

MONDAY | SEPTEMBER 25, 2017

SCHOOLS GO OUT OF WAY TO MAKE LIFE EASY FOR NON-ENGLISH STUDENTS

Sarwat Nasir

English is the main language in private schools across the UAE. As one of the most cosmopolitan countries in the world, it is no surprise that students from non-English speaking countries join these schools. But how do teachers help these students adapt to the language?

Mattia was one of those non-English speaking students who moved to Dubai with his parents. He moved here from Italy with no English language speaking, writing or reading skills. He was struggling to communicate freely with everyone at his new school and knew only a few introductory words.

However, his teachers used several different techniques to help learn the language, including allowing him to use digital translators in class and giving him extra time to finish his exams.

The teachers at Greenfield Community School gave Mattia one-on-one support from the specialist English Additional Language (EAL) teacher and he was accompanied by the EAL teacher assistant to his other core subjects such as Science, English, Mathematics and Humanities.

"In school, he was given extra time in the completion of his tasks and assessments including his examinations. For Mattia, there was a heavy reliance on his device for translation. Furthermore, in collaboration with his subject teachers, he was also allowed to be exempted from certain classes to obtain help in the school library to facilitate the learning of more complex vocabulary," Dolores Allison, EAL teacher at Greenfield Community, told *Khaleej Times*.

"By January, he was already fluent in the spoken language and by the end of the academic year, his cognitive development was sound for further scaffolding. He now confidently expresses himself in a variety of contexts using more demanding vocabulary to make himself even more comprehensible. He often injects what he communicates with a large degree of humour. Now he can sustain himself on a day-to-day basis independently."

Other schools are also using similar techniques to help students as such and are also providing ample one-on-one time with dedicated teachers who are helping students with the English language.

A Grade 2 student at the Gems International School joined the school last year with no understanding or speaking skills of the English language. She experienced "immense anxiety and frustration" and did not want to be in school, according to the CEO of the Gems International School, Glen Radojkovich.



Most schools in the UAE are following strategies that embody a school culture that welcomes and honours languages. — Supplied photo

Tips to enhance language skills outside school



"Over the course of that first month and the following months, the student was pulled out of regular class instruction for English language support for two hours every day. Within a month, she was happy to be in school, starting to regularly participate and contrib-

ute in class discussions," Radojkovich said. "By the second half of the academic year, she was starting to support other students in the group and she is now receiving less than an hour a day and by December she will not need to receive pull-out support any more."



The desire to learn English can sometimes dominate and parents should not lose sight of the importance of maintaining the home language to support in future development and learning."

Glen Radojkovich, CEO, Gems International School

The school also involves parents when it comes to helping their children learn the English language. Radojkovich said students often find motivation to learn another language from their own parents.

He said parents can also help

their children in different ways at home. "The desire to learn English can sometimes dominate and parents should not lose sight of the importance of maintaining the home language to support in future development and learning. Similarly, instilling confidence and encouragement are vital to support a child in all areas of learning, not just language."

"Also, inviting children to practise English in some small low-stress ways, such as writing a grocery list, looking for answers to things online or translating things for their younger siblings are all good strategies. Most importantly, understanding that learning a language takes time and to celebrate small wins as well as big gains."

Parents of English Language Learners (ELL) are also invited to coffee mornings at the school to create home-school partnerships. The school follows a strategy that embodies a school culture that welcomes and honours other languages, which makes parents and students "feel comfortable".

sarwat@khaleejtimes.com

How would you help teach your peers English?



The approach which is most important, according to me, is that the person who wants to help their peer who needs assistance in English has to be in a way he or she doesn't feel bad. We, kids, don't like telling about our weakness to anyone. The person who is teaching needs to teach in a fun way so that the peer enjoys and learn faster. We can play vocabulary games like crosswords, make projects and charts and mainly encourage them to read books so our peer gets motivated to learn English.



Studying with peers is more fun than learning alone. Peers and students share a similar discourse, allowing for greater understanding. Communicating English with a peer will be more easy and free than with a teacher, as we can correct or make them understand the way we learnt it. By creating a friendly atmosphere, by helping to communicate in English and being supportive and interactive, learning English will be more pleasure to those who find it difficult to follow. First step is to make them understand that "the more you use the language, the more beautiful it will be". So without hesitation, use the language, by speaking, writing and reading. You will enjoy it.



In my opinion, the most effective approach when it comes to helping peers in English is by not pointing out their mistakes in front of people when they speak wrong but, instead, repeating their sentence in the right form. This will not only avoid embarrassment but also make them realise their mistake. For example, when he or she says "me and my friend went to the park", you can correct him/her by saying "my friend and I went to the park too."

Next Week's Topic

How schools are using e-learning and smart books? To get featured, send us your views on the topic, along with your school name and high-resolution photograph to education@khaleejtimes.com

Going beyond social media to learn language

Sarwat Nasir

The digital age and technology can play a huge role in helping students learn the English language, according to teachers in the UAE.

Several teachers told *Khaleej Times* that as English is so widely spoken on social media and the Internet, students will learn the language "no matter what".

"It is indeed a fact that the birth of the Internet and social media significantly impacted not only the growth of the English Lan-

guage but also facilitated English as the medium of communication for different nationalities," the English Additional Language teacher at Greenfield Community, Dolores Allison, said. "In view of the fact that young people are the number one users of social media; they will still learn English regardless of whether it is formally taught or not."

However, teachers still have to make sure that the English they are learning is also at a level and standard that can be applied to academic studies. "The language used in everyday communication

is distinct from the language used in the classroom. It is all too easy to think that because a student can communicate socially ('Hello, how are you?', 'Good-bye, please, may I go to washroom?'), they understand the complex language of academia ('find the square root of 25' or 'what are the causes of urbanisation?').

"Regardless of language proficiency, there are always steps we can take to maximise classroom participation for students who are new to the English language by making 'input comprehensible' for students. EAL students bring

just as much background knowledge as any other student, but it is often knowledge of different histories, cultures and places."

Teachers at Gems International School also believe that the use of social media to learn English, however, should be done in moderation and in guidance. The school places a greater emphasis on ensuring the students build their academic language proficiency.

"In the English Language Learners (ELL) course, we recognise that there are different ways to communicate in English. Social

English and basic interpersonal communication skills are one important aspect in children's language learning and one that tends to develop quite quickly," the CEO of the Gems International School, Glen Radojkovich, said.

"To be successful learners, students need to build their academic language proficiency. We teach and heavily support students' academic language in class through different scaffolding mechanisms, including glossaries, word walls and allowing them to construct meaning in their own language."

sarwat@khaleejtimes.com

Multiple strategies needed to impart better language skills

THE PERSPECTIVE



Ashok Kumar, CEO, Indian High School, Dubai

There are numerous skills that prepare children for everyday life once they leave school, but one skill that I feel is absolutely critical to them

is "reading". An important aspect to bear in mind is that most of the children studying with us learn English as their second language.

At The Indian High School, the habit is inculcated in everything that we do; be it in the classroom, on the field or even through the extracurricular activities that we run at our school. Regular programmes like extempore, declamations, school exhibitions help develop confidence among students in using the language.

In classes, strategies like Close Reading, JAM (Just A Minute), class debates, role plays and vocabulary building exercises help to strengthen their language skills. Frequent exposure to a word in multiple forms, usage of idioms and phrases, inculcating reading skills are some of the important strategies for teaching English. Students are encouraged to look for the meanings of new words and use them in sentences of their own.

Reading helps students develop fluency and builds up their comprehension."

Pronunciation and spelling is also given due importance. Reading helps students develop fluency and builds up their comprehension. Scanning, skimming, summarising the text, making inferences are the skills that are encouraged in the

classrooms. Buddy system, paired and cooperative learning is practiced so that students learn from each other and also develop their language skills. Students are encouraged to use 'Graphic Organisers' and 'Mind Maps' to put their thoughts together and weave them into sentences.

Children are adept at picking up on parental attitudes. If they feel that their parents do not give English due importance, they de-

velop a similar approach towards the subject.

Parents and children reading together can be a great motivator. Parents can help by providing access to books and reading with/ aloud with their children as per the age of the child. They can focus on the area of improvement such as vocabulary or writing skills. A cohesion of home and school works wonders in the development of a child.