How to Help the Iranian Students of First Grade of Secondary Schools with their Problems of English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract. Apparently, English is globally used as the most fundamental communication medium. Regarding the objectives of Foreign Language Education in Iran Curriculum, an Iranian educated must be capable of expressing his opinions and viewpoints as well as accurately utilizing the foreign sources and satisfying his demands. Also, he must understand English speeches produced by native English speakers. With perspectives on these objectives, experts involved in English Education sphere design and write Educational English books and teachers have been instructing these books for ages. Indeed we must raise this question: Why Iranian students are such evasive learners and why does almost nobody acquire English in an applicable way in Iranian schools? It is evident that most students of first grade of secondary schools are confronted with certain problems following as:

1. Many students are slightly familiar with English.
2. They often recognize English as a difficult subject to study.
3. Also, they believe that they will not achieve a genuine progress in English.
4. Many students show a lack of self-confidence and inferiority complex.
5. Comparing themselves with the students in the upper grades, they feel that they cannot master English.

So, certain efforts must be channeled into resolving these problems, in particular, the ways the students deal with their English books are to be changed and so are the methodologies in teaching. These may become perfectly practicable by utilizing instructional aides, preserving the students' fondness for their English courses, and organizing the instructional content from the simple to complex, as well as discussing with experts, parents, educational managers, and students. The objectives of this study are to shift students' perspectives upon English and support them through their learning English; consequently they will progress satisfactorily at present and in the future.

1. Introduction

The curriculums in developing countries include English courses as a second or as a foreign language. This language has been brought into sharp focus for a long time. Its significance lies in the following components: a relative competence of English facilitates the cultural exchanges. Furthermore, the era of modern technologies, the dramatic variations, as well as using scientific resources and the recent technologies necessitate developing knowledge of English. In this realm, Iran is not an exception. The background of English Education traces to 1939-1940. In that academic year, provided with a source of support by Culture Ministry, a group of Iranian and non-Iranian authors designed and published a six-level course to teach in six grades of high schools in Iran. According to Curriculum of foreign languages in Iran, English provides a proper ground for understanding and comprehending cultural interchanges as well as communicating human knowledge achievements in various language models as oral, visual and written contexts. It is employed for different purposes and various audiences within the framework and schemes of Islamic criteria. Because the exchanges of human societies and the progress of technologies increasingly influence social intercourses, in order to establish constructive and cognizant relationships, students are required to possess the capability of communicating with other societies and employ the human achievements in universal and regional backgrounds.

In addition to interpersonal and intercultural functions, the Foreign Language Education is efficacious in economic progress such as tourism industry, business, technology, science development, and political- social consciousness. The Language Education underlines the communicative abilities and resolving problems so that a person receiving instruction is able to communicate using all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in order to perceive and convey semantic. The curriculum must familiarize students with language body and required vocabulary and structures in order to instrumentally and effectually communicate worldwide.

Education of English as a foreign language commences from the outset of secondary school grades in Iran. The objectives are to educate four language proficiency as well as familiarizing communication skills in the framework of general orientations. In the second secondary schools, the students must read texts of medium difficulty and comprehend the concepts. Meanwhile, the capability of writing, within an extent of writing a short essay is reinforced. Also, the students may possess the integral abilities to apply resources and to develop intermediate communication skills.

The students in the first grade of the secondary schools think that they lack essential abilities to learn English as other people. They identify no talents to acquire English. They imagine that they are going to face a new phenomenon to deal with. They do not exude confidence for their capabilities to learn English. Therefore, a necessity has aroused to critically survey and highlights these problems as the main headings in teaching practices. Some ways including applying colleagues' experiences and consulting with parents' communities, educational experts, consultants, and the schools authorities are feasible to overcome these obstacles.

An inaccurate belief prevalent among these students is English is a difficult subject. Through encouragement and punishments, even most families infuse their children with this opinion that English is different from other subjects, so they will be obliged to learn it and to devote more time to practice English. Hence English, in particular learning and exercising it, may be an unsolved problem. They usually identify English as the most challenging subject.

An opinion poll designed to represent the opinions of the students in this grade suggests that the students in the first grade of the Secondary School believe English is more difficult than Math because they know nothing about English at all. This situation is not a favorable one for teachers and students. Therefore, I decided to transform the situation through investigation and in consultation with educational experts to surmount this difficulty as much as possible. To do so, some students were queried. A series of question conducted as follows:

1. Why does a majority of new coming students in the first grade of the Secondary School dread studying English and doing English practices?
2. Why do some students experience different troubles and pains while doing English homework?
3. Why are some students stressful when they come to the board to answer questions in English?
4. Why do some students do their homework only when pressed to do so?
5. Why do not most students understand the relationship between English and realities of their lives?
6. What are factors making them unfamiliar with English despite the underlying trend towards acquisition of English?
7. Why is learning English difficult for them and why do they underestimate their capabilities to acquire English?

The questions were responded by all of the students. While most of the questions were honestly answered, in fact the answers seemed like unfavorable excuses for negligence in learning and doing English exercises.

2. The Literature Review

English as a foreign language (EFL) is used for non-native English speakers learning English in a country where English is not commonly spoken. Although ESL (English as Second Language) and EFL (English as Foreign Language) are often used interchangeably, there are unique differences between these two as follows:

EFL students refers to Non-native-English-speaking students who are in the process of acquiring English proficiency in a country where English is not the primary language, but English as a second language (ESL) is a term often used to designate students whose first language is not English [1].

English, as a world language, is taught among others in schools. Learners of English as a foreign language have a larger range of selecting of language variety in comparison with second language learners. The aim of teaching foreign languages in schools is not simply for the learner to be able to write to a foreign pen friend or read a novel in English, though these are all practical by-products of the learning process. The basic aspects of the school curriculum are the instruments by which the student grows into a more secure, more contributory, more total member of society. Some studies have been done in the field of EFL, English at secondary stage of Iranian school and the problems that the students may face with in this regard that some of them will be referred to as follows. [2] in an article entitled" How could I make a disappointed student interested in English" has written that the biggest problem of this student is that he does not enjoy the English learning, so he facilitated the teaching of English, changed the teaching method based on the competitive factors, turned to appreciating, encouraging and giving presents to students and finally, took note about students' weaknesses and strengths and discussed about them publicly: as a result, students had a better feeling toward English as a foreign language. [3] In a study named "Reflections on Foreign Language Education in Iran" provided some fundamental data about the educational system in Iran before the 1979 Islamic revolution, in order to set the history and background for a description of the post-revolutionary system of foreign-language education in this country. Finally, the article discusses about the problems in EFL education in Iran and proposes some possible measurements. Additionally, [4] in "Evaluation of EFL Materials Taught at Iranian Public High Schools" has assessed four EFL textbooks which have been prescribed for use in the Iranian high schools by the Ministry of Education and in this article the advantages and disadvantages of the textbooks are studied in detail with reference to 13 common dominant features extracted from various materials evaluation checklists. In an article by [5] entitled "Motivation and Attitudes of Iranian Undergraduate EFL Students towards Learning English" the authors investigated the different socio-psychological orientations of Iranian undergraduates towards learning English. Based on the outcomes these Iranian Nonnative speakers of English learn the language for both 'instrumental' and 'integrative' reasons and they had highly positive attitudes towards the target language community and its members. In "Foreign Language Education Policies in Iran" article by [6] some theoretical guidelines of setting and/or assessing foreign language education policies in the context of more expanded social and educational policies, based on a conception of policy as distinct from aims and objectives were presented. [7] In "students and their disability in speaking English" has investigated the Iranian students' weakness in speaking. He believes this general weakness is attributed to factors such as using incorrect methods of teaching, teachers' disability in speaking, lack of time, crowded classes and lack of motivation among students toward learning. Similarly, [8] in "Adult Learners in English as a Second/Foreign Language Setting" has focused on the characteristics of adult second language learners and also the paradigms in adult literacy and second language learning and their influences on instruction and classroom research. [9] In a study entitled "Effects of foreign language learning beliefs vnd proficiency level on the use of language strategies by Iranian female EFL learners" has dealt with investigating and defining the teaching-learning problems of secondary students in English subject and he has studied the problems according to linguistic and psychological aspects. The results have revealed that the teachers tend to psychological factors more than linguistic ones intestinally or unintentially. Also, in " Curriculum Pathology of English as a foreign language from teachers' and secondary students' point of view"

[10] has proposed that some educational factors like using unsuitable teaching patterns, ill-equipped facilities, lack of practical view towards learning English as a foreign language and some factors related to curriculum including lack of cultural background, disability in using new and modern methods of teaching English and dealing with few hours of teaching English are the major defects of under-studied curriculum. [11] In a study named "Teaching Second/Foreign Language Literacy to School-Age Learners" has studied about the similarities and differences of developing literacy in second language compared to first language and the aspect of language and literacy that teachers should concentrate on while teaching children English. Moreover, in "Tools and Techniques of Effective Second/Foreign Language Teaching" by [12] the basic tools and techniques of second/foreign language teaching, their efficiency and the guidelines that teachers should follow to use these tools have been discussed. Last but not the least, in a study named "Underachievement in Foreign Language Learning" [13] believes that the main reason that some of the students do not perform well in EFL classes is not the lack of motivation and intelligent, but rather they have problems in their auditory ability; namely, they have problems in sounds and sound-symbol learning.

3. Theoretical Framework of the Research

The Firstly, to evaluate familial status as well as students' educational background, individual questionnaires were transmitted to parents. They were expected to answer truthfully in order to utilize their answers as guidelines. Then an advisory council involving English teachers was created to discover the reasons for students' indifference toward English learning and their inactivity in doing English homework. The precise and relevant information obtained from their lectures was presented in summary form. Also, principals and sub principals were invited to attend a meeting. Getting a wealth of valuable experiences, the sub principals expressed clear views about the circumstance. They believed, "Due to personality moods, the new coming students think once they enter this environment, heightened expectations soar since they have been accepted in a higher grade, therefore they are facing with mental obstacles for learning. A principal suggested we could put the matter to parents and educational authorities. Accordingly, a gathering of some parents, educational authorities, principals, sub principals, and two representatives of students was organized. Then, I used the various libraries in the realm of psychology and education regarding students as well as their mental and personality status. Under the guidance of education professor, a survey examining how to boost self-confidence and develop the students' required abilities was conducted. In a local conference, the subject and these findings were raised by several English teachers. Due to their profound knowledge about students in the first grade of the Secondary Schools, some constructive suggestions were offered.

Considering questionnaires as well as surveying many books and examining the perspectives of students, colleagues, principals, sub principals, consultants, specialists, and parents, the data acquired through the process was analyzed. First, the technical faults were diagnosed. Then, the occasions which demanded to change, accord, and perform were specified.
The facts gathered can appear in the following categories:

3.1 The opinions of teachers in the teacher training centers

3.1.1 The perspectives of educational psychology teachers

They proposed that inferiority and lack of potential self-confidence among the students are the major factors of their problems with English.

3.1.2 The perspectives of education teachers

They remarked that an optimal solution for dealing with this matter would be to provide students with opportunities to direct and to display their talents for learning and communicating in English.

3.1.3 The perspectives of syllabus planning teachers

They stated that their progress in English might be guaranteed through devising long-term plans and offering opportunities, as well as preparing special definite gradual development plans.

3.2 The perspectives of students

3.2.1. The perspectives of brilliant students

A student can learn English and achieve excellent scores for English. Once a high score is obtained, being frightened with English will not be meaningful anymore. English is like other courses.

3.2.2. The perspectives of average students

If students study more, they can learn English well. But this group thinks there seem to be new concepts in English books. They claim that they lack a wealthy educational background in English. They said that they could achieve good scores if they were supported by their teachers or their classmates. They are eager to learn English in an appropriate context provided.

3.2.3. The perspectives of weak students

They explained," We did not already deal with English courses at all. It would seem that we cannot learn English. English is certainly a complex course. Our ears, eyes, and our tongues cannot understand it." They figure that's one of the most difficult courses. Of course, they do not appreciate their abilities and talents.

3.3 The perspectives of parents

3.3.1 The perspectives of educated parents

They claimed that they have bought their children several illustrated books before entering the Elementary Schools. They are familiarized with English phrases and words to some extent. Some said that their children have registered for English classes during elementary schools. The others said since they studied English through their educational lives, their children have a limited knowledge of English.

3.3.2. The perspectives of hardly educated parents

As they said they have attempted to provide their children with what they need or what others suggest especially when they heard about the importance of English in the future. Although they encouraged their children to learn English, various constraints and absence of possible opportunities made them ignore their progress in English. They expressed readiness for taking steps to encourage their children and improve their English.

3.3.3 The perspectives of illiterate parents

They said that they knew a little about English and its significant role in lives. There was nobody literate to support their children through their English. They might regard other subjects like Math and Science, but they completely overlooked English as a basic necessity of life. But they remarked, "At the moment we desire to collaborate in order to develop English learning activities as well as promoting English literacy".

3.4 The perspectives of colleagues

3.4.1 The perspectives of teachers of other subjects

They believed that due to unfamiliarity with English in the first months of an academic year, students feel that is difficult to learn English. It requires more considerable time devoted to provide mental and intellectual preparedness, consequently the students are able to find and realize themselves in English. However, the students with high capabilities in learning English set in the process of learning quickly, so they must he motivated to learn English.

3.4.2. The perspectives of educational consultants in schools

They emphasized that all of us must be patient and motivate the students. We must represent their abilities to themselves and direct them. There must be an atmosphere of cordiality among English teachers and the students. The English teachers must treat their students sympathetically.

3.4.3 The perspectives of English teachers

They pointed out that 1) the students have not already dealt with English, so we must bring them in to study and learn English by and by; 2) the English teachers must represent them the importance and position of English among subjects as well as in their lives and education; 3) the tendency towards English can be reinforced with energetic and active classes.

4. Discussion and Results

The Findings on English Curriculum, syllabus, and schedule suggest that English classes must be organized and assigned according to students' moods; they must have English classes whenever they are energetic. Also, the contents of English books must be designed from simple to complex. The complexity of contents and their positions in books must be decided by teachers [14, 15].

Moreover, the results based on creativity and initiative in English classes could be classified into three categories:

1. Promoting and maintaining rich diversity in the methods of teaching English. The same styles for teaching the subject and its different items must be avoided.
2. Teachers must generate and enrich enthusiasm among students for English with aid education objects and his novel suggestions and functions.
3. A special educational material must be regarded for any individual student and subject [16].

And the findings on Education and motivation illustrate that the students are enthused and stimulated with encouragement and applause. Through correct education they can learn better. Using various methods of learning and evaluating as well as grouping students strengthen their motivation. Applying various visual audio objects like films, songs, texts, and English works in different circumstances exhibits the significance of English in their human lives as well as supporting them frame and utilize the concepts [17].

The primary results could be summarized as follows:

1. The students imagine English as one of the most difficult subjects;
2. The students lack confidence in learning English idealistically;
3. The students do not believe in potential and innate capacity for learning English;
4. The students are unfamiliar with English before entering the Secondary Schools;
5. A majority of students have not registered for English classes in private English Institutes;
6. Some parents are poorly educated.
7. They suffer from inferiority complex and they usually compare themselves with brilliant students during the first months of academic year;
8. The students are reluctant to do their English homework;
9. The teachers rarely consider the significance of English;
10. The teachers lack the knowledge of solutions to enrich creativity and develop students' capacities;
11. The teachers often create a competitive atmosphere in the classes involving the weak and brilliant students (the class activities appear in the forms of competition);
12. The students are involved in class activities individually;
13. The students usually ignore the utility and importance of English in their lives and its influence on their future lives;
14. Some students are away their homes and dwell in boarding schools.

The obtained information signifies that students must receive special instructions in the first grade of the Secondary Schools in order to satisfy the educational objectives; however, they have difficulties with learning English concepts. Also, they are not zestful for learning English and they are ignorant of their abilities to learn English. Albeit, regarding a range of different problems with subjects, it requires that special and relevant activities with respect to the students' educational demands must be reconsidered. The results suggest that this problem appears in distinctive dimensions and develops to different extents. A great deal of constant and fundamental efforts is required in some circumstances while some objectives are achieved with fewer endeavors.

A vast amount of efforts devoted to opt for the solutions. The parents, colleagues, students were enlisted to overcome the problem. Completing the tasks of this stage, a set of solutions containing the following attributions were selected and applied (these solutions were employed in the first academic months, i.e. September and October).

1. The organization of contents changed. (The contents were categorized from simple to complex);
2. The aid education objects were employed in accordance with the topics;
3. The abstracts were identified with using concrete and real concepts and situations;
4. English song CDs were utilized to teach and sing in groups;
5. The group activities were assigned in parallel with individual activities;
6. The English classes were over flown with enthusiasm and zeal in order to remove the horrors;
7. The involvement of students in the process of teaching was ensured for two months;
8. Some items and concepts were effectively taught by students;
9. The cartoons and humorous concepts were used to nominate the topics;
10. The diagrams, pictures, posters, students' paintings, and tables, roles-up were applied;
11. The ways of applauding were widely devised and utilized;
12. Sometimes the students were encouraged to act and endeavor with uttering the sentence, "You may not know it, nor may I. Let's find the answer together".

5. Conclusion

After gathering the necessary information on methods of adopting the solutions and the results obtained as well as submitting the reports to the invited, the theoretical and practical defects in the plan were identified and remedied regarding perspectives and critiques restated in the local conference. The evidences suggest that various informal (games) and formal (the collaborative groups) methods are practical so that many students achieved ideal scientific levels in English. The procedure and efficacious measures taken were explained in an interview with the news group of the schools. In short, the results include:

1. The students were greatly encouraged to do their English homework and enthusiasm for learning English was created in the classes.
2. Almost many students did their English homework independently (they framed and responded to the questions). They could begin and engage in English dialogues via small groups.
3. The students concluded that English is one of the interesting subjects and it is simple to learn.
4. The students realized that English is very significant in their daily and future lives.
5. The parents were delighted and satisfied that their children have improved in English.

It is recommended that families familiarize their children with realities of lives and some words and sentences in English since they enter the Elementary Schools. Also, if they can afford to register their children for English classes in schools or in institutes, the children will improve their English. The families can familiarize their children with books including words and sentences associated with illustrations and books based on games to teach English.

Teaching English at primary schools requires natural methods (games) as well as using aid educational objects and materials; therefore, it is approved to familiarize students with English in 4th and 5th grades. Meanwhile the families watch English movies useful for learning English with their children. If so, when the children get older, they will hold capacities of thinking, imagination. They will display senses of self-esteem and self-confidence. This methodology will be successful and interesting in teaching other subjects.

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