

Headline	Reading for a better grasp of English		
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Description	Children who are native speakers of English should still be encouraged to read as this helps them to learn the correct structures of grammar. Reading also allows children to pick up correct language patterns which are beneficial when expressing themselves in speech and writing.		

GRAMMAR

Reading for a better grasp of English

IT is fortunate that most learners of English are taught grammar in school. Most native speakers know less about English grammar, though they speak and write good English. It's like most Malaysians who speak and write Bahasa Malaysia well but may not know the nitty-gritty of its grammar. A simple reason for this is that the language is habitually acquired at a very young age.

When a language is picked up naturally, there need be little formal teaching of grammar for learners to be able to perform well. This is hard to achieve in the classroom.

Children who do not have the habit of reading are usually lost when it comes to the use of correct structures, especially in writing. Another category of children are those who are able to write reasonably well but find it difficult to speak correctly. There can be two reasons for this. First, they were never exposed to correct patterns

of English and second, they lack practice.

It would be a good move to have children learn correct grammar before they enter secondary school. However, nothing beats cultivating good reading habits among children to help them acquire the correct language patterns. Rules can be easily forgotten and to get back to rules when speaking or writing may inhibit the thought process, affecting fluency and accuracy.

Furthermore, rules can be easily forgotten, and even the language can be forgotten if not practised. Children pick up a language easily but they can also forget it fast if they do not keep on using it.

When children do not have the reading habit, there is little one can do but teach them the rules of the language. This teaching of grammar should best be done at a young age because at this stage, the learning process takes place with less inhibition. The "monitoring or fil-

tering process" is also less, and this will not make them hesitate to express themselves freely in English using the standard patterns prescribed for them.

To make children express in English at a young age is much easier than when they have gone beyond primary school.

The communicative approach has not been effective in making children speak correct English. Most children in school these days speak a mixed language — a mixture of English and Malay or other languages. More than 95 per cent of our school going children speak a mixed language and code-switching is very common. Even teachers subscribe to this language pattern without realising it.

To the children, peer-group influence, in the main, has become more dominant than the teaching process and this encourages them to pick up this mixed-language habit.

Thus, despite the efforts by teachers to teach correct English in the classroom, children end up using ungrammatical structures.

And though grammar drilling may seem too old-fashioned a method for some teachers, many are nowadays beginning to see the advantages in it. At least students are made to keep on practising until they are able to say and write accepted patterns of English structures, in the absence of an English-speaking environment.

The learning of English as a second language should be approached from the right perspective in the absence of a proper English environment. It is the lack of practice and exposure to reading and proper spoken English, and the lack of interest in writing, that have contributed to the poor standard of English among students these days.

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