Essay for my experience of the learning language

I still remember my first foreign language, English teacher. When I entered in my girls’ middle school, I was very excited to have English class. I learned the names of English alphabets and writing system beforehand. When the bell rang, an old lady teacher came in the classroom with her English text book, a big roll book and a pen. She did not introduce herself but she checked the attendance. She made progress her class in Korean. She told us that her classes would start with formal greetings. And she asked the class captain to say ‘Attention’ and made all the students sit properly. And then she asked her to say ‘Bow’ and instructed all of the students to bow their heads. And then she made us open our text book. There were some pictures under the noun words in the book. I can’t remember exact content of the ‘Lesson 1’. But it included some sentences like these: ‘This is Ted. This is Mary. This is a book. This is notebook. This is a pen. This is a pencil’. She read the context herself first. And then she made us follow her sentence by sentence. After that she started to hold up or point out some objects which were available in the classroom. ‘What is this?’ ‘Is this a pen? ‘Is this Ted?’ etc.’ I could not pronounce the words or the simple sentences properly so I was not comfortable. Fortunately she did ask the questions publicly without pointing out any special student. After a few classes, she stopped trying that kind of conversations. And she was concentrated on explaining of the meaning new words, reading the texts and translating of them. And she explained some grammar which was related to the lesson. She never brought any things to show or to listen. After that I met several English teachers. Some of them had forced to memorize spellings or sentences from the text books. Sometimes it was very burdensome. Teachers asked students to do exercises, sometimes with appointing randomly which were very tense. When I could understand some stories in English, I was very excited. It was my goal in the learning English because I wanted to study advanced resources in English. But I did not concentrate in speaking or listening to native English speakers. But after joining in the International Organization named Wycliffe Bible Translators, I became to realize the importance of the verbal communication in English. Most of my language teachers’ teaching was ‘traditional teaching’. And according to Adrian Underhill, they seemed to belong to the category of ‘the explainer’.

I do not think my English teachers did very effective teaching. I agree with Stephen Krashen’s Hypothesis, ‘In order to acquire a second language, teachers must focus on communication rather than the memorization of rules’(from Tim’s lecture note).

However through their traditional teachings I could learn how to read. By their explanations of the grammar, I could understand the sentence structures, and lexical meanings of the words. I can read some books myself.

Now I would like to point out their ineffective teachings.

1) My first English teacher was one of elite group. In those days, most of the women in Korea were not allowed to have a high level of education like her. However she learned English from Japanese teachers who could not pronounce some English words in the proper ways. Korea was Japanese’ colony, so Koreans were taught by Japanese teachers from 1910 -1945. In Japanese, most of the syllables end with vowels not consonants. So they were not familiar with syllable sounds which end with consonants. So in this case, they used to add a vowel. For an example, when they said the word, ‘book’, they used to pronounce it ‘bu-ku’.

2) Their teaching was teacher centered but it should be students centered.

Teaching is for the learner, so it should be students centered. The class used to be set in the traditional way so it was teacher and board centered. At that time, in general, teachers were very authoritative and all the students were supposed to follow teachers’ instructions. All the students had to express respect toward teachers but students could not expect respect from the teachers. Students should not disturb teachers’ teaching plan. So it was not positive learning atmosphere. There was no two ways of empathy or authenticity. But for the effective teaching, they should have a good relationship, ‘rapport’ between the teacher and students, and among students. Students should respect each other as human beings. They can feel empathy as if looking through their eyes. Everyone should be herself or himself ready to take the risk of being vulnerable and human and honest according to Carl Roger and Freberg. So teachers should consider students whom they were teaching: their learning differences, learning modes, their level of language proficiency, their intelligence type etc. besides their subject matter. And students feel comfortable and relaxed and they can be motivated to learn.

3) My teachers teaching style was ‘explainer’ style, but participation of students is more effective.

Among Adrian Underhill’s 3 categories of teaching styles, ‘enabler’ style who is considering subject matter, methodology and people (building effective working relationship and a good classroom atmosphere) looks best. Of course when the subject needs explanation then the teacher should be ‘explainer’. And sometimes the teacher can be ‘involver’ style so students can participate in the class more actively and can be motivated more.

4) Listening and reading and grammar were focused but speaking was ignored.

Even the teacher did not speak in English in classes. But they should remember that the most important goal of language learning is communication and they should try to achieve ‘the integrated-skill approach’. They should give chances for authentic exposure for the students so students could learn the languages in the practical way rather than restricted exposure.

5) Some of the teachers forced to memorize some sentences or whole stories in a short period, but it’s better to understand students’ learning languages process and create a low-anxiety learning environment. And they should try to help the students with effective teaching techniques like audio visuals, live demonstration, discussion group, experiential learning opportunities.

Thanks.