

I would like to relate my experience as a second language learner. Being an Asian American, I was the first in my family to attend a university in the United States. To be successful academically, I had to hurdle my difficulty with the English language. It was not easy but I had a very supportive English mentor who has taught me that learning anything – and being successful at anything – begins with a positive state of mind.

At first, I was very hesitant to join the English language class because I felt that they were better English speakers and because they were more superior, they might discriminate me. Despite the dire lack of facility in the English language, my class teacher has been instrumental in opening up a whole new world for me. Though gradually, I have tried to learn all the concepts taught in class and spent time consulting my mentor if there were topics that were not clear to me. I persevered even if it was very tough for me during the first two months. While teaching me about English concepts, my mentor also went out of his way to express to me that he can empathize with a second language learner like myself. He also shared that at one point, he has also tried to learn another language and have experienced the same hardships. But in the end, he said he was able to succeed because he did not quit. I admitted to him that there were many times when I just felt like quitting and going back to my home country. However, I have profound respect for my parents and cannot let them down by saying that I cannot go on with life in the United States.

And so with a lot of encouragement from my teacher, I strived to study each and every page of my class notes. I also sought opportunities to hone my skills. For example, I watched movies with my teacher and with native speakers to help me be more exposed to the language. I also tried my best to converse with them whenever I can, and express myself as clearly as I could. When I am not understood, I paraphrase what I have just said until I am comprehended.

Apart from sharpening my English speaking and writing skills, my teacher also advised that I should start changing my paradigm about myself and those like me who are second language learners. He said that I should convince myself that I am not inferior to them just because they are well-versed in

the English language. He explained that it just so happened that I was the second language learner and they were native speakers. But they would experience the same thing in wanting to learn a language that was not their native tongue. So much was the encouragement of my mentor that I felt I learned more than the English language itself. I learned about life. I also learned about how one's paradigms can change one's life.

At the end of the learning period, I have expressed to my mentor how grateful I am for his guidance. I feel I am much better now at the English language, in both written and oral forms. While I still feel that there is a lot of room for improvement, I feel that the more important thing is that I am less anxious and more confident of myself now than when I first entered that class. I also realized that the learning is a frame of mind. If I had closed myself to the idea of learning English early on, then I would not have the opportunities that I now have. I believe that this intellectual experience has helped open up a world of hope and opportunity for me. Because of the learning and motivation that has been imparted to me, I want to share the same thing to second language learners like myself. For instance, if I am accepted in a university, I plan to establish an organization whose primary thrust is to help non-native speakers like myself to overcome the ordeals of studying in an American university. I want to help them succeed during this critical period of their lives. I want to touch their lives just as my teacher has touched my life. In the end, the intellectual experience has made a difference in my life because it was one borne out of altruism. There was nothing that was expected in return for the teaching and the encouragement. It was all in the name of goodwill, and that made it distinct. I want to make the same dent in the lives of non-native immigrants whom I come in contact with.