



TEACHING ENGLISH AND LIFE SKILLS TO UNDERPRIVILEGED CHILDREN IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Transition in our education can be more often termed as unskilled illiterate to unskilled literate. Though this statement is not true about everyone it does refer to the majority of people who graduate from colleges and get rejected for employment because of inadequate skills.

With the current rate in number of literates in India; we should have been global leaders. We have made education affordable to everyone and have made many amendments in the law to allow the underprivileged to benefit. All of this shows the emphasis and importance we give to education.

If what Nelson Mandela said is true that "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world" then in India we have missed an essential essence perhaps. Not many people in India are able to change their circumstances let alone Change the world.

For education to become meaningful and powerful enough to equip people with the strength to change their life and the world around them. It has to impart skills, not merely information. Skills that give opportunity to change lives. Life Skills are an essential part of education now, like information is important so is life skills. This paper addresses the need of teaching life skills to underprivileged. Secondly, it talks about how to customize the training by conducting pre and post assessments.

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The phrase 'Life Skills' itself refers that the skills we need to make the most out of life. Life skills are usually connected with managing and living a healthier quality of life.

Life skills help people to encounter their life situation at home, school, work, and any other context in which they find themselves (Manglallan and Raskauskas, 2003; UNESCO, 2010). According to UNESCO (2008) a Life Skills Based Education (LSBE) is distinguished from other education strategies in that it is designed to enhance efforts to positively develop or change behaviours through a balance of knowledge, attitudes and skills.

Why teach English and Life skills

The term underprivileged students now envelop 60 to 70 percent of Indian students. That's a very huge number. Though underprivileged students come from many different places in the country, we specifically want to address students from rural India. Teaching English and Life Skills is very essential to these children. Children in rural India do not have exposure to English from sources such as English movies, English news, other English language programmes unlike students from Urban areas. Primary source of learning English to these children is English teachers in schools. Since it only depends on the English teachers or a little influence they can

have, it is but clear that standard of English communication skill in these rural areas is very under par. Hence it is very important to teach English and Life skills to these children.

How to teach English and Life Skills?

Language learning capacity differs from individual to individual. In a broader sense language is not ink on paper or properly modified sound waves. It is the entire world we see around us in our perspective and ones capacity to translate it to himself/herself and others meaningfully. Every one of us has different perspectives and hence different approaches. What this means is that we cannot have an inflexible teaching methods in language class. Hence the learning outcome should not be narrowed down to only one definition; every improvement regardless of its insignificance is significant and commendable.

Since learning capacity differs in individuals; it is important to customize our class according to the needs of the students.

Student Centric Classroom

Generally people believe that teacher is the most important person in a classroom. It is not true, teacher has an important role but people important in a classroom are the students; because it is students' success that measures the effectiveness of the class. In an English class what can be more important than that the pupil start to speak, read and write English effectively with respect to their age and context.

What is a student centric classroom? A student centric classroom is not confined to come with one specific answer, definition, solution or objective. Student centric class has a bigger objective than just learning grammar. A student centric classroom gives the students a lot of freedom to participate and learning by experiential methods rather than a learning that is based on lectures. Student centric class needs skilled teachers who themselves are liberated and not bound by tradition.

Customizing teaching for effective learning results

To have effective learning results it is vital that objectives and outcomes of the class are relevant to the students. Students have to be

assessed on written, spoken, reading and other life skills like teamwork, confidence, listening skills etc.

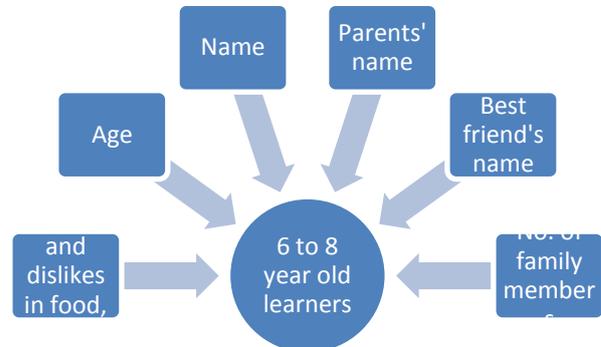
Since learning capacity differs in individuals; it is important to customize our class according to the needs of the students. To accomplish this it needs well planned action and process. Here is a comprehensive method that can be adopted

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Age appropriate assessment

Assessor has to keep in mind that language is limited by experience. The best way to have an assumption of participant's experiences is his/her age. Assessment questions whether written or spoken should not be irrelevant to the participant's context. Here is an example,

How to assess learners from 6 to 8 years? Firstly all the questions have to be contextualized to the participants' age.



What to look in answers for these questions

Spoken

- If the child understands the pace of assessor's speech: This tells us how familiar the participant is with English Language.
- Asking the same questions in a different way e.g.: What's your age and how old are you? Same question but two different ways: This tells us if child understands language on the clues of the words or language in a sentence.
- Check whether a child answers in words, phrases or sentences.

- Check whether a child is confident or nervous etc

Written

- Handwriting of the child: Scattered all over, No sense of spacing, organised but difficult to read, neat or cursive
- Spelling : mistakes in 3 letter words, 4 letter words or 5 to 6 letter words
- Grammar: be forms, prepositions, subject verb agreement, articles etc

Assessments have to be personalized according to age, culture and context of the students.

Assessments have to have

1. Spoken Skills
2. Written Skills
3. Reading Skills
4. Life Skills

Assessment Spoken Skills

Spoken skills have to be assessed during interview with the students. Assessment can be based on a scale of 1 to 5 where 5 are the highest and 1 is the least. Areas such as Understanding language, Speaking skills, Confidence etc can be marked.

Example: Understanding of language

(Can have scale like this to measure it)

Does not understand at all	Understands only familiar words	Understands but needs repetition	Understands phrases	Quite good
1	2	3	4	5

The example shown above can be adopted to assess all other aspects of spoken skills.

Written skills

Written skills can be administered with a written test of 30 to 40 minutes. Areas such as handwriting, spelling, and punctuation can be assessed.

Example: Hand writing

Very Bad	Separated Letters	Cannot write in a straight line	Writes in a straight line	Quite good
1	2	3	4	5

The example shown above can be adopted to assess all other aspects of spoken skills.

Life Skills

Assessment of life skills can be administered by giving group activities, and areas such as participation, contribution, confidence and presentation skills can be assessed.

Example: Participation

Does not participate,	Very Passive but involves when compelled	Shows interest but hesitates to participate	Participates but does not relate anything personal	Participates and relates learning to personal life
1	2	3	4	5

The example shown above can be adopted to assess all other aspects of spoken skills.

A holistic pre-assessment like this can help us determine the level of the students. To determine the levels of scores we need a descriptive framework.

Example:

Area	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Written	>50	51 to 80	81 to 100
Spoken	>50	51 to 80	81 to 100
Reading	>50	51 to 80	81 to 100
Life Skills	>50	51 to 80	81 to 100
Overall Scores	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
200	>100	101 to 150	150 and above

The scores and the table given above is just an example to show the readers how to determine the level of the students. To quantify level is very important. To check the improvement in the students we need relevant scores and scoring methods to assess them. The evaluation and scoring methods proposed here can be one of the tools used to graph the improvement of the students for statistical purposes.

Post assessments

Post assessments are very important in any purposeful, objective driven training programme. Post assessments give a clear, tangible ways of

understand the strength and weaknesses of the programme. It is important to have scores and graphs that tell areas of improvement needed or success.

Post assessment has to be very realistic in their expectations of results. Post-assessments have to be related to the pre-assessment conducted to avoid irrelevant, non-corresponding results. For instance if the student was assessed in the context of 6 year olds than the post assessment has to be in the same context. Post assessment has to be conducted of the same length, same areas and similar context of the questions of that of the pre-assessment.

Conclusion

There is a need to equip underprivileged children with English and life skills. And in the process teachers have to know how to tailor the training according to the age and level of children.

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