

My Learning Journey to Be a Confident English User

Yuri Kawasaki

Kanda University of International Studies

[<yr918.ksep@gmail.com>](mailto:yr918.ksep@gmail.com)

Introduction

I graduated from Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) in March 2019 and now work as a business person. One day I thought that looking back on my four years' experience at KUIS and writing up my reflection is necessary for me as the last thing to do before starting a new chapter in my life. Therefore, I decided to share what I have done since I enrolled at university, what I have learned throughout my experience, and also how it will benefit me in the future. Most importantly, I hope that reading this essay encourages you, the reader, to have confidence in yourself.

First of all, I will explain why I spent time studying English and describe what I have learned from it separating each year below. When I was a high school student, I wanted to be a hotel receptionist and thought I could improve my English skill if I went to a university like KUIS. At the time, English was my least favorite subject so that I got akaten, less than 30 points out of 100, in a midterm exam. I was not motivated to learn English; that is, I felt I had to study English for my future job.

Freshman year

On the very first day of the required English class in KUIS, I heard a lot of my classmates had studied abroad, traveled overseas, or taken global courses that offer many English classes in their high schools. Then, I realized I was the only one who had never had any of those experiences before, and I was embarrassed about my English speaking ability that I could only say "My name is Yuri. Nice to meet you." I felt anxious about the huge difference between me and others. In addition to this, I am very competitive so I could not stand the situation where I was and I did not want them to be ahead of me. These feelings made me motivated to study English hard. The more time passed, the more I got to like English and had a little fun in classes. I was able to talk with my classmates a little bit better and even ask them simple questions, and give opinions using easy words. Additionally, my score on the TOEIC test jumped up 170 points compared with the one I took before entering KUIS. These positive experiences made me notice that my English skill had been developing. On the other hand, talking to my teachers and classmates in English outside of classes was difficult for me because I did not still have confidence when people heard my wrong English, especially my pronunciation. By the time the first year was over, I enjoyed studying and learning English a little bit more. I felt like I overcame my weakness and the fact that I did not like English. This year was just the first small step towards a big change that happened to me later.

Sophomore year

In the spring semester of the second year, I set a goal which was to get 650 on TOEIC in order to meet graduation requirements. I took a required class for achieving the target score. At the time, I belonged to the school festival committee which is a volunteer group for managing a school festival, and I expected that I would be much busier in the fall semester. One of my friends who was also in the committee took the same TOEIC class, and we decided to get 650 in the TOEIC test together within the spring semester, and it made us study much harder. Though finding study time was challenging, I used my commuting time for memorizing vocabulary and reading short English articles for the TOEIC study. Whenever we met in the class, we always shared our progress or difficulties of what we learned and asked some vocabulary questions to each other. I had thought that studying with others would distract me, but it did not. It actually made me have motivation by competing with a classmate. Thanks to studying with him, I passed the requirement by the time the spring semester was over. In the fall semester, because preparation for the school festival was much busier than I anticipated, I did not have any spare time for studying English. The top priority at the moment was the festival. After the fall semester, I joined the sophomore winter camp where students could look back on what we did regarding English for two years with other students and teachers. I talked with Mr. Sakai, the former KUIS President, and each of the participants set a goal for our language learning. He encouraged me to challenge myself more, and his suggestion made me notice that I had never done anything for my English studies by myself when I looked back on the past two years. I had studied for the TOEIC for the university requirement, not for myself.

Junior year

In this year, I tried a lot of things, and each of them was unforgettable for me. It was the most meaningful year I have ever had. In the first semester, I took a class using the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) model. I was taking Basic First Aid: How To Be an Everyday Hero and learned how to manage emergencies. Most 4th-year students and transfer students from our sister college were passionate about improving their English skills, and I got inspired by them. This feeling was exactly the same as when I was a freshman student surrounded by enthusiastic students. The obvious difference compared with my first year was that I had got more confidence thanks to what I had done in English classes for the past two years. I realized the meaning of English to me had completely changed. I had studied English because it was a requirement until I became a junior. By reading online articles, writing reflections, and discussing with classmates, English became a tool to learn new things and verbalize my thoughts with others. I got to be able to enjoy giving opinions and comments in English. At the time, I remember it felt fun communicating using English. I was taking a module which helps students' self-directed learning as language learners in the first semester as well because I wanted to force myself to study harder until studying became my habit. It gave me more opportunities to use English outside of classes. Because of taking the MOOC course and the module, I had become more interested in self-directed learning. That was why I took another self-directed learning class in the fall semester. I studied for the TOEIC reading in a small group in the class, and all of the group members were so much better at English than I

was. I wanted to catch up with them and not give up on this situation. Having such feelings and studying together with competitors, peer learning worked really well for me. I was always excited about going to class and solving problems with my classmates. I realized my English ability had greatly improved throughout this year.

Internship in Malaysia

I joined an internship program in Malaysia over the summer break in my third year. One of the reasons why I started thinking about joining the overseas internship was I had never been abroad before, and I thought I did not need to study abroad for practicing English, but it was the time to go outside of Japan to have some experiences using my English ability. I think the first semester of my junior year was the reason to have such feelings. Throughout the internship, my point of view definitely changed, and it felt like spending the summer abroad had broadened my horizons. I learned the importance of giving my ideas to others proactively and having confidence to speak in your second language. In other words, telling your ideas is more important than your language abilities because no one can understand what you think unless you say any words that describe your feelings. Unfortunately, I did not notice it until I joined the internship. On the first day of the internship, my anxiety got bigger than before I left Japan. People in Malaysia had different accents and we both could not understand what we were trying to say. I was really worried about if I could get through it at first. Meeting a lot of people, working with them, and having conversations with them, I gradually got used to the accents. At the same time, my confidence also increased because they understood what I said even though my pronunciation was not fluent and clear. I just looked at the tip of the iceberg in the first place, but on second thought, Malaysia is a multinational country and people have different accents for sure. When I noticed it, I did not know why I had really cared about my accent all the time and felt like I was an idiot. I was always a perfectionist whenever I did something. Instead of caring about my pronunciation too much, I realized all I have to do is just step outside of my world and be proactive not to miss chances. Trying new things that you never have done before is a little scary and you may feel anxiety, but I realized the internship made me have confidence in my English and be more proactive as a person. Moreover, this internship program experience told me that I could evaluate my English skills not only my TOEIC score but also interactions with others using English.

Senior year

I always gave up new things I had always wanted before I actually tried. However, I wanted to have new experience, so I just decided to give it a shot before thinking whether I am good at it or not. I had once joined the Kaede program which is a volunteer activity to talk with exchange students to help their Japanese improve, but I did not communicate with them so often. In this year, I had a lot of opportunities related to helping exchange students, I made friends with them, and made many memories. Another new challenge was that I started working as a peer tutor who has been taking TOEIC and raised the score by studying with a study buddy. I had never taught anyone anything, and I was the one who always asked for help. Making a balance for tutoring and job hunting was very difficult to manage my time and motivation. Every time I took the second

best for a tutoring session, inside of me said “Are you sure? Your hard work will go down the drain if you give up right now.” Actually, asking myself the question helped me a lot and made me feel better. Doing a lot of things at the same time, I noticed it is sometimes necessary because of my busy schedule. The busier I get, the more important I think it is to spend time doing things productively and becoming more flexible. Making a weekly plan to manage class assignments, preparation for tutoring, and job hunting every week were tough and took time, but once I got used to it, I was able to do it easier and quicker, and everything went my way. Through the tutoring program, I also learned the difference between teaching someone and learning by myself, because I needed to think about others and explain so they can understand. Through teaching younger students English, I could gain confidence in my English more. My dream, to be a hotel receptionist, changed to wanting to work internationally using English. If I had still hated English, I am positive I would not have thought I wanted to work overseas. I was glad that although it has been taking time, I overcame my weakness and gained confidence moving towards my new dream. After I was done with my job hunting, in order to keep up my English ability and make the most of my time using the facilities in SALC (Self-Access Learning Center), I took a module program again and used the conversation desk. My fear of losing English skills led me to succeed. I finally got 905 points on TOEIC and achieved my goal that I discussed with the former President.

Conclusion

My four years at KUIS gave me a lot of confidence in myself. I think I totally grew as a person through overcoming my weakness that I was not good at English and turning it out to be my strength. What I changed the most is that I like studying and seeing how I improve. I want to say to the readers that it is not essential if you are good at things or not; yet, your efforts are everything. All you have to do at first is to take action. I realized no matter how much time you take to achieve your goals or you cannot get results that you expected at first, your efforts will definitely pay off at the end. Looking back, one thing I still regret is that I did not try to have these experiences earlier. I cannot actually take myself back in time, but it is not too late to catch up on things from now; thus, I will keep trying not to feel regret. Before I realized it, I had always made excuses not to fail. Now, I am never afraid of making mistakes or failing, because taking actions makes my horizons wider and my life better. My four year experience was a turning point in my life. How does the whole experience lead me to make my future better? Of course, I will continue learning English for my career. My new goal is to become a global person working and communicating internationally. I think confidence that I have gained from what I have done or achieved is always my strength and I will never forget it. I mean when you try new things, you might face problems and struggle with them, but later, you will feel a sense of accomplishment and might see a new aspect of yourself. For me, I believe ‘my never-give-up mindset’ can help me and motivate me even if my environment changes dramatically. I am really excited to do new things in the future. No matter what happens or what I bump into, in order to be the person I want to be, I will follow these words as my life quotes; ‘don’t make excuses, take action, and be more confident.’