

Parents! Let's Do Something for Our Children

Let us admit this fact: while other countries are recognizing the importance of English and upgrading their proficiency in this lingua franca, we in Malaysia are regressing! A prominent speaker, who is also a very concerned parent, lamented on this recently during the English Language Teaching Association conference by stating that most Malaysians today cannot speak and write well in English compared with the older generation who are in command of the language. We have no time to lose now. Instead of lamenting further and waiting for the authority to come to their best senses for the sake of our younger generation, let us start taking pro-active steps in helping our existing school-going children learn better English.

We have heard this many times, but how well do we really hear it? It has reached an appalling state of how low the English proficiency of our students can be today despite the fact that they have an A in the subject at the SPM level. What's the point of "academic excellence" when our poor children do not have the confidence and ability to speak out in public? Parents must change this typical scenario by first changing their mindsets: academic excellence doesn't guarantee mastery of the language! What is more important for parents to know is that their children learn better by discovering the true joy of real learning and getting the A alone doesn't make any sense at all. If our children realize their parents think English is now not only a communication tool, but also a survival tool, they will likely approach English learning in different manner.

Parents can help their children learn English by ensuring they're well-prepared for it mentally and physically. Encouraging children to master the language as mentioned earlier moves the wheels to correct direction. Next, parents need to ensure the children have enough resources such as reading texts and dictionaries. We definitely don't need the best or any award-winning books and dictionaries to learn English, but if we don't have the basic ones, learning could be hampered. Let us try our best to provide them some decent resources and create the environment that learning English is easy and fun at home.

There is no cause for alarm if parents themselves are not proficient in the language itself. Qualified and experienced English experts can be invaluable partners in helping children reach their full language mastery. Besides collaborating with competent teachers in schools, parents may consider sending their children to learning centres that can offer quality support. In addition to providing an effective and conducive English language learning environment, these experts provide feedback on a student's overall progress and may suggest the best methods for practising English at home and point parents to helpful resources.

Parents may also want to consider this: help your children learn English by attempting to learn English yourselves. When parents are able to use English at home, children get more opportunities to practise speaking and listening. Imagine the great fun and bonding both the parents and children can create from practising their new language skills together. For those parents who are already fluent in English, they can enhance language learning at home by guiding their children on an area of improvement such as studying a more challenging book to learn complex vocabulary or perfecting their writing skills.

Reading can develop vocabulary power that helps in mastering English. Reading may be an arduous task for beginners, and reading good books is even tougher. However, the benefits of reading can be likened to climbing a rocky mountain. Only by conquering the challenging task of getting to the top, the successful climber can enjoy the beauty of the scenery and experience the real sense of fulfilment. Readers too can get great satisfaction by reading good books. Parents need to constantly encourage their children to develop good reading habit. To start off, parents can choose suitable reading texts for their children that can motivate and sustain their interests in reading more. Parents may even consider reading some of the books

that their children read so that they can discuss the books together. Sometimes parents can also read different books on the same topic that their children are reading to have more to share. In short, besides learning English through good reading habit, both parents and children can definitely gain other advantages from embarking into this project.

We parents can do many things if we want to help our children learn English. It seems like we are flooded with a lot of information and advice daily. We don't have to do everything at once, but we can always choose to do something that we feel comfortable with and make it into a beneficial habit. Some of us may have already been doing something to help our children master the language. If so, we can help them more if we are conscious of what we are doing. After all, very few parents are doing anything that is so wrong to help their own children, but most parents could do more right. And we may not, at the moment, be able to change the whole world for everyone, including our education system, but we definitely can change the one world of our own child. By making a dedicated effort to promote English language learning, parents can be the key to a child's success. Let us empower them with this survival tool of mastering English.

About the Author

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