



My English learning path

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I am not a native English speaker, but English has become the most fluent language that I can speak among my other two languages. English has always been my favorite language but I did not attend an English school until when I was ten years old.

I was born in Macau and the early stages of learning were in Portuguese. I attended a Portuguese Primary School and I had to speak, read and write in pure Portuguese and no English was taught. I did not have any chance to learn proper English in school, and the only English I knew was from speaking with my Filipina nanny at that time. I remembered how I used to envy my cousins and friends, who attended International Schools and spoke perfect English. In 1998, at the age of ten, I changed to an English School and started learning English in grade 5.

I was scared and nervous because my English was poor and I did not have the confidence to speak the language in front of my classmates. My family supported me a lot and I started to work really hard and spoke a lot of English around the school campus. By that time I already understood that English was such an important language and it was becoming more and more widely spoken. Eventually my English improved and it pushed me to want to learn more advanced English and to be able to speak it more fluently.

Two years later, due to some personal reasons, my family moved to Hong Kong. I enrolled to an English School where English and French were major spoken languages. It was nerve racking since I was not used to the education system in Hong Kong and I first thought it was very strict and I never witnessed so many students in such a small building and



classrooms. The majority of the teachers were French Canadians and more than 60 percent of the students were not Chinese nationals. The environment forced me to become best friends with the English language. All my close friends whom I met while I was studying in Hong Kong were not Chinese and the ones who were Chinese, grew up in Canada or in the States. I spoke very little Cantonese during that time and eventually I could speak very fluent English without even realizing it.

Not only my fluency in speaking has improved but I have excelled academically. Once I was honored with the highest grades in the English subject among the 8 classes in the 3rd grade, in which there were more than 130 students altogether. I was shocked and my teachers were surprised that I have had better results than all of my native English speaking classmates.

In 2003, my family decided to move back to Macau and I enrolled to the same school which I left in 2000. The English books and materials I learned were more advanced than the other classmates, I had also written an essay which was later published in the School's Yearbook. I successfully graduated from high school in 2005.

After high school, I pursued my further studies at IFT (Institute For Tourism Studies). IFT is an English institute; all courses are taught in English. IFT has given me a lot of opportunities to improve my English speaking skills in a professional manner and it has helped me vastly in many other courses. Fluency in English has made me confident not only in the campus but in my daily life, especially





when meeting professional people in the Hotel Industry. I was noticed by lecturers and I was invited to do oral translations in English and Cantonese in IFT. I assisted in food demonstrations, seminars and MORS courses. Through these work opportunities, I met many great Chefs and mentors who have taught me many valuable things.

My English speaking skills and my confident and outgoing personality have given me a lot of job opportunities and experiences. One interesting and unforgettable experience I have had was working with Tiffxxx and Co. Through a friend, I was invited to tour guide one of Tiffxxx and Co.'s jewelry designers, Miss Paloma Picasso, around Macau. It was in April 2007 and up till today, I still cannot believe I had met and had dinner with Picasso when I was only 18 years old. I was so happy and I shared my experience with some of my mentors, and my Dining Etiquette lecturer has described it as "Not even once in a life time in everybody's case".

All the opportunities I've had are not because of how lucky I am or the network I know; they are the results of the efforts I have put to learn to present myself when speaking, especially in English. I think it is very important how one speaks and presents himself/herself because that can sum up the first impression in people's eyes, and always remember that you can never have a second chance for the first impression. I know how I have done it and I believe that anyone can speak fluent English and benefit from it, depending on how much time and effort they are willing to give. One can never "learn it all" and everybody needs to learn continuously everyday and keep self-upgrading to survive in this competitive environment.

English is a dominant international language in many fields and there are around 1.8 billion of native and non-native English speakers around the globe. It is currently the most often taught second language around the world, and sources claim that non-native speakers have outnumbered native speakers by the ratio of 3 to 1. I am glad that I am familiar with this beautiful language and I strongly encourage everybody to learn and master it well too.

