For me, learning another language besides Korean was one of the toughest tasks in my life. This is because of my experience of learning English in a Korean middle school. I never felt that I was learning something in class. Rather, all I did was to memorize 30 vocabulary every day without any enthusiasm. One of the teachers in my middle school is the perfect example of so-called ‘traditional teacher’. He led classes by giving unilateral lectures, and explaining grammar or sentence structures. Back then, the only chance to get involve in my English class was when he asked the whole class to follow along what he was reading. However, that was not enough to satisfy my desire to learn English in a better way. These lectures were given twice a week, and the teacher paced himself for his own sake, not the students. Back in the days, America was not more than a nation where my relatives live in. Hence, learning a language of an unfamiliar nation was such a huge burden for me. Of course, I know that this was a widespread problem among Korean students in the old days. Still, as a student with visual and kinesthetic intelligence myself, those lectures were overly tedious. He was not more than an ‘explainer’ who mechanically explain everything without encouraging students’ active participation. On top of that, in that class, students who did not pass the vocabulary quiz had to go down to lower level classes. Consequently, I had no choice but to unwillingly memorize words. Indeed, that was when I started to feel nauseous from speaking and listening English.

However, my fear about foreign languages perfectly disappeared when I studied abroad in Japan. This was not possible without the support of my friendly teacher in Japan, who had good sense of humor. In my university, there was a Japanese language acquisition course prepared for international students. There were only five students in the class, and all students were from diverse background: Korean, Mongolian, French, and Chinese. The first class was very unexpected. Instead of introducing ourselves like many other classes, the teacher asked us to teach famous fad words from each country. Since I was interested in that topic, learning new fad words from other countries was so exciting. Obviously, all students in the class were not so good at speaking Japanese, but the teacher really listened to his students. In turn, I got to know other students’ personal information, such as interest, hobby, age, and academic field. What I enjoyed the most about his classes was his teaching method. For instance, he asked us to bring our favorite book and introduce the content to the rest of the class. For our Japanese culture classes, we were able the profoundly understand the culture by making our own magazine or an image portfolio. Whenever I opened the door of that class, I felt like as if I became a true ‘autonomous learner’. When I did not know a word, I did not have to be frustrated and fail a class. Instead, I actively asked questions without fear and gradually improved my speaking skills. If the teacher was not available, other international students in the class willingly became my teacher by working collaboratively. As I started to lose my fear about Japanese due to my teacher and colleagues’ support, I even started to create my own learning method that was tailor-made for me. For instance, since I enjoy watching the news, I mimicked the way the news reporter talks or voluntarily go to the library and search for Japanese books that I am interested in. In turn, at the end of my university year, I knew over 20,000 vocabularies and use them in a year. His effective teaching method encouraged my interest in Japanese. For our grammar classes, I naturally learned sentence structures and proper use of vocabulary by reading our journal out loud to the class. He was also a good ‘counselor’. He consistently checked our progress in homework or gave meaningful advice about my attitude in classes. The positive, wholehearted feedback he gave to me served as a momentum to start a new life as a Japanese teacher in Korea. I often compared the teaching method between my English teacher in Korea, who was an ‘explainer’, and the Japanese teacher in Japan, who was an ‘enabler’. From these different experiences, I realized how teachers play a key role in foreign language beginners. As an ‘enabler’ myself, I am truly excited to teach other students in my TESOL classes.