

5 Star English

Report on:

English Teaching Methods for Vietnam

By Ken Symicek

I have been living in Vietnam for over five years now and have picked up some valuable pointers and methods about Teaching English to Vietnamese Students (TEVS - I just made that abbreviation up). So, today I want to share with you MY philosophy about teaching English here in Vietnam.

I have been teaching here for nearly 4 years and I don't want to sound like I am bragging, but I am going to anyway. My English students loved having a foreigner teach them the English language. I provide them a model of proper pronunciation, sentence structure, listening drills and the use of the many English idioms. I teach them how to get excited about English. In my classes, they learn a lot of new methods to improve their English easily, faster and naturally.

What I would like to share with you are some of the methods I used while teaching English to Vietnamese students. However, I am not going to share all of them, I need to keep some for myself; it is what makes me valuable!

- **Stop studying English words.**

That's right, do not memorize words. When I first came to Vietnam I started studying Vietnamese by memorizing well over 3,000 Vietnamese words. My problem was I didn't know how to use them. I forgot that we native English speakers did not learn English by remembering long word lists. We heard and learnt phrases that are made up of words that naturally go together. If anyone wants to speak English automatically, like a native English speaker, they must learn phrases not just the words.

I taught the students to never study an individual word. When one finds a new word always write down 'The Phrase' it is used in. When one reviews, always review all of the phrases, not the single words. I show students how to collect phrases, review phrases, and remember phrases. By studying phrases one's speaking and grammar abilities will improved 3 to 4 times faster.

- **Do not teach hard grammar rules.**

In most Vietnamese high schools, the teachers told the students that grammar was the keys to learning English and they need to remember all the rules. They were really wrong. In fact, studying too much grammar is the worst thing to do. Grammar study can destroy one's English speaking ability. Why, because simply studying grammar makes you think too much and makes you scared to use English. You don't want to think about speaking English, you just want to speak quickly and automatically without too much thinking. Some of the students in my classes know more grammar than I do, but most of them don't know how to use it.

However, I do teach SOME grammar. I use it to explain the few major differences between the Vietnamese and English language. There are about seven major differences that are easily understood by surrounding them with some BASIC grammar rules. Some of the differences between Vietnamese and English are:

- English usually places adjectives before the nouns while Vietnamese after the noun.
- They usually forget to pronounce the last letter of the English words. Words like "want" becomes "wan" and "much" becomes "mut" (They often do this same thing to their Vietnamese words)
- Often the 'To Be' verbs are omitted in most Vietnamese sentences.
- There are no singular or plural nouns in Vietnamese.
- Their verbs show no tense. The tense of a Vietnamese verb is usually derived from the content of the sentence.

These are just five of seven things that cause the Vietnamese trouble with learning English. Teaching just a LITTLE basic grammar seems to help them jump over these English hurdles. I understand that some English certification classes need a lot of grammar. I am not the man to do that kind of training.

- **Do they hear enough English?**

In most schools in Vietnam, the teachers do not speak enough English to their students. They speak mostly Vietnamese! They explain English grammar using Vietnamese. They give class instructions in Vietnamese. They translate all English words into Vietnamese. They use the 80% - 20% rule the wrong way. They will speak 80% Vietnamese and only 20% English. The results; Vietnamese students cannot think in English, have trouble speaking English, and find it hard to understand an English speaker.

The student's speaking is usually slow and painful because they just didn't hear enough English. They seem to be learning English with their eyes. They read textbooks. They study word lists. They watch the teachers write the grammar rules with examples on the blackboard. That is why most of them are able to read English, but cannot speak it. That is why they have great difficulties in understanding English when it is spoken to them. They need to learn English with their ears, not just their eyes.

During my classes, I will give them more than 90% English. One must listen to English to understand English. There are times when I will use some Vietnamese to explain those really hard English definitions. Nouns and verbs are easy, but try to explain the words attitude, emotions, or some of those other touchy-feely words using only English.

- **Slow, Deep Learning Is The Best.**

The secret to speaking easily is to learn every phrase and word DEEPLY. It's not enough to know a definition. One must put the words deep into one's brain. This is usually accomplished by practicing, having long periods of repetition, associations and testing.

One of the best ways to have students improve their English skills is by using the language over and over again. Granted, this repetition may seem boring and tedious, but it will allow the expressions to be firmly planted into their long term memory for fast and easy access when needed.

One of the things that hampers communication is when one or both of the participants must pause in the dialogue to search their memory banks for the expression they need. If the expressions are readily accessible, that problem is eliminated and effective communication is enhanced.

Because of the value of repetition, many of the role play situations and activities that we do in the classroom are designed to give students ample opportunities to practice using the language in situations that they are likely to encounter when dealing with guests.

So .we must have the students practice and repeat! Practice and repeat! Practice and repeat!

I am not going to go into any more details - because I need to keep some of the secrets and methods to myself. I can't have everybody stealing all my tricks.

I know by using me and my teaching methods that 95% of the students will be successful in having their English words come out more naturally. They will feel comfortable using English. They will feel confident. Please believe me; communication using English can be fun and easy to learn.