

Exploring the Role of Teacher in English Language Teaching in Rural Areas

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Students with English as a second language constitute a significant percentage of the population in our schools. These students are also among the lowest ranking in academic achievement and expectations. They represent an at-risk population faced with a wide range of challenges. This presents a unique challenge for teachers who strive to help these students in learning the English language. Every teacher who teaches subject matter in English to ESL students is not only a teacher of the content area but a teacher of English as well. We must continually focus of these students and find effective ways to ensure their learning to help them achieve their desired goals.

This paper considers the challenges faced by teachers teaching ESL in rural areas. ESL students encounter many problems in their efforts to become proficient in the English language. They often come to realize that in order to be fully accepted they must abandon their native language, surrendering the aspect of their identity. They are caused to feel they must either speak English or nothing at all. Thus, they are caught in a painful power struggle over the use of English and their native language.

Forcing the students to only speak English sends a very bad message. You are telling the student that English is superior to their native language. This may not be your intention when telling students not to speak their first language, but it is certainly the message they will receive.

Most effective way to learn a language is to get your brain to start thinking in that language

when you are in the classroom. This applies to any language you are learning, not just English. It's got absolutely nothing to do with considering English superior.

Teaching ESL is challenging. As an ESL teacher, you must learn to constantly adapt to your students needs. A good ESL teacher must be able to recognize classroom problems, and work to find solutions.

The following will outline the most common problems faced when teaching English as a second language, and just how to solve them.

Students become dependent on teacher.

It has been observed in an ESL class students always look towards teacher for the correct answer instead of trying themselves. This becomes spoon feeding. Instead, focus should be on encouraging the students to ask questions and asking them to find answers themselves even if incorrect. This will boost up their confidence.

Persistent use of first language

As an ESL teacher, it is important to encourage students to use English and only English in the classroom. It has been observed that in and outside the classroom the first language is persistently used and English remains restricted to the book only. Even in a lecture of fifty minutes actual English is spoken for a couple of minutes. To overcome this problem student's involvement is necessary in speaking English whether incorrect it may be and certain rules are to be framed and penalty system should be developed for when they use their

first language. For the process of learning, it should not be forgotten that 'compulsion is the best motivation'.

Memorizing the content

Memorizing a set of grammatical rules and answers can be a good thing. It shows students interest in the lessons or assignments. But comprehension is more important than merely memorizing rules and answers. Here teacher plays an important role in making them understand the concept and then memorizing it, if necessary.

Sustaining genuine interest in students' learning

A persistent problem faced by many English teachers is to sustain genuine interest in students in learning and using English language. Students like English but believe that it is very difficult a language to learn. Their negative attitude along with their attitude towards their English language teachers, whom they are afraid of as symbol of authority, demotivates them. Their negative attitude is stronger than the positive and therefore it is a great challenge for the teacher to break off the negative attitude of the students and teach the language effectively. But with effective teaching methods, a teacher can help students improve their language. One solution is to develop a continuous program in and outside classroom language activities which help students to acquire language skills. The famous proverb "Don't give your students fish, but teach them how to fish" is perhaps true in language teaching. It has been observed that by memorizing set of grammatical rules and answers to the questions, students become good test takers, and yet they are not able to speak and write competently when they graduate from colleges. Teachers need to find creative ways to teach the language and increase students' motivation to learn the language and to eventually appreciate the language.

Undoubtedly, possessing the knowledge of various teaching methods is crucial but it is important for a teacher to understand the cultural and bilingual background of the learner before applying any particular method of teaching.

Strong cultural dominance

Everyday language is "tinged" with cultural bits and pieces – a fact most people seem to ignore. By the very act of talking, we assume social and cultural roles, which are so deeply entrenched in our thought processes as to go unnoticed. Interestingly, culture defines not only what its members should think or learn but also what they should ignore or treat as irrelevant. For example, a student tries to identify the meaning of a certain English word in his mother tongue. Students' cultural heritage must not be dismissed but instead utilized to enhance their learning. It is also important to identify potential areas of cultural interference where two cultures may come into conflict or overlap. Teachers must prepare themselves to be effective instructors of culturally and linguistically diverse student population. Learners can readily transfer concepts learned at home in their first language to the second language. A unique opportunity is provided for exchange among learners, which allows utilizing their cultural and linguistic heritage while learning new skills in learning a new language.

Learner's gain a sense of empowerment or confidence when the content and ideas discussed are relevant to their experiences and understandings. For example, while teaching grammar students mother tongue helps a lot to understand the concept. For effective teaching of ESL to culturally and linguistically diverse, teachers must be concerned with students' learning styles. Content will be meaningful only if it takes into account the student's prior knowledge.

Bilingual education must include multicultural awareness and respect for different cultures to facilitate in acquiring second language learning skills and culture, while maintaining an appreciation of their own cultural heritage. The link between effective teaching and learning and the teachers' formulation of learning goals that are appropriate to the student takes on even greater significance where effective bilingual instruction is the aim. The unique linguistic and academic needs of the bilingual student must be taken into consideration when formulating and communicating learning goals.

To facilitate learning, teachers need to accommodate students' background knowledge and skills. Many students internalize basic values and beliefs of their native culture. This is the hidden element of culture that is so important to successful bilingual education. Mc Combs defines learning as "an individual process of constructing meaning from information and experience, filtered through each individual's unique perceptions, thoughts and feelings". For example, articles are taught in the ESL classroom, where it is important to know that pronunciation is more important than the spelling. It can be easily explained in their mother tongue how to pronounce the word and

thereby selecting the appropriate article. This develops a positive self concept and minimizes the conflict between cultures.

Once having found the solution to these commonly faced problems it is up to the teacher to determine the goals and provide the means with which to meet them. Teaching English as a second language nge because performance in examinations is considered more important for any other purpose.

Taking reasons, as well as language acquisition needs into consideration when planning a class or individual instruction is crucial for a successful learning experience. When a student understands reasons for learning English, he can better plan his learning strategy. In the classroom he can help the teacher identify his needs and desires.

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