My experience in learning English as a second language

44th TESOL Lee Soo Yeon (Francis)

There is an old proverb that says ‘it is never late, when you think it is too late.’

I’m 46 years old now but it doesn’t matter how old I am. I just like to learn what I like. Especially I like to learn English. So, I’m here to attend this TESOL program in order to know how English could be used between people. Prior to going forward in TESOL, it might be helpful to remind my experience in learning English. I’d like to say that my experience gave me positive effects because I always think learning from the experience could be my precious assets no matter how bad the experience itself was.

Unlike current early-childhood English education, I began to learn English when I was 14 years old at middle school. Before I entered middle school, my mother made me study English by taking a private lesson during winter vacation. I was very excited to learn English because I thought I could understand AFKN (American Forces Korean Network) TV programs which I had been satisfied with just guessing the meanings from the gestures and motions of them. I came to learn the alphabet and finish the 1st grade English text book in advance. But most students didn’t do that. I was proud of myself that I was better at understanding English than any other student in my class. My English teacher was tall and always had an angry face which made students feel overwhelmed. He made us just listen and repeat after him. Another teaching method was to use drawing charts as a visual aid. But he yelled, scolded and punished us all the time. We trembled with fear and prayed not to be picked to answer his questions. Our homework was to write new words ten times in our notebooks. Of course we got bored soon and many students started to give up catching up the English classes. In my opinion, the most important period in learning English as a second language is in middle school. Thus, teachers should have spent more time raising our curiosity rather than focusing on our progress. If it had not been for my preparation of learning it in advance, I would have lost interest like other students. Especially the thought that I was better than others in class led me keep studying English.

But when I entered high school, this small confidence couldn’t help me any longer. One of the major differences between middle school and high school English classes was that I had two classes, English 1 and English 2, without any difference between them. In addition, we didn’t get the chance to learn any useful English such as speaking or writing. Just making us read and listen to passages and giving out tests were what the teachers did, just to reach the goal of “sending renowned universities”. One day, we had to memorize 100 words we didn’t know in class. Soon these English classes made my interest in English fade away.

After graduating college, I had worked for one company over 17 years. I entered my company as an engineer, but after several changes in my role, I had a chance to use English at an overseas marketing team. At that time, I felt the necessity of learning actual English in order to apply it to business talks, to write business letters, to make English presentations, to guide buyers to my office and factories etc. I quit my job there 2 years ago, but I am still trying to use English in my everyday life. My goals are to understand the people and cultures abroad, to communicate with them, to expand my range of knowledge, to travel around the world with my family without any communication problems.

In conclusion, it has been almost 33 years since I started to learn English. But the problem is that I still have difficulty in using appropriate expressions in English, because we have been wrongly led by our educational situation - treating English as a test tool than a tool to use it in our lives. So according to my experience, I came to realize the importance of appropriate language teaching method. I hope to get some help from this TESOL program, regarding the right direction of teaching English as well as the improvement of my linguistic ability.