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Pepperdine University

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF JAPANESE  
UNDERGRADUATE EFL STUDENTS IN THE FLIPPED CLASSROOM

A dissertation proposal submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Learning Technologies

by

Jeffrey Gerald Mehring

January, 2014

Dr. Martine Jago – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Jeffrey Gerald Mehring

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES .....	vi
LIST OF FIGURES .....	vii
DEDICATION .....	viii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	ix
VITA .....	x
ABSTRACT .....	xii
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Problem Statement .....	5
Purpose Statement .....	6
Research Questions .....	7
Epistemology .....	8
Significance of Study .....	9
Definition of Terms .....	10
Limitations of the Study .....	11
Chapter Summary .....	11
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	13
History of English Language Learning in Japan .....	14
A Shift to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) .....	22
Technology as a Teaching and Learning Tool .....	27
Student Perceptions of Learning in Japan .....	33
Chapter Summary .....	38
Chapter 3: Methods .....	40
Research Design .....	41
Sources of Data .....	42
Tools and Instruments Used .....	45
Data Collection Strategies and Procedures .....	47
Human Subjects Considerations .....	55
Proposed Analysis Methods and Procedures .....	57
Means to Ensure Validity .....	59
Plan for Reporting Findings .....	60

	Page
Chapter 4: Results .....	62
Themes of Classroom Experience .....	63
Chapter Summary .....	82
Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings .....	83
Context of the Study .....	83
Conclusions .....	86
Implications .....	98
Project Evaluation .....	99
Recommendations .....	100
REFERENCES .....	106
APPENDIX A: Interview Schedule .....	115
APPENDIX B: Journal Questions .....	117
APPENDIX C: Observation Protocol .....	118
APPENDIX D: Permission to Conduct Research Letter .....	120
APPENDIX E: Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities Letter .....	121
APPENDIX F: Participation Request .....	124
APPENDIX G: Interview Follow-up .....	126
APPENDIX H: Journal Outtakes .....	127
APPENDIX I: Interview Outtakes .....	130
APPENDIX J: IRB Approval Letter .....	133

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1. Linking Research Questions and Themes.....	62

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1. Triangulation of the sources of evidence.....	45



## DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to all teachers who never give up on reaching their students and helping them to reach their full potential. I remember my mother, Nancy, a teacher who spent endless summers with me reading, reviewing math, grammar, and making learning fun. She always wanted me to succeed and constantly gave of herself to make it happen. To my grandmother, Margaret Mehring, and also a teacher who once told my mother, “you better watch out because someday Jeff is going to surprise you.” She saw my potential and wanted to make sure others would witness it as well. Helping students reach their true potential is an exhausting task and to those teachers who never give up, you are my role model.

“Do not confine your students to your own learning, for they were born in another time.”

~Chinese Proverb

“Tell me and I'll forget. Show me and I may not remember. Involve me and I'll understand.” ~Native American Proverb

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JALTCALL Conference, 2013  
*How To Flip Your Class Using Sophia.org and Google Forms*

HITESOL Conference, 2013  
*Brain-based learning and video games—Teaching with immersive gaming*

International Rotary, 2012

*Why and how games should be incorporated into education curriculum*

JALTCALL Conference, 2010

*Creating an academic listening/blended learning environment using Moodle and the iPod*

JALT Conference, 2010

*Brain-based learning classroom techniques*

## PUBLICATIONS

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Mehring, J. (2011). University life through learner created digital storytelling. *Journal of the School of Liberal Arts*, 2, 37-47.

Edwards, J., Mehring, J., & Murphey, T. (2006). Exploring JiTT: Just-in-Time-Teaching. *The Language Teacher*, 30(12), 9.

## ABSTRACT

Recently, Japanese higher education has decided to transition from a traditional teacher-centered to a more student-centered, communicative classroom. One promising possibility that could help in the transition is the flipped classroom technique. Examining the lived experiences of Japanese university English as a foreign language (EFL) students who have taken part in a course taught using the flipped classroom technique will help in determining possible benefits of the flipped classroom in EFL higher education in Japan. This study will use a qualitative approach with a case study design to focus on the lived experiences of Japanese EFL university students at Iwate University enrolled in a course taught using the flipped classroom model. This study will focus on the students' impressions, possible changes in study habits, perceived benefits and challenges, and if students experienced higher levels of authentic communication opportunities due to the flipped classroom. By examining the lived experiences of students who have taken part in a course taught using the flipped classroom technique, this study will contribute to the understanding of learning technologies used to support the implementation of a communicative, student-centered learning environment in the undergraduate EFL classroom.

*Keywords:* flipped classroom, inverted classroom, lived experience, English as a foreign language, higher education

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Moving into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the world is becoming globalized and English is quickly becoming the language of business and communication. In Japan, English became the language of business communication in 2010 with the online retailer Rakuten when it was decided English would be the official language of the company. Hiroshi Mikitani, the co-founder and chief executive officer (CEO) of Rakuten who has become a billionaire Internet entrepreneur, pointed out that because of the language barrier Japanese firms are unable to compete globally, the language barrier prevents companies from completely understanding the competition and being competitive in the marketplace. This inadequacy of English proficiency hinders Japan from recruiting non-Japanese talent globally and retaining them (Wakabayashi, 2012). This decision by Rakuten has caused other companies to re-examine the role English will play in their companies as they consider expanding outside of Japan.

Fast Retailing, another Japanese company and the parent company of Uniqlo, plans to incorporate English as the official language of business in the company by 2012, as well as have employees tested for English language proficiency. Tadashi Yanai, CEO of Uniqlo, recently mentioned that in the next 10 years Japanese who work for international companies would need to speak English or be unemployable (“Exec: Non-English Speakers”, 2011). Mr. Yanai was asked his opinion about Japanese who possess a quality education and the skills necessary to succeed in Uniqlo, but cannot communicate in English; Mr. Yanai bluntly replied, “We don’t need such people” (para. 15). Not all Japanese firms have businesses overseas, but companies are beginning to see the benefits and possibilities of expansion.

Today, the actions of companies like Rakuten and Fast Retailing have led to roughly half of Japanese companies expecting new recruits to possess English language abilities in the

business field, a strong increase compared to only 16% in July 2009. Even as Japanese companies become more global at home, they are also looking to acquire new revenue streams by purchasing overseas businesses. One example is Itochu, a Japanese trading house that is purchasing Kwik Fit, a British tire company, for \$1 billion, increasing the need for English-speaking Japanese (Katsumura, 2011). Undoubtedly, it is possible these rapid changes could pressure Japanese businessmen, who presently possess poor English abilities, to improve.

Without a doubt, the average score for a Japanese citizen on the TOEFL iBT, the computer version of the test of English as a foreign language, indicates the lower English abilities of Japanese citizens. In 2010, out of the 30 Asian countries, Japan ranked 27th, placing even lower than Mongolia and Turkmenistan. These results are remarkable considering Japanese students study English between 6 and 8 years during middle and high school, and once they enter the university, they take one or two additional English courses. A survey conducted in 2010 summed up the opinions of Japanese white-collar workers when only 9% expressed an ability to communicate in English, with many of the workers evaluating their ability to speak and listen in English as *barely* (Katsumura, 2011). It may be difficult to fathom how this is possible, but when a person examines the methods used to teach English in Japanese schools it becomes easier to understand.

The most significant reason why Japanese seem to possess lower English abilities is the method of instruction. In the English classroom, the teacher explains how English sentences are formed in Japanese while students take notes and try to memorize the necessary steps for forming correct English sentences. For example, the teacher would write the sentence, *I went to the store to buy some milk* on the board in English. Next, the teacher would describe in Japanese what each word meant and its part of speech, breaking down the entire sentence word-by-word

and explaining each grammatical point. During the teacher's explanation, the students would take notes to enable them to memorize the lesson material later at home. This process is similar to the grammar translation method used in the United States during the 1970s to learn a foreign language. The grammar translation method requires students to translate entire texts word-by-word and apply memorized grammatical rules, exceptions, and lengthy vocabulary lists (Celce-Murcia, 1991). Students spend little class time on communicating in the target language. In Japan, English language education has been hobbled by an overemphasis on grammar study, over-reliance on translation, and a reliance on the teacher-centered classroom ("English Taught in English," 2009). The consequences of how English has been taught in Japan's public schools over the past decades have left many Japanese citizens struggling to communicate in English and Japan unprepared for the new globalized marketplace.

In order to participate more actively in the new globalized world, Japanese government officials and business leaders have realized the importance of revising Japan's English language education system (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2006; Koike & Tanaka, 1995; MEXT, 2003). Business leaders and the government of Shinzo Abe desire Japanese citizens who can use English to communicate effectively (Clavel, 2014), as well as collaborate, innovate, and adapt to rapidly evolving global situations (Robinson, 2011). Since the 1990s, bilingualism has become an important skill in Asia, and Singapore is a good example of what the future of globalization may look like. Former Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew proposed spending the equivalent of US\$80 million to develop bilingual education beginning as early as pre-school ("Exec: Non-English Speakers", 2011). Similar to Singapore, governments in other Asian countries such as China, Vietnam, and South Korea have begun to focus on English language development, and if



Japan wishes to remain globally competitive, it will need to improve the English abilities of its citizens as well or fall farther behind.

In a first step to remain competitive, the Japanese government has recognized the important role that higher education will play in driving the economy and developing a knowledge-driven population. In April 2004, major reform to higher education in Japan was made with the intention of responding to society's needs, that it would be quicker to respond or adapt to change, and become more globally competitive (Aoki, 2010). A 2007 report from the Central Council of Education stated that the goal for students in higher education is to acquire high order skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, logical thinking, and communication in Japanese, but especially in a foreign language. Along with these skills, in January 2006 the Information Technology (IT) New Reform Strategy developed by the Japanese government aimed to make Japan the leader in IT education, and the Central Council of Education stated that the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is to enable teachers to overcome the limitations related to interactivity in education (Aoki, 2010; Latchem & Jung, 2010). Creating an English language learning environment where students use and develop higher order skills while incorporating communication technologies could help with Japanese citizens' language acquisition abilities.

In order to reach this level, teachers and students in higher educational institutions need to revisit second language methodology and the tools being used to teach English. Communicative lessons that provide students with authentic environments in which to interact with the language require innovation, a willingness to take risks and make mistakes, and a change in classroom structure. However, shifting from classrooms where English is taught in

Japanese to a more interactive, communicative English-based approach will not take place overnight.

### **Problem Statement**

In order to understand the present situation, one must first look at Japan's history of language education. By examining the language learning history in Japan, it is noticeable that communication was never the main reason for learning languages: rather, understanding the text was the goal (Hino, 1988; Koike & Tanaka, 1995). Thousands of years ago when the Japanese first began to read Chinese they used *yakudoku*, a technique where the target language first undergoes word-by-word translation and then is rearranged to mirror the Japanese or target language word order (Hino, 1988). For example, English has a subject-verb-object word order, while Japanese is subject-object-verb, so the sentence *I drank water* would first be translated word for word, *watashi (I) nominashita (drank) mizu (water)*. Then the sentence would be rearranged to mirror Japanese word order, *watashiwa mizu o nomimashita*. For Japan, rapid modernization meant the information contained within texts was more important than the communication or sharing of ideas. The Japanese were not concerned with how to sell products overseas or how to deal with people in a language other than Japanese; they simply needed to understand how to replicate existing products in order to become a modernized society. Therefore, translation not only was a means to an end, but also contributed heavily to Japan's success and modernization (Koike & Tanaka, 1995). As foreign information was translated into Japanese it became available to all Japanese who could read Japanese, not only to the few Japanese with a knowledge of English. Since the *yakudoku* technique was successful in enabling a larger portion of the Japanese society to understand foreign text and information and help Japan to modernize, it was adapted as a method for language teaching in the classroom.

Teachers typically “teach the way they were taught” (Bruffee, 1999, p. xiii), and since the Japanese had learned foreign languages using the *yakudoku* technique for centuries, they perpetuated this method in the classroom. *Yakudoku* requires very little training or class preparation time, and because Japanese teachers were not exposed to other methods or teaching techniques, they depended on the technique with which they were taught (Hino, 1988). It did not help that throughout Japan’s history, the Japanese government sent people overseas to learn and master language skills; unfortunately these skills were taught in a language other than Japanese and transmitted to the government people in Japanese through an interpreter (Koike & Tanaka, 1995). In 1983, a nationwide survey aimed at gaining insight into language learning throughout Japan showed that between 70-80% of Japanese universities still used the *yakudoku* method (Koike et al., 1983). Even though the *yakudoku* method was still used widely, as Japan continued to modernize and enter the new globalized world, changes to how English was being taught were well overdue.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to understand EFL students’ experiences of the flipped classroom at a Japanese university. The study investigated the students’ lived experiences when instructors used the flipped classroom technique for EFL instruction, creating a learner-centered environment that provided opportunities to use the target language in authentic scenarios, building higher order thinking skills such as collaboration and critical thinking, and taking advantage of changes in learning technologies. In order for Japanese to play a more effective role in the new globalized world, it is imperative that Japanese possess the tools necessary to be effective communicators and active participants.

## Research Questions

This study investigated the lived experiences of students who took part in an EFL course taught using the flipped classroom technique. The researcher aimed to provide an understanding of student motivations and challenges, which may be useful to instructors interested in adopting the model for their own courses or encouraging and supporting its adoption. Many instructors may be hesitant to risk such a significant conversion process and can benefit from hearing the students' voices. EFL faculty can gain an understanding of the important role that this model plays in the undergraduate educational experience.

This study used a qualitative approach in the form of an exploratory case study. Participants were generally defined as students who are enrolled in, or have completed, a course taught using the flipped classroom model. The primary research question addressed was: What were the lived experiences of EFL university students taught using the flipped classroom model? The following sub-questions were also addressed:

- What were the students' impressions and opinions about being taught using the flipped classroom model?
- What were students' perceived changes in their study habits as a result of taking a flipped class?
- What were the students' perceived benefits and challenges of learning English in the flipped classroom?
- In what ways, if any, did students experience increased communication opportunities in the flipped class?

By exploring the lived experiences of students who have taken part in a flipped class, this study explored the effectiveness of the flipped classroom to increase EFL students' English verbal

communicative abilities from the students' perspective. The examination of these issues provides guidance for instructors who are interested in creating a student-centered approach and a more participatory learning experience for their students. By facilitating a student-centered approach to instruction, this model may enhance the undergraduate educational experience.

### **Epistemology**

The perspective that this researcher brought to the study was based on a feminist and interpretivist worldview. The feminist paradigm is based on the ideas of justice and power and is best described by Freire (1993) and his concept of "banking education" (p. 72) as a tool of oppression. The banking concept of learning establishes the educator's role as controlling how new information is received by the student; in this view, the instructor's task is to fill students' minds with information that the instructor feels constitutes true knowledge. In the past, many countries, including Japan, have relied on the lecture format for the transfer of knowledge from teacher to student as the main means of education. Sometimes a teacher's lecture causes students to memorize the content mechanically, turning them into vessels of learning that the teacher has crammed full of new content; the effectiveness of the teacher tends to be measured by the extent to which he/she fills the vessels. Recently, a transformation from the instructor-centered to a more student-centered classroom has begun taking place. Knowledge develops through invention and re-invention, formulating and testing ideas, and learning from mistakes as people pursue knowledge as part of, and in connection with, the world and each other. In the language classroom, this process requires students to collaborate in the target language, using authentic language in activities designed to reflect the real-life environment. Through social interactions, students learn from each other and the teacher as they create new learning socially from these interactions.

The second worldview was based on interpretivism, which defines the world as being socially constructed, not existing independently of people's knowledge of it. In the communicative language teaching classroom, students construct new ideas about the language through authentic social interactions with classmates and the teacher. This new learning is not based solely on the textbook or the teacher's explanation of grammar, but rather is socially constructed. Researchers following an interpretivist paradigm gather observations from people's interactions in the social world in order to gain a better perspective and bring about new understandings that can be implemented in the social world. Considering that interpretivism is concerned with the interpretation, understanding, and experiences of the social world, and is distinct from the natural sciences, methods of study are required that are better suited to the social sciences (Upadhyay, 2012). A value position is unavoidable in qualitative research, and the researcher's perspective and biases need to be taken into account. Subsequently, the researcher strived to set aside any biases and aim for the highest ethical standards when collecting data from the physical and cultural environment.

### **Significance of Study**

Many college instructors tend to adapt technology into their undergraduate courses without truly understanding the students' views or abilities to use the technology properly. Although instructors may use technology due to pressure from administrators or students, instructors need to consider carefully how technology is being used for learning. Instructors may witness students using technology for reasons other than learning, but do students enjoy using technology to study or learn? Students who partake in a course where the instructor uses technology may not be learning as much as the instructor believes, or as much as they could in a traditional course.

This study examined the lived experiences of students who took part in a course taught using the inverted classroom model, providing a foundation for understanding the influences, motivations, challenges, and benefits involved in adapting technology in combination with this instructional method. The results should help college instructors develop student-centered courses by detailing the experiences of students who have taken an inverted course. Learning more about the possible outcomes of the model can facilitate its effective adoption by university EFL instructors. By articulating the experiences of those who have taken part in an inverted course, this study illuminated its current use and drew attention to the significant role it can play in higher education.

In addition, the findings may interest faculty-development personnel and higher education administrators in their efforts to develop a more communicative EFL classroom. Further study of the model holds the potential to contribute much needed change to the conditions of the EFL undergraduate learning experience in the face-to-face (F2F) learning environments that currently constitute the primary setting for college courses in Japan. This study contributed to the body of knowledge on learning technologies used to support the implementation of a communicative, student-centered learning environment in the undergraduate EFL classroom.

### **Definition of Terms**

This section provides definitions of some key terms that are used throughout this study.

*Student perceptions or lived experiences.* The lived experience was described as witnessing the events taking place inside the classroom from the students' vantage point. These recollections paint a real life picture of how the student views various in-class learning activities,

including student-student and instructor-student interactions, instructor talk time, and the integration of technology into the learning environment.

*Flipped classroom.* For the purpose of this study, the flipped classroom was defined as one where the instructor moved lecture content previously presented in class to the online environment in the form of podcasts, narrated presentations, or other types of digital formats. The instructor devoted the entire F2F time to authentic, communicative, interactive activities in the target language.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study had several limitations due to the size of the study and time constraints. Although multiple participants from the same class were included, the size of the study left many EFL learners' experiences untold. With a more diverse group of participants, a wider view of the students' lived experiences could have been taken into account, but due to time limitations this was not possible. The time restrictions of the study also created significant challenges, as Iwate University is over 4 hours away from the researcher's home making site visits not as frequent as the researcher would have preferred. The flipped classroom is a new concept in Japan, especially in higher education, and Iwate University was the closest location the researcher could find that used the flipped classroom. Due to this distance, regular site visits and observation of the EFL learners' physical spaces might have provided a greater sense of their day-to-day experiences.

### **Chapter Summary**

In order to transition from an instructor-centered approach towards a more student-centered style using the flipped classroom technique, an understanding of the students' perspectives of this new learning environment will play an integral role in its success. The following chapter will discuss the progression of English language education in Japan, the



communicative language approach, and inverted classrooms, including activities and technologies used in the inverted classroom. Finally, a detailed description of Japanese students' lived experiences with related learning theory, principles, and approaches will be presented.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides an overview of the literature on two aspects of this study: examining the shift in English language instruction and a possible technological adaptation that shows a promising alternative to the present method for teaching English in Japan. The first area examines the history of English language learning in Japan leading up to, and including, the communicative approach. This introduction will provide a strong background on the developmental changes in English language education during the last 150 years in Japan. Finally, the focus will move from the history of English language education to an exploration of the communicative approach, the focus of Japan's present method for teaching English. In the area of English language acquisition, Japanese citizens need to develop communicative language abilities and English language learners who can use English in authentic, communicative situations. Communicative lessons that provide students with authentic opportunities for language use and motivate students to acquire the language will depend upon innovation, risk, and changes in the classroom structure. In order to participate in a globalized world, Japan needs to improve its English language education system, as present and future employers desire employees who can communicate effectively and work in teams, in addition to being creative, innovative, self-confident, and adaptable to the expeditiously evolving world environment.

In the second half of the chapter, the focus shifts to the flipped classroom and how this learning technology could be used in higher education and incorporated into the communicative classroom. The flipped classroom is one promising alternative that could contribute to the development of more effective opportunities and educational outcomes for EFL students in Japan. The final section of this chapter will examine the students' lived experiences with learning English in Japan. After 6 years of English language studies, many Japanese university

students have become disinterested in or strongly dislike learning English. Many students feel that most present methods for learning English are ineffective and that more focus should be placed on communicating in English. Japan's present teacher-centered style of lecturing needs to give way to a more student-centered classroom, but instructors fear students will not receive the knowledge needed to use English properly and effectively. The flipped classroom is one possible method for overcoming this dilemma.

### **History of English Language Learning in Japan**

This section begins with a short explanation of why Japan needs to change, followed by a more in-depth look at the four most recent time blocks, or eras, according to Japan's Imperial system, which is also the common method by which the Japanese view history. Each time block begins when a new emperor succeeds to the throne, with the four most recent time blocks being; Meiji (1868-1911), Taisho (1912-1925), Showa (1926-1988), and Heisei (1989-present). Considering the Taisho Era was extremely short, less than 15 years, and nothing significant related to English language education took place during this time, this era will be skipped, allowing for greater focus on the Heisei Era and the present time in Japan.

**Why English education in Japan needs to change.** Traditional grammar-based translation methods like *yakudoku* have been effective as Japan absorbed new cultures and technologies as it modernized, but in the 21<sup>st</sup> century communicative skills are required, not translation of intricate sentences (Horwitz, 1988; Kern, 1995; Koike & Tanaka, 1995; Peacock, 1999). With no reform to higher education in Japan, schooling will not be able to respond to the needs of society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In order to avoid this, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) decided to make substantial changes to the Japanese approach to English education. MEXT is a government ministry that manages and regulates

almost every part of the education process in Japan. Besides deciding which textbooks are used each year, MEXT is responsible for Japan's English Teacher (JET) program that places native English speakers in elementary and middle school classrooms, and developing policies for how English should be taught. In 1987, MEXT decided that international communication was the ultimate goal of English language learning (Koike & Tanaka, 1995). Japan's economy had become the second largest economy in the world and countries with stronger English language programs such as China, Vietnam, Singapore, and South Korea were rapidly adapting Japan's business practices. Business leaders understood that if Japan was to remain successful and continue to grow and expand, it needed Japanese who could communicate effectively in English, which was quickly becoming the language for business and trade.

Government leaders clearly understood this viewpoint as well, and over the years have continued to refine and update the English language requirements in schools. As Japan begins to play a more active role in the new globalized world, its citizens must begin to communicate effectively in English. In 2003, MEXT set a new goal for Japanese society: for Japanese to possess the necessary English skills to engage in daily conversations and exchange ideas, opinions, and knowledge. In order to reach this goal, MEXT (2003) called for more focus to be aimed at the development of fundamental and authentic communication abilities. MEXT is striving for English to be taught by teachers using English as the common language in the classroom, with a focus on the communicative approach.

**Meiji Era (1868 to 1911).** The Meiji Era is most known for the great transformation Japan underwent after the arrival of Commodore Perry in 1854, who brought a letter from the current President of the United States, Millard Fillmore, to establish a treaty with Japan. This treaty ended the isolation of Japan and led to Japan's subsequent opening and modernization.

During this time period, Japan's desire to catch up to the West caused the Ministry of Education to send students overseas to acquire foreign knowledge and language in 1871 (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2006; Koike & Tanaka, 1995). Japan's insatiable quest for modernization led to a boom in English language education and the importation of instructors from the West, especially in the areas of technology, architecture, and science. Almost 3,000 westerners were invited to Japan to teach during this time, and in 1872 English became the language of choice and the language of instruction for all subjects at Kaisei School (present day Tokyo University) to demonstrate the government's wish to modernize and bring Japan's educational practices up to standards equivalent to the West (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2006). The government's push to develop its citizens' communicative abilities became a common theme during the Meiji Era and beyond, but there were some dissenters.

In 1883, Japan encountered a backlash against the English language as Japanese who were studying overseas began to return and entered the education field. In order to educate large bodies of students the returnees could not use English as the lingua franca, or working language, of instruction and began to teach using Japanese; slowly, Japanese replaced English as the working language of instruction. First, Tokyo University returned to using Japanese as the working language of instruction, then academic materials were translated from English into Japanese, and slowly an understanding of English was no longer necessary in order to gain new insight and knowledge (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2006). Translation skills became more and more influential in Japan's success and modernization, not knowledge of English. This dilemma created two philosophies in English language education that persist to this day: the government's position, which was to continue English education because it was necessary for the importation of modern ways, and the *juken-eigo* or English language education for the purpose of preparing

students for university and secondary school entrance exams (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2006; Hosoki, 2010). These exams focused on the ability to read and listen in English. With *juken-eigo* the reason for teaching and learning English created a shift from Japanese students with communicative abilities to Japanese students who could analyze English enough in order to gain entrance into prestigious secondary schools and universities.

As these two philosophies continued to cause friction and confusion regarding English education, the Japanese government in 1901 invited Howard Swan, a scholar from the United Kingdom, to spread the use of the Gouin Method, a precursor to the Audio-Lingual Method. Around the same time *juken-eigo* was being popularized through various publications, one publication by Nanbi in 1905 was titled *How to Analyse English Sentences* to help students pass entrance exams (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2006). As time progressed, the *juken-eigo* path became more dominant as fewer Japanese instructors were able to speak English, let alone teach communicative English, and the importance of getting students into prestigious educational institutions took precedence.

**Showa Era (1926 to 1988).** With the events leading up to World War II and the military takeover of Japan in the 1930s, English education was seen as a negative, foreign import that society should avoid. Not until after the war, in 1956 to be exact, was the Oral Approach reintroduced into Japan by C. C. Fries, a British linguist (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2006; Hosoki, 2010). The Oral Approach establishes English as the target language in the classroom and uses materials that are taught orally in advance before being produced in written form (J. Richards & Rodgers, 1986). After the war, the government's aim to develop its population's English abilities once again became the focus as Japan began to modernize and business leaders called for an improvement of English standards. As Japan began to export larger and larger quantities of

merchandise for sale overseas, business leaders began to realize they needed company recruits who were better equipped to conduct international business affairs (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2006; Hosoki, 2010; Imura, 2003). Even though schools continued to prepare students for entrance exams using the *juken-eigo* method, government and business leaders pushed for greater implementation of the latest learning methods in order to prepare their citizens to function in the international world.

In this regard, as America's influence in Japan grew, the Oral Approach, a British import, gave way to the Audio-Lingual Approach, an American import. The Audio-Lingual Approach, which closely resembles the Oral Approach, advocates initial aural instruction followed by oral instruction, pronunciation and speaking, and finally reading and writing (J. Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Greater emphasis on pronunciation, speaking, and writing skills were important to business leaders, but unnecessary for students wishing to gain entrance into prestigious universities. More attempts to incorporate the Audio-Lingual Approach into the classroom began to occur with technological developments during this time.

In the early 1980s, with the Japanese government and businesses increasingly demanding workers with communicative language abilities, the Audio-Lingual Approach was replaced with the communicative approach becoming popular and attracting many instructors (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2006; Hosoki, 2010). In the communicative approach, as defined by J. Richards (2008), the goals of language teaching should be communicative competence and communication in the target language. Communicative language teaching (CLT) incorporates authentic, real-life situations that require students to communicate in the target language. The teacher creates an environment where students interact with classmates and the teacher using the target language, similar to the way they might communicate in a real-life setting. At times, CLT

can be confusing for students, as they are unaware of an activity's outcome since the outcome depends substantially on a classmate's reactions and/or responses (J. Richards, 2008). These authentic interactions change with each class and the students' motivation to continue grows from the goal to communicate in authentic and meaningful ways about real-life topics.

An example lesson in the CLT classroom could be the examination of cultural holidays. The objectives would be to: (a) develop the students' ability to discuss and compare holidays, (b) encourage students to examine critically the origin of a holiday, (c) enhance students' collaboration skills, and (d) enhance students' ability to present on their cultural holiday and how it compares to a foreign culture's holiday. The teacher would introduce the lesson by providing students with handouts describing various holidays throughout the world. The teacher may give a brief lecture on a holiday from his/her country, focusing on its origins and how the teacher's family may celebrate the holiday. Then, in dyads or small groups, the students would begin to research and discuss their holiday in preparation of the final presentation. During this time, the teacher would move around the room, observing and helping the various groups, and keeping them on task. While students work in groups there is no pre-planned structure to the communication taking place; instead students rely on group members for help in expressing their thoughts and ideas. A few possible outcomes from this process are new vocabulary, language structures, the ability to collaborate and create an artifact that demonstrates the students' new learning, and the ability to use the target language in for authentic communication purposes (Papert, 1980).

This type of activity creates a student-centered learning environment because as new learning is being constructed it is being accomplished through collaboration and strategic thinking (Papert, 1980; J. Richards, 2008; Savignon, 2005), not from the teacher's lecture or the



memorization of facts. The focus of learning shifts from the teacher to the students and the teacher acts as a guide, encouraging students to search out new learning and collaborate with classmates. CLT is one teaching approach that may enable college graduates to be able to interact effectively in English within their chosen occupational fields, thus meeting the goals of MEXT (MEXT, 2003). Unfortunately, as the Japanese government changed its methods for teaching English in the hopes of improving students' English abilities, schools continued to teach to the entrance exams. Classroom implementation that focused on learning English to pass the secondary and university entrance exams was still the primary means for teaching English, but slowly things were beginning to change.

**Heisei Era (1989 to present).** As Japan continued to grow and prosper, business leaders and the government began to exert more influence, insisting that its citizens develop English abilities. In 1987, MEXT decided that international communication was the ultimate goal of English language learning (Koike & Tanaka, 1995). Globalization, cultural differences, and international understanding were the catch phrases of the day, and countries began to cooperate, work together, and interact on a daily basis. As more Japanese traveled overseas they began to realize the English education they received did not enable them to communicate effectively. Results from a 1983 nation-wide survey administered by the Research Group for College English Teaching in Japan supported these travelers' feelings. To conduct this survey, the Research Group distributed a total of 2,910 questionnaires to college administrators, K-12 and college English instructors and instructors who had taught Japanese students overseas, as well as students and graduates on a range of college English teaching problems. Included in this group were 10,381 students at both private and public 4-year and 2-year colleges (Koike et al., 1983). Results from this survey found that 74.5% of college graduates perceived their listening

comprehension and speaking abilities were weak (Koike & Tanaka, 1995). Despite Japan's efforts it has not been very effective in developing Japanese citizens' communicative abilities. Japan lacks the ability to bring about changes in instruction that are consistent with and focus on communication abilities (Sakui & Gaies, 1999), and continually encounters difficulty in its efforts to emphasize oral communication abilities. Traditional grammar-based translation was highly effective in absorbing new cultures and technologies for modernization, but in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, communication skills are required, not translation of intricate sentences (Horwitz, 1988; Keim, Furuya, Doye, & Carlson, 1996; Kern, 1995; Koike & Tanaka, 1995; Peacock, 1999).

In 2003, MEXT's national plan was to develop Japanese citizens who could use English (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2006), or who had practical English abilities (Hosoki, 2010). MEXT developed this plan, which paved the way for the next phase of English education in Japan. MEXT's (2003) plan suggested that a transformation of English education rested upon the advancement of integral and pragmatic communicative abilities. The plan defined a student's communicative abilities as the ability to communicate effectively in English in their chosen occupational field. MEXT's goal was for all members of Japanese society to hold daily conversations and exchange information in English. MEXT's guidelines emphasized increasing a person's ability to think critically and communicate with others in English based on the person's breadth of knowledge, life experiences, and logical reasoning. With no reform to higher education in Japan, schooling will remain unbeneficial to societal wishes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Amano & Poole, 2005).

The main method for comparing and analyzing the English abilities of students from various countries is the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). This test is required of non-native English speakers who wish to enter an American university. The results from these

tests consistently demonstrate the ineffectiveness of English education in Japan. In 2009, the iBT (Internet Based Test) for the TOEFL showed Japan ranked 28<sup>th</sup> out of 28 countries in Asia even though Japan has the greatest number per capita of people taking this test (ETS, 2010). It also showed that the Japanese had the second lowest score in Asia and the lowest score in speaking among all iBT examinees from around the world (ETS, 2010). This finding is consistent with average TOEFL scores in July 2000 and June 2001 that showed Japan ranked 144<sup>th</sup> out of 155 countries (Gray, 2003).

In Japan, English language education has evolved, but met with obstacles continually. Beginning with the *yakudoku* technique, Japan was able to modernize quickly during both the Meiji and Showa eras. Unfortunately, English education became stagnant and today is at a crossroads as Japan enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century and becomes an active member in the global community. The Japanese government and business leaders pushed to take a more direct role and began to promote students' communicative abilities (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2006), and slowly universities have followed and have begun to emphasize a more practical usage of English (Hosoki, 2010), incorporating the CLT method. Japanese citizens feel it is important to be able to communicate in English rather than be able to translate sentences in order to gain new knowledge. Many instructors and students have stayed with the traditional methods because they were highly effective in gaining new knowledge of advanced technologies and culture. However, the time for change has come and a shift from the traditional methods to a communicative approach is necessary.

### **A Shift to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)**

CLT developed from the realization that simply understanding the grammatical forms and structures of a language does not properly prepare one for using the language in real-life

situations. The CLT approach acknowledges that language cannot be separated from a learner's character or his/her demeanor (Savignon, 2005). The core tenets of CLT, according to Savignon and Berns, are that language teaching is based on language used for communication, language is a social tool learners use to create meaning, diversity is perceived and welcomed as an integral part of language development, and learners engage with language where language has multiple affordances (Berns, 1990; Savignon, 2005). The essential affordances of language are interaction, communication, and the expression of ideas. Even with a strong understanding of the grammatical and structural foundations of a language, one may not be socially capable of using the language properly for communication.

**Communicative competence.** In the early 1970s, communicative competence emerged as explorations into the affiliations between language, society, and culture became a concern. Habermas (1970) and Hymes (1971) defined communicative competence as the ability to interpret and negotiate meaning, stemming from research in second language acquisition (SLA). Communicative competence is based upon the common view of how language is used in both societal and cultural contexts, something the *yakudoku* style and *juken-eigo* method lack. Language learners need to demonstrate their capability to collaborate and create meaning, which is different from the ability to use language in set dialogues or to recite grammatical rules on various tests (Berns, 1990; Savignon, 2005). In order for language learners to create meaning and interact with others in English, the classroom environment must be more student-centered and teacher-talk must be limited as much as possible. In this environment, language is incorporated into more extensive sociocultural contexts, including a student's behaviors, beliefs, and word choice (Firth, 1957). This environment affords students the opportunity to express themselves, practice new vocabulary, and learn language from their classmates and instructor in authentic

situations. The grammatical and structural components of a language are not its main entities, but rather how language is created and used to infer meaning through discourse (J. Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Since the focus of instruction is on the practical application of the language, not solely the grammatical structure, students become motivated to use language, which in turn enables them to comprehend the complex grammatical rules and develop a stronger background knowledge of the language that they can rely upon in future interactions.

Language competence means one is able to create conversations and communicate; it relies upon both implied knowledge, where grammar is a resource, and the ability to use the language in sociocultural contexts (Hymes, 1971). Understanding a language requires more than the methods for developing grammatically correct sentences, because competence, what the learner understands about his/her abilities, and actual use of the language in a variety of unrehearsed situations, are two different concepts. Competence is linked to the understanding of grammar and other parts of language, whereas performance is linked to actual use. In Japan's case, competence would be linked with the *juken-eigo* approach, one that is built upon the basis of linguistics and grammatical forms that underscore how these forms can be connected to make grammatically correct sentences. MEXT's approach is built upon the practical use of communicative language, where the learner is required to understand how grammatical forms can be used in conversations to voice one's ideas appropriately (Canale & Swain, 1980).

This ability of communicative competence will require a change to how English is taught in Japan. Japanese will need to be able to connect their knowledge of English with the contexts or situations where English is needed. They will need to choose the communicative strategies that best suit their aspirations and associate them with the outcomes and background knowledge presently possessed in their linguistic inventory through practical decisions at the logical level

(Davies, 1989; Stalker, 1989). In order to achieve this, the present state of the English language classroom in Japan will have to change and incorporate CLT practices.

**CLT in the classroom.** In the CLT classroom the focus is on the communicative needs of the students with plenty of time allotted for heightened levels of interaction. Howatt (1984) recognized two versions of CLT: a weak version and a strong version. The significance of the weak version rests upon students being given opportunities to utilize English in communicative settings that integrate activities into a larger program of language learning. Students may learn specific skills such as listening or reading in a class, but these skills are also developed across the language curriculum. The significance of the strong version is the understanding that through authentic, real-life communicative situations, language can be acquired, and that acquisition is simply not an activation of one's background knowledge or the stimulation of the language itself (Howatt, 1984; J. Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Students must work on language skills using authentic language in real-life situations and not simply structured dialogue practice. Instructors need to plan classes to enable cross-curriculum materials and skills to be encountered by the student in different classes, activating the student's background knowledge of the language as well as the material. In addition to the weak and strong versions of CLT, language learning can also be accomplished informally and formally.

Informal learning can take place anywhere at any time, whereas formal learning can only take place in the classroom. One comment many language learners make after their first encounter with native speakers is that the textbook did not teach them the *real* language; the language the native speakers used was different than what they learned in the textbook. Social media offers students opportunities to experiment with a variety of vocabulary and sentence structures, usually outside the classroom. In contrast, formal learning is defined as the types of

learning that are best created in a collaborative environment where interpersonal relationships, the sociocultural contexts, also have the ability to make a contribution (Breen & Candlin, 1980). Formal learning usually takes place in the classroom under the instructor's supervision, enabling the instructor to give constructive feedback, but at the same time offering students opportunities to collaborate with classmates and express their ideas.

CLT aims to take advantage of the realistic affordances a classroom offers as a learning resource and for its communicative potential. The classroom becomes an environment where students use authentic language to communicate and exchange ideas through collaborative activities as they search for, reflect upon, and test new language strategies while receiving feedback from classmates and the teacher on their progress and competence (Breen & Candlin, 1980). CLT's classroom goals are: (a) to make communicative competence something for which students strive, ultimately using language productively and receptively in unrehearsed contexts; (b) language techniques need to be designed for high levels of student engagement in authentic, meaningful purposes; (c) classroom goals are not only confined to grammatical or linguistic proficiency, but include communicative competence as well; and (d) the four language skills are an interdependent aspect of the language and communicative classroom—fluency and accuracy are complementary principles (H. Brown, 2000; J. Richards & Rodgers, 1986). The instructor and student roles also take on new meaning in the CLT classroom.

The instructor's role in the CLT classroom involves: (a) advocating for communication between all participants, and (b) being an interdependent member of each group (J. Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Communicative proficiency should be the goal for which language instructors strive and instructors should cultivate strategies for teaching the four language skills. Technology

can aid instructors in the creation of this type of learning environment and later the researcher discusses the use of the flipped classroom as one such piece of technology.

With MEXT's nationwide plan to develop Japanese citizens' communicative skills (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2006), or Japanese citizens' practical English abilities (Hosoki, 2010), CLT offers more spontaneity in the classroom, giving students needed opportunities to engage with classmates and understand that learning is a continual process. The CLT classroom is a place where students can become emboldened to deal with unrehearsed situations with the instructor as a guide, not controlling the student's learning process. CLT encourages inquiry, a search for clarification and the use of indirect speech or any other linguistic and non-linguistic abilities students may possess in order to negotiate meaning and accomplish the communicative tasks laid out by the teacher. With the integration of technology into the language classroom, teachers and students have more tools available to them to accomplish the communicative tasks. How technology is incorporated into the classroom can have both positive and negative effects on student outcomes.

### **Technology as a Teaching and Learning Tool**

A shift is taking place in how instructors are teaching at many higher educational institutions in America. In the past, instructors provided instruction and students usually sat passively, listening and taking notes. Today, universities are seen as a place where learning is produced. This new learning paradigm replaces the traditional lecture with whatever approach best serves the continual learning, growth, and expansion of each entering student. As part of this new learning paradigm, higher educational institutions are not places where knowledge is transferred from instructor to student. Instead, higher educational institutions need to create environments and experiences where students come together to discover and construct new



learning, become problem solvers, and become members of a community of learners (Barr & Tagg, 1995). Within this new educational habitat, learners become engaged, constructive learners of knowledge, developing and creating entire frameworks of new knowledge through collaborative, authentic use of their previous knowledge.

This new interactive pedagogy takes passive, note-taking students and makes them de facto teachers, explaining ideas to fellow classmates and defending their points of view. At the same time, instructors are challenged to re-design F2F class time in ways that are most beneficial and provide the greatest value to students. This interactive pedagogy views education as a two-step process: the transfer of new information, and the student's ability to make sense of and assimilate the information (Lambert, 2012). In the traditional classroom, the first step usually takes place during F2F class time with the second step being assigned as homework. During the second step the student is on his/her own to make sense of the new information encountered during F2F class time and assimilate the new information. Essentially, the F2F class time needs to be flipped; students' first exposure to new learning takes place outside the class, while in class students collaborate with classmates and the teacher, enabling the teacher to give immediate, corrective feedback as the students assimilate the new information and develop their own thoughts and ideas. Emerging technologies, in combination with the flipped classroom, offer one possibility.

Greater access to technology has opened up new avenues in terms of how to provide students with information and what students are able to do with it. In 1988, a comparative study by Richard Hake (1988) examined the use of traditional methods versus interactive-engagement methods in introductory physics classes at Indiana University. The traditional methods classes were made up of passive student lectures and algorithmic problem exams and consisted of 14

classes with 2,084 students. Interactive-engagement methods, defined as activities where students needed to be both heads-on and hands-on, were supported by immediate feedback from discussions with classmates and the instructor and involved 48 classes with 4,458 students. Dr. Hake compared his findings and found an average gain of almost two standard deviations in the interactive-engagement classes than in the traditional classes that used no interactive-engagement methods. The interactive-engagement courses enhanced students' problem-solving abilities and made the courses more effective when compared with traditional methods.

A similar study by Deslauries, Schelew, and Wieman (2011) analyzed a physics class with two sections and a large enrollment of students. The study consisted of 267 students in the control section who were given lectures by a highly motivated faculty member with numerous years of teaching experience and who had received high course evaluations from students. The experimental section consisted of 271 students who were taught by an inexperienced postdoctoral instructor who taught using concepts based on thought provoking questions and activities that challenged students to demonstrate their learning by using problem solving skills and physicist-like reasoning during class activities while receiving continual feedback from the instructor. Both sections were taught using the traditional methods until the 12th week of the semester. At this time the experimental section was *flipped* and new material was first encountered prior to class, reserving class time for challenging questions, tasks, and discussions with feedback from classmates and the instructor. Engagement increased in the experimental section, but the most surprising finding occurred afterwards when students completed a multiple-choice test completed. Students in the control classroom earned average score of 41, whereas the experimental classroom's score was 74, with results being spread over a large area, considering the effect size's standard deviation was 2.5. Student feedback was also positive, with 90% of

students responding they enjoyed the interactive teaching technique and 77% agreeing that learning outcomes would have been higher if the courses were taught using the interactive technique for the entire semester. These two studies support the need for greater instructor-student, student-student interaction during F2F class time, and with the explosion of technology it has become easier to incorporate these techniques into the curriculum.

In a 2011 study by CompTIA, a non-profit association, 500 educators and administrators further demonstrated the benefits of technology in the classroom. The study consisted of 353 primary/K-12 educators and staff and 147 higher education employees responsible for decision-making regarding technology used at their institutions. In this study, nearly two-thirds of respondents commented that students were productively better today than three years previously because of more access to technology in the classroom. In Japan, information and communication technologies (ICT) have also increased in the classroom. As mentioned earlier, in his 2010 study Aoki identified the following top three reasons for this increase: (a) ICT offers more effective instruction than traditional courses (81.6%), (b) ICT offers efficient education (60.7%), and (c) ICT responds to the diverse needs of learners (60.4%).

The findings of the aforementioned studies support something that educators have known for years; providing environments where students can use their new learning with access to immediate instructor and classmate feedback enables students to correct misunderstandings, organize new learning, and formulate their own ideas/perceptions enabling easier future access to new learning (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). The feedback students receive in these interactive classrooms enable them to examine and reflect upon their learning and growth. For instructors who are concerned about adding more active learning exercises into the F2F class time, the flipped classroom offers them a model for creating a classroom environment that

contains more active learning exercises. The flipped classroom offers a promising possibility for Japan in its efforts to create a communicative learning environment as well.

Flipped learning or inverted learning is a teaching technique that incorporates the use of traditional video or audio lectures as students' homework, typically viewed outside of class. In this model, in class time focuses on the utilization of new learning and the construction of public artifacts, such as portfolios, webpages, or working models that demonstrate a student's understanding of the new material. This new technique opens up the F2F class time to a variety of teaching methods, providing structure and strategies that enable instructors to fully transform their classes to learner-centered environments. The flipped classroom makes optimal use of student-student and student-instructor time as students learn how to think in front of the instructor and the instructor is able to see areas where students are struggling. From these observations, the instructor is better able to scale the instructional resources available to support learning. Key parts of this technique include students' convenient access to new material preceding class (usually through recorded, rewindable, and rewatchable lectures) and supplemental materials that help in the preparation for class. Higher-level cognitive activities become the focus of the in-class activities in conjunction with some sort of mechanism to assess student understanding. The flipped classroom increases F2F class time for discussing complex topics and provides opportunities for students to work one-on-one with the instructor or in small groups. Bryman and Bell (2007) stated that an advantage of groups is the opportunity for more clarity since students may seek clarification from each other's responses.

In a study at San Jose State, 85 students in an engineering electronics and circuits course watched edX lecture videos before class and attended class twice weekly to participate and practice as well as ask questions, while two other sections partook in the same course taught in

the traditional format. Exams taken at midterm showed students in the flipped section scored 10-11 points higher than those in the traditional section, even though the questions in the flipped section were more difficult (Biemiller, 2013). Another study at the University of Michigan demonstrated that students in a flipped calculus course had gains about twice the rate of those in traditional lectures (Berrett, 2012).

Research conducted by Marlowe (2012) examined the effect the flipped classroom could have on student achievement and stress levels of 19 students enrolled in an environmental systems and societies course in the final semester of their senior year. For part of the course, students were taught using traditional methods and for the other part, students were taught using the flipped classroom method. In the flipped classroom, students would watch video lectures outside of class and submit questions or a summary, which were used to stimulate F2F class time discussions. Students reported lower levels of stress in the flipped classroom and there was an average increase of 3 points in students' grades.

The Center for Digital Education conducted a nationwide survey to determine if the flipped classroom technique was being adopted by higher education faculty. They received a total of 309 responses between August and October 2013. The top reasons cited for U.S. higher educational institutions to adopt the flipped classroom technique were that it provided an enriched learning environment for students, accessibility to technologies, and positive results from initial trials. Fifty-seven percent of respondents already employing the flipped classroom technique stated that it is extremely successful or successful. Respondents stated that the benefits to students include enhanced mastery of information (80% of respondents) and higher retention of information (81% of respondents). In addition, 86% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that student attitudes improved once the flipped classroom technique was adopted (Jackson,

2013). Their research shows that the flipped classroom technique is critical when changing an educational policy from an instructor-centered passive environment to a student-centered active one that engages learners in the material and learning.

Integrating technology into classroom learning has had positive results. Research shows the positive impact of the flipped classroom on student outcomes with some feedback from students who took part in a flipped class. All the findings come from instructors and students of science courses, leading instructors to believe that most students prefer learning in this format. The introduction of the flipped classroom may be successful in the language classroom, but first, it is important to explore how Japanese students feel about their present learning situation and the how flipped classroom could change these perceptions.

### **Student Perceptions of Learning in Japan**

**Lived experience.** For the purpose of this study, the lived experience, sometimes referred to as the student perception, will be used to refer to the classroom and learning experience from the students' point of view. This experience can include in-class activities, homework, assessments, materials or technology used during class, and instructor talk time. If an instructor video records a class, he/she will be able to observe a class from the student's vantage point, but still not understand what is going on inside the student's head: what the student may be thinking or feeling during various class activities. Findings from research mentioned previously report the student experiences of the flipped classroom technique as positive. Responding students stated that they enjoyed the format better because they are able to learn through experience and example and have lower levels of stress in the flipped classroom (Marlowe, 2012), but these studies were conducted with native English speakers in science courses. To date, no studies have been conducted to examine how this format would be received in an EFL, content-based course

at a Japanese university. In order to better understand the lived experiences of EFL students, one must first look at how students view general education at the university level in Japan.

**Higher education experience.** For years MEXT has been trying to instill changes in higher educational institutions: changes that represent the current state of the world economy and ways for Japan to remain competitive. Japanese university students and graduates of higher education institutions feel they are not getting a high quality education and want the government to make changes. A variety of studies have been conducted over the years that examine students' lived experiences in Japanese higher education in general (Aoki, 2010; Hino, 1988; Koike et al., 1983, 1985).

One study by Hino in 1988 found that 70-80% of EFL Japanese university instructors continue to teach using the *yakudoku* method in their classes. The study found that 82% of classes were lecture based, instructors gave lectures, and students repeated back what they had learned from the lecture or read in the textbooks, on the exam. In these classes, 30% of students mentioned that they encountered some occasions when they were able to express their opinions or comments during class, but students rarely were asked to take part in intellectual inquiry, independent and critical thinking, or problem solving activities.

In a study by Aoki in 2010, the University of Tokyo conducted a nationwide survey, titled the College Student Survey, on attitudes and opinions of college students in Japan. Completed questionnaires were obtained from 48,233 students in 127 colleges and universities across Japan. Based on this study's findings, higher education in Japan could be described as lacking engagement from both professors and students in the classroom. According to Aoki's findings, typical classrooms in Japanese universities rarely create an environment where students engage actively with the new learning and classmates in intellectual inquiry or thinking critically

of possible solutions with feedback from the instructor. Results of the survey showed only 44% of basic courses and 59% of advanced courses appeared to be of some value to students. Eighty-two percent of classes were lecture-based, only 30% of students responded that they encountered a few occasions in class when they were able to communicate their opinions and comments, and 79% regularly attended classes but did not believe the classes were interesting. When it came to collaboration, 38% stated they had a chance to participate in group work.

These studies show that higher education in Japan is not satisfying to many students and unfortunately similar findings appear when the focus of the students' lived experiences is on English language learning. From these experiences it can be determined that change is also needed with regard to how English is taught and learned at higher educational institutions in Japan.

As mentioned earlier, a study conducted by the Research Group for College English Teaching in Japan found that 78.3% of college graduates felt university level English courses should concentrate on communication, 74.5% of college graduates perceived a weakness in listening comprehension, 74.5% perceived a weakness in speaking, and 54.3% felt English was important for their job (Koike et al., 1983, 1985).

Another study conducted by Matsuura, Fujieda, and Mahoney (2004) in 2001 consisted of a questionnaire containing 32 multiple-choice items beginning with a statement accompanied by an 5-point agreement or disagreement marking on by a Likert scale. Of the 32 items, eight examined respondents' feedback on the idea of English as a second official language in Japan. Twenty-four of the items were aimed at the respondents' general convictions about teaching and language learning. The questionnaire was distributed to university instructors and students. The researchers received responses from 660 students and 50 instructors who were native Japanese



speakers either teaching or studying English at universities all over Japan. All students were enrolled in one or more English language course at the university and the majority, 94.5%, never lived in a foreign country.

From the results of this study, the researchers found that 60% of students agreed that it is not useful to study English unless the reason to learn the language is for functional purposes and that future Japanese citizens need to become capable of speaking English. In addition, the results showed that motivation levels are higher when students learn for occupational purposes since they believe Japanese need to have better English abilities in the future (Matsuura et al., 2004). The adaptation of technology and the flipped classroom may change these perspectives and bring success to the language classroom

**Introduction of technology in the EFL classroom.** With the adaptation of technology into the EFL classroom, it might be possible for Japanese universities to incorporate the technology into the classroom and shift even more from a teacher-centered instruction to a more student-centered, communicative-based format. Computer applications for language learning are employed in many higher education EFL classes; however, unfortunately, in the past they have generally comprised standard CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) software, which usually include simple digitally-mediated versions of drills adapted from paper textbooks, and are generally consigned to language labs as supplementary or self-study material (I. Brown, Campbell, & Weatherford, 2008). In order to create a more communicative classroom, instructors are encouraged to incorporate technology into their lessons that engage students actively in class discussions and group activities. This new learner-centered model forgoes unneeded teacher-talk time during class, scaffolding the learning from the pre-reading assignment or instructor's video presentation before class. This method of transforming

classroom-based courses is sometimes referred to as the *inverted* or *flipped* classroom (Young, 2009).

The flipped classroom is a teaching technique that incorporates the use of traditional video or audio lectures as students' homework, typically viewed outside of class. The flipped classroom model flips the traditional instructional format of a classroom-based course. First demonstrated by Khan (2011) and later developed by Bergmann and Sams (2012), the flipped classroom is the common instructional approach where teacher-created videos featuring instruction of new concepts are viewed outside of scheduled class time, in turn freeing teacher-student time for more collaborative efforts in class.

The flipped mindset changes the focus of class time, directing attention on the learner and learning thereby taking the focus off the instructor. The traditional teacher-led lecture, the primary contact activity in the classroom, no longer takes place during class time. Instead this content is made available online in a variety of formats, essentially replacing the teacher-led lecture and freeing up class time for other uses. Activities that would normally take place outside the classroom, conventionally known as homework, are restructured and rescheduled to take place during the times that the class meets face-to-face (F2F). This significant switch impacts the roles and responsibilities of instructors and students alike and holds the potential for improving classroom-based learning experiences for both groups (Baker, 2000; Lage, Platt, & Treglia, 2000). Class thereby evolves into a problem-solving environment where students engage collaboratively, learning to resolve problems and advance concepts. The flipped classroom means personalized, intercommunication among the members of the learning environment; higher levels of personal responsibility on the students' part; a combination of instruction from the teacher and constructivist learning; and students actively engaged in the learning outcomes.

A more communicative classroom signifies intercommunication as the method and eventual outcome of language learning; this technique requires students to think through an answer, taking time to develop their thoughts and ideas. Students of well-designed flipped classes may develop greater ownership of their learning, collaborative skills needed for a participatory culture, and more opportunities to interact with the instructor and classmates using authentic language.

MEXT understands the important role of higher education if Japan is to remain economically competitive in the knowledge-driven global economy. For years, Japan has been known as a country that excels at developing the elements of many products and services; now it is time for Japan to work on improving students' lived experiences in higher education, especially in English education. The communicative teaching approach states that the learner needs to possess communicative skills similar to a native speaker, and not simply possess the capability for creating sentences that are grammatically correct. The learner needs to possess the awareness of the appropriate language use in specific situations and not merely the understanding of a well-formed sentence (Spolsky, 1989). To achieve this goal in an EFL classroom will require that some elements are pushed outside the classroom so greater focus can be placed on communicative skills in the F2F classroom. Listening to the students' lived experiences and learning how best to adapt technology into the EFL classroom makes for a good starting point.

### **Chapter Summary**

The history of English language education in Japan has followed two distinct paths, paths that have at times been on opposing sides of the fence, but today are focused on the same goal: the ability of Japanese citizens to be able to use English effectively both academically and communicatively. With government officials and business leaders pushing for communicative

language teaching, a focal point has been created from where education can move forward. Technology is capable of enhancing CLT and opening up new methods to teach and learn English as a foreign language.

As Japanese education moves to shift its English language instruction from a traditionally teacher-centered approach towards a more communicative, student-centered style, flipped classrooms have emerged as one promising alternative. Assessing students' perspectives of flipped classroom learning will contribute to the development of more effective opportunities and educational outcomes for EFL students in Japanese universities.

By exploring the experiences of students who have taken part in the flipped classroom technique, this study provides a foundation for a better understanding of the benefits and challenges of implementing the flipped classroom technique in an undergraduate EFL classroom based on the students' perspective. The examination of these issues provides guidance for instructors interested in developing a more learner-centered approach to teaching and a more participatory learning experience for their students. By facilitating a learner-centered approach to instruction, this model can contribute to the enhancement of the undergraduate educational experience.

### Chapter 3: Methods

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory case study was to understand the lived experiences of Japanese EFL university students who took part in an English course that was taught using the flipped classroom model. For the purpose of this study, the flipped classroom was defined as one where the instructor created lecture content as podcasts, narrated presentations, or other types of digital formats that students reviewed outside of class time. Class meetings were then used to apply this knowledge. As expected, the specific uses of class time varied widely, with the common thread being that the instructor acts as a guide, encouraging and attending to the actively involved students. Thus, in this EFL class, the instructor devoted the entire face-to-face time to interactive activities that required students to speak in English.

Investigating the students' lived experiences in the flipped classroom has helped to elucidate the role of the flipped classroom in creating a learner-centered environment, providing opportunities to use the target language in authentic scenarios. This study involved three data-collecting instruments: journals, observations, and interviews. From the beginning of the semester, participants kept journals detailing their experiences in the flipped class. In addition, the researcher conducted observations throughout the semester. Finally, the researcher held focus group interviews with the participants twice during the study. The data gathered during the study were analyzed to answer the overall research question: What were the lived experiences of EFL university students taught using the flipped classroom model? The following sub-questions were also addressed:

- What were the students' impressions and opinions about being taught using the flipped classroom model?

- What were students' perceived changes in their study habits as a result of taking a flipped class?
- What were the students' perceived benefits and challenges of learning English in the flipped classroom?
- In what ways, if any, did students experience increased communication opportunities in the flipped class?

By exploring the lived experiences of students who have taken part in a flipped class, this study explored the effectiveness of the flipped classroom to increase EFL students' English verbal communicative abilities from the students' perspective.

### **Research Design**

This qualitative case study examined the lived experiences of Japanese university students and explored the flipped classroom's impact on communication opportunities for EFL students. Qualitative research allowed for the exploration and understanding of individuals and the complexity of a situation (Creswell, 2009; Gray, 2009; Yin, 2014). Furthermore, the case study methodology afforded the researcher an in-depth examination of an activity while retaining a holistic, real-world view. A case study was an effective technique for managing technically distinctive situations characterized by a lesser number of data points compared with variables of interest. These variables of interest and data points were determined by data collected from multiple sources in order to determine the consistency of the findings and navigate the data analysis (Yin, 2014). From these convictions, the researcher chose a qualitative research method with a case study design.

The theoretical framework for this study was based on a pragmatic worldview developed through the researcher's teaching philosophy that is built upon social constructivist theory. The

pragmatist perceives the world through a variety of lenses, leading to the use of a mixture of data collection instruments and analyses (Creswell, 2009). Social-constructivist theory is based on the idea that people acquire knowledge through interactions with others, and these interactions lead to the internalization of new learning that can be demonstrated through the creation of a public artifact (Papert, 1980; Vygotsky, 1978).

### **Sources of Data**

The following section briefly describes the demographics of this study. Iwate University is a national, coeducational 4-year university located in Morioka, Iwate Prefecture, Japan. The university has an enrollment of just over 6,000 students and undergraduate and graduate schools made up of four departments: social sciences, agriculture, engineering, and education. The university is also home to an international center where non-Japanese students can study the Japanese language and culture in order to build closer relationships with other students and the local residents.

**Target population.** The participants of the study were Japanese first-year agriculture and engineering students studying English as a foreign language. Students from other disciplines did not participate because English is not required for students in the social sciences and education departments. Participants were enrolled in a course, "Project One," to improve their English language skills. The students, aged 18 to 19 years, had been studying English between 4 and 6 years before entering the university, coming from both public and private high schools. There were 37 students in the class, 24 males and 13 females, and participants had TOEFL scores between 200 and 420.

The participants selected were students from a classroom-based course taught using the flipped classroom model. Thus students previewed course content before class and used class

time to work through the homework assignments. The objectives of the Project One course were to build communication skills, collaborate, and develop organizational skills while working on projects within a group. Some of the objectives students needed to complete were:

- Read four graded readers; a graded reader is an easy reading book used to support the extensive reading approach to teaching English as a second or foreign language.
- Write four book reports.
- Complete four online vocabulary/grammar quizzes.
- Give four mini speeches to recommend each graded reader read.
- Give one *pecha kucha* style presentation. A pecha kucha presentation consists of 20 slides with each slide being shown for 20 seconds for a total presentation time of 6 minutes and 20 seconds. This style keeps presentations concise and fast paced.
- Give one mini presentation (group).
- Give one poster presentation (group).
- Prepare one research project (local topic).
- Give one final presentation on the research project (group).
- Write one 1500 word report on the research project (individual).
- Assess the group on the final research project presentation.

The class was divided into groups (each consisting of a group leader who organized the group schedule), group uploads to the course's Moodle site, and communication with the instructor. Students were encouraged to use the digital tools provided by the instructor to gather information on their topic and present it to the class.

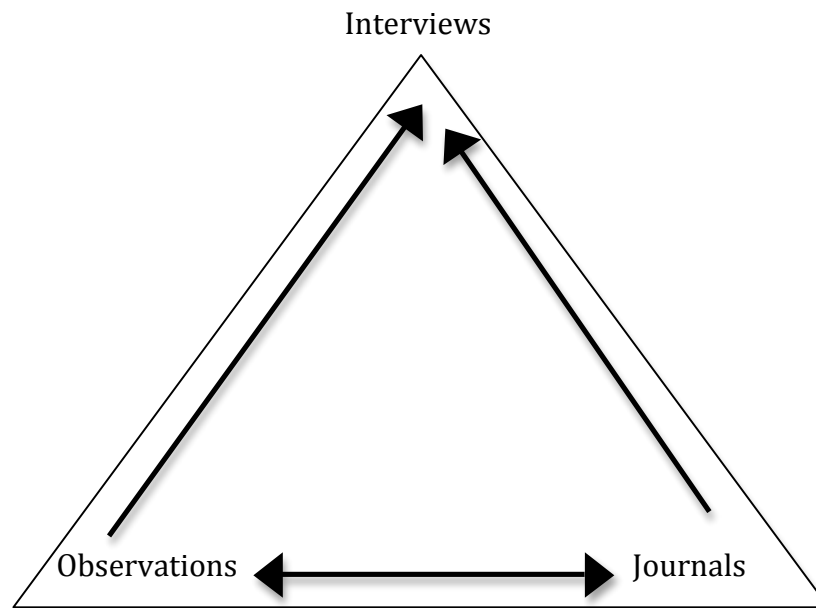
**Sampling method.** The researcher used purposive sampling to collect qualitative data through journals, observations, and two focus-group sessions. Purposive sampling is beneficial



when a targeted sample needs to be reached quickly and the researcher's main concern is not sampling for proportionality. Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to choose the people to be studied using a small sample size based on the people meeting certain characteristics (Creswell, 1998; Gray, 2009). The advantage of this method was that it allowed the researcher to choose people from the group being studied who had specific characteristics and use the results from the sample to generalize across the population, in this case Japanese university EFL students learning through the flipped classroom (Creswell, 1998, 2002; Gray, 2009). To select participants for the study, the researcher consulted with the instructor and identified six participants from various English levels in the class—two students from the high, middle, and low ability levels—to gain a deeper understanding of a variety of students' lived experiences across a range of language abilities.

**Triangulation.** A major benefit of conducting a case study was the ability to use a variety of corroborating sources, enabling the researcher to address a wider range of historical and behavioral issues, develop a theme, and strengthen the validity of the study (Creswell, 2002; Gray, 2009; Yin, 2014). The key to triangulation is the ability to view data from different vantage points and be able to confirm or challenge findings of one method to, or against, another (Bell, 2010; Gray, 2009; Merriam, 1998, 2009). Basing this study on observations, interviews, and participant journals enabled the researcher to triangulate the sources of data and determine the consistency of the findings (see Figure 1). The researcher conducted class observations, routinely read participant journals, and interviewed the participants twice: at the mid-point and end of the semester. Data gathered from reading the participant journals enabled the researcher to gain a deeper perspective of the participants' experiences during the face-to-face class time and cross-check them against data gathered during the observations. Finally, these cross-checked

data enabled the researcher to formulate additional questions for the interview, enabling participants to confirm, expand upon, or clear up any misunderstandings that arose from their journals or the observations. Data gathered from these three sources were then triangulated to determine the consistency of the findings.



*Figure 1.* Triangulation of the sources of evidence.

### **Tools and Instruments Used**

**Interviews.** Interviews enabled the participants to reflect and expand on answers, allowing for more detail in their responses than would have been possible through a survey or opinion poll. Equally important, interviews allowed the researcher control over the line of questioning (Creswell, 2009; Gray, 2009; Yin, 2014) and were adaptable (Bell, 2010; Gray, 2009), which allowed the interviewer to follow up with probes, while noting visible facial expressions, physical gestures, and tone of voice. These non-verbal clues provided the interviewer with valuable information that might otherwise have gone undetected in a written response. Interviews were conducted with a semi-structured approach, to both collect specific data and permit some amount of exploration of topics with the participants (Merriam, 2009),

with questions partially pre-planned from data gathered during the observations and participant journals.

**Participant journals.** According to Creswell (2009) and Yin (2014), a journal is an unobtrusive method of data collection that enables the researcher to peer into the inner workings of the participants' minds and thoughts. Additionally, journals were flexible, could be used with other forms of data collection, and were capable of accessing information that may have been difficult to access using other methods (Alaszewski, 2006). This type of documentation was unobtrusive and allowed the researcher access to the participants' words and language (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2014). For this study, the journal acted as a reference, providing data gathered over an extended period of time, unlike data gathered from a few observations (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003). By using journals, participants had time to compose their thoughts over a 3-month period, which gave the researcher insight into how the participants changed during the course of the semester.

**Observations.** Observations gave the researcher a first-hand experience, allowing the researcher to keep field notes of participants' actions in class as they occurred, and were helpful in examining actions that may have been difficult for participants to discuss openly (Bell, 2010, Creswell, 2009; Gray, 2009; Yin, 2014). DeWalt and DeWalt (1998) stated that observations improve the validity of a study since they help the researcher gain a clearer understanding of the context being studied. Observations were also useful in determining if people behaved in the way they claimed (Bell, 2010).

Furthermore, an observer can never become completely invisible, but the goal was to become as unobtrusive as possible so that participants would exhibit behavior that was as normal as possible (Bell, 2010). For this reason, the researcher observed the class as a non-participant

observer (Bell, 2010; Creswell, 2009; Gray, 2009). The researcher felt the non-participant observer role caused fewer ethical problems than the participant observer as the researcher had little influence over the participants, removing the possibility of bias.

### **Data Collection Strategies and Procedures**

Data were collected from three sources: multiple oral interviews held face-to-face during the course of data collection, examination of participant journals that were kept during the semester, and observations of the class. To ensure the validity at each stage, a pilot study was conducted to enable the researcher to refine data collection procedures, gain insight into the type of data collected, and refine questions to clarify the research design (Creswell, 2002; Yin, 2014).

**Interviews.** For this study, the researcher used the focus-group interview that allowed participants to build from one another's responses and helped participants feel more relaxed than if the interviews were held one-on-one. A carefully planned focus-group ideally creates a non-threatening environment where valuable information on a specific area of interest can be obtained from participants' discussions (Bell, 2010; Gray, 2009; Krueger, 1994; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Focus-group interviews were particularly desirable in the context of the proposed study because the focus of the research was on the students' attitudes and lived experiences in a flipped classroom setting. According to Bryman and Bell (2007), the advantages of using focus-groups over one-to-one interviews include the ability to observe a joint formulation of opinions. Considering English was the participants' second language, a focus-group enabled the participants to ask one another for help when expressing their thoughts. The researcher's intent was to conduct the majority of the interview in English, but participants were made aware that if they were unable to express their thoughts sufficiently in English, they were

able to use Japanese. Emphasis was placed on the expression of thoughts and ideas over the use of English. The process of working with each focus group took place as described subsequently.

The focus-group interviews were conducted at two points during the semester, one around week 7 and the second around week 14. Conducting the interviews at different times during the semester gave the researcher a wider breadth of the participants' lived experiences. For the interview process, the researcher used the structured questions found in the interview schedule (see Appendix A) to elicit responses from the participants about their lived experiences in the flipped classroom. At the beginning of the first interview, as an ice-breaking activity, the researcher solicited demographic information from the participants, including age, number of years studying English, and college major. The researcher had four to five probing questions ready to ask individual participants to explain their thoughts and ideas in more detail or to elaborate on a participant's response to a question. Data obtained through the journal entries and during observations was used to prepare the researcher for the two focus group interviews. The researcher used the journal entries as prompts during the focus group interviews, encouraging participants to expand upon the journal entries, or as a means for participants to compare in-class experiences with each other. During the focus-group interviews, participants were encouraged to interact, discuss questions with one another, and exchange and comment on others' experiences and viewpoints (Gray, 2009; Krueger, 1994; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

Before each interview, the researcher contacted the participants to remind them of the appointed interview time through email. To begin each interview, after a brief greeting, the researcher noted the time and stated that he would provide a cue to begin wrapping up the interview 15 minutes before it was scheduled to end. He then let the participants know that he was starting to record the interview. The researcher briefly reviewed the informed consent

process and asked participants if they had any questions before beginning. The researcher then proceeded with the interview.

To begin, participants were asked to describe and discuss their experiences in the flipped classroom. During this process, the researcher offered brief prompts to encourage further description as needed, and took notes to keep track of the discussion. The researcher followed this discussion with a small number of open-ended questions, again using a short list of prompts.

At the conclusion of the interview, the researcher asked whether the participants wanted to discuss anything that had not yet been addressed. The researcher thanked the participants and ended the interview session. The researcher informed the participants that the interviews would be transcribed and each participant would receive a copy of the transcript interview to review. Participants were told they should inform the researcher of any mistakes in the transcription or additional information the participant wished to add. In addition, the researcher reviewed the notes taken during the course of the interviews to be used as further documentation in the study.

On the day after each interview, the interview follow-up letter (see Appendix G) was sent by email thanking the participant for his/her participation. The participant was advised that he/she might be contacted to respond to additional questions or for member checking purposes during the data analysis stage, as well as the interview schedule for the second interview so that participants could prepare. During the later stages of the data analysis process, each participant was emailed a report letter providing an update on the progress of the study. Attached to each email was a brief summary of the participant's contribution to the study and any additional questions the researcher had for the participant. Contact with participants continued as the study neared completion, and each participant was an essential contributor to the success of this study.

**Description of interview pilot study and lessons learned.** A pilot study was conducted to test the interview questions and gather information on possible ways to improve the data-gathering tool. A pilot study could reveal problems with the interview question design, enabling the researcher to make the necessary changes before the larger study began (Creswell, 2002; Gray, 2009; Yin, 2014). To pilot the interview, the researcher asked three of his students who were similar in age, gender, and language ability to the actual participants to participate in a focus-group style interview (see Appendix A) in order to gauge students' understanding of the instructions, quality of the questions being asked, the amount of time it could take to conduct the interview, and the participant's reactions to being interviewed using this interview style.

Feedback from the participants included the perception that the questions were difficult to comprehend for second language learners. Participants mentioned that it would be easier to express their thoughts if they had a clearer understanding of the questions being asked beforehand. After careful review, the researcher added a Japanese translation to each question to help eliminate any possible confusion on behalf of the participants and made the questions available to the participants at least 1 week before the interview date, giving the participants ample time to review the questions and prepare for the interview. After making these changes, the researcher carried out a second pilot study to determine if the changes made to the interview schedule were sufficiently helpful (Creswell, 2002; Gray, 2009; Yin, 2014). It was determined from the second pilot study that the participants better understood the questions being asked and were better able to express themselves given the extra time to prepare. These changes enabled the researcher to not only refine the instructions and interview questions, but also check the validity and reliability of responses to the interview questions.

**Participant journals.** During the course of this study, it was important that participants had a place where they could record their thoughts on a regular basis. The journal acted as a record to which participants were able to refer throughout the semester. The journals helped participants improve their thinking skills, allowing them to develop a voice and improve their communication in preparation for the focus group interviews (Bell, 2010).

The journals offered a stable piece of evidence that the researcher was able to review regularly, allowing the researcher to compare what the participants were writing in their journals with what was being observed in class (Bell, 2010; Creswell, 1998, 2002). Since the journals were the participants' personal narratives of their lived experiences in the flipped classroom, participants reflected on their experiences, providing the researcher a unique look into their lives as students. These journals consisted of participants' thoughts and opinions about learning in the flipped classroom environment: subjective data that could only be provided by the participants themselves (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003). Once the research project was completed, the participants' journals were downloaded and stored securely or deleted to protect the participants' anonymity.

Considering the collection of participant journals represented the first contact made with each participant, the researcher initiated this contact by sending members the participation request letter (see Appendix F) in Japanese by email. The letter explained the research project's focus and purpose with details of what participation in the study entailed. In addition, the researcher attached the informed consent form (see Appendix E). The participant's signed agreement to take part in the study constituted his/her consent to the conditions of the study, as was made clear in the request letter. Participants were able to request more information and were given an opportunity to discuss the study before agreeing to participate. The researcher addressed



all questions and concerns expressed by the participants and contact continued by email as needed.

The researcher provided space on the Project One course Moodle site where participants were asked to journal after each class. The researcher provided some guiding questions (see Appendix B), but the participants were free to record their thoughts as they pertained to their lived experience in the course. Because participants had time to compose their thoughts, they had the opportunity to be specific in their recollections, giving specific details of the events that took place in class. Hosting the journals on the course Moodle site allowed the researcher continuous access to the journals and physically eliminated any disruption that may have occurred if the researcher was required to collect the journals, read them, and then return them to the participants. Each journal was not accessible online to the other students and the journals were cross-referenced against visual data gathered during the researcher's observations.

**Description of journal pilot study and lessons learned.** Just as the researcher piloted the focus-group interviews, he also piloted the data gathering from the participant journals. The researcher asked three of his students who were similar in age, gender, and language ability to keep a journal on Moodle for 4 weeks, responding to the journal questions (see Appendix B). This method provided the researcher with valuable feedback on how students interpreted the questions and how they answered them. Piloting this part of the study also gave the researcher an idea of how much data he would receive each week from the participants.

Feedback from the participants showed that they gave simple answers to the questions and did not provide descriptive detail of the events that took place during class. Participants mentioned that they were not sure what the researcher was looking for and that it would be easier if they had a model to follow. After careful review the researcher added a model that participants

could follow when journaling. Adding this model gave participants a better idea of how to address the questions and possible responses to help participants formulate and express their thoughts. After making this change, the researcher carried out a second pilot study to determine if the changes made to the interview schedule were sufficiently helpful (Creswell, 2002; Gray, 2009; Yin, 2014). It was determined from the second pilot study that the participants were better able to answer the questions and began to compose more descriptive, detailed journal entries. Again, these changes not only enabled the researcher to refine the journal instructions, but also allowed the researcher to check for validity and reliability of responses to the journal questions.

**Observations.** For the final data gathering procedure, the researcher used observations. For this study, the observations were used to build context, enabling the researcher to understand the circumstances of what was taking place in class in order to help him better understand the relationship between the researcher's observations and the participant's journals. Observations gave the researcher a first-hand experience of these events in real time. Since the observations took place after the researcher had read the participants' journals, the researcher was able to notice any discrepancies between participants' journal entries and their behaviors (Bell, 2010; Creswell, 1998, 2002). In addition, the researcher used the journal entries as prompts or areas on which the researcher wished to focus during the observations in order to compare the participants' in-class experiences with the information gathered from the journals. Thus, considering the observations were made after an extensive reading of the participant journals, the researcher was able to compare data gathered from the journals and determine if the participants were acting in a similar fashion during the observations. Cross-checking against what the researcher witnessed during the observations was another way to triangulate the data and ensure the study's validity.

In order to minimize the degree of obtrusiveness and enable students to conduct themselves in a normal fashion (Bell, 2010; Yin, 2014), the researcher also used video as part of his observations. This unobtrusive method captured participants' real life actions as they took place, affording the ability to review them at a later date. Using video allowed the researcher to focus on various observation tasks, while at the same time not missing anything that was recorded by the video camera. An observation task is an activity on which the researcher works while observing the lesson in progress. It focuses on one or two small parts of the learning or teaching process, requiring the researcher to collect data, such as the language used, or patterns of interactions, from the actual lesson (Wajnryb, 1992).

Before each observation session, the researcher stationed the video camera in one area of the classroom and positioned himself in another section of the room. This afforded the researcher of an overall view of the classroom from different angles as he conducted his observation tasks. The researcher had two to three observation tasks prepared, and while he observed the class he took notes, afterwards reviewing the video using the same observation tasks.

During the course of observations, the researcher kept detailed field notes on the participants' behavior and activities (see Appendix C). The researcher used a structured observation approach, as the objectives of the study had been identified and the behavior or aspect of the observations had become apparent (Bell, 2010). The development of the observation protocol served as a means to eliminate any variations that could become apparent due to the researcher's bias or perception of the events and provide a framework for the observations (Denscombe, 2007).

**Description of observation pilot study and lessons learned.** A pilot study was conducted on the observation methods used by the researcher. To carry out this pilot study, the

researcher asked a colleague if it was possible for him to observe her class. The class was made up of students similar in age, gender, and language ability to those of the actual study. The researcher stationed a video camera in one area of the room and conducted the observation tasks from a different vantage point than the video camera (see Appendix C). Afterwards, the researcher asked the students for feedback about the presence of the observer and video camera.

Feedback from the participants showed that, at first, they felt intimidated when they saw the video camera. The participants mentioned they felt nervous and shy, afraid that the video would catch them making mistakes. From this feedback, the researcher decided to hide the video camera as much as possible. In order to help participants become accustomed to the video camera as well as less obvious to participants, the researcher asked the course instructor to place the video camera in the same position for every class and to obscure it as much as possible by hiding it behind a computer monitor. This process enabled participants to become accustomed, and at the same time less aware, of its presence.

In addition, the pilot study enabled the researcher to gain valuable insight into how to conduct the observations with as little disruption as possible, and to determine that the observation tasks chosen were suitable for Japanese university EFL students. After making changes based on participant feedback, the researcher carried out a second pilot study to assess the changes made to the observation protocol (Creswell, 2002; Yin, 2014). It was determined from the second pilot study that the participants felt more comfortable and less aware of the presence of the video camera, and that the observation tasks chosen were suitable for the study.

### **Human Subjects Considerations**

**Ethical considerations.** Though the students chosen to participate did so on a volunteer basis, it was important to acknowledge any risks associated with participating and to establish

proper considerations for the study of human subjects. An application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was an important component of this study. Human subjects research is guided by federal policies. According to those policies, such research is eligible for exempt status when it takes place within an acknowledged educational setting and addresses issues of instructional strategies or classroom management (National Science Foundation, n.d.). Therefore, this study qualified as exempt research.

Several steps were taken to ensure that risks were minimized for study participants. Each participant was provided with and asked to review an informed consent form confirming his/her understanding of the study and his/her role in it (see Appendix E). This form provided participants with an overview of the study and its goals, what was expected of the participants, and information on confidentiality, risks, and benefits of the study. The participant's signature agreeing to participate in the study was taken as agreement with the conditions of the study.

It was anticipated that participants would have questions about the study's goals, processes, and outcomes. Every effort was made to address their questions openly prior to confirming their participation in the study. Because participants in the study cannot remain completely anonymous, their concerns regarding the confidentiality of their interview responses and journals were addressed. In order to protect participants' privacy and identity, study data were reported without using actual names, and other identifying information was excluded from the report. In addition, data collected were not shared with anyone and remained confidential. All study documents were stored securely during the course of the study and will be destroyed 3 years after completion of the study, as established by rules of the IRB. These steps were intended to make participation in the study a positive and protected experience for all participants.

**Permission from Iwate University.** The researcher sent a letter requesting permission from Iwate University (see Appendix D), along with a copy of the IRB approval and methods minimizing any potential risks to the participants (see Appendix E). It was the researcher's intent that the journal collection, interviews, and observations be conducted with as little disruption as possible to the normal class routine and that the researcher's presence in no way affected the participants' or the instructor's ability to conduct class in a normal fashion.

### **Proposed Analysis Methods and Procedures**

Data gathered from the participant journals, observations, and interviews were coded so they could be used to answer the research questions.

**Content and textual analysis.** The participant journals and transcribed interviews provided the researcher with data that needed to be coded in order to determine the link between the data and their meaning (Charmaz, 2001; Gray, 2009). A code is a word or short phrase that succinctly symbolizes the importance of a chunk of language or discernable data. The codes became an essential element to the researcher, allowing him to organize and group codes into similar categories, leading the researcher to the idea or point the data was trying to express. Coding is an iterative process that begins with single words or sentences, but develops to longer pieces of text or even the restructuring of the codes themselves (Saldaña, 2013).

In order to filter through and code all the data from the participants' journals and transcribed interviews, the research used MAXQDA, an analytical software program created to assist in qualitative research. Qualitative data analysis is sometimes considered to rely too much on the researcher's feelings or impressions because the researcher does not give explicit details on how the analysis process was completed (Welsh, 2002). Using software for data analysis added an element of rigor through data triangulation. Analyzing different qualitative data

separately or together where interviews, journals, and observation data are linked, coded, and triangulated in order to make connections between the various data sources (Kuckartz, 2014; L. Richards & Richards, 1991). The researcher aimed to keep the coding analysis process as transparent as possible and believed that being able to display his analysis process clearly led to greater validity of the study.

**Themes.** During the course of coding and data analysis, the codes developed into themes that the researcher used to categorize and link the data to the research questions. The themes developed were: (a) active learning, which described the participants' experiences in the flipped classroom; (b) workload, which referred to tasks or activities required in order to participate actively in class; (c) collaboration, which explained participant collaboration in order to prepare for class; (d) technology, which demonstrated how participants used technology to expand the learning process and communicate more effectively; (e) communicative English, which pointed out the opportunities to communicate in English; (f) interaction, which explained the opportunities to interact in the flipped classroom; (g) improvising, which described communicating with classmates naturally and not from scripted dialogues; (h) admiration, which showed how participants evaluated and compared their own language abilities against classmates; (i) English used with classmates, which described how communication led to speaking English more than before, (j) knowledge construction in English, which described participants using English to gather ideas and express opinions and the development of critical thinking skills; and (k) an awareness of one's improvement, which referred to how, as communication capabilities and the creation of knowledge increased, participants became more aware of their improvement.

### **Means to Ensure Validity**

To ensure the internal validity and trustworthiness of the study, the researcher employed four techniques: triangulation, member checking, long-term observation, and peer review (Gray, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). First, triangulation increased validity by using multiple data sources to support the findings of the research. Cross-checking data from observations, participant journals, and interviews enabled the researcher to determine if there were consistencies in his findings. Through participant journals and observations, the researcher was able to comprehend the broader aspects of the class context and the lived experiences of the participants.

Second, the researcher used participant member checks with the interview transcripts. Member checking, also referred to as participant verification (Rager, 2005), refers to the process where data and interpretations gathered by the researcher are cross-checked with the members from whom the data were originally obtained, seeking to improve the accuracy, credibility and validity of what had been recorded during a research interview (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The interview questions that were formed from the participant journals and observation field notes acted as the member check of the researcher's understanding and interpretation of the journals and observations. Moreover, the interview transcripts were sent back to the participants for their member check, making sure any changes made respected the participants' voices.

Third, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), prolonged engagement in observation is one way to increase credibility of the study. Because the researcher engaged in non-participant observations over the course of the 15-week semester and read the participant journals, the participants opened up and allowed him to access their internal thoughts during the focus-group



interviews. The more at ease the researcher made the participants feel, the better opportunity he had to understand the cultural influence on the knowledge and meaning of their actions.

Finally, the researcher submitted early drafts of the research findings and data analysis to peers for review and feedback. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined peer debriefing as “a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (p. 308). The researcher’s peers consisted of two colleagues from work and two doctoral colleagues. Feedback from these peers enabled the researcher to obtain different viewpoints, perceptions, interpretations, and analyses within the same data set, but also confirmed assumptions and interpretations.

### **Plan for Reporting Findings**

The writing of a study report was an important part of the research process, serving to bring the study process to a conclusion as well as to offer the study results to its audience. This study was intended to be of interest to instructors of EFL at higher education institutions. Instructors concern themselves with studies that present information they can transfer to their own settings for application (Merriam, 2009). The sharing of the lived experiences of the flipped classroom provided much of the value of this study, illuminating the possible reasons for transitioning to the flipped classroom for readers of the study.

The final report for this study addressed each of the research sub-questions, integrating the themes as needed within the larger questions. As each section was composed, the corresponding data were once again reviewed, compared, and questioned to ensure accuracy and completeness. Each sub-question section incorporated interview, observation, and journal excerpts to both enrich the report and allow the participants’ perspectives to be heard. This

mixture of strong common traits and widely varying experiences produced results in a report on the flipped classroom. Although the study database may be considered and presented as one outcome of a case study (Yin, 2014), the database for this study was not shared in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants. However, the study instruments were included to provide readers with as full a picture of the study as possible. The following chapters provide the results and the final report of the study, striving for a fundamental understanding of the students' lived experiences and its meaning in the flipped classroom.

## Chapter 4: Results

This chapter reports the findings related to the primary research question of the study: What were the lived experiences of EFL students in the flipped classroom? Table 1 explains the relationship between each sub-question and its corresponding theme developed during the analysis and coding phase of the study.

Table 1

### *Linking Research Questions and Themes*

Research Question	Themes
What were the students' impressions or opinions about being taught in the flipped classroom?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active Learning- describes the participants' experiences in the flipped classroom.</li> <li>• Workload- tasks or activities required in order to participate actively in class.</li> </ul>
What were the students' perceived changes in their study habits in the flipped classroom?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration- describes participant collaboration in order to prepare for class.</li> <li>• Technology- how participants used technology to expand the learning process and communicate more effectively.</li> </ul>
What were the students' perceived benefits and challenges of learning English in the flipped classroom?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicative English- opportunities to communicate in English.</li> <li>• Interaction- opportunities to interact in the flipped classroom.</li> <li>• Improvising- communicating with classmates not from scripted dialogues.</li> <li>• Admiration- participants evaluating and comparing their own language abilities against classmates.</li> </ul>
In what ways did students experience increased communication opportunities in the flipped classroom?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English Used with Classmates- communication leads to speaking English more than before.</li> <li>• Knowledge Construction in English-using English to gather ideas and express opinions and the development of critical thinking skills.</li> <li>• An Awareness of One's Improvement- as communication capabilities and the creation of knowledge increased, participants became more aware of their improvement.</li> </ul>

Entering a class taught using the flipped classroom model can be a challenge, but considering participants only possessed the knowledge of learning English from their high school experiences, the participants would have had few preconceived notions as to how learning in the flipped classroom could or should happen. This conceptualization enabled the participants to offer honest opinions or impressions of the flipped classroom, describing their learning experiences and reflecting on their new understanding of how English should be taught and learned. The results obtained from the six participants from various English levels in the class—two students each from the high, middle, and low ability levels—are presented in this chapter. To preserve participants' anonymity, a code was developed for each participant: for example PH1, with P meaning participant, H the level of the student in the class (high, middle, or low), followed by a number 1 or 2, as there were 2 participants from each level. All participants' quotes are transcribed verbatim and may contain errors in grammar and punctuation.

### **Themes of Classroom Experience**

Initially, it is important to gain an understanding of the participants' overall impressions of this new learning environment before moving on to other questions that look at specific ideas in more detail. During the data analysis process, two primary themes were developed that address the question, What were the students' impressions or opinions about being taught in the flipped classroom? They were: (a) active learning, and (b) workload. During the course of this project, participants began to realize that learning in the flipped classroom created a more active, student-centered environment when compared with high school. Participants were informed about the use of English and that in this class they would not simply study English in order to do well on the assessments, but also that they would use English for communication. Participants would work with classmates in English to prepare, present, and assess various projects that the

instructor had assigned during the semester. Participants also came to realize that this technique involved a heavier workload and that they needed to come to class prepared and at times work together outside of class. Even with this heavier workload, participants felt that flipped learning was a more beneficial and authentic way to learn English than how they had done in the past.

**Active learning.** The theme of active learning describes the ways in which the experiences of the participants changed while learning in the flipped classroom. As participants compared learning English in a teacher-centered classroom during high school to the flipped classroom, they were able to see differences between these learning environments. PH2 commented, "In high school, when teachers gave lectures, I translated into Japanese or took notes and later filled in blanks on exams. I studied English only for the entrance exams which was strictly learning strategies." Similarly PH1 reported, "I, when I was high school student I mainly memorized, but this class I learn with using English." PM2 pointed out, "Other classes teacher explain student long time but in this class we communicate with classmates. I think this class is good because we can share own opinion, better than high school classes." Participants recognized a key difference between their past experiences of learning English in high school and how they were learning English in the flipped classroom at the university.

Participants also made comparisons between other English and non-English university classes. PH2 acknowledged that, "There are many classes that I just walk in the classroom, sit down, and listen to teachers. It is very rare that I raise my hand to make suggestions or cooperate with friends during other classes" PH2 mentioned, "From studying grammar or memorizing vocabulary words changed to more towards using English." Participants realized that in the flipped classroom, English had a different purpose from previous experiences or conversations with friends. PH1 mentioned,

I have thought learning is solving questions or translations like my friend's class, but this class I speak more English in this class. This maybe useful English so in this class we can learn English...First all this class can, in this class I can develop my English.

Later in the interview, PH1 stated, "In my friend's class they have some textbook and do translation and started with some questions. But our class is mainly talking. This is nice." PL2 concurred, stating, "I studied English only to get a good point on a test so far. However I study English to take the communication now." Participants seemed to notice that the focus of learning English in the flipped classroom was communication and the development of their language abilities.

Furthermore, participants were capable of distinguishing clearly and explaining the differences between active and passive learning environments. PH2 stated, "In other classes, there is no communication at all. Very passive." PM2 pointed out, "Other class teacher all explain and students hear but this class to make groups we talk with group members so we can communicate with classmates" PM1 emphasized that, "The students are in charge of the actions. We can't be passive." PH2 added, "It is an active class. The others are passive classes." PM2 commented, "In high school class we are given textbook but now we have not textbook so we can...we can think....we think." PH2 summarized the participants' thoughts when he stated, "In this class, learning English for communication for real life. We need to use English to communicate a lot. That is the major difference about this class." Participants appeared to realize the flipped classroom enabled them to be more active and participatory than they were used to: that an active learning environment increased students' opportunities to communicate in English.

**Workload.** The theme of workload describes the participants' thoughts on the amount of work to be completed before the face-to-face class. Workload is not to be confused with

preparation, which is discussed in the next section, and looks into the different methods or tools participants used to prepare for face-to-face class. Here, workload focuses on tasks or activities required in order to prepare for and actively participate in the face-to-face class.

At times, assignments involved gathering more information, creating new materials, or making changes to an upcoming presentation. As PL1 pointed out, "Our group must look for good information about coal and push it. I want to research about more information for good presentation." PM1 echoed PL1's sentiment, "I will research about natural gas and do presentation next class." PH1 stated, "We listed up the point in poster we have to remake and add. We decided to do a questionnaire to make our poster better." PM1 explained, "We decided that we make new slides for presentation and remake slides. We should write more information and use big size letters in poster." The increased workload participants experienced in the flipped classroom also included rehearsing the language used in order to be successful.

An increased workload also involved participants practicing to express their thoughts and ideas in English. PH1 mentioned, "I prepare for presentations or poster program I decide what I say." PL1 stated, "I should practice many time." Participants apparently realized that there was a clear distinction between preparations in the flipped classroom as compared to other classes. For example, PH1 mentioned, "Preparation was not meant to memorize by rote. I aimed to talk with thinking and to convey my research. It helped my developing."

The increased workload seemed to increase stress levels among participants as evidenced by PH1's statement, "The teacher gives us lot of homework and my studying time my English study time is more longer than before," and PL1's comment that, "The weight of studying other school subjects is heavy, too. Can't spend all my time only on English. There are math, physics,

chemistry and so on. So teachers to take that in consideration would be very appreciative.” An exchange between a few participants demonstrated the increased workload:

PM1: “Ummmm...for me, after school studying at home has become English studying time a lot.”

PH2: “I agree.”

PL2: “Taking a lot of time for it.”

PM1: “I agree...agree....mainly English, only English...What comes first is now English.”

PH2: “On every Mondays and Tuesdays, I first think of what I have to do for my English class.”

Additionally, the researcher observed increased stress related to the environment. The learning environment caused a few participants to struggle with the course format. PL2 stated, “So often due to the amount of work, we tend to struggle. We miss quite a few points of activities.” PM1 added, “Knowing if students understand what they have to do is important. For me..., didn't know the objectives sometimes,” but also stated, “Checking students schedule, how much information students absorb, and the system status of Iwate University's homepage is important.” Taking into account the learning shift was completely new to the participants, a few seemed to offer ideas on how to introduce the flipped classroom in the future. PM1 commented, “The same style from the beginning would be very hard. Taking step by step, gradually shifting might be fine. It does take some time to get used to the style.” PM1 added,

All the notices and the announcements in the class are in English, we can't get everything. Throughout the class, it seems like homework or instructions for homework



are given here and there, but can't get them all. At the end, we often say, "What are we supposed to do?"

Even with the increased workload leading to higher levels of stress, participants felt that learning in the flipped classroom was beneficial.

Taking into consideration the increased workload and reflecting on the new learning environment, participants expressed a theme of appreciation in their responses. For example, PH1 stated, "It was busy, but satisfying in a way." PH2 added, "Became more skillful, because we tried to use and to speak English for sure. Being able to use English more than in other courses." Participants also conveyed their feelings regarding interacting with classmates and learning from each other, as demonstrated by PM2's statement, "It is a group learning setting, so broader friendship will be expected. Could expand your network." PL2 added, "We help each other because we don't understand much English. By working together, we encourage each other too." Participants described the new challenges they experienced learning in the flipped classroom as well as the benefits. Additional impressions and opinions in regards to study habits are discussed in the next section.

During the data analysis process, preparation was the primary theme that emerged. This theme was connected with two subthemes (a) collaboration and (b) technology, both of which helped to answer the question, What were the students' perceived changes in their study habits in the flipped classroom? This section will examine the different methods or tools participants used in the preparation for class as well as in class. Results from the participants' journals and interviews revealed higher levels of collaboration and use of technology in preparation for in-class learning.

**Collaboration.** The subtheme of collaboration describes how participants worked together to prepare for class. In the traditional class, homework is usually completed alone after the lesson as a method for practicing what was learned in class. Since the flipped classroom requires homework to be completed in class and for students to come to prepared, often students learn in dyads or small groups as seen in PH2's comment, "We need to work together with new classmates," and PL2's statement, " We need to cooperate with each other."

Alternatively, there were times when collaboration involved discussing ideas with classmates, practicing, making changes to the assignment, and meeting with the instructor outside of class. PH2 remarked, "I talked with my group to prepare our poster...before class I have to work with my group." PL2 demonstrated the necessity of having a goal before discussions, stating, "By next class we should discuss the rate of each energy." Equally important, PM1 expressed the need to include each group member's voice and the importance of using technology to do so; "Before the debate, we discussed about each opinion to other energy source. We have to do discuss about energy source in the future on the Internet." PH1 concurred, stating, "Our team speaked every person. Because of this, I think our team member's ability got better." Furthermore, there were times when participants needed to speak with the instructor outside of class, either alone (as PM1 stated, "I am going to go to library to meet the teacher and talk about environment issue.") or as a group (as PM1 stated, "Our environmental issue group will go to the library to meet the teacher.").

During the study, participants realized they needed to rely on different methods when preparing for the flipped class. Participants also appeared to use technology in previously unfamiliar ways to extend the learning environment outside the classroom and come to class better prepared.

**Technology.** The subtheme of technology describes how the participants used technology to expand the learning process as well as help them communicate more effectively. PM2 commented that, "In class we can talk but out of class we can talk with Internet, for example forum." PM1 explained how the affordances of technology changed in the flipped classroom when describing how he used his electronic dictionary; "For that reason the way I use my dictionary has been changed to look for the proper words, not to just look up the meaning of the words to memorize. The need is there." PH1 added, "I had the hardest day when I forgot to bring my own dictionary! I couldn't say anything. I was just quietly sitting there."

The instructor used Moodle as the learning management system and set up a forum where students were able to communicate with each other. For some participants, using the forum to communicate was new, as PH2 stated, "Using the forum via computers as a communication tool is new to me. Never done it or used before." As participants became aware of the efficaciousness of the forums, they describe how they used the forums more beneficially. PH1 said, "We decided 'forum time' on Saturday in order to discuss smoothly. Of course, we discussed other day too. Thanks to it [forum], I think we could speak frequently." Given the tools necessary to be successful, the participants began to implement them in ways that best suited their needs.

Additionally, participants mentioned how they used the forums to collaborate before class, as evident in PL2's comment, "Our group was looking for solar energy's good points and its bad points. We must get much information until next class. So it is necessary for us to cooperate. I want to use forum very much." PM2 commented, "I talk in my presentation groups in Internet before each class and I prepare script and presentation slides." PH1 added, "Our team prepared for it since last week. Our group members are working on our presentation mainly at forum." In addition, with their busy schedules, the forums provided a way to communicate at a

time most convenient for each participant, as PH1 emphasized; “When I schedule is not, when our schedule is busy then we can’t use forums so much but try to use it. Forum is helps us.”

Finally, technology was also used to prepare and create materials for class, as PH1 explained, “We decided to do a questionnaire to make our poster better. So we worked on it at each own department group LINE after the class” (LINE is a text-based App many Japanese students use to communicate with each other). PM2 pointed out, “In this class has many presentations so I don’t, we need to write our forum and making slides and script in personal computer.”

Participants described the various ways they used technology to collaborate, communicate, and prepare in the flipped classroom. In addition, participants noted how technology enabled them to increase the amount of time they communicated in a foreign language classroom:

PL2: “It’s been helpful. Outside of the class, we can communicate regarding our activities and even the chances to use English increases through technology.”

PM1: “Journals too.” [The participant was referring to the forums but used the word journals instead.]

PH2: “Being able to use the Internet tools for learning English after going home is really useful and helpful.”

Overall, the participants used technology to accomplish many different tasks, for example, to collaborate and prepare for class, to extend the learning environment outside the face-to-face classroom enabling participants to participate actively in class, and to accomplish more and focus on course work at times convenient for them. In the next section, the benefits and challenges of learning in the flipped classroom will be examined.

This research question—What were the students’ perceived benefits and challenges of learning English in the flipped classroom?—explored the participants’ perceived benefits and

challenges to learning in the flipped classroom. To fully understand the possibilities, this question has been broken down into two parts: benefits and challenges.

**Benefits.** While examining the benefits of learning English in the flipped classroom, two primary themes were developed that address this question: (a) communicative English, and (b) interaction. Over the course of this study, participants began to realize they had more opportunities to use English in authentic situations. Participants also witnessed higher levels of interaction not only among themselves, but also between the instructor and students.

**Communicative English.** To begin, the flipped classroom provides students with more opportunities to communicate in English than they had experienced previously in high school. For some participants, more opportunities to communicate in English brought a new interest in learning the language, as PH2 explained; "I don't like studying English so I was very worried to take this class, but this class don't study English to take a test. We practice presentation and take the communication with other people in English." PH2 went on to note,

In the beginning of this class I could not communicate with others but in this class we are learning English for communication for real life. We need to use English to communicate a lot. That is the major difference about this class.

Comments from other participants supported PH2's thoughts. PM2 explained, "Before this class, like in high school, we don't speak English, only write. In this class we talk, express our opinions, so speak English more than before. This class is better than high school class." PM2 added more details to his comments later in the interview, stating, "When I was a high school student I mainly memorized but this class I learn with English." PM2 also noted,

Before this class I use English only like [PM2 demonstrates writing] but this class we talk so I can speak English more than before. In high school we don't speak English so much, but in this class we have to speak only English so I improved English.

PH2 and PM2 were not alone in observing the differences between learning English in the flipped classroom versus high school. PL2 commented, "In high school I studied English to solve English questions, but now I study to express my thoughts. So the purpose has been changed, not for English exams now." PM1 elaborated on the benefits of communicating in English in the flipped classroom, stating, "Getting communication skills, skills for presentations, skills to make statement in English." PM1 also noted that their English skills were "More in practical use now. We have to describe things in English too. So naturally trying to translate Japanese into English in the head. Feels like adapting and acquiring the skills to do so." Summarizing many of the participants' thoughts about communicating with classmates in English, PH1 stated, "In class I'm speak all English and discussing with my class friend," adding, "I can develop my English." Communicating with classmates required participants to be able to explain their thoughts and ideas clearly in English as well.

In order to make sure others understand what one is saying, clear and concise communication of one's thoughts is important, as PH1 explained, "I thought I want to speak English more fluently because I want to convey the exact thing I'm going to say." PL2 elaborated on how collaboration increased the use of English for communication, noting, "We help each other because we don't understand much English. By working together, we encourage each other, too. Therefore we communicate more naturally." Communicating one's thoughts and ideas clearly and in a manner that others can understand is the essence of PL2's comment, "If I cannot understand what you are saying when I and you talk, it is not a conversation. So I study

English to talk with the other person.” Learning English in the flipped classroom increased the opportunities participants had to communicate using English in authentic situations. More opportunities to use English were a result of higher levels of interaction between students and the instructor.

**Interaction.** Increased opportunities to use English steamed from increased opportunities to interact in the flipped classroom. At times interaction involved only communicating with classmates as PH1 demonstrated; “In the class we talked with not only my group member but also other group member.” PM2 added, “In my other classes, I rarely discuss with others and rarely do presentations. In this class, we almost discuss with group member.” PM1 noted, “When we discussed about Bigmac, we call member of local food group and exchange information.” Sometimes interactions took place outside of class with an effort to improve on a project or presentation as PH1 described; “We discussed after the class too because we found some little bad points. I think if we can continue, we can make more progress! So I think this style is nice.” At other times, interaction simply meant asking a question during a class presentation as PH1 described; “I could ask one question to Convenience Store group in question time. I was nervous at first and my English might be little peculiar but I could convey my question.” Exchanging ideas or asking questions were not the only ways participants witnessed increased interaction. Additionally, increased opportunities to interact resulted in improved learning outcomes as participants evaluated classmates’ work.

Interactions between classmates enabled participants to understand the value of learning from each other, as PL2 explained, “We can look at other group’s poster. I can learn most from there. In other words, the slide of other groups had a good effect on me. I thought that today’s action was splendid.” Students also learned to evaluate their own work, as PL2 added, “When I

evaluated other groups presentations, I was able to find my improvements.” PH2 had a similar thought, stating, “Other groups poster was so nice! There were many helpful things.” PM2 concurred, “First, I looked at other groups presentation. I was surprised that other group’s presentation were fantastic! So I thought I wanted to try my group presentation better.” In the flipped classroom, interaction becomes an important learning tool as students view each other’s work, evaluate it, and gain valuable information. Additionally, in the flipped classroom students have more opportunities to interact with the instructor since teacher talk time is greatly reduced.

Interacting with the instructor afforded the participant valuable, immediate feedback that would usually come at the end of a project in the traditional classroom. PL1 explained, “The teacher advised for us about the presentation. His advice is good so I should to receive his advice and use forum and change our slides.” PH2 added, “The teacher showed us how to do poster presentation. I thought poster presentation was difficult. But I must do. Then the teacher advised us on our poster. The teacher said me good. I was happy.” More opportunities for instructor-participant interaction enabled the instructor to ask in-depth questions about participants’ work, as PL2 conveyed; “Because one of my slide was lacking in the accuracy, the teacher asked about it, however we were not able to give a good answer.” PH2 added, “Our group presentation went off without a hitch, but we made a mistake. And the teacher questioned me. However, I could not answer.” Immediate feedback from the instructor enabled participants to incorporate it into the learning process, as PL2 stated; “We got the teacher’s advice so we found what to do.” Increased interactions between participants and the instructor enabled participants to communicate in English in more authentic situations, but it also created additional challenges for the participants.



**Challenges.** The following section examines the challenges participants reported regarding learning English in the flipped classroom. During the data analysis process, two primary themes developed: (a) improvising and (b) admiration.

**Improvising.** In the flipped classroom, if students do not come prepared it can be challenging to participate fully during the class, as PM1 explained; “I didn’t prepare for this presentation, so I didn’t speak what I wanted to say.” Considering participants interacted with classmates about projects, being prepared was especially important, as PH2 pointed out, “Group members questioned me, but I couldn’t answer.” PM2 mentioned, “My group practiced very hard but I could not do well the presentation. I was disappointed that I could not explain oil’s good points well.” After some of the presentations, the class was able to ask participants questions requiring participants to improvise, as evidenced by PM1’s comment, “Sometimes after we did presentations we were asked questions and didn’t answer.” PL1 concurred, stating, “We prepared for our presentation so I thought that we can do it well, but we didn’t answer many questions. I thought our group’s information is few.”

Group work and presentations were not the only activities participants needed to prepare. Part of the course assessment involved giving oral book reports throughout the semester. Participants realized that improvising on a book report is extremely challenging, as PM2 stated; “Today we did the book review. I did it quickly because I got nervous...So my turn was late. Because of that I got nervous more than usual.” PH2 concurred, stating, “First we did the second book review. I was flurried. I didn’t be ready! But I weathered it.” The participants realized the ability to improvise in a second language was challenging and that they needed to be prepared for every class.

*Admiration.* As participants interacted and communicated in English they seemed to begin to assess their own language abilities against their classmates' skills, as PM2 explained; "My group members speak English well and understand English. I am group leader. So I want to speak English better than my group members." PH2 added, "When classmates presented I was surprised. Because they made nice slides and spoke very well. I was ashamed my slides and speaking." PL1 and PH1 had similar feelings. PL1 stated, "I think that the presentation my classmates did is good. But my presentation is not good. My voice is small and I speak fast because I was nervous." PH1 added, "But the day of presentation I couldn't speak frequently because I felt nervous. And our group had a little miss." Interacting with the instructor was no exception, as PM2 stated; "I was surprised at one thing. They could answer the students' and teacher's question. I couldn't understand well what they said."

At other times, participants appeared to compare their work against their classmates' work, as PM2 explained; "First I looked at other groups presentation. I was surprised that other groups presentation were fantastic." PL2 added, "Second we can look at other group's poster. It is good. I thought that we have to work harder. I found other group has the conclusion well. Their slide has contents well." Later, after watching another group's presentations and reflecting on his own, PL2 added, "I thought that our group conclusion is difficult to understand. Because it is abstract. So we must improve it. Also, I know which slide is it hard to understand. We must improve it too."

Learning English in the flipped classroom offered students both benefits and challenges. Participants witnessed more opportunities to communicate in English with both classmates and the instructor in authentic situations. These authentic learning situations also required students to interact, share ideas, learn from others' work, and interact more with the instructor. The fact that

students were not using rehearsed dialogues to communicate required them to improvise when interacting with others. This appeared to pose a new challenge as participants began to assess their language abilities against their classmates', leading to a sense of admiration. The final section examines how participants recognized increased opportunities to communicate in English as a result of participating in the flipped classroom.

During the data analysis process, three primary themes emerged that address the question, In what ways did students experience increased communication opportunities in the flipped classroom? They are: (a) English used with classmates, (b) knowledge construction in English, and (c) an awareness of one's improvement. The researcher feels (c) an awareness of one's improvement is the most significant of these three. First, a participant needs to witness his/her ability to use English with classmates. Once a participant determines he/she is able to listen and speak in English with classmates, he/she then begins knowledge construction in English. This process can take on different forms, from learning vocabulary or grammar, to expressing more clearly one's thoughts, to an ability to use English to construct knowledge on academic subjects that the participant is learning. When a participant accomplishes this, he/she might have an awareness of his/her improvement in English. The participant may be able to reflect upon his/her learning and see exactly how he/she has improved, which can lead to a greater intrinsic motivation to continue learning. This is why the researcher considers an awareness of one's improvement as the most significant of the three themes. One cannot become fully aware of one's improvement if one is unable to use English with others and construct knowledge. When one can accomplish those two tasks, one may be able to become fully aware of one's improvement. The next section examines how participants experienced opportunities for increased communication with classmates.

**English used with classmates.** To summarize some of the participants' comments that were mentioned regarding the theme of communicative English, PM2 mentioned that in the flipped class students talked and expressed their opinions with classmates and friends, allowing them to speak English more than before in other classes. PH1 mentioned that in the flipped class she spoke English, better enabling her to develop her English abilities. PL2's concept of a conversation was when the participants understand each other; if they do not it is not a conversation. This statement points to PL2's aim for learning English; namely, the ability to talk with others. Other comments seemed to describe the participants' thoughts on using English with classmates in the flipped classroom. PL2 explained, "We can practice speaking English in this class. It is valuable for me and helps that I convey my opinion in English." Communicating with classmates enabled participants to recognize similarities in their projects, as PH1 stated when working with another group on a project, "I was glad to notice a link between our theme and that of other group." When presenting their ideas or during class discussions, participants needed to find unique ways to express themselves, which is evident in PM2's comment, "I tried to explain, not memorize." Slowly, the learning shifted from using English to communicate with classmates to constructing new knowledge in English.

**Knowledge construction in English.** Participants began to use English to gather ideas and express their opinions followed by the ability to evaluate critically others' work, and finally the start of developing critical thinking skills. As PM 1 explained, "The chopsticks poster presentation was very fantastic. They did a questionnaire survey which asks us 'which do you use wooden chopsticks or plastic chopsticks?'" Collaborating with other groups to express ideas and create knowledge on various projects was also demonstrated by PH1's comment, "I visit 'Big Mac' team. Our team is 'local food.' So I didn't think we had connection. But I came to

understand we had something. Because I could know it, I think the activity is nice!" PM2 corroborated PH1's comment, "My group is Big Mac. We talk with local food group leader to exchange information each other. We thought if McDonald's use local food in Big Mac, it will become healthy. So the talking was so good."

The next step was the ability to evaluate critically classmates' work in English, as PM1 explained, "After this each group debate with other groups. This time was very exciting. Before the debate, we discussed about each opinion to other energy source. They criticized other group's energy." The subsequent stage in the process was the early development of critical thinking skills, as PM1 demonstrated, "More in practical use now. We have to describe things in English too. So naturally trying to translate Japanese into English in the head. Feels like adapting and acquiring the skills to do so." PM2 added, "Because there are presentations to give, started thinking how we can convey the message nicely to others." The participants' language abilities demonstrated a shift from using English to gather ideas, to critical evaluation of classmates' work, to the initial development of critical thinking skills. From this point, participants were able to witness their improvement.

**An awareness of one's improvement.** As participants became more able to use English to communicate as well as to create knowledge, they became more aware of their improvement, as PH1 explained, "The mainly every days conversation, especially every day's conversation ability or describe my thinking ability is especially improve." PH1 added, "Thanks to practice and experience I became to speak frequently. I could do research and discuss in English. I feel speaking all in English became easier than first time class." Many of the participants repeated, "So I think my English ability improved through this activity." This sentiment was expressed many times during the course of the study (namely, by PH1, PM2, and PL1). Other participants

became aware of their abilities as well. PL2 stated, "We can practice speaking English in this class. It is valuable for me. And it helps way that I convey my opinion in English. In addition, it helps improvement of ability for presentation." PM1 added, "I thought that I used many English in this time." Lastly, PH2's comment summarizes what others expressed; "That became a really good experience. And I lost my awareness of the things that I am bad at in English."

Participants also became aware of specific skills they developed or strengthened as a result of learning English in the flipped classroom. Speaking in front of others in English became easier, as PM1 explained,

Since we have to give presentations in English, speaking English in front of people has gotten less scary or embarrassed. I lost my awareness of that I was not good at speaking English to people or in front of people.

PH2 commented how language skills could transfer to other subjects when he commented, "Besides the English communication skill, a face-to-face common Japanese communication skill to talk to strangers will improve. As it did in this class." PM2's demonstrated a shift in how he uses English now as compared to before, stating, "I tried to explain, not to memorize. Because of that I could do better than usual presentation but I think I could not do the presentation perfectly because I got nervous." Lastly, PH1 shared how participants became aware of their new ability to interact with classmates, stating, "Our group's turn is next week but I could learn a lot of thing today. I listened to other group's presentation. I could understand their English." PH1 added, "I was nervous at first and my English might be little peculiar but I could convey my question!! I'm glad about it. I think the experience made my English better."

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the data in terms of the sub-questions that examined and described the lived experiences of Japanese EFL students learning English in a class taught using the flipped classroom model. The stories of the participants as they transitioned from a traditional teacher-centered to a student-centered learning environment introduced the chapter and provided the groundwork for reporting on the sub-questions. Participants gave their impressions and opinions about learning in the flipped classroom. They also discussed the perceived changes in their study habits due to the flipped classroom experience. Participants described the benefits and challenges of learning in this new environment, followed by opportunities for increased communication in the target language. The following chapter will summarize the study and propose some interpretations of the data presented here. The strengths and limitations of the study will be discussed. Finally, recommendations for further research and concluding remarks will be offered.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings**

This study was developed in light of the changing needs of Japanese EFL university students learning English and the development of a more communicative learning environment than currently exists. The purpose of this exploratory study was to understand the lived experiences of Japanese university EFL students studying English in a course taught using the flipped classroom model. This technique incorporates learning technology developments with long-standing ideas of learner-centered instruction, bringing significant changes to the language learning classroom. The study tells the stories of six students who took part in a course where the flipped classroom model was employed. Although these participants possess a range of language levels and each of their stories is unique, they shared significant similarities from this learning experience.

### **Context of the Study**

This study began with a strong interest in investigating the flipped classroom from the students' perspective. Although present research has focused on ways to incorporate the flipped classroom into a curriculum, until now the students' voice has not been taken into consideration. In order to understand the benefits of a method or technique, it is imperative that the students' voice be heard. The role of higher education is changing at a rapid pace, and concerns in Japanese higher education include not only how to meet the differing needs of incoming students, but also the role that higher education needs to play in helping Japanese develop communicative English abilities in order to participate in the globalized community. The study began by examining the history of language education in Japan and how it developed into its current state. When Japanese citizens began learning English, the emphasis was on acquiring new knowledge in order to increase economic production. Language education was not focused



on communication of ideas, but rather on interpreting English so that Japanese could better understand how to modernize their society. As time progressed, learning English became important for passing the necessary secondary and university entrance exams. Subsequently, learning English meant one needed to be able to decipher the grammar and structure of the language in order to answer exam questions, resulting in Japanese who are unable to communicate effectively in English.

As of 2014, the Japanese government and business leaders are looking for Japanese who can use English effectively in order to conduct business in the globalized world. In order to reach the goals set forth by business and government leaders, Japan needs to change how English is taught, and the flipped classroom offers one possible alternative. In flipped classroom, learning moves from the classroom to individual learning outside the class, usually before class. What is traditionally thought of as in-class learning is transformed into an active, dynamic learning environment where students are in control and the teacher guides students as they apply new skills and collaborate actively. This study investigated the students' lived experiences when instructors used the flipped classroom for EFL instruction, creating a learner-centered environment that provided opportunities to use the target language in authentic scenarios, building higher-order thinking skills such as collaboration and critical thinking, and taking advantage of changes in learning technologies. The primary research question addressed was: What were the lived experiences of EFL university students taught using the flipped classroom model? The following sub-questions were also addressed:

- What are the students' impressions and opinions about being taught using the flipped classroom model?

- What are students' perceived changes in their study habits as a result of taking a flipped class?
- What are the students' perceived benefits and challenges of learning English in the flipped classroom?
- In what ways, if any, do students experience increased communication opportunities in the flipped class?

The participants' stories reported in the previous chapter briefly described some key results, such as the flipped classroom being an active learning environment where participants needed to collaborate in order to further their learning. Additionally, technology was used to enhance learning as participants interacted and discussed course-related activities. Technology led to more opportunities to use English as participants discussed ideas through the forums enabling participants to improve their language abilities and have deeper discussions than would have been possible had time been restricted, such as during class. Finally, English was no longer a subject they memorized in order to pass a test; instead, they were expected to use English to communicate and interact with classmates. The flipped classroom created a more communicative learning environment, one where participants could not rely upon memorized dialogues when interacting with classmates, but instead needed to respond to participants' interjections and improvise during the conversation. Through this process participants began to evaluate their language abilities as they listened to and spoke with classmates. As participants transitioned from using English with classmates to knowledge construction and finally to an awareness of their improvement, their view of English learning took on a new identity. It was no longer a subject they studied to pass an exam, but rather had become something they could use to express their thoughts and ideas with others. From their comments, they seemed pleased to be able to see how

their learning had improved and what they were able to do with the language in comparison with before. Findings of greatest significance speak to the greater student-centered and active learning environment, the added amount of time participants spent preparing for the face-to-face class, and the significantly enhanced authentic, communicative learning environment.

### **Conclusions**

Major findings in this study include: (a) active learning, (b) collaboration, (c) effective instruction through technology, (d) efficient education through technology, (e) diverse needs of learners and technology, (f) interaction, and (g) knowledge construction. This study provides a wealth of information and ideas about the students' lived experiences when studying English as a foreign language in the university setting. The data described a learning experience to which Japanese students were unaccustomed, but that they found to be a positive learning experience nonetheless. The blend of insights into both the motivations and opportunities to communicate using authentic language in the flipped classroom suggests a complete transformation of the learning experience for university EFL students. Interested instructors, faculty development professionals, and second language education policymakers may be interested in the following interpretations of the findings.

**Active learning.** The literature review demonstrated how English is currently being taught in Japan through the *yakudoku* and *juken-eigo* techniques. These techniques were clearly evident in various participants' comments, for example, when PH2 described his high school classes where teachers lectured and he took notes, translating English sentences into Japanese so he could fill in the blanks later on the exams; how PM2 didn't speak English in high school, he only copied what the teacher wrote on the board; and how PL2 studied English only to solve

English questions on the exams. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries this way of thinking may have been acceptable, but over time, English instruction techniques should have changed.

Unfortunately, over time, teaching techniques in Japan did not change, as was evident from PH2's comment that in his classes there was no communication at all, and the environment was very passive. This comment supports Hino's (1988) findings that 82% of higher education classes in Japan were lecture based, where instructors gave lectures and students repeated back what they had learned from the lecture: the regurgitation of learning. In addition, PL2 mentioned that in many of his classes he would just sit and listen to the teachers talk, rarely raising his hand to ask a question or collaborate with classmates. The type of classes about which PL2 is talking reflect Aoki's (2010) study, where he found that only 30% of students mentioned they encountered some occasions when they were able to express their opinions or offer comments during class, but students were rarely asked to take part in intellectual inquiry, independent and critical thinking, or problem solving activities. Teachers typically "teach the way they were taught" (Bruffee, 1999, p. xiii), and in Japan it is no different, but in today's globalized world Japan needs citizens who can communicate effectively in English. Initial results from this study demonstrate that language teaching methods have not changed in Japan, and that students are viewed as empty vessels awaiting knowledge from the teacher. In contrast, results from this project demonstrate that the flipped classroom is one method that can work in Japan and lead to improvement in the communicative abilities of Japanese citizens.

When PM2 was a high school student he mainly memorized English in order to pass exams, a possible reason MEXT (2003) suggested that a transformation of English education rested upon the advancement of integral and pragmatic communicative abilities in order to develop Japanese citizens who could use English (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2006), or who had

practical English abilities (Hosoki, 2010). In the flipped class, PM2 remarked that he learned in English, that he communicated a lot in order to use English effectively in authentic situations. PL2 shared that in high school he mainly solved English questions, whereas in the flipped classroom the purpose for learning English had changed, and he was now able to express his thoughts in English. Participants in the flipped classroom noticed they were acquiring practical, communicative abilities. Indeed, that form of language learning in the flipped classroom was supported by Koike et al. (1983, 1985), who found that approximately 78% of college graduates felt English classes must focus on more communication, and participants in this study were able to witness that change in language learning.

Equally important to this change was that participants in the flipped classroom realized they were learning English for practical purposes rather than for passing an exam or being a passive member of the class. A study by Matsuura et al. (2004) found that 60% of students agreed it was not useful to study English unless the reason to learn the language was for functional purposes. As PM1 noted, acquiring communication skills for presentations and skills to make statements in English enables students to use English more practically and changes how they think, enabling them to naturally translate Japanese into English as they adapt and acquire the skills to use English effectively. PH2 observed that using English for real life communication was a major difference from how participants learned English in high school in comparison to how they are learning English in the flipped classroom. PM1 and PH2 asserted that the students are in charge of learning in the flipped classroom and cannot be passive participants like they were in the past. The passive learning environment that participants experienced in high school was gone; they were now part of an active learning environment where they were responsible for their learning outcomes. Participants witnessed a pedagogical change in the flipped classroom:

from learning English to pass a test, to a communicative classroom where the participants played an active role in the learning. Business leaders and the government of Shinzo Abe desire Japanese citizens who can use English to communicate effectively (Clavel, 2014) for international communication (Koike & Tanaka, 1995), with more focus aimed at the development of fundamental and authentic communication abilities, and for all members of Japanese society to be able to hold daily conversations and exchange information in English (MEXT, 2003). Participants in the flipped classroom demonstrated that Japanese students are able to acquire authentic communication abilities, meeting the goals MEXT established.

The present system for language education in Japan has been shown to be ineffective in many studies. In order to produce effective communicators, English education in Japan needs to have a functional purpose and students need to have time to use the language in communicative situations. The flipped classroom participants witnessed the possibilities of how English could be studied while achieving the goals desired by business leaders and the Japanese government. The following section examines how collaboration in the flipped classroom increased the participants' communicative abilities.

**Collaboration.** This study found that cooperating and working together with group members and other classmates was consistent with Breen and Candlin's (1980) idea that in order to develop communicative abilities, it is critical to establish a collaborative environment where interpersonal relationships and the sociocultural context are indicative of social learning. In the flipped classroom, this environment was established and led to more opportunities for participants to communicate in English and for social learning to take place. In other classes the teacher talks and students listen, but in the flipped classroom they worked in groups,

communicated with group members, and discussed upcoming presentations, which rarely happened in other classes, as noted by PM2.

Furthermore, participants recognized that two benefits of collaboration were: first, their language abilities could improve because they were able to develop their English abilities (as stated by PH1), and second, collaboration offered opportunities for more clarity since students sought clarification from each other's responses (Bryman & Bell, 2007). For example, when the McDonald's group asked a member of the local food group to join them to discuss and exchange information (as reported by PM1), the flipped classroom created a collaborative learning environment where participants interacted actively and used English with classmates. The dynamics of the class shifted, enabling participants to realize the important role collaboration played in their language improvement. A powerful result of participating in the flipped classroom was learning from classmates and communicating in English in authentic situations, which increased the amount of time spent working in the target language. By incorporating technology into the learning curriculum, the collaborative learning environment that began in the flipped classroom spilled over into the class's online environment as well.

**Technology.** A main pillar of the flipped classroom is to shift learning from direct instruction, usually thought of as teacher talk, to a dynamic, interactive, individual learning environment. One way to develop this type of environment is for the instructor to incorporate technology into the curriculum in order to provide students access to course materials in the online environment. This study found that Aoki's (2010) three reasons for increased use of technology in the classroom—(a) effective instruction, (b) efficient education, and (c) diverse needs of learners—were supported by participants' comments.

***Effective instruction.*** Incorporating technology into the flipped classroom provided participants with an effective, interactive pedagogy that allowed them to transfer new information and make sense of and assimilate the information. Using technology to collaborate and gather information on a group's topic (as mentioned by PL2) and exploiting the forums to extend in-class learning outside the classroom (as noted by PM2), the flipped classroom provided participants time to review and practice new learning before demonstrating their competence.

Furthermore, discussion and assimilation of the new information with classmates enabled participants to prepare for and practice the presentation many times (as mentioned by PL1 and PL2). Through repetitive practice the participants were able to give better presentations, enabling the presentation material to become part of the participants' background knowledge, thus enabling them to recall it at later times and build upon their language abilities. Equally important, the affordances of technology changed through the discussions as participants no longer used their dictionaries to simply look up the meaning of words to memorize, but instead to look for the proper word (as PM1 stated). The flipped classroom created a need to use English for effective communication and technology made learning more effective as participants transferred ideas in the forums, used dictionaries for effective communication, and assimilated the new information in preparation for in-class activities. Technology also offered participants a more efficient learning environment.

***Efficient education.*** The addition of technology in the flipped classroom not only allowed participants to come to class better prepared, but also made learning more efficient. Participants were able to visit the forums frequently at convenient times, enabling them to discuss the project and become more fluent with the topic (as PH1 stated), sometimes discussing the presentation in the forums before each class and preparing the group's presentation slides (as



recalled by PM2), or developing a questionnaire to enhance the group's poster using emerging technologies such as LINE (as PH1 mentioned; LINE is a text-based App many Japanese students use to communicate with each other). Participants' comments were consistent with research that stated technology offered participants asynchronous opportunities to work and prepare when it was convenient for everybody, enabling each member to participate actively and build interpersonal relationships (Breen & Candlin, 1980; Deslauries et al., 2011). Through the combination of the flipped classroom and technology, participants were able to prepare materials within the forums that allowed each group member to contribute his/her thoughts actively, leading to higher levels of engagement. Technology deepened in-class learning by altering the environment and making it more efficient, as evidenced by a discussion between PL2 and PH2:

PL2: "It's been helpful. Outside of the class, we can communicate regarding our activities and even the chances to use English increases through technology."

PH2: "Being able to use the Internet tools for learning English after going home is really useful and helpful."

The fact that participants were not required to accomplish all the day's objectives during class and were able to communicate outside of class afforded them more opportunities to discuss and use English in authentic situations. The integration of technology into the flipped classroom helped participants prepare more effectively and discuss their learning outside of class, responding to the diverse needs of each learner.

*Diverse needs of learners.* Today's university student is not simply focused on studying; many of them are involved in extracurricular activities and work and have an active social life. The diverse needs of each learner require a learning environment that is not rigid, but adjustable to their hectic schedules. The forums help when schedules are busy and meeting face-to-face is

not possible (as PH1 emphasized). Finding time outside of class to meet face-to-face can be difficult, but technology offered participants the option to work at times most convenient to them. The ability to work asynchronously also allowed participants to spend more time on a project or presentation because the learning environment is more flexible (as stated by PH1). Participants could use the forums to discuss ideas, enabling them to concentrate on the presentation itself when face-to-face, using time more efficiently and effectively. In the flipped class, technology offered participants a variety of ways to prepare, communicate, and practice for each class, leading to higher levels of collaboration and a richer active online learning experience that transferred over to the face-to-face class, the topic of the next section.

**Interaction.** Greater opportunities to interact with classmates as well as the teacher are one of the many benefits of the flipped classroom. Flipped learning provides participants with interactive-engagement opportunities (CompTIA, 2011; Hake, 1988) and an enriched learning environment (Jackson, 2013), as was evident from PM1's comment,

I think that interaction is important to learn English. When I try to tell my thought to the other person, I find the importance of language. And I think that when I have a purpose to learn a language, learning English advances.

The flipped classroom evolves into a communicative environment where students use authentic language to discuss and exchange ideas collaboratively as they search for, reflect upon, and test new language strategies with continuous feedback from classmates and the teacher on progress and competence (Breen & Candlin, 1980; Canale & Swain, 1980). Results from this study showed that participants not only experienced greater opportunities to interact with classmates and the instructor, but also increased learning outcomes as a result of these interactions. The next section will examine the benefits of student-student interactions.

***Student-student interaction.*** Interactions among peers enabled participants to use the language through group discussions. In other classes participants rarely conversed with classmates, but in the flipped classroom participants had more opportunities to communicate (as PM2 stated). This was consistent with the assertions of Berns (1990) and Savignon (2005), who stated that language learners need to demonstrate their capability to collaborate and create meaning, which is different from an ability to use language in set dialogues or recite grammatical rules on various tests. Participants had ample opportunities to converse with classmates, demonstrating their ability to use English in authentic situations and not relying on scripted dialogues.

Subsequently, participants recognized the value of learning from each other, as PL2 explained, “We can look at other group’s poster. I can learn most from there. In other words, the slide of other groups had a good effect on me.” Through these interactions, participants were able to evaluate their peers’ work, notice weaknesses in their own work, learn from this new knowledge, and apply it to their own project (as PL2 and PH2 recalled). As a result, participants became cognitively aware of evaluating classmates’ work as well as self-evaluation, leading to higher levels of language comprehension and use. The flipped classroom afforded students an environment with more opportunities to collaborate, leading to greater self-awareness of their work as well as the ability to assess the work of others, but this component is only one part of the equation. The other part is how the flipped classroom also offered more opportunities for the instructor to interact with students and offer immediate, effective feedback.

***Instructor-student interaction.*** Together with student-student interaction, instructor-student interaction provided an environment where students had access to immediate instructor feedback, enabling participants to correct misunderstandings, organize new learning, and

formulate their own ideas and perceptions, thus enabling easier future access to new learning (Bransford et al., 2000). For example, the instructor's advice about a group's presentation was very helpful and useful (as PL1 emphasized), and the instructor's feedback on how to set up the posters was timely, enabling groups to incorporate the feedback into the project (as PH2 recalled). Increasing the amount of teachable moments enabled participants to learn from the instructor's feedback and make changes when they were most needed. If the participants had handed in an assignment and waited for the instructor to return it with feedback, the learning outcomes would not have been as significant. Timely, immediate feedback helped participants learn and do more during the valuable instructor-student face-to-face class time. Instructor-student interactions also enabled the instructor to gauge student learning randomly during the course of an activity.

Another pillar of the flipped classroom is that face-to-face class time should be student-centered, which also allows the instructor more opportunities to interact with participants and ask them questions, contributing greatly to opportunities for formative assessment. In one situation that PL2 recalled, a PowerPoint slide was lacking in accuracy, and the instructor asked the group about it, but they were unable to answer his questions. In another case described by PH2, a group's presentation was good, but participants were unable to answer the instructor's questions about it. These situations demonstrate how instructor-student interactions create a more authentic learning environment: one where participants are not able to give scripted responses to the instructor's questions. Participants needed to demonstrate that they understood the material and were able to communicate their thoughts and ideas to the instructor effectively. Being able to synthesize one's learning is the beginning of knowledge construction and language improvement, the topic of the final section.

**Knowledge construction and language improvement.** As participants experienced the active learning environment, incorporation of technology, and greater levels of interaction during the flipped class, they became better equipped to construct knowledge in English and grew more aware of their language improvement. As J. Richards and Rogers (1986) explained, the grammatical and structural components of a language are not its main entities, but rather how language is created and used to infer meaning through discourse. In the flipped classroom, participants were not creating English sentences for scripted dialogues, but instead they were creating new meaning. Participants wanted to explain their ideas in English naturally, to convey their message clearly to others, and describe their ideas learned from interaction with classmates and research (as both PM2 and PH1 asserted). For participants, language learning was no longer something they would study and memorize, but had become a tool they could use to learn and express their ideas. Learning in the flipped classroom enabled participants to become more cognizant of how to use the language to interact and communicate with others, to discuss their ideas, and construct new knowledge as they processed the language and its meaning. The notion of language competence (Hymes, 1971) describes a person who is able to create conversations and communicate, to use language, and to rely upon both implied knowledge (where grammar is a resource) and the ability to use it in sociocultural contexts. As participants progressed in the flipped classroom, their language abilities demonstrated that they were becoming competent in English and able to use English in authentic situations.

Through the flipped classroom, participants began to possess an awareness of appropriate language use in specific situations and not merely the understanding of a well-formed sentence (Spolsky, 1989). PL2 asserted that being able to communicate in English during class is valuable and enables him to learn how to express his/her opinion in English. Communicating with

classmates also offered participants the ability to recognize similarities in their projects and realize they were not studying English to take a test; rather they were communicating with others that enabled their language skills to improve (as PH1 and PH2 stated). Being able to construct knowledge in English to exchange ideas and discuss research was only one component of the participants' accomplishments. Over time, participants also began to witness a change in their language abilities.

Now that participants were critically aware of their ability to create knowledge in English, they began to understand how their language was improving. Participants acknowledged that acquiring the skills to describe their thoughts and ideas (as PM1 stated), and explaining concepts to others, not memorizing what they want to say, enabled them to give better presentations and interact with their classmates more naturally (as PM2 observed). As his language skills developed, PH2 became unaware of his/her weaknesses in English, enabling him/her to move forward, to challenge himself/herself continually, and communicate in English. The flipped classroom afforded participants the opportunities necessary to practice and use English in authentic situations. Participants were no longer passive learners; they had been transformed into active, collaborative learners who used the tools available to interact with their classmates and the instructor in English. As active learners they were able to construct knowledge in English from readings and discussions they were having with others. Ultimately, they grew to be aware of their language abilities, essentially becoming empowered language learners.

The flipped classroom seemed to have met the goals the Japanese government and business leaders desire. In the flipped classroom, participants were able to develop their practical language abilities and were able to use English to hold conversations and exchange information.

Evidence came from the lived experiences of those who participated in the flipped classroom. Their voices said that they enjoyed this new learning style, and that they felt empowered and satisfied with their language accomplishments. Even with the higher levels of stress in the flipped classroom, they could realize the benefits of being able to communicate in English with their peers, the instructor, and now the world.

### **Implications**

As English language education in Japan shifts from the present grammar translation method to a more communicative environment, it is important that Japanese consider the flipped classroom as a teaching model. This study has shown that the students' experience in the flipped classroom is positive and that they found this learning style beneficial to their language growth. Participants witnessed dramatic increases in collaboration, communicative language use, and their awareness of their improvement in English. Participants recognized that the learning environment had changed, and passively sitting and taking notes was no longer the norm; instead, participants needed to take an active role, to be in charge of their learning. This change inspired participants to find ways to communicate outside of class, come to class prepared, use in-class time more effectively, evaluate classmates' work, learn from others, and apply this new learning to their own project or presentation. The classroom became a collaborative work environment where English was used in authentic learning situations and participants strived to improve.

Even though participants commented that they enjoyed learning in this format, they did mention the increased workload as a negative aspect of the class. This is one point that needs to be taken into consideration because it could cause students to become disinterested in learning.

### **Project Evaluation**

Before an adequate discussion of the study's limitations can take place, the researcher felt it would be noteworthy to reflect upon the present study in order to assess the overall process critically. After reviewing the research design, the researcher found a few items he would change in order to minimize limitations to the present study: for example, critical participation looping, the focus-group style interviews, and journaling.

This study focused on six participants in a class of 37 students. It would be interesting to determine if the findings were limited to only the six participants or if other students in the class had similar thoughts about learning in the flipped class. If this study were to be repeated, the researcher would use critical participation looping to obtain feedback from the rest of the class. Critical participation looping allows researchers to double-check their data and interpretations through an iterative feedback loop consisting of the participants or other members of the group (Murphey & Falout, 2010). In this method, all participants in the class (interviewees and non-interviewees) are given a summary of the data gathered by the researcher (in essence member checking) and asked for their feedback. For example, in this study, after initial findings were realized, they would be given back to the class as a whole (the group) to determine if others had similar experiences or outcomes. This process would empower the entire class in the research process, encouraging them to become more active participants in their learning outcomes. It would also enable the researcher to confirm participant findings as being generalized to the entire class.

Second, for this project the researcher used a focus-group style interview, but upon reflection this may not have been the most effective method. The researcher observed that during the interviews some participants did not wish to contribute to the dialogue unless they were



asked questions directly, and then only giving short, concise responses. The researcher feels participants may have felt more comfortable one-on-one with the researcher, especially considering the participants saw the researcher during class observations and had become familiar with his presence. The main reasons for using a focus-group interview were to help participants feel more relaxed and to build upon one another's responses, but through class observations the participants had already become comfortable with the researcher, so the focus-group interview format ultimately did not seem necessary for the study.

Finally, the participant journals needed more structure. The questions given to the participants were valid, but since the participants had never taken part in a research study like this, they needed encouragement and a lot of guidance in their journals. The researcher did provide the participants with an example, but even then many times the participants simply answered the questions in short, concise sentences. Keeping the journals as a data-gathering source is fine, but next time the researcher would probably interact more with the participants in their journals. For example, if participants wrote something of interest, or required clarification, the researcher could ask them to expand on their answers. It is possible that over time the researcher would have to interact with participants less and less as they began to describe their experiences more, but initially it would have been a good process.

### **Recommendations**

Policymakers and practitioners should seriously examine the research on the flipped classroom, which describes the following outcomes of the method: improved student-teacher interaction, opportunities for real-time feedback, student engagement, and self-paced learning. Bolstered by the findings of this study, policymakers and practitioners should consider implementing the technique into their curriculum. Continually looking for new and effective

methods to teach is imperative if one wishes to prepare students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The five key points for policymakers and practitioners from this study include: (a) communicative English, (b) active learning, (c) technology, (d) collaboration, and (e) workload.

Policymakers in Japan should consider the results of this study and what the participants said about learning English in the flipped classroom. Participants continually mentioned how much communicative English they were using in class with classmates and the instructor as well as online in the forums. If policymakers in Japan are serious about developing Japanese citizens with more communicative abilities—citizens who can share ideas in English and take part in the globalized economy—they need to begin implementing the flipped classroom for language learning.

Practitioners should remember that during this study participants compared learning English in high school to the flipped classroom. It was the participants who used the words active learning; they were not parroting the instructor or researcher. When a practitioner flips his/her class, it is important to remember that he/she is no longer using class time to lecture, but instead is interacting with the students and engaging them in authentic language use. Instructors need to restructure the class, not simply overlay prepared courses on the flipped classroom. Throughout this study the participants mentioned that they enjoyed the active learning environment and that the students were in charge; hence, even if one decides not to flip his/her class he/she should still remember to make language learning an active process.

From this study, it can be determined that technology plays a big role in learning, even if an instructor does not design his/her course to include the use of technology. Although the flipped classroom does not require the use of technology, the participants in this study mentioned the benefit of using technology to prepare and communicate with others at times most convenient

to them, enabling participants to do better work. Technology also offered participants more time to communicate in English, thus increasing the amount of time spent using the language in authentic situations.

Participants in this study consistently mentioned that the flipped classroom offered them more opportunities to collaborate with classmates in comparison to what they experienced in high school. Within instructor-student collaboration, many participants commented that the instructor provided immediate feedback, which helped them to proceed with the activity.

The most relevant theme examined in the study for policymakers and practitioners is workload. This seemed to be the one area participants felt was a negative aspect of the flipped classroom. When discussing if participants would want all their courses taught in the same manner during the interview, PM1 mentioned, "The same style from the beginning would be very hard. Taking step by step, gradually shifting might be fine. It does take some time to get used to the style." PH2 added, "Only IF there's less to do, I would...Fewer activities/agendas would be preferred." Considering the flipped classroom was new, students seemed to be surprised by the new classroom setup, therefore a slow implementation of the same system should be taken into consideration. If a school was planning to use the flipped classroom for all classes, the school might want to implement the program slowly, or be aware that the number of assignments or activities should be fewer in the beginning and grow slowly over the course of the first year. After a semester, the researcher feels students would become accustomed to the flipped classroom and it could be used in more classes or instructors could add more activities to the course.

From the participants' point of view, the flipped classroom appeared to be an enjoyable learning experience. There was a learning curve, but as the participants became accustomed to

the course format and witnessed the increased opportunities to communicate in English, they found the flipped classroom beneficial to their learning outcomes.

This study has discussed the changes experienced by students when they learn English in the flipped classroom: the workload, use of technology, and most importantly, their ability to construct knowledge in English and become aware of their language abilities. In fact, the participants, unaware of the changes at the time, purposefully caused the changes that they have experienced and continue to experience. Participants chose to alter the ways in which they learned both in and out of the classroom in order to improve their language abilities. Taking steps to collaborate with classmates, to continue expanding the learning environment through the use of technology, and to interact with classmates and the instructor in English, participants willingly became active learners. Actively engaged in the learning process, as well as learning from their past experiences in high school, the flipped classroom enabled participants to move forward and had a positive impact on their futures. Their primary reward for these efforts was their ability to use English to communicate effectively, exchange ideas and information, and participate more fully in the globalized world.

At the time of this study, many calls have been made for change in higher education, and many beliefs have been expressed about the best way to bring about that change. A recent article by Anraku (2013) discussed Takeo city in Kyushu, the first municipality in the country to adopt the flipped teaching technique. This strategy which became popular in the U.S. during the 2000s is now being adapted in Japan. During a geology class offered in a middle school, small groups discussed the daily topic and later present their conclusions to the class. This activity not only developed camaraderie but also increased opportunities for conversation and knowledge creation. Parents noted that the flipped classroom encouraged communication among students as

well as between students and teachers. The mayor hopes that his city can be an inspiration to schools across the country and demonstrate the effective adoption of emerging technologies in the classroom.

This study of the lived experiences of Japanese EFL university students studying English in the flipped classroom provides a number of possibilities for further research. First, future research may focus on a skills-based course instead of a content-based course to determine whether the flipped classroom model can be applied to different types of second language courses. The flipped classroom has mostly been associated with content-based subjects, such as chemistry, math, and history, taught in the students' native language. Finding a flipped course that focused on skills-based learning would be beneficial, as many university courses in Japan are skills-based and the findings would help instructors in these courses.

Second, repeating the same study with a larger group over a yearlong period might be informative. The researcher feels that considering that this learning format was new to the participants, they did not realize the full benefits of learning in the flipped classroom. The participants made great progress over the course of the semester, but with a strong foundation and understanding of flipped learning, the researcher feels the participants will make even greater improvements as well as have more insights when learning in the flipped classroom.

Practices and perspectives closely related to the flipped classroom model are being investigated and debated actively elsewhere. However, it must also be noted that the concerns about teaching and learning at the post-secondary level are not new. Specifically, professors have been calling for a shift from the grammar translation method to a more communicative language teaching approach for decades (Aoki, 2010; Fujimoto-Adamson, 2006; Koike & Tanaka, 1995; MEXT, 2003).

So where does the flipped classroom fit into all these concepts? According to this researcher's theory of the lived experience in the flipped classroom, it is not that no one thought of or tried innovative teaching and learning practices before, but that accessible tools are now available that make the flipped classroom more viable for instructors and students. From the students' lived experiences, the flipped classroom offers an exciting new alternative for language learning in Japan and a change from current practices. The flipped classroom model is not a panacea for all the challenges in language education. However, it is a valuable paradigm worthy of consideration by educators, administrators, and policy makers that will prove advantageous as Japan transitions into a new era of communicative language teaching and learning.

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## APPENDIX A

## Interview Schedule

## Interview Introduction

We are starting at [start time] so we can expect to be finished by [end time]. I will mention when we get to [15 minutes before the end] so that we can begin to wrap up. I will turn on the recorder now, and then review the study information before we begin the interview.

This research is being done in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the Department of Learning Technologies at Pepperdine University. [REDACTED] is supervising the study.

The primary research question for this case study is: What is the lived experience of undergraduate EFL students who are taught using the flipped classroom model? The purpose of this in-depth interview is to hear directly from you about thoughts and ideas from learning in the flipped classroom. Accordingly, questions will be posed concerning your personal experiences, as well as your impressions and opinions.

As covered in the consent form provided to you, this interview will be recorded and transcribed, and you will have the opportunity to review the transcript of your interview and a written report on your portion of the study. You will also receive an executive summary of the study once it has been completed. All identifying information will be removed from the study before presentation or publication. Your identity and all study documentation will be kept in strict confidence.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose to not answer any questions in the interview process, and you may decide to withdraw from the study at any time. Your emailed agreement to participate is taken as your agreement to the consent form provided.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin?

#1) Could you describe the weekly class routine and especially what you do each week?  
[Remind the participants they can use Japanese if necessary]

Prompts:

How do you interact with your classmates or teacher?

How do you prepare for class?

[Use additional prompts as needed based on case, e.g, Tell me more about...?]

#2) Could you describe your experiences learning in the flipped class compared with other classes?

Prompts:

What are your impressions of the student-centered classroom?



In what ways did this teaching technique change your views of learning and being a student?

What did you feel was most rewarding from the class?

[Use additional prompts as needed based on case, e.g., But how do you mean.....?]

#3) How would you describe the opportunities to communicate in English in this class?

Prompts:

How much English do you use during class time?

In what ways do you feel your language abilities have improved?

#4) What study habits have changed as a result of taking this class?

Prompt:

What parts of the class were most difficult?

Describe how you prepared for each class?

#5) How did this class challenge you academically?

Prompt:

Did using technology in any way cause problems for you?

Could you describe the benefits of learning in this class?

Are there any points we have not covered that you would like to discuss? Anything that may have come to mind during the interview?

Interview Closing

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I will follow up with you to provide you with a copy of the transcript of your interview and the written report on your portion of the study as they are completed. I may also request a shorter follow-up interview later in the study if needed to cover additional questions or request confirmation of findings. I will contact you by email as needed. Please feel free to contact me also if any questions or issues arise. Again, thank you so much for your contribution.

## APPENDIX B

## Journal Questions

Each week, as you write in your course journal, Use the following format as a guide in your thinking or points you may consider writing about.

What---describe the activities or any discussions that took place during class in your own words. This includes the language you and your classmates used, what the teacher did during class, and your English ability.

When—describe the in a timely order the activities and discussions.

Where—describe in the class where the activities or discussions took place. Did you move around to visit with classmates or stay in the same seat during class.

How—describe the organization and how the decision was put into effect, or carried out of the class activities or discussions. This includes how you prepared for class.

## APPENDIX C

## Observation Protocol

Date:

Number of students in class:

Number of participants present:

Class start time:

### Task #1: The Learning Environment

This task will focus on the learning environment. The observer will be watching and listening for anything he feels will contribute to helping the students learn better. Areas to focus on:

- 1) seating arrangement
- 2) size of the room
- 3) classroom dynamics
- 4) room conditions, hot/cold/humid

In addition, for a short period during the observation the observer will focus on one student and write down any factors that may be helping them or shaping their learning.

Factor/Item	Memory Jog

On a graph with the vertical line being concentration (low to high) and the horizontal line time (0 minutes to 15 minutes), graph your observations of the single student. Write any observations on the graph at the appropriate time.

Questions to think about during observation:

- 1) What surprised you?
- 2) What puzzled you?
- 3) What concerned you?
- 4) Do you see any patterns?
- 5) What language patterns do you notice?

### Task #2: Language of Negotiation

This task is aimed at observing the language students use when negotiating with classmates. Interlanguage is the language produced by non-native speakers who are in the process of learning.

Use the chart to record language used by the learners when talking with classmates and the teacher. Record the initial utterances, the response, and who was involved.

Language	Participants	Type of Operation	Success of Outcome

Questions to think about afterwards:

- 1) Classify the data according to what type of language operation was used and was the outcome successful.
- 2) What factors were conducive to the language learning in today's class?
- 3) How were the participants involved helping each other?
- 4) How did the flipped classroom technique enable students to take part in this type of activity compared with other teaching styles?

### Task #3: Learner Talk Time

This task will focus on observing learner talk time. The flipped class is supposed to improve the learner-centered classroom and learner talk time. During this observation, the observer will watch and place a number, according to the key, in the learner or teacher's box.

Key:

5=more than 5 minutes	2 to 3 minutes
4= 4 to 5 minutes	to 2 minutes
3= 3 to 4 minutes	0= 0 to 1 minute

Teacher	Learner's Name	Learner's Name	Learner's Name	Learner's Name	Learner's Name

## APPENDIX D

## Permission to Conduct Research Letter

Ms. [REDACTED]

Iwate University  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT IWATE UNIVERSITY**

Dear Ms. [REDACTED],

My name is Jeff Mehring, and I am an associate professor at Ohkagakuen University in Nagoya, Japan. The research I wish to conduct for my doctoral dissertation involves the exploration of the students' perspectives from learning in class taught using the flipped classroom technique. This project will be conducted under the supervision of my chair, [REDACTED], and [REDACTED], an associate professor at Iwate University and the instructor for this course.

I am hereby seeking your consent to spend time observing [REDACTED] class, interviewing between six and twelve students from this class, and collecting and reading personal journals they will keep as part of the research during the course of the 2014 spring semester.

I have provided you with a copy of my dissertation proposal which includes a copy of the informed consent form to be used in the research process, as well as a copy of the approval letter which I received from the Institutional Review Board.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Jeff Mehring

Ohkagakuen University

## APPENDIX E

## Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities Letter

**INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**

## 研究への参加同意書

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

参加者氏名

Principal Investigator:

主任研究者

Jeffrey Gerald Mehring

ジェフリー ジェラルド メーリング

Title of Project: An Exploratory Study of the Lived Experiences of Japanese Undergraduate EFL Students in the Flipped Classroom

課題：学士課程EFL日本学生のフリップクラス（反転授業）実体験についての試験的研究

1. I \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in the research study being conducted by Jeffrey Gerald Mehring under the direction of \_\_\_\_\_.

私（氏名）は、\_\_\_\_\_博士の下、ジェフリー ジェラルド メーリングによって行われる研究に参加することに同意します。

2. The overall purpose of this research is to explore the lived experiences of higher education Japanese EFL students studying using the flipped classroom technique.

当研究の全体目的は、フリップクラス（反転授業）を用いて学習するEFL日本学生のより高度な教育の実体験を調査することにあります。

3. My participation will involve the following:

I will keep a journal during the course of the semester to record my thoughts on learning in a flipped classroom environment. Being observed during class time by the researcher. The researcher will not interfere with my class work, but may ask questions about his observations during the interviews. I will participate in two interview sessions where I will be able to further explain my thoughts and ideas expressed in my journal as well as answer questions from the researcher.

私が参加するにあたり、以下の事象が含まれます：学期コース期間中は、フリップクラスで学ぶことについての感想や意見をジャーナル（日録）に記します。講義中、研究実施者によってクラス観察が行われます。研究実施者は、私のクラスワークに支障はきたしません、インタビュー等でクラス観察について質問をすることがあります。私は2回のインタビューセッションに参加し、ジャーナルに記した感想や意見についてさらに細かく説明することが可能です。また、研究者との質疑応答があります。

My participation in the study will last for the duration of the spring 2014 semester. There is no limit on the length of the response. The interview shall be conducted synchronously at Iwate University.

研究への参加は、2014年春季学期です。インタビューの応答に時間制限等はありません。インタビューは岩手大学にて同時に行われます。

4. I understand that the possible benefits to foreign language education from this research are a better understanding of the students' opinions and experiences from learning in a flipped classroom environment. Such an understanding will inform policies and strategies to encourage the adoption of the flipped classroom as an approach in the instruction of foreign languages, and inform EFL instructors on the importance of adapting the flipped classroom for increased communication.

この研究による外国語教育への恩恵は、学生の意見やフリップクラス（反転授業）学習実体験のより良い解析・理解にあります。そのような解析や理解は、フリップクラス（反転授業）テクニックの選択を、外国語教習へのアプローチとして奨励し、その方針や対策を見出します。EFL講師には、コミュニケーション量アップの為に、フリップクラス（反転授業）テクニック対応の重要性を示します。

5. I understand that the risks involved in participation are the same as those that would be present in the informal sharing of knowledge between familiar colleagues via the internet. The risk of a malicious third party using the research for identity theft, diffusion of malware or other illegal acts is the same as normal use of email to exchange information.

参加によるリスクは、インターネット上での、同僚や親しい仲間との非公式な知識のシェアと何ら変わらない程度のもので、悪意ある第三者が、研究を利用して個人情報盗用や有害ソフトの拡散、その他違法行為を行うことは、電子メールの送受信行為と何ら変わらない程度の危険性です。

6. I understand that my estimated expected recovery time from any anxiety due to participation in the synchronous interview, if it occurs, would be immediate or within the timeframe it takes to discuss any confusion or issue with the principal investigator.

参加することで同時に行われるインタビューにて、万一、不安が生じて、すぐに或いは主任研究者との対話時間内で改善されるものと思われま。

7. I understand that I may choose not to participate in this research.

この研究に参加しないことを選択できます。

8. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to participate and/or withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in the project or activity at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

研究には任意参加であり、参加拒否や同意の撤回、参加非継続はいかなる時においても罰則や不利益無く可能です。

9. I understand that the investigator will take all reasonable measures to protect the confidentiality of my records and my identity will not be revealed in any publication that may result from this project.

研究者は機密や記録を守秘し、私個人の情報はこの研究についての出版物等にも明記されることはありません。

10. I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact Dr. Martine Jago

( [REDACTED] ) if I have other questions or concerns about this research. If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I understand that I can contact [REDACTED], Chairperson of the Graduate and Professional School Institutional Review Board, Pepperdine University (tel.: [REDACTED]; email: [REDACTED]).

研究者は、ここに説明された研究に関する疑問等には躊躇なく答えます。この研究に関して他に質問がある時は、[REDACTED] 博士にも連絡を取ることが出来ます。研究参加者としての権利について質問

がある場合、ペッパーダイ大学大学院治験審査委員会委員長 [REDACTED] 博士に連絡を取ることが出来ます。

11. I will be informed of any significant new findings developed during the course of my participation in this research which may have a bearing on my willingness to continue in the study.

研究中に重要な新しい発見があり、継続的な参加が望まれる場合は、告知されます。

12. I understand that in the event of physical injury resulting from the research procedures in which I am to participate, no form of compensation is available. Medical treatment may be provided at my own expense or at the expense of my health care insurer which may or may not provide coverage. If I have questions, I should contact my insurer.

研究の一環にて身体的な怪我を伴った場合の損害賠償に関する書類は存在しません。治療や治療・医療費は、私個人の健康保険にて補われます。保険適用範囲については保険会社と確認します。

13. I understand to my satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have received a copy of this informed consent form which I have read and understand. I hereby consent to participate in the research described above.

研究について十分な情報を得ました。この同意書を読み、理解し、複写を受領しました。研究に参加します。以上、理解しています

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

参加者氏名

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

日付

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the subject has consented to participate. Having explained this and answered any questions, I am cosigning this form and accepting this person's consent.

参加者が研究参加に同意した通り、研究者として詳細を明確にしました。連署し、参加者同意を受け入れます。

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator

主任研究者氏名

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

日付\_



## APPENDIX F

## Participation Request

参加のお願い

Dear [Name],様

I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Technology at Pepperdine University. In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, I am conducting a study on undergraduate EFL students' lived experiences in a class taught using the flipped classroom model. I hope you will consider contributing to this research.

私はペPPERDAINE大学教育テクノロジー科、博士課程修生です。博士号修得の必須課程の一部として学士課程 EFL 学生のフリップクラス（反転授業）実体験を調査しています。貴殿のご協力をいただきたく、お願い申し上げる次第です。

Your participation in this study will include two one hour interviews, which will take place face-to-face at Iwate University. The purpose of these in-depth interviews will be to learn about your experiences learning in a flipped classroom. You will have the opportunity to review the transcript and the written report for your interview, as they become available. A shorter follow-up interview may be requested if needed to cover additional questions and to confirm initial study findings.

この研究参加においては、1時間の面談によるインタビューが2回、岩手大学にて行われます。インタビューの目的は、フリップクラス（反転授業）におけるさらに詳しいあなたの体験を知ることです。インタビュー内容の写しやレポートは開示可能になり次第閲覧が可能です。更なる質問や新たな発見があった場合、短いフォローアップインタビューが行われることがあります。

**Other requirements:** Prior to the scheduled interview, I will ask participants to share with me a person journal which they will keep during the course of the semester. This journal will be a place for participants to reflect upon and write down their thoughts and feelings of learning in the flipped classroom. Questions will be provided that you can use as a guide, but you are not required to answer them.

その他の必要条件：インタビュー予定日の前に、参加者は記録している個人ジャーナル（日録）の研究者との共有をお願いします。このジャーナルは、研究参加を振り返るもので、フリップクラス（反転授業）での学習に対する感想や意見を書き留めるものです。質問は提示されますが、回答の義務はありません。

Your participation in this research would be completely voluntary. All identifying information will be removed from the study before presentation or publication, and your identity will be kept in strict confidence. The findings of this study may benefit other instructors who wish to transform their classes and use the flipped classroom model.

あなたの研究参加は、完全なる任意です。個人情報や明らかな情報は、プレゼンテーションや出版物発行の前に削除されます。あなたの個人情報は厳密に保護されます。この研究による発見は、フリップクラス（反転授業）のテクニックを使い授業・講義の改善を目指す他教師・他講師の恩恵となるかもしれません。

**As such, your participation in the study will contribute to the scholarship on undergraduate EFL learning and instruction.**

あなたの研究参加は、学士課程 EFL 学習の学術や知識に貢献することでしょう。

**Please review the attached consent form before replying. Your emailed agreement to contribute to the study will constitute your consent to be a part of the research described therein.**

必ず、返答の前に添付の同意書に目を通してください。電子メール（Eメール）での研究参加同意書返信は、説明された研究参加への同意となるものです。

**Let me know if you have any questions or concerns you would like to discuss before deciding whether to contribute. I look forward to hearing from you.**

協力へのご決断の前に質問や懸念等がある場合、お知らせください。連絡をお待ちしております。

**Sincerely,**

心をこめて。

**Jeff Mehring**

ジェフ メーリング

## APPENDIX G

## Interview Follow-up

## フォローアップ インタビュー

Dear [First Name], 様

I'm writing to sincerely thank you for allowing me to interview you for my research study, and for sharing with me access to your personal journal. Your time, effort, and generosity are greatly appreciated.

私の研究の為にインタビューに参加や個人ジャーナル（日録）の共有を表明して下さい、感謝申し上げます。あなたの時間、努力、寛容さに感謝致します。

As previously discussed, I will provide you with a copy of the transcript of your interview and the written report on your portion of the study once they are available, and appreciate any comments or input that you may have. In addition, I may contact you for a brief follow-up interview if needed as the study progresses. Once again, all identifying information will be removed from the study before presentation or publication, and your documentation and identity will be kept in strict confidence. An executive summary will be sent to you once the study has been completed.

既に申し上げたように、インタビュー内容の複写やレポートの記述は、準備が出来次第、開示可能となります。あなたのコメントやご意見には、大いに感謝致します。研究が進み、簡単なフォローアップインタビューを行う為にご連絡差し上げることがあるかもしれません。再度申し上げますが、個人情報厳密に保護されるものであり、プレゼンテーションや出版物発行からは削除されます。研究終了後、要旨をお送りします。

I hope you will let me know at any time if you have further questions or comments on this study. I will also be in contact to keep you informed of the study's progress. Please know that your contributions to this research are greatly appreciated.

この研究についての更なるご質問、コメントがおありの際、私までご連絡頂けますようお願い申し上げます。研究進行中、進捗や内容等はお知らせさせていただきます。

研究へのご参加は、大いに感謝されるものです。

Best Regards,

よろしく願い申し上げます。

Jeff Mehring

ジェフ メーリング

## APPENDIX H

## Journal Outtakes

Yesterday, we discussed the presentation of project one and prepare for it. And we found our presentation's bad things. [REDACTED] advised for us about the presentation. His advice is good. So I should to receive his advice and use forum and change our slides. And I want to do good presentation.

We did the presentation about coal energy in our last class. But the time of our presentation is over. I'm sorry. I should practice many time. And we have a time to discuss other energies and push our energy. It is difficult. By next class we should discuss the rate of each energy. I want to do my best.

First, we discussed poster presentation with member of project 1. When [REDACTED] explained, I understood difference between presentation and poster presentation. I thought that our slides must be changed poster from presentation. And we got [REDACTED]'s advice. So we found what to do. I decided future plan. I felt that I should do my best more and it is difficult for us to decide our telling you. The conclusion is so important for presentation. Second, we can look at other group's poster. It is good. I thought that we have to work harder. I found other group has the conclusion well. Their slide has contents well. I can learn most from there. In other words, the slide of other groups had a good effect on me. I thought that today's action was splendid.

We did the final environmental presentation. I was very nervous. My group did it very first. Because one of my slide was lacking in the accuracy, it was not good. [REDACTED] asked it. However we were not able to give a good answer. I did not notice a bad point. So I want to be careful to be able to notice it in next. While other group's presentations were good. And we evaluated the classmate. It was good. When I evaluated others, I was able to find my improvements. So I want to do a better presentation. And I want to say to the member of my group thank you for good work.

I think that the interaction is important to learn English. When we try to tell my thought to the other person, I find the importance of language. And I think that when I have a purpose to learn a language, learning English advances. If I cannot understand what you are saying when I and you talk, it is not a conversation. So I study English to talk with the other person.

How has your English ability changed? →I studied English only to get a good point on a test so far. However I study English to take the communication now. So my English ability change more practical. It is fun for me to study English to talk with people. How did the way this class works help? →We can practice speaking English [REDACTED]'s class. It is valuable for me. And it helps way that I convey my opinion in English. In addition, it helps improvement of ability for presentation.

We did presentation about energy source. For example, coal energy, tidal energy, wind energy, geothermal energy and so on. Our group did presentation about Natural gas. I forgot some my

lines when I spoke about Natural gas. I want to do presentation well. After this, each group debate with other groups. This time was very exciting. Before the debate, we discussed about each opinion to other energy source. They criticized other group's energy. We have to do discuss about energy source in the future on the Internet. And we must prepare for poster presentation by next time. So we are very busy!!

First, the representatives of each group did presentation about each energy source for a minute. But, wind power group's representative forgot Powerpoint data in house, so once he got home. When he was getting home, we did presentation. After that, we discussed about project one. When we discussed about Bigmac, we call member of local food group and exchange information. For example, about Pink Slime, using local food in Mosburgar. And we decided to add slide and order. Today, didn't use PC. I was very sleepy in class. We have not made slides yet, so I'm very anxious. Next class, our group will do presentation about Bigmac.

Today, we did the environmental issue presentation. I tried to explain, not to memorize. Because of that, I could do better than usual presentation but I think I could not do the presentation perfectly because I got nervous. I was disappointed that my slide was showed imperfectly. However these experience lets us improve.

Today, we did presentation about Japan's energy. My group is oil energy. Oil leader did fantastic presentation. Next, we discussed about Project One. My group is Big Mac. We talk with Local food group leader to exchange information each other. We thought if McDonald's use local food in Big Mac, it will become healthy. So, the talking was so good. Next week, we will do Project One presentation. We will try to do good presentation!!!

Yesterday, we discussed in order to make project one better. We had prepared for the class since last week. I asked my group member for advice because I thought it is difficult to make each poster unity. What I tried the hardest is to express the thing I researched in English. It is very hard to tell the thing I don't understand very much so I try researching details. Thanks to that, I could make my slide easier than I thought. In the class, we talked with not only my group member but also other group member. I was glad to notice a link between our theme and that of other group. I thought I want to speak English more fluently because I want to convey the exact thing I'm going to say.

Last Tuesday, we had a short presentation. Our team prepared for it since last week. We discussed almost everyday. In addition, we discussed Project One. I visit "big Mac" team. Our team is "local food." So I didn't think we had connection. But I came to understand we had something. Because I could know it, I think the activity is nice! I also think that we can more progress when we talk freely than when we talk about the things prepared. So I think my English ability improved through this activity.

Today we had Orange One presentation! We did it an all-purpose room. Our group's turn is next week but I could learn a lot of thing today. I listen to other group's presentation. I could understand their English. However, there are some special words I couldn't understand. So I want to expand my vocabulary about special words. I could ask one question to Convenience Store group in question time. I was nervous at first and my English might be little peculiar but I

could convey my question!! I'm glad about it. I think the experience made my English better. Our group members are working on our presentation mainly at forum. Yesterday we completed power point slide but we do our best for speaking until next week.

The day before yesterday, I talked with my group to prepare our poster presentation. We checked our slides, and advised each other. My slides wrote little words. So, group members said you wrote more words. This is a great help to me. In other classes, I talk with group members about what the teacher has instructed, but sometimes I don't know what I do. In [REDACTED]'s class, I easily understand what I should do. Then, we saw other group slides. At the time I spoke Japanese. [REDACTED] heard and advised me. Sorry, [REDACTED]. Before class I have to work with my group. But I belong to American football team. So, I don't get enough time. Sorry, my group member. I'm free on Friday. Therefore, my group usually work on Friday. So, we use English as soon as possible from now on. In other classes, I don't communicate with my classmates. [REDACTED]'s class is a great help to me. Thank you, [REDACTED]. I think [REDACTED]'s class is very difficult. But I think it is useful for us to learn in [REDACTED]'s class in the future. Therefore, I will work hard. Then [REDACTED] may be happy.

How has your English ability changed?→ To be honest. I don't like studying English. So, I was very worried to take [REDACTED]'s class. But [REDACTED]'s class don't study English to take a test. We practice presentation and take the communication with other people in English. Therefore, my English ability change utilitarian. How did the way this class works help?→ I didn't do the presentation in English so far. I was glad to practice the presentation. That became a really good experience. And I lost my awareness of the things that I am bad at in English.

## APPENDIX I

## Interview Outtakes

Q: How does this class compare to some of your other classes? How is it similar or how is it different?

PH1: In my friend's class they have some textbook and do translation and started with some questions. But our class is mainly talking. This is nice.

PM2: Other class teacher explain student long time but in this class we can communicate with classmates.

PH2: ■■■'s class is unique. Other class I, Other classes...I take a Russian class. It is a basic class with easy conversation. There is a similar part which is to take communication with each other. In other classes, there is no communication at all. Very passive.

PL2: There are many classes that I just walk in the classrooms, sit down, and listen to teachers. It is very rare that I raise my hand to make suggestions or cooperate with friends during other classes.

PH2: Using the forum via computers as a communication tool is new to me. Never done it or used before. In high school, when teachers gave lectures, I translated into Japanese or took notes, and later filled in blanks on exams, it was almost just like that. I was preparing for the entrance exam for a year after graduated from high school, and I studied English only for the center exam which was strictly learning strategies. So, in the beginning I could not communicate with others. Now in ■■■'s class, learning English for communication for real life. We need to use English to communicate a lot. That is the major difference about this class.

PM1: Using a dictionary a little more than before. Until now, Studying English was only for exams, but since I got here, the purposes have been changed to use for presentations or to express my opinions. For that reason, the way I use my dictionary has been changed to look for the proper words, not to just look up the meaning of the words to memorize. The need is there.

PL2: In high school, I studied English to solve English questions, but now I study to express my thoughts. So the purpose has been changed, different. Not for English exams now.

Q: About communicating, please tell me some of your chances or some of your opportunities to speak English in this class?

PM1: More in practical use now. We have to describe things in English, too. So naturally trying to translate Japanese into English in the head. Feels like adapting and acquiring the skills to do so.

PH2: Besides the English communication skill, a face-to-face common Japanese communication skill to talk to strangers will improve. As it did in this class. We needed to work together with new classmates.

PL2: We help each other because we don't understand much English. By working together, we encourage each other, too. Therefore we communicate more naturally.

Q: In this class, how has your ideas of learning changed?

PH1: I have thought learning is solving questions or translations like my friend's class, but this class I speak more English in this class. This maybe useful English so in this class we can learn English.

PM2: I think this class is good because we can share own opinion.

PM1: The students are in charge of the actions. We can't be passive.

PM2: Other class teacher all explain and students hear but this class to make groups we can talk with group members so we can communicate with classmates.

PH2: It is an active class. The others are passive classes.

PL2: Active way of learning, learning how to give presentations in English are the most beneficial, also communication skills. Communication, presentation, and English.

Q: Is the technology helpful? Does the technology help you in this class or not helping?

PL2: It's been helpful. Outside of the class, we can communicate regarding our activities and even the chances to use English increases through technology.

PM1: Journals, too.

PH2: Being able to use the internet tools for learning English after going home is really useful and helpful.

Q: How has your study schedule changed from this class? Before when you used to study and now with [REDACTED]'s class, has the way you study changed?

PH1: I, when I was high school student I mainly memorized, but this class I learn with using English and [REDACTED] give us lot of homework and my studying time my English study time is more longer than before.

PM2: In class we can talk but out of class we can talk with Internet, for example forum.



Q: Do you think that your language, English language, has improved?

PM2: Yusuke: Before this class I use English only like, (he demonstrates writing) but this class we talk so I can speak English more than before.

PM2: In high school class we don't speak English so much but in this class we have to speak only English so we I improved English.

PM1: Since we have to give presentations in English, speaking English in front of people has gotten less scary or embarrassed. I lost my awareness of that I was not good at speaking English to people or in front of people.

## APPENDIX J

## IRB Approval Letter

# PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

## Graduate &amp; Professional Schools Institutional Review Board

April 23, 2014

Jeff Mehring  
[REDACTED]

Protocol #: E0314D06

Project Title: An Exploratory Study of the Lived Experiences of Japanese Undergraduate EFL Students in the Flipped Classroom

Dear Mr. Mehring:

Thank you for submitting your application, *An Exploratory Study of the Lived Experiences of Japanese Undergraduate EFL Students in the Flipped Classroom*, for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Graduate and Professional Schools Institutional Review Board (GPS IRB). The IRB appreciates the work you and your faculty advisor, Dr. Jago, have done on the proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations (45 CFR 46 - <http://www.nihtraining.com/ohsrsite/guidelines/45cfr46.html>) that govern the protections of human subjects. Specifically, section 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) states:

(b) Unless otherwise required by Department or Agency heads, research activities in which the only involvement of human subjects will be in one or more of the following categories are exempt from this policy:

**Category (2) of 45 CFR 46.101**, research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: a) Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and b) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If

changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit a **Request for Modification Form** to the GPS IRB. Because your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the GPS IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite our best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the GPS IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete explanation of the event and your response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the GPS IRB and the appropriate form to be used to report this information can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* (see link to "policy material" at <http://www.pepperdine.edu/irb/graduate/>).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all further communication or correspondence related to this approval. Should you have additional questions, please contact Kevin Collins, Manager of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at [gpsirb@pepperdine.edu](mailto:gpsirb@pepperdine.edu). On behalf of the GPS IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,



Thema Bryant-Davis, Ph.D.  
Chair, Graduate and Professional Schools IRB

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives  
Mr. Brett Leach, Compliance Attorney  
Dr. Martine Jago, Faculty Advisor