Various experiences in learning English

TESOL

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Variety! That is the word can represent my experiences in learning English. I’ve been through one extreme to another in terms of teaching style. I’ve been taught English by very traditional classroom in Korea and moved to States for oversea studying and faced whole new atmosphere. I took the ESL class before join the regular class to be able to follow regular school curriculum and eventually joined the regular class incl. English class. What I experienced in learning English through these 3 different classes was quite interesting, unique and distinguishably different.

My first experience in learning English started at mid. School in Korea. It was first English class I ever took and I remembered that I was quite excited. When I look back now, the class was typical traditional classroom as same as other classes were. It was very teacher-centered class with chalk & talk way of teaching. Not surprisingly, individual difference was not a concern at all and teacher used text book most of time to explain things directly to us. Among 5 basic language systems, grammar and lexis were important elements and teacher taught and delivered us rules and meanings of vocabulary directly. Class was receptive skill teaching oriented; listening was taught via auditory method. We were listening cassette tape player and repeated it after. And reading was taught via translation of dialogs’ each sentence from text book. All these activities were one way interaction. Only teacher was talking and teaching and students had to pay attention or write down what teacher is writing on the board just like typical jug and mug class room.

After 2 and half years of education in Korea, I moved to States for entering high school. I took the ESL class first before semester starts and the way of teaching was very different from what I’ve been experienced. First, it was quite close to modern classroom. It was still teacher- centered but there were more interactions between teacher and students and also students and students. Individual differences were carefully monitored by teacher and via individual sessions for each student after class to get to know each student better. At that time, I felt rapport with my teacher for the first time. During the class, visual, auditory and kinesthetic tools were well used for teaching as well as realia and that was not only learning one language but also acquiring language with its culture which helped us to adapt the life in States easier. Different from my previous experience, during the ESL class, the productive skills were slightly more focused than receptive skills so that I can communicate with teachers and roommates. Teachers were more like involver and used audio-visual and live demonstration programs to help students increase their retention levels. One big thing that strikes me was natural order environment. Before, mistake was not allowed in the class and I and my classmates felt like walking on eggshells during the class. However, mistakes were seemed as natural thing and encouraged to give a shot without concerning about mistakes. That was totally new point of view of mistakes and wrong answers and helped me a lot to speak out loud without worrying errors.

With ESL class completion, I finally joined regular classes with other native speakers. It was a very modern classroom which was very students-centered and teacher played role as facilitator and enabler. One key thing that helped me to improve my ability was eliciting. Teacher was very patient and continuously asked questions to find out the answers by myself and also leaded class with group work so that students can speak out and getting close to the answers by themselves instead of just gave us answers directly. That was very new but at the same time very impressive experience for me. Eventually that helped me to improve my English skill and adapt to various situations. Also, integrated skill approach was used in the class so, we had to focus on all four skills which were both for receptive and productive. Since it was students-centered class, discussion groups and live demonstration were often held and that helped my retention level increasing as well. Also, teacher used input hypothesis method in class and challenged students to elicit the answers in order to help us to reach higher level. Last but not least, as much as elicit strategy, affective filter environment influenced me a lot in acquiring English. I was not accused by wrong answers and I was not urged by answering the questions instead I had enough time to think, share and learn. Therefore, I was not anxious in classroom and enjoyed the class comfortably. Ant that actually made me brings out best ability of me. It was very strong but positive experience for me.

Above all three experiences were very important and valuable for me. In terms of efficiency, one is better than another however, even chalk & talk classroom gave me a lesson and cornerstone to compare various methods and strategies and figure out each method’s strong and weak points.