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Essay Topic: My Experience of L2 Acquisition – a Success or Failure?

Most people mistakenly believe that learning and acquisition is the same due to the little difference in definitions; Google defines the former as “the acquisitions of knowledge or skills through experience, study, or by being taught and the latter as “the learning or developing of a skill, habit, or quality. However, two concepts, in essence, are claimed to be different with regard to **Second Language Acquisition** **(SLA)** theory by Stephen Krashen. According to the theory, ‘learning’ is the product of formal instruction and it comprises a conscious process which result in conscious knowledge about language whereas ‘acquisition’ is the product of a subconscious process very similar to children undergo when they acquire their first language, which requires meaningful interaction and natural communication in the target language. In this essay, my experience about acquisition of English language will be discussed with the course of time: from elementary school to university.

It was at Wonderland where I first started to learn English as a foreign language from 2nd to 6th grade (2000 ~ 2004), and I found the acquisition successful. Everyday classes were composed of two sessions, one of which was done by a native and the other by a Korean. Being that of the old days, **the way of teaching** **was quite modern** in that students actively participated in activities without hesitation. It was made possible thanks to the teachers performing a role as **a** **involver**, who had a good balance between Teacher Talk Time (TTT) and Student Talk Time (STT). Students, including myself, could gain certain amount of fluency in English, accordingly. Moreover, the teachers, who made good use of experiential learning, cooperative learning, and live demonstration in the right place, elicited relatively high **Learner Retention Rates (LRR)** as a result.

SLA did not go smoothly, however, from 2005 to 2010, the dark ages of SLA in my life. It was nearly impossible to focus on the completion of Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) due to the systematical changes in education, and the importance of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) was rising in the meantime. The government and schools emphasized particular **language skills and systems**: reading, listening, and grammar for each. In other words, the importance of oral language was thoroughly overlooked. What is more, it is impossible for students to acquire English language due to the fact that **language proficiency** of students was assessed purely based on unofficial test scores at school and took classes based on the unreliable scores. Needless to say, instructors had no interest in **individual learner differences**. In other words, motivation, learning strategies, and reasons for studying English were never taken into account, and the teachers who asserted their authority as an instructor made acquisition nearly impossible.

Fortunately, the complete acquisition of English language was made possible through 2 years (2016 ~ 2017) of campus life at University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD). The teaching environment was certainly modern, it had some traditional aspect yet. The way students were taught was similar to that of SMU. The huge difference was, however, that flow of each class was led by students, not professors. Unlike those who sit at desks saying nothing until the end of the class, international students actively participated in and clearly express their opinions without hesitation, and it motivated me to be **a data gatherer**. Thanks to them, I could be a real friend with Americans, by fluently communicating in English. The atmosphere of lectures was comfortable, relaxed, and positive enough to establish a close relationship with students. Professors, who played roles of explainer, enabler, and involver at the same time, were **teachers** **who** **effective taught** English language with honesty, authenticity, and clear feedback on every situation. As a result, the close **rapport** between the teachers and students was easily established within limited time. Above all things, English used there was 100% authentic, and Americans, who has certain degree of respect in their nature, offered me a chance to successfully “acquire” English language.

The topic of the essay is whether my experience of L2 Acquisition was whether successful or not. In spite of subjectivity of the word “successful,” I would like to maintain that my L2 acquisition was close to a success now that I am able to have a natural and meaningful communication with the natives. On top of that, the chance to write the essay reminded me of the true meaning of education, and I hope the reflective essay can pave the way to be a good English teacher.