

Seminar on “Teaching and Learning of English: Co-curricular Program and the School Based Experiences in Venezuela and Russia”

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Language: English (simultaneous interpretation in Cantonese)
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Speaker:

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Abstract :

Teaching and Learning English at Primary and Secondary School – Co-curricular Program and the School Based Experiences in Venezuela

To develop the topic related to teaching and learning English through co-curricular activities within Venezuelan primary and secondary education, it is necessary to describe some general characteristics of the educational system and its modalities, to talk about the New Education Law (2009) and to share the innovative educational tendencies in this country. Then, activities that could be assumed as co-curricular are described, and the mode in which these are inserted in the academic programming or its connection to students' calcifications. Having a view of the Venezuelan Educational context, the area of languages is undertaken to talk about English learning at primary and secondary school (EFL); as well as the English teachers' formation, specifically within the area of literature and culture at the Pedagogical University, as a contribution for the future development of special activities at school. To illustrate the described information some pictures and videos are shared; as well as some comments from teachers who were formed in the area, which are developing schools activities of theater, storytelling, cinema forum, songs translation, classroom fun-library, among others.

English as a Foreign Language: Arrangements, Ways & Approaches

Education in Russia is compulsory for children between the age from 6 to 15. It

consists of primary school education for ages 6-10, followed by senior school for ages 10-15. If a student of secondary school wishes to go on in higher education, he or she must remain to complete secondary school for 2 more years, from ages 15-17. Every school has a core curriculum of academic subjects. Foreign language, mostly English, is one of them. A typical lesson lasts 40-45 min with 5-15 min break in between. An average class consists of 20-30 students.

In Soviet times it used to be only state schools and all of them had the same programme and the same curriculum. Now we have all sorts of educational establishments offering varied programmes. State schools, private schools, lyceums, gymnasiums, schools with intensified instruction in languages, etc. are schools in Russia today. Many of them emphasize learning English and other languages as the main curriculum. Although there are different schools, they still have something in common. For example, language class often means reciting, writing and oral testing and a teacher plays the mentoring role in class.

Russia used to have free additional after school English classes almost at every state school. These days only a few schools provide such things. More often parents find a class for their child to join outside the school. It can be after school advanced placement classes with traditional methods of studying. Grammar, almost mechanical vocabulary acquirement, reading, translation and topics are preferable. Sometimes, for a change it may be offered an essay writing or dictation. It is so called “an old school” technique. Introducing this technique achieves little function except helping students to get familiar with English structure. It is not bad but studying languages recently has become more functional and we need it for communication. So to combine both, we have to change the role of English teacher in educational process. A teacher-mentor or dictator should be gone and now we are looking for a teacher-observer, -mediator, -leader role for teacher in education.

Learning English has more fun in “English club” with its communicative approach as the main method in teaching. Among the four languages learning components (reading, writing, speaking and listening), “English club” enhanced our attention on the last two. Oxford and Cambridge are the main monopolists in Russian market in terms of methods and English courses. They emphasize audio-, video- and interactive resource. Their courses are based on authentic materials and focuses on situational language, life examples, skills development and different kinds of reading (scan reading, reading for gist, summary reading, etc.). Parents can also choose either conversational or reading club for a child. Conversational club introduces topics for students to debate and discuss. Reading club expects students to read the book and form the topics for discussion. Aspects such as who their favorite character were, what they liked about it, etc. are the topics in the group discussions.

Another way to learn English is to become a part of Educational Complex

system. Educational Complex is a unique pedagogical system. It includes kindergarten, gymnasium, art department and sport school. The main goal of such enterprise is to create educational area for providing personal development of each and every child. Succession and continuity in educational contents and organizational process provides optimum environment for health and physical, psychological, emotional and subjective development of students. This type of education is free to students and so is the additional after school classes.

English learning usually starts at the age of 5 and continue throughout their school years. All additional studying at this age goes through games and songs. The objective is to have fun. Games and fun activity helps concentration and provide sources for memory and creativity development. They reduce fatigue and help to overcome language and psychological barriers. At the age of 6, the aim of education slowly moves towards phonetics, transcriptions, letters and gaining vocabulary. Game is still the main tool on that stage.

Primary school students take compulsory English classes with a help of text books and writing developed by Russian authors. For those students having their after school classes they use modern foreign materials which are closer to reality. Materials produced by “Express Publishing”, “English First”, “Sunny Plus”, “Language Link”, etc. lead students to the “third” international level of competence in language. Teachers usually offer all sorts of methods for language improvement at the after school class. They adopt approaches with focuses on communicative learning technology, projects, real situation modeling, “Sugesto pedia” or immersion, audio-lingual method or method of repetition, etc.

Another very powerful and common tool in language teaching is organizing special events. Usually it is either a play or a party. For primary school students, it is common to have ABC Party, Merry train or any fairy tail. For secondary school students it may be any modern play, making a video, Halloween, Mister and Miss English show or any kind of contests and Olympiads.

Looking back to the Soviet time there were well known and approved methods of teaching English. Students were taught a large amount of grammar, pretty wide vocabulary; they could read mutely, translate and write. There was a big problem with expressing themselves and listening. At the end of XX century, English teaching experienced the “revolution” in Russia. The period of 90-th was the epoch of developing and implementing different methods, courses and unusual ways of studying English. So, now we have a variety of methods and methodics to choose and combine. Learning languages has always been popular in our country, now it is a must for children. The Russian experiences indicate the importance of “the earlier they start the better”. The matter is what to choose for the best result.