Second Language Acquisition

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Some people spend 12+ years studying a second language and still find it difficult to open their mouth in front of a foreigner, whereas some who spent less time may be fluent enough to communicate with ease. That does not necessarily mean that people who had an unsuccessful language learning experience did not work hard enough. There are tools that facilitate the learning process, and ineffective ways of studying can be time-consuming and tiring. I find myself to be lucky to have a successful language learning experience, because even though I worked very hard to be where I am now, I wouldn’t have been able to learn English as effectively as I have if it weren’t for the environment I was surrounded in.

One of the reasons for my successful language learning experience is because I was goal-oriented, autonomous and self-directed. Though these are characteristics of adult learners and I was not yet an adult, I was motivated to work hard and that was the key reason for my success in learning English. I spent many hours memorizing vocabulary, studying grammar, and watching news every night trying to catch words the reported said. Learning a second language takes time and effort and can sometimes be frustrating. My parents believed in purpose-driven and independent learning so they helped me to set realistic goals and encouraged me to study on my own. I had a reason to study English and that drove me to keep on going even when I found English boring and hard.

The second factor would be the classroom environment. I was taught in modern classrooms with ‘involver’ types of teachers. Modern classrooms, unlike traditional ones, are focused on students and consist of a lot of activities relating to the topics covered to get every students engaged. The teachers knew what they were doing and made sure each student could get engaged during a class. I could improve not only the receptive skills, reading and listening, but also productive skills, speaking and writing, through discussions and essay-writing. The materials provided were carefully chosen to use various types of intelligences and were easily relatable that I can still recall some of the lessons even after more than 10 years later. I was evaluated through many quizzes, tests, and exams. Then, I was given extra assignments for the skills I needed to work on. I know that not many schools have that much resource or faculty to help ESL students but my school did and it helped me vastly.

There are many factors involved when learning a second language and there can be as many underlying principles when one successfully communicates. I can think of two main reasons from my experiences, autonomy and supportive environment. Having successful language learning experience will be valuable to me when helping students learn English better. I will also gain insights from failed efforts; I can learn from my worst teacher’s mistakes. When I teach, I will keep in mind that enabling students to get involved in the learning process and providing motivations to reach their goals autonomously is imperative.