

Making Learning English Easier

Poulami Samanta

Nowadays there is pressure on everyone to learn spoken English. There is the feeling that if a person does not learn this language, she might not be 'successful'. As with any language, learning English needs opportunities for practice. There are many reasons why children find English difficult to learn, especially if they are more used to speaking their home languages. Here are some of the reasons:

- Diffidence
- Lack of proper learning activities
- Absence of suitable environment for conversations in English
- Greater use of mother tongue
- Lack of parental co-operation
- Teachers' inability to create the right learning atmosphere or a safe space for learning

Ways of enhancing the learning of English

Direct method

The teacher converses with the students only in English and leads the class in presenting new sentences. Later, in the course of the conversation, the teacher guides the students in speaking the language. The technique of presenting the sentence with the help of audio-visual aids should be used. Material aids, like pictures, models, flashcards, actual objects, worksheets, etc are very effective if they are made attractive and interesting for the learner in the initial stage. Constant use of English would help students in speaking and reading in English.

Grammar-cum-translation method

The teacher begins the lesson with vocabulary items. The meaning of the words is explained in the mother tongue/local language. Then, the teacher translates the passage and explains the grammatical items with the help of mother tongue/local language. The learners are asked to copy the grammar rules in the mother tongue/local language. Finally, unfinished exercises and learning of rules are given as assignments.

Learning variation of a word or its uses

Learning and capturing other related words in the classroom or home, for example, the words *tidy* and *untidy*, *tidying up*, etc.

What a teacher can do

In many cases, the classroom could be the only place where a child gets the opportunity to learn and practise a new language, especially English. The teacher has to be alert to the ways in which children could be helped to learn. Some of the ways in which this can happen are, making sure the class gets enough reading material and speaking opportunities. Learning new words through reading stories or speaking on a subject in the class is a very effective strategy too.

Enhancing vocabulary

A good speaker has new words her vocabulary and uses them while speaking. So as a teacher, introducing at least ten words every day and trying to find chances to use it in the class the next day would help.

Helping children overcome hesitation

Hesitation and thinking about how people 'see' you if you commit mistakes while speaking is a great fear that almost everyone, especially non-native English speakers have. This fear will remain unless it is removed by a teacher who can create a safe space where all the children are given equal opportunity to convey their thoughts and views.

Storytelling

Help children to focus on speaking *fluently* rather than *correctly*. Encouraging them to tell stories is a good way of doing this.

Watching English movies

Encourage students to watch English television programmes or movies if possible. It is a good way of learning new words and phrases. If these can be watched together during school hours, there can be a discussion after such a session.

Keeping a notebook and using a dictionary

Encourage children to keep a notebook of new words and help them to look these up in the dictionary. This could be an interesting classroom activity.

Using local language as well as English

Learning English can become easier and more understandable if teachers use both the local language as well as English. For instance, children should be encouraged to use the local language to interpret stories.

Describing pictures in small sentences

Students can develop their ability and understanding by describing pictures. Ask them to observe a picture and describe it in simple sentences. This activity is helpful for different levels of students in the class.

Making sentences from words

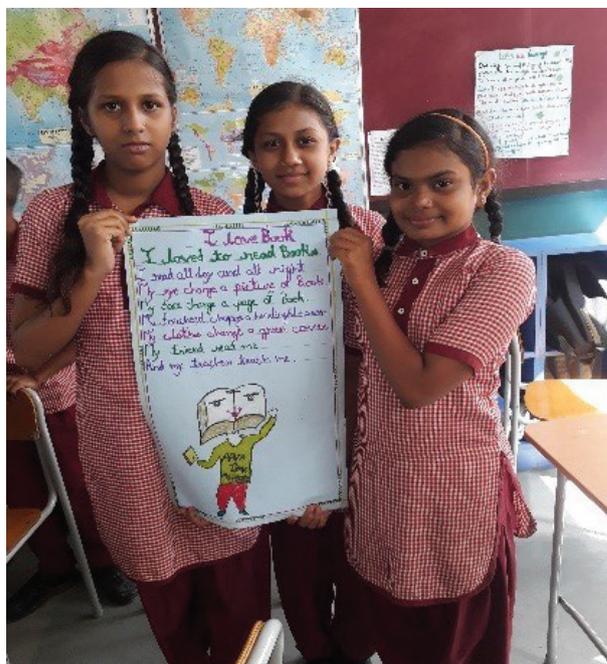
Every child can learn how to frame sentences both in English as well as the local language with a little help and encouragement.

Making picture stories

Get the students to arrange pictures in a sequence to tell a story. Encourage them to tell the story as well as describe the pictures in both the local language and in English. This activity develops the thinking and imagination of pupils while improving their English.

Reading the newspaper

This is useful for older children. Teachers can use the newspaper as reading practice and encourage children to use the dictionary for difficult words. Having a discussion about a news item is good for the practice of speaking.



Extending a story

Each and every child in the classroom can take part in this activity by using their imagination to make up a new story even after the story has ended.

Using the library actively

A library, or even a class library, can be a great resource if used well. Reading always increases vocabulary and helps in writing skills.

Conclusion

There is no one method which suits all children, so it is the teacher who must select the best method of teaching English according to the needs of the class. A method of teaching that may be successful in an urban environment, where technology is available may not work in a rural area. The activities and processes that I have described can help pupils in rural areas to learn English.



Poulami Samanta is a postgraduate with B Ed from Pt. Ravishankar Shukla University, Raipur. She is a teacher at the Azim Premji School, Shankardah (Dhantari, Chattisgarh). She believes that every child has a different capacity and capability to learn and they can learn better with proper guidance from teachers. She enjoys cooking, singing, travelling and writing stories. She can be contacted at poulami.samanta@azimpremjifoundation.org