

DOs and DON'Ts of ENGLISH AT PRIMARY LEVEL

TEACHING ENGLISH FROM 5th std is going on. Syllabus, books, annual/ trimester methods are being tried. All these are being experimented on children of age 8 and above. When persons want to start teaching English to students almost 5 years earlier, discussions and opinions galore. Assuming that we (as teachers) have to start at any stage at primary school level there are many basic principles of teaching and learning which have to be borne in mind .this article will focus on methodology . I.e. what to do when I have a group of kids who are never exposed to a few sentences of English

Total English from nursery onwards is going on for decades – Let them continue or revise their methods and tools. This article is for helping honest, duty-bound, child-centered learning facilitators.

Given below are some ideas to help teachers who handle mothertongue – medium classes. They are given in the form of DOs and DON'Ts.

Before listing these, let me state the obvious in order to help the teachers and their trainers.

Please do remember the well-known method of how a child learns a language: - hearing (being immersed in an environment) **listening** (when persons talk to him/her) repeating (simple words from which positive response from elders is forthcoming) speaking (as per the context). Then, organizing ideas and thoughts in mind and then **communicating**. All human beings (even illiterates) go through this process. Scholastic learning starts from here. Those who stop at this stage remain illiterate. In the case of English for all (which includes first generation learners) these preliminary (home and family based) periods are absent. Someone has to provide all these to each child. After giving these exposures the teacher may start introducing the **alphabet, reading, writing** etc.

Now read on about the dos and don'ts.

1. If there are **natural English words** used in a household DO allow them to be used.

Give the meanings if not already known, e.g. table coffee tubelight...

DO NOT forcefully thrust unusable/ archaic/ unfamiliar words in English or in mother tongue (hereafter kuttha; Kannada, Urdu, Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, and others) e.g. meju, kurchi ok only if the child already uses them familiarly. Roti. Chapati only never Indian bread---

2. DO FIND a list of words which can be called **COMMON VOCABULARY (c.v.)** this can be maintained e.g. bus road bun police

DO NOT even try to write c.v. in English or in kuttha -- all words spoken and understood i.e. **aural and oral**

3. DO HAVE space for **variations**. Do understand that the extent of c.v. may vary depending upon the (social, economic, academic ..)Status of the family. Respect it. Thus, breakfast, dining table, mom, dad may be ok for some . not ok for all children.

DO NOT IMPOSE words which according to you are c.v. in case of doubt , test e.g. try car, scooter, hotel .. if ok for all use and build a bigger c.v.

4. DO ALLOW FOR **URBAN AND RURAL** make-up of c.v. even in your city similar differences of kinds of nouns and verbs may differ ... perhaps each teacher and each class may evolve and use their own c.v.

NO REGIMENTATION. Unknown words could be slowly learnt. They will not be c.v. it is not good to insist that everyone must know this many etc.

5. **MAKE YOUR OWN** c.v. and other contents for each set of your students because this may vary even though the teacher (i.e. you) is the same.

NEVER FREEZE /standardize a syllabus – do not let anyone do it for you and push down your throat – even if they are govt. or dept, or resource persons – never take anything imported from abroad or from “convents” (do use them with thanks after your own tests for suitability to your situation)

6. **DO FOLLOW** the great principle of going from **KNOWN TO THE UNKNOWN** - in both words, sentences , information. And above all ideas.

DO NOT PUSH matter (words, information., ideas) before its kuttha version (or explanation) is understood by the child.

7. **LIMIT WRITING** to the alphabet and child’s own name at the primary level .In this also, follow development of fine motor flexibility.

NEVER START with writing (even if you have seen “posh” schools doing it). No slates, no notebooks until child’s “**mouth is full**” of English (as judged by the parents) Assure parents that you will fill mouth first and then they can bring slates etc.

8. **DO TALK** . Do a lot of talking, acting, laughing, storytelling etc first before any “serious” lessons are started. Try what I call **EVENT-DESCRIPTION** in kuttha first and followed by English/mixed BHASHA. Let students learn to listen and understand

Reading is not a substitute for talking. **DO NOT BORROW.** Let the talking come from your own (teacher’s) head. Use books and reading material to help you talk.

- 9 **REMEMBER** that there is a **sequence of learning** a language (esp. at young age). Viz. **listening; speaking** (repeating what is heard); **reading ; writing** (copying the given matter) . give lot of time and attention to the first two. the other stages can wait (even if some parents are impatient)

DO NOT ALTER the sequence. At the worst scenario, all the four can be simultaneous. But **NEVER** cart before the horse.

10. **ADD** to 9 above two other important aspects of language teaching which many teachers and experts seem to have forgotten. They are **SPEAKING (using your own words) ; COMPOSING (writing with your own effort)** the “own” adjective used here refers to the child/learner since this is difficult to do you can make a small beginning in kuttha

Do not mistake rote memorized oral version for spoken English Similarly do not confuse composing with copying from the book /blackboard.

(let me elaborate this point. Memorized sentence is not spoken English. Repeating after a teacher or a book or a tape is not spoken language , unless the usage is internalized. Similarly copying from a book or blackboard or from memory is not writing – writing comes from translation of one’s ideas through a brain process to written form (which I call “composing”).

11. As per 9 & 10 above **ENCOURAGE CREATIVITY** (both in kuttha & in English)

Do not produce **copywriters** (Xerox machines have come!)

12. GET OUT of the class room for speaking and story telling
DO NOT THINK outdoors is only for sports and PT.
13. SEATING /STANDING arrangement should be such that everyone MUST SEE and HEAR the teacher and everyone else also if possible.
DO NOT ALLOW any other activity except listening to you and one another.
14. For 13 above **CIRCLE OR SEMICIRCLE** helps the students to **SEE LIP- MOVEMENTS** of the teacher . Ask them to see, exaggerate lip movements and sounds to clarify.
AVOID shouting, multiple talking, seeing books etc.(by you or any student) when students must be seeing your lips and listening.
- 15 At the primary level USE BOOKS for showing pictures and talking about them . You can talk and let the children also talk not necessarily verbatim
At this stage **books are not for reading** – that comes later
16. CAN AND SHOULD SUBSTITUTE in 15 above, ‘ books’ by **charts, flashcards., photos, pamphlets, cuttings, 2D and 3D toys , objects, scenarios,** photos etc
DO NOT THINK all these should be in English for teaching English . They can be in kuttha , any language, or none.(e.g/ slide shows)
17. **OBJECT OR EVENT DESCRIPTION** helps to acquire appreciation and understanding of the language. USE MATERIAL of 16 above for this purpose.
DO NOT USE material of 16 above for giving new info in English language - Only kuttha teacher can do enhancement of info and knowledge at primary level and she should do it.
18. Read and understand 6 , 16 and 17 above to know the role of the English teacher
Do not think (arrogantly) that some items can be learnt only through or after a knowledge of English – not at this level
19. While reading this rather dry and heavy article, you may wonder what is this method of teaching English. This is teaching English as a second language (sometimes 3rd or nth depending on the family and the region). The child is also simultaneously struggling with kuttha language skills.
This is **NOT DIRECT English teaching** – that is left to “convents” and the elite. So NEVER English first- It should be **kuttha first** or at the worst, kuttha and English together.
20. Get self-confidence that you can do all these yourself. Esp. 16 to 19 above. If still doubtful, see demo at the end .
Do not think these suggestions are too much and beyond you . Really they are simple and many are things most of the teachers are already following. Here i have compiled them.
21. Learn/teach **ONE WORD AT A TIME** . Do clear and loud speaking with lip movements while learning that one word
DO NOT ALLOW other words or other activities while learning one word

22. **One word- one meaning** and clarity- if variations they come later – e.g. father means..... papa, daddy etc. even if you think are necessary they come later (or before) – not together at primary level.

NO IDIOMS or slang or figurative use –for obvious reasons. – e.g. *look* means *to see*-no *look after*, *look down on* etc.

23, as in 21, **ONE IDEA PER SENTENCE**. If a story or event has many sentences they should build up one idea at a time. Narration must be logical and connected also.

DO NOT USE complex constructions - certainly no idioms or ambiguous usage- **no puns** while new languages or ideas are being acquired

24. Follow **natural way of acquiring knowledge** appropriate to the situation,

Do not be bound by constraints like textbooks, syllabus, evaluation by exam etc. certainly do not be influenced by statements like *all convents do this way*; *Montessori method is ...*they have done enough to divide the society so far.

Points 16 to 20 need some explanation, refer to some related documents or teachers..