My English Learning Experience in Korea

 Jenna Jiho Joo

I started my English learning since the age of 11 at a small English class which was held at a Kids Community Center in my neighborhood. But it was not that long but was the first English lesson experience that I’ve ever got. I remember that the class was formed with the same age group for who were already aware of alphabet. At the time I only could read and write alphabetical letters alone. In the classroom desk arrangement was typical Korean classroom style like a theater for whole class work. The teacher was an explainer giving a lecture most time. She taught 11 year old kids how basic sentences were made using simple nouns on the given worksheet in the classroom. No chances to learn speaking & listening lessons. The class was for just lexis and grammar focused writing exercise.

When compared my first English classroom with modern classroom its teaching way was a very traditional style. The class was focused only receptive skills. Chalk and Talk for whole class hours and no fun activities for Kids such as singing and chant. Only writing practice proper words and sentences to match. According to the learner’s retention rate, less than 10% to make students hold the basic language knowledge.

And then my mother took me to a private English lesson class of 5 kids to prepare the middle school course when I was 13. The female teacher was also an explainer type like Jug and mug. She was focusing on grammar and lexis. Textbook and wordbook were given and only student activity was homework for preparing vocabulary and grammar test. I had no chance to speak English as language to communicate.

Also, other classes I had experience both in the middle and high school were the same as the old style of typical school class. All teachers had the same teaching method as an explainer type. Text books were composed of 4 language skills (reading, listening, writing, and speaking) to be improved. However, there was no speaking practice time provided at all. Teacher spent most of time transmitting grammar and lexis. We were busy taking a note on the text book while teacher was explaining.

During middle and high school days, the purpose of English learning was for getting a good grade from tests and Korea SAT to enter high-ranked university in Korea not for learning language to communicate. So English teaching had been fixed according to that education system. We can read and understand, but cannot communicate with English.

For my university life, when it’s not needed necessarily that English learning for the test purpose I had had, I took an English speaking course by my choice at language school. Classroom type was very different from my previous classrooms in school or private lesson. Students sit making a big circle and teachers stand in the middle or sometime in front of the white board. Teacher is an involve type. He just gives a short instruction and for some words I cannot pronounce, he corrected me when I had conversation with another student. There were many speaking and listening activities in a pair.

Another most impressive memory about my learning English was the summer vacation of my first year of university. My cousins visited us from Canada and one day they taught me the pronunciation of “L”. I became to make a correct sound of L and R. When I got back to school English class, my mates

I entered a university with major as Korean language and wanted to learn English more practically. As I already mentioned, all English lessons were focused on improving receptive skills. When I became 19 over 10 year English learning, I cannot communicate properly with my cousins who live in Canada as they were visiting Korea. The most impressive moment about English learning was my first summer vacation of my university life. My 2 cousins were staying at my house and they taught me how to pronounce ‘L’ and ‘R’. They kept making me repeat after them with practicing two vowel sounds and then we started doing words - Small

A, my mother had me attend the small private lesson classes to prepare middle school English. This was basically the same learning method until the course of my high school English. However this time teachers were an involver.