

Lack of Exposure in English Language for Saudi Students

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Learning a foreign language is like learning about another world. As said by Chancellor Edward Lee Gorsuch:

“Learning a foreign language not only reveals how other societies think and feel, what they have experienced and value, and how they express themselves, it also provides a cultural mirror in which we can more clearly see our own society.”

The importance of learning a foreign language can be determined by saying that “to have another language is to possess a second soul”. English language, being a universal language, is the most learned and taught language in all over the world. Perceiving the importance of learning this language many countries have made English as a mandatory subject for students even from the primary levels. It is beautifully said that:

“Language is the road map of a culture. It tells you where its people come from and where they are going.”

But in Saudi Arabia the condition is different. Even though English is one of the compulsory subject here but one can easily smell the lack of the zest of acquiring this language in everyday life. We must know the fact that:

“One language sets you in a corridor for life. Two languages open every door along the way.”

–Frank Smith

If we talk about the countries like India, Pakistan and Bangladesh we find a number of English medium schools in almost every part of the country, but unfortunately I didn't see the same in Saudi Arabia, especially the Assir region of this country. In the big cities of Saudi Arabia even though we find one or two international schools but in the small places of Assir region like Al Namas, Tanumah, Mohayal etc. the condition is not favorable. Moreover, the local schools that we have in these places introduce the English language in the very late classes though not promising.

Being the English teacher of one of the colleges of Assir region of Saudi Arabia I notice that the students are in ardent love with English language and culture. Their inclination towards English could be clearly seen by the huge number of students opting English language as their course as well as by their body language and accent as English people. But, at the same time I find them scared of this language as well. In my opinion, the main reason for this fear is the lack of exposure for them in English language. First of all, in schools they are not provided with the promising English environment. English in the kingdom is taught at school levels which does not enjoy as important place in the curriculum as in most developing countries. Despite good planning, curriculum, text books, qualified teachers and effective administration, the teaching learning process sometime seems to be futile when the actual skill development is not up to the mark. We should understand the fact that:

“Language is not a genetic gift, it is a social gift. Learning a new language is becoming a member of the club, the community of speakers of that language.”

–Federico Fellini

As we know that language learning is like cycling or swimming; the more you practice, the more you learn. But unfortunately in Saudi Arabia, students hardly find those exposures of practice English language what they actually need. Activities, which are conducted in schools, colleges and universities of this country, are not language centered. It seems that students are taught English in Arabic. Although the students are very talented here; dexterous on learning as well as accepting challenges, but when it comes to English language they remain entangled in translating every word and expressions from Arabic to English which deters them to be a good speaker as well as the good learner of this language. As a result of this, I notice that, they don't even know the names of their subjects in English. For example, they call the subject “Translation” as “Tarjumah (ترجمة)”, or “English Phonology” as

“Englizia Al Sotiat (الإنجليزية الصوتيات)” or “Grammar” as “Qawa’ad (قواعد)” and so on. It clearly shows that the practice of English language is almost zero over here. We should not forget that:

“Learning another language is not only learning different words for the same things, but learning another way to think about things.”

–Flora Lewis

As cited in Al Shumaimeri (2003), The Higher Committee for Education Policy in Saudi Arabia has asserted that the ultimate aim of education in Saudi Arabia is to make students understand Islam in a correct and comprehensive manner; to implant in them the Islamic creed; to imbibe in them the Islamic values, teachings and Ideal; and, above all, to spread Islam as well as to develop the society economically, socially and culturally, and, more importantly, to prepare the individual to make meaningful contribution to the strengths of his community. This aim of education is definitely fulfilled but not in English. It could have better impact if the effort was given in the English language as well, because the above mentioned sacred aim of education should not be confined only to Saudi Arabia. It is the fact that there are still many misconceptions about Islam in many other countries of the world which can be cleared by the one who has deep knowledge about Islam. As we know that Islam is rooted in Saudi Arabia, thus it is believed that Saudis can have better explanations about Islamic queries. It’s Saudis who can take the world out of the darkness of misconceptions about the religion Islam. But this is not possible if Saudis are not good in English language, as Arabic cannot be understood anywhere other than Gulf Countries. Hence, to accomplish the goal of education of Saudi Arabia it is vital to have command over English language.

I perceive that the activity department of schools, colleges and universities of Saudi Arabia is very innovative and ingenious but none of the activities is conducted concerning English language practice. There should be some activities like Speech Competition, Word Game, Reciting Hadith and meaning of Quranic Verses in English etc. But amongst many inventive activities we find lack of the language centered activities mentioned above. Moreover, the students of Saudi Arabia experience huge lack of manifestation of English language inside and outside the educational institutions. I mentioned above, that English too is taught in Arabic here. All the English dramas, novels, poetries etc. are taught and explained in Arabic.

Apart from it, they hardly have conversation in English with their teachers and instructors. We cannot expect them to practice English at their homes or outside the homes anywhere other than schools, colleges or universities. But, unfortunately the attention is not at all given towards providing them better exposure in order to learn the language as a whole.

In my opinion the responsibilities lie on the shoulder of teachers and instructors of schools, colleges and universities of Saudi Arabia, especially Assir region of this country, to provide English atmosphere to the students in order to make them qualified for the language. As we know that one can never learn to master a foreign language if he or she is not brought up with it. Besides teaching and explaining them in English, teachers must interact with them in English; they must conduct language based activities and they must make their endeavor not only to teach the students in order to pass academic exams but to make them eligible to conquer the world. As we know that

“Learning is a treasure that will follow its owner everywhere”.