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# **Keep Them Coming Back**

**An investigation and analysis of adult  
*eikaiwa* classrooms in Japan**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of**

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## Abstract

*Eikaiwa*, or private English language classes for adults in Japan, can be characterized as being relatively small, having teachers from English-speaking countries and students that are looking for face-to-face interaction in the English language. The aim of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of what goes on in these EFL classrooms. More specifically the purpose is to give a thick holistic description of four adult English language classrooms.

The study is located in a qualitative paradigm and uses the ethnographic methods of interviews, focus groups and participant observation to collect the data. The data was collected from four different classrooms in Utsunomiya, a city 100km north of Tokyo. The results of the study can be divided into three major themes. Firstly, the study showed that the sociocultural factors of the context influenced the content and behaviour in these classrooms. Secondly, in this context, unique classroom cultures were formed with participants involved in ‘sociopedagogical relationships’ as they adjusted to create a comfortable environment with mutual understandings. And lastly, often the sociolinguistic aspects of language learning are given secondary importance as participants focused on the more tangible and easier to understand aspects of language learning.

The research suggests that the participants in these classes need a greater awareness of the sociocultural influences on language learning and teaching and the sociolinguistic nature of language use. Implications about classroom practice are drawn in relation to the teaching of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in conjunction with using certain basic principles from ethnography to address these needs.

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## **Glossary of abbreviations**

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
TL	Target Language
L2	Second Language



# CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

## ***1.1 Background***

My interest in looking at adult EFL classrooms in Japan was kindled because of my working experience in that context. Working as an expatriate English teacher in Japan at various private language institutions, I witnessed and experienced the different ways people coped in this teaching and learning environment. The teachers that I worked with, the majority being from English-speaking countries, and their predominantly Japanese students often formed bonds but there was also miscommunication. At times, there appeared confusion between the teachers and the students about what should happen in these classrooms.

There seemed to be a pattern that many people new to the environment went through. Operating in a social environment outside their previous experiences, both the teachers and students often struggled at first to find a common ground that was comfortable for them. It appeared that there was a frustration from both parties because expectations were not being fulfilled. In the teachers' room you would often hear teachers make blanket negative comments about the characteristics of Japanese students. The school staff sometimes received complaints from the students about teachers' attitudes, especially new teachers.

Participants new to these classes needed to learn how to operate in this setting. It was an environment with different behaviour and norms from what they were used to. Some people quickly adjusted to their new environment; however others never did find a comfort zone. Frustrated teachers and students often left and some even had quite negative opinions about their experiences.

I observed other phenomena with the students. High level students, often talkative in the classroom, hardly said a word when interacting in English outside of the classroom or school. Less often, others who were quiet in class seemed to come alive outside the classroom and were talkative and animated. The point here is that the students appeared

to have different levels of communicative ability in English inside and outside the classroom.

This side of teaching and learning, including the classroom environment, the influences on the setting, how the teachers and students interacted, how they coped or did not cope, how they formed bonds or not, was largely ignored by schools' in-house training and also by independent training courses for teachers. In my experience, the focus was exclusively on methodology and teaching techniques to counter what teachers would find in the EFL classroom.

Personally, I view the EFL classroom as a place of human interaction. It is a complex and often misunderstood phenomenon. Students and teachers come together in the classroom, all from different backgrounds and interact to create a bonded social setting. This setting operates within an influential and complex wider environment. There needs to be an in-depth description of what actually happens in these classrooms from this perspective.

## **1.2 The setting**

Utsunomiya is an industrial city of approximately 450,000 people, 100 kilometers north of Tokyo and it is the capital of Tochigi prefecture (see Figure 1.1). There is a small community of ex-pat English language teachers working in a variety of institutions both public and private. These institutions range from universities and high schools to small private language schools tucked away in the suburbs with only tens of students. The sector of English teaching where traditionally the majority of 'foreign' teachers have plied their trade is called *eikaiwa*. *Eikaiwa* literally means 'English conversation.

*Eikaiwa* are usually English language classes that operate outside of formal education. The Japanese public education system teaches English as part of the curriculum from fifth grade. However the focus is, especially from Junior High School, generally on English grammar with reading and writing skills. Therefore people attend *eikaiwa* classes to supplement their school studies or to improve their all-round communicative ability in the language. Parents send their children to *eikaiwa* in the hope of improving their child's chances of higher education as many universities now are incorporating interviews and listening tests in English for entry requirements. Many adults, with

grounding in English from schools and universities, seek out a way to expose themselves to the language to improve their English ability once they leave formal education. *Eikaiwa* classes are one of the few places outside of the formal education institutes where Japanese adults can learn and use their English.



Figure 1.1: View from Utsunomiya train station. Source: Google images

There are many types of *eikaiwa* classes. There are large, well-known schools with many branches and staff to small neighbourhood schools with only one or two staff members. There are company classes which are organized and funded by each respective company and taught on their premises. As well, there are community classes as local governments promote adult education. Less formally, there are lessons called ‘privates’ which are lessons in homes, cafes or empty offices for cash in hand.

The majority of English teachers that work in *eikaiwa* are from English-speaking countries and stay for a year or longer and then move on when personal circumstances dictate or when working contracts expire. Most teachers work at *eikaiwa* schools but some establish themselves and work independently, choosing when and where to accept classes at the various educational institutes and companies or set up ‘privates’. Increasingly others have set up their own *eikaiwa* schools as they make Japan their home and these schools are becoming an increasingly popular choice for some English learners as alternatives to bigger schools who previously dominated the market.

The *eikaiwa* schools in this research are relatively small (2-4 teaching staff). Although the majority of *eikaiwa* schools are run by Japanese, the selected schools are independently owned and operated by the head teachers who are all from English-

speaking countries. The head teachers of these schools and the students of their classes are the informants for this research. The classes that were observed at these schools were general English conversation classes for adults conducted in the evening during the week. All the classes were well established and had been going for longer than six months.

In these classes students and teachers meet for an hour at a time, once or twice a week to practise and improve the students' English skills. There were differences in the participants but each class shared similar characteristics in that the 'foreign' teachers and their students came together in an organized setting to communicate and participate in English language instruction.

### **1.3 Classroom practices and their influences**

This project looks at *eikaiwa* classroom practices and the contexts in which they operate. In other words, it focuses on what goes on in *eikaiwa* classrooms and also what influences them. To do this, the classroom needs to be looked at holistically or from a wide perspective. Some important concepts that shaped the study will now be presented but will be explained in greater detail in the next chapter.

Firstly, the classrooms are places of group human interaction that over time develop their own patterns of behaviour and understandings. This is called a 'classroom culture' (Holliday, 1999; Senior, 2006). This human interaction can be observed and described. However, these places are not isolated but instead have a variety of influences on them. This brings into focus the social and cultural features of the classroom. These are termed the 'sociocultural' aspects.

One of the most important influences on the *eikaiwa* classroom is the different backgrounds of the teachers and their students. The teachers from English-speaking countries and their Japanese students have preconceived notions and expectations for classroom practice developed in different contexts. How the teachers and their students view classroom behaviour such as expectations of contribution, the showing of emotion and degrees of formality, to name a few, can be different. Therefore the participants in these classrooms must negotiate these differences in order to understand each other and create a mutually beneficial learning environment. The participants need to adjust and this creates an environment that is unique.

In more general terms, the teachers and their students have differing ‘cultural perceptions’. Simply put, cultural perceptions are the world views people have acquired from their backgrounds and experiences. Therefore the *eikaiwa* classes are intercultural settings. Operating in an intercultural environment is sometimes not easy. Kramsch (1998, p. 27) described intercultural encounters as maneuvering the way through “the troubled waters of cross-cultural misunderstanding.”

Therefore, there is a need for a focus on intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in *eikaiwa* classrooms. ICC is a combination of attitude, skills and knowledge that can help people adjust and find a common ground with people outside their own social groups to interact effectively (Bryam 1997). A working knowledge of ICC principles by teachers would facilitate an understanding of the sociocultural nature of classrooms and the sociolinguistic nature of language use. This would help them not only to create smoother interaction between themselves and the students but also enhance language learning as they could assist the students to apply the lessons learnt in the classroom to communication outside of it in intercultural encounters.

#### **1.4 The aims**

Why are some participants comfortable and others frustrated in the classroom? Why do some students have different communicative ability inside and outside this environment? I believe that the classroom is like an iceberg; there is more than meets the eye. We can easily observe some things but the cultural and social aspects of the classroom as well as language learning remain largely hidden. But these aspects have a strong influence on English instruction and use. The goal of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of this side of adult EFL in Japan.

It is hoped this research will:

- lead to more informed teaching practices and teacher training practices for this context;
- help students and teachers understand each other and the processes they go through while teaching and learning the English language;
- help highlight the necessary skills needed for successful communication in the English language for the students in this context.

## **1.5 The study**

The questions formulated to achieve the aims of the study are:

*A. What factors are influential in the creation of the classroom environment and what kind of classroom culture is formed in private adult English language classes in Japan?*

This question is designed to take a broad and exploratory look at the social and cultural aspects of the language classroom. The context needs to be examined and classroom behaviour investigated to have a holistic understanding on all aspects that could affect the learning process from this perspective.

*B. How do language teachers and students perceive and deal with the sociolinguistic aspects of language use in private adult English classes in Japan?*

This question expands on the first one and is designed to analyse and discuss the teachers' and students' attempts to deal with the social and cultural nature of language learning and use.

## **1.6 Outline of the thesis**

To provide a complete description of the chosen EFL classrooms this thesis has the following progression:

- Chapter Two reviews the literature on the subject.
- Chapter Three goes over the methodology choices that were made and explains the reasons for these choices as well as giving vital information about the methods used and the chosen informants.
- Chapter Four goes over in detail the findings of the data. The data is presented in thematic headings and gives a thick description of the setting and its dynamics.
- Chapter Five provides a detailed discussion of the findings and how it relates to the current literature.
- Chapter Six provides concluding remarks and final implications of the findings.

## **CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Overview**

In order to gain a background understanding of the topic, a varied and complex area of literature had to be explored. This research project draws on a number of different disciplines in the social sciences that are connected to the field of teaching English as a foreign language. The following literature review maps my journey through the writings and attempts to show the literature that was important in conceptualizing the project.

The review has three sections. In the first section the important concepts that shape the study and also the important terminology are dealt with. The second section looks at and analyses previous research projects that are relevant to this project. And the last section looks at culture learning and the current research related to how this aspect of language learning can be approached, especially in an EFL situation like Japan.

### **2.2 The nature of the classroom**

The classroom is a complex site of human interaction with many aspects that influence its making. It is not an isolated space but instead part of the larger world in which it operates. This means the environments in which classrooms operate and which the participants come from have a strong influence on what happens in the class.

What we need to understand is that there is a complex interplay between classrooms and the outside world. ... From this perspective, the walls of classrooms become permeable (Pennycook, 2000, p. 89).

From a wider perspective Pennycook (2000, p. 102) argues for the importance of seeing the classroom as a cultural and social space that is a site of “contestation, where different codes, different visions of the world and different pedagogies are in competition and conflict.” Traditionally classrooms have been seen as “some sort of quasi-laboratory” in which languages are taught and learnt in isolation. However everything that happens in the classroom needs to be seen as a social and cultural

practice that is a “microcosm of the larger social and cultural world” in which it operates (p. 102).

Looking at the classroom holistically brings into focus the social and cultural nature of the setting. The term sociocultural, for the purposes of this project, is the term for relating to or involving the combination of social and cultural factors that affect language learning and teaching in the EFL classroom. The sociocultural nature of the EFL classroom, especially private language classes away from the formal educational institutes, is a relatively unexplored area of research.

One sociocultural concept that becomes pertinent when looking at the classroom holistically is ‘culture’. Generally we can say that implicitly or explicitly, teachers and learners of English face aspects of culture in whatever they do (Atkinson, 1999). Atkinson (p. 625) states that “except for language, learning and teaching” there is no concept more important.

### ***2.3 The problem of culture***

‘Culture’ has been described as being “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” (Williams, 1985, p. 87). It is a nebulous term that is used widely in different situations and contexts. There have been many definitions from many different sources and the word may mean different things to different people. In order to proceed we must now clarify the conceptual framework of this project and define culture as it relates to this study.

There is a standard notion about culture(s) that sees them most typically as “geographically (and quite often nationally) distinct entities, as relatively unchanging and homogeneous, and as all-encompassing systems of rules or norms that subsequently determine personal behaviour” (Atkinson, 1999, p. 626). Holliday (2005, p. 17) describes this view of culture as:

coincidental with countries, regions, and continents, implying that one can ‘visit’ them while traveling and that they contain ‘mutually exclusive forms of behaviour so that people ‘from’ or ‘in’ French culture are essentially different from those ‘from’ or ‘in’ Chinese culture.

This popular way to conceptualize culture sees a ‘culture’ as a static, isolated entity. Lately, especially in the social sciences, this way to define culture and subsequently the behaviour of people has been problematized (Holliday, 2005).

This popular way to view culture is problematic not only for the vague, imprecise terms, for example, ‘Asian culture’ or ‘Islamic culture’, but also because it defines and constrains people’s behaviour to their perceived culture and so “reduces a person to something less than what she is” (Holliday, 2005, p. 17). In other words, this reduces very complex human phenomena in a simplistic and often abstract way. In addition, Holliday, Kullman, and Hyde (2004) argue that this standard notion of culture also ignores human agency and does not allow for the negotiation of identity between people.

Simplifying this complex human phenomenon has been termed ‘culturalism’ or ‘essentialism’.

Culturalism is the idea that individuals are determined by their culture, that these cultures form closed, organic wholes, and that the individual is unable to leave his or her own culture but rather can only realize him or herself within it. (Erikson & Stjernfelt, 2009, p. 1)

Essentialism is defined by Holliday (2005) as defining and constraining people’s behaviour by the culture in which they reside. It was necessary for the project to avoid these pitfalls when describing complex human interaction.

## **2.4 Cultural perceptions**

This project views ‘culture’ as a set of perceptions that make up a person’s ‘everyday knowledge’, ‘common sense’ or ‘taken for granted’ ways of viewing the world and themselves. Basically, culture is an acquired knowledge that influences behaviour. This knowledge is the ‘cultural perceptions’ that people have from previous experiences. These perceptions play an important part in structuring the social reality for many people. This notion is important in order to understand certain group dynamics, especially in intercultural settings.

The participants of *eikaiwa* bring with them cultural perceptions because group culture is learnt. By being in a social group, humans naturally acquire the rules of that group. Culture can be explained simply as the knowledge that participants know so they

can participate in that group successfully (Brody, 2003). This learnt knowledge is both overt and covert. From this angle it can be said that learning cultural norms is a basic ongoing socialization process.

These cultural perceptions have also been termed ‘cultural frames’ or ‘cultural frames of reference’. Hall (1998, p. 53) refers to “cultural frames” as tacit frames of reference, or the rules for living which vary from social group to social group and which can be traced to acquired culture. Barnlund (1998) explains that we learn these cultural perceptions largely unconsciously from early childhood. For example, the family or the playground can reinforce certain types of behaviour by praising or criticizing certain ways to dress, react, think, gesture and so forth. However, the most significant way to learn cultural codes, argues Barnlund (p. 45), is conveyed implicitly through modelling behaviour.

However, using the concept of cultural perceptions to look at how people perceive things could easily lead to essentialized descriptions. In order to avoid culturalist pitfalls we need to be aware of certain characteristics of these cultural frames.

- First, these cultural frames are often not linked to nationality or any geographical entity. Cultural differences, Holliday (2005, p. 23) states, might have to do with the cultures of family, age, occupation or any other social background factors. There is a multiplicity of groups in society, Brody (2003) warns, and that has to be taken into account.
- Second, when dealing with these cultural frames, it is important not to ignore human agency. All humans are influenced by the groups in which they participate but individual differences are also in play. Therefore, although cultural frames are an important element, people are not robots of their social conditioning but are idiosyncratic beings with their own perceptions shaped by many influences.
- The third characteristic is that these cultural perceptions are dynamic, they are always changing. Cultural learning is a process and not just a set of facts to acquire (which would mean cultural knowledge is static). As Shaules (2007) asserts, cultural learning is an ongoing process with no absolute end state or final goal. An individual’s way to view the world, which is developed from personal history, is always incomplete and continuously changing. Cultural perceptions

evolve as we interact with people, especially with people outside of our usual social groups.

To reiterate, we are influenced by the groups we are involved in. We learn the internal coherence, integrity and logic that differentiate them from others (Shah, 2004). We gain cultural perceptions from our interactional experiences and what we pick up is often implicit. These are continuously evolving as we gain more experience in various settings and help to make meaning of what is going on around us.

## **2.5 Small cultures**

The approach used in this project to study the classroom environment relates to a feature of human life. It is the cohesive behaviour of any social grouping. Termed ‘small culture’, it has an omnipresent nature. Where there are humans and interaction, there is culture (Holliday, 2007). Society is made up of an infinite number of small cultures and people belong to a number of different cultures at different times.

Small culture is a dynamic, ongoing group process which operates in changing circumstances to enable group members to make sense of and operate meaningfully within those circumstances. (Holliday, 1999, p. 248)

In other words, small culture can be said to exist when people come into contact with each other regularly. The interaction forms “discernible sets of behaviours and understandings connected with group cohesion” (Holliday, 2005, p. 12). It is described by Beales, Spindler, and Spindler as “all the processes, happenings, or activities in which a group or even just two people habitually engage” (1967, p. 9). Although small cultures are dynamic by nature, the habitual actions of people in groups have patterns and are observable. Therefore the characteristics of groups can be researched, discovered and analysed as they happen. Small cultures can be any social grouping that interacts habitually, such as rugby teams or workplace organizations. The EFL classroom can be looked at as one of these small cultures.

## **2.6 The classroom as a small culture**

To restate the approach, we can look at the classroom through the small culture paradigm and see it as cohesive behaviour of a group of people. A classroom, in other words, is one setting which a researcher can draw boundaries around and discover the type of interactions and understandings formed between the participants. We can term this the ‘classroom culture’

A good example of this (small cultures) is the classroom group where a small culture will form from scratch when the group first comes together, each member using her or his culture-making ability to form rules and meaning in collaboration with others. (Holliday, 1999, p. 248)

Senior (2006, p. 203) wrote that a ‘classroom culture’ can be “a useful term to describe the body of understandings that are developed, shared and maintained by both teachers and students for the duration of each language class.” Classroom culture is built by its members who “constantly construct interactional patterns, routines and norms for appropriate actions and appropriate talk for that particular setting” (Frank, 1999, p. 45). These small culture behaviours, argues Brody (2003), are unique to the classroom and therefore the classroom setting must be recognized as a distinct and unique situation of interaction.

There are an infinite number of influences on the classroom culture. The classes are part of the wider social environment. The culture and relationships formed in the classroom are influenced by the sociocultural environment. Pennycook (2000, p. 90) argues that the classroom is a sociopolitical space that exists “in a complex relationship to the outside world” and the larger social context determines social relations inside the classroom (see 2.2). Each context in which classrooms operate is different and this has implications for how a classroom culture is formed.

## **2.7. The classroom as a hybrid culture.**

The EFL classrooms under research are by nature intercultural settings. This is because the participants come from different backgrounds and experiences. They have various ‘cultural perceptions’. As well, the students are not completely familiar with the language being used and the aspects associated with its use. There needs to be an adjustment in order to form a mutually positive classroom culture for all concerned.

In most *eikaiwa* classes there are differences in expected classroom norms and behaviour between the teacher and the students. Both have spent numerous years in classrooms in their respective countries and have come to view that style of education as the norm (Kato, 2001). How a teacher behaves in class and their expectations on good classroom practices, for example, have been strongly influenced by their previous learning experiences and educational background (Senior, 2006). Termed the “hidden curriculum” by Denscombe (1982, p. 251), it can mean there are possible stresses between the parties about matters such as levels of contribution.

Taking a closer look at differing educational experiences, Dimoski (2006, p. 7) wrote that “reserve, formality, and silence are qualities that are encouraged and fostered within the Japanese classroom.” The teacher in Japanese classrooms often assumes the role of a transmitter of knowledge. In contrast, teachers from Western countries such as the U.S. often assume the role of facilitators of knowledge and encourage learning strategies such as debate and the negotiation of meaning (Dimoski, 2006). Such differences in cultural perceptions can lead to possible sociopragmatic failure. Sociopragmatic failure is the differences in expectations and assessments by participants in a socio-cultural context.

One particular issue that highlights this is the different uses of silence between English speakers and Japanese speakers. Harumi (1999) argues in her classroom study that the interpretation of the use of silence by native English-speaking teachers and their Japanese students caused miscommunication. One aspect of this was that students claimed, for example, they never got a chance to speak in class. The problem was with the differing styles of turn-taking;

There are learners (Japanese students) who think that they should express themselves only when they are required to do so by being addressed individually ... their expected classroom behaviour differs from the Western pedagogical perspective which allows learners to compete for turns, or to volunteer in order to freely express themselves and exchange ideas (Harumi, 2001, p. 34).

There were various other reasons for being quiet in class Harumi’s (1999) study found.

The main point was that the native English speakers and native Japanese speakers misread each other. She showed a video of a Japanese student’s use of silence in a

classroom situation to both Japanese and British informants. Japanese informants in her study interpreted the silence as:

- not wanting to stand out;
- waiting for the teacher's help;
- wanting the teacher to understand even without saying it.

On the other hand British informants commented that the student:

- was being rude;
- was being lazy;
- thought the class was boring.

The study showed the kind of sociopragmatic failure that can happen in *eikaiwa* classrooms due to differing cultural perceptions.

Intercultural communication researchers generally take the view that there are obstacles to communication when people from different backgrounds interact (Kramsch, 2001). Hall (1998, p. 6) suggests that communication with people from different backgrounds is often difficult because "neither parties are aware that each inhabits a different perceptual world." Cultural perceptions have an influence on the interpretation of all types of communication both verbal and non-verbal. Because of this influence, misunderstandings and conflict are inevitable in intercultural communication (Matsumoto, Leroux, & Yoo, 2005, p. 28).

It is important to be aware of the fact that each language or language variety has its own sociocultural and pragmatic norms when analysing interaction. In the analysis of conversation, Bowe and Martin (2007) argue that there are cultural variations in such things as turn-taking, humour, conversational routines, back-channeling and greetings. Understanding these norms is essential to operating successfully in a conversation dominated by English speakers. The speaker who violates these norms or is unaware of them can be perceived as rude or, at the other end of the scale, passive or meek.

How do individuals cope when communicating to people outside their usual social groups? It has been found through research that individuals navigate the problems inherent in communicating with people coming from different cultural perceptions. They do this by finding a way to construct a common ground (Bowe & Martin, 2007). Similarly, Giles (1977) claimed successful communication involved an accommodation to the conventions of others. This adaptation is linked to people's identities, is often a

natural implicit phenomenon and is in a constant state of change (Adler, 1998; Bennett, 1998; Shaules, 2007).

Related to the foreign language classroom, Kramsch (1993) suggested that classrooms are a confrontation of cultures and that participants need to find a “third space”. This third space is not of the target language’s culture or the student’s local culture but it is an idiosyncratic state of mind that reflects a type of dynamic acculturation by the learners. Carving out this ‘space’ is a struggle for a lot of people because they leave behind “the naïve paradise” of their known world and suddenly taken-for-granted perceptions are “questioned, challenged and problematized” (p. 238).

Similarly, Kato (2001, p. 53) suggests that when the teachers and students have different backgrounds, successful classrooms are where both the student and teacher adjust to each other to find a “culture of learning”. This is because, Kato explains, at first the teachers and students can have different expectations about classroom practices such as appropriateness of behaviour, displaying emotion and social control. The participants and especially the teachers need to be aware of the different cultural perceptions that are in the class and react accordingly. Kato stresses the importance of the teacher’s role in creating this culture.

There needs to be caution about descriptions of this third space (or whatever it is termed) that forms when people try to make sense and adjust to communication outside their expected norms (Holliday, 2005). The concern is that when researchers describe this third space, it is often in terms that are related to national or ethnic notions of culture. To avoid this Holliday advises conceptualizing it “as something shared between the normal and unusual” (p. 168) and not as something between two static large cultures.

Regardless of how the word ‘culture’ is defined, Shaules (2007) writes that crossing cultural and social boundaries puts us in contact with people who are different from us. Because of this the participants need to adjust. Intercultural (and intracultural) adaptation is often an implicit, unconscious and ongoing process that humans, “as social animals and participants in cultural communities, go through any time they have to come to grips with the need to function in a new, systematically different social environment” (p. 22). The EFL classroom is a place where adjustments are made by

individuals and these are major influences on the culture that is formed in the classroom.

## **2.8 Other influences on the classroom culture**

As well as the intercultural aspect there are other major influences on the classroom culture. There are issues of power dynamics and this factor shows up in every aspect of classroom life (Auerbach, 1995). Regarding the curriculum, Auerbach (1995) writes that typically, goals are formulated through a formal needs assessment directly linked to societal institutions and these provide written criteria to guide teachers' practice (called the ends-means model). However, what happens outside of these formal institutes where power dynamics between teachers and students are different and there is no externally imposed curriculum within a framework of an institution? Auerbach suggests the day-to-day decisions made inside the classroom are influenced by the social order outside the classroom.

In addition, the relationships formed in classrooms between teachers and students are also context-driven and include issues of power (Leki, 2006). Leki dubbed these kinds of relationships, 'socioacademic relationships'. Focusing on people in academic settings, she wrote:

That relationship is dynamically constructed by the participants in the activity that brings them together, in the context of their varied goals, actions, beliefs and sociocultural histories, within a given setting, and mediated by the tools inherent in or brought into the system. (p. 138)

The relationships in education settings include a social dimension, a forming of some kind of social relationship between the persons in power (the teachers) and their students. Also contextual features help define and determine the nature of the interaction. This can be frustrating, or participants can accommodate to "construct comfortable subject positions for themselves in the context of unequal power relations" (p. 136).

The point here is that the social relationships formed in each context are unique and the interaction of these relationships are influenced by contextual factors. There has been very little written about the nature of relationships between participants in educational contexts such as the one chosen for this study.

However, we can look at research on group dynamics or human interaction in other educational or non-educational contexts to get a hint of what kind of characteristics the classroom culture might have. Senior's (2001) detailed account of language teachers covers a number of these classroom features. One that has proved significant for the current study and warrants attention is humour. Senior reported that humour was a powerful force in English language learning classrooms. She concluded that humour has a number of functions and these included:

- bringing classes together. It played a pivotal role in developing groups into cohesive learning units;
- making people feel relaxed and at ease;
- as an indirect means of establishing codes of behaviour, of admonishing people or of drawing them into line (issues of power-dynamics).

Many teachers regard humour as an important teaching tool that transcends barriers (p. 175).

There are clear parallels between workplaces and classroom relationships especially in relation to power differentials between participants (teachers/students). Therefore workplace research can provide a hint of what might be found in the EFL classroom. Looking at humour in depth in workplace settings, Holmes (2000) found that humour was context-bound and it also functioned as a type of de-emphasizer of power differences. When there is a trend towards informality and a reduction of emphasis on power differences humour can:

- gain willing compliance with subordinates
- retain goodwill between people
- promote social cohesion
- reduce power differentials. (Holmes, 2000, p. 165)

Another important function of humour is as a contestive instrument. This means that it can provide subordinates with a way to contest, such as express an opinion or take risks in a situation of power difference (Holmes, 2000).

There are other influences on the classroom. Each participant brings to the class a different personality with differing goals and objectives. One factor highlighted in this study is the motivations of the students. Motivation drives these individuals to learn the target language. Motivation is an easy catch term used for explaining success or failure

in language learning but this glosses over a more complex reality (Brown, 2000). Motivation can come from external pressures (extrinsic motives) or internal desires (intrinsic motives).

Some students learn English because of external pressures or strong personal reasons but that does not explain others who seemingly have no strong reason to put in the effort required to learn a foreign language. With regard to motivation theory, in early research on L2 learning, the dominant model was Gardner's socioeducational one with a focus on integrative motivation. Integrative motivation to learn a language states that the learner has a desire to interact or even become similar to members of the target language community (Dörnyei, 2003). This however doesn't seem to 'fit' some EFL contexts as the students have little or no chance or even desire to integrate with target language users (Ryan, 2009).

Dörnyei (2009), questioning the applicability of the integrative model in EFL contexts, postulated that motivation is an important part of one's identity. It is driven by mainly intrinsic motives. In the Japanese context there are positive attitudes to the TL communities without the desire to integrate (Ryan, 2009). Some students are driven to study in order to satisfy their inner self-motivation, to become their ideal L2 selves (Dörnyei, 2009). In other words, students are motivated to learn a foreign language in EFL contexts by what individuals desire themselves to be. This is a more pertinent aspect to motivation in EFL contexts than the integrative aspect, Dörnyei (2003) argues.

## **2.9 Previous research findings**

There are few actual descriptions of classroom culture to be found in literature. Most of the literature on culture in the classroom focuses on idealized teaching goals for cultural learning and doesn't deal with what actually happens in the classrooms, what kind of environment is formed and how this affects aspects of language and cultural learning.

There has been much theorizing about language and culture learning in this more structured and formal setting [the classroom]. Unfortunately there is a remarkable scarcity of empirical or descriptive studies dealing with the real world of the classroom. (Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klien, & Corby, 1998, p. 188)

Especially related to the EFL classroom in Japan, research on the realities of this culture are relatively sparse. Here I will review what others have found that is relevant to this study inside and outside of Japan.

Senior (2006) did a comprehensive study on many aspects of the language classroom from the teachers' perspective. The data was collected from more than 100 native English-speaking language teachers through interviews and focused on each teacher's personal interpretations to gain a better understanding of "the complex pedagogic and social reality of language classrooms" (p. 16). Senior found that as the course developed, a classroom culture was built (see 2.6 for Senior's useful definition of class culture). Each classroom has a unique culture with shared understandings between its members. She also suggests some aspects of classroom behaviour can be better understood by findings from research into group dynamics. As well there is a sense of community in most classes, she argues, and this community is reinforced with types of ritualized behaviour unique to each class.

Senior (2006) also describes how many of these native-speaker teachers place a high priority on oral interaction in their classes. Animated interaction is perceived by the teachers as a sign of a successful language class. Therefore they promote class atmospheres which are informal as it is believed that this increases the chance for oral communication. It is not surprising then, Senior suggests, that one of the major stresses for many teachers is what they perceive as the passivity of students:

Language teachers from western cultures, accustomed to being looked at in a direct manner and to seeing muscular movement in students' faces, feel unnerved when standing in front of students who are reluctant to engage in eye contact and who maintain bland, impassive expressions on their faces. (p. 173)

The study was exclusively from the teachers' perceptions. It did not take into account students' perceptions of what happens nor does it take an etic perspective from any observations of classrooms. The study focuses on the teachers' cognition as a "fruitful way of uncovering and more fully understanding" the complex reality of classrooms (p. 16).

Li and Girvan (2003) found in their study of the class environment of an ESL classroom in Canada that the participants created a class 'interculture'. The students in this classroom were from various countries around the world. Collecting data through

class observations and individual interviews, they found that this intercultural was created naturally, was influenced by the participants' identities and involved "forging a path through unmapped terrain" of intercultural relationships (p. 27). Major influences on the classroom intercultural were the need for participants to get along with each other and developing strategies to communicate with people from diverse backgrounds. The data suggested that the nature of the intercultural is fluid and flexible. Regarding teaching culture in the classroom, the study came to the conclusion that each group must negotiate its own path.

The authors of the research stated that in spite of the literature, for example, Kramsch (1993) and Byram (1988), suggesting that teachers should create a cultural learning environment that focuses on awareness of these issues in their classrooms, the classroom's intercultural was largely created at the subconscious level. The teacher in the study characterized what she did as 'second nature' and both the teacher and students felt that getting along with people from different backgrounds was largely intuitive. They all came to the class however with the conscious desire to improve their English and strive for cross cultural connections.

Li and Girvan's study project was a short term research on one classroom. It highlighted the different influences, such as individual personalities, on the class culture as well as the important role of the teacher in creating the learning environment. As well, it showed the importance of doing this kind of research in each context. However the study, the authors conceded, was limited in scope and because of this has limited applicability.

Duff and Uchida (1997) did a six-month ethnographic study on teachers of private *eikaiwa* language classrooms in Japan. The study explored "the complex relationships between language and culture, between teachers' sociocultural identities and teaching practices and between their explicit discussion of culture and implicit modes of cultural transmission in their classes" (p. 451). They found that the cultures created in each class "represented many elements, created by teachers, students, and others and shaped to a large extent by other factors such as institutional goals and course books" (p. 479).

Focusing on both the foreign and Japanese teachers of English, the study highlighted their ever-changing cultural identities in the context. The classroom, they argued, is a dynamic site of negotiation and teachers need to be critically aware of the processes

involved. There are many unexplored aspects of teaching, such as the cultural and cognitive dimensions, that need to be researched, the authors concluded. Their study raised questions about the complex nature of the language classroom.

Examining the EFL classroom in Japan, Farooq (2007) looked at, through ethnographic methods, teachers' questioning strategies, their rates of speech, wait-time in interactions, feedback, and learners' language production. The researcher found a type of modified interaction that is regarded as successful classroom interaction. In this unique form of interaction, almost half the time was used in question and answers between the teacher and the students. As well, the teacher waited longer than in usual English conversation for student responses. It was also found the language production from the learners in this environment was much less than that of the teachers. EFL learners in Japan have very few chances to use English verbally outside of the classroom so this type of interaction was their main form of English use. The study highlighted the type of classroom interaction that takes place in EFL settings between foreign teachers and their students. In his research Farooq also found that studies focusing on classroom practice in EFL in Japan were rare and stated:

a careful inspection of the available literature shows that comparatively little attention has been given to exploring EFL classrooms, and with the exception of Ishiguro (1986, cited in Chaudron 1993), information in regards to Japanese EFL learners is not available. (Farooq, 2007, p. 38)

In their study of classroom interactions as cross cultural encounters Luk and Lin (2007) found that native English-speaking teachers and their students in Hong Kong high schools didn't always find that idealized 'third space' that Kramsch (1993) postulated was important for successful language learning. Painting a rich descriptive account of what happens in the language classroom they found a complex but far from ideal classroom culture affected by the participants and the outside world. Teachers and students coming from different norms and expectations formed from previous experience had trouble, at times, finding a comfortable middle ground. In other words, the authors suggested that their data, collected by ethnographic methods, showed that the Hong Kong students and the native English-speaking teachers did not always share the same space of learning.

In order to create a positive cultural learning environment, they argue, teachers need to be resourceful intercultural TESOL practitioners who are aware of the need to create a third space. Teachers who possessed the language ability but not an awareness of the sociocultural processes that occurred in the classroom or the sociolinguistic nature of language use (often characteristics of monolingual teachers) were ill-equipped to provide the students with the tools for intercultural engagements. They did not see the value of intercultural communication settings where conflict was produced because of differences in perspectives. This can be contrasted to others such as Tseng (2002) who argued in her paper that it is differences and tension that propels cultural learning. They are the catalyst to change individual perception.

What Luk and Lin (2007) achieved was a holistic, thick descriptive look, using a triangulation of data-collecting methods, at a type of classroom culture that is formed in a particular setting. Their study highlighted the need to look at the classroom culture in each different context in order to reflect on the teaching and learning processes. The study raises issues such as whether monolingual native speakers make suitable intercultural language teachers in that context and what might be seen as appropriate pedagogical approaches in EFL settings.

## **2.10 Culture learning**

How to go about culture learning has been one of the most debated aspects of English language instruction in recent times. This arises from the recognition that culture and language are interconnected. It is linked to many different issues, including English as an International Language (EIL), teacher training, appropriate methodologies for the context, and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) .

Hymes (1972), with the notion of communicative competence, and Halliday (1979) were some of the first to incorporate socio-cultural aspects into language learning and teaching (Clouet, 2006). Communicative competence was expanded on and defined by Canale and Swain (1980) in a very influential work. Their definition included:

- grammatical competence, that includes “knowledge of lexical items and of rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, and phonology” (p. 29);

- discourse competence, which is the ability to “connect sentences in stretches of discourse and to form a meaningful whole out of a series of utterances” (Brown, 2000, p. 246);
- strategic competence, which was described by Canale and Swain (p. 30) as “the verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or due to insufficient competence”;
- sociolinguistic competence, which is the knowledge of the sociocultural rules to using the language. “This type of competence requires an understanding of the social context in which language is used: the roles of the participants, the information they share, and the function of the interaction” (Brown, 2000, p. 247).

These notions of communicative competence had within them the established goals of teaching the second language’s culture and also of holding up the native speaker as the role model of language attainment (Aguilar, 2007; Corbett, 2003; McKay, 2002). One aspect of this was the tendency to see the learner as an imperfect native speaker who had to acculturate to native speaker norms in order to be a successful language learner (Aguilar, 2007, p. 61).

However, Kramsch (1993) pointed out that learning other cultures does not mean that the learner has to accept those cultures. Kramsch instead argued for cultural competence in which cultural awareness was paramount. She states that learners should be mediators who can handle different interpretations of reality and can come out of their own perspective and take up another. This culture learning is an essential aspect of successful language learning:

If language is seen as a social practice, culture becomes the very core of language teaching” (p. 8).

This notion of intercultural competence has been further explored by Byram (1997) in what Corbett (2003, p. 31) refers to as the “most fully worked out specification” of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). It can be understood as preparing language learners for intercultural situations and indicating “the student’s ability to reach Kramsch’s third space” (p. 31). It involves dealing with the attitudes, skills and

knowledge in the classroom necessary for communicating with people outside your own social groups. The taxonomy below outlines the necessary elements.

- **Knowledge:** About social groups and cultures in one's own country as well as in other countries. About the processes of interaction at societal and individual level.
- **Attitudes:** Curiosity and openness. Readiness to suspend disbelief and judgment with respect to other's behaviours. Willingness to suspend belief in one's own behaviours and to analyse them from the point of view of the other.
- **Skills of discovery and interaction:** Ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture. Ability to use knowledge, attitude, skills under the constraints of communication.
- **Skills of interpreting and relating:** Ability to interpret a document or event from another culture. Ability to explain it and relate it to documents and events from one's own culture.
- **Critical cultural awareness:** Ability to evaluate perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures (Ojeda & Cecilia (n.d.) adapted from Bryam 1997)

The end goal is for learners to become mediators who have “the ability to manage communications and interaction between people of different cultural identities and languages, coming out from their own perspective and taking up another” and are also “able to handle different interpretations of reality” (Aguilar, 2007, p. 65). Therefore it can be said that ICC principles take language learning beyond the concept of a mechanical communication device and culture learning as some factual knowledge about a target community (Aguilar, 2007). It is more about the development of attitudes, skills and critical awareness. Therefore it can be said it is a mindset or world view rather than set knowledge.

Sercu (2005) notes that the process of becoming competent in intercultural encounters is not an easy one. It often requires a revision of beliefs, concepts and attitudes that one has grown up with and had previously taken for granted. Changes in identity and values are at stake and this can be a difficult experience for some people.

These are, however, idealized intercultural goals and it has been suggested that there is a gap between research and theory and what actually happens in the classroom

(Stapleton, 2000, p. 291). Brody (2003, p. 49) suggests that teachers are generally ill prepared to deal with the difficult concepts of culture in the classroom in any depth. Many teachers associate culture teaching with the simple transmission of knowledge or “approach cultural teaching/learning as if it were an exercise in creating a taxonomy of differences between familiar and exotic cultures” (Guest, 2002, p. 154). Byram (1988), recognizing the problem and the size of the task, calls for interdisciplinary training for language teachers.

One study that backs up these claims is Stapleton’s (2000) survey of native English teachers in Japanese universities. It found that the majority of teachers included cultural information in their lessons. However, it was introduced randomly, it included overt cultural information and it played a secondary, supportive role to other aspects of language instruction. Some teachers were even skeptical of the importance of culture in the classroom and the research suggests their cultural awareness may not have developed enough (Stapleton, 2000).

Shaules (2007, p. 233) concluded from his study of “deep cultural learning” there was a gap between the ICC goals and what happens in reality. He stated that everyone resists, accepts and adapts to varying degrees in different settings so it is important not to moralize about what should happen. He suggested that an awareness of this salient process is what facilitates culture learning and it is an ongoing process without end state or final goal. In the classroom, materials and activities shouldn’t be afraid to show “the mishaps, misunderstandings, resistance and stress that go along with cultural learning” (p. 234).

In many EFL contexts, there is limited exposure to any meaningful intercultural contexts. How to convey culture and become a “cultural diplomat”, which Corbett (2003) suggests is the target of culture learning, is “one of the greatest challenges of the second language classroom” (Brody, 2003, p. 48). One problem is that foreign language study by itself does not ensure culture learning or understanding (Byram & Morgan, 1994; Kramsch, 1993) and there is still a great deal of ongoing debate on how to go about culture learning in the classroom.

## 2.11 Culture learning In Japan

Despite a stint at formal English education of six years or more many students in Japan find it difficult to communicate in the language. As well, scores in international tests like TOEFL, while not an absolute test of communicative ability, have remained relatively low (Honna, 1995; Yoshida, 2003). English education from Junior High remains squarely focused on getting students to pass the University entrance examinations.

*Kokusaika* (often translated as internationalization) is a popular concept in educational discourse concerning language policy. The Monbukagakusho (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) uses the term to describe their language policy. It basically promotes learning English as well as Japanese cultural heritage (Kubota, 1998). It incorporates *nihonjinron*, theories about Japanese national character.

A problem with *kokusaika* in relation with English instruction is the difference between stated objectives of the Monbukagakusho and its actual practices. On one hand it promotes the learning of English. However, practices of English education suggest it is “wary of ‘foreigners’” and is “protecting its culture by not carrying out practices that would make foreign language practices effective” (Hagerman, 2009, p. 62). Therefore the university entrance exams are still the main goal of studying English at secondary school. These exams are controlled by the Monbukagakusho which views English as indicative of one’s mental abilities, such as Latin used to be with English speakers, and focuses on grammar, translation, reading and recently some listening (Hagerman, 2009).

For most secondary students in Japan, English has a clearly defined instrumental function, stripped of any communicative function, as content for a series of examinations that have profound consequences for future academic or career prospects. (Ryan, 2009, p. 125)

Another problem with *kokusaika* policies is that they ignore diversity and stress teaching and learning English with references to only inner circle English-speaking countries (Kubota, 1998). Inner circle countries are the Western nations in which the inhabitants are considered the ‘native speakers’ of English. Although *kokusaika*

promotes English as a lingua franca (a global language), non-Western countries and their people are “excluded from the scope” (p. 301). This is because *nihonjinron* theories stress the uniqueness of Japanese in comparison to the English-speaking West especially the U.S.

Through teaching and learning about English, stereotypical images and certain value judgments on language and communication style are also created for both English and Japanese. (p. 299)

Therefore *nihonjinron* theories, presented in education and taken up by the mass media, have contributed to the construction of the world view of many Japanese, analysts argue (Burgess, 2010). This cultural perspective is “rooted in everyday lived social reality” and it holds a significant meaning to many Japanese (p. 2). Responding to analysts who dismiss *nihonjinron* as imaginary and illusionary ideology, Ryan (2005) argues it is a real system of thinking that creates its own reality. However Burgess (p. 7) is correct to point out that without “national character, shared values, and similar traits, the modern state could not exist.” There is a similar promotion of a national identity in any nation state. As well, merely focusing on *nihonjinron* as how Japanese people think ignores human agency and veers towards essentialism.

Having missed out on gaining communicative competence at formal education some adults pursue their English language studies through *eikaiwa* lessons. For many of these students, their only experience of ‘live English’ is in the classroom (Farooq, 2007). This may restrict opportunities to acquire communicative or intercultural communicative competence. This is because experience and/or exposure to natural contexts in which the language is used so the process of cultural learning can happen, can be an important aspect of language learning.

Therefore cultivating a critical self-awareness in the *eikaiwa* classroom is essential (Yoshida, 2003) and the students “need to understand culture as a fundamental social phenomenon and develop the ability to manage difference” (Quinn, 2006, p. 75). Finding effective approaches to culture learning in the Japanese EFL classroom is one of the major challenges of this context. Going beyond the ‘culture as static knowledge’ or *nihonjinron* discourse and focusing on what is actually needed in order for students to effectively communicate in a diverse world is the first step in the right direction.

## **2.12 Summary on literature**

The literature relating to this study is broad and multidisciplinary. The literature directly describing the reality of the situation in private EFL classes in Japan is not abundant. Overall, a great deal of research describes what might be found in these types of language classes, but there are few accounts from classroom-based research. Actual detailed accounts of classroom practices and contexts are hard to find. The same can be said for literature on culture learning. Idealized goals of culture learning are common but accounts from classrooms, actual interpretations of the ‘realities’ that are found there, are scarce. The questions formulated for this research are designed to add to, expand and test the existing knowledge.

## **CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Overview**

This chapter details the research project. The approach taken, the methods used to gather the data and how the subjects were chosen are explained. It describes the actual research journey by detailing the practicalities of the project, the pilot study, details of the participants and the ethical considerations. As well, the workings of data analysis are covered. Lastly, it goes into the issues of reliability and validity with such research.

### **3.2 The approach**

When it came to methodology the qualitative paradigm seemed the logical choice. Firstly, the study of social and/or cultural phenomenon is dominated by qualitative methods and this is overwhelmingly supported by the literature. Further reading reinforced the ‘fit’ until it seemed to become common sense. Broadly defined, qualitative studies can be defined as research that is based on descriptive data that doesn’t regularly use statistical data (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Basically, qualitative research focuses on obtaining naturalistic data. This can be contrasted with quantitative research which tries to obtain data in a controlled, objective manner to be presented as measurable outcomes. The possibility of a mainly quantitative approach was excluded early on as it was clear that classrooms were not laboratories where variables can be controlled. Senior (2006, p. 15) wrote:

In classrooms it is almost impossible to exclude all the variables that may influence the findings. In controlled environments such as laboratories it is much easier to establish cause-effect relationships, since extraneous variables can be identified beforehand and then eliminated or acknowledged to have had a possible effect on the findings. This is virtually impossible to achieve in naturalistic settings.

There was little support from literature about what might be found in the class in this particular context. I needed to go into the environment with a general question, and leave behind any previous assumptions that had formed from my previous experience in the setting. Therefore there was a need for a broad view at first and then as the study progressed and themes emerged, the study could progress and delve deep into the behaviour of the social setting. Qualitative research is open-ended with “categories that emerge” (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 165), and it is “designed to lead the researcher into unforeseen areas of discovery” (Holliday, 2007, p. 5).

Another important point is that the qualitative researcher must avoid “reductive cultural overgeneralization” (culturalism or essentialism). It is problematic for qualitative research in that it implies how things are before any research is done (Holliday, 2007, p. 12). The researcher in other words must not presume how things are, how people behave, before any research commences.

Defining qualitative research, Mackey and Gass (2005, p. 162-164) state that it has the characteristics set out below.

- There is rich description. ‘Real’ and ‘rich’ data.
- There is natural and holistic representation. Naturalistic and uncontrolled observations in natural settings.
- There is a need for emic processes or the insider’s perspective.
- There are possible ideological orientations.

All of these characteristics provided a base of understanding and were influential in indicating how the research project would progress.

The concept of ‘culture’ was the starting point for the whole project. When researching such a concept, the word ethnography comes to the fore. This was backed by literature which espoused the virtues of looking at culture with such an approach. An ethnographic approach seemed to be tailor-made for the research at the beginning as it suited the nature of the project and this was reinforced as the study progressed.

It suited this project as ethnography can research sociocultural processes in language learning (Watson-Gregego, 1988) by focusing on and analysing how groups of people think and behave in their natural environments (Fetterman, 1999). Mackey and Gass (2005, p. 167) state “from a second language research perspective, ethnographic

research aims to describe and interpret the cultural behaviour of a group.” Harklau (2005, p. 179) writes that the purpose of ethnography “is to come to a deeper understanding of how individuals view and participate in their own social and cultural worlds.” An ethnographic approach focuses on culture (‘ethnography’ literally means the study of culture) and tries to interpret and describe it in its many forms.

From an ethnographic perspective a classroom culture is always there whether or not the participants are aware of it (Frank, 1999). As stated earlier culture is omnipresent (2.2), it is present wherever there is human interaction. An ethnographic approach ‘provides a lens’ to understand the patterns of behaviour and interaction in the classroom that are often implicit because they become “so regular, patterned and ordinary” (Frank, p. 3). Even the simplest of things in the classroom like where to sit and where the teacher is positioned in relation to the students becomes customary and routine to the participants. An ethnographic lens can reveal the explicit and implicit patterns and routines.

Finding strategies to put the approach into practice was not an easy task. It was an ongoing process. It involved reading methodology literature, thinking about and discussing the practicalities of the research at hand and analysing what others had done previously. There were some concepts that were strong influences on the types of data collection methods employed, however, and these included:

- the need to have multiple data collection methods. Multiple types of data collecting methods are necessary not only to give depth to any claims but also to gain a holistic view, a comprehensive and complete picture of the classroom. Davis and Henze (1998) state that the credibility of ethnographic studies is enhanced by the use of multiple resources and methods. Methodological triangulation involves the “multiple, independent methods of obtaining data” of phenomena in order to justify research findings (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 181). It was decided to employ a number of data collection methods to look at the same phenomenon from a number of ‘angles’.
- there are multiple realities. The views of all the participants in the setting, the ‘emic’ insider’s perspective, was necessary to understand and describe the classroom. Fetterman (1999, p. 20) writes that this is central to most ethnographic work and states “the insider’s perception of reality is instrumental

to understand and accurately describe situations and behaviours.” Basically each situation must be understood from the perspective of all the participants. In the end, it was decided to employ methods that extracted both the teachers’ and students’ views. This also provided an important triangulation of data resources on the phenomenon under study to add credibility to the findings.

- an open and cyclical process to data collection. Emergent hypotheses or what is commonly known as grounded theories, are extracted and based entirely on the data collected. Researchers go back and forth between analysis and data collection testing and working on theories. Senior (2006, p. 17) states that theories gradually emerge from the data in an organic way and are not imposed from outside. As well, using these types of guidelines can focus ethnographic methods and so help deal with the complexities of such a study (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001). The study was from the start a wide-ranging one. This concept helped focus the research, to test and specifically look in more detail at theories that were raised in the data collection process.

### ***3.3 The epistemological stance***

Another important aspect is the role of the researcher. It needs to be pointed out here that I view the classroom as a complex and dynamic setting. I do not claim any discovery of ‘truth’. My research descriptions and interpretations are subjective. Although they are, I believe, important pieces of the jigsaw to understand what goes on in the EFL classroom, it is only from one perspective. After years in the field, I find it obvious and commonsense that “the widest possible number of variables are interacting with and influencing one another in any language classroom at any point in time” (Senior, 2006, p. 15). I see my research as interpretive, “it offers a reality among many possible realities” (Jordan, 2001, p. 42):

we can explore, catch glimpses, illuminate and then try to interpret bits of reality. ... The pictures are themselves only interpretations – approximations – basic attempts to represent what is in fact a much more complex reality – paintings that represent our own impressions, rather than photographs of what really is there. (Holliday, 2007, p. 6-7)

Additionally, things are constantly changing. There can be a descriptive interpretation of what was seen at the time, however since “culture is contested, temporal, and emergent ... ethnographic truths in the study of cultural phenomena are inherently partial” (Clifford, 1986, p. 19).

The study takes place in a sociocultural context in which I have spent the last 15 years. Although familiarity with the context can be problematic, gaining physical access in order to do the research was possible due to my working relationship with the teachers in the field. Studies also highlight the significance of getting along with participants and having insider knowledge and a shared identity can help gain social access (Shah, 2004, p. 560). Social access can also mean getting the participants to feel enough at ease to be a productive source of good data. And lastly, an insider’s knowledge of the sociocultural context, a tacit understanding through ‘indwelling’ (Shah, 2004), helps the interviewer understand what is going on and how to interpret the results. I believe my experience helped to make sense of the phenomenon but also shaped my perception that would be different from a complete outsider.

### **3.4 Methods**

As stated previously, a qualitative paradigm was chosen to explore the phenomenon and some basic concepts from social science methodology helped guide the research through the problematic process of looking at a complex social setting. The methods were chosen within an ethnographic stance to collect the data that reflected the nature of the study. The triangulation of methods looking at each classroom included four stages:

- 1) An interview of the class teacher. Arrangements were made to do the observation at this meeting.
- 2) Observation of the class.
- 3) A focus group with the classes’ students. This was done immediately after the class observation.
- 4) A second interview with the class teacher. Done usually a week or later after the observation and focus groups in order to analyse the data already collected.

All four stages were used to delve into the culture of the classrooms. The details of each stage are described later in this chapter (see 3.11-3.14).

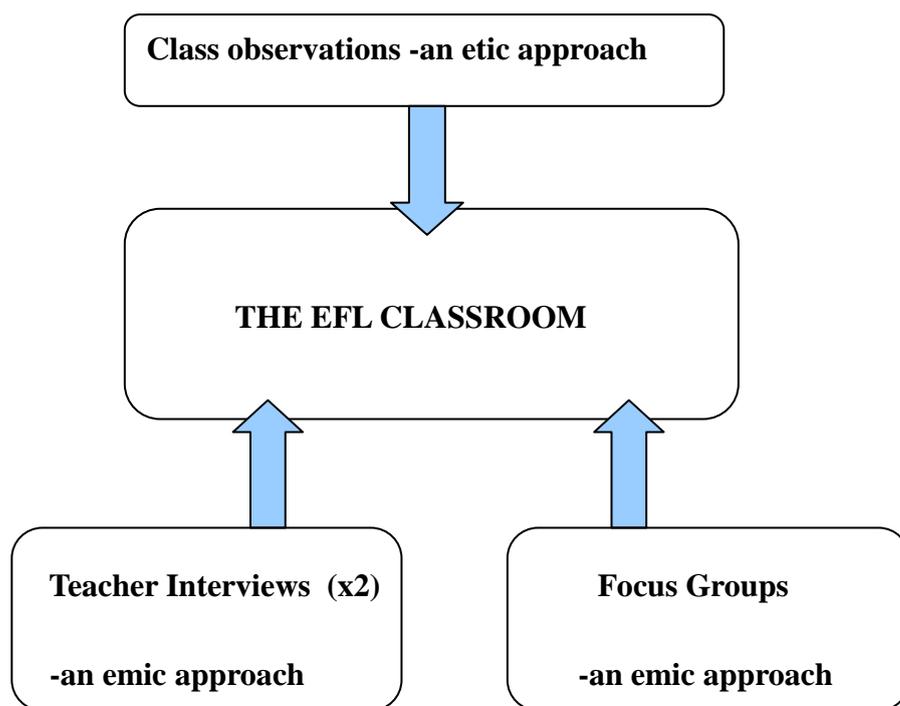


Figure 3.1: The four stages of data gathering.

### 3.5 Ethical guidelines

First and foremost the compulsory procedure for all research projects, to determine possible risk to participants, was done. Following Massey University guidelines, this had to be done before proceeding with any research. After doing the Massey University Human Ethics Committee’s screening questionnaire and reading the guidelines, it was determined that this research was probably low risk but subject to the Human Ethics Committee’s decision. I filled out the Low Risk Notification and submitted it to MUHEC. The project was evaluated by peer review and judged to be of low risk.

After receiving guidelines from MUHEC, an information sheet (Appendix A) and consent forms were written for the teachers (Appendix B) and the students (Appendix C). The information sheet was provided to all participants prior to commencing and before any recording was done consent forms were signed by all participants.

### **3.6 The pilot study**

A pilot study of a class was done. The pilot study's aim was to trial the proposed procedures, make sure the methods proposed provided meaningful data and eliminate any potential problems. Mackey and Gass (2007, p. 3) state that pilot testing is crucial and is "an important means of accessing the feasibility and usefulness of the data sampling and collection methods and revising them before they are used with the research participants." The pilot study was conducted from the 27<sup>th</sup> of August to the 6<sup>th</sup> of September, 2008.

### **3.7 The pilot study results**

The pilot study was judged to be effective and the procedures were found to be good for the aims of the study. It was decided that the results from the pilot would be included in the main study. However, it also revealed some weaknesses with the initial plans. The focus group questions needed to be revised. Due to time constraints, and sometimes the students' inability to grasp certain concepts, the data collected was not as rich as was considered necessary. General open-ended questions that let the students express their own reality worked well. This was because they provided time for the students to think about their answers. Also as there was less pressure to provide specific answers, students could formulate their own personal interpretations.

As well, it was decided to pursue more advanced English level classes for the study. This was done for two reasons. Firstly, because it was believed the best informants were people experienced in the context, which advanced students tended to be. And also because it was found that the students insisted on using English as the medium for the focus groups. They saw the focus groups as an extension of their English lesson. Therefore students needed to be able to understand the difficult concepts that the project was dealing with and express their ideas clearly in English.

### **3.8 The selection of informants**

The first practical consideration for this study was the selection and recruiting of informants. All the teacher informants were known to me due to the nature of the ex-pat community in Utsunomiya of which I have been a part for over 10 years. They were

asked to participate and provide a class of students that were both willing and able to be involved in the data gathering process. The long term working relationship I had with the teachers who were approached to participate not only helped to gain access, but also started off the data gathering with a level of trust needed to conduct such research. Willingness to participate from the students' side was based, I believe, on the relationship the teachers had with their classes.

At first, I planned to set the research in classes that took place on company premises and were organized and sponsored by the companies for their employees. However, permission was not given by management of several companies citing the concerns of their employees. I decided then to direct the focus on the more common private language school classes. These were more accessible and reflected the realities of teaching in English in Japan for many foreign *eikaiwa* teachers.

A number of classes were accessible for the project. This allowed for a selection process that was relatively flexible. Therefore the selection process was ongoing throughout the study. After each unit was finished and reflected on, the selection for the next unit of data started. This type of selection is what Glaser and Strauss (1967) termed "theoretical sampling". It allows for informants to be chosen as the research progresses and reflects the researcher's assessment of what the study needs.

Selection veered towards experienced teachers who were owners of their own schools because it was deemed that they would make the most ideal candidates to be informants. They had had time and motivation to adjust and learn about the context. As well, they had had the time to reflect on their experiences (see 3.9 for teacher profiles).

Another practical consideration was the number of classrooms to be investigated. There needed to be enough to provide validity to the data. The patterns found and descriptions given were hoped to be 'typical' of EFL classes in this context. However one of the strengths of qualitative research is the richness of the data and the depth of descriptions. This is done through having a relatively low number of focuses. As well, there were time and resource restraints. It was decided to focus on four classrooms from the beginning and this could be increased or reduced if deemed necessary as the project progressed.

### **3.9 The teacher informants**

All teachers in this study shared one characteristic and that is they were not from Japan. All were from English-speaking countries. Any attempt at a group description of these teachers is difficult as they were at various stages of life, and they came from different backgrounds. However the classes researched are typical of EFL *eikaiwa* classes in Japan in that the teachers are foreigners to their Japanese students and therefore there are aspects of their backgrounds, their cultural perspectives that are not shared with their students.

However, the teachers did all share some common characteristics. All of them had been in the context for an extended time. They had all worked in various English language learning institutes previously and had experience in a variety of teaching situations. All of them ran their own English schools and dealt with the aspects the research was looking at on a daily basis. As well, they all had had experience at some time, but in various degrees, with in-house training for people to teach English in Japan. The four teachers' details are as follows:

**Class A)** Winston. A British national who at the time of the study had spent more than seven years in Japan. After arriving in Japan, he spent a number of years at a major private language school teaching a variety of English classes. He now works independently and has classes at a Junior High School, private companies and his own private language school.

I have worked in Japan as an ELT teacher for 7 years. I graduated from University and wanted to do some travelling and earn some money at the same time so I became an English teacher. I have worked at various companies. I came over with a company called ... and I started working for a company part time called .... Then I managed to acquire a few private classes then I quit and went back to England for a few months. Then I came back to Japan and picked up business classes and private classes and worked for... again. At the moment I'm working as a freelance English teacher and I have opened up a new business with a friend. We have opened up a school.

**Class B)** Patrick. An Irish and British national who has taught English on and off for the last 18 years. He had taught in France and the Middle East before arriving in Japan. He got a teaching certificate in 1987 before coming to Japan and has spent 16 years

teaching in Japan. After designing and running an English program for a major company, he bought his own school where he now works. As well, he currently or has in the past taught at universities, technical colleges, public schools, companies and has run a variety of specialized courses such as TOEIC.

I have been teaching on and off for the last 18 years. I have the Trinity certificate, a 3-4 week course that I did in 1987 before I got my degree. Graduated in 92 in Arabic and Middle Eastern studies and then went to the Middle East and did some more teaching. Then I came to Japan and I worked for ... group and there I trained teachers, specifically trained them to, well ... they were trying to centralize their eikaiwa program so they wanted their company in Osaka to have the same as everywhere so when people transferred they could carry on with the same eikaiwa program. Basically, they wanted to standardize and centralize everything. So I designed 16 manuals and I trained about 60 teachers to use the system. That is how I started to teach in Japan.

**Class C)** George. An American who after teaching in the Middle East came to Japan 15 years ago. Firstly, he worked in one of the biggest private English schools in Japan before establishing his own school where he now works. He also takes classes at a private language school specializing in teaching returnee children from English-speaking countries.

In 1992 I took the RSA training course and after that I got a job teaching English in a school in Egypt and then got out of the field and went back to archeology. I returned to English teaching in 1994 when I came to Japan and I have been doing it ever since so that racks up 15 years. Apart from Egypt that is all in Japan.

**Class D)** Jesse. An American who has more than 16 years' teaching experience in the context. He worked at a variety of private English schools in Tokyo and Utsunomiya before establishing his own private English language school where he now works.

After teaching EFL at various conversation schools in Tokyo and Utsunomiya for 10 years, I left and started my own EFL school, ... , in Nikko with my wife and have been teaching there for a number of years. We now have two schools, one in Nikko and the other in Kanuma.

### **3.10 The student informants**

The students or classes chosen for the study are also difficult to define. They represented ‘typical’ *eikaiwa* classes in Japan in that the students had various motivations for studying (see 4.2.5) and they came from different walks of life. They came together however, once or twice a week to practise and improve their English ability. They were all Japanese nationals, their first language was Japanese and they all had that particular shared common background.

**Class A)** A private English class in a company’s reception room on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor. The class met at 6.00pm on a weekday evening after the students finished work. There were comfortable seats surrounding coffee tables with a portable whiteboard behind the teacher’s chair. All participants were offered and given refreshments (juice or green tea) before commencing the class. They brought pens and notebooks with them into class and started to converse in English as soon as the teacher sat down.

The students were all female office workers in the company where the lesson took place. One of the four students took additional lessons at the private *eikaiwa* school that was owned by the teacher. It was a lower level class.

**Class B)** A private English school class. The class meets at 10.00 am on a Saturday morning. The classroom, one of two in the school, had two office tables put together that were surrounded by six chairs. There was a big whiteboard at the front of the class and that is where the teacher positioned himself during the class. All the students brought their textbooks, notebooks and pencil cases and they were positioned in front of them.

There were four female students of various ages. There were usually six students in the class but on this Saturday morning at 10.00am two students “no-showed” (were absent from this particular class). They were all experienced *eikaiwa* students and were of upper intermediate level.

**Class C)** A private English school class. The class was at 9.30pm on Thursday evening. The classroom had two big tables that were surrounded by eight chairs. A whiteboard was situated at the front of the classroom. On the walls of the classroom were maps, pictures from around the world and various posters related to English teaching. Coffee and tea was given to the students before the start of the lesson by the teacher.

The students were all male ‘salaryman’ (a term to describe people who work as employees for companies usually in the area of business). Two of the students studied for business reasons and two studied for personal reasons.

**Class D)** An ‘English club’ lesson for students who also took more formal lessons with the teacher in his *eikaiwa* school. The lesson on Monday night from 9.00pm to 11.00 pm took place in a room of a private residence that is located in a commercial shopping area. The room itself looked like a small private library, the walls were made up of bookshelves piled with various books and magazines. The students and teacher sat around a coffee table in the middle of the room that was laden with refreshments.

The students were both male and female of various ages. In a sense this diverse range of students reflected my own experience of these types of classes. The students had their own reasons for studying and all had various life experiences but they all came together once a week religiously to study and practise English. (See Table 3.1).

*Table 3.1 Profile of Classes*

<b>Class</b>	<b>Teacher’s profile</b>	<b>Time of data collection</b>	<b>Class level</b>	<b>No. of students</b>	<b>Class profile</b>
A	Winston (British) 28 years old	Sept /Oct 08	Upper Elementary	4	4 women, all office workers. Class is located at the company where they work.
B	Patrick (Irish and British) 45 years old	Oct/Nov 08	Upper Intermediate	4	4 women. Class in private language school
C	George (American) 41 years old	Dec. 08	Intermediate	4	4 men. All businessmen. Class in private language school
D	Jesse (American) 43 years old.	Jan/Feb 09	Upper Intermediate/ Advanced	6	4 women and two men. Class located in private home. Students also take lessons at private language school with the same teacher.

### **3.11 Procedures – the first teacher interviews.**

Firstly, ethnographic interviews provided the means to gain an insider's view from the teacher's perspective. I decided that getting the insider's perspective on the social reality of the classroom was imperative to fully understand what goes on in the classroom. Their personal interpretations would provide a different lens to describe the phenomena and this followed the emic approach of ethnography and also provided a useful triangulation of data in combination with the other methods.

Ethnographic interviews are described as reflective and the interviewer takes an active part in the process by asking questions and making comments based on what the informant says. Spradley (1979) states that ethnographic interviews have explicit purposes, the questions follow ethnographic guidelines (description, structural and contrast questions), the informants are told about the purpose of the interviews and questions are explained as the interview goes along. Interviewing is widely used for data collection, focusing on intercultural communication due to its "ontological and epistemological relevance" (Shah, 2004, p. 550).

As general interview techniques, Corbett (2003, p. 121) provides the list of the guidelines set out below.

- Try if possible to interview the respondent more than once.
- Decide in advance themes or topics you wish to cover.
- Listen to the responses; react to them to establish further themes to follow up.
- Decide in advance how to record data.
- Avoid leading questions.
- Elicit information without evaluation.
- Encourage interviewees to elaborate on topics.

The first interview was designed to gain the teachers' general perspectives on their jobs, their backgrounds, their lessons, teaching philosophies, their experiences of teaching in Japan and general ideas about language learning. I used this same question sheet for all the first interviews which created a similar structure and the same areas were covered in all the interviews.

The interviews were taped and then later transcribed. The interviews themselves were relaxed and forthright as I knew the teachers well. The presence of the recording device did seem to have an effect on the atmosphere of the interviews however. Winston in his

second interview commented that it was “like a police interrogation” I sensed a degree of formality in all the interviews once the recording device was turned on signaling the start of the interview which finished when it was turned off signaling the end.

### **3.12 Procedures – class observations**

The second data gathering stage was observation of a class taught by the interviewed teachers. The purpose was to understand and uncover the often implicit patterns and routines of the participants in the classroom. The problem starting out was what to observe. Frank (1999) states that observation has to be selective, there needs to be a perspective or purpose to observe. She adds the observer should follow the advice of Spradley (1980) in his book *Participant Observation* and observe from an ethnographic perspective. An ethnographic perspective situates the study holistically, within the sociocultural context, and strives to present the insider’s view. Observations were taken in the form of written field notes.

There were two concerns going into the observations. First, after 15 years’ teaching would my familiarity with the context hinder ‘seeing’ what went on in the classroom and would my interpretations be meaningful with only one visit? In light of these concerns I focused on writing descriptive notes with interpretations based on evidence which Frank (1999, p. 87) calls “ethnographic eyes”. I was introduced to the class by the teachers at the start of the lesson. After that, I usually sat in an unobtrusive place in the class on my own away from the class participants. The students seldom took notice of me hurriedly scribbling notes on my observation sheets. An example from class A:

*“Good Evening” – start of lesson-tone of voice signals start of the lesson.  
Students stop chatting.*

*“What did you do on the weekend?” Some students take a deep breath. Students answer the question. Teacher milks the answers ... Each student focused on in turn (turn taking)*

*Clockwise until each student has a turn ...*

Afterwards the observation notes were discussed with the teachers in the second interview and their interpretations or views of what I had written were recorded. On reflection I believe the experience I had had in the environment before doing the

observations influenced what kind of data was recorded. I believe it helped interpret what I was seeing.

### **3.13 Procedures – focus groups**

Focus groups were another formal method used to collect data. This provided an emic perspective of the classroom from the students' standpoint. For practical purposes, immediately after classes were observed, focus groups were held with the participating students. A list of questions were prepared but not always adhered to as themes that were raised by the participants were discussed. Focus groups are basically group interviews and their hallmark is their use of group interaction to produce in-depth data. Morgan adds that the data focus groups provide can complement the data gathered in other ways, such as observation and interviews in multi-method ethnographic studies (Morgan, 1996).

I believed that the group dynamics of focus groups would produce meaningful data. It would put less pressure on the students than one-on-one interviews. This is because the students were not known to me and I would not have the rapport with them that their teacher enjoyed. Also the students would appreciate the help from each other discussing the often complex topics.

Focus groups were favoured for reasons of practicality as well. I could talk to the students all together in their own classroom environment after the observed lesson. In one of the classes the students go to the private language school once a week late in the evening before dispersing and usually heading home at 10.30pm. Individual interviews with these students with their schedules would have been very hard to arrange and administer.

The interviews were taped for later transcription and students were told they could use Japanese if they wanted. The students looked on the focus groups as an extension of their lessons, it was in an environment that was usually "English only" and it was with a foreign English teacher. Few therefore did speak Japanese and that was usually as a last resort after attempting to reply in English. On the odd occasion that Japanese was used in the focus groups, translation was done by myself and the details later rechecked with a person whose first language was Japanese.

### **3.14 Procedures – the second teacher interviews**

The second interview with the teachers, the post-observation interview, took on its own character. Although questions were prepared, emergent themes were discussed. The teachers' perspectives of what happens in their classrooms were compared and discussed with my own. My interpretations were taken from data collected from the observations and the previous interviews. I went into the meetings expecting a semi-structured interview process. The interviews were more like discussions of both of our respective views and ideas were bounced off each other. An example taken from class C talking about the need for experience (interviewer's language is in bold):

**New teachers to the context would have trouble though huh.**

I disagree. There is a degree of cultural naivety you would have but whether you are a generally decent person who grew up where it was stressed to have empathy for other people.

**I think you couldn't read the signs too well though.**

You couldn't probably read the cultural signs that people give off but that doesn't necessarily make you a bad teacher. If that were the case then teachers would be disasters in the classroom and they are not. ... I think your base personality is the no.1 determining factor in whether you are going to be able to read your students or not. (George's second interview)

This allowed me to check my data interpretations and also provided a funnel effect where the data collection went from broad and open to a focusing on the emergent themes. This basic strategy, which parallels a basic guideline from grounded theory, focused the process. The experience of the teachers was invaluable here as they had the ability to make sense of what was going on in the classroom from their perspective and relate or contrast it to all their classrooms.

### **3.15 Data analysis methods**

Data analysis was an ongoing process throughout the whole project. Firstly there was an informal analysis. There was an analysis of the data from the first interview before the observation of the class. After the class observation, notes of the class observation

were used as leads for questions or examples in the focus groups. After a week of reflection and data analysis the final interview with the teacher took place. The information taken from the previous stage was used in the next stage of data gathering. This informal data analysis involved listening to the taped interviews, reading the observation sheets and noting down the emerging themes and also taking specific examples from the existing data.

The data from the previous class also helped to define and focus the data gathering for the next class. Although the line of questioning didn't change for interview one, this process strongly influenced the content of the second interviews with the teachers. Charmez and Mitchell (2001, p. 160) state that certain strategies like "simultaneous data collection and analysis" and the "pursuit of emergent themes through early data analysis" can focus and streamline ethnographic projects.

The formal data analysis took place after all the data had been collected. Firstly every interview and focus group was transcribed from the recordings. Transforming oral speech into written text is a laborious process that can provide its own dilemmas. The repetitions, hesitations and incomplete statements can cause problems if written verbatim. However I tried to keep as close to the original statements as possible and included the researcher's voice when presenting the data at times to reproduce and not to distort the original meanings.

After the interviews and focus group sessions had been transcribed all the data was analysed and subsequently organized and put under existing and new thematic headings. The existing thematic headings had come from the informal data analysis and had been used as lines of inquiry in the data gathering process. Holliday (2007, p. 93) advises the researcher to submit themselves to emerging patterns of data and "be free to engage strategically and creatively with the complex realities that go beyond the initial design". Under the initial broad thematic headings more specialized subheadings were arranged. These thematic headings and subheadings then became the basis for the data presentation.

### ***3.16 Reliability and validity***

Attaining 100 percent validity and reliability is an impossible goal for any research, state LeCompte and Goetz (1982), but researchers must try to attain credibility and

tackle the problems inherent in their projects. Firstly dealing with reliability, there is external reliability which is the extent to which an independent researcher would obtain the same data in a similar context. Also there is internal reliability which is the extent researchers would draw conclusions from the same data. In order to address these issues, the project:

- used a type of methodological triangulation of data gathering methods. This strengthened the project's claims and can add what Mackey and Gass (2005, p. 61) describe as "credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability in qualitative research." It helped to provide a holistic account and revealed the multiple perspectives of the phenomenon that is needed to produce a thick description.
- had adequate access to the subjects and the settings. Four classes were chosen, and the participants were approached or observed in multiple ways to extract the data and this provided enough information.
- analysed, contrasted and compared the data of the four classes to reveal emergent themes.

Additionally, the project meets Nunan's (1992, p. 61) criteria for reliability by:

- engaging the informants in collaboration with the researcher. The second interview and focus groups evolved into a discussion about what I had interpreted from the class observation.
- mechanically recording all interviews and focus groups were (audio).
- making explicit The status of the researcher and the purpose of the research was at all times.

In an effort to ensure the validity of findings in a research project such as this, Mackey and Gass (2005) say that researchers must be aware of certain issues and challenges. One of these challenges is to make sure that any data taken accurately reflects the 'reality'. Another is for the researcher to be aware of their relationship with the participants and/or setting so that he or she can self-monitor and critically evaluate his or her influence on the project.

To ensure some of these problematic issues relating to validity were addressed the researcher has:

- done observations of natural classroom settings. Naturalistic data was gained as once the teachers had introduced me to the class and explained my presence, the lesson continued as normal. The classes were used to observers and there didn't seem to be observer's paradox (Mackey & Gass, 2005).
- had an extended period in the setting through both research and work experience. Time in the setting is useful to recognize verbal and non-verbal communication and behaviours and also how to "interpret the hidden assumptions underlying the behaviours" (Shah, 2004, p. 556).
- made explicit in the written process all the concepts, methods, conditions of research, choice of informants and possible influences on the researcher.

### **3.17 Limitations of the methods**

There were some limitations to the methods used.

1. The data gathered was only of four classrooms and of these classrooms all of the teachers were male.
2. There was limited contact with the classes and its participants. This was due to time restraints and practicalities. It is perceived that a longitudinal study would provide a broader breadth of data.
3. There was limited depth to the data in the focus groups due to time restrictions and the ability of the students to get across the implied meaning in a foreign language. Students were encouraged to use Japanese but few took that option instead preferring to speak in English.

## CHAPTER 4 PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

### 4.1 Overview

This chapter details the findings of the research. There are four parts:

**4.2 The context.** This section explores the contextual aspects that shaped the EFL classes.

**4.3 The classroom culture.** This section deals with the explicit and common characteristics of the classrooms under investigation when foreign teachers and their Japanese students spent time in the bonded social setting, the classroom.

**4.4 The mutual understanding.** In this section, how the participants were acculturated into their classroom's environment and the participants' influence on each other will be presented.

**4.5 Culture learning in the classroom.** Here the explicit and implicit learning of culture in the classroom will be examined.

The data is presented under thematic headings (above) and subheadings which include the voices from both teachers and students as well as data from observations. In order to show where this data came from in the research and ensure the transparency of sources, a coding system is used, as shown in Table 4.1. These codes are shown whenever a direct quote from one of these sources of data is used. The bolded script in the direct quotes is the interviewer's voice.

*Table 4.1: Data coding system*

Teacher/ Class Name	Teacher Interview One	Teacher Interview Two	Student Focus Group	Observation of Class.
<b>Winston</b>	<b>W1</b>	<b>W2</b>	<b>WFG</b>	<b>WCO</b>
<b>Patrick</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>PFG</b>	<b>PCO</b>
<b>George</b>	<b>G1</b>	<b>G2</b>	<b>GFG</b>	<b>GCO</b>
<b>Jesse</b>	<b>J1</b>	<b>J2</b>	<b>JFG</b>	<b>JCO</b>

## **4.2 The context**

In order to get a detailed description of the adult English classes under investigation we need to look at the influences that shape them. The contextual factors that will be discussed here are by no means the whole picture. They are themes that came out of the data from observations and from the teachers' and students' perspectives. The descriptions and themes presented in this first section are aimed to build a holistic view and show the types of influences that have an impact on shaping the nature of these classes.

### **4.2.1 General description**

Firstly, the general characteristics of the classes which were under observation will be explained.

- There was no set formal syllabus from external sources that directed the class content and no formal internal testing system. The syllabus was developed and maintained by the teachers themselves based on general guidelines, perceived needs or by following a textbook. Students took exams that were not directly associated with the schools based on their own needs such as TOEIC and Eiken. *Eikaiwa* literally means 'English conversation' and students who join expect a general communication course. Below is an example from one school, advertising its courses. This English version, a translation of the Japanese copy, is used by the teacher for a starting point for class content.

#### **General Communication, Upper beginner.**

**This course is for those who want to review the basics of English conversation, and improve their conversation skills in daily life. It is to be designed as a step up course after the above beginner's course (Estimated TOEC 350-470)**

The students ranged from young adults in their 20s to retirees. There was a wide range of ages in all of the classes.

- The students came from all walks of life. In one class, for example, there was a young woman, well-travelled, in her early twenties, working in the local government, sitting beside a retired carpenter who had never left the country.

- The size of the class was generally small. Three of the four classes had four students in them and one had six students.
- The teachers were from English-speaking countries in contrast to the Japanese-speaking students.
- All the classes used a designated textbook. Three of the classes used a textbook from a major publishing company and one class, Patrick's, used a textbook that was developed in that particular school. The textbooks were used as a curriculum guideline in the classes to varying degrees although other materials from other teaching resources (sometimes other textbooks) were also used. The textbooks were influential on the class content and it was the teacher's responsibility to choose a suitable one for their classes.
- Another important point to this description is that all of these classes were total immersion classes, they were 'English only'. Schools, as a general rule, frown on students using Japanese in these types of classes and many classrooms have a 'no Japanese' rule.

#### 4.2.2 The business needs

A strong influence in shaping these *eikaiwa* classes was the need to keep the students happy and coming back. I call these the 'business needs'. The teachers all run their own schools and these schools are their livelihood. The pressure associated with keeping the students happy was much evident in the data. Successful teaching is, in part, measured by how many students are enticed to the school or the retention of existing students. Existing students generally pay month to month or occasionally in blocks of months, for example, a three-month period. Words used to describe good classroom environments by both teachers and students included, "friendly", "fun", "enjoyable" and "comfortable". George felt this pressure:

I have to make sure people are enjoying the hour or so they spend in my classroom. If they don't enjoy it they might not return. **G1**

The main focus is on keeping the customer happy and from a teacher's perspective, the business needs took precedent over everything else. The nature of the situation from the viewpoint of these owner-teachers was shown in these following pragmatic

statements. Firstly, Jesse talks about his teaching philosophy that he also tries to instill into the teaching staff at his school:

I think everything I do it is make them happy even if they are not learning anything concrete. If they leave your lesson and say that was fun they are going to want to come back and over time they are going to enjoy it. **J1**

George was even more explicit about the situation when he said:

I believe a lot of people have no idea what a good English lesson would be or not be. I think a lot of my lessons by English-teaching textbooks are not good lessons but I'm in a business here and I want the students to come back so whether they actually – for me them coming back takes precedent over whether they actually learn something. **G1**

### **4.2.3 The main focuses in the classroom**

There is a perceived need to include as much speaking as possible in the classroom. Interaction, communicating in the class, was seen by the students as the most useful activity in these classes. When asked what the best way to learn English was, “speaking” was overwhelmingly the most popular response. Below are some responses to the above question:

- Speaking to native people is the best way to learn a language. **GFG**
- I think speaking English with someone is the best way to learn. **WFG**
- Communicating with English-speaking people. **GFG**

The teachers felt the pressure to include as much speaking and listening as possible in their classes despite what the teacher perceives as the actual needs of the students. George on the subject of the main focuses of his classes said:

I like to think that people who come to my school and do their homework learn all the aspects of English. Although some of my students are definitely not interested in learning all the aspects of English. All they want is a chance to come in and practise speaking. **G1**

Patrick described a successful classroom as:

Activity. Moving around, smiling and all people speaking at once. Not necessarily the atmosphere but I like to see all people speaking. **P1**

#### **4.2.4 The classroom as the main exposure to English**

Another strong theme that came out from both the students and the teachers was that the students had little chance to improve their English outside of the classroom. The majority of the students' exposure to the language as a communicative tool was in the classroom with their teachers and the other students in their class. Some students used English in their workplace but that also was infrequent and usually in written form such as e-mails and faxes. The classroom was the students' main and, in some students' circumstances, only exposure to any interactive English language use. Exploring this point further, when interviewing the students in Patrick's class I asked how they used English outside the classroom. One student quickly lamented, "I don't have any chances to speak outside of the classroom" **PFG**. All the other students quickly and enthusiastically nodded in agreement. It was a theme shared by many of the students. Some students perceived this as a factor that limited their ability to improve. A student, talking about his learning experience, implied his level of English was not advanced in spite of years of study. He said this was due to the lack of opportunities to speak the language:

I think it is important to have the opportunity to speak to American people. I studied grammar at high school but I didn't study how to speak. I didn't have the opportunity to speak to native people. **GFG**

Teachers commented on the lack of opportunity for their students to practise the language. To compensate the teachers saw it as part of their job to try to create the opportunity to speak in the classroom. Because of this, activities that focused on speaking were perceived as the most useful things to do in class (see 4.2.3), activities that "give the student the opportunity to use the language" **W1** and get the students "to speak as much as possible" **G1**.

#### **4.2.5 The students' motivations for studying**

There are many reasons why the students were studying English. Typical motivations from the classes observed could be divided into two groups. The first group (Group 1) shows specific purposes, external influences that provided impetus to study. The second group (Group 2) shows motivation not from external pressures but their own internal reasons to study.

### **Group 1**

- I work for a machinery company. My company exports the products to foreign countries, mainly Asia. We the employees need English for work. **GFG**
- I always use English at work with e-mails with suppliers. The suppliers are from America, China, Taiwan, Europe and so on. **GFG**
- I use English here [for her job] and I have a boyfriend in Canada but he is not from Canada, he is from Turkey. He is still studying English in Canada as a University student. We need to speak English because we can't speak Turkish and he can't speak Japanese so the language is always English. It is difficult because I cannot always say what I want to say. His English is better because he is a University student in Canada. I talk with him every day. **JFG**

### **Group 2**

- My hobby is watching movies so I want to watch movies without subtitles. **PFG**
- I studied English at high school and University. But I went to New Orleans because my sister lives there so it is a good opportunity to start to study again. [But] I don't use English in my job. **GFG**
- I want to speak English well and I want to go abroad and I want to know a foreign culture and how other people think. **PFG**

Group 2 responses show intrinsic motives. Even though there is no immediate practical reason, such as interaction with people in their community, these people spend a lot of time, money and effort on learning English. This corresponds to the theory that motivation is part of one's identity and is tied up with positive images of the target language (see 2.8).

Another important point the data shows is the rich variety of contexts in which the students intend to use the language. These contexts include using English with people from a variety of countries. The data implies the lingua franca status of English to the students with Group 1 motivations, especially in business situations. *Lingua franca* means a language that is spoken internationally, or by many people who do not share a common native language in order to facilitate their communication.

#### 4.2.6 Qualities of the teacher

What contributes to a positive learning environment in this context? From the teacher's angle, there was a perceived need for experience in teaching English as a second or foreign language but especially with teaching Japanese students in Japan. Each situation, in this case adult language classes in a Japanese city, needs a new set of skills in order to cope. Two of the teachers, George and Patrick, were experienced at teaching in both Japan and in the Middle East. They were animated on how different both situations were. George, when talking about what was necessary for successful teaching in this context stated:

Teaching here in Japan is much different than teaching in other places. In Egypt they spoke English better but they didn't know any grammar or vocabulary whereas here they know grammar and vocabulary but they don't speak as well.

So I taught a lot more grammar points in Egypt than I do here. **G1**

Both George and Patrick stated there were tricks to teaching in Japan. George talked of the need to be "friendly" and "talkative" **G1**. Patrick articulated that the 'dos and don'ts' **P1** of teaching in this particular context were essential to learn and know in order to teach successfully. Teaching in other contexts and the 'dos and don'ts' of other situations were considered helpful. However teachers new to *eikaiwa* would struggle at first. He explained, "They [new teachers] need a good mentor or teacher who can sit down and explain what they need to do" as "they don't understand the concepts – the 'dos and don'ts' are very important when teaching in Japan" **P1**.

Patrick explained some general 'dos and don'ts' of the teaching situation. He noted that the average student in his classes had stronger reading and writing skills than speaking and listening skills. In class the teacher needed to focus on these weaker skills but there was sometimes a perceived reluctance to actively participate in the classroom, especially with less advanced students. The teacher had to "draw the language out of them" with "well-structured written material for support." The teacher needed to do scaffolded pattern practice using a number of activities which he called the "Look and Say method" with the written material until they could get the students to "do it on their own" **P1**.

Teachers new to the context could have trouble in their new environment until they adjusted. They were working out how to cope in an environment that was new to them.

In other words, they had not yet found a comfortable common ground in which to operate. Patrick stated that new teachers could “freeze” **P1** when confronted with a class of students they could not understand and who were reluctant to act in the way the teachers were used to. Jesse described a current employee and his “fight” to adjust:

Talking about advertising for teachers for my school, we ask for experience but the last person we hired had zero experience because we had no choice ... [At first] some of the students were scared of him. With the adults he was kind of nervous. He is 40 with four kids so he knew how to handle them but with the adults you could tell he was uncomfortable! But now he has got some fans. **J1**

The teacher being a father of four could transfer that experience to the children’s classes. However the adult classes were an entirely new environment so he struggled to adapt at first. After some experience he adapted and found a mutually beneficial ‘space’ for both him and his students.

Adding to the above points, George explained that backgrounds and personalities were also important in helping people become successful teachers (see 3.1.4). Knowing the ‘dos and don’ts’ was only one angle to look at a successful classroom. There was a need to empathize with the students and have a personality that was open to other people. Without these qualities, he stated, new teachers would be disasters in the classroom but they were not (see 3.14).

From this we can conclude that teachers benefit from both experience in this context and also the ability to adjust to the environment. With experience they to get to know the ‘dos and the don’ts’, in other words the ability or know-how to organize a classroom where the language is drawn out of the students to focus on their speaking and listening skills. And also as they gain experience they need to be flexible and adjust. It is this ability to adjust to the context that provides a comfortable environment for both teachers and students.

#### **4.2.7 The need to read the students**

One of the major reasons why experience in teaching in this context was valuable was the need to ‘read’ the students. This was a major theme that was brought out from all the teachers in their interviews. By ‘reading’ the students I mean the ability to know what the students need and want in the class and also to tune in to class behaviour and take

care of the social well-being of the group. In other words, teachers need to understand how students, individually and collectively, are feeling during their lessons.

Every student is different, they have different needs and wants, and also different personalities. The ability to assess this and react accordingly is important in the classroom. Knowing how the group is behaving and being flexible enough to change things if necessary is also essential. Let's look at what the teachers said about it as an influence on their teaching style. After being asked about his teaching philosophy, George stated:

I believe that every student has different needs or different wants and one of the better things you can do especially here in Japan is work out what they want and give it to them in an enjoyable atmosphere. The key to be a good teacher is not necessarily your English skill, grammar and speaking ability but those help—it is being able to read a classroom and react accordingly and be accordingly flexible. By reading a classroom I mean you got to know when people are not enjoying a lesson or people are upset by what is going on in the lesson or just frustrated because they can't get it or understand and you got to know how to react to that. **G1**

In order to do this, teachers need to be sensitive to changes in behaviour. Experience assists teachers to know the normal behavioural patterns of the group and to read the vibes from such things as body language, facial expressions or changes in collective behaviour. Some of these clues about how people are feeling are universal to humans. However it can be more difficult to read students, especially things like facial expressions or why a student is quiet, when the teacher and students come from differing cultural perceptions (see 2.4). The teachers in this study had over time developed an understanding of this.

Jesse and George, for example, talked about how they had developed the ability to 'read the air' (*kuki o yomu* in Japanese). George stated that to "see what was happening and manage the atmosphere" **G1** was an important teaching skill to develop and teachers got better at it the more time they spent in the classroom. Jesse focused on the signals he picked up in order to read the students:

If they are laughing and if they are smiling, if they are not closed and not looking down, body language, I just pick it up, wow I hope I am right. **J1**

Winston talked about his own struggle to adjust to the classroom environment when he first came to Japan. It was difficult as a new participant in the environment to read the clues and tune in to the feelings of individuals and the group and adapt accordingly. Experience changed this. He reflected what all the teachers in this study brought up:

When I first came to Japan I'd say that I wasn't that able to adapt my lessons to suit the needs of the students whereas now I would say that I can. **W1**

Now he didn't "emphasize grammar too much" because the students would "shut down and focus on their mistakes" **W1**. Instead he focused on "communicative tasks", "having fun" and getting the students to think that communication was the most important thing and mistakes were part of learning a language.

The ability to read the students and to manage the social environment in order to make the students comfortable was perceived to be an important part in creating positive classroom environments.

### ***4.3 The classroom culture***

The participants of the EFL classrooms, the teacher and the students, created a distinct and unique type of interaction. The teacher, who is an influential player in this contact, is from a different background and set of experiences from the students. The students, all born and raised in Japan, share common experiences and aspects to their backgrounds but are also from different walks of life. The medium of communication is a language with norms and pragmatic uses different to what the students are used to. Through interaction with each other a 'classroom culture' is formed.

The four classrooms investigated were all different in many ways but they also shared many aspects. This next section will present these aspects, the common characteristics to all the classrooms in the study that formed the class culture.

#### **4.3.1 The informal nature**

Firstly, the classes were generally informal places of instruction. The students and teachers were casually attired, and refreshments in the form of drinks were served at the beginning of the lessons or brought by the students in all of the classes. As well, there was informal although polite interaction throughout the classes when the students and

teachers communicated. Students confirmed these observations. When asked about their classes typical replies included:

- This type of class is friendly. **PFG**
- (It's) casual. **PFG**

Teachers also indicated the need for a casual, enjoyable, classroom atmosphere for a positive learning environment. Describing his class Winston reported:

Being the teacher from the beginning has allowed me to bond with the students and created a class that is very friendly and the students are actively trying to help each other progress. **W2**

Jesse, talking about the kind of staff he wanted for his schools, valued friendliness highly because:

when you are teaching if you can make the students comfortable they can learn so if you are friendly to the students – anybody can learn. **J1**

The students saw the *eikaiwa* class as different from language classes they had taken in formal education. The classes were relaxed and casual as opposed to the formality fostered in Japanese education (see 2.7). This was a strong influence from the teachers who encouraged a relaxed and friendly environment. The teachers encouraged this kind of environment because they believed it facilitated the language learning process and also served the business needs of the schools (see 4.2.2).

#### **4.3.2 The importance of routine**

The students and the teachers come from different backgrounds and experiences so it can be assumed they might have differing expectations about how a class should be managed. Yet the students were comfortable in these classes. The atmosphere was calm and there were relaxed poses and a lot of smiles. Many students, however, when talking about their learning experiences were explicit about describing their nervous first encounters when they were new students.

- My first conversation class I was very nervous. **PFG**
- When I first joined this class it was difficult to understand the teacher but after a while I became accustomed to here – his English. It is good for me, I be able to accustomed to talk to foreign people. **GFG**

The classes went from strange new environments for the new students to comfortable safe havens in which to practise a foreign language. One important reason for this was the routine nature of the classes. The classes were a kind of script. There was a ritualized routine to all of them. The students and teachers knew the ‘habitual routines’ which created an easier environment to operate in for both parties. The activities and exercises within the ritualized lesson routine changed and each class had a different routine but this was a fundamental aspect to all the lessons.

I noted in my observations this ritualized nature of the classroom. While observing Winston’s lesson I wrote:

*“Good evening” – start of the lesson – tone of voice signals start of lesson.*

*“What did you do on the weekend?” ... Each student focused on in turn (turn-taking) Clockwise until each student has a turn.*

*Relaxed atmosphere/ laughter/jokes.*

*Students ask each other questions after gestures from teacher. WCO*

The students knew what was going on, the tone of voice from the teacher signaled the start of the lesson, a simple gesture got the students asking each other questions. The students were relaxed, they knew from experience what was coming and there were no surprises in store for them. Winston added among other things when asked about creating a positive learning environment, “the teacher must also be able to deliver a structured lesson” **W1**.

All the teachers were very articulate on the importance of classroom routine. It was a theme that all the teachers brought up when asked about good teaching or successful classrooms. Patrick was very particular about the importance of a well-structured classroom:

A well trained classroom, they [the students] will know as soon as they have finished their conversation that they are going right over to the side of the table.

The people are swapping. Structured organization and that is what makes a successful classroom. ... And activities! Organized, structured and fun. **P1**

He attributed the success of his schools to this factor:

I like to think my schools are popular because of the teaching. All teachers have similar structured lessons. I think the students get a lesson that is very similar,

they know what is going on – I think materials and structure are very important.

### **P1**

The teachers believed that the routine, with which the participants were familiar, put the students at ease. They knew what was going to happen, the environment was predictable and they could make sense of what was going on around them, as Jesse explained:

They know the pattern. Even in my so called unstructured classes each class although different has a certain routine. They know when I say at the start *How are you?* I will always say *Why?* So there is a familiarity. **J2**

The students and teachers were sometimes so used to their classrooms' routine nature that even if the participants changed the routine continued. Even if there was a new teacher, they came into the class and were taught the classes' routine by the students. This means that they carried on with some things in the class that were done previously:

Most of our students have been there for a while so I can throw another teacher in there and like, they will train him. I mean they know what to do, ask questions that kind of thing.

### **So the students will train the teacher?**

Yeah, they will know what to do. Yeah, the teacher going into there will be nervous and well you can imagine my students [friendly and helpful] – anyway a new teacher goes in there and they are going to feel very at home. **J2**

## **4.3.3 Speaking turns within the class**

Another feature of the classrooms observed, and one that is related to the above points about routine, was the rigid way in which the participants took turns to speak in the class. The students all shared the time to speak with no one person dominating the floor. As well, there were few if any interruptions to the designated speaker. There was a distinct lack of competition to maintain a turn that might distinguish certain other English-speaking contexts. The other participants, including the teacher, waited quietly until the speaker had finished talking, which was usually signaled by a period of silence. Even correction done by the teacher, on the majority of occasions, was done after the student had signaled he or she had finished. There was spontaneous speaking and times

when people interrupted or broke in to speak but structured turn taking was a feature of all the classes.

Jesse was quite unaware of this classroom feature but once pointed out he described what happens in his classes:

you point to people whose turn it is and say, *What do you think?* Yeah you ask your students then stop them and say thank you, *What about you?* (*uses hand gestures*) They expect that. **J2**

The above quote shows that it is the teacher who can orchestrate this turn-taking process. On occasions, the teachers used gestures or looked in the student's direction to signal a turn. On other occasions it was just a predictable order of turn-taking seemingly self-policed by the students themselves. The teachers and students seemed to attach importance to giving everyone a fair share of talking time, thereby maintaining harmonious relations, and this led at times to a structured type of turn-taking when speaking in class.

#### **4.3.4 The importance of humour**

Humour was a common feature of all the observed lessons. Both teachers and students participated in humorous banter and jokes that led to collective laughter. There were many incidents of humour in the classroom and it was used in a number of ways. Uses of humour that were common included:

- controlling the class and maintaining codes of behaviour;
- creating a bonded, inclusive learning environment;
- creating a comfortable and friendly environment in which to speak.

On one occasion in Patrick's class, one student was speaking out of turn. Patrick looked at the offending student, put on a feigned angry face and said loudly, "It is not your turn!" **PCO**. The class laughed, order was restored (the students did what the teacher wanted) and the class continued. When the students started using too much Japanese, all Patrick said was "Ooooh!", the students laughed and went back to using English. One student used the same sound to admonish Patrick when he said something in Japanese later which created collective humour. Talking about humour generally, and one of these particular incidents, Patrick stated, "It keeps things interesting, it keeps them coming back." He drew on his own experience in valuing it highly:

that is what I want to see in a teacher. I have had humorous teachers and I have had boring teachers. I only remember the interesting funny ones! **P2**

Jesse also was explicit about using humour to control the class:

I think that you control the class through humour. It works better than, you know, berating, beating someone down (*Jesse laughs*) yeah you want them to come back the next week. **J2**

Both teachers were aware of keeping the students happy but also keeping control of the classroom. Humour helped to do this. It de-emphasized power differences and allowed the teachers to control the class. Humour created relaxed, friendly atmospheres in the classrooms. The teachers made an effort to include humour, to keep classes interesting, and it was welcomed by the students. One student commented on Winston's lessons: "And his jokes – his jokes are a little different and interesting" **WFG**.

Winston perceived humour as one way to create a positive class environment that helped create a bond between its members:

As an observer you wouldn't understand if the students would find a particular name or scenario funny, whereas from our point of view it is funny because in a previous lesson we had a joke about it or created a joke about that particular thing or topic. [It] has allowed me to bond with the students and created a class that is very friendly. **W2**

The students used humour to create chances for spontaneous contributions in class and to contest the teacher's actions. In Patrick's class a student was given the wrong sheet of paper by the teacher. The student feigned anger the same way the teacher had done previously and said, "YOU gave me the wrong paper!" **PCO**. There was collective laughter.

This involvement in a co-construction of collective laughter was one of the main sources of spontaneous contributions to the classes made by the students outside of the more rigid, structured turn-taking described earlier. In the majority of cases everyone understood the humour but it also had the potential to create miscommunication (see 4.4.2).

#### 4.3.5 Speech modification

The teachers modified their spoken level of English. Students were rarely confused by the level of language used by the teacher or taken aback by the speed of delivery, and if they were, the teacher realized this and modified the level of English accordingly. A lot of spoken language used by the teachers was characterized by a lack of idioms, lexical phrases, slang and complex sentence structures. If the teacher used language perceived to be outside of the students' knowledge, it was generally followed by an explanation written down where the students could see.

The teachers were well aware of this aspect to their classes, as Patrick indicated:

students have said I can sit in my class and understand every single word! That is because of experience – I slow down certain things that I know they won't understand. I know when they don't understand. **P2**

Jesse believed it was an important skill for the teacher to have. In order to keep the students satisfied and happy in the class the teacher needed to be aware of the type of language used:

I have got this theory that the classroom is not like real life conversation I think that is true, we dumb it down you know. But I think it is important as a stepping stone. I remember one guy and students were consistently complaining about him because they couldn't understand a word he said. He said "If they go to New Zealand they are gonna have to listen to people who talk like me." I see his point but from a business owner's view you don't want frustrated students.

**You want to give them a feeling of accomplishment?**

Well, keep your students happy. You need to scaffold it for your students. **J2**

The students were also aware that the teachers were easier to talk to and understand than someone they would meet "on the street" **WFG**. It was a constant theme that kept coming up in the focus groups. Talking English in class and to their teacher was different to meeting someone outside of the classroom, for a number of reasons:

The difference between the classroom and outside the classroom is that we don't know the topics and our teacher is trying to understand our English so – that is his job. Talking to a person on the street and talking to our English teacher is different. **PFG**

Meeting a foreigner on the street is difficult because they speak very quickly, I can't hear what they say. In the lesson you can understand the story but outside of class they speak fast and you don't know what they are talking about. **WFG**

#### **4.3.6 Encouragement**

Teachers encouraged their students extensively in the class. It was a routine feature of all the classes. After each exercise or contribution from a student the teacher usually provided positive feedback. In Winston's class observation sheet the following passage was written by the researcher:

Constant use of praising   Great  
  Good  
  Very good!  
  Thank you!  
  Brilliant  
  Very, very good **WCO**

Patrick used the same vocabulary in his class and also included high fives and low fives. Teachers brought into their classes their own forms of encouragement and it was a constant feature of all the classes.

#### **4.3.7 The unique hybrid classroom culture**

In this section, aspects of the unique cultural environment that was found in the classrooms will be described. They looked, on the surface, what I expect many adult English language classes from many parts of the world would look like. The teacher stood at the front of the class, beside the whiteboard and directed the class. The students sat at their desks with their textbooks or materials in front of them and took notes. However the classes had unique elements to them. Some of these came from the students, aspects of Japanese behaviour and practices they used in everyday life (see 2.7). Other elements came from the teacher's side, from norms and practices they had brought with them (see 2.7). I will now describe some of the aspects of this classroom culture by giving examples from the classrooms to show their unique nature.

First, there were periods of prolonged silence in the lessons and within the conversations in these lessons. Both the teachers and the students seemed comfortable with these periods of silence. George explained his attitude:

I don't mind a bit of silence. That is why I make a cup of tea or coffee while they are silently thinking about what they are going to say. **G2**

George had got used to and accepted the patterns of silence and their importance to his students. It was for George a natural aspect of this environment and he managed the silence in his own way, by making refreshments.

Typical examples of silence were when students took time to formulate answers to a given question. The teachers and the other students waited patiently until either an answer was formulated or help was given. In a typical example, in Winston's class the teacher asked, after a reading exercise, "Are there any questions?" **WCO**. This was followed by a lengthy silence until Winston carried on with the lesson without any verbal replies from the students.

To decide who is going to go first or who gets the best seat, for example, Japanese children often use the hand game, *Jan-ken-pon* (Paper, rock, scissors). It is sometimes used by adults as well, in a light-hearted way, to decide unimportant matters. It was instigated by the teachers to decide whose turn it was in two of the classes observed. The English version was used and it was a very quick and efficient way to decide things in class. There is a common understanding that is learnt from an early age in Japan, which a student in one of my own classes summarized by saying: "decisions are final and there can be no complaining".

There were certain aspects of politeness that were unique to this environment. The classes on one hand were casual. A relaxed, friendly environment was promoted by the teachers (see 4.3.1). However, there were on occasions extensive uses of formality. One example of this came in Winston's class. Winston's class was doing controlled activities in pairs. The pairs were changing after each activity was finished. When each activity was over the students smiled and said, "Thank you very much" **WCO** to each other and shook each other's hands. This was repeated in some way after each pair work activity.

Bowing to each other was also common, especially amongst the students, but on occasions teachers also participated. The bowing was often informal nods that were always returned to acknowledge each other, especially after activities like introductions and greetings, when students first came into the class. Some of the students in Patrick's class for example, came into the classroom and said "Hello" or another English greeting while bowing and then proceeded to sit down. Bowing was also prevalent when students

said “thank you” to each other thus bringing an element of Japanese formality into the classroom interaction.

Japanese was sometimes used in the classroom. The students often inadvertently used their native tongue. For example, in moments of understanding “*naruhodo*” (which can be translated as ‘I see!’ or ‘I understand’) was said. There were other paralinguistic messages from Japanese that were uttered in moments of surprise, disbelief and so forth. In other words, the sounds used to express certain emotions were directly from the students’ native language. In this regard, a unique type of interlanguage was formed. It was dominated by English but also had a strong influence from the students’ native language. Both teachers and students engaged in this unique form of interaction.

Another example was the use of *San* as a title after the name. When the students called on the teacher, usually by using the first name, *San* was sometimes used. *San* is a common form of address in Japanese used with last names, similar to *Mr*, *Miss*, *Mrs*, or *Ms*, but usually not to a teacher. *Sensei* is used most often to address teachers in Japanese contexts. It literally means ‘former-born’, and is used to refer to or address teachers, doctors, politicians, and other authority figures. This covert use of Japanese seemed to be a natural part of the classroom as it was ignored or not acknowledged by the participants. In other words, it was an accepted part of the classroom behaviour.

Japanese was also used to recheck vocabulary meanings or instructions by students and on occasions by teachers as well. This kind of use was also sanctioned and ignored. This can be contrasted to when the students tried to interact with each other in Japanese outside of the classroom’s accepted norms of use. On several occasions when these norms were breached they were challenged by the teacher, as the example in 4.3.4 illustrates. In Winston’s class he directly said, “English please” when the students lapsed back into Japanese during an activity. The level of Japanese use that was accepted in each class varied. Only people with an insider’s knowledge would know these unwritten class rules.

Therefore the classroom culture was a combination of influences and adjustments from both the teachers and the students. The students for example incorporated some of the behaviour from their previous experiences into the classroom. They used expressions and practices of polite formality from Japanese society or their previous educational experiences. This can be seen in the use of *San* or in the practice of bowing.

The teachers in contrast promoted a relaxed, friendly environment. There is an adjustment by both parties. The teacher's tolerance of silence is a good example of adjusting, as is the students' acceptance of the informal nature of these classrooms. Basically, the norms and expectations of the teachers and students were different to what they were used to in their former experiences but in the end, over time, common understandings developed and a class culture was formed.

#### **4.3.8 Individual adjustments**

Another very important point is that each individual was affected by exposure to the class environment and noticed a change in how they acted. The teachers and students both influenced each other's behaviour. In other words, the interaction that they had in the classroom affected their respective behaviour. They were influenced by interacting with a person or people from different backgrounds and took on aspects of behaviour from them.

Winston found himself adopting some of these norms such as bowing: "a Japanese response but it also rubs off on me because I find myself doing it as well" **W2**. The influence went in both directions:

A lot of my classes I joke with them especially if it is the first class and the students don't know it is a joke. But of course it is a great opportunity to introduce things like *he is only joking, don't take him seriously*, language like that. After I had done that I found a lot of the students started to do similar things — tell a lot of lies but then follow it up with, *I'm only joking*. I don't know whether it is their character to tell jokes or they are doing it because I told a couple of jokes. I have noticed that happens in my classes. Their behaviour changes over time. **W2**

Patrick noticed changes in his students as well. He mentioned the change in their body language because it is something he does and stresses in class:

Certainly in my class they try to be more expressive, their hands move more, their faces move more. I think that is because that is what I do. **P2**

The students themselves felt that they had been 'changed' by being exposed to English and interacting with a person from an English-speaking background.

- Foreigners are very positive but Japanese are very shy so sometimes it is a little hard, it is a little too tough. I think I am an actress in the class. **PFG**
- Yes, yes, I'm getting used to my heart ... and I enjoy speaking English – now – before I was a little nervous now I'm getting used to it. It is good, very positive. **PFG**
- I used to be a little pessimistic person but nowadays very optimistic

**That is the influence of learning English?**

Yes. **PFG**

- I feel speaking English is colorful so when I speak a foreign language I must make up myself. No, I must build up myself, my character, my knowledge, my information, then I'll have confidence to speak English. **JFG**

What I believe these conversations show is the change the students and teachers must make in order to interact smoothly. When the students enter the classroom the teachers expect a certain level of enthusiasm and they expect the students to actively participate in class. The students also expect certain things like a level of politeness (see 4.3.7). There are individual adjustments as people create a 'space' for themselves within the classroom culture.

#### **4. 4 The nature of the interaction**

An important aspect of the interaction in the classes was the mutual understanding that the participants exhibited. Through experience the participants had learnt to empathize with each other and work out common understandings that ensured the smooth running of the class. As well, there were effects and misunderstandings from individuals. This next section will explore this part of the class culture.

##### **4.4.1 The teachers' empathy**

Firstly, the teachers showed an understanding of their students. This empathy that had evolved was developed over time and experience, the teachers believed. Indications included:

**A)** When teachers gave explanations of language or vocabulary, they were given with the students' level of language ability in mind. In other words the teachers tended to grade their explanations in accordance with the students' abilities. One example of this

came in Patrick's class. In order to explain the differences between the verbs, "play" and "do," he stated:

Generally for ball sports we use *play*, for *STRANGE* activities we use *do*, for example, do yoga. **PCO**

He reduced the complexity of the distinction and provided a working definition adequate to the needs of the students. Talking about these adjustments Patrick clearly saw this as part of a teacher's professional skill:

A teacher is paid to do it, a teacher will be very careful about what he says ... I've had students who have said to me "Do you always talk like this to people or are you just choosing your words for me so I will understand?" And I say I am choosing the words well. **P1**

**B)** The teachers knew through experience, through trial and error, which language items the students wouldn't know or would have trouble with. Before readings or after input from other students and on other occasions the teachers knew which language to focus on for collective student understanding. Patrick expressed that knowing this was down to experience:

Why do I instinctively know? It is the experience I have had in meeting similar situations each time. It is obviously experience. **P2**

Winston similarly attributed to experience not just adjustments to his own language but alertness to hidden misconceptions in the students' language:

I have noticed that sometimes you might ask a question or give an answer and the students interpret it as meaning something else and they give an answer and through experience you know that the answer is perfect for the question asked but that the students didn't get or understand the real meaning. In that case obviously you need to explain to the student in another way what you have said is the best thing to do. That is experience and cultural knowledge. **W2**

**C)** The teachers could also extend this ability to be in tune with the students' use of silence in the class. From Winston's class the observation notes read:

*Any questions?* ~ lengthy silence ~

Teacher rechecks meaning regardless ... the students didn't ask/ didn't say anything, again moment of silence. Use of [Japanese] to recheck. Teacher writes down the difficult points. **WCO**

Here it seemed that the teacher took particular meanings from the silence of the students from the situation. He interpreted it as a lack of understanding. Again, after the teacher had given the English explanation there was silence, the teacher then resorted to Japanese equivalents for the language causing concerns, then wrote the points on the board. The students didn't want or need to express their lack of understanding directly to the teacher. It was on this occasion obvious.

There seemed to be silence for understanding but also for not understanding. In both cases, it was usually comprehended by the teacher. This wasn't random; the teacher was in these instances in tune with the students' use of silence. There were many ways to convey meaning. This was done through subtle facial expressions, where the students were looking (eye contact or not), certain emotional cues and expressions (see D below) and body language. The teachers were through experience relatively adept at picking up these signals.

**D)** The teachers were also well aware of their students' emotional cues and expressions in the class and used them to gain useful feedback on their teaching. When a new vocabulary item was introduced to a class, understanding was at times expressed by the students saying, "*Aar-naruhodo*" (literally, "I see"). Patrick found this a useful signal:

You know you are teaching them something [when they say that] and that is something you have to work on. **P2**

When the students said, "Eh"? (short and high pitched ) the teachers knew that they didn't understand. When they went "Ehhh~" (long and usually low pitched), the teachers knew the students were expressing disbelief or surprise. As stated earlier, this was an accepted or ignored use of Japanese and it was a consistent aspect of the class. These expressions and sounds become natural to the participants of the EFL class.

**E)** The teachers generally knew the type of humour that would not only be understood by the students but would actually be found humorous. It was a significant part of all the lessons. Jesse was aware of his ability to do this: "I tell jokes like Japanese now" **J2**.

#### **4.4.2 The misunderstandings**

The teachers' norms and expectations of what a successful language classroom is sometimes clashed with the students. Both parties had been conditioned by their previous educational experiences. The teachers stated their main stresses in teaching in

Japan were learners who were passive or non-participatory in the classroom. Talking about their overall experience in teaching in Japan the teachers implicitly indicated how such behaviour transgressed their expectations of how language classes should operate:

People who don't seem to be happy no matter what I do and don't show any reaction or emotion, don't give any feedback, they are very passive – that stresses me out when I don't feel any kind of rapport – I care about my lessons.

**G 1**

If you are teaching a class, students who aren't very active – it is very difficult – I believe that there has to be a lot of participation for the class to work. **W1**

These comments show the effects of differing cultural perspectives in the classroom. Some students were perceived as emotionless and passive. Their actions clashed with what the teacher considered 'normal' behaviour. On the other hand, the casual environment the teacher tried to create was not completely incorporated by individual students.

As a result of these differing perspectives, it has to be said there were misunderstandings. In the classes, there were of course language misunderstandings when the participants couldn't express themselves freely due to their language levels, or what was said was misinterpreted. As well, there were times when the humour used by the teachers was met with students' blank stares. This happened in both Winston's and Patrick's classes, for both of whom humour is a big part of their teaching. Winston's use of sarcasm wasn't understood by his students and Patrick's attempted play on words went over the students' heads. There was an incident in George's class where a student used a gesture that meant "sell" and George did not know this, therefore missing the point of the story. The point here is that there are many misunderstandings in the EFL classroom as well as a lot of mutual understanding.

#### **4.4.3 The effect of individuals**

Every class is different. The teachers perceived that the influence of individuals on the class culture and the class atmosphere was a very significant factor. They felt that their own behaviour depended on who they were teaching at the time. Some classes were easy to teach because they sensed the students were more receptive and more willing to

communicate. Some were more difficult, the teachers seeing the students as unresponsive and passive.

George compared the observed class to another of similar language ability:

Yeah that class is also different to some of the other lessons I have. I wish you had come to the Thursday night one because the class although they are all nice people and they are a higher level than this class – it just doesn't go as well as that one. This is a very good class. They never lack for things to say and they always try no matter what I say. That other class is – mmmmmm ... it's just their personalities and the group dynamics of the class. Recently a new guy has thrown them off balance. **G2**

George was adamant that individuals were the number one determining factor on the class environment and believed that "all classes are going to be as different as each person is" **G1**.

Jesse stated "my personality is different in every class because what I work with" **J2**. This means he is influenced by the students in the class. He went on to describe his teaching situation emphasizing the importance of individuals on a class culture:

I feel even my personality is different [in each class]. My students influence the class, I feed off them and as a teacher you give them what they want, what they are comfortable with. In one I can be very sarcastic and joking and they laugh and another one I just say, "OK let's just open the book then..." it's very serious – and it is fresh in my mind now because I have this new Friday night class with an old student who has been there for a couple of years and she brought two of her friends. They are good friends and want to study together but I can't find any comfortable ground for everyone. I have been teaching them for about two months now but every class feels forced and I can't get to a comfort zone. I'm sure they feel it too. It's like I'm looking for the culture! **J2**

#### **4.4.4 Patrick's class**

The effects of individuals are apparent on each class and Patrick's influence on his classroom is a good example of this. First, Patrick's previous experience and background affected his teaching approach. He had learnt languages and he

incorporated that experience into his classrooms: “a lot of the drills and the way I learnt Arabic I put into teaching English” **P1**.

Patrick’s class was characterized by humour and he thought it was an important part of the class. His previous experiences and teachers were influential (see 4.3.4). Patrick also brought an approach to the class that challenged his students and gave them an experience they were usually not accustomed to. He greeted the students at the door with firm handshakes and sat each student down individually by pulling out their chairs and gesturing for them to sit. During the class he monitored his students by sitting down next to them. This was a conscious strategy:

I do it on purpose because I want them to have an experience that is not only a communication thing but it is a full-on situation that they don’t get anywhere else. I want to push them, high five them – I want them to know that my classes are different to anything else anywhere that they have been to and that is why they come back.... some people find that difficult at first but – they still come back for more. **P2**

His students also acknowledged his teaching style and commented it was outside of their usual experiences.

- Ladies first. It makes me a little embarrassed – not now. **PFG**
- Foreigners are very – mm – but Japanese are very shy so sometimes it is a little hard. **PFG**

## **4.5 Culture learning**

In this section the perceived role of ‘culture’ in the classroom and its role in learning English in an EFL setting will be explored from the participants’ perspective. Then the actual practice of culture learning in the classroom will be described. Last, the implicit nature of culture learning will be discussed.

### **4.5.1 The perceived role of culture**

Both the teachers and students expressed the view that learning aspects of the teacher’s country and its customs was a part of the language classroom. As well, the teachers expressed a concern to get across to the students necessary information to be

able to communicate effectively in their respective countries if questions were brought up. These usually involved the pragmatic norms of English. The students believed they needed certain information about English-speaking countries, specifically their teacher's and its customs, to be able to operate effectively in the language.

On being asked how they actively teach aspects of the language outside the 'nuts and bolts' (the grammar, the vocabulary and so forth), three of the teachers stated that they dealt with aspects of this nature as they came up but did not focus on them during their lessons. It has to be noted here that the teachers were not asked to define the concept of culture or how they perceived culture learning. They appeared to perceive it however as related to teaching relevant knowledge the students needed to effectively communicate in English.

I don't focus on culture but I bring it up if it is important. Students often ask those kinds of questions. A lot of times there is no answer or no clear answer but sometimes there is. **G2**

Um just by being me they learn a lot of Americanisms but I don't teach it per se. I talk about America and I say people in America do this. I don't consciously do it. If the text brings it up I will deal with it. **J2**

Winston stated he dealt with cultural aspects of the language when they came up and this aspect of the classroom was covered:

I do teach culture, about how to act overseas from my point of view ... you don't have to go to another country to experience it, you can experience it through movies, books, there are lots of ways to experience it. I believe that the aspect of culture is being addressed in class. **W2**

It seemed that the teachers had the opinion that culture learning could be dealt with in class by providing relevant facts to their students. It was not a major concern or focus, however.

The students had various perceptions about culture learning in the classroom but a common theme that came out of the data was that it was an important part of learning English and they expected to gain some insights from taking classes with foreign teachers. Firstly, on being asked the difference between a foreign teacher and a Japanese teacher of English, a student replied:

I think it is better that the teacher is foreign because it's normal to speak with native speakers and nationality [culture/national characteristics] is different with Japanese so I want to know any information, foreign countries ... information and pronunciation. How to mmmmm ... so I prefer a foreign teacher. **GFG**

Another student from a different group had a similar answer:

It is difficult to go to a foreign country so foreigners can tell about their country so I can understand without going ... so we experience it here in the classroom.

**PFG**

To gain information about the teacher's country as well as gaining experience with communicating with someone outside their usual social groups seemed common reasons to be taking EFL classes with 'foreign' teachers.

- With an English teacher we can not only learn the language but also we can learn a foreign culture – for example the clothes that our teacher wears, the t-shirt's writing very interesting. **WFG**
- Our teacher shows us pictures of England. **WFG**
- And his jokes – his jokes are a little different and interesting. **WFG**

Many students were also adamant about the connection between the language and the cultural aspects behind it. They stated it was an important part of learning another language:

I think it is better to know about English culture to speak English. The purpose of learning English is to speak and understand one another so knowing about the other background and culture is important. **WFG**

If I can't get foreign culture and thinking I think I can't learn the language well, the language and the culture are together I think. **PFG**

#### **4.5.2 Culture learning in the classroom**

Although not their main focus, the teachers perceived that they dealt with cultural aspects of the language in the classroom. There were simple explanations concerning pragmatics, how to act in certain situations and the telling of experiences. It was a part of presenting the language, students were 'corrected' at times when they displayed a lack of competence and it provided topics for discussion in the classes. Two examples of the teachers purposely providing cultural information in their classes will now be described.

Firstly, in Patrick's class he got the students to introduce themselves to each other at the start of the lesson. In the introduction the students avoided certain personal information that the teacher deemed important to include. Patrick picked up on this and after a while stopped the activity. He pointed it out to the students and then he got the students to do it again using the type of information that he would probably use. Students then included the 'appropriate' information.

In George's class the students were practising requests and invitations. The students were at first declining invitations without giving any explanations. George explained that Americans would probably give a reason for declining an invitation and that it was polite to do so.

You have to give a reason in English when you say 'No'. It is just polite. It is just English culture. **GCO**

The students seemed to understand this explanation and then gave reasons in addition with their declining. When I brought up this example in the second interview George stated:

Sure that is important. It is their job especially the one guy that uses his English for business. It is important that he doesn't put people off. He does business with people all over the world. A lot of Chinese, Taiwanese and so forth. **G2**

The teachers were well aware of the students' 'thirst' for this kind of information in the class. The students often asked about the teachers' life experiences and their home countries. Carrying on the discussion about culture learning in the classroom, George said he felt he imparted "a fair bit" of cultural knowledge in the classroom:

because I think a lot of my students are interested in that kind of information so I give it. A fair bit, a good bit because it is important to them. I do it fairly often I think, something comes out every lesson that gives some sort of insight to American culture. **G2**

The explanations and focus for this kind of knowledge were on explicit aspects of cultural information. This is a 'culture as knowledge' approach. Simply, it can be described as giving a set body of facts about a specific group (the teacher's country or native English speakers as a group). The teacher acts as a gateway to information on the target group and provides the relevant knowledge to the students.

Another point is the focus on native-speaker norms. Throughout the data the students were focused on native speaker norms for language guidance and also native speakers were the perceived target group on which to practise their English (see 4.2.3; 4.2.4). This can be contrasted with the students' actual reality. Many were as likely, or even more likely, to communicate with English speakers from non-native-speaking countries (see 4.2.5).

Teachers also focused on native-speaker norms when imparting cultural knowledge. The information given was specifically about either a particular country and its customs or native English speakers as a group. This can be contrasted with the culture-general approaches found in ICC literature which focus on awareness and negotiation of differences rather than specific 'facts' about groups (see 2.10).

### **4.5.3 The implicit nature of culture learning**

Many of the aspects of language learning remain hidden from the participants. The processes that students and teachers go through to create a familiar common ground can be outside of their awareness. In other words, it is an ordinary, mundane process and hence largely out of the consciousness of the participants. In contrast, when talking about the difficulties of language learning, both parties tended to focus on the aspects that were tangible to them.

In general the teachers saw instruction as the teaching of competencies other than sociolinguistic and culture learning as the transmission of facts. George was asked about his role in the transmission of culture in his classroom, about his influence on his students. Although George considered he included a "fair bit" of "cultural knowledge – the stuff that would help them live in the US" (see 4.5.2), he was unaware of any influence he could have had on his students in the transmission of culture and he was concerned with the more linguistic aspects such as intonation:

cultural stuff and gestures? No I can't say I have noticed – Intonation yes rise and fall ... sentence patterns perhaps.

The students also focused on the grammatical competences when talking about language instruction in the classroom. When the students were asked what was difficult about speaking English, the replies were mainly about the difficulties they had with the lexis and syntax of the language.

- It is difficult to make a long sentence and Japanese language and native grammar is so different I think so sometimes I'm confused – I don't know like, at, on, in and so forth. PFG
- The grammar is difficult. GFG
- One word has many meanings for example a verb and a noun and an adjective. GFG
- To speak English is comparatively OK but hearing is difficult to hear native English because they speak fast and word to word connect elision – so it is very hard. GFG
- I have many things to speak but the words don't come to my mind so I need more training. GFG
- I like to speak English but I feel it is difficult. I can't speak simply. JFG
- I have some problems with my vocabulary. If I know many words I can speak more. I can tell what I want to say. If you don't know the words you cannot. JFG

This can be contrasted with their responses to a question about the perceived best way to learn a language. The students here articulated a different theme from what they found difficult about English. There was a desire to get away from the grammatical competences and focus on other aspects of the language:

- The best way mmmm. To touch English because of several reasons. We cannot easily go abroad so we have to find how to touch English by any way that I can find. So every day if we take care of grammars we will not be able to speak so fluently. Because if we concentrate too much on grammars we are afraid of speaking so I think it is better to touch English, to speak English even though it may be broken. Including body language – touch English. JFG
- When people really like to speak English they must feel English every day for example when you see DVDs or TV every day you must choose English subtitles or something.

**Why is watching movies good?**

Because it is – is interesting and you feel like you are in America or England or – you can feel the country. You can feel surrounded by English without going abroad so I like to watch movies in English. **JFG**

- When I lived in Nepal at first it was difficult. Then I could speak to Nepal people so I became a good speaker. So I think to live in another country, be surrounded by the language is the best way. **GFG**
- Everyday speak English – it is best to be surrounded by English. **PFG**

On the one hand students were saying the difficulties they had with the language were with the form (the grammatical competence). These were aspects that they could focus on, had experience with (formal EFL instruction in schools/universities) and were tangible to them. However they perceived the best way to learn the language was to “touch English,” to be “surrounded by the language.” This represented the other competences of learning a language such as the strategic and sociolinguistic competences (see 2.10). The perceived best ways to learn the language went beyond just the study of the form of the language in other words, it also included experiencing the language and to describe this, metaphorical terms were often used.

The teachers also supported the students’ ideas on how to best learn the language. Jesse, reflecting on his own experience and contrasting it with his students, emphasized the value of:

being surrounded by the language, wives that speak it, families that speak yeah if people around me didn’t speak Japanese I would never learn. You mimic those around you. But for those students who learn English in Japan – **J2**

The final comment highlights his opinion that the students are not surrounded by English. Their exposure to the language is usually limited to the classroom.

Patrick articulated similar ideas when he said:

they also ask me “How can I learn English quickly?” and I tell them to find a girlfriend or boyfriend. Why is that? Because it is natural, it is a natural thing to sit and talk. You are consistently learning. **P1**

Jesse later gave his reason why he thought being surrounded by the language was necessary to learn English:

No matter how well you know something, using it is different. It is like reading a book on rugby. Like if I read a book on rugby I’ll say, “Ok I know how to play

let's go!" but I'd get creamed on my first time out. You gotta get out there and learn how to hit and where to put the ball in the tackle. It is theory versus practice. You know if you read a book on brain surgery you still don't know how to do it. **J2**

Winston highlighted the problems that his students had in learning in an EFL environment and not being surrounded by the language. Reflecting on the previous comments about learning languages, that you have to experience the language and not just study the form, he told a story about one of his high level students who had had an experience in Hawaii:

I have a student and he went to Hawaii and he was in a restaurant and he shouted "excuse me" to try and get the waiter's attention and the waiter came over and told him he would have to wait. He said that he felt really embarrassed because he realized that he shouldn't have shouted "excuse me." He noticed people came into the restaurant and waited to be served whereas coming from Japan he thought he had to inform the waiter he was ready. He learnt by experience, by observing other people in another country how to behave. **W2**

All of this shows, quite clearly, I believe, an awareness of the implicit nature of language learning and therefore also the need to experience using the language in natural ways. How to go about this kind of learning in the classroom was a more difficult prospect for both the teachers and the students. There was potential for this kind of learning in the classroom; however, instead instruction was mainly focused on other aspects of the language. Generally, when it was addressed, cultural learning was the exchange of tangible cultural knowledge about English-speaking countries, with an occasional reference to pragmatics. Within these classrooms, it was of secondary importance to other aspects of language instruction.

## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

Having provided an overview of the current literature, outlined the methods used to gather data and presented the data in thematic categories, this chapter will now discuss the findings in relation to the research questions and the current literature. It will explore and analyse relationships within the data that will lead to the implications of the findings in the final chapter. The first two sections will consider the first research question:

*A. What factors are influential in the creation of the classroom environment and what kind of classroom culture is formed in private adult English language classes in Japan?*

### **5.1 Managing the context**

Pennycook (2001) argued that classrooms are a complex interplay between the realities of the outside world and what goes on inside of them. The data revealed that eikaiwa classes were a complex space with many influences. In this study, an integrated mix of factors, both internal and external, affected classroom practice. These factors in this discussion are called the ‘sociocultural aspects’. I use this term to include the social and cultural factors that influence language learning and teaching in the classroom. It includes external factors like the business and social realities and internal factors such as the participants’ beliefs and motivations.

#### **5.1.1 The business needs**

The private English conversation class is a very competitive business. The retention of existing students and the attraction of new students is an economic reality. Within the framework of typical language classroom practice that would be expected from many classrooms around the world (physical classroom arrangement, teacher as class leader, use of textbooks and so forth), one strong influence on the classroom were these business realities.

The data revealed that the business realities hung over the choices the teachers made and also influenced the relationships within the classroom. This is because, above all, from the teachers' perspective, the main focus was to maintain or increase the number of students (see 4.2.2). Therefore students' 'wants' and satisfaction were at the forefront of the teachers' thinking.

### **5.1.2 The teacher beliefs**

First and foremost the teachers took into account the business needs of the situation. It took precedence over everything else. There was a pressure to "keep the students happy" and to "keep them coming back" (4.2.2). This pressure had a strong effect on classroom practices.

Teachers perceived they needed to keep things fun, friendly and enjoyable. If the classes were enjoyable, the students would be more likely to come back (4.2.2). Related to this was the pressure to include as much speaking as possible. The teachers were well aware of the students' desire to focus on speaking in the class. Lots of fun and speaking were considered aspects of a 'successful classroom' in this business environment.

These business pressures sometimes contradicted what the teachers perceived the students needed, however. Getting the students back was more important than the students "learning anything concrete" (4.2.2). George felt they sometimes needed a more balanced approach to lessons that included some grammar instruction but this was not what the students wanted. All they wanted was a "chance to speak" (4.2.2).

The teachers indicated making the classroom a fun, friendly environment was beneficial to the learning process. George stated there was pressure to keep things "enjoyable" (4.2.2) as it coincided with business needs, but also the teachers generally thought this kind of classroom promoted a positive learning environment. Jesse stated that if you made the students comfortable "anyone can learn" (4.3.1).

It needs to be included here, however, that the teachers shared certain of the students' perceptions about the limitations of their learning situation. For example, a lack of opportunity to use the language was a problem (4.2.4). They also perceived that years of studying English at school had developed the students' writing and reading skills to a higher level than their listening and speaking skills.

### 5.1.3 The student beliefs

In this EFL context the students perceived they had very little chance to use their English outside of the classroom. There was little chance to interact face to face in English or to integrate into any type of English-speaking community. Most of the students, it can be said, were relatively isolated from English-speaking settings. This was a social reality of living in Japan especially away from the major cities.

However, it wasn't the only factor in this type of 'linguistic isolation'. *Kokusaika* policies in formal education promote learning English with references to western English-speaking countries only, the so-called native speaker countries. Non-western countries are excluded (Kubota, 1998). *Nihonjinron* theories, which are part of *kokusaika*, create value judgements on language and communication and influence the world view of many Japanese, analysts argue (see 2.11). Many students believed that to learn English they needed to communicate with 'native speakers'. Throughout the data this was an evident belief (see 4.2.3; 4.2.4; 4.5.1 for examples).

Therefore, it can be argued that there was a type of language isolation that was created by the students' belief in the need to learn only from 'native speakers'. There were strong indications from the students that the lack of 'chances' to be able to communicate to 'English-speaking people' was their major concern about studying English. And also this lack of opportunity to talk to native speakers was perceived by them as a major stumbling block to better proficiency (4.2.4).

The students therefore wanted to 'speak' as much as possible in the class (4.2.3). The class was the opportunity to speak to the native English speaker. It was a way to "touch English" (4.5.2). This was one of the reasons the classes focused on speaking as the students as paying customers had a strong influence on class content.

### 5.1.4 The contradiction

The data pointed to a discrepancy between what was desired by both teachers and students and the realities of the situation. A fun, interactive classroom seemed to fit the students' wants, what the teachers perceived to be part of student needs and also the business needs. However both students and teachers acknowledged this was not an easy objective.

The teachers stated that one of their main stresses was inactive or passive students. Winston stated that there had to be a lot of participation in order for the class to work (4.4.2), but all the teachers explained one of the main problems in class was inactive students. The ‘tricks’ of teaching in such an environment overcame such difficulties.

The students also spoke of this issue but from a different angle. They explained the difficulty in participating in the classroom and getting used to such an environment (4.3.2). Many of the students indicated they needed to change in order to operate in the classroom environment. A student stated, for example, “I must build up myself”; another said, “I am an actress in class” (4.4.2).

### **5.1.5 The power dynamics**

It can be noted here that the realities of the context, especially the business realities, affected the power dynamics in the class. These realities represent the complex interplay between these classrooms and the outside world. The political relationships from the world outside are reproduced in the classroom (Pennycook, 2000). In this context it can be described as paying customers (the students) and the service provider (the teacher/school). The teachers were the class leaders, expected to provide an appropriate teaching approach and materials and to address the needs of the class (provide a service). However, the students as paying customers with individual needs had a considerable influence on these choices. As Pennycook (2000) explained, the walls of the classroom are permeable to the outside world realities.

### **5.1.6 Student motivations**

For some of the students the reasons for taking private English classes depended on their personal or professional circumstances. One example of this was the young woman with the foreign boyfriend in Canada (4.2.5). They had identifiable extrinsic motives to learn the language. It would be easy to say the motivation to learn was idiosyncratic to each individual (4.2.5), however the data revealed a more complicated picture.

If the majority of students gained no immediate personal gains from studying the language and/or few chances for interaction in the language, why go to great lengths and expense to learn it? Ryan (2009) states the Japanese context can be understood to a certain extent by Dörnyei’s concept of the ideal L2 self (see 2.8). The positive attitudes towards the TL communities, in this case English-speaking countries, self-motivates the

students to learn English in order to fulfill their dreams of becoming their ideal self (Dörnyei, 2009). These students are intrinsically motivated as they learn for their own self-perceived needs.

The data revealed the students' positive attitudes to the target language. For the majority of cases there was an explicit motivation to interact with 'native speakers' and learn about native speaker communities. The chance to be able to interact with a native English-speaking foreigner in class was cited by some students as one reason why they took *eikaiwa* classes. Where does this positive attitude towards so called 'native speakers' of English come from? Analysts state the discourses of *nihonjinron* learnt at school and taken up by the mass media have an influence on the world view of many Japanese (2.11). The teachers indicated that there was a 'thirst' for knowledge about native speaker communities and that they were asked a lot of questions about their home and other 'Western' countries (4.5.2).

### **5.1.7 Classroom practices**

How are comfortable environments created that take into account the context? It can be said that there was a naturally occurring 'informal needs analysis' process. The decisions about class content and teaching approach were choices made by the teachers under certain influences and pressures both outside and inside the classroom. In this situation the teachers tried to find an approach that 'fit' the context as best they could.

The data revealed that the teachers believed the ability to do an informal needs analysis depended on both experience and the ability to empathize with the students. The teachers indicated the need to 'read' the students (4.2.7). This gives teachers the capacity to adapt their lessons to suit the needs of the students. As well, through experience teachers got to know the 'dos and don'ts' or the 'tricks' of teaching in this context. This can be explained as the ability or know-how to organize a classroom where the language is drawn out of the students to focus on their speaking and listening skills. The 'tricks' were to create active, communicative classrooms where all participants contributed.

The data showed a variety of classroom practices that were employed by the teachers to work with the context, such as the business and social realities, and overcome any difficulties, such as passive students. These included:

- a focus on the students' weaker skills (speaking and listening);
- predictable classroom routines to take away the unexpected (4.3.2);
- managing speaking turns in the class so everyone contributed (4.3.3);
- the use of humour (4.3.4);
- the use of scaffolding and speech modification (4.3.5).

Patrick had a name for his own personal approach called the 'look and say' method. He articulated that it used a lot of scaffolding and pattern practice.

However, classroom practices were also strongly geared towards student wants. The teachers, even though they perceived a need for a more balanced approach, did not focus on this because students desired speaking and other communicative tasks. The students' satisfaction as paying customers had a strong effect on classroom practices.

The influence of the classes' designated textbook was also apparent. The teachers used the textbook as a loose syllabus guide. Each class had a designated textbook and the teachers were going through the textbook's lessons either sequentially and following the book's curriculum or were using parts the students had not yet covered. It provided certain practicalities for the class. The textbooks directed class topics and provided the language content for the classes. An appropriate textbook was chosen by the teachers (or in Patrick's case made in the school) to suit the students' levels.

### **5.1.8 Summary**

In light of these circumstances, how can the teachers create and establish a classroom environment that enhances learning and student satisfaction? In other words, what can be considered 'good teaching practice' in this context? The data implied that a flexibility to adjust to the context was important. Private EFL classes in Japan demand their own teaching approach. Holliday (1996) argued that each English language classroom with its complexity and variety needs to be investigated to find a teaching approach that fits the context. Bax (2003) postulated that there had been a neglect of contextual issues in teaching approaches. He saw an assumption in English teaching that methodology was the key and context was of secondary importance. He argued for a different mentality:

Surely a key to good teaching is understanding and being able to analyze and reflect on culture, the classroom, the pupil's needs and so forth. (p. 282)

Each situation is different. Patrick articulated this when talking about the difference in teaching approaches he perceived were needed in Japan and the Middle East:

For a successful classroom in Japan, in the Middle East it is the exact opposite so the teaching techniques in both countries are very much different. **P1**

To be able to take into account the sociocultural aspects, adjust accordingly and create a positive successful learning environment, experience in and knowledge of this context was important. Senior (2006) found a similar principle in her research. Experienced teachers, she concluded, have a firm experimental foundation, a developed knowledge base to know the specific needs of their classes and what works and does not work in their classes. They go through a process of adjustment and can eventually use what can be called a class-centered approach. This approach is based on the teacher's perception of what is best for the class at any given time. McKay (2002, p. 116) expressed similar sentiments when she suggested there was no best method for each context but instead the most important factor in selecting an appropriate teaching approach was the teacher's "sense of plausibility". This sense of plausibility was affected by the teacher's experiences and knowledge of the context.

This means a shift away from solely methodology-driven or language-driven approaches. Instead the teacher needs to respond to the realities of the situation. This is not an original idea. As mentioned, Bax (2003) urges a paradigm shift to place a priority on the context, while Senior (2002, 2009) advocates a class-centred approach and Holliday (2005) argues for learner-centeredness approaches based on contextual issues, to name a few.

The data suggests that the experienced teachers in this study did adjust to find a teaching approach that fitted the situation. This created tensions, such as catering to the students' wants as paying customers over what the teachers thought was needed. For example, reflecting on his approach George stated there was a difference between what was considered a 'good lesson' and what he did to try and keep his students happy (4.2.2). However, the adjustment did produce comfortable learning environments that keep the students coming back.

This process occurred naturally through trial and error. New teachers fought with the context (4.2.6). Patrick stated new teachers needed a mentor to show them the "dos and

don'ts" (4.2.6). What is apparent is that teachers need to go into *eikaiwa* classrooms equipped to deal with the situation. This means an awareness of the context and the flexibility to adjust. Teacher training should prepare teachers for this reality.

## **5.2 The classroom culture**

In this human social context the participants created their own unique type of interaction and relationships. Despite the varied goals, motivations, beliefs, differing past experiences and cultural perceptions between the teachers and the students, they are brought together under the umbrella of learning and teaching a foreign language. The classes were casual, relaxed learning environments where relationships were formed, influenced by the sociocultural aspects and largely restricted to the classrooms. The term 'sociopedagogical relationships' is used here to describe the unique type of relationship between the participants and 'classroom practices' found in the classes.

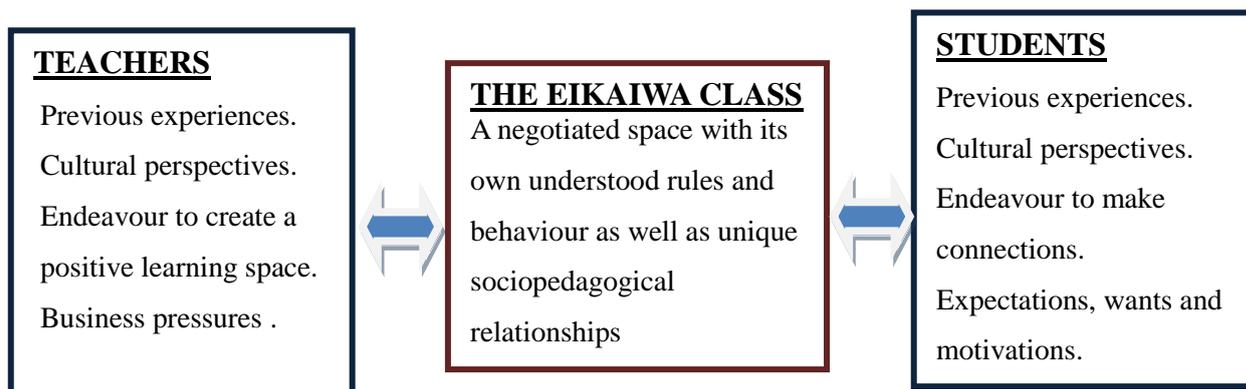
Both teachers and students had vested interests to create a positive learning environment so there was an endeavour to make interpersonal connections between the participants. Sowdon (2007, p. 308) found the same in his studies:

success as a teacher does not depend on the approach or method that you follow so much as on your integrity as a person and the relationships that you are able to develop in the classroom. The ability to build and maintain human relationships in this way is central to effective teaching.

From both the teachers' and students' perspective, the maintenance of positive relations between members was an important part of the classroom.

In my study, the data revealed this endeavour for connections was an important element in the development of a classroom culture that generally overcame the obstacles inherent in interacting in such a context. If we focus on the teacher-student relationship, research indicates that in the absence of shared cultural experience there are possibilities of misunderstanding, error and bias (Bennet, 1998; Hall, 1998; Shah, 2004). The *eikaiwa* classroom in other words is an intercultural setting. However there was a mutual understanding that had developed between participants on how to interact and behave in the classroom. The data doesn't show an intercultural utopia, as there were misunderstandings (see 4.4.2); however, it reveals a negotiated space that was mutually inclusive for all parties.

The classroom practices that were used and the sociopedagogical relationships formed were familiar for the participants with understood rules and routines. It can be further represented by the diagram in Figure 5.1 presented below.



*Figure 5.1: The influences that affect behaviour and the relations formed in the classroom*

### 5.2.1 Friendly relationships

The students and the teachers tried to create a friendly atmosphere. They saw it as important in creating a successful learning environment. A friendly, relaxed environment, the teachers believed, led to a responsive classroom with lots of speaking. And the amount of speaking was perceived by the teachers as an indication of how successful the classroom was (see 4.2.3). The creation of a positive, friendly, non-threatening learning climate was an important aspect for the students as they attempted to communicate in the language.

Techniques used to establish personal, friendly relations that the data unveiled included:

- constant praise from the teachers when the students spoke and to a lesser extent between students as well. Encouragement to speak and praise for effort was a constant characteristic of all the classes especially from teacher to student. It was not only spoken encouragement; there was also clapping and high fives. The teachers all had their own forms of encouragement (4.3.6).
- managing speaking turns. This was important in keeping people involved and giving all the students a turn to speak. The teachers often directed the turns at speaking but at times the students themselves were also self-regulating.

- using humour; a big factor in the classes in establishing and maintaining friendly relations.

We will now look at the use of humour more deeply as one example of maintaining friendly relations. There are multiple functions of humour but the basic social function is that it serves to create and maintain social cohesion and to negotiate the power dynamics of a group (Holmes, 2000). When informality is valued, there is an emphasis on the reduction of power differences between participants in a communicative act. Humour often functions to “gain willing compliance, retain goodwill, promote social cohesion and at least superficially, to reduce asymmetry” (Holmes, 2000, p. 165). I think the data shows this type of humour is an important factor in class management. For example, the teachers tried to de-emphasize any power differential with humour. It was also an important way for students to take risks, to work around the classes’ expected norms and behaviour (4.3.4). Holmes (2000, p. 165) labelled this later type of humour, “contestive humour”. The data showed humour functioned in the class in a number of ways:

- It maintained class order.
- It created a bond between participants as insider’s information was needed to get the jokes.
- It also gave the students chances to speak in impromptu ways outside of the established routines (4.3.4).

We can conclude that humour in this context was an invaluable tool for the participants. It maintained social cohesion in the face of tricky power dynamics when there was a need for teachers to manage or students to contest. As Jesse (4.3.4) stated, “It [humour] is better than berating someone ... you want them to come back the next week.” In this learning environment where there were business pressures and participants came from differing cultural perceptions, it seemed humour transcended any barriers and maintained harmonious sociopedagogical relationships.

### **5.2.2 Taking away the anxieties**

Taking away the unexpected made the classes comfortable settings for all the participants. All the classes observed had similar aspects that took away the anxieties of communicating in a foreign language with people outside their usual social groups and

created non-threatening learning environments. There are certain strategies that individuals employ to interact in response to the challenge of talking in a language of limited familiarity and/or talking to people with differing cultural perceptions (see 2.7). Motivated by a shared responsibility for making meaning in a challenging context, participants not only accommodated the conventions of others but also employed tactics to do this.

One classroom practice that helped shape the non-threatening environment of these classrooms was their routine nature. The classes had a certain ritualized routine to all of them and in this regard seemed a type of extended speech act. The students got to know the teachers' patterns and so "there is a familiarity in the class that makes the students feel comfortable" **J2**. One simple example of this was the starting routine of Winston's class. The students knew the start of the lesson from the teacher's tone and that it was 'news time', where students gave personal news, in turn, in a clockwise direction, as a warm-up before any new language instruction began.

Turns at speaking were another feature of the classrooms (see 4.3.3). The speaking turns were regulated by the teacher as class leader but there were also speaking turns that were self-regulated by the students. No one individual dominated and so this ritualized turns at speaking and, I believe, maintained harmonious social relations and gave everyone a chance to participate. Just like in natural situations, I would argue that one of the major stresses in talking in such contexts is knowing when and how to contribute (see 2.7). In these classes, speaking turns were clearly marked and this aspect reduced the stress of speaking in the classroom.

Another aspect that reduced the stress of interacting in the classroom, as opposed to 'natural contexts', was the fact that the teachers modified their speech. The teachers were aware and deliberately slowed down their speech and also used language that was known to the students. Through experience, trial and error, teachers learnt what language their students knew and didn't know. Students commented that it was easy to speak to their teachers and that it was vastly different to speaking to 'someone on the street'. Speech modification is noted as a common strategy to the challenge of interaction in intercultural settings (Giles, 1977, p. 332).

### 5.2.3 The adjustment

There was an implicit adjustment made by the participants in these classrooms in order to create successful environments for learning in which everyone was comfortable. To avoid the problems inherent in intercultural settings people try to find a common ground. This can be related to Kramsch's (1993) theory of a negotiated third space (2.7). This mutual understanding that developed had similar features to other intercultural settings but also had features that were unique to the sociopedagogical relations of the classroom.

Firstly the classroom was a unique 'hybrid' cultural environment. I say 'hybrid' meaning it had influences from both the teachers and the students and these influences were accepted norms of the group's behaviour. Therefore it was a classroom culture that demanded a certain flexibility from the group's members.

One example of this was the use of Japanese in the classroom. The students used a sort of interlanguage, the majority of which was English but it also contained interim use of Japanese. Titles (the use of *San* for all participants), certain expressions and sounds were used idiosyncratically by students in their own language but within the boundaries of the group's accepted norms (4.3.7). This Japanese language use was not used to bridge knowledge gaps, it seemed, but was a type of hybrid language developed in and unique to the classroom context that was natural and seemly implicit to the participants. I would suggest it was a way of making the classroom 'comfortable'.

Another example of hybridity was the forms of polite behaviour from the students. The teachers' expectations of the class were that they should be informal, relaxed spaces in which to practise the language. The data revealed that the students enjoyed the fun and enjoyable atmosphere but also saw the classroom as a place where certain behaviour was expected. Bowing, honorific titles and expressing gratitude after each activity were common types of Japanese formality in these *eikaiwa* classes (4.3.7). Winston commented that because the students did it, he sometimes also engaged in this type of behaviour.

One of the main contributing factors to a positive learning environment in this context was the teacher's empathy developed over time towards their students. This included:

- speech modification (knowing what the students could or couldn't understand) (4.3.5);
- the tolerance the teachers had developed for periods of silence in the class (4.4.1);
- knowing the type of humour that worked and did not work (4.4.1);
- the teacher's knowledge of Japanese language and body language (4.4.1).

The point here is that I believe the teachers were sensitive to the students' communicative styles. Part of this, it could be argued, is individual common sense and/or social skills but the level of understanding the teachers had for the students was through experience in the context and through the endeavour to make connections with them

The data suggests that both the students and the teachers had modified their behaviour in order to fit into the class environment. Focusing on the student, teachers noted, for example, a change in their body language or the way they told jokes (see 4.4.1). The students also noted changes in their own behaviour and assumptions of different personas, as the actress comment in 4.3.8 highlights. One student noted how "tough" (4.3.8) this transition can be for students. This behaviour modification, it can be argued, is necessary in order for students and teachers to successfully operate in such a context.

#### **5.2.4 Summary**

Senior (2006) reports that teachers see it as important to establish personal relationships with their students and suggests that teachers are able to adjust and adapt to create positive learning environments. The data here points to experienced teachers being generally adept at creating and maintaining harmonious relationships within a challenging context.

The sociopedagogical relationships and the classroom practices employed had similar aspects to what other research had found in other settings. There was a 'culture of learning' formed in the classrooms and this can be seen with such aspects as the routines and regulated speaking turns. Kato (2001) argues a culture of learning forms in ESL/EFL contexts to overcome different expectations and norms between teachers and students who have different past experiences and cultural perceptions. Power dynamics

in the sociopedagogical relationships between the teachers and students were negotiated by the use of humour. This corresponds to research done by Holmes (2000) who pointed out the important use of humour to contest and manage power differentials. And parallels can be drawn with Kramsch's third space in the adjustment of individuals (2.7). This can be seen in unique classroom characteristics such as the use of a type of interlanguage.

The endeavour for connections and the strategies involved were, the data suggests, created out of the necessity to create mutually expedient learning environments. From the teachers' perspective it was done as second nature, through built up experience rather than any conscious strategic approach. From the students' perspective the motivation was for harmonious relations in order to "touch English" (4.5.3) and was to some degree an implicit process (4.5.3). Leki (2006) found unique "socioacademic" relationships (see 2.8) between the teachers and students in academic contexts in which there was a mutual accommodation to find a comfortable common ground. Similarly the study found unique, 'sociopedagogical' relationships that were formed in this non-academic setting and influenced by contextual factors.

### **5.3 Culture learning**

This section considers Research Question B:

***How do language teachers and students perceive and deal with the sociolinguistic aspects of language learning and teaching in private English classes in Japan?***

The findings show that culture learning for the EFL students of these classes should be an important aspect of their language learning process. Due to the nature of the context, the teachers have a responsibility to address culture learning in some way. Culture learning is understood here as getting prepared for interaction with people outside your own social groups. However the data also suggests that culture learning was often implicit and if not neglected, then reduced to a secondary importance. In this section I will discuss why culture learning is important but is not being addressed properly. However there is opportunity for students together with their teachers to explore culture learning through intercultural communicative competence principles by analysing classroom practices and relationships. Finally, it is concluded that awareness and

reflection of these things are the keys to more successful culture learning in this EFL setting.

### **5.3.1 Why is culture learning important?**

There are many and varied reasons to include culture learning in a language course. However the reasons to do so in *eikaiwa* will be discussed in this section in relation to what was found in the data. I believe the data shows that the participants were aware that there were sociolinguistic elements to language learning but due to its complexity both the teachers and students were limited in their ability to deal with it.

Firstly, the findings suggest the students wanted more encompassing culture learning. The students displayed an understanding of the link between language and culture and its role in effective language learning. On being asked the best way to learn a language they gave responses such as: “to be surrounded by English”, “to touch English”, “to experience English” (4.5.3). They emphasized the need to experience English, to be exposed to authentic language. Studying the ‘nuts and bolts’ (syntax, lexis, phonology and the like, the grammatical competences) was the theory but that was different to actual practice. One of the reasons for taking lessons from a foreign teacher was the students’ perceived need for cultural understanding. This is important not just from a student beliefs standpoint but also from a business needs standpoint where student satisfaction is paramount.

Secondly the data showed that there was a need for culture learning. The students’ intended uses for their English were to communicate with a variety of English-speaking foreigners. The reality, especially due to Japan’s location, is that the students are just as likely to use the language with people from non-English-speaking countries. The data implies the lingua franca status of English for the students (see 4.5.2).

The problem in this EFL context is that the students don’t have the opportunity to often interact with people in English from outside their own social groups. This is in part self-imposed, as the data shows *nihonjinron* as a factor in some students’ world views (5.1.2). One of the effects of *nihonjinron* discourses is that students believed they could only learn ‘real’ English from native speakers. And also this language isolation is a social reality. Aside from their teachers, contact with people with differing cultural

experiences and perceptions is limited. This leads to a large gap in their language learning.

The students had trouble understanding and using their English outside of the classroom. They found it easier to communicate in class where everything was predictable and they had gotten used to that particular type of interaction. However some students were perplexed about why communication was different when interacting with someone away from the class norms (4.3.5).

Teacher beliefs and practices also indicated a need for a better understanding of culture learning. There seemed to be an understanding that culture learning was in part a socialization process. For example, the teachers indicated they understood the students need be exposed to authentic language use and to learn by experience. On this point Jesse stated that it was theory (studying the forms of the language) versus practice (authentic communication), and reading a book on brain surgery, for example, doesn't make you a competent brain surgeon (4.5.3). However, there was a limited exposure to authentic language. For example, teachers used language and situations from textbooks, practice focused on language functions, and imparting cultural knowledge was focused on tangible features such as facts about countries.

Teachers were also aware of intended student uses of the language. That they would be just as likely to, or more likely to, use their English with non-native speakers. However, there was a complete focus on native speaker norms despite what the students would face outside the classroom. One example is George telling the students in his class that they have to give a reason when you say "No" as it is deemed polite. (4.5.2) Then in the follow-up interview he stated the reason why he gives that kind of information was that the student used his English in business all around the world with people from Taiwan, Germany and so forth. The focus is on native English speaker norms but the student is intending to use English as a lingua franca. The information about native speaker norms is very necessary and relevant but it is only part of the picture. Students also need to be aware that there may be more differences in communicative styles when interacting with people from various backgrounds.

### 5.3.2 The ICC approach

The data suggested that culture learning was not being adequately addressed in the classroom (5.3.1). Therefore there needs to be a greater awareness and focus on what cultural learning is and how it could be taught in *eikaiwa*. With a lack of opportunities for authentic interaction outside of the classroom cultural learning needs to be addressed explicitly. McKay (2002) raises the question that if cultural learning involves interaction with people outside your own social groups, how can the classroom replicate that process and get students to reflect on and be better prepared for the things they will encounter?

Byram (1997) argues that teachers should strive to develop such things as the right attitudes, skills and knowledge in order to improve a student's intercultural communicative competence (see 2.10). The problem is that due to the nature of culture it is difficult or even impossible to predict what the students will encounter when using English. Rather than just the transmission of knowledge about certain target groups, people need to be sensitized to the sociolinguistic factors in language. They need to be aware that culture learning is an important part of communicating in a foreign language.

Byram's (1997) model of ICC specifications includes having knowledge of self and other, as well as about

- how interaction occurs.
- how to interpret and relate information.
- how to engage with the political consequences of education.
- how to discover cultural information.
- how to be: how to relativize oneself and value the attitudes and beliefs.

(Corbett, 2003, p. 32 adapted from Bryam 1997)

These notions could help the participants of *eikaiwa* to directly deal with the issues of culture learning. Corbett (2003) states that people need to be equipped with the tools to analyse and interpret this aspect of language. They need ways of observing, interpreting and understanding the different contexts of communication they will encounter, as well as reflecting on their own cultural perceptions and experiences. Just as grammar is used to study the form of the language, a type of 'cultural grammar' is needed to study the less explicit aspects of language use. ICC can help to address this issue.

The notions of ICC would be beneficial in *eikaiwa* in a number of ways. For example, understanding and being aware of differing norms of interaction in different contexts could better prepare students for what they would encounter outside the class. As well, it could make implicit the interactional norms of the classroom to enhance cultural learning (see 5.3.3). Awareness of the political consequences of education and the mass media could expose the effects of *kokusaika* policies and *nihonjinron* discourses. The issues of English as a world language could be discussed and addressed. In other words a working knowledge of ICC by both teachers and students in *eikaiwa* could greatly improve the language learning process.

### **5.3.3 The classroom experience**

Part of cultural learning is a basic socialization process. People learn how to act appropriately, what to say, how to say it and when to say it by interacting and observing the people around them. Often this on-going process is implicit as we are naturally influenced by those around us (see 2.4). So contact and interaction with people is the catalyst for a certain part of cultural learning.

Therefore we can say that natural and implicit culture learning was happening in the classrooms. Culture is learnt by interaction with others so by default the classroom is an extension of that process. The students (and teachers) were learning how to interact in another language and/or with people from differing cultural perceptions. The adjustments the students and teachers made, the influences on each other and the classroom practices used to connect to the other participants in the class (such as the use of humour, speaking turns and speech modification), I would argue, were a type of cultural learning.

I propose that analysing the sociopedagogical relationships and the classroom practices can provide an insight into the nature of intercultural language use. Reflecting on the use of English in the classroom setting could provide useful insights to prepare for intercultural encounters. The critical point here is that the EFL classroom is by default an intercultural setting and mirrors to a degree the differences in communication styles the students will face outside the classroom. This is made all the more explicit because *eikaiwa* classes are small, interpersonal places of intercultural interaction.

How could this be done? In order to analyse the classroom people need the tools to do so. Firstly, ICC principles and notions described earlier would prepare the students. As well, basic principles from ethnography can provide the tools. These could include:

- developing observational skills of how to look at interaction and behaviour;
- focusing on making the implicit become explicit;
- creating an understanding of small “c” culture;
- looking at the context of interaction and behaviour and using it to encourage a holistic focus;
- gaining an understanding that there are multiple perspectives (realities).

Ethnographic tools provide a lens by which to discover different worlds. With these basic tools, participants in the EFL classroom would be better equipped to pay attention to the sociocultural issues in language teaching and learning and to deal with the sociolinguistic nature of language use.

The use of movies, TV and the internet in tandem with ethnographic tools of observation could be beneficial. The point is to highlight the nature of interaction, to bring into focus the often implicit aspects of communication. The students need to be exposed to authentic examples of English use and contrast them to the interactional norms in the classroom. One simple example would be highlighting and discussing the aspect of taking turns to speak around a dinner table in the U.S. using a movie scene and contrasting it to classroom practices.

### **5.3.4 Summary**

We can conclude from all of this that teachers in this EFL context need a broad understanding of the sociocultural nature of classrooms and the sociolinguistic nature of language use. Teachers with a better awareness and knowledge of possible sociocultural variation in language learning and teaching are in a better position to facilitate such competence in their students. It is the teacher’s responsibility to be brokers between the language and the students, to connect the students to a world that is different from their own. How can teachers do this if they have a limited understanding themselves of the processes involved in foreign language education?

The students themselves need to become intercultural mediators if they are to effectively use their English skills outside of the classroom. In order to do this they need

to be aware of the sociolinguistic nature of language use and the complexities of communicating with someone outside of their own social group. This can be regarded as culture learning. Regarding this aspect of foreign language education, what is important is not the amount of knowledge transmitted, as intercultural contacts are complex human phenomena each with its own variables. Instead, it is the attitudes, skills and awareness that people need to enhance. Overall there needs to be a critical awareness of the processes that humans naturally go through and the influences on these processes when people are faced with interacting in new environments. For the students, this is especially important as English is a lingua franca and any potential use would be in a variety of contexts.

The reality is that language learning and teaching in this EFL context is a complex human activity. The teachers already have many burdens and the students already have many challenges. However, a working awareness of ICC and its notions means potential for a richer and more satisfying experience. Therefore culture learning for both teachers and students is not an optional extra. It is a necessity if we are to realize effective foreign language education. There is no prescribed or easy way to go about this but an awareness and some useful 'tools' or guidelines are the first step forward.

## CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

The research presented in this thesis highlights the need to have a wide perspective on language learning and teaching. It explored classroom practices and contexts and found that *eikaiwa* classrooms were indeed like icebergs in the fact that there was more to them than met the eye. And also in conjunction with these findings it showed that not all of the language learning puzzle was being addressed.

The study's first question dealt with the social and cultural influences on *eikaiwa* classrooms. There were a number of significant findings. Firstly, *eikaiwa* is a business and the teachers strived to keep the paying customers happy and coming back to their classrooms. There was a necessity to 'read' the students, be sensitized to the context and satisfy the students' wants and needs as much as possible. In order to do this the teachers practised what can be called an 'informal needs analysis'. Through experience in the context mediated by their own perspective, they formulated their own approach as best they could. Therefore it was found the influences of the context affected the content and behaviour in the *eikaiwa* classroom.

Within this context a unique classroom culture was formed with its own practices and behaviour. Classroom practices reflected the need to work with the social and cultural issues. Examples of this were the use of humour to overcome relationship power dynamics and the use of speaking turns to ensure participation and ease anxieties. Both teachers and students were influential in creating and maintaining these classroom practices. Similarly, as the participants strove for connections, they adjusted their behaviour to create sociopedagogical relationships with its own interaction.

The second question of the study dealt with how teachers and students attempted to deal with the social and cultural nature of language learning and use. The findings raised some notable points. Overall the data suggested that there was a lack of understanding of the less explicit aspects of language learning. In other words, there needed to be a better awareness of the social and cultural aspects of the classroom as well as language learning. For example, culture learning was not being addressed

clearly in these classrooms. Culture learning here means the preparation of students for intercultural interactions.

The students and teachers focused on native speaker norms and their communities for reference points in their classes. This focus contrasted with the students' use or intended use of English as a lingua franca. It could be argued that the students were influenced by *nihonjinron* discourses that are inherent in Japanese education and society and the teachers were reacting to their students' 'thirst' for this knowledge. The problem is, for effective language learning and to increase the opportunity to use the language, a wider perspective of language use is required.

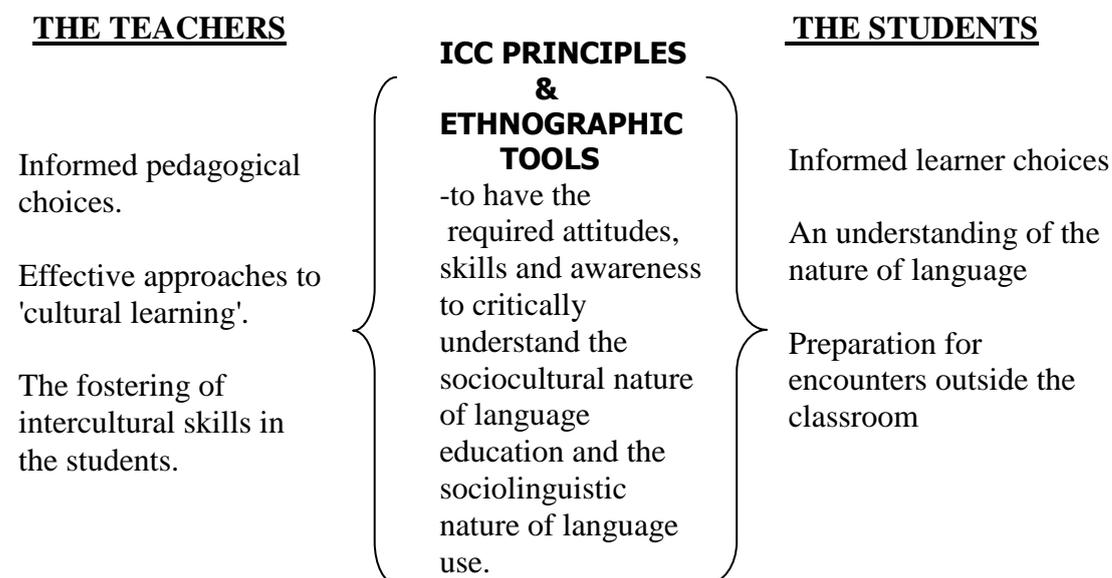
Also, it was found that the *eikaiwa* classroom was a unique environment. The teachers and students had differing cultural perspectives and backgrounds. To create a comfortable learning environment for all, the participants adjusted their behaviour and also brought aspects of their past experiences into the classroom. Tolerance of silence was one adjustment the teachers made in the class and the use of modified Japanese honorifics such as *San* by the students indicated aspects of politeness from Japanese society. It created a type interaction and language use that was unique to the classroom. The patterns of interaction are different outside the classroom however. The data suggested that this was an issue, as students found communication in English away from the classroom's norms difficult. In spite of this, classroom practices indicated a lack of focus and understanding of this aspect.

In general terms, a lot of cultural learning was 'ignored', with a focus instead on the more tangible aspects leaving this important part of language learning often untaught. Another important point is that from a teacher's perspective a better awareness and knowledge of possible sociocultural variation in language learning and teaching would put them in a better position to adjust to the context. As it was, the attempt to negotiate the context and find an appropriate teaching approach was left to natural processes. It was trial and error that only experience and the right attitude could facilitate.

We use grammar to enable learning as we study the language forms; we also need a type of 'cultural grammar' to address these issues inherent in language instruction and communication in order to facilitate competent holistic language learning. By 'cultural grammar', what is meant is giving people a way of looking at and interpreting the nature of language instruction and use. This is not an easy task. The research has highlighted

the difficulty of doing this kind of training. It has showed the nature of social and cultural issues are complex. Classroom cultures for example are all dynamic and nebulous, influenced by individual differences and with their own contextual variables.

However, for both teachers and students an understanding of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) principles (see 2.10) could provide a good basis to be able to foster these needs. Also a working knowledge of basic ethnographic ‘tools’, such as an awareness of multiple perspectives or a holistic focus on the nature of interaction, would be beneficial (see Figure 6.1). Basically, an awareness of the external context issues that affect communication and the internal context (what the participants bring) is crucial to assist linguistic competences. It is especially crucial for teachers to understand these issues as they have a responsibility to not only provide an appropriate teaching approach for each situation, but they are also required to foster ICC skills in their students in order for them to become better intercultural mediators. It is the teacher’s responsibility to be brokers between the students and the English language so they can connect the students to a differing perceptual world from their own.



*Figure 6.1: Guidelines for a more informed classroom in adult EFL classrooms in Japan.*

## **6.2 What has been achieved?**

The study is a holistic, descriptive look at the sociocultural aspects in language learning of a specific type of EFL classroom. It found aspects that were in line with descriptions of other classrooms in the literature but also others that were unique to this particular context. The study provides a description of the context, the interactions and the relationships within that context, and also deals with the important and often debated issue of culture learning as it relates to this particular setting.

By giving a thick description of what influences the EFL class, and how individuals view and operate in it, it has added to the already existing knowledge in relevant literature. A deeper understanding of what happens in these classes beyond the ‘nuts and bolts’ of language education highlights that all the aspects need to be consciously addressed in the classroom. The influences on language learning and the nature of language use cannot be ignored and left to natural and haphazard processes. The findings endorse a greater awareness of sociocultural aspects in language education and finding ways to deal with the sociolinguistic nature of language use.

Insights provided by the research have implications in a variety of ways connected with foreign or second language education. Teacher training courses, classroom practice, pedagogical approaches or simply preparing the students for language use outside the classroom in EFL should be guided by knowledge such as that explored in this study. Without such insights, teaching and learning goals become so much harder to achieve.

## **6.3 Limitations of the study**

The project provided a holistic description of EFL classrooms. Each classroom revealed its own patterns and each encounter provided a more in-depth look at these patterns. However time restrictions and practicalities such as access to settings played a part in the final nature of the report. The study touched on many aspects of language learning but because of the small number of classes and the number of times these were accessed, it could not explore each issue that it raised in greater detail. A complex and dynamic setting was revealed, however, that provides a base for further research.

The results show a description of a particular setting. They are not applicable to every educational environment. Each particular context has its own variables and unique

aspects. There are many different contexts even within and outside of Japan that have their own different dynamics, especially in more formal educational institutes. The study does emphasize the need to investigate each setting however.

#### **6.4 Recommendations for further research**

The research touched on many areas, opening a ‘Pandora’s box’ of issues that could be used for further research. The following suggestions are not only to build and extend the knowledge of this research but also to guide future similar research projects.

1. Longitudinal studies of EFL classrooms could provide the researcher with opportunities to further test findings and go into each issue in greater depth.
2. A focus on one particular aspect could provide a detailed account of certain features of these classrooms. Some examples of these could be:
  - motivational factors in EFL settings especially private adult classes.
  - the use of humour in EFL classes.
  - communication analysis in the classroom and how it compares to communication styles in other settings outside the classroom. The study reveals that this is an important area as students become socialized into an environment. Does this affect communication in the target language outside the classroom?
  - the role of power dynamics in the EFL classroom. This is an important area in understanding the sociopedagogical relations in these kinds of settings.
  - differences in uses of silence.
  - the use of a hybrid language in the classroom that is dominated by the target language but also affected by the students’ native language(s).
3. The research uncovered a unique environment that the students were acculturated into. They use and experience English in this setting with its own norms and communication styles. Does socialization into this environment affect learners’ use of the language outside of the classroom? This question remains unanswered.

As I see it, much remains to be done in exploring the various contexts where English is taught, particularly in EFL, and also concerning effective approaches to culture teaching. It is within these orientations that concerted efforts should be made to build up

the relevant knowledge for more effective approaches to foreign language teaching. Doing so may ensure that students and teachers are given the best possible instruction and training at all aspects of language education. The pursuit of that ideal needs to continue.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Information sheet for participants



**Massey University**  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
Te Kura Pūkenga Tangata

SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE STUDIES  
Private Bag 11 222  
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#### Information Sheet

### **A Qualitative Study of EFL Classrooms**

Dear

My name is Rory Banwell and I'm doing research for my thesis. The study will explore what goes on in EFL classrooms and how they are perceived by both the teachers and students.

#### **Why am I doing this study?**

I am doing this study because I think it is important to find out how both teachers and students perceive what is going on in English language classrooms. The data collected will hopefully lead to an improved understanding of these cross-cultural contexts.

#### **What am I going to do?**

I want to explore English language learning environments by recording what goes on in EFL classrooms and talk to the participants of these classrooms about their observations and experiences.

*Please note: this is a study about the classroom environment, basically the EFL experience and the participant's perceptions of what goes on in the classroom. It is non-judgemental and not about good or bad teaching or learning.*

For my project I want to:

- meet and talk to foreign teachers about their experiences and observations as an English teacher in Japan.
- take a look at a lesson and note down the characteristics of that environment.
- meet and talk to the students of these lessons in a group and talk about their EFL experience.

The interviews shouldn't take long and would be at a time and place that is convenient.

### **Will anyone else know what was said?**

I'd like to record the talks. This is so I can analyse what was said later on. You can turn off the recording device any time you want to. Some of the information that you tell me might be included in my project. However I will not use your name without permission and I will make sure all identities are protected. *All information will remain confidential.*

### **What rights do I have?**

You are a volunteer so you have the right to:

- decide not to join
- change your mind about participating at any time.
- ask me about the study any time you want are involved.
- talk to me knowing that your name will not be used unless your permission is given.
- decide not to answer a question I ask you if you don't want to.
- check and make changes to my transcript of our interview if you want.
- if requested a summary of the project findings will be given when it is finished.

### **Any questions?**

You can ask me questions about the research before you take part. You can contact me by e-mail at [roryinjapan@hotmail.com](mailto:roryinjapan@hotmail.com) or by phone 090-4387-8207.

Or you could ask one of my supervisors , Dr. Gillian Skyrme [g.r.skyrme@massey.ac.nz](mailto:g.r.skyrme@massey.ac.nz) or Dr. Averil Coxhead [a.coxhead@massey.ac.nz](mailto:a.coxhead@massey.ac.nz)

*“This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University’s Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.*

*If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor Sylvia Rumball, Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor (Research Ethics), telephone 06 350 5249, e-mail [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@massey.ac.nz) “.*

Thank you very much.

Rory Banwell

**Appendix B: Teacher consent form**



**Massey University**

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Te Kura Pūkenga Tangata

**A Qualitative Study of EFL Classrooms**

**CONSENT FORM: INTERVIEWS**

**This consent form will be held for a period of (5) years.**

I have read the information sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree to the interviews being recorded.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the information sheet.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Full name(printed):** \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to receive a summary of the results of the project when it is finished.

YES / NO

**Address / Contact Details:**

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**Massey University**  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
Te Kura Pūkenga Tangata

## **A Qualitative Study of EFL Classrooms**

### **CONSENT FORM: FOCUS GROUPS**

**This consent form will be held for a period of (5) years.**

I have read the information sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree to the interviews being recorded.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the information sheet.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Full name(printed):** \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to receive a summary of the results of the project when it is finished.

YES / NO

**Address / Contact Details:**

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