The personal experience of learning English as a second language

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I’ve studied English for over 15 years as a student. I could write, read, and listen as like other normal Korean students could, but I couldn’t speak confidently for a long time, because I wanted to speak perfectly in front of others.

4 years ago, after quitting my job, I needed some break time for my further future and eventually, I got a chance to go to USA and then studied there. Before starting with the master program, I was in ESL school for a while to improve my English in order to adapt the real student life in US.

I was positioned in intermediate level at the very first time. As I thought at that time, I expected to be higher level than I was arranged in reality, so I was a little disappointed with my test results which I was given, but I soon realized that the results was not wrong.

During the class, I always focused on what teacher was saying and what teacher wanted the students did, so I could improve my English as time passed by. When I studied English in the school or language institute which called ‘hakwon’ in Korea, the teacher usually lectured something and the students just followed by what teacher taught. I was also familiar with this teaching style, one-way teaching, and even felt comfortable as I was in the class. However, the experience in the class which I got in US was totally different from my previous one. I could say that it was very shocked to me.

When I entered the classroom, the seating way for students was rather new to me, compared to the previous way which I have always experienced in Korea. Teacher was not always standing in front of the students and the students’ seat was arranged in circle with teacher as the center. In doing so, she wanted every student to pay attention to her as well as to have an opportunity for speech freely whatever the students said. That could be called modern classroom style, not traditional one which is normal style in Korea.

Her class always started with the very simple question, like what did you do yesterday? Or how was your weekend? Every student should answer about her question, but if the students didn’t want to share with the other students about that, he/she didn’t need to say by force. And then she suggested the simple games or group activities to us and we usually did by her direction. Actually, at that time, I didn’t know why we should do those kinds of activities during the class, because I would like to learn something from the teacher by lecture and also I thought the games or activities was a waste of time. To be honest, I didn’t know teacher’s aim of all doings at that time. However, after doing these kinds of activities, I realized that they were very helpful to understand about that day’s lesson. And now I came to understand all things what she did in the class were meaningful and important for students, especially the foreign students, even though I couldn’t understand the true meaning of every single activities given by teacher. She, of course, was one of the best explainers who I have ever experienced before in my life; in addition, she could be an involver and enabler to students.

Before the experience with my ESL program in USA, I always thought that my motivation and my ability were very crucial to learn something more than teacher’s style or method. However, learning second language is rather different from the other things, such as learning math in mother’s tongue, so the most important thing for learning second language, in my opinion, is the role and responsibility of teacher. Depending on his/her teaching method and skills, the students will be able to do everything confidently or they cannot and even more the worst thing is that students could hate learning second language. Therefore, teacher’s role is very important for students.

I can say that I could get the confidence with my English skill through my precious experience in ESL school.