**Times Media TESOL**

**Experience as the Best Teacher**

**Past Experience Learning a Second Language**

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Learning a new language could be a scary experience and a difficult task for some. For others, it could be a fun and exciting new challenge. As for me, although it was one of scariest experiences, it was not the hardest task that I had to take. My experience started when I was seven years old and my parents decided to move to the Philippines. Even at the very young age, I knew I needed to learn English quickly for survival purposes. I knew I needed the language not only to help me get through school, but also for me not to become an outcast. What I did not realize back then, was how important and useful learning a different language can become.

As only a short preparation time was taken to completely move out of Korea, I started learning English the very first day our family arrived in the Philippines. I only had a few weeks before school started and I needed to get my level up to be able to enter First Grade. However, everyone knew that my English skills were no better than a 2 year old native English speaker. My mother became my first teacher. She taught me grammar and helped me memorize words. The walls of our one bedroom apartment unit were covered with Manila paper with words in both English and Korean.

My mother was a very enthusiastic teacher, but she, like many common teachers in Korea, was used to teaching by rote, spoon feeding the answers, and memorizing. I was honestly scared to learn English because of the overwhelming number of words and grammar rules that I had to memorize. Even with my mother's efforts to help me *memorize* English, this got me nowhere close to saying a simple sentence to express how thirsty or how hungry I was.

My mother knew she was more of an explainer type of teacher because that was how she learned English. She was very good at explaining, and grammar rules did need profound explanation, but when she realized that I was more of a tactile-kinesthetic learner and that her visual and auditory materials had not helped me much, she found a young bilingual Korean teacher to help me. His teaching style was completely different from that of my mother's. He was an involver and he always came up with games that we would play at the end of every lesson. These games were closely related to the day's lesson and helped me improve my speaking abilities.

My mother continued to teach me grammar and helped me improve my writing; while my bilingual Korean teacher helped me with my pronunciation, speech and reading. I studied with them for a month and a half before I entered school. Filipino teachers were not very strict, and they were more of the enabler type of teachers. They would give enough time for students to come up with their own answers to certain questions. They were very keen to the interpersonal intelligences of the students as we were given various group works and projects where the teachers expected us to come up with different answers that we could share with the class. We were given equal opportunities to recite. My teachers and classmates even waited for me to finish my recitation spoken with my very poor English.

My English soon improved very fast, as this, along with a mix of few Filipino words, was all I could speak in order to communicate with my classmates and teachers. Of all the ways to learn English, continuous exposure to the language and natural communication were best ways for me to learn the language. Instead learning the language, I can say I have more so acquired it like I would my first language. It even makes me wonder sometimes whether my first language is Korean or English. They say the language you think with would be your first language. In my case, I think both in English and Korean.

I believe language is a very powerful tool. My father used to tell me that if you know a different language, you yourself become the best tool to carry out a certain job. Although it was a scary experience having to learn something completely new, it was not the hardest one as I had talented teachers and friendly classmates to help me. l was very privileged to learn English at a very young age and to experience diverse ways of teaching styles by learning English in a country outside of Korea. With these past experiences and with the new methods that I am currently learning in my TESOL class, I feel very confident that I can utilize these different methods, techniques and tools to effectively teach English to speakers of other languages.