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From 'McEnglish' to the 'Holy Grail': Transitions between Eikaiwa and University Teaching

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Abstract

Within Japanese ELT, private conversation (*eikaiwa*) schools are commonly viewed as the bottom rung of the professional ladder. In contrast to *eikaiwa's* marginalized position, language teaching in university is regarded as the pinnacle of the field's professional hierarchy (Nagatomo, 2016). The aim of this paper is to examine first-hand perspectives of teachers who have transitioned between these two 'spheres of experience' (Zittoun, 2006) and analyze perspectives on each context's pedagogical constraints and affordances. Drawing on Zittoun's sociocultural framework related to life transitions, an investigation of the lived experiences of eleven teachers was conducted. This explorative study focused on changes in skills and knowledge, identity, and personal meanings that stemmed from moving from *eikaiwa* to university teaching as well as cognitive and social resources that mediated the transition. Teachers revealed that *eikaiwa* teaching provided them with experiences that contributed to their pedagogical skillset and evolving teacher beliefs. Conversely, university teaching afforded enhanced professional identity due to factors such as increased teacher autonomy and authority in the classroom. This study supports a nuanced view of different teaching contexts that recognizes diverse affordances and constraints rather than subscribing to a linear, hierarchical view of certain ELT settings.

Introduction

English language teaching (ELT) in Japan, it could be argued, is a context that is viewed in a hierarchical sense (Whitsed, 2011). Assistant Language Teachers in public schools and instructors in private English conversation (*eikaiwa*) schools are widely considered as entry-level positions. *Eikaiwa* in particular is regarded by many as being the bottom rung of the profession with metaphors often being drawn between this kind of teaching and the fast food industry – profit-oriented ventures with minimally trained employees turning out a low-quality product (Appleby, 2014; Nagatomo, 2016). Perched at the top of the hierarchy is the university teacher. This position is viewed by some as the 'holy grail' of Japanese ELT (Nagatomo, 2015)

both in terms of working conditions and status in the field. This oversimplified dichotomy between these two polarized positions in terms of social capital, along with the logistical difficulties associated with collecting data from *eikaiwa*schools (Kubota, 2011), may contribute to the dearth of studies related to the *eikaiwa* context within educational research (Lowe, 2015).

Literature Review

Eikaiwa Teaching

Previous studies into *eikaiwa* have drawn attention to institutional tensions that exist within the context. Nuske (2014) carried out a study of Japanese and non-Japanese teachers at a chain *eikaiwa* school who engaged in various acts of resistance towards established company policies. One critical point of conflict was over what was perceived as a focus on business interests rather than genuine concern for students' development. *"[The school] focused on increasing the amount of revenue they could get from a student instead of satisfying the student's needs as an English pupil"* (Nuske, 2014, pp. 116-7). Some participants exhibited frustration over such institutional requirements. Many of the non-Japanese 'native speaker' teachers were also shown to be at an intersection of "privilege and marginalization" (Nuske, 2014, p. 126) within the *eikaiwa* industry. While these teachers were granted employment solely due to their race, nationality, and speakerhood, they were also utilized as commodities by the company and denied professional identity and mobility.

Bossaer (2003) further highlighted a disconnect between the school owners and the *eikaiwa* instructors as to what professional conduct in conversation schools entails. The Japanese owners claimed that foreign instructors should recognize that friendliness and enjoyment are important elements of their job, equating it with a counsellor role common among Japanese public school teachers. Conversely, the teachers interviewed complained that the school management were unconcerned with teaching quality in classes or training for new instructors and instead stressed the importance of qualities like friendliness, youth, and physical appearance.

Numerous studies have specifically analyzed the role of the 'native speaker' *eikaiwa* instructor (Bailey, 2007; Hooper & Snyder, 2017; Kubota, 2011). These studies' findings mirror some of the complaints from Nuske's participants in that 'native speakers' in the *eikaiwa* industry are commonly found to be positioned as 'objects of desire' (Kubota, 2011) or 'language hosts' (Hooper & Snyder, 2017). These deprofessionalizing discourses are further reflected in pejorative images in mainstream ELT, academia, and Japanese society. *Eikaiwa* is portrayed as 'McEnglish' with *eikaiwa* instructors cast in the role of pedagogical 'burger-flippers' (Appleby, 2013; 2014; McNeill, 2004; Makino, 2016). Taylor (2017) highlights the contribution that these assigned identities (salesperson, host, sexualized object, etc.) as well as various pedagogical constraints may have on *eikaiwa* teacher demotivation. The researcher and his three participants – all of whom were former or current *eikaiwa* teachers – cited a lack of teacher autonomy, a focus on physical appearance over teaching ability, and a lack of training and professional development as key demotivational factors.

University Teaching

In stark comparison to the lack of academic interest and professional status received by *eikaiwa*, English teaching in tertiary education is the focus of the majority of Japanese applied linguistics/TESOL research (Lowe, 2015) and is regarded by many as the career pinnacle for English teachers in Japan (Fraser, 2011; Nagatomo, 2015; Whitsed, 2011; Whitsed & Wright, 2011). Lowe's (2015) study into the research focus of past articles from the Japan Association for Language Teaching's *JALT Journal* highlighted the extent to which tertiary contexts dominate academic enquiry. He found that the university context featured in over 60% of articles in the journal, research into the *eikaiwa* context accounted for just over 2% of published studies.

As to why university English teacher positions are so highly prized in Japan, there are a number of factors. Firstly, the salaries in this sector are often substantially higher than those in *eikaiwa* or primary and secondary teaching (Nagatomo, 2016). Additionally, teachers receive extremely generous amounts of paid holiday leave time and many feel that a position as a university English lecturer/professor commands greater professional respect than an *eikaiwa* teacher or assistant language teacher (Fraser, 2011; Nagatomo, 2015; Whitsed, 2011). Perhaps a consequence of heightened respect in the field is a perception of increased teacher autonomy in university positions (Whitsed, 2011). This stands in stark contrast to the horror stories from *eikaiwa* teachers of being constantly forced to keep to a script (Taylor, 2017) and the 'human tape recorders' (Miyazato, 2009) of the secondary school system.

However, despite the seemingly enviable position of university English teachers in Japan, a growing body of literature questions the degree of professionalism and status in this professional sphere. One recurring issue raised in many studies that look at professional teacher identity is the idea that the relative positioning and treatment of Japanese and non-Japanese university educators is unequal (Nagatomo, 2016; Rivers & Ross, 2013; Whitsed, 2011; Whitsed & Wright, 2011). Non-Japanese teachers are viewed by students and institutions as 'exotic' or 'friendly' and are predominantly in part-time or fixed-term employment as opposed to their Japanese counterparts who are more likely to be selected for tenured positions (Burrows, 2007; Murray, 2013; Rivers & Ross, 2013; Whitsed & Wright, 2011). Additionally, due to declining student numbers in Japan, tertiary education has become a "buyer's market" (Nagatomo, 2016, p. 50) where foreign staff are resources utilized to attract more students. It is sometimes claimed that students are increasingly regarded as customers "that are to be kept happy at all costs" (Nagatomo, 2016, p. 56), a belief that has exacerbated a feeling of deprofessionalization for some teachers (Burrows, 2007; Fraser, 2011). Therefore, certain literature on English teaching in *eikaiwa* and university arguably presents a more complex and nuanced picture by showing the 'privileged and marginalized' positions of *eikaiwa* teachers described by Nuske (2014) potentially continuing even after reaching the 'holy grail' of university teaching.

In transitioning between teaching contexts or *spheres of experience* (Zittoun, 2006), a range of affordances and constraints exist that teachers must negotiate in order to successfully adjust to a new professional role and identity. By analyzing the challenges within each sphere of experience and the knowledge and skills that can be carried between them, we gain insight into the individual lives of teachers in both *eikaiwa*and university and develop a more nuanced take on both educational contexts. By providing a platform for insider voices on the transition

between different teaching contexts rather than proliferating stereotypical representations of teaching roles, we are able to challenge unhelpful assumptions that may disempower certain teachers.

This study presents emic perspectives of eleven current university teachers who began their careers in *eikaiwa* and transitioned into university teaching. These teachers were encouraged to discuss how their teaching skills and identity were shaped within each context, the perceived challenges and benefits they experienced, as well as the process of relocation between the two professional spheres. By examining their reflections on both the 'bottom rung' and the 'holy grail,' this study aims to enhance understanding of the lived experiences of current and former *eikaiwa* teachers and, rather than presenting them in a position of deficiency, will highlight some ways in which *eikaiwa* teaching can contribute positively to professional development.

Methodology

Transitions, Rupture and Transforming Identities

The conceptual framework for this study was taken from Zittoun's (2004, 2006) research into transitions between the different *spheres of experience* – the diverse lives or frames (Goffman, 1975) individuals participate in over the course of their lives. Most research relating to transitions (Beach, 1999; Wenger, 1998; Zittoun, 2006) is grounded in sociocultural theory as it foregrounds the interaction between individuals' internal cognitive processes and the social context in which they participate. In their study of transitions of immigrant children into Spanish mathematics classrooms, Gogorió, Planas, and Vilella (2002) offer a useful interpretation of the sociocultural nature of transitions:

Transitions arise from the individual's need to live, cope, and participate in different contexts, to face different challenges, to take profit from the advantages of the new situation arising from the changes. Transitions include the process of adapting to new social and cultural experiences (Gogorió, Planas, & Vilella, 2002, p. 24).

A shift between an individual's spheres of experience is not always a seamless, unproblematic process and often leads to feelings of instability, confusion, and uncertainty. Certain skills or deep-seated assumptions from their previous physical or cultural context may be challenged and individuals may be forced to completely reevaluate their identity within their new sphere. This phenomenon is referred to as *rupture* (Zittoun, 2006). Zittoun (2004) argues that people utilize a range of resources when transitioning between spheres of experience and dealing with the ruptures that accompany this process. Two categories of resources especially relevant to this study are *cognitive resources* – past technical and practical knowledge drawn on to mediate understanding of a new context, and *social resources* – the affordances and learning facilitated by interacting with others that help explore and redefine new identities (Crafter & Maunder, 2012).

Mobilization of these varied resources plays a role in the *relocation* of a person in their new social and symbolic status. However, it is important to note that the relocation into the new sphere of experience comes not only with affordances, but also with constraints or even losses that must be negotiated depending, in part, on the agency and values of the individual (Valsiner,

1998; Zittoun, 2006). Zittoun (2004) offers three types of change that may occur as a result of transition:

1. The development or acquisition of *skills and knowledge*
2. *The redefinition of identities* – including one's past and possible future selves
3. The creation of a *personal meaning* related to the transition as part of personal narrative

As a result, Zittoun's transition framework was determined to be useful in exploring how each context (*eikaiwa* and university) contributed to teachers' development, any identity transformation that may have occurred, and what meaning, if any, they ascribed to the change in contexts. This exploratory study therefore sought to address the following research questions:

1. ***What cognitive and social resources mediated participants' transition from eikaiwa to university teaching?***
2. ***What pedagogical affordances and constraints did participants perceive to exist in each context?***

Data Collection and Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were conducted focusing on participants' transitions between *eikaiwa* and university teaching and their perceptions of their professional role and teaching practice in each sphere of experience (Appendix). Interviews were conducted wholly in English both in person and via Skype. Interviews varied in length from approximately 20 to 90 minutes. Each interview was recorded using a smartphone or PC and each participant gave verbal consent for their interviews to be used as research data on the understanding that their confidentiality would be ensured and that upon completion of the study their respective audio data would be destroyed. Following transcription of the audio data, open coding was conducted utilizing the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) via QDA Miner, a qualitative data analysis software, based on salient themes that appeared in the interviews. In this process, the transcriptions of the interview audio were entered into QDA Miner and then read and reread in multiple cycles while indexing and sorting themes (e.g., "*eikaiwa*as hobby") emerging from the data and then gradually developing these themes into larger categories (e.g., "entertainment") (Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2014). From the developed thematic categories, six recurring dichotomies were identified and recoded as 'versus codes' (Saldaña, 2015). After the versus codes had been identified, three independent researchers volunteered to carry out peer debriefing sessions at different times to examine both the thematic and versus codes in order to partially offset any subjectivity or bias present during the initial data analysis. Any discrepancies in interpretation were highlighted, discussed and, if necessary, altered or deleted from the study. In addition to the peer debriefing sessions, member checking sessions with three participants were carried out in the interests of transparency as well as acting as another opportunity to reinforce the validity of the data analysis.

Participants

The eleven participants in this study were chosen via purposive sampling based on their experiences in both *eikaiwa* and university contexts. Two of the participants were Japanese and nine were non-Japanese 'native speaker' teachers from inner-circle countries (see Figure 1). Although in the later stages of the participant recruitment process female participants were actively sought, all but one of the participants were male. Of the eleven participants, ten were still residing in Japan at the time of the study and all were working in tertiary education settings. To ensure confidentiality, all of the names used in this study are pseudonyms.

Figure 1. List of Study Participants

Name	Nationality	Degrees	Current position	Current location	Eikaiwa experience
Barry	British	MA, PhD	Associate Professor	Japan	Worked in chain eikaiwa for four years. Taught children and adults.
James	American	MA	Lecturer	Japan	Worked in independent eikaiwa for two years. Taught children and adults.
Lawrence	Canadian	MA	Associate Professor	Japan	Worked in chain eikaiwa for ten years. Taught children and adults.
Derrick	British	MA	Part-time Lecturer	Japan	Worked in chain eikaiwa for over ten years. Taught children and adults.
Matthew	American	MA	Lecturer	Saudi Arabia	Owned and ran independent eikaiwa for approximately 20 years. Taught children and adults.
Keisuke	Japanese	MA, PhD	Associate Professor	Japan	Worked in chain eikaiwa for three years. Taught children and adults.
Nana	Japanese	MA, PhD	Associate Professor	Mainly Japan	Worked in chain eikaiwa for five years. Taught children and adults.
Rick	American	MA	Associate Professor	Japan	Worked in independent eikaiwa for six years. Taught adults.
Steve	Australian	MA, PhD	Associate Professor	Japan	Worked in chain eikaiwa for two years. Taught children and adults.
Paul	British	MA, PhD	Lecturer	Japan	Worked in chain eikaiwa for 18 months. Taught children and adults.
Alan	British	MA	Lecturer	Japan	Worked in chain eikaiwa for five years. Taught children and adults.

Positionality. My positionality as an *eikaiwa* teacher at the start of this study was influential in both my reasons for investigating this topic and also for the way in which my participants may have interacted with me during the interviews I conducted. At the start of this study in November 2016, I had been an *eikaiwa* teacher for approximately eight years and was preparing to move into university teaching in April 2017. Therefore, some of my initial impetus for the study lay in my curiosity to hear from my participants about how the two contexts differed from each other so as to aid me in my own transition. Additionally, I felt that *eikaiwa* teachers were largely marginalized and pigeonholed within mainstream Japanese ELT and thus sought

to question some of these prevalent stereotypes that existed within the field. Conversely, I had also taken a strongly critical position regarding some of the practices and beliefs that I experienced first-hand in *eikaiwa* schools. At the time of the study, I had already written a number of articles criticizing native-speakerism, the deprofessionalization of teachers, and what I perceived as a lack of quality control within the *eikaiwa* industry (Hooper, 2016, 2017; Hooper & Snyder, 2017). These opposing positions meant that I went into this study with few expectations and felt that whatever insight I could gain from my participants would not only enrich my study but also raise attention to the place of *eikaiwa* in the field.

The fact that nine of my eleven participants were similar to me in that they were Caucasian males from inner-circle countries and were long-term residents in Japan may have allowed them to respond comfortably and openly to my questions. I did feel, however, that my position as an *eikaiwa* teacher while the interviews were conducted did affect how some of my participants interacted with me. As most were aware of the negative stereotype that *eikaiwa* teachers had in Japan, they were often apologetic to me when they criticized the context in any way or sometimes appeared to take great care hedging their responses to certain questions. If I were to carry out this study again in my current position as a university lecturer, it is not unrealistic to expect the responses I might receive may differ from those in this study. These issues fall under the larger issue of qualitative interviews being co-constructions of both the interviewer and interviewee (Mann, 2010). It must therefore be recognized that these interviews are "interactionally co-constructed events in which participant identity and positioning have significant analytical implications" (Richards, 2009, p. 159, cited in Mann, 2010).

Findings

The six dichotomies reflected in the versus codes were focused on as they represented recurring issues of *skills/knowledge*, *identity*, and *meaning* within transitions between *eikaiwa* and university teaching. The six versus codes that emerged from the data analysis are as follows:

- measurability vs. closeness
- student vs. customer
- administrator vs. entertainer
- business vs. education
- freedom vs. constraint
- chaos vs. order

In the following section, each of these dichotomies will be explicated in order to provide a more detailed picture of the ways in which they impacted participants' teaching experiences in both the *eikaiwa* and university settings.

Measurability vs. Closeness

With their reliance on producing standardized test scores and preparing students for job hunting, accurately measuring students' linguistic development is a key concern for university educators. Several participants (n = 7) cited assessment as both an important facet of their role

in university and as an area of serious weakness in *eikaiwa* schools. Often assessment in *eikaiwa* was described as having no theoretical foundation, being manipulated by staff in order to push students into new courses, or not really existing at all.

"(in eikaiwa) you're encouraged to slightly fudge the numbers if the students haven't been doing that well, well that kind of thing. (laughs) And in university, you absolutely can't do that." Paul

In the case of one participant, they requested rigorous assessment requirements for their students and these were viewed as a measurement of the increased responsibility that they were given in their professional role.

"…so I think that is one thing about a difference between eikaiwa and if you want to look at professionalism is that you are responsible for showing results." Rick

When asked about the strengths and weaknesses of the respective contexts, however, a number of participants (n = 7) noted that they sometimes felt dissatisfied with what they perceived to be a greater psychological or emotional distance between teacher and student in university classrooms. Some mentioned that they saw the closeness of *eikaiwa*, due to the age and status of students, as well as small class sizes, as having significant educational value.

"You know, if I was just looking at them in a lesson basically, um, so, you know, and in eikaiwa you can do that more, it's a smaller group, you get to know these people, so I think that's something that I've taken from eikaiwa that, um, and, you know, I think part of, a big part of, uh, language learning is being able to make a positive affective connection with using the language or users of that language." Steve

One participant offered a vivid metaphor that offers an interesting perspective on the respective benefits and drawbacks of both settings.

"I was thinking of eikaiwa like as something like playing… basketball in a backyard or on the street where you know your playmates or your students in an informal context and less or fewer rules. You are playing it and so there is a more personal touch, less formality, and often you are using language in authentic communication oftentimes, because you want to get to know your students and they want to get to know you and your culture. And then university teaching is maybe like playing basketball in your gym or a basketball court. So in a way you don't know your opponent so much and it is a formal, better equipped place you play in. But more curriculum and a more structured environment, a lot more assessment. But you know that's the kind of you know both pros and cons for both." Nana

Student vs. Customer

The close teacher-student relationships in *eikaiwa* classes cited by some participants (n = 5) was sometimes attributed to a reduced, or even reversed, power differential that was perceived to exist due to *eikaiwa* students being paying *customers* or *clients*. On several occasions, it was stated that as customers, *eikaiwa* students could refuse to do homework and could essentially vote with their wallets if a class (or teacher) wasn't judged as entertaining or useful enough. This was in contrast with university teaching where participants viewed their role more as an authoritative teacher or assessor who had complete control what and how much work students had to complete.

"The students are the boss in eikaiwa. If you want them to do homework you know they might say "Go to hell". I just I am paying you to talk but here (at university) the students have to do what you tell them and for better or for worse." Rick

For two participants, however, the increased power that *eikaiwa* students wielded had positive implications for their development as teachers resulting from the openness afforded to students when judging teaching competence or lesson content.

"If students (in university) are unsatisfied with your class, uh, it's really hard to know. Whereas, like, with little kids and things like that, you know instantly whether or not they're paying attention, whether or not they're having fun or not. And so, I think it's, it's done two things, it's made me more aware of, of, I guess, what, what are students thinking in terms of my teaching style, so I try to pay attention more to those cues." James

A number of participants (n = 4) also stated that the reduced power differential encouraged them to view *eikaiwa* customers as 'people' or 'friends' rather than 'students.' The difference between dealing with 'students' and 'customers' was a common theme among several of the participants. This consideration, in tandem with a perceived focus on measurability opposed to closeness with students, meant that there were a number of teachers who saw their professional roles in *eikaiwa* and university being grounded in contrasting expectations.

Administrator vs. Entertainer

Several participants (n = 6) were keenly aware of the importance of entertainment in *eikaiwa* classes. These teachers perceived that their role was often not purely, or even primarily, educational as they were often called on to simply 'chat' with students or 'keep them happy'. This apparent need to act as a 'host' and keep students entertained was sometimes viewed as being at odds with their desired role as a teacher.

"But at eikaiwa, I think you're not seen as 'sensei,' to use the Japanese word. You're seen as just a guy or girl who's there to entertain them." James

Conversely, university work was characterized by a number of participants (n = 5) as being more focused on time-consuming administrative work rather than purely focusing on teaching. These requirements were viewed by some as challenging or indicated an increased perception of professionalism. When asked for a metaphor to describe what they saw as their roles in each setting, one participant provided a clear demarcation between *eikaiwa* and university work.

"Like going from, what, I don't want to say anything too derogatory. It was like going from, from being a bar host to an administrator or a kind of you know treating people. I'd say going from a bar host to a bureaucrat." Rick

Upon examining the extant literature on *eikaiwa*, and particularly on the performative and commodified identities of 'native speaker' teachers in the industry (Bailey, 2007; Kubota, 2011; Nuske, 2014), it is perhaps unsurprising that neither of the Japanese participants referred to the role of entertainment in their experiences. Of course, due to the extremely limited sample size, one can certainly not make any generalizable claims about this phenomenon. However, it is interesting to note that in the case of 'native speaker' teachers, this theme emerged reasonably frequently – in six out of nine participants.

Business vs. Education

Although *eikaiwa* schools are primarily profit-focused, dependent on maintaining turnover to survive, the majority of teachers (n = 6) saw this as something that they wished to avoid, preferring to focus on their teaching practice.

"In our company, I would say, "Look, the manager will talk to you about business and me, I'm going to talk to you about teaching." and I always tried to separate the teaching and the business." Barry

Other participants actually went further, stating that they felt there was a fundamental conflict of interests between education and business in *eikaiwa* or that some of the business practices were actually detrimental to promoting language learning. On the extreme end of the scale, some teachers (n = 3) even claimed that they saw some business practices in *eikaiwa* as deliberate attempts to deceive students and equated this with a general lack of ethics in the industry.

"Yeah. So I feel kind of ashamed that the business, that business of eikaiwa does, you know. Trying to kind of lure people into, you know, what they make, what they (laughs), what they make as if that something is professionally research based." Nana

Business interests were also perceived by some participants (n = 6) to be responsible for a lack of sufficiently trained or experienced teachers in *eikaiwa*. Some claimed that teachers were hired in order to create a certain marketable image rather than because of any pedagogical skill whereas other noted that experienced teachers were maybe viewed by schools as surplus to requirements or not financially viable.

There was, however, one participant who, despite earlier in the interview expressing concerns about *eikaiwa* business practices, stated that she felt that in her role as head teacher, the business requirements of the school actually pushed her to maintain teaching quality among all of the staff.

"As a head teacher, I had to, um, make sure, uh, to make the ends meet. So I had a lot of another, other things to worry about. But that actually pushed me to worry about the quality of education I was providing as well as what my colleague teachers were providing." Nana

Freedom vs. Constraint

In the case of almost all participants (n = 9), the transition from *eikaiwa* to university coincided with an increase in autonomy they were afforded in relation to curriculum, materials, and methodology. Many teachers (n = 7) experienced *eikaiwa* as being extremely systematic with some schools requiring instructors to strictly adhere to a school-specific system with few allowances for tailoring instruction to individual learner needs.

"We can choose materials (in university), we can choose our approaches to teaching, but if it's reverse, right? Maybe if I'm going, uh, back to eikaiwa school it may be difficult, because there is a rigid structure for you to follow and also there are materials that we need to use." Keisuke

The enhanced teacher autonomy in university appeared to be, for some participants, important for their professional identity and their perceived effectiveness as a teacher.

"There were a lot of restrictions in the eikaiwa industry that didn't let me cater, um, the approach to the student. So, when I went to university I was given a lot more autonomy on the ways I can help people meet those goals… it was liberating in that way." Lawrence

A more practical constraint in university that many participants (n = 9) noted was the issue of class sizes. Some teachers (n = 6) believed that teaching very large classes in university was detrimental in several ways to the quality of lessons and teacher-student relationships.

"Some of the bigger classes, the students don't, they're not engaged because the instruction is so generalized and you don't get a chance to know them and they don't have a chance to get to know you. So, that's a problem." Paul

Chaos vs. Order

In contrast with the idea of a strict systemized curriculum being in place in many participants' (n = 7) experiences in *eikaiwa*, a recurring theme that emerged from some interviews (n = 3) was the idea of *eikaiwa* being somewhat chaotic and extremely challenging for teachers. Two examples of this were the scheduling of classes and the management of student attendance. These two issues are linked in part to the previous issue of students as customers – as paying clients they are under no pressure to ensure regular attendance in classes and may be able to join a course at any time should they desire it. This meant that instructors were often given extremely demanding class loads, were provided minimal time for lesson planning, experienced last-minute walk-ins, and had classes canceled suddenly.

"So every day is literally different. You're not even seeing the same people from one day to the next. Um, and, on top of that, your classes can just change at the drop of a hat… So, you never know what the day is going to bring." James

However, the idea expressed in the previous section of university teachers being afforded a great deal of autonomy was also seen by one participant as a potential source of chaos, claiming that a lack of oversight sometimes creates serious problems within higher education settings.

"When you're teaching language, if there's no oversight you end up with a situation we had where someone, like a teacher in the third year, was using the same textbook as the teacher in the first year so the students were (laughs) getting their first year classes again!" Paul

Another area marked by teachers as a challenging facet of *eikaiwa* was the wide range of students they were required to teach. Several participants (n = 3) stated that they often taught students ranging from pre-school age to retirees, sometimes in quick succession. This made the idea of creating resources and tailored lesson plans for each class even more unlikely for teachers in this setting. In contrast, university classes were described as being more stable and uniform, allowing teachers to plan for an entire semester or academic year.

"…that is the tough part about eikaiwa is that because every situation is unique. It is like you have to create a syllabus for each lesson right? When we are at the university we have five classes a semester… I make a syllabus at the beginning of the year for those five classes and some of them are of the same type of class." Rick

Despite the challenge of the sometimes chaotic nature of *eikaiwa* teaching, some teachers (n = 4) noted that their experiences in that setting had a positive impact on their development as

teachers. Some saw it as 'a baptism by fire' that honed their skills, transforming them into more reactive and flexible educators well-equipped to handle the university classroom.

"You've got to be able to ad lib, you've got to be able to kind of work on your feet, and, uh, you can't, you can't just always be referencing something, you've just got to, if you don't know the answer, you know, just get back to them later or whatever. Um, but you just have to, you've just got to have activities in the back pocket, that sort of thing." James

Discussion

What Cognitive and Social Resources Mediated Participants' Transition from Eikaiwa to University Teaching?

A range of cognitive resources developed through their experiences as *eikaiwa* teachers mediated the relocation of my participants into the university context. A combination of negotiating scheduling chaos and teaching a wide variety of students contributed to teachers' reactivity and flexibility in the classroom. Together with the need to frequently 'ad lib,' a heightened sensitivity to student needs was fostered by necessity due to the altered power differential in *eikaiwa* where customer satisfaction was tied to evaluations of teaching efficacy. Furthermore, some teachers claimed that the informal *eikaiwa* student-teacher dynamic had raised their awareness of the importance of social bonds in the classroom and contributed to their beliefs in a more egalitarian classroom where they saw their students on a more personal level as individuals. Therefore, in these ways, some of the stressful and presumably undesirable aspects of *eikaiwa* teaching were actually recognized by a number of participants as having been instrumental in developing their effectiveness in the classroom. Although some participants framed their challenging *eikaiwa* experiences as critiques of the industry, others perceived the 'baptism of fire' as a key stage in their development as a professional teacher.

The majority of social resources that were found to mediate participants' transition into university teaching served in different ways to *redefine their professional identity* (Zittoun, 2004). Many of the teachers talked about an increase in teacher autonomy as having a significant influence on their performance in the classroom and how they felt about their professional role. This, along with more stringent assessment procedures and a focus on producing measurable results was perceived by several participants as a legitimization of their practice and a measure of the trust placed in them by their institution. The provision of resources and adequate time for lesson planning as well as stability in terms of scheduling also stood in contrast to their *eikaiwa* experiences and represented a genuine desire for quality instruction. Furthermore, a professional identity in the new sphere of experience was reinforced by a more formal classroom dynamic with a significant teacher-student power gap existing and the perceived absence of certain undesirable professional roles (entertainer/salesperson). Arguably, these social resources contributed to the creation of a *personal meaning* (Zittoun, 2004) tied to the transition for several of these teachers where they framed the move into university teaching as an ascension to professional status in their personal narratives.

What Pedagogical Affordances and Constraints did Participants Perceive to Exist in Each Context?

Just as research on transitions claims that relocating into a new sphere of experience entails both gains and losses for individuals (Valisiner, 1998; Zittoun, 2006), the teachers in this study revealed several pedagogical affordances and constraints that resulted from the transition between *eikaiwa* and university. These can be categorized into two rough themes: *scheduling* and *social distance*.

The practical issue of *scheduling* was perceived as a significant pedagogical affordance in the university context compared to *eikaiwa*. The 'chaotic' lesson schedules and lack of planning time stemming from a production-line style, high-density teaching load in *eikaiwa* were claimed by several participants to be deeply detrimental to sound pedagogy. Furthermore, some teachers claimed that, due to students being able to join and leave classes as they pleased, there was little hope in *eikaiwa* for the development of curriculum or coherent measures of achievement. This instability was also seen as problematic because teachers were put in a position where it was impractical to adequately plan for lessons due to time constraints and excessive variation between student proficiency levels and needs. Perhaps partially stemming from these systematic hurdles as well as questionable hiring policies was the reliance on 'teacher proofing' through the use of formulaic in-house materials that consequently led to a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to teaching methodology. The lack of autonomy that in-house 'teacher proofing' represented meant that several teachers felt they were not able to provide optimal instruction for their *eikaiwa* students.

Between *eikaiwa* and university, the issue of *social distance* between teacher and student was revealed to be something of a double-edged sword that intersected professional identity and teacher beliefs. Compared to the 'host' role that some teachers inhabited in *eikaiwa*, participants highlighted the salience of the role of 'assessor' as university teachers. The perceived pedagogical benefits of this were related to the importance of providing learners with clear goals, an area that many teachers felt was a marked weakness of *eikaiwa* classes. As previously stated, assessment was also found at times to be linked to teachers' conceptions of legitimate professional identity and the role that accountability played in this. Conversely, along with the issue of larger class sizes, the increased teacher-student power gap stemming from an assessor role was revealed to be a potential source of rupture (Zittoun, 2006) related to certain assumptions or beliefs teachers had developed throughout their career. A number of participants stated that they valued the 'personal touch' that they had experienced in *eikaiwa* and that this was one area that they were concerned was lacking in the university context. In this way, the social resources provided by university teaching in the form of heightened professional status had mediated this rupture in the relocation to university teaching but it was apparent that some teachers still saw this as a loss that they hoped to perhaps negotiate in the future.

Conclusion

While the findings from this exploratory study reveal some interesting insights into teachers' lived experiences in *eikaiwa* and university, this area warrants further discussion. Given the relatively small sample size and the highly interpretative nature of the data analysis, the findings should not be generalized beyond this study. However, rather than the generalizability

desired in positivist research – the value of which is questionable in the social sciences (Bassey, 1981) – this study does provide relatability, e.g., insights that teachers can relate to their own experiences. It also foregrounds the need for future research to shed light upon teacher perspectives from non-formal contexts such as *eikaiwa* or *juku* (cram schools) as well as exploring the process of transitioning between different educational contexts. As this study focused purely on retrospective accounts of teachers' transitions, it may be valuable for a longitudinal ethnographic study to center on a teacher transitioning between educational settings in order to get a deeper understanding into the relocation process.

Teachers' transitions between the *eikaiwa* and university contexts of experience in some ways serve to cement the prevalent image of conversation schools in Japan. The well-known challenges relating to deprofessionalization, teacher autonomy, assessment, curriculum, and training were confirmed by most participants. Furthermore, many highlighted these areas as central to the personal meaning they attributed to their movement into university teaching. However, the idea that this transition was a simple escape from the 'bottom rung' to achieving 'the holy grail' of teaching is an oversimplification of these teachers' developmental journeys. The 'baptism of fire' experienced within *eikaiwa*forged the cognitive skills that facilitated their transition into a more formal academic setting. In addition, their time in *eikaiwa* contributed to deep-seated beliefs about language learning and teaching that frame their pedagogy each time they step into the university classroom. Teachers saw the differences between *eikaiwa* and university teaching as a tradeoff between measurability and professional status versus an environment that relied upon the value of human connections to create both enjoyment and learning. Just as transitions involve both gains and losses, this study reveals a more nuanced picture of the complementary benefits and constraints of the move to university teaching opposed to a simple step up the ELT ladder.

About the Author

Daniel Hooper is a lecturer in the English Language Institute at Kanda University of International Studies. He has taught in Japan for 12 years, predominantly in secondary education and the English conversation school industry. He completed his MA TESOL at Kanda University of International Studies. His research interests include learner and teacher identity, critical applied linguistics, and the eikaiwa industry.

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Appendix

Interview questionnaire

1. How would you describe your experience of teaching in an eikaiwa school?

2. How did you come to move into university teaching?

3. What metaphor would you use to describe your move from eikaiwa into university?

4. What challenges, if any, did you encounter from your transition, in your transition from eikaiwa to university teaching?

5. How do you feel your professional role has changed, or not changed, between the eikaiwa and university contexts?

6. How have your experiences in eikaiwa influenced, or not influenced, you in the way you teach in university?

7. Based on your current theoretical and pedagogical experience, knowledge, what is your current impression of the efficacy of the eikaiwateaching model?

8. What are some ideas or practices from university English education that you feel could maybe benefit the efficacy of eikaiwa instruction?

9. What are some ideas or practices that you encountered in, in eikaiwa teaching that you feel might benefit university English instruction?

10. What advice would you give to a new teacher entering an eikaiwa school?

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