important skill in the process of EFL. It is a controlled action. We listen to something for meaning and to understand it. To teach and improve listening skill of students, a teacher must do the following two things:

1. He must provide his students models of good pronunciation. Good pronunciation is very important for learning listening skill.

2. He must make a special effort to expose his class to as many different accent as he can.

While learning listening it is necessary to listen carefully. So, make it habit of your students to listen everything carefully. You may do this by repeated practice. There are also a plenty of methods which can be used by a teacher in the class—room to improve listening power like dictation, aural comprehension, note—taking etc.

The most important element in learning to listen effectively in a second or foreign language is confidence, which comes from practice. The role of a teacher is to provide as much as positive practice as possible by speaking to learners in English, by exposing them to a range of listening materials in the class—room, and by encouraging them to use whatever resources are available in their institution or community.

All the above mentioned four skills are very important. It is true that learning reading and writing skills make students pass the examination but in their practical lives, speaking and listening are equally important. But this division of the language is not natural. We divide this only for our convenience. As teachers, we divide the language into four skills only to divide and share our teaching loads. To say that Mr. X is an expert in writing skill and Mr. Y is an expert in speaking or listening skill is not proper. Language should not be divided like that. It should be taught as an integrated course. We should not forget that all the four skills are related to one another and teaching of all the four skills is very important for the students. So, instead of teaching four or five classes, one teacher should teach all the four skills to one class so that he will be well aware of the overall progress of his students. Making sure that all the four skills are taught by one teacher and that they are taught so that they support each other is all part of the concept of

Integrated English, which you may have come across.

Methods of Teaching

While teaching EFL a teacher uses a lot of methods, techniques and styles. This usage of different techniques is called methodology. Methodology means the way of teaching. There are many methods of teaching which are used by the teacher according to the need of students. Students of different levels need different methods. Beginners need different methods of teaching from those students who have been learning EFL for a long time. Those who need the language as a medium of instruction have to be taught differently from those who only need as a subject. The teaching of English, perhaps, has the largest number of different methodologies. Moreover, methodologies have also kept changing over the years. Some methods have become fashionable, whereas others have become out dated.

Out of the largest number of different methods of teaching English language, there are three universally recognized methods:

1. Grammar—Translation Method.
2. The Communicative Method.
3. Direct Method.

1. Grammar—Translation Method.
This is the oldest method of teaching English language. For many years English was taught by the use of rules of grammar and by the lists of vocabulary. The students had to memorize the rules of grammar and a long list of vocabulary. Then they were asked to translate the sentences or passages from one language into the other. This method is called Grammar and Translate Method. This was very difficult, but it gave a good knowledge of the language. But this knowledge was only bookish. Moreover, some of the rules taught to students were not applicable in modern English because they were the rules of the dead languages like Greek and Latin. It is surprising that this method remained in practice for a long time. It may be due to the limited aim of teaching English. At that time English was taught to students who wanted to learn only how to read and write the language. Speaking was not necessary for them. They were not supposed to meet the natives to converse with them. The second reason may be the unavailability of tape recorders, cassettes, films etc.

Communicative Method

This is the recent method used in English language

Teaching, In this method spoken English is given more weight than the reading or writing English. In this method it is emphasized that student can communicate easily in English. This method has some shortcomings. Through this method students do not learn English properly. It provides shallow knowledge to students. They do not learn to read or write. They also do not have sufficient knowledge of grammar. But the communicative English also has some advantages. It gives students the satisfaction of being able to achieve something of the language. This feeling is very important in learning a language.

In Communicative Method students are taught how to greet, how to ask ordinary questions, to understand the answer and to talk about the things of our daily life. This method useful for the students in their daily lives. This method works the best when students have opportunity to use English outside the class—room in their public lives.

Direct Method

This is the most recent English teaching method. In this method students are taught through English medium. The teacher does not speak any other language in the class—room. This is called the direct method. It is easy to use Direct Method in the class but it needs a careful plan before teaching in the class—room. A teacher has to make a plan about what and which lesson he must teach first. For instance if a teacher is teaching vocabulary he has to plan which words should he introduce first. In this method, we also use audio—visual equipment such as audio—cassettes, slides and videos.

CONCLUSION

Thus we see that there are many different methods to teach the four skills of English language. Which skill, out of the four, is the most important depends on the purpose of the learners. But from the technical point of view, reading and writing skills are the most important. So the emphasis should be on reading and writing. If a student learns how to read words or sentences, he would automatically become able to write and speak English. If he does not know how to read, listening words would fall flat on his ears. He will not understand anything because he is not acquainted with words or sentences in English. So, first of all, a student of EFL should be trained in reading the English alphabets, words and sentences. To teach EFL a teacher must have patience. In Saudi Arabia there is no environment of English language. Here English is not a serious subject. Students as well as Saudi teachers take it

lightly. Students are not taught English in a proper way in their schools. After passing school when they come universities to study professional courses, all of them have to study everything in English and so suddenly English becomes very important for them. It is at this stage that students are frustrated. They want to learn English but they are helpless because they do not know how to read and write English properly. Consequently, they lose interest in English language and consider it the most difficult subject. At this stage a teacher plays a vital role. If a teacher is dedicated, competent, intelligent and understands the psychology of students, he rescues his students from their frustration. Only a competent teacher can be helpful for these students. To teach grammar and composition to students having the knowledge of English language is very easy but to prepare students for English language is the most difficult task. The progress of these students in learning English language totally depends on the competent teachers and the curriculum they are taught.

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