

# **Task-Based Language Teaching: Modifications needed for successful implementation within a Japanese setting in a foreign country**

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## **Abstract**

In an ever-evolving world of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), schools have been scrambling to find the best way to implement and maintain an effective and realistic way of teaching English to their students. This research is a qualitative case study that used thematic analysis on material gathered from semi-structured interviews. The interviewees are all teachers or managers at the focus school. The study investigates how one particular Japanese primary/middle school in a foreign non-Anglophone country made curriculum changes in order to fulfil the requirements of Japan's Ministry of Education (MEXT's) curriculum under unique circumstances. This research brings together a vast combination of factors to not only tell the story of how the school implemented TBLT, but also of choices that had to be made, barriers that had to be overcome and how all of this worked together with the current school environment in order to make TBLT a success. Findings of this study revealed that TBLT can be successfully implemented into a Japanese context in a country other than Japan, although it takes time and all stakeholders have to be included. Change needs to occur from the uppermost level of the institution with an in-depth understanding of what is being implemented by all stakeholders being crucial to its success. It was found that the best way for the school in this study to implement TBLT was by executing a hybrid continuum focusing on vocabulary and pronunciation in a student-centred environment for the lowest grades, and up to full implementation of TBLT in the higher grades. This not only allowed for younger students to increase their communicative vocabulary, but also slowly acquainted them with a student-centred approach which was abnormal to them. It was also discovered that while teacher autonomy is good in planning, teacher accountability must be maintained to make sure all teachers are implementing TBLT to the highest possible standard. This can reduce the risk of tensions between teachers who put in varying workloads. As the population of Japanese citizens moving abroad to engage in paid work continues to rise and more of these Japanese government funded schools open, effective TBLT implementation will only become more vital as new schools will look to the already established ones to learn the best way to enact these educational strategies without needing to make the same mistakes as the pioneering schools. This research not only represents an original and significant contribution to knowledge, but also serves as an exemplar for other schools to build on or even lead to a network where schools in similar situations can trade ideas and resources.

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## Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

Term	Definition
<b>Case Study</b>	“An empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (R. K. Yin, 2013, p. 2).
<b>Coding</b>	Coding is the process of analysing qualitative text data by taking them apart to see what they yield before putting the data back together in a meaningful way” (Creswell, 2015, p. 156).
<b>EAL</b>	English as another language.
<b>Hybrid methodology</b>	A mixture of task-based language teaching and more traditional forms of teaching that include focus on form and rote learning.
<b>Input-based TBLT</b>	“An input-based task aims to promote inter-language development by directing learners’ attention to second language (L2) input through listening or reading without requiring them to produce the L2” (Shintani, 2012, p. 254).
<b>JET</b>	Japanese English teacher (not to be confused with Japanese Exchange Teachers or the JET program in Japan).
<b>MEXT</b>	Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.
<b>NET</b>	Native English teacher.
<b>PD</b>	Professional development.
<b>TBLT</b>	Task-based language teaching.
<b>TEFL</b>	Teaching English as a foreign language.
<b>Thematic Analysis (TA)</b>	A method for identifying, analysing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
<b>Traditional classroom</b>	A typical teacher-centred classroom is where the teacher stands between the knowledge and the students. Information is dispersed by the teacher and learned by the students.
<b>Qualitative research</b>	Qualitative research is empirical research where the data are not in the form of numbers.

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## **RHD Thesis Declaration**

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## **Chapter 1 – Research objectives**

This chapter introduces the case that is to be studied and the driving forces behind it. It then moves to introduce the research questions and how they work together to make a significant contribution to knowledge in the field. This is then followed up with the limitations of the study along with a chapter summary which briefly outlines what readers can expect from this thesis.

### **1.1 Introduction**

Over the past two decades there have been significant changes occurring in both ideology and methodology of how English is taught as a foreign language to students worldwide. These changes in teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) have had significant impacts on schools, teaching, students and policy makers who have all had to react to rapidly evolving and extensive research findings on the best way to teach English as a foreign language. This study will focus on the changes that have been implemented in a Japanese school in a foreign (not Japan and non-Anglophone) country in order to create a new curriculum and improved pedagogy that is successful and effective within this specific context. Recent worldwide changes to TEFL have seen a shift away from traditional teaching methods such as presentation, practice and production (PPP) which focuses on students learning, remembering and recreating specific grammatical forms, to a more student-centred communicative form of TEFL called task-based language teaching (TBLT) (Rod Ellis, 2003; Samuda & Bygate, 2008; D. Willis & Willis, 2007). TBLT focuses on using the second language (L2) in order to complete a task with an emphasis on fluency rather than on grammatical forms and accuracy. This methodological shift caused the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) to enact significant changes in their educational outcomes relating to the teaching of English. These changes included implementing TBLT as their official method of teaching English and also stating that students must use English to communicate in authentic situations during classroom activities (MEXT, 2008). The problem lies in the fact that although this new method of instruction has been the official education policy for Japanese English teachers for several years now, it has not been implemented correctly or consistently throughout Japanese schools, leading to confusion, and in some cases, ineffective execution (Adams & Newton, 2009; Hahn, 2013).

### **1.2 Aim/s, research questions and objectives**

While current research into TBLT is extensive, it typically focuses on a specific point of TBLT, such as quantifiable comparisons between TBLT and PPP (De la Fuente, 2006; Rod Ellis, 2014; Shintani, 2011); focuses on form (Marzban & Mokhberi, 2012; Saito & Lyster, 2012; Sato, 2011; Shintani, 2012; van de Guchte, Braaksma, Rijlaarsdam, & Bimmel, 2016) or focuses on the effectiveness of corrective feedback (Asadollahfam, Kuhi, Salimi, & Mirzaei, 2012; Marzban & Mokhberi, 2012; Saito & Lyster, 2012). The research intended in this study differs as it aims to provide a comprehensive analysis and case study of the implementation

of TBLT within an English department of a Japanese school in a non-Anglophone context. The objective is to explore all aspects required for the culmination of a successful working methodology to teach English as another language, including: teacher training; resource creation; pronunciation; constraints to overcome; cultural exchange; hybrid methodologies; curriculum creation; differentiation; and examination. In order to do this, the following research questions are posed:

1. What were the challenges when implementing TBLT?
2. What are the strategies needed to successfully implement TBLT?

The first question seeks to explore teachers' and managers' understanding of the Japanese curriculum or course of study that is prescribed by MEXT and how this can be implemented correctly within the specific context of a Japanese school in a foreign non-Anglophone country. It will examine the process involved in preparing a department to radically change their teaching methodology and way of thinking within a Japanese school in a foreign context. This question aims to explore teacher's original reactions to curriculum/pedagogical change and what was needed to support that change, including both teacher support and curriculum/resource creation. The second research question explored problems related to the implementation of TBLT that arose and had to be overcome, including those for both teachers and management. It then investigated what this all means in terms of EFL and TBLT within Japanese schools both in and outside of Japan. These two questions will elicit information regarding the implementation of TBLT from the perspective of Japanese English Teachers (JET) and the Native English Teachers (NET), as well as the NET management.

The objective of this research is to explore the opinions and ideas of the teachers and managers in terms of how successful the implementation of TBLT was and to see what changes could have been made earlier in order to help with its facilitation within the department and within the school. A secondary objective is to showcase this school as an exemplar to help with the implementation of TBLT within other Japanese schools in foreign countries. This could potentially lead to the establishment of a network between similar schools where teachers could help each other by sharing ideas, challenges and successes. The results of this research will also be used as a resource for educators. I, the author will be able to learn how certain aspects could have been managed differently in order to assist teaching staff in overcoming challenges that arose.

### **1.3 Contribution to Knowledge**

There are currently 88 Japanese schools in foreign countries around the world (Japan Overseas Educational Services, 2019). Each of these schools are using their own strategies to teach English as an Additional Language (EAL) and follow the policy outlined by the latest MEXT educational reforms. While completing the literature review for this study, it was

discovered that there is a significant lack of research on the entire implementation of a TBLT curriculum within a department of a Japanese school, and no information relating to TBLT within Japanese schools outside of Japan was discovered at all. The intended contribution to knowledge from this research is to provide an in-depth understanding of what is necessary to successfully implement TBLT within a unique context such as a Japanese school in a foreign, non-Anglophone country. This will help to assist others who may be in similar situations, looking at the daunting task of creating and implementing a TBLT curriculum within their own department or school. The vision is that this will showcase a unique teaching situation as an example to be used by others, and also address any challenges or difficult situations that occurred and had to be overcome by both teachers and management.

#### **1.4 Limitations**

This study will comprehensively delve into how modifications have been made to implement TBLT successfully within a particular school, while noting several limitations, the first being the uniqueness of the research. Contextually, the school in this study may be very different to other Japanese schools outside of Japan due to it having significant private funding and being able to pay for additional staff where needed. Although the specific implementation of TBLT within this context may be effective, this may not be possible within other school environments which will limit the transferability of the findings of this research. Another limitation is the fact that, due to time and managerial considerations, no research will be undertaken with the students involved in the program. Their ideas, thoughts, reactions and results would have added significant input into the investigation; however, this is an aspect for further research. Lastly, it is also said that as the researcher, while also being involved in the creation and implementation of the curriculum in focus, there could be bias due to my involvement. R. K. Yin (2013, p. 59) believes that “all of the preceding conditions will be negated if an investigator seeks to use a case study only to substantiate a preconceived position.” Although this is true, the researcher has tried to negate this by not using himself in the study, but rather sourcing data from both NET and JET teachers to obtain a fairer, non-biased assessment.

#### **1.5 Chapter Summary**

In chapter one I have discussed the aims of the study and presented the research questions driving the study. I then discussed why this study is a significant contribution to knowledge while acknowledging some of its limitations. In chapter two the literature outlining research in this area is interrogated while in chapter three the research design is documented starting with positioning this research within a qualitative case study methodology, then outlining the data collection and analytical processes before moving onto chapter four. In chapter four I introduce the context and people involved in this in-depth exploratory case study. The participants are introduced along with a discussion of the uniqueness of the school site where this research took place. The chapter also discusses the influences and

constraints of operating within the broader policy and procedures of the Japanese education system. Chapter five begins the analysis of data and breaks down how TBLT has been implemented by the participants. Chapter six then moves on to look at the participant's understanding of TBLT and how they see the implementation happening. This includes how participants perceive the students to have responded to TBLT through their experiences with the students in class, and through the student's response to non-traditional pedagogical practices. Chapter seven is devoted to intercultural nuances that occur in the school due to teachers from different cultures working together, as well as cultural challenges that have arisen due to implementing a system of education which fundamentally undermines traditional Japanese teaching norms. Japanese teachers are discussed, along with the constraints of working within a Japanese school in regard to resource management, budget, large classes and local policy and then on to the broader structural issues of the education system including promotions and what that means for the Japanese teachers once they return to Japan. Chapter eight discusses how suitable TBLT actually is for the school in the context of this study, if the implementation was successful or not along with some final recommendations and suggestions for possible improvements. Then a conclusive summary is provided in chapter nine.

Chapter one outlined the educational context for this study. It began with discussing that the world of TEFL is currently transitioning from traditional educational practices such as PPP to student-centred communicative methodologies such as TBLT. This change has also been seen in Japan where MEXT changed its official English teaching methodology to TBLT. This qualitative case study is premised on two research questions which aim to explore how TBLT was introduced as the EAL department's new pedagogy and what challenges arose in this unique context. The second focuses on strategies that needed to be enacted to overcome said challenges to increase the chances of a successful implementation. This research represents a significant contribution to knowledge as there is extremely limited research into implementing TBLT or any other methodology in Japanese schools in foreign countries. With the number of Japanese students attending these schools on the rise, this research will only become more important as similar schools look for examples of how to implement their own pedagogical changes around the world. The chapter finishes by discussing several limitations that have to be acknowledged such as the context being very unique which may limit transferability, the researcher being an insider-researcher which could lead to bias and the fact that students weren't directly involved in the research, instead only attaining perceived responses by students.

## **Chapter 2 - Research and Related Literature**

### **2.1 Examining the relevant literature**

#### **History of Teaching English as a Foreign Language**

Methodologies for Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) have been consistently changing for decades with researchers continuing to investigate the best ways to foster language acquisition. As there have been a multitude of different methodologies implemented over the years, it is worth understanding these approaches in order to appreciate where many of the more modern concepts come from, including TBLT. Grammar Translation Method (GTM) was originally used to teach classical languages such as Latin and Greek. This particular method concentrated on grammar and learning the skill of translating from one language to the second with the use of literary texts (Ahmed, 2013). Ahmed (2013) asserts that this method focused on grammatical accuracy which left very little room for true communication skills to develop, leaving learners unable to effectively speak in a real world contexts. More recently, Audio Lingual Method became all the rage of the TEFL community which was inspired by the behaviourist theory (Ahmed, 2013). This methodology was based on the idea that languages could be learned by developing habits, and students were instructed to imitate their language instructors using drills. This methodology augmented into the traditional form of Presentation, Practice and Production (PPP) that was used around the globe for teaching foreign languages for decades and can still be found in many places today, especially in Asia (Littlewood, 2007).

The traditional PPP approach is made up of a three cycle process. Samuda and Bygate (2008) identify these cycles as: 1) the teacher presents the grammar to be learned; 2) a series of controlled practices occur which gradually become less controlled; and 3) the students produce the target language in a controlled activity. Although this method was extensively practiced throughout Asia, it has been deemed a failure by many researchers due to lack of acquisition and countless students leaving school after six to eight years of learning English and not being able to effectively communicate (Rod Ellis, 2014; Narawa, 2006). A problem with PPP is that it is focused on accuracy and avoidance of error, which can result in a sense of failure, loss of self-esteem and a drop in motivation (D. Willis & Willis, 2011; J. Willis, 1996). This was further discussed by Kikuchi and Sakai (2009), who in a recent study found that traditional non-communicative approaches to TEFL, such as PPP, are a significant demotivating factor in language learning. This all led to a large scale realisation that language goes beyond learning sets of vocabulary, grammatical rules and lexical formations and that language is a “dynamic source of creating meaning” (Ahmed, 2013, p. 450). This in turn led researchers and educators to create Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which views language as a tool for communication rather than sets of phonological, grammatical and lexical items (Nunan, 2006).

## **Reforms implemented by the Japanese Ministry of Education**

Due to this philosophical change in TEFL ideology, many researchers' overwhelming criticisms of traditional methods of TEFL within Japanese classrooms (Rod Ellis, 2014; Shintani, 2012) and Japanese students graduating from high schools without the ability to communicate in English (Narawa, 2006), MEXT implemented vast educational reforms in 2008. One such reform was lowering the compulsory age of learning English by two years to grade 5 (11 years of age) in order to familiarise students with foreign language sounds and to develop their understanding of cultures in foreign countries (MEXT, 2008). Additionally, (MEXT, 2008a, p. 1) states that language activities should be "designed for specific language-use situations in order to encourage students to apply their abilities to understand and convey information and ideas, and should be conducted in English". These changes to the English program were designed to bring the curriculum more in line with CLT, which treats English as a communicative tool rather than just a testable, academic subject (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2006; Life, Falout, & Murphey, 2009; Tahira, 2012). Due to these communicative changes being implemented, and the failure of traditional methods, another product of CLT called Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), in which J. Willis (1996) presents as a logical development of communicative language teaching, gained attention in many Asian countries and began being developed and implemented for teaching English throughout Japan.

Since 2008, there have been several revisions of MEXT's "course of study" with each outlining changes made to the recommended English curriculum and methodology. The latest was in 2018 and although several changes have been made which affect TBLT, they are minor and support TBLT and hybrid methodologies. One of the major changes is that English lessons have again been brought forward by two years and grade 3 and 4 are now to learn English. Although specific goals have not been set for these grades, guidelines have separated speaking into two categories of interacting and presentation. Another significant change is that grades five and six, reading and writing should be taught in order to get the students familiar with these two areas. It then stands to reason that rudimentary reading and writing skills should be introduced in grades three and four. Along the lines of TBLT, the new guidelines list English as an "experimental subject" which involves various interactive activities with classmates in various learning formats with a focus on pair and groupwork. Content and activities are expected to take into account students' interests and are expected to make use of learning materials from different subjects (Kyoiku-shuppan, 2018). Although these changes have no impact on a hybrid syllabus, they seem to have identified several issues and given more guidance to teachers of English as to what is expected.

### **What is TBLT?**

Task-based language teaching uses tasks in order to facilitate the use of language in communicative contexts and expose students to language that they require in order to communicate in real life within the classroom (Ahmed, 2013). Examples of tasks can range

from something as simple as the students being able to introduce themselves or order food at a restaurant to being able to ask for specific sizes or styles when shopping for clothes. R Ellis (2013, p. 1) states that TBLT “assumes that, as in first language acquisition, a language is best learned when it is used as a tool for communicating rather than being treated as an object to be studied.” Over recent years there has been a lot of research and discussion about “tasks”, and although researchers have not necessarily agreed on a single definition, most definitions have the following characteristics (Ducker, 2012, p. 4; Rod Ellis, 2009, p. 223):

- 1) Learners are expected to complete some sort of task or goal (the use of language is needed to complete the goal but is not the goal itself);
- 2) The completion of the task requires students to “fill a gap” or come up with their own language rather than reproduce language already given to them;
- 3) Language produced should resemble authentic language used in the real world;
- 4) Meaning is more important than form (grammar).

TBLT transforms traditional teaching environments into learner-centred classrooms consisting of activities where students have to interact with each other in communicative contexts and negotiate their own communication problems that arise (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2011). As no two learners are identical, TBLT is an adaptive pedagogy where teachers are encouraged to design their own tasks to best suit their learner’s contexts (Robertson, 2014). Although the tasks vary significantly in different contexts, the TBLT lesson always follows a similar plan which involves a pre-task phase (introducing the task, brainstorming, task planning), a task phase (completing the task itself) and a post-task phase (reminding students of the learning that took place) (Rod Ellis, 2003).

### **TBLT: Promoting fluency, then form**

In the early stages of TBLT, researchers such as J. Willis (1996) argue that there should be no attempt to focus the learner’s attention on form as it could deduct from fluency and meaning. Since then, although the primary goal of TBLT is to focus on meaning, most advocates of TBLT see a role for grammar within the methodology (Calvert & Sheen, 2014). While researchers such as Long (2014), Martin Bygate, Swain, and Skehan (2013) and Rod Ellis (2003) see grammar as an essential element in TBLT, it is important that learners are not explicitly instructed on grammatical features of the language such as they were in traditional methodologies as this does not result in authentic use of the language (Asadollahfam et al., 2012). Although students generally focus on meaning, there are several ways that attention can be drawn to grammar or form through all phases of the TBLT lesson, despite differences still existing between what advocates think is the best (Calvert & Sheen, 2014). Several researchers are now looking into corrective feedback (CF) as a possible way to focus on grammar without losing the integrity of the communicative task at hand (Asadollahfam et al., 2012; Rod Ellis, 2014; Marzban & Mokhberi, 2012; Saito & Lyster, 2012; Shintani, 2013). This method assumes that grammatical forms are “best learned in flight

while learners are struggling to communicate” (Rod Ellis, 2014, p. 109), and in this way, form can be mapped to meaning.

One such study is that of Asadollahfam et al. (2012) who used quantifiable data in order to show that grammatical knowledge can be greatly improved by using CF without the need for grammar being explicitly taught. This positivist study encompassed teaching a second language to two groups of young adults (16 – 20 years old) using varying methodology. One group focused on grammar while the other focused on meaning, and used corrective feedback in order to correct students’ utterances. After seventeen weeks of instruction, students were then tested, and were tested again two weeks after the end of the learning program. Not only did the results show that CF helped students to make less grammatical errors, but it also showed that it helped students retain the knowledge longer as the CF group outperformed the focus on form group in the delayed post-test. This accentuates the point made by Rod Ellis (2014, p. 109) that “In short, there is plenty of ‘grammar’ in TBLT. What is missing, however, is the explicit teaching of grammar”. Although the Asadollahfam et al. (2012) research has several limitations, such as only having male students who can respond quite differently to females in many learning situations, it still drives home the point that learners need immediate negative evidence (CF) to know if their speaking skills are intelligible and correct as sometimes the learners alone do not have the knowledge to judge this for themselves (Saito & Lyster, 2012). No matter the subject, when a student is attempting to complete a task and receives little feedback or help, there is a moment of realisation which can be referred to as the “aha” moment (Shayan, Abrahamson, Bakker, Duijzer, & Van der Schaaf, 2015), which can help them to achieve the task and also help retention as they were not just given information; they had to work for it and have an attempt first. This is why teachers should navigate the classroom, helping where needed, showing enthusiasm and adding the occasional word to facilitate communication, which in turn reinforces the importance of the task. If teachers simply point out errors, the importance is transferred from the task to the grammar, which takes away from the task (Hobbs, 2011).

### **Benefits of TBLT**

Although TBLT has not won over all educational researchers in the TEFL field, it clearly has a lot of benefits which have been shown in a myriad of investigations. For example, in order to compare methodologies, De la Fuente (2006) completed a restaurant task lesson where students had to negotiate the meaning of vocabulary in order to complete their task, and also conducted a PPP lesson where students had to learn vocabulary and grammatical structures, complete controlled practices and then complete an activity where they had to use the vocabulary. Both groups were then tested for proficiency immediately after their lessons and again in a weeks’ time. The tests showed very little difference in their scores in the immediate tests but the TBLT group vastly outperformed the PPP group in the delayed test. This confirms that if students have to develop meaning and fluency through using the language, it increases the learner’s chances of retaining the vocabulary (Rod Ellis, 2014).



Although these results are very relevant to my own research, De la Fuente (2006) investigation has a lot of limitations and differences, including the 38 participants being of university age and the researcher's sole reliance on quantifiable data analysis. The students were also English speakers learning Spanish, both languages being Latin-based. This is very different to the current study where the second language has a completely different form and grammatical structure. Shintani (2012) conducted similar research to De la Fuente (2006) in the form of a quasi-experiment that studied the incidental acquisition of plurals, even though they were not specifically taught to the participants who were beginner level students. The results showed that acquisition occurred within the TBLT lesson but not within the PPP lesson and Shintani (2012) argues that this was because TBLT instruction created a functional need to attend to grammatical structures. Although the results of this experiment are intriguing, they may not have been completely accurate as the use of the plural form of words using "s" was not essential in the tests. This means that some students may have learned plural forms without the results of the tests explicitly showing it.

### **Contextual constraints to implementing TBLT**

Although there are ample studies arguing that TBLT is the most effective method of TEFL to date (Bao & Du, 2015; De la Fuente, 2006; Rod Ellis, 2014; Kozawa, 2013; Shintani, 2011; Tang, Chiou, & Jarsaillon, 2015), some earlier educators such as D. Carless (2007) and Sato (2010) raised the issue that conflicts can often occur between the implementation of TBLT and the local contexts. This is especially true within East Asian contexts such as Japan, China and Korea. One of the largest stumbling blocks for the implementation of TBLT within Japanese schools is high stakes examinations, both at school and as entrance exams for high schools and universities, whereas TBLT calls for the use of performance based testing which allows for testing skills rather than knowledge (Rod Ellis, 2009). Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, and Shimizu (2004) point out that Japanese students are often not motivated by the need to communicate and are usually test driven and motivated by scores in order to achieve their goals of getting into specific schools or universities. This can lead to students treating TBLT classrooms as less of a priority due to lack of focus on grammar or form (D. Carless, 2007; Lai, Zhao, & Wang, 2011). One suggestion that D. Carless (2012) has put forward is that teacher's marks awarded for work done in the classroom can count towards the overall high stakes examination, which could motivate students to perform well in their communicative tasks.

While communicative language teaching and TBLT have been the official educational policy in Japan and other East Asian countries for several years now, there is some research (Adams & Newton, 2009) which suggests that the policies have not been effectively or consistently implemented. In fact, the majority of investigations have suggested that curricular policies have had little effect within classrooms, and teaching methodologies still overwhelmingly remain traditional with explicit focus on grammar and form (D. Carless, 2007; Hu, 2005; Zhang, 2007). There are several overriding contextual issues that may have contributed to this lack of implementation, including but not limited to: lack of education

and professional development (Calvert & Sheen, 2014; D. Carless, 2012; Erlam, 2015; Hahn, 2013); the ability of non-native English teachers to correctly implement TBLT (Adams & Newton, 2009; Hahn, 2013; Sato, 2010); and student and teacher dissatisfaction due to non-traditional classroom management and information transfer techniques within TBLT (Bao & Du, 2015; Burrows, 2008; Harris, 2016). One important factor that has been a significant stumbling block for TBLT is the apparent lack of top down dissemination of ready-made resources. Hobbs (2011) discusses that textbooks designed to fit TBLT are generally quite rare, which leads teachers to believe that the only way to implement TBLT is to create all of their own resources. For busy teachers who do not have the time to do this or feel more comfortable using a commercially produced textbook, implementing TBLT may seem quite daunting (Hobbs, 2011). Wakaari (2011) pointed out that although TBLT has many advantages, especially if tasks are made for specific purposes, the time needed to create the task and resources was inconceivable, especially for inexperienced teachers, and therefore, not practical. Another problem is the time that teachers are allocated to teach English. As teaching a skill takes longer than teaching knowledge, some teachers find it hard to implement tasks into their syllabus while still covering all of the necessary learning outcomes specified by the curriculum (Erlam, 2015; Hobbs, 2011; Wicking, 2009).

### **Criticisms of TBLT Method**

A common criticism of TBLT is that the syllabi do not adequately instruct grammar (Sheen, 2003; Widdowson, 2003) and Swan (2005) even went as far to say that TBLT 'outlaws' the grammar syllabus. While it is true that TBLT focuses on fluency of communication over form, it is important to differentiate between TBLT syllabi and TBLT Teaching. As discussed earlier in this document, a good TBLT syllabus should consist of both focused and unfocused tasks (Rod Ellis, 2009) with the focused tasks attending to language structures and form that were obviously lacking within the unfocused communicative tasks. Another common criticism of TBLT is that TBLT is not suited for beginner level learners. This critique comes from the idea that students need to speak in their second language to complete the tasks therefore students need to be taught some language before they can take part in the task (Littlewood, 2007). Again, this criticism may hold some credence if referring to a TBLT syllabus that only comprised of unfocused tasks that needed to be completed without taking into account focused or input tasks. Again, evidence suggests that language can be learned through input tasks without having to utter a word in their second language. An example is Shintani (2012, 2013), who conducted an experiment where students were required to listen to commands and show their understanding by selecting cards that matched. Although this task did not require students to speak any second language, results showed that their understanding of their teacher's commands increased over time.

## **Hybrid curriculums and methodologies**

Considering some of these contextual constraints within the Japanese TEFL environment, some teachers have reported the need to come up with a method that is somewhere between TBLT and the traditional approaches (D. Carless, 2007; Harris, 2016). There is a considerable amount of research that suggests there is no single approach to language teaching that should be adopted in all teaching contexts (Calvert & Sheen, 2014; Rod Ellis, 2009; Harris, 2016). D. Carless (2004) suggests that teachers need to take on many considerations when creating a lesson, such as a student's abilities, experiences and socio-cultural environment amongst others, and should adapt each lesson so that it is a situated version of TBLT. The results of a survey of teachers in Japan in TBLT curriculum schools found that although the teachers agreed with the theoretical merits of TBLT, only six per cent of teachers always follow the TBLT approach, with ninety per cent indicating that they sometimes follow the TBLT approach (D. Carless, 2004). Task-supported teaching is one such method which is often described as a "weak" version of TBLT and gives students the opportunity to communicate in order to complete a task using language that they learned in a traditional way (Rod Ellis, 2003). This approach has been described as a way to deal with some of the supposed weaknesses of TBLT, while from a different perspective, is seen as a way of dealing with some of the weaknesses of PPP (Ducker, 2012). In conclusion, research suggests that teachers are currently experimenting with a large variety of hybrid methods of TBLT, some of which seem to be more successful than others. This implies that TBLT is an adaptable approach which needs to consider a myriad of variables, affirming the contention by Rod Ellis (2009, p. 221) that "there is no single 'task-based teaching' approach".

## **Chapter 3 - methodology/the research design**

This chapter outlines the conceptual and theoretical frameworks in which this research was conducted before moving onto explaining how the data was collected and analysed.

### **3.1 Paradigms**

The researcher's individual view is that people learn and construct meaning through their own personal experiences, which means that meaning is subjective and can change depending on personal experiences. Therefore, it can be argued that there can be multiple views of the same things, which suggests ontologically, that I prescribe to the constructivist paradigm. Wahyuni (2012, p. 69) defines epistemology as "the beliefs on the way to generate, understand and use the knowledge that is deemed to be acceptable and valid." Due to my own experiences, educational background and beliefs being different to those of my co-workers, I believe that my personal views of situations are very different to those of others. Because these human perspectives and experiences are subjective, social realities may change and can have multiple perspectives (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2010). Therefore, within this study, I not only looked for a single answer but attempted to create dialogue with the research participants to gain an intimate understanding of the phenomenon under study. Constructivism employs a narrative form of analysis to describe specifics and highly detailed accounts of a particular social reality being studied, which is termed the ideographic approach (Neuman, 2002). This investigation used qualitative research to collect a large amount of subjective data which was in turn analysed to give a detailed and specific description of how a particular implementation of TBLT transpired.

### **3.2 Qualitative research methodology**

The chosen method of qualitative research for this investigation is case study. Case studies have become the preferred method when the focus is on a phenomenon within some real-life context (R. Yin, 2003). R. Yin (2003, p. 2) states that "the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena" because "the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events," such as the implementation of a new teaching pedagogy within a school. The case study is a research methodology that involves observing or conducting systematic research on a specific individual, group of individuals or phenomenon, the 'case' so to speak (R. K. Yin, 2013). This approach allows for the investigations of the topic in far more detail than would be possible if trying to deal with a large number of participants. Also, most case studies only happen in a very specific place or context. Bryman (2015, p. 67) states that "the most common use of the term 'case' usually relates to a specific location such as a community or organisation. The emphasis tends to be on an extensive examination of the setting." The context of a case study is extremely important, for as Bryman (2015, p. 5) states, "social research and its associated methods do not take place in vacuum." The case study in this research will be contained to a single location which will allow for a detailed study of a particular situation namely, the implementation of a TBLT curriculum into a

foreign Japanese school. Being an insider-researcher, this case study will have the advantage of the researcher having an intimate understanding of the institutional politics, the culture being studied and the participants being interviewed. Freebody (2003, p. 81) places case studies into three categories: exploratory; explanatory; and descriptive. While these categories are used in different situations, segments of each were used in order to complete this research. That being said, it is primarily a descriptive-analytic case study which described the case in depth, rather than in breadth.

### **3.3 Data Collection Methods**

The primary source for data collection is a mixture of semi-structured and responsive interview questions with teachers and managers working within the EAL department, as well as with JET teachers. The interviews were conducted towards the end of a sixteen-week term with a total of eight participants consisting of five NETs, one JET and two NET managers. This process was completed over a three-week period in a non-formal setting, outside of the school grounds and during the teacher's free time. It was intended that the non-formal setting such as a restaurant or café would help the participants open up and speak freely about certain topics without it feeling like a work event, or that their answers would adversely affect their working environment. The participants volunteered to partake in the research and were explicitly told (as well as it being stated on their consent forms) that their answers would have no bearing on their jobs or work and that anonymity would be maintained. The interview questions directly related to the research questions guiding this study and referred to specific topics that emerged during the literature review, topics that have been consistently debated by TBLT experts, teachers and educators.

#### **3.3.1 Participants**

To maintain anonymity, detailed information relating to the participants cannot be divulged although an overview of characteristics can be revealed. The eight participants consisted of seven native English-speaking people from various countries including the USA, Canada, Australia and South Africa along with one participant from Japan. All except one of the teachers had at least several years of teaching experience with half having taught for several years each in Japan which added an extra dynamic to their perspectives and therefore their interviews.

#### **3.3.2 Ethics Approval**

Before the interview process could begin, human ethics permission was sought and acquired in order to fulfill the principles of human research ethics relating to the project. Due to colleagues being interviewed, this ethics application was rigorously scrutinised and passed with the provision that consent forms were to be signed stating that the participants volunteered and that answers given would have no impact on their working environment. Written permission by the school's management was also sought in order to collect data from employees. After submitting all the documentation required, the research was

approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (CQUHREC) under the Application ID 0000020818.

### **3.3.3 Interview techniques**

Semi-structured interview questions were used as this technique allowed the participants as experts in their field to add as much information as they felt necessary in order to fully explore the question. Responsive interviewing also occurred during the interviews. Responsive interviewing focused on obtaining a deep understanding about the investigated topic by asking follow up or reactive questions to the interviewee (Rubin, 2015). These follow-up questions and probes were used when there was the possibility of more important information being extracted from the interviewee that had not entirely emerged in the original response. Impromptu questions were also used when the interviewer believed that the teacher had not fully understood the questions or had not answered it in the way anticipated. The option for second interviews was left open in case emergent themes arose while analysing the data and needed to be further explored in order to fully answer the research questions although in the end, this was not needed. All interviews were recorded using a recording device so they could later be transcribed and coded to find themes and similarities between interviewees' responses. All transcripts were then numbered using turns for ease reference throughout the thesis.

Directly after the interviews, detailed notes were taken by the researcher. This included descriptions of physical responses of the participants during the interview and any immediate findings and reflections that emerged. The researcher was very interested in non-verbal cues and responses of the participants that possibly revealed unspoken ideas or opinions that could be further probed using impromptu questions. Initial codes and themes to emerge were developed during the interview process in order to sharpen the researcher's understanding of the data and allow for follow up questions relating to emergent themes. This process not only focused on discovering what the participants knew, but also in trying to interpret their point of view on the topic. The researcher's working relationships with the participants was a useful benefit to this process as it allowed for the seeking of information from an insider perspective. Lastly, a research diary was used to keep a written record of the researcher's activities, thoughts and ideas during the entire research project including design, research collection and data analysis. This could be reflected upon during the writing process for subsequent ideas.

### **3.4 Data analysis method**

Upon completion and transcription of the interviews, analysis of the data began. Analysing qualitative data involved dismantling, segmenting and reassembling data to form meaningful findings in order to draw inferences (Boeije, 2009). When qualitative research is undertaken, researchers often have to gather and store large amounts of data in many different forms. This data often comes from conversations between subjects/participants, interviews or from other relating documentation. To examine a large collection of data, a

methodology has to be implemented and conducted to extract the necessary and important information. As qualitative data by nature does not conveniently fall into neatly bundled categories, a form of data management was needed to order, categorise and make sense of the collected data as well as determine links between different data groups.

The data management system that was used in this study is called coding. Firstly, the definition of a code is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative attribute for a portion of language (Saldaña, 2015). Coffey and Atkinson (1996, p. 45) state that “coding qualitative data enables the researcher to recognise and re-contextualise data, allowing a fresh view of what is there.” The coding system was produced manually by searching transcripts for repetition and relevance to the research questions (Bryman, 2015) both before and after the interviews. The first codes generated were perceived codes that were created before the interviews took place using the data already at hand, including the literature review. The codes were used to start to break up the information during the interview sessions and tended to be quite general, such as the definition of TBLT, planning tasks or contextual issues and were specific to certain interview questions. During the interview and coding process, emergent codes were continually discovered and adapted. These unforeseen codes were added to the perceived codes in order to create a complete and comprehensive system that was capable of breaking down the raw data into easily comprehensible segments. The emergent codes can sometimes be the most factually illuminating as they separate the participants and open up new avenues of discussion and research. The codes constantly changed and grew as the investigation developed as coding is something that evolves during the research process.

### **3.5 Thematic Analysis (TA)**

Once the data was coded, Thematic Analysis was used to systematically explore the codes for common themes or relationships and generate meaning. Thematic Analysis (TA) was the best methodology to sort and categorise the data in this study as it could be applied to a large variety of communication forms, such as spoken interviews or even written texts that do not occur in natural communicative situations such as a conversation. Coding is great for breaking up the data into small categories although sometimes different categories had links which could all be placed under a similar umbrella of thought. These greater umbrellas of thought are called themes which are often linked to one another through common codes. Themes transcend any codes as they are built from groups of codes. The strength of using TA lies in its ability to illuminate relationships between participants. Codes emerged in more than one theme which allowed similarities and differences to be observed much more systematically. This allowed for inferences to be made as to why specific results are occurring such as “people who say this, tend to do this” (Gibbs, 2011). Once the data was broken up into categories, themes and subthemes, it was then placed into a matrix to easily display the similarities and differences in responses between participants.

After the raw data was broken up according to perceived and emergent codes and analysed using TA, the results were compared to the current literature in the field, drawing links between the findings in this research and other theoretical and philosophical frameworks. The discussion section of this study was designed to compare similarities and differences to current knowledge of TBLT and TEFL in order to compare the successfulness of the TBLT implementation in the context presented in this study, compared to others in the field. Finally, recommendations were provided for other organisations thinking of undertaking a similar endeavour and implementing TBLT within their school. These recommendations relate to management and teachers, including classroom practices and methodological ideas. Furthermore, this section highlights what worked and what challenges arose and possible ways to resolve those challenges regarding future implementations of TBLT. Other educators can use this research as an example of how to overcome complications before they arise while undergoing similar changes within their departments.

This chapter discussed the methodology that this research fell within before moving onto explain how the data was collected and analysed. The research method chosen was that of qualitative case study in order to get a holistic and meaningful insight into the phenomenon being studied. This constructivist approach also had the added benefit of having an insider-researcher who had an intimate understanding of institutional policies, the culture and participants. The data was collected using semi-structured interviews which allowed participants to divulge extra information that they may think is needed to effectively answer questions. Responsive interviewing was also utilised to allow follow up questions and probes where the possibility of extracting extra important information presented itself. The analysis process included coding the data by searching for repetition and relevance in order to break it down into comprehensive segments. TA was then used in order to explore the codes for common themes and illuminate relationships between participants.



## **Results and discussion**

### **Chapter 4 – Context and Characters**

This chapter explores the context of the study to allow the true story of this exploratory case study to emerge. This includes background information of the researcher, the participants as well as detailed information relating to the governmental, institutional and cultural context in which this case study lies. It provides a simple and understandable description of all aspects of the school and it's working.

#### **4.1 Research Context**

The exact school that this study was conducted in is to remain anonymous which means that locations and specifics will be kept out of this document. Therefore the country that the study is being conducted in will not be included because then the school would be easily identifiable. Pseudonyms will also be used for all participants so that they cannot be individually identified.

I have used JS (Japanese School) as a pseudonym for the name of the school.

I have also used the following pseudonyms for the participants.

Davin Kerr

Sara Johnson

David Smith

Eriko Okada

Steven Hurst

Cassie Byers

Joshua Kirkland

Murray McDonald

#### **Researcher background information**

I, the author of this research paper was a teacher in Australia for two years and developed a love for travelling and experiencing different cultures while undertaking a Bachelor of Education at CQUniversity. While completing university, I worked at a prominent Queensland boarding school and developed a curiosity in understanding unique educational environments. I am very interested in learning about differences in cultures with a focus on their education and communication. This led me to accepting a position as a teacher in a Japanese school in a non-Anglophone country where I worked as a teacher for two years before gaining a promotion and becoming the assistant manager of the English as Another Language (EAL) department. During this time I completed a post graduate degree in

executive management before starting this current research project on TBLT. Through working at this Japanese school and being involved in a unique culturally blended society, I am in an ideal position to not only be included in curriculum changes happening at the school but also to view how the students integrate into the local society and their surroundings.

While being perfectly placed to complete this research, this also makes me an insider-researcher which is defined as somebody who chooses to study a group to which they belong (Breen, 2007). This brings with it both advantages and disadvantages. Several of the main advantages are that as the researcher, I have an intimate understanding of the culture being studied; I have a personal relationship with the participants, promoting both truth telling and judging of truth; and I also understand the politics of the institution. This includes how the organisation “really works” rather than just the formal hierarchy (Smyth & Holian, 2008). While acknowledging the advantages, the disadvantages also have to be discussed. These include the greater familiarity leading to a loss of objectivity or the researcher unconsciously making wrong assumptions about the data based on the prior knowledge. This can be considered as bias (DeLyser, 2001; Hewitt-Taylor, 2002). Although I am aware of the negatives that come with being an insider-researcher and don’t think they will come to fruition, for the integrity of the research, it is important that they are acknowledged and recognized by both myself and future readers.

### **Japanese expatriate context**

One unique attribute of the Japanese is that they are both adaptive and self-protective. This is evident in the fact that although rapid modernisation and globalisation has seen a breakdown in social structures and traditional values in most cultures, this has not happened to a great extent in Japan. While Japan is not immune to globalisation, few changes have been spotted within the Japanese social fabric (White, 2014). This, on top of a combination of high wages and a declining population in Japan, has been pushing manufacturing overseas which means a greater number of Japanese people having to move abroad to manage Japanese interests. This comes with a lot of challenges for Japanese people and part of this cultural and societal self-protection is having government funded Japanese only schools in many of the countries that contain a lot of Japanese expatriates. These schools vary from country to country and often run in unison with weekend cram schools which tend to focus on Japanese language and test preparation.

As of October 2017, there were approximately 1.35 million Japanese citizens living in foreign countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), 2019) with approximately 79,251 Japanese students enrolled in overseas schools, both Japanese and local (Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), 2016). This is the largest number since records began in 1968 and represents an eleven per cent increase in the previous five years (Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), 2019). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) (2019, p. 339) states that:

Education for children is one of the major concerns for Japanese nationals living abroad. In cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), MOFA carries out assistance for Japanese schools so that the overseas school children at the age of domestic compulsory education can receive education equivalent to that of in Japan.

There are currently 88 Japanese schools and 204 weekend supplementary schools in over 50 countries that are subsidised and recognised by the Japanese Government (Japan Overseas Educational Services, 2019). These schools teach the Japanese curriculum in Japanese so that students can seamlessly transition between foreign and Japanese schools with minimal educational disruption. This means that all foreign Japanese schools need to maintain a similar standard of education and resources. Similarly, this allows parents to feel confident that their children will be educated in a Japanese environment and will retain their culture while living overseas. This again relates to the Japanese being very self-protective and being diligent about protecting their cultural values and traits. It is very important to the Japanese that their children grow up and become educated in a Japanese environment so that they don't lose any of their values.

The percentage of students that attend the Japanese-only schools in foreign countries largely depends on the cultural and developmental makeup of the country. For example, approximately fifty per cent of Japanese students living in Asia (outside of Japan) attend a Japanese funded school whereas in the Pacific (Australia and New Zealand) and North America (USA) this percentage drops down to well under ten per cent (MOFA, 2019). This is due to a combination of factors such as the educational standards tending to be higher in developed countries, and also utilising the chance to be educated in an English speaking curriculum may give students an advantage of gaining entry into a more prestigious high school or university in the future. There are also Japanese government funded weekend schools where students go to further their Japanese education and prepare for upcoming tests that they may have to sit in Japan to get into high schools or universities. Whether or not a student goes to a Japanese school also depends on how long the family is intending to stay in the foreign country. If they are only intending to stay for a few years, it is preferential to keep their children in a Japanese school so that they can easily transition back into the Japanese schooling system when they return home to Japan, without prejudice. Attending a Japanese school also maintains their strong cultural and societal values which may be important to the parents.

Due to the Japanese educational system placing great importance on academic testing, a significant amount of time, especially in junior high schools is given to test preparation. This also includes entrance examinations to get into high schools and universities. This places a great amount of stress and pressure on students as achieving well on these tests can be more important for their academic future than learning skills such as communicating in a

foreign language. This presents several problems as students are expected to learn communicative English skills although high stakes examinations which are grammar knowledge focused, hindering any efforts for teachers to experiment with communicative based tasks in their lessons (Adams & Newton, 2009). This contradicts MEXT's own recommendations that English should be taught as a communicative tool and suggests that the system has not yet caught up with the reforms. It also adds stress to the students as parents expect their children to achieve both good test results, and also be able to speak English well.

### **Study country context**

Japan is a significant trading partner of the country in which JS is located (UNcomtrade, 2019). Recently, the two governments signed a Free Trade Agreement which gives tax breaks as incentives to Japanese companies who decide to invest in this country or make it a manufacturing hub (Japanese Ministry of Foreign affairs, 2007). Local laws stipulate that no foreigner is allowed to work in the country if it is possible for a citizen to do that particular job. This means that all Japanese people who reside in this country are usually upper management or specialists rather than general workers. This means that most Japanese families come over on company packages which include schooling and housing.

### **Specific school context**

JS has two campuses which are the focus of this research. Although both campuses are supposed to have identical conditions, there are some subtle differences which emerge throughout this study. The largest and most visible campus is a flagship school for foreign Japanese citizens, meaning it is always in the spotlight. This school is often visited by dignitaries and even Japanese royalty and strives to stay at the forefront of Japanese education, always adhering to the newest changes in curriculum and rules set by MEXT. The second campus is much smaller although the student numbers are increasing quickly. This campus is in a more regional location and is designed to service Japanese citizens working in the local industrial area an hour's drive from the capital.

To attend JS, students have to be a Japanese citizen. About eighty per cent of students are Japanese with the other twenty per cent being a mix of Japanese and another country (usually the local country) but still Japanese citizens carrying a Japanese passport. Due to their fathers usually being businessmen, some students have lived all over the world and most are used to traveling and are much more aware of foreign cultures and the wider world than those of the same age in Japan who have never lived abroad. This means that some students are already fluent English speakers after living in countries such as the USA or England.

JS is a government funded Japanese school with a Japanese curriculum, taught in Japanese by Japanese teachers. The school runs on a trimester, with the academic year beginning in April and finishing in March. The Japanese teachers and administrative staff are on three

year contracts after which they have to depart the country. This means that approximately one third of the staff are replaced every year and teachers are not allowed to renew contracts or stay longer. This includes the administrative team which tends to mean that each time there is a new principal; they arrive with new policies to implement in order to make the school their own. There are also some negotiations between campuses as new policies at one campus need to also be implemented at the other. This is to keep consistency as parents are paying the same amount of money for their students to attend either school. If one has a policy superior to the other, parents will get upset and complain that their children are missing out on these special opportunities. It cannot be seen to be advantageous to attend one campus over another. Other than being government funded, this school is also funded by high school fees and private donations from Japanese citizens and companies.

The Japanese seem to isolate themselves quite a lot from the local community, living in Japanese areas, eating in Japanese restaurants and shopping in Japanese shops. The towns even have Japanese-only clubs and Japanese-only housing estates. Accommodation in these Japanese estates is also usually paid for by the Japanese companies, so a lot of the students live in the same areas. There are also several Japanese shopping centres nearby, which eliminates the need for the Japanese students to learn the local language or even interact with the local population. As the students do not know the local language, they may occasionally need to speak a little English in order to achieve tasks in society such as ordering McDonalds, but overall, this is a very acquisition poor environment to learn English. The Japanese people are living in this context are usually only there for work and get paid a very high salary. They are not there primarily to experience the culture or learn the language.

In terms of the appearance of the schools, they have very high fences with a lot of security. When entering the gates, it is almost like being in Japan. Almost all of the students arrive and depart the school using buses which take them directly to their houses or apartments. These buses are usually paid for by the parent's company and are included as part of the schooling package in their employment contract. There are Japanese feeder kindergartens which work very closely with JS, and JS students go regularly to the kindergarten to read stories to and interact with the younger students. The JS students do get to interact with local students once per year when they have a cultural exchange. Each year, one of the schools hosts an event where students get together to exchange ideas and culture with each other. All students also experience different cultures during school excursions. The younger students have one day excursions around the local area while upper primary students travel to different towns around the country. The junior high students even travel to foreign countries in the area.

JS is divided into primary school and junior high school. The objectives of the EAL Department differ significantly between these two school levels. In primary school, there is a large focus on fun and communicative games that get students to open up and feel

comfortable interacting with each other within an English speaking environment. There are no tests except for a single communicative one at the start of each year that is used to separate the classes by ability level. This test does not involve any grammar and has been created in a way to allow students to creatively display the communicative knowledge they already have. The EAL Department provides the only source of English instruction that the students receive at school. The teachers use a hybrid methodology that combines TBLT including a single task per unit and PPP in order to slowly coach the students away from PPP and towards being able to handle a true TBLT environment once they reach junior high school. This combined system is referred to as a hybrid instructional methodology.

Junior high school is different as it runs multiple syllabi in order to give the students the best opportunities to learn English. The Japanese English Teachers (JET) continue teaching their Japanese English curriculum, focusing on reading, writing and grammar, whereas the EAL department only focus on speaking skills using a TBLT curriculum. The tasks are still designed to be fun but are also intended to create opportunities for students to communicate in English in order to achieve a real world goal or task. The only focus on form is corrective feedback (CF) which is used in order to keep students on the right track or to 'kick start' them if they forget the necessary language. There is also a pronunciation section to this curriculum which focuses on words from their Japanese curriculum that have specific sounds that are difficult for the Japanese to correctly pronounce. The EAL department teachers create all of their own resources and share them among themselves. All text books and curriculums are created on site with a specific focus on communication rather than grammar. Task repetition occurs from grade to grade but the task difficulty increases as students become older and more proficient. All tasks and lessons are created to have real world relevance to the students in this specific foreign context. Due to there not yet being a Japanese high school in this country, after junior high, the parents have to make the decision to either send their children to an international school or for them to go back to Japan in order to complete high school. For students to be able to attend an accredited international school, their English has to be up to a certain standard which often applies more pressure on these children to perform well in English.

The school itself has quite strong discipline strategies in place to keep in line with Japanese standards and cultural norms. The students are not allowed to have any technology at school such as phones and music players. They are not even allowed to wear watches and the students adhere to these policies completely. They are allowed to bring books which you regularly see them reading in their free time or on their buses to and from school. Japanese students do not even learn technology skills at school until high school as teachers do not want the students to become reliant on technology and they also believe that there is not any point of teaching them technological skills that will be out-dated by the time they leave school. For this reason, the students are intensively thrust into technology and computer studies at a later age. Most students learn about using technology from using computers at home.

## **Parents**

Due to most of the families being in this country on company packages and the strict local laws prohibiting foreigners from gaining employment, most mothers stay at home mums. This means that they have the time and will to be very involved in the school. This includes everything from the day to day running of the school, to teaching expectations. The school aims to please them. Parents often observe classes and have luncheons and dinners with all teachers and staff. Fathers are usually only seen at important school functions such as graduation or sporting events.

## **Classrooms**

Students have a seating plan in the class which the teacher is free to change from time to time. Boys and girls usually sit next to each other because if you put boys or girls together, it has been observed that they can talk too much instead of paying attention. There are three rows of pairs in each classroom. The classrooms are Japanese style which is very basic, consisting of small wooden chairs and tables with large blackboards at the front of the room. Although there is a projector in the room which the NETs use quite regularly with their computers, but the Japanese teachers do not really use technology in the classroom.

Class sizes usually range from ten to almost forty students. While the NETs are teaching, they usually have a Japanese English Teacher (JET) in the classroom to assist or keep an eye on things, such as behaviour and children's comprehension. They are very helpful and will always agree to help model activities if needed. The classes are quite formal with two English leaders officially beginning and ending the class. They get all of the students to stand up and greet the teacher at the beginning of a class and to say thank you at the end of a class. Each grade is split into two classes, based solely on ability. This means that sometimes the class split is not very even resulting in smaller or larger classes. The students do not usually mind which class they are in but sometimes the parents complain if they think that their child belongs in a different group. Some students also receive private tutoring which gives them a further advantage over others. This can sometimes be entertaining as the students gain an accent from the native country of the tutor.

Students learn English and the local language as foreign languages. The Japanese curriculum does not require students to start learning English until grade five but the classes start in grade three to give them an extra advantage. English is very important to the parents as most of them are international businessmen and understand the importance of speaking English fluently. From grade 3-6 (primary), NETs teach each class two times per week. Grades 7-9 (Junior high) are only taught conversational English once per week. Junior high students also have 2 classes per week with the JET where they primarily learn reading, writing and grammar. They also have one team teaching class where they are taught by both the NET and JET and this class is usually a communicative activity based on the grammar learned in the JET class. The school finishes at junior high, although the new campus that is being built will cater to students up to grade 12. Currently, after grade 9, the

students need to have sufficient English skills to be able to transition into an international school or else they have to return to Japan to complete their education. This is another reason why English is very important to the parents. They want their children to be able to perform well in an international school located in the host country rather than splitting up the family or having to move back to Japan.

## **Students**

In general, the Japanese are rote learners and are also quite socially reserved. They want to already understand something or know it before attempting it (D. Carless, 2007). This makes learning languages very difficult as they do not want to speak in front of people for fear of making mistakes. Japanese English teachers often say that their students know the grammar but they are usually unable to speak well or afraid to try. This is something that has to be overcome early on in the Language learning process. MEXT has noticed that Japanese students are failing to achieve English communication proficiently and are trying to implement changes to allow Japanese students to learn more effectively. This, along with current research findings, is the reason for the school's move towards TBLT.

## **School staff and hierarchy**

The junior high staff and primary staff have separate staffrooms. The NETs sit in a group within the elementary staffroom. The environment is very positive and supportive and the teachers seem to just get on with their work. The NETs don't attend the Japanese meetings, which are plentiful, due to the obvious language barriers. The Japanese English teachers later inform us of anything that is important. The staffroom is further broken down by grades and subjects. There are homeroom teachers and subject teachers. Homeroom teachers have a lot more work to do as they are the only ones that really have access to the parents and have to deal with them all of the time. If there is a big problem with a student, they will personally visit the student's house to talk to the parents. There seems to be a little animosity between Japanese company and government teachers about the differences in workload, although this is minimal. The experienced government teachers are usually homeroom teachers, with the less experienced company teachers being in a support role or subject teacher for their first year, usually becoming a homeroom teacher in the following years.

Below is a list of employees at the school.

**Native English Teacher (NET)** – Teachers that come from native English speaking countries (USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, UK and South Africa) and work in the English as Another Language (EAL) Department. These teachers used to be solely recruited from their home countries but the department has lately made a shift towards local hiring due to some problems arising. The first problem was the obvious culture shock of moving to another country. If the teachers did not like living in a foreign country or the job, there was not much holding them to their contracts and several teachers left unexpectedly over holidays. This



leaves the department in a bad situation and makes the EAL department look unprofessional and unpredictable as a whole. Although this is an incredibly unprofessional thing to do, teachers often look at their time overseas as a working holiday that they can go home from anytime, rather than a career move. It is the manager's job to weed these candidates out during the interview process and meticulously follow up on references but the odd one inevitably gets through, which can have disastrous results on the department. If somebody leaves mid-contract, it means that others must cover their classes, which brings down morale. The Japanese administrators also do not understand this as it never happens with Japanese teachers. If a Japanese teacher leaves a contract early it can have negative effects on their career back in Japan.

The second problem is that teachers from overseas sometimes have different expectations as to what the job is. During the interview process, the manager stresses that the job is conversational English and explains in detail what they are expected to do. Despite this, they sometimes try to make it into something it is not and want to teach reading, writing and grammar. When they get pulled up on this, it then demotivates them and they sometimes do not understand why this is so. The JETs are there to teach grammar and form in their classes. The NETs are employed to teach students to be able to use the English language to achieve real world tasks through speaking and conversation and with correct pronunciation. It is a skill that the Japanese teachers cannot do and the EAL department fills the educational gap. By hiring local teachers the department can almost eliminate these problems. Firstly, most teachers that are hired usually have some sort of a connection to the local country which is keeping them here. They have built a life here over the years and do not want to leave. Secondly, they have usually been conversational English teachers for several years which means they know what to expect. Thirdly, it is much easier to get to know the character of a person with face to face interviews. They can see the school and some classes to see what is expected so there are no surprises. Recently, the EAL department seems to have had a much better success rate with retaining teachers by using this approach.

### **JS Teaching staff**

There are several different levels of teacher employment which come with different duties and salaries. Although the Japanese company teachers, government teachers, Native English Teachers (NETs) and local language teachers are all on different salaries, there does not seem to be any animosity towards one another. Japanese teachers are sent to the school on three year contracts. There are two different types of Japanese teachers. The first are the fully registered teachers employed directly by the Japanese government. The second group of Japanese teachers are referred to as company/contract teachers and are usually quite young and inexperienced. Generally speaking, all male Japanese teachers have to be married and all female teachers have to be single. This tends to put a stop to fraternization between co-workers which is frowned upon by the Japanese management. A more comprehensive description of each kind of teacher is listed below.

**Japanese Government Teachers** – These teachers are hired directly from the Japanese education system and basically transfer to the school or any other government funded school around the world. They receive a diplomatic passport from the Japanese government which allows them to travel in and out of the country easily and they use the VIP gates at immigration so there is no waiting in queues at airports. Government teachers have very strict conditions attached to their employment, such as not being able to operate a vehicle in the host country. These teachers usually have quite a lot of experience and have already done their tests to become permanent, registered teachers in Japan. They continue to get paid their full Japanese teacher salary plus the school that they are working at pays them a normal contract salary. They also receive a generous living allowance for living overseas. There is a lot of competition for these overseas positions which means that these teachers are usually exceptional educators. It also means their job comes with a lot of expectations and pressure. These teachers are usually a homeroom teacher during their first year and then many of them move into management positions. They are also tasked with supporting and training the less experienced contract teachers. There is one teacher whose sole job is to observe, support and train the new teachers. The Principal and Vice Principal also fit into this group and are hired the same way.

**Japanese Contract Teachers** – These teachers are usually straight out of university and have not completed their tests to become permanently registered teachers in Japan. They apply to a company which places them around the world. The schools get to pick and choose who they hire which also means that these teachers did very well at university and during their practicums as only the best are chosen. The experience of teaching overseas looks great on their resumes for future careers and helps them prepare for their tests to become permanent teachers in Japan. They are usually a homeroom teacher for the entirety of their stay at the school although sometimes become support teachers or specific subject teachers for the first year. They never gain any management positions and spend a lot of their time training with the government teachers.

For company teachers, the entire three year contract is supposed to be a training experience. This is why they only receive a single contracted salary directly from the school. Each year, they are paired up with a government teacher who mentors them. They also have meetings each week with all the new teachers and the mentors to discuss situations that have come up throughout the week. On top of this they are still expected to complete certain professional development requirements and attend conferences. This is all paid for by the school. All Japanese staff conduct three lessons per year in front of a large group of other Japanese teachers. These lessons are then meticulously critiqued by the more experienced teachers and recommendations are made.

**Japanese English Teachers (JET)** – These teachers are either contract or Japanese Government teachers who teach English. They teach the same curriculum as schools in Japan but have the benefit of being able to utilise the NETs when needed. They also work very closely with the NET teachers and are sometimes support teachers in the

conversational English classes. The NETs and JETs also work together to team teach some junior high classes.

**Local Language Teachers** – Local language teachers teach every grade the local language once per week. They work under the supervision of the school Director and also teach the Japanese staff the local language every second weekend. All new Japanese teachers have to learn the local language during the first year they are in the country.

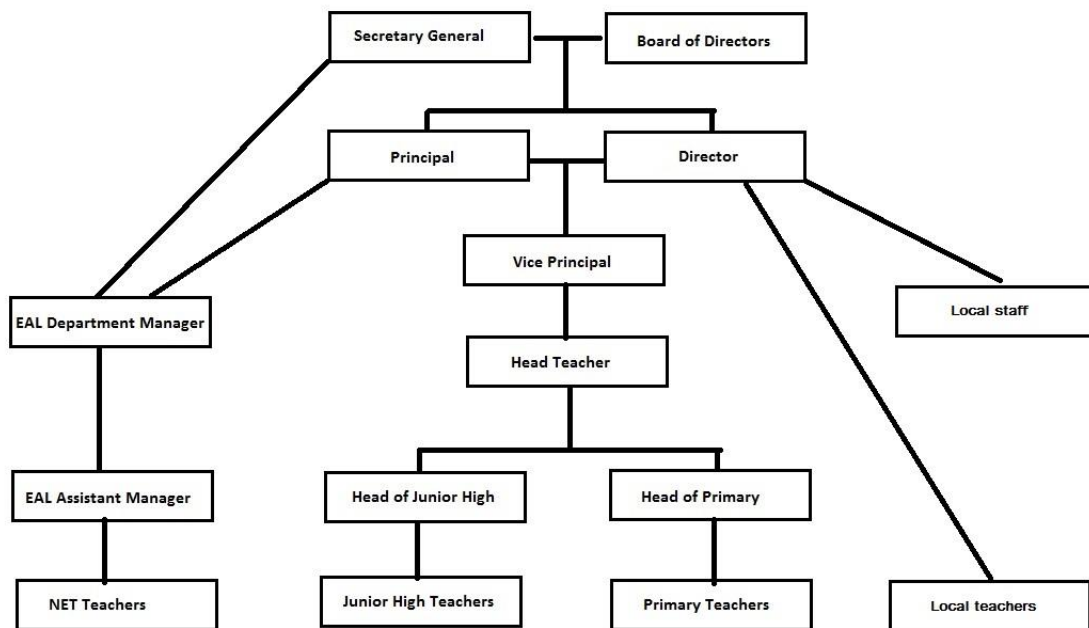
**The school Director** – Every foreign organisation in this country needs to have a citizen of the country as a Director. The Director has a lot of duties but also needs to be aware of everything that is happening in the school as nothing can be accomplished without their signature. It is a way for the local government to make sure that there is still a local national keeping an eye on things. The Director can speak fluent Japanese and works as a liaison between the Japanese and local agencies. Some of the many associated duties are as follows:

- **Signing paperwork** – The Director's name needs to be assigned to everything from buying materials for the school to paying salaries. If the school wants to build a new building, hire another teacher or pay bills, the Director has to sign off on it.
- **Managing local staff** – The Director is responsible for all local staff in the school. This includes drivers, maintenance, cleaners, local language teachers, administration services and so on.
- **Organising events** – The Director has to organise everything that involves communicating with the local society. These events include dinner parties, presentations, school excursions, cultural exchanges with other schools and school events outside of the school premises.

**Secretary General** – The Secretary General holds the highest position at the school. He is a businessman rather than an educator and is responsible for the schools finances and dealing with the board of directors. He can speak fluent English as he was a businessman in the USA for many years and also holds a place on the Board of Directors of the Japanese Association of which the school is a subsidiary. He is the only Japanese staff that is not on a rotating contract, meaning that he can stay employed for as long as he wants, or the board of directors want him there for. The previous Secretary General held the job for over fifteen years. The Secretary General and the EAL Department manager have a good working relationship and often communicate with each other directly as they are both constants within the school, whereas the Japanese management will always leave after three years. If the EAL Department wants to hire a new teacher or ask for salary increases they have to discuss this with the Secretary General.

Below is a concept map that shows the hierarchy of the school.

## School concept map



### Cultural differences

The cultural differences between the Japanese teachers, students and the NET staff are many and varied. In general, the NETs and the Japanese staff get along very well and have a great working relationship. They share ideas, resources and celebrate successes together at work functions and parties. However, this can fall apart if the wrong hire is made and somebody joins the NET team that has trouble adapting to the Japanese working conditions. The Japanese value hard work and experience over almost anything which means that sometimes teachers from other cultures can appear lazy to them. For example, the NETs usually leave when their contract stipulates that their work day is over, which is perfectly acceptable. Japanese teachers, however, generally stay several hours after this time. They see the amount of time that they spend at work as “working hard” and believe that this behaviour should be duplicated by younger and less experienced staff. The problem is that they do not necessarily value efficiency which is very important for western staff who want to finish their job to a high quality as quickly as possible to allow them time to spend with their family or relax after work. The NET management team always makes a point of staying later to appease the Japanese. This does not really apply to the local language staff as the Japanese do not put the same importance on the local language as they do for English. They are also aware that the local language teachers earn a great deal less money than other teachers.

All teachers are expected to lead by example which means that everything the students are expected to do, the teachers are also expected to do. This even extends outside of the

school with Japanese teachers not being allowed to drive vehicles, and ride motorcycle taxis as it is considered dangerous and they would not want any students to see them doing this. These rules are a little more relaxed for NET teachers.

All students in all grades of Japanese education have moral classes twice a week. These classes are intended to teach the students how to act in society and develop high character. This may be one of the reasons that Japanese students do not seem to misbehave and may be reflective of the fact that Japan has one of the lowest crime rates in the world with crime being significantly lower than similar modernised countries (Liu & Miyazawa, 2018). In the lower grades students are presented with scenarios that they have to discuss and explain with the class. Most of these scenarios do not have a correct answer as such, the teachers being more interested in the children's explanations (please see the examples below). These lessons focus on teaching students to be considerate to others and how to behave in society. Students are not only taught rules and what they can and cannot do but they have to discuss why the rules exist. It could be argued that this could be one of the reasons that students do not seem to bully each other in the school and you would be very hard pressed to find a piece of litter around the school. This sense of responsibility also flows into their behaviour management techniques. The teachers are very proactive in teaching students why certain behaviours are acceptable or not rather than being reactive and punishing students for misbehaving. If students do misbehave, their only punishment is talking through the incident and trying to find out the reason behind it, rather than a traditional punitive punishment.

### **Examples**

**Grade 2** - If you came across a gecko eating a praying mantis, would you free the praying mantis? Answers have to show thinking about the fact that it would be nice to save the mantis although the gecko still has to eat.

**Grade 2** – Why do you wrap up your umbrella before putting it into the umbrella stand? Answers have to show thinking about you inconveniencing other people.

All students are required to clean the school for 15 minutes every day. They have their own zones and work in teams to complete the job. There are a couple of reasons behind this. The first and simplest is so that students respect their own environment. The second and deeper reason relates to the fact that the Japanese do not believe in or have a caste system. One will never hear a Japanese person say that anything is not their job, such as "That's the cleaner's job." The Japanese are raised to see everybody as an equal and cleaning every day is supposed to remind them that they are not better than anyone else. This all reinforces *Wa* harmony. For this reason, when you ask Japanese students what jobs they want in the future, it is not rare to hear jobs such as taxi driver, farmer, and cleaner mentioned and this is perfectly acceptable to other students. The Japanese students are also trained to work as a team. An example of this is sport's day, where instead of competing against each other as an individual, every single event makes people work as a team to achieve something or to

beat the opposing team. They work very hard at ensuring no one is left out and boosting those who are falling behind which is again reflective of their strong cultural norms of groupism and maintaining harmony. This can also be seen in the classroom. If a student is struggling or falling behind, usually other students will help them before the teacher gets a chance.

## **Chapter 5 - Teacher implementation of TBLT**

Chapter 5 discusses the results of the data relating to how and why the participants have implemented TBLT within their classrooms. The implementation is broken down into its smaller components starting with the physical layout of the classroom and then delving into the intricacies of TBLT such as the hybrid approach, differentiation, cultural exchange and assessing task successfulness. This chapter also looks at managerial responsibilities and how they can assist teachers to be as successful as possible. Although the data represents participants who teach different grade levels, codes have also been looked at to identify consistency of implementation across participants.

### **5.1 Classroom environment**

Several key themes arose from the data relating to the implementation of TBLT within the school. The participants discussed the effectiveness of their implementation and provided reasons about successes and failures. Research has shown that there is often a disconnect between theory and practice when it comes to employing TBLT methodologies in the classroom (Rod Ellis, 2009; Samuda & Bygate, 2008). This can be due to many and varied reasons, with several highlighted by the interview data. The first key theme was the classroom environment of TBLT lessons. Before delving into the reasoning, it is important to reiterate that TBLT classrooms are typically different to traditional Japanese classrooms. Traditional Japanese classrooms typically rely on a strong teacher-fronted information transfer model of teaching to maintain classroom order (Cortazzi & Jin, 2001). Good classroom management is often defined in terms of volume, with students individually working quietly and not causing disruption (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). Task-based approaches however, rely on participatory activities and use the teacher as a facilitator rather than just dictating information to students, which challenges traditional classroom management techniques. This facilitator-approach was echoed by Joshua (turn 677) when he stated:

Ideally having not too much structure, having the students be able to move around the room if it's appropriate. Group tasks, so that they can work together, bounce ideas off each other, talk when they need to. If I have to say something, I like them to be listening, but if I'm not needing to explain something to the whole class, the noise level doesn't bother me. They could be talking about whatever they want as long as the task is being done.

Not only does the facilitator approach involve a different physical classroom setup but also an open mind about how a classroom looks and operates in an educational setting. This new idea of teaching is often radically different to the traditional Japanese methods that both students and teachers are used to. This was accurately expressed by Davin (turn 010):

At least for our English classes, I think it's a lot less you need to absorb this set amount of information. It doesn't seem to be as much. There's less focus on testing, less focus on absorbing so much information and maybe we're a little bit less

focused on correcting mistakes than we are on getting them to communicate an idea. For me, English is more about - or language is more communicating ideas. As long as you are making yourself understood to a certain degree, you're successful at it, where preparing for a test is all about the correct answer in this exact situation, a lot more grammar, a lot more granular kind of focus and less on big ideas.

## **5.2 Hybrid approach**

As any new methodology can take some time to get used to, the EAL Department has applied a soft approach that gives both the teachers and the students time to adjust to the different way of teaching and learning. This is called the hybrid or weak-task approach which starts with subtle changes at the beginning of implementation for the youngest students and ends with full TBLT lessons at the advanced levels. This approach is also a situational approach which allows teachers to adapt their tasks, activities or frameworks to meet the needs of the learners in this specific Japanese context. Combining local materials with Japanese culture in a Japanese context lessens the burdens of the sudden change on the students (Shintani, 2011). The idea is for the teaching approach in the youngest grades to be primarily PPP in order to give the students a solid foundation of vocabulary that they can build from. This includes the teachers giving the students the vocabulary and practicing it with them before getting the students to complete the task amongst themselves. This stage is very structured and very teacher orientated. Teachers will then slowly introduce more communicative games and activities in order to slowly transform the learning style to a more communicative approach. The middle grades will use hybrid lessons which combine both exercises and tasks before moving onto the highest grades which learn using full TBLT lessons, where students need to fill their vocabulary gaps themselves. This involves student receiving a task to complete and then approaching it and finding a communicative solution in order to complete the task themselves. It is completely a student-centred approach. The ages that students begin using TBLT will become younger from year to year as they become more adept at the methodology. The Department's decision to use a hybrid methodology is based on a large volume of research that recommends a softer approach when initially introducing TBLT, especially in typically traditional environments such as East Asian schools (Izumi, 2009; Matsumura, 2011; Murano, 2006; Swan, 2005; Takashima, 2005, 2011; Yokota, 2011). As Ellis (2009, p. 224) notes, "There is no single way of doing TBLT".

Teachers communicated a very positive view of this scaffolded hybrid approach, with every participant indicating that they have adopted this framework. An example of this agreement was David (turn 256) stating: "Yes, I think it's suitable. I think it does work. I actually believe that you shouldn't just ever choose one way of teaching and you should try and use as many tools as possible, but I think Task Based Learning is definitely a good tool to use, especially if it's used correctly". He went on to say "I believe in a hybrid system where you're building a foundation of vocabulary, language, working on their pronunciation, while requiring to complete the task and being assessed on their ability to complete tasks" (David, turn 598). These comments show that all participants prefer to make slower changes where they can



see the improvements over a period of time. Research has shown that students can sometimes find tasks threatening or they panic when being pushed into such a sudden change of methodology (Erlam, 2015). The hybrid approach is designed to assure that students are prepared for the different focus by the time TBLT is fully implemented. As the years progress and students slowly become more adjusted to a student-centred approach of learning communication, the standards can slowly change to becoming a more TBLT based curriculum overall. It is important to note that in the context in which this study is based, this program will run in unison with their more traditional Japanese English classes which will still focus on grammar and testing.

### **5.3 Teacher autonomy**

The nature of TBLT invariably allows the teacher to have a great deal of freedom with how they choose to teach a topic. As long as the curriculum that has to be taught is adhered to, the teacher can plan, create and teach a communicative task however they desire. Teacher autonomy in this context relates to the amount of freedom that the teacher has over how they teach their own class. According to Davin (turn 102), “Right now, I think we have a lot of autonomy and I think it’s nice. I like being able to choose what we can do in the classroom. I think that’s very nice.” This statement highlights the theme of autonomy which ran through the questions of the interviews relating to implementation. There is limited top-down dissemination of task ideas and resources in TBLT which means that everything that has to be made and taught has to be created by the teacher themselves. This was clearly stated by every teacher interviewed, with statements such as “100% [autonomy], as long as the curriculum is adhered to” (Eriko, turn 441). However, this freedom was taken differently by different teachers. Some saw it as a blessing and prefer it to the usual structure of teaching from a textbook. This view was expressed by David (turn 318), who said: “I think that’s something that we’re very lucky about in our school is that we are given a lot of autonomy to create the resources that we want to create and use.” It could be argued that people who are naturally creative and crave the freedom to produce entertaining and unique resources will thrive in this environment.

Autonomy gives teachers the opportunity to adapt tasks and activities to be relevant to the specific town or context where they reside, creating interest and allowing students to see the value of the language they are learning. This enhances the transfer of learning, which is the connection or link between what happens in the classroom and the real world (Benson, 2016). It can be said with confidence that when students can see this simple correlation they become more motivated as it is something that will be useful to them. This was evidenced in a statement by Cassie (turn 582) who posited, “I think it’s something that as teachers, we need to find what motivates them. We need to put them in a situation where they realise that English is very beneficial, it’s going to help them in the future.” Although seven of eight teachers interviewed enjoyed the autonomy, there was one who would prefer a little more structure or assistance. This was conveyed when she stated: “Maybe sometimes a little bit of guidance. I might be on the wrong track, but we don’t get enough

observation and guidance in that way” (Sara, turn 219). This is also a fair point and could possibly be an oversight by the management team.

#### **5.4 Pronunciation**

Although TBLT requires teachers to focus on fluency over form (Ducker, 2012; Rod Ellis, 2009) and restrain from over correcting students who are trying to communicate, research has shown that students sometimes struggle to master the correct pronunciation and therefore desire more pronunciation practice in their curriculums (Bao & Du, 2015). This touches on another theme that arose from the data regarding the implementation of TBLT, namely that of “pronunciation”. Being able to give examples of and suitably correct pronunciation is one of the major advantages of having native English-speaking teachers employed at the school. This resource has been utilised with a phonics program being implemented by the EAL department in both primary and junior high classes that starts with simple sounds and moves to focusing on specific sounds that Japanese people have trouble articulating. While all of the interviewed teachers agreed that pronunciation was extremely important, there were very differing views on the effectiveness of the current program. David (turn 314) believed it to be very beneficial, stating that “I think it’s very effective. I actually did a lot of work developing the Phonics Program. So, I really like our Phonics Program at the moment and I think it’s very beneficial.” However, others were not so enthusiastic, reflected by comments such as “They’re not building on the basic sounds and then on to diphthongs, these things are just not happening” (Sara, turn 211), and, “We do this rather quickly, so I don’t know how – I’m not sure how effective it is” (Steven, turn 547).

Although there were differing opinions, a theme to emerge was that of ‘bad habits’, with all teachers agreeing that pronunciation is important to stop students from developing bad pronunciation habits. This was concisely stated by Cassie who explained that “the benefit is that you don’t pick up bad pronunciation in the beginning. Pronunciation can be a habit. Anyone who’s learned a second language realises that if you get into a bad habit early, then it’s really hard to get out of it” (Cassie, turn 642). Another positive was the fact that most of the phonics, especially in junior high, are taught using pictures to first elicit the words which also helps to build students’ vocabulary before tasks. The phonics vocabulary lists are compiled from words that are used in the current unit of work that they are completing. This combination of PPP in the form of teaching phonics and vocabulary along with TBLT minimizes teachers work as it achieves two goals at the same time.

#### **5.5 Correcting mistakes**

Related to pronunciation, another significant theme that arose from the data was that of “correcting grammatical mistakes during tasks”. It is widely recognised within academic research that TBLT must focus on fluency over form (Ducker, 2012, p. 4; Rod Ellis, 2009, p. 223). This was reinforced by Cassie (turn 596) who stated “The key is the ability to effectively communicate”. As a result, TBLT allows students to learn a foreign language in an authentic environment, which leads to a natural acquisition (R Ellis, 2013, p. 1). The fact that

one hundred per cent of the participants stated that they never interrupt or correct a student's grammar while they were communicating with them indicates that the teachers have a good understanding of this. This is supported by Davin (turn 010) who said "Language is more communicating ideas. As long as you are making yourself understood to a certain degree, you're successful at it." Several others reinforced this notion, including Murray (turn 804), who while discussing correcting mistakes, stated "No, never while they're in mid-flow. I know this is one of the key aspects of Task Based Learning, that errors are okay and its communicative meaning." Although focusing on fluency and meaning is a core pillar of TBLT, it sometimes challenges the ideology of the Japanese students who are often used to a more structured and traditional approach from their teachers, reflected in David's (turn 266) statement:

They traditionally learn from a teacher-centred position and they just quite often the way they learn maths or Japanese or whatever, is very - there's a right or wrong answer. I think that probably the biggest problem is the thing that they think there's a right answer and there's a wrong answer, but with learning English, that's not the case. You can be more fluent than other students, but you can still be fairly correct even if you're not grammatically correct...

David's statement illustrates that Japanese students are used to being given language that can either be replicated correctly or incorrectly. The fact that TBLT allows them to come up with their own language in order to communicate an idea or achieve a task can sometimes confuse or intimidate them.

In spite of academics agreeing on the fluency over form principle (Rod Ellis, 2003; Shintani, 2013; Skehan, 1996), the methodology of implementing a correction strategy is far from in agreement. Different academic institutions have employed a diverse range of methodologies in order to correct mistakes, but the school in this study has chosen to implement corrective feedback (CF). CF is a practice in which teachers use immediate negative evidence (teacher speaks the correct pronunciation) to allow students to know if their language is correct or intelligible as students do not have the knowledge to judge this for themselves (Saito & Lyster, 2012). This method praises students for attempting new language and does not punish mistakes as they can be learning tools to achieve the correct language. This methodology avoids the creation of bad language habits, draws their attention to specific grammatical forms and also facilitates acquisition (R Ellis, 2013; Shintani, 2013). Murray (turn 828) communicated this in the following statement:

Because you know in a language setting, mistakes aren't mistakes, they're learning opportunities, and when you make a mistake, it imbeds that deep within you and then you won't make that mistake again. So, as I've always said, and I write on a lot of their reports, it's good that they see English class as a zone for making a safe environment for taking chances with language and making mistakes, because that's exactly what it is.

This again raises the emergent theme of teachers becoming facilitators as they monitor the classroom language in the context of a communicative task for errors and help learners use their chosen language structures more accurately. This was illustrated by six out of eight participants with statements such as “So, for example, if they say “His name are Dan”, I’d go, “Oh, his name is Dan”. You correct it, but you just repeat it and then they say it after you, but I would never directly correct them” (Sara, turn 147). Joshua (turn 709) gave a great example of corrective feedback when he stated:

Usually if I hear them saying it when they’re talking to other students, then I’ll go and I’ll wait for them to finish that conversation and I’ll play the role of another student. So, if they’re buying something, I’ll say something to them, and as they say, their incorrect part, I’ll just repeat it back to them correctly, so I’m not actively trying to say, “Oh the way you said that, that’s wrong”. I’ll just repeat them and they usually pick up the difference and then they say it correctly the second time.

All participants said that they praised the students, or when they corrected them they did so in a positive and supportive way. This was highlighted by Sara who said “So, I don’t correct them like that, but I repeat. You know, the old ESL method. I don’t like to say “no” or “wrong” or “no, do it like this, no or bad,” it’s always positive language supportive.”

Corrective feedback is the central approach that has been adopted by the school in this study to correct grammar, while still focusing on fluency and meaning. There are however other stages of task-based lessons that can address difficult sections of language or common mistakes. This was pointed out by Cassie (turn 596) and how this can be achieved during the pre-task or post-task sections of the lesson:

The key is the ability to effectively communicate. There are ways, after the task is completed, that you can do more closed activities to basically address those common mistakes or those common grammatical errors that were made during the task itself. But you don’t want them to think in terms of grammatical accuracy. You want them to think in terms of being able to effectively communicate and complete the task. If they think too much about being perfect, they’re not going to think about completing the task.

Through comments like this it can be argued that although TBLT does not specifically focus on grammatical forms, there is still plenty of space for grammar to be learned or corrected.

## **5.6 Repetition of tasks**

Studies have shown that students with limited attention spans can sometimes become so preoccupied with completing a task that they fail to pay attention to language or linguistic accuracy (Skehan, 1996, 1998). Although task completion is the aim of TBLT, repetition of tasks has been shown to have several benefits. These include increases in task complexity, accuracy and fluency (Ahmadian & Tavakoli, 2011; Martin Bygate et al., 2013; Cameron, Moon, & Bygate, 1996; Lynch & Maclean, 2013). Although the benefits of task repetition are

clear, students tend to find repetition of the same task 'boring' and become unmotivated to complete the task (M Bygate, 2001). This was highlighted by Davin (turn 096) who stated "I try to avoid doing the same task again and again. I feel like it gets stale very quickly, it gets a little boring". Due to this, the EAL Department implemented two strategies to get students to improve both their linguistic accuracy and oral confidence over several lessons. The first is by completing similar tasks over multiple lessons. Although the objective of the task may be the same, the materials that are used are different so that it holds the students' attention. Joshua (turn 771) reiterated this in his comment: "I'll try to have similar language activities or similar physical activities so they're doing the same type of thing that they'll do at the end, so that when we get to the end it's not all new to them. They've got some bits that they understand already." Completing similar tasks, coupled with corrective feedback, has shown to increase both pronunciation-focused corrections as well as increasing a student's confidence, especially if they complete the tasks with the same student or group of students each time (van de Guchte et al., 2016). As Shintani (2012), points out, familiarity makes negotiation easier.

The second initiative taken by the EAL Department is to complete follow-up activities or mini-tasks which focus on specific errors or gaps in knowledge noticeable while completing the task. It is important that these activities are carried out post-task to reinforce specific language rather than pre-task to introduce the language structures. It has been shown that with the latter, students often get preoccupied trying to replicate the grammatical forms that have been taught rather than trying to achieve real communicative outcomes (Hobbs, 2011). This was found by Cassie (turn 658):

If someone completes a task, and as a teacher you notice that there's a common theme or common error that's happening or they lack vocabulary or certain grammatical structure, after the task is completed, you can do some controlled activities that practice, that adds the vocabulary, practices the language and then they can do very similar tasks right after that to see what kind of improvement, if they were able to achieve the task more easily, if the communicative aspect was improved through the practice of those grammar structures.

Despite repetition of tasks and follow-up activities being completed slightly differently by each teacher, the one area that repetition was used by all teachers was pronunciation. Every teacher agreed that when it comes to Japanese students correctly articulating specific sounds, repetition and practice is a major part of creating good habits and committing the vocabulary to long term memory.

## **5.7 Differentiation**

A predominant theme that arose from the collected data was that of differentiation. The ability differences of students within the school proved to be a major factor in the view that participants hold of TBLT. Seven out of eight indicated that they prefer TBLT for advanced

students but did not believe that it was an effective methodology for novice learners or students with low ability levels. This was made abundantly clear with every participant raising a concern relating to the ability of students participating in TBLT. Murray (turn 788) stated that “I like task-based learning, but it needs to be done either with really advanced level students or older students who have more exposure to English”. This idea that TBLT is better suited for advanced learners is based on the premise that beginner learners do not have a sufficient English vocabulary base to communicate at all, therefore completing tasks is virtually impossible. This is evidenced in David’s statement that “They need a certain amount of basic knowledge to even effectively use the language at all” (David, turn 086) and was reiterated when David (turn 244) said:

The weakness would be primarily with weaker students who don’t really speak anything, who don’t really have much English apart from maybe they can say their name, or say basic colours, or something very small, then it becomes challenging because they don’t have anything which they can build a conversation upon.

It is important to note that this challenge of implementing TBLT with low proficiency learners is widespread within the TEFL industry with many researchers (Bao & Du, 2015; D. R. Carless, 2003; Li, 1998) bringing up similar difficulties, some even going as far to say that it is unsuitable for low-level learners who do not have the requisite knowledge to independently develop comprehensible output to complete tasks (Bruton, 2007; Swan, 2005).

Although none of the participants mentioned input tasks, research suggests that TBLT can be effective with true beginner learners through input tasks which focus on teaching vocabulary (R Ellis, 2013; Shintani, 2012). It could be argued the reason behind teachers not understanding they could be coming up with input-based tasks instead of output-based tasks may rest solely on management and a lack of training in TBLT. Interestingly, a related emergent code that arose from the data was that of “vocabulary base”, referring to students needing a certain basic vocabulary before being able to undertake tasks or larger sentences. Participant comments such as “The biggest challenge is I just don’t think a lot of kids have the language in order to use it”, and “I think one problem with task based, especially for the lower levels is that they just don’t have the language necessary to even know how to get started...” (Steven, turn 471), clearly show that at least half of the participants believe beginner students need to work on building their vocabulary first before implementing TBLT. This can be done through input-based TBLT (Shintani, 2012). As described by Shintani (2012, p. 254), “An input-based task aims to promote inter-language development by directing learners’ attention to second language (L2) input through listening or reading without requiring them to produce the L2”. Although participants did not have the theoretical knowledge behind input-based TBLT, statements such as “I think not so much for low proficiency learners. I think it’s better just to do the vocabulary”

(Joshua, turn 765), show they still saw a need for it and began to implement input-based activities in their own way. This led to a hybrid approach to TBLT being implemented in the lower grades.

Many researchers suggest that because students are often unaccustomed to TBLT, that it should be introduced slowly and from the earliest age possible in order to give them time to adjust (Harris, 2016). The school in this study is no different, with Steven (turn 473) referring to this dissimilarity: “I think it’s totally different to anything they’ve been exposed to and I think it might take a while to get used to it...”. A slow transition from present, practice and produce (PPP) to full TBLT is a principle that the EAL department works on and aims for. During this transition, there is a large cross over, which is referred to as hybrid or weak TBLT. Hybrid lessons usually contain both PPP and TBLT features and often teach vocabulary before completing a task. Data shows the participants have a strong understanding of this transition with six of the eight teachers referring to conducting hybrid lessons as being preferable to TBLT within the lower grades. An example of this is Cassie (turn 652) who stated: “I believe in a hybrid system where you’re building a foundation of vocabulary, language, working on their pronunciation, while requiring them to complete the task and being assessed on their ability to complete tasks.” This approach has been adopted by the teaching staff and is being successfully implemented across all grade levels.

Variations in ability levels across grades require different teaching approaches to be used, such as hybrid classes. Another problem that participants ran into was that of variations of ability levels within the same grade or class. According to Krashen (1985), the single most important source of L2 learning is comprehensible input, or language, which contains something to be learned, that is, linguistic data slightly above their current level. As defined by Ellis (2009), one of the key criteria of a TBLT lesson is that there must be a gap in the student’s knowledge that is filled by completing the task. This allows for students to realise the difference between what they want to say and what they can say, leading them to recognise what they don’t know (Swain, 1995). For this methodology to be implemented correctly, teachers need to know the exact level of their students and then plan a lesson slightly above this level so as to leave gaps in their knowledge that need to be filled. Several comments from the participants reflected this, such as: “The hardest part is knowing if I’m making it too difficult for them” (Joshua, turn 759), and, “I think I have a lot of task ideas, but setting a fair goal, I think, is a lot more difficult.” (Davin, turn 080). This can be even more difficult when there are a large range of abilities all in a single classroom. The school in this study has tried to reduce this difficulty by implementing several strategies. The first is that classes have begun to be divided into ability levels so that similar students are in the same class. This is done at the beginning of the year and consists of a speaking and listening test which pushes students to use vocabulary in order to explain situations in pictures. This also has to added benefit of making the classes smaller so it is easier for the teachers to target a specific English ability level. The lower class is a great place for new students to the

school to not only learn the basics of English, but also get used to the student-centred classroom before moving into the hybrid or TBLT classes.

A perceived code raised in the data was “negative effects of TBLT on lower level students”. It is the opinion of three of the eight participants that motivation seems to rise and fall in line with their English skills. This is expressed in participant comments such as: “Varying for poor students. So, go to the top students that are really keen. They take everything serious. They take all the Task Based Learning pretty seriously” (Joshua, turn 697), compared to the following statement by Cassie (turn 580):

It goes based on what their foundation already is. I found that the students that are confident using English, the ones that tend to be the top of their class, in their Japanese/English classes, tend to be more motivated, because it’s something that they’re good at in comparison to their peers. The ones that lack motivation are the ones that choose not to participate and are the ones that tend to do poorly in the Japanese/English class or are newly exposed to English overall.

This suggests that if students struggle to understand the task they may just give up or totally rely on more capable students rather than engaging themselves. There are two main solutions that have been implemented by the department and teachers to deal with this lack of motivation in low level students. The first is Japanese English teachers being utilised to assess student’s levels and help the ones who are behind. This has been applied well, as evidenced by David (turn 280), stating:

They’re really good for the weaker students. We use them a lot for that. Because some of our students come from Japan and they haven’t studied any English, especially in the lower grades. They really need the Japanese English Teachers’ assistance just to get them through the introduction and aware how our classes work.

This often gives the students the help and confidence they need to be able to interact with the other students to complete the task.

It appears evident that a gap in ability can also arise when students get private tutoring after school. Three participants also brought up that some of their students get extra tutoring which can make quite a big difference in class. Joshua (turn 687) stated that “their parents pay for them to go tutoring after school and so there’s a big difference between the students who get that little bit of extra input.” This can lead to some students being a lot better than their peers, which also results in them being very confident. A second strategy is that the teachers often use stronger students as student teachers in order to help slower student. Not only does this extend the ability of the higher-level students, but also gets



Japanese students to communicate to each other in English which can lead to improvements in ability and confidence of the lower level student. The better student teachers can also be used to make sure that the group is on task, as evidenced by Sara's (turn 723) comment:

It's my main tool for especially Grade 1, 2, 3. I've got a few students in the class and try to seat them strategically as well so that there's always - whenever I break up a group, there's always at least one strong student in each group who can, not necessarily teach them what to do, but they're really good at catching them if they're not doing the activity. So, if they start talking Japanese, the stronger student will sort of remind them to talk in English, or they'll repeat the language with them so that they're speaking properly.

The old quote says, "the best way to learn is to teach". As teachers do not often get extra time to extend the more advanced students, this, along with general conversing with the students, is the only way that they can extend their English skills in the EAL classroom. This was reaffirmed by one participant comment that "the stronger ones, we just don't have enough time for me to give them extra little tasks or something, so what I do is just talk to them, so I just have a little conversation, how was their weekend or based on that content, I just do it as a little conversation, but it's always a little bit of attention." (Sara, turn 167).

## **5.8 Cultural exchange**

In 2008, MEXT implemented vast reforms. One such reform was lowering the compulsory age of learning English by two years to grade 5 in order to familiarise students with foreign language sounds and to develop their understanding of cultures in foreign countries (MEXT, 2008). This raises the next theme of "intercultural exchange". It can be argued that culture and language are inseparable and TBLT gives the perfect opportunity to learn culture as students navigate different ways to complete tasks within a realistic environment. As Liddicoat (2008) points out, "Every message a human being communicates through language is communicated in a cultural context. Cultures shape the way language is structured and the way in which language is used" (p. 278). This idea of cultural exchange taking place was supported by seven of eight participants, with most also giving examples. An illustration of this was the comment by David (turn 276) who said: "We did quite a nice task about Christmas which was a good way of explaining a cultural event which they don't fully understand. They do know of Christmas, and they celebrate it a little bit, but mostly they don't really understand it, so it's nice for them to get to know the cultural differences through a task." Another example was Steven who stated "I mean if you go to a restaurant in Japan, and you order food, you might say "I want Sushi and Teriyaki and Karaage Chicken", but you go to England, you're not going to order that, you're probably going to go somewhere and order "Fish and Chips" or if you go to the US, you might order a "Burger and Potato" - no, French Fries" (turn 499). Krieger (2012) postures that with an increased awareness of the target language culture, students are better prepared to manage their

engagement with native speakers. Today, with the use of English as an international language (EIL), the questions have to be raised as to which culture should represent English speaking culture? As the school in this study teaches American-English, it is fair to say that teachers should focus on American culture, although this is often complicated as the EAL staff are hired from all over the English-speaking world, with some having very little knowledge of the USA. It can therefore be argued that this department gives a wide range of English culture throughout the student's educational career as they swap and change between different English teachers over the years and each represents a different English speaking culture. This should best prepare the students for any kind of English that they come across in their future. As Krieger (2012, p. 40) states, "learning about cultural diversity provides students with knowledge and skills for more effective communication in intercultural situations".

Joshua was a participant who noted that this intercultural exchange is not always intentional and raised some issues that he experienced when first beginning his career at the school. He said "It seemed like something that is normal for me, and normal to students from Australia, so if they get a bit stuck, I sometimes didn't have the cultural knowledge to push them in the right direction to give them that ability. It's mostly just myself not being used to their way of learning" (turn 705). This example shows that the cultural exchange has to go both ways and the teachers also have to become aware of how to deal with the student's unique culture, hence "exchange". Joshua (turn 715) also explained how TBLT is the perfect environment for informal language to be learned:

If you're just teaching them out of a book, it's all very scripted formal language. If you make more of a real-life situation, realistic situation, then I definitely get some more casual, the more Australian ways of talking slipping in, and I think that's good for them that they're hearing different ways of saying the same thing, they already know what I'm trying to say, it's just that they're hearing a different version of the same thing.

The informality of TBLT can often lead to many different ways of achieving the same task which allows informal and sometimes colloquial language to work its way into the vocabulary. Although this language is not always useful, it equips students with the information needed to cope in a large variety of English speaking environments. When learning to communicate proficiently, it is also important to learn to how to communicate appropriately (East, 2012). Learning to negotiate these cultural differences rather than just accumulating facts from a young age gives the students a distinct advantage over students who solely learn from Japanese teachers within a culturally Japanese environment.

## **5.9 TBLT assessment (placement tests)**

Due to the unique nature of TBLT, differentiation is extremely important. As previously discussed, students who are among peers with a superior knowledge of English, will struggle

to understand the conversation. This has the possibility of leading to demotivation and a general dislike of English (O'Neill, 2008). Students who are far superior to their peers will not have the opportunity to extend their language abilities and there will not be a gap to fill when completing tasks. This can also lead to a lack of motivation and students feeling that the class is a waste of their time. This results in a lack of academic interests and what McVeigh (2001, p. 29) terms an "apathetic attitude". The school in this study is fortunate enough to have the resources and space to be able to separate the junior high students according to their ability. It is extremely important that students are placed into their correct group to spare them from feeling embarrassed if they have to be moved at a later date.

The testing procedure involves three main sections that are designed to test understanding, fluency and listening.

The first section is a cartoon picture that has a lot of action in it. The criteria matrix that students are to be scored on does not involve anything to do with grammar or mistakes, instead focusing on whether students can make themselves understood, the range of vocabulary and their ability to understand what is asked of them. Teachers are to ask a series of questions relating to the picture that must be answered by the students. The questions are designed so that the students have to listen to the question, understand the question, find the answer in the picture and then discuss the answer. This effectively tests all three skills that are required to complete task based lessons.

The second section of the test is a cartoon (series of pictures and captions) with the captions missing for the last couple of pictures. The teacher will read the captions for the beginning of the cartoon and then the student has to complete the story for the last two pictures, using the information given to them as well as their imagination. The final section of the test is a cartoon without any captions and the student has to create their own narrative to complete the story. This testing procedure is modified depending on the ability of the students as if they cannot complete the first section of the test, it would be a waste of time continuing on with the more difficult sections. In the majority of cases, only the initial cartoon section of the exam is needed. This is also decreased in difficulty as grade levels decrease. Lower primary years have a very simple picture with the teacher pointing at parts of the picture if necessary. This process was explained by Davin (turn 040):

Our testing involves asking a student about a photograph usually, and if they can answer questions about the photograph effectively, and without a lot of grammatical mistakes, that's an A for me, and if they can basically understand the question and answer it with a number of mistakes, then that's a sort of B level.

Although this participant correctly discussed assessing understanding and vocabulary, he also said that he used mistakes as a criterion, which shows a lack of understanding of the criteria. This could be due to a lack of understanding or put down to the fact that the interviews for this research took place almost a year after the testing procedure resulting in

possible discrepancies in his memory. Sara (turn 151) also described this placement test in a nonchalant but correct manner saying “We basically have a little speaking assessment and it’s all based with picture props, so that’s all. It’s not a big massive assessment; it’s basically just A or B, almost like a competency thing. It’s competent in doing these things, so like picture basis.”

### **5.10 Assessing communication**

Educational systems in many parts of the world (especially East Asia) place an emphasis on knowledge-learning rather than skill development, and a task-based approach to language teaching is not readily compatible with such a philosophy (Rod Ellis, 2009). TBLT calls for the use of performance-based testing which understandably means that teachers will have to overcome significant changes and tailor their teaching to this new style of testing (Rod Ellis, 2009). The following quote by Davin introduces the next theme which is assessment within TBLT:

I think it’s at least for our English classes, I think it’s a lot less you need to absorb this set amount of information. It doesn’t seem to be as much. There’s less focus on testing, less focus on absorbing so much information and maybe we’re a little bit less focused on correcting mistakes than we are on getting them to communicate an idea. For me, English is more about - or language is more communicating ideas. As long as you are making yourself understood to a certain degree, you’re successful at it, where preparing for a test is all about the correct answer in this exact situation, a lot more grammar, a lot more granular kind of focus and less on big ideas (Davin, turn 010).

The interview data revealed that three of the eight participants found assessing communication and fluency more difficult than traditional grammatical examinations. This led to a large percentage of the participants conducting their examinations in an informal manner. David produced an example of this:

I mean it’s definitely good for communication or grammatical - assessing for grammatical knowledge is a lot easier, especially if the students are able to write, then you have more of a right and a wrong, but for grammatical errors, it’s a lot easier to know - it’s a lot easier to say “No, that’s wrong”, or you want to use this kind of grammatical form, but where you are just wanting fluency, that’s where it’s harder to assess, so you have to do it a lot more informally (turn 272).

Another important note that was raised by the participants was that Japanese students tend to be a little less forthcoming with answers than western students, so sometimes it can be hard to definitively identify their verbal competence during a speaking examination. This timidity, on top of their unwillingness to make mistakes, can lead them to clamp down and not perform to their potential during a formal communicative examination. Informal

examinations are a way to overcome this and allow students to be assessed in a safer and less stressful environment. Murray expressed this perfectly in the following statement:

You've got to be aware that students' shy levels - we had some non-verbal communicators as well who were lovely students, but wouldn't say anything in Japanese or English, so that obviously isolates them from the rest of the class unfairly. So, I had no problems dropping a formal assessment. I do think assessment is important and valuable though, because it gives us a chance really to find those ones that slide through the gap so for high ability who are just quiet and those in low ability who are always noisy and we think, "Oh, this one can handle the language content". Now what I tend to do is the final lesson of the unit, have a group game or a pair game and I just simply stand behind them with a clipboard and take notes on every single student (turn 806).

Another distinct advantage of informal assessment is that students will not necessarily know that they are being assessed. TBLT communicative classrooms involve a lot of student-student interaction which allows them to comfortably attempt English in a safe environment without direct teacher observation. This often gives teachers the necessary opportunities to complete informal observations and take notes of student's speaking abilities during activities without the students knowing that they are being assessed. The following statement by Murray discusses his use of this method in detail:

And it's really that I try to stand out of their line of sight or I look like I'm assessing one student, but actually it's the other student, like Sigmund Freud always said that he was the one when he talked to his patients, he said he would like to move his chair behind the patient, because when the patient's been psycho-analysed, he reads off the psychologist's face so much that it will change, maybe if he says some really disturbing shit, and he sees the psychologist go "whoo", then he's going to clamp up and not release any more, so Sigmund Freud said you should always be behind the patient and I take the same way with the students to stand out of their line of sight and just assess them when they don't know that I'm there (turn 806).

D. Willis and Willis (2007) state that task-based teaching is not designed with examinations in mind, and that it is designed to produce learners who can use their English outside the classroom, even if they make grammatical mistakes or errors. This means that no teachers in a TBLT classroom should be testing for grammatical accuracy and instead should only be looking at whether or not students are able to complete tasks using only English. The intended outcome of this indicates whether or not students will be able to complete similar tasks outside of the classroom when they are in an English-speaking environment. The interview process identified that there are several different techniques that the participants used to assess their students. Although all participants indicated that they were using the

same marking criteria, it suggests that management should identify exactly how teachers are to assess their students to increase consistency throughout the school.

The following statement represents the first and most important method of assessing communicative ability which is assessing whether or not students have the ability to complete the task provided. According to Cassie, “Right now, we assess them based on their ability to complete tasks. If they were able to complete the tasks that we presented to them, they obviously were able to effectively communicate” (turn 598). This method represents the basic principle of assessing students within the TBLT methodology and data showed that this was undertaken by all participants, reiterating that they do have a solid understanding of the TBLT methodology and how to assess communication. Although the participants indicated an understanding of the basic assessment tool, they were using several different techniques to separate the grades of students at similar levels. One example of this is Davin who uses the student’s ability to complete the task without using any Japanese at all as a criterion, evidenced in the following statements. “I don’t think I focus that much on grammar, I just try and focus on whether they’re actually completing the task without reverting to their native language” (Davin, turn 044), and, “Usually I try and focus on whether they are using only English and they don’t need to use Japanese to complete the task (Davin, turn 040).

As native English speakers, it appeared easier for the participants to understand broken utterances that the students produce during tasks. Joshua took a different approach to assessment, and on top of assessing task completion, also judged whether or not the other students understood the language that was produced. As he said, “It’s usually easier for me to understand what they’re saying if it’s incorrect. If the rest of the class understands, then it should be good enough that it’s understandable, so then I’ll take that as my basic level and then work from there” (Joshua, turn 711). Although basic understanding is required for students to complete a task, using understanding as a criterion separates this teacher from the rest of the cohort and introduces another inconsistency into assessment across the school. A final method of assessment that was raised was assessing the student’s ability to add language to that which was modelled. Davin stated “If they’re using the language that we’ve given them plus more language, then that is an A. So, if they’re using the model language plus more language then that’s a high grade for me. If they’re only using the model language and nothing more, then that’s a B or a C” (turn 040). This is an integral part of assessing TBLT as it enables teachers to be able to assess the student’s ability to fill the gap, which is one of the pillars of a successful TBLT lesson.

### **5.11 Assessing task successfulness**

Every teacher has to reflect on their lessons and decide whether or not it met expectations and if it could be improved. Within TBLT research, several methods have been put forward

to evaluate tasks. Rod Ellis (2003) provides a framework for evaluating tasks with the following three criteria: (1) student-based, which measures the degree to which students found the task useful and/or enjoyable; (2) response-based, which compares predicted task outcomes to the actual ones; and (3) learning-based evaluations, which attempt to measure the degree to which learning took place as a result of the task. When conducting formal teaching observations, management at the school on this study places most importance on the second criterion, as stated by Cassie (turn 600): “Well we basically have guidelines to what the completed task would look like. In a sense it was expected outcomes. The students should have been able to do this, this, this and this. And so, we have that clearly written out prior to the task completion.” Although this teaching assessment is made clear to the teachers, the data shows that teachers have employed several different methods of assessing their own lessons that combine all three of Ellis’ (2003) evaluating criteria. While all three options are not assessed by management, it can be argued that they all hold an important part within TBLT methodology, and the fact that the participants use all these methods illustrates their healthy understanding of TBLT.

Looking at response-based task completion, Davin (turn 044) stated “For example, in a buying and selling game, I’ll see if they actually bought all the items that they needed, sold all the items that they needed to get rid of, and without reverting to their native language, and I’ll walk around trying to listen for what English they’re using.” This statement identifies that the task was successful if they completed the intended outcomes. Along the same lines, Sara (turn 157) stated:

A basic observation. I would just observe as I go and see, and if they’re doing it, then I know. It’s not like a B assessment thing, it’s basically, yes, they can, or no, they can’t do it. And it’s not that they can’t do it really well or that, as long as they can do it then I know it’s happening. They’re doing a task.

This participant also bases the task’s success on whether students can complete it or not. Several participants also measured their success from the student-based criteria and more specifically, participation levels and understanding. As Joshua said:

Usually I just take the participation levels, so if they’re not understanding it, if they’re not able to do it, they won’t enjoy the task. So that’s the easiest thing. If they’re enjoying the task, it’s a good sign that they’ve known what to do, they were able to at least achieve what they wanted to and then if it’s enjoyable, it means it’s run smoothly (turn 713).

Joshua correctly identified that participation levels indicate understanding, which means that the task implementation and modelling has been a success. This was also reiterated by Murray (turn 814) who said, “I mean obviously if you look at the lower ability students, the ones who usually find things quite difficult to perform, and if you’re standing at a distance or you’re observing the whole class and everybody’s engaged and participating and taking their time in speaking.”

Another assessment was that of 'speaking time' which also falls into this student-based category. David expressed that the more time that students are participating and actually using English to achieve something, the more successful a task is. He expressed this when he said, "at the end of the class I write what I did think went well and what should be improved, but it is always the speak time. Like if the students are speaking, then it's a successful task, if the students are doing very little speaking, they're falling back on that one, then it's probably not a success" (turn 274). Finally, Joshua tended to evaluate his TBLT lessons using learning-based evaluations. He said:

I haven't had to correct too many times or stop it. If I have to stop something more than once or twice, then that's something I haven't done correctly at the start. I should have explained further at the beginning, but usually, if they're enjoying it, then I'm taking that as it's working to the best extent that it can (Joshua, turn 713).

This combination of different evaluating techniques throughout the cohort shows that teachers have a well-rounded idea of how to evaluate their lessons, which will in turn become modified and improved.

### **5.12 Textbooks (advantages/disadvantages)**

An issue of concern at the school in this study was the availability of textbooks. The EAL department found it difficult to find textbooks suitable for both the age group and TBLT context in which the students are being taught. This difficulty is shared with others in the field of TBLT as seen below:

We find that textbooks designed to fit TBLT are generally few and far between, leading teachers to believe that the only way to implement TBLT is to create their own complete set of teaching materials. For busy teachers with little time for creating materials, or who feel more secure using a commercially-produced textbook, TBLT may thus not appear to be a realistic option (Hobbs, 2011, p. 489).

This shortage/limitation has led to "limited, sporadic, unsystematic, and sometimes contradictory dissemination of TBLT by various disseminators, including educational authorities, teacher trainers, university scholars, and textbook writers" (Zhang, 2007, p. 76). Years after these quotes were published they still fundamentally underline one of the major problems with implementing TBLT within the Japanese educational system, evidenced in the next theme, "resources". The fact that MEXT has engaged in no "top down" dissemination of TBLT curriculum or resources has led to schools such as the one in this study to independently decide how much or little of the innovation they want to adopt.

This issue led to the EAL department management making a decision to create their own curriculum based on popular TEFL topics useful in real world communicative situations. Each unit has communicative objectives that are to be achieved and come with their own text book, almost entirely created by the assistant manager. The textbooks are focused on communication and have no grammar past the phonics section. Although these books were



intended to help teachers as much as possible, they only came with limited embedded activities, meaning that teachers still had to create all supplementary materials. The idea was to create a supportive environment for teachers to experiment with a new classroom practice.

The process of creating these resources involved significant teacher input as to how the curriculum was going to look. There were several meetings where teachers were asked for input as to what they thought students needed to know, which was all cross-referenced with topics that appear in popular TEFL textbooks. The idea behind this was to give the topics a more local context which may give students more opportunities to practice what they learn in their everyday lives. The fact that teachers were involved in coming up with the topics also allowed for them to make choices that they could relate to or may find interesting to teach. After the topics were agreed upon, a scaffolded curriculum was created and the books started to be developed. Teachers then had multiple meetings per month to come up with task ideas that could be used in conjunction with the topics. It is important to remember that for primary year levels, this was only one small task per unit, but for junior high this involved a task every lesson or two. The decision to involve teachers so heavily in the development of the curriculum was not only to lighten the load of management, but also due to a large amount of studies that discuss the effectiveness of tasks and TBLT programs that involve teachers in their development (Andon & Eckerth, 2009; D. Carless, 2004; Ilin, Inozu, & Yumru, 2007; McDonough & Chaikitmongkol, 2007; Tavakoli, 2009). Edwards and Willis (2005), state that this step is deeply important if tasks are expected to be widely used and accepted in the classroom. Tasks become something that teachers have seen and understand instead of an unfamiliar style of teaching thrust upon them with an expectation of utilisation. This is more accurately put by Rod Ellis (2003, p. 35) who suggests that “opportunities for teachers to revise task materials may explain the relative success of one program over another”.

When participants were asked about the use of our own textbooks in TBLT, quite varied responses emerged. A very positive view can be seen in the following statement from David:

Well, the creating of the books were really good for speaking and fluency. We basically get to use real world language instead of “the whale is longer than the dolphin”, which is stuff which you find in a lot of primary textbooks. You know, we were teaching them turn left at the Post Office and you’ll find the train station. And so yes, it’s more real, you know, like they can go into a shop and try and order something from a counter, even if they can just buy a drink from a convenience store, then that gives them something to be able to use or if they can get in the taxi and tell the taxi where they want to go. And that all came from basically having their own textbooks and being able to choose the language which they get to use (turn 304).

The above statement speaks to the fact that the textbooks are designed to incorporate real world communicative language that can be practiced in a safe environment before practicing these skills in public. With teachers having input into the textbooks and also being able to choose what activities or tasks they use to teach the curriculum, they obviously have quite a lot of autonomy over how and what they teach. This expected thematic code also confirms what was raised in the “Autonomy” theme and was mentioned by half of the participants interviewed. A proponent of the system was Cassie, who stated:

The advantage is that we own our curriculum, at the start, we could sit there and say what do we think the students should be able to do, and we can create a continuum from the lowest grade to the highest grade and then we basically create exactly what we want to support those outcomes (turn 632).

This also speaks to the bigger picture where the curriculum is designed to perfectly scaffold from grade to grade. This sentiment of autonomy and real-world relevance was also raised by Joshua who said “The advantage is only the language we want, we don’t have to adjust our lesson to fit the book. So, we take a book that’s already made, and we’ve got our own syllabus” (turn 743).

Although there were some very positive comments relating to the department making their own books, there were also several underlying problems which were raised by several participants. While several of these constraints will be discussed in the “Constraints” section, a couple of important ones that relate directly to the textbooks will be discussed now. An expected code to arise was that of “time constraints” which related to the fact that teachers had to create all of the resources, including the textbooks from scratch, taking an incredible amount of time. This was evident in Cassie’s statement: “The disadvantage is the labour involved. It will take up to a single teacher or assistant manager’s complete time every day, where they’re unable to do anything else. We have to print everything out, the whole works versus if you’re using a textbook, everything is done for you” (turn 632). This was further explained by Murray (turn 844) who said “But it is a massive time constraint and when you think of it holistically, how much time does one person have to create four sets of books every month. It takes a hell of a lot of time.”

Another code to arise which could have been avoided if not for the tight time constraints was that of “grammatical errors appearing in the books”. Although these errors were only simple mistakes such as spelling errors, there were sometimes words placed into the wrong areas that did not fit with grammatical rules that were supposed to be taught in that section. Although these errors were probably not noticed by the Japanese, it sometimes made segments of the textbooks more difficult for the teachers to plan for. This was brought up by Steven: “I think a lot of it was time constraints. Sometimes they had grammatical errors in it that would have been avoided if we had have had an Oxford book or

some other company.” This is also an issue that would be slowly solved over time with the textbooks being amended and improved from year to year.

The Japanese management and parents of the school in this study also had problems with the textbooks being used. This was mostly due to the books not being aesthetically appealing and not coming from a famous brand name company such as Oxford or Cambridge. This was explained by Steven:

Some of the problems with the books was that they were in black and white, so they weren't very colourful, they weren't as interesting as a normal textbook. A lot of it, especially for the Japanese, is presentation even if the material is better in a book that we made, it didn't look as good as an Oxford and we didn't have that name recognition behind it (turn 543).

Murray agreed with this sentiment and took it a step further:

Japanese side looked at it and just went “they're just black and white pictures, how's it better than a textbook? Textbooks are colourful, they're full of very well animated characters, parents can see where their money is going, and now we're giving them photocopies of black and white characters, which often have some mistake, or they don't bring anything out of the kids, there's no reference guides there, there's no - all over the pages they're just pictures of animals or stuff like that, and the kids don't want to pick them up, the kids are not excited to pick them up again”. So, there's that going through the minds of the senior Japanese management, and if it's not explained to them that they are there purely to back up the way the style that we teach, it's a tool to implement the in-class learning rather than a reference tool, then of course they are going to cancel it based on that (turn 844).

This theme of the department creating their own resources touched on several weaknesses relating to creating and using private resources. One flaw was parents wanting to see high quality resources such as professionally published textbooks after paying so much money for their children to go to the school. Our teachers simply did not have the time or skills in order to make adequately aesthetic and professional resources. Another constraint raised was the fact that the Japanese parents and management did not have an adequate understanding of what the department was trying to achieve and therefore did not understand that the books were only intended to be a supplement to the lessons. The topic of the Japanese community's understanding of the department will be further explored in the constraints section of this document.

### 5.13 Management's responsibilities

The EAL department's management team arguably have the toughest job of all when implementing TBLT as not only do they have to lead by example, but they also have to get the other teachers to change their own mindset and methodology. Motivating teachers to want to change emerged as a recurring theme when discussing the success of the implementation of TBLT with management. This point was raised by David (turn 322): "The buy-in of the teachers probably was quite surprising that they - I was quite surprised how they weren't very willing to change and adapt to the Task Based" and "I was quite surprised by the fact that we were really having to push the teachers to want to implement tasks." This view was shared by Cassie (turn 666) who stated that TBLT has not worked as well as expected due to the fact that some of the teachers had "given up". Cassie (turn 666) added that "some of the teachers have implemented a true hybrid system with very little task based learning. They've basically been teaching vocabulary, language, grammar rules, and then they throw in a little task where they provide everything the student needs." Although some small tasks were being implemented by the teachers, students were being provided the language that they were expected to use, which defies the logic behind TBLT and how it is designed to work. This will be discussed in more detail in the "barriers" section as it is well documented that teachers often struggle to make significant changes to their instruction methods after professional development (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017).

It could be argued that management should have countered this with more top down dissemination of resources and extra professional development for the teachers. Cassie (turn 664) went on to posit that it is the management's responsibility to motivate the teachers to understand and see the effectiveness of the pedagogy so that they will in turn encourage the students to participate:

Well, I think the most [important] thing was getting them to buy into it. As the teachers try to get the students to buy into Task Based Learning, getting the manager - the manager needs to get the teachers to buy into it. Very early in the process I would say the majority of the teachers say you can't do Task Based Learning within a Japanese system. They'll have excuses like language is too low, we don't see them enough, there isn't enough frequency, they're not conditioned to learn this way, they're conditioned to learn, to memorisation, rote learning and regurgitation of facts and information. So you, as a manager, you need to get them to buy into the system, you need to get them to understand that Task Based Learning is effective. It can be very useful in terms of improving their communicative ability in real world situations, but it's something you have to stick with. You can't just jump off the ship when you start seeing obstacles.

This was also supported with evidence from Sara (turn 221) who called for "more of a positive push for it because it's not being pushed enough. I think there's not enough energy about it. Enthusiasm by the teachers." This proclamation identifies the same issue as

management but suggests that the new methodology was not pushed or encouraged enough by management to the teachers.

On the other hand, the same teacher also used very negative language and brought up the exact excuses that management had previously quoted. She stated: "I think for me is just that coming back with the same answer again, it's just that there's not enough language in the primary school, they can't - there's not enough language to build tasks on, we can't do tasks if we - they just can't get the language." Looking at both of these statements, it is easy to assess that the process has not been handled perfectly by either management or teachers. For the transition to run smoothly, management needs to consistently encourage the change and teachers have to be willing to do so. David followed up with a statement that outlined his belief of why several of the teachers had difficulty changing to the new methodology:

"I think it's change. Change is very difficult for anyone. It's easy to do what you're familiar with and if you're not familiar - a lot of our teachers aren't familiar with Task Based Learning. For me I was quite familiar with it, so it was quite easy for me. But I think a lot of the teachers found it quite difficult to change from what they've always done" (David, turn 324).

This point stands to reason as changing a technique from something that you have been using for years and accumulated a vast amount of resources for, will lead to an increased workload. One participant even reiterated this sentiment themselves with statements such as: "I use the old traditional ESL methods, you know, present the content, then let them practice it in some way, either a worksheet or some sort of little task based on that content, but the whole situation of the Task Based Learning I haven't done much like that. So, I'm more like the old traditional ESL methods" (interview 2, turn 129).

Although management did see problems with the process of introducing TBLT, it was also acknowledged that this was only the first year of implementing TBLT. This is a very complicated process and one can argue that mistakes have to happen in order to slowly refine how TBLT is used and how it fits in with this unique Japanese environment. There will be a learning curve with all involved and some of these are already being ironed out. This was evidenced by David's (turn 320) statement:

The most effective part I think - I don't know, it's difficult to say, I think it could have been a lot more effective, especially this year because it's sort of the first year of trying. The realisation that tasks should be shorter I think has been very effective. The longer tasks definitely become quite problematic because the students forget what they've done from class to class. So, you want to try and keep the task within a lesson, and I think that's probably been the most effective thing.

As there is such a large turnover of Japanese management over short periods of time, each trying to make their own mark and leave a legacy, the English teaching environment is ever-

changing. All of this could change in years to come with variations such as increased frequency of classes. For now, both teachers and management have to learn on the run and implement TBLT to the best of their ability.

While looking into the implementation of TBLT by the participants, this chapter overturned a lot of valuable information. The first being that management are the most important part in change and need to wholly support the staff, not only with professional development but also with resources and ideas. It was found that due to full teacher autonomy in their classrooms, although all participants were employing TBLT, implementation was a little inconsistent with varying hybrid approaches being utilised. When it comes to assessment, all participants were employing effective communicative assessment which was generally in an informal communicative setting to allow students to communicate with their peers to complete a task without having the pressure of formal assessment placing an extra stress on their performance. This was a cultural adaptation due to Japanese students tending to be quiet or non-responsive when in a formal communicative test environment. Corrective feedback has been effectively employed by all participants in order to help the communicative process in a positive and empowering way. The most problematic part of TBLT was differentiation with participants struggling to effectively engage beginner students and sometimes confusing a lack of English knowledge and a lack of academic ability.

## **Chapter 6 – Teacher/Student understanding and responses to implementation**

The following chapter delves into the implementation of TBLT from the perspective of the participants and how they perceive their students to have responded to this dramatic change in pedagogical practice. It starts by looking at how in depth the participants understanding of TBLT actually is, before moving onto how they feel about it and whether or not they think that TBLT is suitable for the focus school. How the participants perceived the students to have responded to TBLT is then discussed, including their enjoyment in the class, enthusiasm for speaking English and any negative responses that have been noticed.

### **6.1 Teacher understanding of TBLT**

One of the key themes of the interviews related to teacher understanding of TBLT is that all participants referred to the need to complete a task that replicated the real world. A point reiterated by Eriko, who stated, “To learn English from achieving some tasks” (turn 361). According to Rod Ellis (2009), the first characteristic and essential part of effectively applying TBLT, is that learners are expected to complete some sort of task or goal (the use of language is needed to complete the goal but is not the goal itself). Davin (turn 016) reiterated that this authentic language use was a strength over other methods of EAL teaching as the task environment leads to natural language acquisition that can then be used in real life situations when the students leave school each day. The goal is that the students will build confidence by completing tasks in a safe environment which could lead to them attempting similar tasks using English outside the school. As Cassie said, “The more they use the language, the more they build their fluency” (Cassie, turn 576). Getting the students to use the language in a natural way is particularly important in this school’s unique situation as the students live in such an enclosed Japanese environment. It may be the only place they are exposed to surroundings where they have to use English in order to communicate. Steven (Turn 469) pointed out that English is dynamic, and that large variations of language can mean the same or similar things:

I would say that the strength is, when you do a listen and repeat, or the teachers are focused and you’re giving them a very - they’re only going to say one or two sentences and they’re going to listen and repeat that, but I think English is dynamic and there are lots of ways to say the same thing, maybe they’re not comfortable saying it the way you want the language to be said. I think a strength would be to determine what they find to be important and they get to be the authority on what English they want to speak. It’s not constrained to whatever the teacher says. And I think at the end when they produce something, they’re more excited about it, it’s more personal and they’re more likely to use that language in the future.

This approach gives TBLT a distinct advantage over other methodologies which primarily use repetition as students get to learn and utilise these variations so they do not get flustered when somebody speaks to them in a slightly different format. The fact that the students rather than the teacher have the authority to choose what is or is not important in their

vocabulary may also motivate students to reach for higher goals as they get to produce something that they are more excited about. In turn, it could be argued that this may make them more likely to use the language in the future.

According to David (turn 242) “task-based learning is a way of creating a situation which is authentic in the classroom so that they can use language which they already know and try and connect it together using problem-solving and situations to try and help them to build on their knowledge of what they already possess.” Murray (Turn 786) reiterates by explaining that, “They’re trying to effectively communicate to me their answers using any parts of English that they might have that hasn’t been given to them.” These ideas reaffirm that students need to use knowledge that they already possess in order to create meaningful and diverse dialogue to complete an action. This also highlights another characteristic of TBLT, namely the completion of the task requiring students to “fill a gap” or come up with their own language rather than reproduce language already given to them. While students work to complete a task, they notice a gap between what they want to say and what they can say, leading them to recognise what they do not know (Swain, 1995, pp. 125-126). As indicated by Murray, while trying to perform an action, this gap in communication forces them to use or adjust language that they already have, not dictated by teachers, encouraging them to focus on developing meaning rather than form. This generates multiple language arrangements and more authentic, meaningful communication (J. Willis, 1996, p. 24).

A more interesting idea that emerged from the data was that the authentic language situations were particularly important for Japanese students as they are accustomed to traditional rote learning and also tend to not be very forthcoming with answers in class.. This trait is often contributed to shyness, however, from a young age, Japanese children are socialised not to stand out in a crowd, rather to fit into their uchi groups (Hendry, 2019). This is a cultural trait that can explain to some extent those students not wanting to make mistakes in front of others. Murray (Turn 786) said “The idea I guess, being on a deeper level, is that you’re trying to reproduce the stress that a language learner would feel when using the language in a real-world context.” Murray (Turn 786) suggested that the students usually understand the language and its grammatical form, although do not have the confidence to attempt using the language in real world situations due to the fear of making a mistake:

It’s especially important for more shy cultures to use this because they will often understand the language and understand what is required, but when it comes to a real-world situation, we worry that they might make a mistake and then not use it, not using it in the real world. Mistakes are seen differently in this culture. There’s a feeling I think in our school that it’s far better not to make a mistake than what it is to excel in any way. Mistakes have always been in the Japanese culture. I mean, if you go right back to Samurai times, if someone makes a mistake, they are expected to commit Seppuku, cut their stomachs open, but you’re expected to do great every



day. So, as I've always said, and I write on a lot of their reports, it's good that they see English class as a zone for making a safe environment for taking chances with language and making mistakes, because that's exactly what it is (turn 786).

From what Murray has described above, it can be seen that TBLT gives some Japanese students at the school the opportunity to use the language in a safe environment. This ultimately leads to a boost in their confidence, hopefully helping them attempting to use the language outside of the school. This was reiterated by Cassie (Turn 670) who said: "I would just say that in my opinion and in my experience with Task Based Learning, that for countries or for students who traditionally learn in a rote system, that the Task Based Learning gives them an opportunity to actually be able to effectively communicate in real-world situations." Cassie's comment illustrates another characteristic of TBLT; this being the language produced should resemble authentic language used in the real world. This allows for students to be capable English communicators in dynamic and varying environments. All participants connected on these characteristics, using such words as authentic, real-life and real-world repeatedly throughout the interviews. This suggests that the overwhelming majority of teachers within the study are aware that the set tasks have to simulate authentic situations.

TBLT operates on the principle that learning is a conscience process, while acquisition is subconscious, similar to first language acquisition, and is activated when an individual uses language for communication (Nunan, 2006). This means that the successful completion of the task or action should be more important than the grammar used in order to achieve it as a learner will only acquire language in a communicative context. Simply stated, the goal is fluency and language acquisition rather than grammatical precision. It can be argued that the final characteristic of a successful TBLT lesson plan is that meaning is to be more important than form. This was highlighted by Cassie who said:

Well, my understanding is, first and most, is assessing their ability, or actually assessing their ability to complete the task by using English, not specifically the grammar, language or pronunciation that was used (turn 570).

According to Cassie, it is all about communication and becoming fluent in the language rather than focusing on old-fashion grammar and correct sentence structure.

Another code that hinted at this notion was the use of "facilitator", relating to teachers becoming more facilitators in the classroom rather than directly teaching the students about language structures. This also suggests that teachers were not focusing on grammar, but rather letting students determine their own communicative path to completing the task. According to Eriko, (turn 363) "The strength of it (TBLT approach) is that they can concentrate on solving the problem instead of learning the language." So again, a participant referred to the importance of the communicative aspect of language learning rather than knowing the correct grammar. It can be argued that a comprehensive

understanding of the methodology by staff of what they are implementing is fundamental to its success.

Another theme emerging from the data indicated some misunderstandings by staff of TBLT. This can be seen in the comments from Davin who repeatedly referred to project work rather than communicative tasks. An example of this was “I think there was a lot more students helping each other in projects, project-based learning” (Turn 058). While Davin indicated some understanding of TBLT, it became clear from further discussion that he applied what he considered as TBLT but saw his tasks as multiple lesson research projects, which step away from the communicative language acquisition of TBLT. However Sara was more honest with her answer concerning TBLT and stated:

For me it's very difficult because for me it's a new thing and honestly, I don't understand it too well. Even after I got some insight on it, but I don't understand it all that well, and I'm just too set in my old ways, and I think my ways work (turn 177).

Although this response indicates that the teacher is struggling to understand TBLT and its implementation, the majority of her discussion conformed to the ultimate goals of TBLT within the organisation. This suggests that it was more a lack of confidence rather than a complete absence of understanding. Unfortunately, any misunderstandings or distortion of TBLT could lead to unsuccessful implementation in the classroom. Thus, it could be argued that a lack of understanding among the teachers signifies a failure of training and mentorship by the school's management team; however the majority of teachers interviewed in this study indicated a solid understanding of the fundamental structures and notions of TBLT. This means that the school management team can now use professional development to target specific components of TBLT that teachers seem to be struggling with.

## **6.2 Teacher responses to TBLT**

It is recognised that teachers' views and attitudes towards the methodology that they are employing can be one of the most important factors for its success or failure in the classroom (Mowlaie & Rahimi, 2010). This is reflected in the theme of “teacher's responses” or how teachers have responded to the sudden changes of a new methodology in the school in this study. A positive result from the interview process was that one hundred per cent of participants saw the positives in changing to a TBLT methodology and most stated that they preferred it or that it was the most suitable. This was evidenced through statements such as: “I prefer task based learning in terms of second language acquisition. I prefer it because I believe in it and I think it works” (Cassie, turn 576), and, “PPP makes life a lot easier as a teacher, but I think I personally prefer the task based learning because it, as for me, I can see it like the development of the students a lot more” (David, turn 254). While all teachers discussed several positives to TBLT, there were several varying reasons for their positivity, which resulted in a mixture of both prescribed and emergent codes.

Two of the prescribed codes were 'fun' and 'interesting', relating to the participant's perspective that students were more captivated by the TBLT curriculum as it is dissimilar to traditional classrooms and students tended to be more active and involved. Davin (turn 110) posited that "I think project-based learning would be really fun and interesting. Everyone likes to feel creative to some degree." Five of the eight teachers made comments relating to TBLT being the most effective communicative tool they had experienced due to it giving the students the opportunity to use real and worthwhile language in an otherwise limited English speaking community. Sara had very strong views about TBLT, not only delivering students useful language for everyday life, but also having the opportunity to actually use the language in the classroom to achieve something. This was made very clear through her statements:

I think the advantages are, of course, that you're learning real and useful stuff, you're not learning unnecessary vocabulary and strange words and grammatical structures and things that you don't clearly use but you're just learning the stuff that you can really use" (turn 123) and "You teach them the thing and they've got to do it. They've got to do the task. Otherwise, what's the point of that? The new knowledge that you've given them. You've got to show them how to use it (turn 191).

This sentiment was also echoed by Steven who argued that the hybrid approach, which eases the change into task based learning, is the best approach as the teacher can dictate a curriculum that is most useful to the student at their current age. As Steven (turn 477) said:

I would say Grades 3, 4, 5, PPP is the best approach. 6 depends on the strength of the students, and then I think by Grades 7, 8 and 9 more of a focus on Task Based Learning is appropriate. Because by that time you want them to be able to talk about how to go to a doctor, or how to interview someone, something they might do in real life. Order food at a restaurant. I don't think - maybe in third or fourth grade, they're not going to McDonalds and ordering food, but maybe by eighth or ninth grade, they are, right? Maybe by eighth and ninth grade, they go to the doctor and they need to be able to explain their problem, so Task Based Learning gives them an opportunity to talk about real life situations.

It can be reasoned that this changing of curriculum based on relevance in children's everyday lives can help to motivate them for multiple reasons. Firstly, they may want to achieve these tasks while in the community and secondly, they can see the everyday relevance of the work that is being completed. This may motivate them more than a grammar focused curriculum with little real application. This view was supported when Joshua who suggested that TBLT is the most appropriate methodology for a country where English is not the spoken language. He argued it is the only way that students get a chance to apply communicative language rather than just learning grammar and vocabulary:

I think it's probably the most suitable because it's a different subject... It's a good active and involved way of learning English, especially in a place where you're learning a language that's not the language of the country. So, in (deleted country) I think it's not where they're not going to be able to use English, I think it's really good, it's really effective and it's probably the only way that they'll learn how to actually apply language rather just learning language (turn 773).

According to Davin (turn 016), for children, "the strengths [of TBLT] are that they can make mistakes and learn a lot more on their own and come up with a lot of solutions, do a problem on their own, and it feels a lot more natural, or a lot more real." This raises a final emergent code of "mistakes being useful". This code stems from the idea that one of the most important assets of TBLT is that it is a very effective platform to give students the freedom to attempt new language, make mistakes, and then find solutions or alternatives. This idea correlates with previously conducted research which states that a student's realisation that they have made a mistake, followed by them being corrected using corrective feedback, results in students having a greater retention of the correct linguistic format (Asadollahfam et al., 2012).

This idea of mistakes being beneficial tends to counter traditional Japanese educational values and ideals where students are taught specific language structures by the teacher in a very teacher-centric environment. The traditional Japanese language classroom also usually focuses on grammar and writing more than communication (D. Carless, 2007; Hu, 2005; Zhang, 2007). Due to this, students tend to find it a little difficult to adapt to the student-centred and less structured classroom environment of TBLT. This is why the hybrid approach is very important at the school this study is focusing on as it slowly changes their approach to language learning over a period of time and gives the students time to adapt. This different mentality towards learning, making mistakes and communication was summed up by Cassie (turn 662) in her statement:

It showed them that being perfect and not making mistakes, is not the most important thing about learning a language. The most important thing about learning a language is to effectively communicate with another person, and so what a task basically says is "Hey, if I can effectively communicate then I can get what I want, I can achieve what I want to do", and I think they learn that mistakes are okay. That learning a language, mistakes are not important, you can actually learn from mistakes are a good thing, but if you can effectively communicate, that's why you learn a language.

This sentiment that language needs to be used in order to be learned is similarly summed up in the simple statement by Ellis (2014, p. 109) that language is "best learned in flight while learners are struggling to communicate".

### 6.3 A work in progress

Although there was overwhelming support for the TBLT curriculum, it was also acknowledged by three of eight teachers that the implementation is still a work in progress and has not been perfected yet. Davin's statement (turn 110) that "I think project-based learning would be really fun and interesting, but I think it's not something that can be implemented quickly or overnight. It sounds like a long and difficult thing to do correctly", displays his positivity towards TBLT while still recognising that there is work to be done in perfecting its implementation. Although this is true, one can argue that no methodology is ever exactly perfected and teachers and administrators should aim to keep training and improving over time. This opinion was seconded by David who expressed his excitement to see the future development of TBLT within the school as teachers develop their understanding: "I look forward to seeing the development in the future. Seeing it. Just improving basically" (turn 328). Steven also suggested that this will be a field that will just keep developing over time, reflected in his statement: "I just think it's one of those fields that's just going to grow and grow in the future and right now we're just kind of figuring out what we're going to do and the best way to approach it" (turn 517).

A positive sign was that of the eight teachers who were interviewed, there was only one negative view expressed about TBLT. Sara (turn 213) expressed the idea that TBLT may not be the best approach to learning language as it focuses too much on communication rather than incorporating all four language skill sets:

I'm just old-fashioned again, so I believe you need all four skills at all times, because they're always present, and I think you'll never master language or the communication of any part of the language which you don't have all four skills. Reading is very important. Maybe writing is the least important but you can't get away from that. So, all four skills, all the time. And the phonics and there you go. Got it.

Although this statement may hold some truth, there are many counter arguments that can be made that in fact that TBLT does teach grammar. Sara's particular view was also influenced by her admitting to just being a bit "old fashioned" indicating a possible reluctance to change. Firstly, TBLT is used primarily as a tool to focus on communication. This is due to the fact that both the Japanese government (MEXT, 2008) and the school have noticed that there is a specific problem area where student's English skills are falling behind other similar countries, even though Japanese students learn English for similar amounts of time per week. The English as Another Language (EAL) program is designed to run in unison with the Japanese English curriculum that is already implemented and focuses on more traditional methods of teaching reading, writing, grammar and test preparation. In short, the students are not missing out on the other skill sets that Sara refers to; rather, they are just focused on it in a different class and environment. Secondly, although grammar is not specifically taught in the TBLT classrooms, there is still room in pre- and post-task activities

to run activities that focus on specific grammatical structures that the students had problems with. While TBLT does focus on communication, grammar is still learned through making mistakes and corrective feedback. As Ellis (2014, p. 109) states, "In short, there is plenty of 'grammar' in TBLT. What is missing, however, is the explicit teaching of grammar".

#### **6.4 Student response to TBLT (non-traditional) (teacher's perspective)**

As TBLT is a very foreign system of learning to the students, it is important to notice and react to how they respond to its implementation. As such, participants were asked about how they perceived students have responded to TBLT in their classes, which resulted in the emergence of two central codes. Despite these codes being inextricably linked, both are important enough to be discussed individually. The first "student response" code relates to how students reacted to a new non-traditional, student-centred classroom environment. Starting with the positive codes that arose from the data, the fact that the TBLT English classes were different to their Japanese classes was a positive outcome, and many students thought that it was fun. This was evident with five of the eight participants noting that the students really enjoyed the classes. This was reflected in statements such as "Just because we try and make it enjoyable as possible... They like doing activities. They love anything that involves guessing... It's different. They get to participate a lot more than I think in their other classes. I think they really enjoy English class." (David, turn 236). Davin (turn 006) also expressed his opinion that the students enjoyed the different classroom environment, stating that "I think the students like that they're not told what to do and what to write down as much as they are in their Japanese classes. The kind of activities they do in their Japanese English class are pretty rote and straight forward and boring..." Although Davin expressed that EAL classes are a lot more fun, he still acknowledged that students take the work very seriously and work hard to perfect their English. As he said: "I think they could do very well. They take school very seriously and they would do anything that we ask them to do pretty happily I think" (turn 034). This draws parallels with research that concluded that student-centred classrooms in fact lead to higher satisfaction and attention from students (Stroud, 2013).

Cassie reaffirmed her opinion that Japanese students are still really averse to making mistakes. This was evidenced by her statement that "Their biggest fear that I've seen within Japanese culture, is the fear of mistakes and the fear of what others will think of them if they make that mistake" (turn 592). Due to TBLT relying on students making mistakes to help ingrain the correct language, this is a problem that needs to be overcome by conditioning the younger students from an early age that the English classroom is a safe space to try new language and make mistakes. There are signs that this is already occurring. As Steven (Turn 509) said, "When you're doing an activity or they have to produce a language in groups, they're around their friends and - I'm not always watching everything they're saying exactly, so they're more likely to feel more comfortable producing the language." This statement clearly corroborates the TBLT method of the teacher being more of a facilitator than a teacher, which can seem abnormal to the Japanese students in the

early stages of using this methodology. Despite this, five of eight participants agreed that the students are fine with TBLT, but it takes some time to get used to it. Cassie (turn 586) said it perfectly when she stated:

Initially, they think the teacher is not doing their job... It's a learning experience for them. When it first starts out, they go silent. There is very little if any participation because they just don't know what to do. We're not providing them with exactly what we want them to say in a controlled... When we take off the constraints and we tell them that they'll be assessed on their ability to complete the task, they still ask - well they want the language and vocabulary. As time goes on and you do it a couple of times, it becomes a routine, it becomes something that they become more comfortable at and the Task Based activities become more successful.

This statement, along with others, was part of a recurring code that suggested getting used to TBLT was not a cultural difficulty, but instead relied on the ability of the teacher to effectively model and guide students adapting to change. Steven (turn 489) reiterated this with the statement: "Some of them, once they have to get up there and talk - use the language, maybe they're a little bit shy or they're nervous about making mistakes and maybe they freeze, but I think that would be normal for every culture, I don't think that's something that's just like a Japanese thing necessarily." This statement expresses that all students take time to adapt to change and become shy when having to talk in front of their peers. This was supported by Sara (Turn 137) when she stated "I think if it's modelled properly and they're guided into it, I think they do okay." This evidence suggests that the students will get used to this style of teaching over a period of time, illustrating the aims of the EAL Department and why a hybrid program has been implemented. This not only gives time for students to become accustomed to the new class environment, but also allows for it to be rolled back over the years so that students are eventually beginning TBLT at a much younger age. Despite being in its early stages of implementation, this process already seems to be working with Joshua (turn 703), who focuses on younger primary children: "I think the younger ones that I've got do fantastic. A lot of the time once they understand the task and they're doing it, I think that's pretty much exactly how I would expect any student their age to go."

### **6.5 Student response to TBLT (student motivation/enjoyment) (teacher's perspective)**

Student motivation was one of the main considerations when originally deciding to start working towards a full implementation of TBLT. Motivation, along with student enjoyment, can be one of the most important factors in successfully implementing a new methodology. Although perceived student motivation was the participants' opinion and not direct evidence, this discussion was of significance to the participants, resulting in it being the second core code of teacher-perceived student responses. Repetitive language drills in the classroom inevitably become tiresome and lead to boredom and a lack of motivation amongst the cohort (Wicking, 2009), and this problem especially relates to Japanese

learners who are generally taught using a very traditional, teacher centric technique with little opportunity to use English as a communicative tool. After seven years of learning English, many Japanese students still cannot see linguistic improvement and perceive themselves as beginners due to a lack of ability (Burrows, 2008). This has been shown to affect motivation and often results in lack of academic interest (McVeigh, 2001). This is where TBLT stands above other language learning methodologies, as through the provision of communicative opportunities, students can keep track of communicative abilities and see linguistic improvement. This achievement gives a “sense of accomplishment, a sense of value in the instruction itself, and a resultant confidence boost” (Burden, 2002, p. 18). In this specific context, with the EAL department focusing on building confidence through students successfully completing communicative tasks and the Japanese focusing on grammar and form, students have the highest chance of success.

The next emergent code is “students seeing the importance of English”. This was found by Eriko (turn 373): “For this school, I think they are motivated, because they can feel how important the English is and also their parents are very sensitive on language, like English education, more than the people in Japan.” This was followed up by Joshua (turn 682) who said “The older students see the value in it. They see how they can use it outside of school, how it will help them later in life...”. It has been shown that there are two main kinds of student motivation (Harmer, 1991). The first is intrinsic motivation, which consists of students learning for personal reasons. For students to be able to see the importance of the English they are learning, it is crucial that what they are learning is useful and relevant. This once again relates to teachers having full autonomy over what they teach in their classroom and how they implement their hybrid methodology. Although teachers have a curriculum to adhere to, how they teach key language aspects and how they set up the task is completely up to them. It is up to the teacher to get to know their students, what level they are at and what interests them enough to keep them engaged and motivated throughout the course, and plan accordingly. An integral study by Thurman (2013) indicated that when students have a limited choice over what task/topic is to be completed, not only is their interest higher, it also leads to greater time spent on the task and greater complexity, which is suggestive of greater intrinsic motivation. Joshua (turn 699) touched on intrinsic motivation by discussing the fact that some students just inherently like to learn new languages for their own sake:

The majority of the students I think enjoy trying a new language. I think the more it confuses them at the start, the more they want to work out how to apply the language, so if it's a sentence that doesn't make sense and then you give them more examples and give them more options to use it and they say “Ah, it's starting to make a bit more sense, I understand how I would use this now”. They may get more motivated to keep pushing with that extra language.

From the above statement, it seems students enjoy a challenge and this works to motivate them, rather like competition in English class when the teacher introduces more



competitive games and activities. Intrinsic motivation means that you do something simply because you enjoy doing it. In other words, we think it is fun to do (Schmitt & Lahroodi, 2008). This directly relates to a code that arose with over sixty per cent of the participants commenting that students loved English and thought that it was “very fun”. As discussed earlier, it can be argued that this consensus comes from classes being different to their typical classes, designed to be fun for the students so that they feel comfortable speaking and enjoying English. Fun can be a great motivator and although the amount of fun games and activities played during lessons differs depending on grade levels, the results indicate that most students were motivated due to enjoying English class. This was highlighted in Sara’s (turn 133) comments:

They’re very motivated and they’re co-operative and energetic and they really enjoy it very much, but it’s probably because of just the way I present it... But they love English. They are very excited with this English and when they cancel an English class, they are really upset. They absolutely love English, but it’s really so much fun, but I’m not too sure they learn as much as they should, but they have a good time and they’re motivated and they try.

David echoed this sentiment, saying that (turn 234) “The students love - especially Grades 1 and 2 - they love English. I think that’s one of their favourite subjects.” Murray (turn 782) reiterated this by stating:

I think they do, I really think they do [enjoy English]. In Grade 3 they’re so motivated and so excited to do any kind of activity that involves a change from the routine. English class always brings a game as well. They are fully aware of that. They’re going to have sing-song, they’re going to have some fun pictures on the TV, they’re going to bring - they’re going to play a game where it’s competitive and they can beat their friends.

The second form of motivation is extrinsic motivation, which relies on gaining some sort of external reward. This reward could be obtaining a good mark on an exam or when it comes to TBLT, excelling amongst peers. This directly relates to a code that emerged, namely that student motivation was often based on the students ‘success with English’ in the classroom. This was supported by Cassie’s comment that “I think for the most part they do if they have a foundation of English. If they’ve been successful at English, they seem to enjoy it” (turn 566). A negative finding from data relating to students having success through higher motivation, however, was that students on the other end of the spectrum can invariably become demotivated and lose their interest in academic English. This difference in student attitude towards TBLT was expressed well by Joshua (turn 697):

Varying for poor students. So, go to the top students that are really keen. They take everything serious. They take all the Task Based Learning pretty seriously. They throw some jokes in but they’ll go in there, if they’ve got the job of the supermarket worker, they will say what they think a supermarket worker would say and they’ll try

to suggest things and make it feel a bit real. Then the less motivated students who maybe, because they don't think they'll ever use it or they don't think they're good at it, they'll just stick to the basic language that I've given them in class usually.

Joshua's comment illustrates the importance at the outset of the EAL department, in correctly ascertaining the differentiation and separation of students based on ability levels. When students are learning and interacting with others who are on a similar level, they feel more comfortable speaking, trying new language and making mistakes. This needs to be monitored from year to year and students need to be placed into the class that suits them as their needs and abilities change. An example of this is students who receive extracurricular tutoring and then surging to the top of their class.

A final negative code that emerged and which also relates to ability levels was that of "group consensus". This is a typical Japanese or East Asian trait where groupism plays a significant role in maintaining harmony. Maintaining group harmony is perceived as more important than the individual in Japan. Murray (turn 782) articulated this quite well when he stated that "It starts to change with the girls towards the end of Grade 4. They start to enter that phase of development where they start to turn away from standing out from the crowd or doing something that seems a little silly." The EAL department has a plan to limit this within the TBLT classroom by introducing the hybrid system over a period of time. TBLT is necessary to develop students' English communication skills that the traditional methods were failing to deliver. Tasks encourage the learner in the instruction of meaning, which encourages self-expression and personalisation, which in turn lifts motivation (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2001). It is very important for students to feel like they are in a positive environment and a safe space when speaking in the classroom as TBLT requires them to learn from mistakes without the fear of being laughed at by their peers or scolded by the teacher. Over a period of time, this will feel more natural within English classroom as students become accustomed to learning in this manner from a young age, and teachers become more adept at delivering high quality task-based lessons.

#### **6.6 Negative student responses (non-traditional) (teacher's perspective)**

Although most perceived responses that participants detected in students were positive, there were also some predicted student barriers to TBLT implementation concerning the change to a non-traditional classroom environment. An expected but possibly under-predicted code to come through in the data was that students tended not to understand TBLT in the beginning due to it being at odds with Japanese pedagogical traditions. Research has found that students become accustomed to their habitual learning styles and prefer to receive their language, culture, conformation and encouragement this way (Burrows, 2008; Zhang, 2007). Japanese classrooms, like many other classrooms of eastern Asian countries, tend to be very teacher-orientated and value group consensus (Hendry, 2019). This tends to lead to a reluctance of students to interact with or question the teacher, and can sometimes result in dissatisfaction when teaching practices are inconsistent with this style (Williams,

Burden, & Lanvers, 2002). When introducing TBLT, students are expected to take initiative and solve language related problems by interacting and collaborating with their peers (Bao & Du, 2015). This has the possibility of leading to dissatisfaction, a lack of understanding and possibly even dissidence. This view was reinforced by Davin: “These students I think have a little bit of difficulty because their classes normally are so structured, that they look at this as not very gaining and it’s time to screw off a little bit” (turn 018). This was reinforced by Cassie (turn 590) who stated that “Initially, they think the teacher is not doing their job. Initially, they don’t understand why they’re not being provided everything that they’re supposed to do and memorise it.”

Murray was another who commented on difficulties for students to initially follow the TBLT methodology because it is so different to a traditional Japanese classroom. He stated that “It’s very difficult for the students to understand that the aim of what we do here, is to really have them relax and communicate. Learning is only one part of that” (turn 792). Although this is a negative response, it is expected when implementing such dramatic changes into any educational program. Students simply are not used to this style of teaching, but will get used to it over a period of time. This again connects to the original strategy of implementing the hybrid system which is designed to slowly get students accustomed to the more communicative approach over time. This was mentioned by Joshua (turn 703):

Some of the older ones who are more set in the Japanese way of learning, I think they have a bit more trouble with the freedom and not being restricted to doing something in an exact way. So, where you give them options, sometimes you might have to keep prodding them to use those different options for doing things.

Now that the system has been fully implemented in the school from grade one, it can be argued that by the time students get to the higher grades, communicating freely within the classroom with less fear of making mistakes should feel more natural to them. It is very important that the EAL Department gets students accustomed to treating language as a tool rather than as an object, which should in turn allow them to see the importance of performing tasks that cater to incidental instead of intentional language learning (Rod Ellis, 2018). It is expected that the issue of the older students who struggled due to being thrust into an entirely new methodology will eventually disappear through attrition. This was precisely stated by Steven (turn 471) when he commented that “I think this is just kind of too different at first, and I think it might take a year or two to get used to.” In the meantime, teachers can still combine the two styles of teaching by including some more traditional forms of learning in the pre-task and post-task activities. This would both allow for students to transition a little more slowly and also can reinforce how much they gained from the task, leading to confidence, and vicariously a motivation boost in learning English.

Chapter six examined the human side of implementing TBLT within the focus school. The data showed that the participants had a sound understanding of TBLT and the principles

that drive it. Data also showed that all participants viewed TBLT in a positive light and thought that it was well suited in the focus school. Participants generally thought that although TBLT was more work, it had the opportunity to produce better outcomes. The participants observed that after the initial change was complete, students generally had a positive response to TBLT increasing their enjoyment and enthusiasm towards English. It was acknowledged that teachers played a very important role in the transition period into TBLT as student-centred learning is so different to their traditional educational environment. For example, seeing mistakes in the classroom as a positive learning opportunity for the students is so different to their traditional acquisition of knowledge that it takes some time for the students to get accustomed to. It was acknowledged that this is only the first year of implementation and all changes of this scale take time. This all reinforced the importance of using a hybrid system to implement TBLT over a period of time in order to slowly get the students accustomed to the different environment and setting them up for the best chance for success.

## **Chapter 7 – Intercultural issues and TBLT**

Chapter seven analyses intercultural issues that have arisen from implementing this system into such a unique Japanese context. Although many of these constraints are contextual, lessons can still be learned to avoid similar issues arising in similar schools undertaking similar implementation processes. Other issues will permeate all Japanese schools due to cultural and traditional norms being pushed by Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). This chapter begins by discussing the JETs and how they are utilised in TBLT classrooms as well as touching on the possibility of TBLT being implemented in mainstream English classrooms throughout Japan. It then moves on to how the Japanese national examinations affect TBLT and that non-traditional pedagogy can be quite confronting to all involved including students, Japanese teachers and parents. Finally, contextual institutional issues are discussed and possible solutions are outlined.

### **7.1 JET Context**

This school effectively has two English programs running in unison, designed to complement each other and work together to give the most well-rounded English education possible. The English as Another Language department is composed of Native English speaking teachers who focus on fluency, and the Japanese English Teacher program is composed of Japanese English teachers who work towards school exams and tend to focus more on grammar and form. The different teaching areas and methodologies they employ are not necessarily exclusive, and both departments often lean on the other for support. As this is strictly a Japanese school, Japanese management dictate what they want taught to the students and how they want it taught. It is the job of the JETs to act as a liaison between the EAL department and the rest of the school and administration. This includes everything from changes in classes to discussing issues that arise with students. Most EAL primary English and some EAL junior high lessons also have a JET in class for support and assistance. How the NETs utilise this resource is largely up to them, which leads to the next topic, namely the utilisation of JETs within the English classroom.

### **7.2 JET Utilisation**

The data showed that most participants utilised their JETs in similar ways, with several key codes emerging. The first was that participants overwhelmingly used the “JET as a partner” to model new language or tasks with. This is an integral part of TBLT lessons that have access to a JET, with over eighty per cent of participants mentioning it. This was aptly represented by Sara who said “Also in the modelling because that’s what’s really important in our set up because of the communication thing and the level of language. We have to model everything and then that’s where he or she (JET) plays a very crucial role” (turn 165). An example of this modelling was expressed by Steven (turn 503): “If I’m going to ask a new question, I ask them [JET] first. Like “What time did you wake up?”, and they’ll answer, and then they’ll ask me “What time did I wake up?”, and I’ll say the correct answer I hope, and then the kids just hearing that one or two times, they kind of get the idea.”

Another code to arise was that of “facilitator/observer” with eighty per cent of participants stating that they use their JET as a facilitator who observes the class to make sure that students are on track. This was simply put by Sara (turn 165): “The JET helps with the observation to make sure the tasks are done.” Closely linked to facilitating was the predicted code of “helping low level students.” From the data, it appears that this has become the major role of the JET within the TBLT classroom, evidenced by the following:

I tend to aim the class at the middle students and then I’ll go and try and help the higher students as much as possible and then I’ll get the Japanese English Teacher to help with the lower students, and I’ll try and offer the higher students more English in more ways that they can say things (David, turn 282)

This demonstrates that the JET teacher is an important resource for helping the slower students, which allows time for the NET to focus on the central group of students while also allowing some extra time to possibly extend higher ability level students. As David said:

They’re really good for the weaker students. We use them a lot for that. The students that may be studying - they probably - because some of our students come from Japan and they haven’t studied any English, especially in the lower grades. They really need the Japanese English Teachers’ assistance just to get them through the introduction and aware how our classes work (David, turn 280).

The above statement reiterates the “helping low level students” code and also speaks to the fact that the JETs can play a pivotal role in helping new students entering the program. Students who have recently arrived from Japan and have not been exposed to a communicative classroom before may become overwhelmed and not understand TBLT procedures. This makes the JET an invaluable member of the team as they can not only explain to the new student how the student-centred environment works, but also help them to catch up to other students who will inevitably have a higher English ability after months or even years of English lessons. When it came to JETs helping the class and individual students, an emergent code arose which was that participants thought “using Japanese during the class to help with instructions” was both productive and useful. This was made abundantly clear with every participant who had access to a JET in their classroom agreeing that Japanese language within the class has its place. Most of the data pointed to Japanese being used for helping students to understand tasks or other activities that does not affect the actual language being used in the class. An example was Cassie’s (turn 610) statement: “I’m a believer that at times using your native language, when planning for a task, could be very useful. It could be a part of natural acquisition, especially in the low-level groups.” This same sentiment was reiterated by Joshua (turn 719): “If I’m working with a lower class, then they can use a little bit of Japanese to give the directions for it, not to translate but just to give directions of where you need to go first and who you should speak to first.” Steven agreed and explained that it is far more efficient to use the JET when explaining task instructions for difficult tasks, whereas the NET could waste a significant amount of valuable

time trying to get students to understand it in English. This was evident in Steven's statement:

They can explain a few things in Japanese, especially like as I said, if you have a game where the language isn't hard, but the rules of the game are difficult, they can translate those things. I think that's the fastest and most effective way to explain it, is just to have them quickly say it, it takes ten seconds versus me trying to explain it for ten minutes and I still might not get it (Steven, turn 503).

Although all NET participants expressed that explaining instructions in Japanese can sometimes be useful, when the JET was asked the same question, she believed that students attempting to understand instructions in English and helping each other was of more value than the JET explaining it herself. This was made evident in the following statement:

I always think that it's not good to translate everything to the students, even though they are having difficulties understanding their teachers, I just try to ignore them because I think that they have to figure out by themselves. I can find them teaching each other and I think that is the most important thing (Eriko, turn 403).

The following statement represents an important and obviously overlooked point that the teamwork and communication shown between NETs and JETs is a great example for students to see. "I think the kids like the fact that it's me and the Japanese, the foreigner and the Japanese teacher actually communicating and doing this, so they copy that and understand but, yes, this is cool" (Sara, turn 165). This is a positive outcome that can only arise from the teamwork of the two departments. This positive collaboration is obviously dependent on the NET and the JET having a constructive working relationship and mutual respect for each other. Both the EAL and the JET departments have many teachers, ranging in age and coming from significantly different cultural backgrounds and geographic areas. This can sometimes lead to a working environment where JETs are not utilised to their potential, a fact raised by Murray (turn 822): "Well, depends on the JET really - I have a really good relationship with (deleted name). She's fantastic, she's fantastic, she's smart and she plays along really well."

A final expectant code that arose was the fact that JETs are often much better at "behaviour management" as they can understand what the students are saying and can often give greater penalties. This was expressed by Steven (turn 503): "They're probably a little bit better disciplining than we are. I think they know which students tend to get distracted more easily, they can walk around. Just their presence standing next to a certain group or a certain side of the classroom can get the kids more focused, can get them talking less."

### **7.3 JETs, the school and MEXT**

The following statement by MEXT was an addition placed into the educational policy in 2008 to start steering English classes in a communicative direction after realising past failings.

“Students should be engaged in activities that will lead them to exchange their thoughts and feelings by actually using the English language” (MEXT, 2008a, p.6). Although they changed their policy, they did not effectively implement any real changes that would allow teachers to alter their methodology in the classroom. This following statement gives an insight into some of the frustration felt among participants with the system and their unwillingness to change:

As educators, that’s what we do. We find problems and we find solutions and we apply those to make sure that the next cultural group doesn’t have the same issues. So, really if we’re going to increase the students’ English, Task Based Learning is good, but how can we - that’s only half of it - how can we put it into this setting, into not only this school, but also schools in Japan (Murray, turn 860).

In order for tasks to be enacted by teachers in the classroom, the government institutions that plan educational policy and the schools that adopt them need to create a supportive environment for teachers to experiment with new teaching approaches in their classrooms (Zhang, 2007). This sentiment was echoed by Eriko who believes that there is currently no way to evaluate communicative abilities within the Japanese educational system, meaning teachers have to focus on paper-based test results. This was expressed by her statement: “Abilities [communicative]. Yes, there is no way for a Japanese High School to evaluate that one in this moment. Everything will be done by paper-based. So, if they cannot answer the semester examination, which means they also cannot pass the higher High School examination in Japan. So, they tend to focus on the paper or tests more” (Eriko, turn 379). Until real changes occur, this school sees its only option as implementing the dual English department system in order to improve all competencies. The JET department must complete the Japanese grammar-based curriculum and prepare for entrance exams alongside the EAL department, with a focus on communicative ability.

This raises the point that with two different styles of learning English, each with their own objectives, which do the students place more importance on? Yashima (2000) pointed out that Japanese learners have dual goals, namely a practical realistic goal related to tests, and a goal related to using English for communication; and these learners may attach a greater or lesser degree of importance to each of these goals. In a system that places such importance on tests, students have no choice but to place more significance on their grammar based curriculum, which was supported by Eriko’s statement:

For this moment, I think the test result is more important for them. Because the test results are directly connected to their future, so the test results will be their – it matters to their high school and trans-examination too. But communicative results, there is no way for a Japanese High School to evaluate that one in this moment (turn 379).



Although Japanese teachers like the idea of TBLT, there is no opportunity to implement it without students falling behind in their Japanese curriculum, which affects their test results. This is explained by Carless, who states that “Teachers normally see TBL as something you can experiment with spasmodically in years 7–9, but hands off years 10 and 11, because those forms are the preserve of public examination preparation” (2007, p. 602). This was echoed by Eriko:

It’s hard, because we have a certain curriculum, so if we try to do the Task Based curriculum, we have to create something new, plus we have to teach them grammatical things and our aim of English lessons is to let them pass the High School examination which is done by paper-based tests, so instead of letting them speak English fluently, it is necessary for them to write correct grammar (turn 413).

This is reflected by Adams and Newton (2009) who state that “at the governmental level, the measurement of success in language teaching and learning through norm-referenced, knowledge-based, vocabulary- and grammar-focused exams may hinder efforts to use task-based teaching in the classroom” (Adams & Newton, 2009). Until there are changes at a governmental level to steer away from standardised tests, teacher’s hands are tied and TBLT will never be fully implemented within Japanese classrooms. This also guarantees that the EAL department will be necessary to teach the Japanese students communicative English.

#### **7.4 High stakes examinations (cultural constraint)**

The Japanese education system places great emphasis on knowledge-based, high stakes examinations, which are used as entrance exams to universities and even high schools. This educational system places the emphasis on knowledge-learning rather than skill development, which is not readily compatible with the TBLT philosophy. As TBLT requires performance-based testing and the Japanese educational context requires teaching discrete items of testable language, teachers understandably tailor their lessons to teaching for such exams (Rod Ellis, 2009). These concerns of teachers needing to teach to the test were echoed by Deng and Carless (2010), who found that teachers in their case study were reluctant to integrate communicative activities as she thought that the students needed more mechanical practice to prepare for the national exams, on which the students, teacher, and the school are all judged. Due to this, Japanese learners often have dual goals, namely, a practical realistic goal related to tests, and a goal related to using English for communication. Yashima (2000) pointed out that these learners often attach a greater or lesser degree of importance to each of these goals, depending on their future goals relating to English. Sato (2010, p. 193) states that “It cannot be denied that most Japanese secondary students study English for tests that mostly measure accurate knowledge of English rather than communicative language ability.”

The view of students placing a higher value on test results over communicative ability was supported by one hundred per cent of participants in this study. An example of this is David's (turn 260) statement: "I think they're probably more motivated by the results of the test. Communicative results are very difficult to track and see how you are progressing, so 10 out of 10 on a test is probably to them, especially if they're younger, probably makes them feel better." Although all participants felt that test results were more important to the students, there were several varied reasons behind this. The first was simply that the Japanese have a very test orientated culture, mentioned by Steven (turn 483): "I think it's a very test-oriented culture and that's why they put all the emphasis on it." Although this participant believed that the Japanese culture could have been a driving force for their pre-occupation with tests, another major force and an expected code that emerged was that of their education system placing such importance on high stakes examinations. Cassie (turn 582) believed that "The Japanese education system, its curriculum, prepares a student to pass national exams, which are paper tests. It does not prepare them to communicate effectively with other English speakers." This idea was echoed by the JET, Eriko who quoted: "Because the test results are directly connected to their future, so the test results will be their – it matters to their high school and trans-examination too." Eriko also followed this up by explaining that there is no way to currently examine students' communicative abilities, which therefore means that there is no real reason for students to focus on communication unless it is part of their own goal or career plan (turn 377). This idea of students specifically pursuing communicative confidence was also expressed by Joshua: "I know the ones that - a few of my students who have their career plan involves having to speak English, so they're definitely motivated by having results and by learning more language, being able to apply that language" (turn 701). On the other hand, the quote below by Murray (turn 794) discusses that some students are just high achieving and are motivated by acquiring new skills:

I think it's all for communicative ability. Definitely in Primary, they're the ones who are wanting that two-way engagement, ones who are wanting to excel and are doing it purely because they like to master puzzles. They like to master problems. They like to have that ability to be able to do something. They don't like to be on the outside. They don't want to not have that skill, and those students are the ones who are like that across the board. They want to be good at art. They want to be good at music. They want to be good at English and it's predominantly the girls who are like that. So, they're trying, they're motivated by being able to do this, not by exams.

The next expected code was "time constraints in the curriculum". This means that "the time required to acquire language from a task does not allow for all of the course objectives (i.e. linguistic knowledge) to be adequately covered for assessment via comprehensive examinations" (Reid, 2015, p. 55). Rod Ellis (2018) argues that there is not sufficient time to ensure that the appropriate grammatical structures are taught if they adopt a task-based approach. For this reason, most teachers rely on an explicit grammar teaching curriculum

which prioritises explicit knowledge and accuracy over implicit knowledge and fluency. This failure to prioritise interactional competence and confidence has left many Japanese students unable to communicate, even after six years of instruction (Rod Ellis, 2018). These ideas were echoed by several of the participants, such as Davin: “It uses up a lot of class time that could be used if you just handed them the information. It’s not great for preparing for a standardised test that has a set questions and answers because you can just get a lot more information into their heads if you just tell them the answer” (turn 016). Eriko followed the same train of thought:

Because we have a certain curriculum, so if we try to do the Task Based curriculum, we have to create something new, plus we have to teach them grammatical things and our aim of English lessons is to let them pass the High School examination which is done by paper-based tests, so instead of letting them speak English fluently, it is necessary for them to write correct grammar. Otherwise, they cannot get the higher score to enter High School (turn 413).

This is why the circumstances of this school are very unique where TBLT is able to exist in a way that is uninhibited by national and entrance exams. This gives students the opportunity to study for both their exams in their Japanese English classes, as well as focus on tasks and communicative skills with the EAL department. The following statement by Eriko illustrates that she believes that significant changes need to be made to the Japanese TEFL education system in order for students to be able to focus on learning skills instead of just knowledge:

Firstly, I think the entrance examination system in Japan has to be changed and also English curriculum should be changed, other than focusing on the grammatical things. But I think grammar is also important as a second language learner, because without learning any grammatical things, it is quite hard to use a second language. That’s why the balance is very important. I assume English education is trying to change from grammatical-based to speaking-based, and now they are trying to use EIKEN which is the English proficiency test which can evaluate more skills including speaking skill, to use that score for University examination. Maybe these kinds of small steps can change, come down to Junior High School English education to focus on speaking more, but in this moment, I cannot come up with any idea what I can do with my ability (turn 415).

The above statement touches on some very important points. Firstly that this process of change is gradual as major changes cannot be expected overnight, but also that changes have already begun. With task-based experiments and research occurring throughout Japan, as well as changes such as EIKEN being implemented and placing more importance on communicative skills, the idea of fluency as well as form is gaining traction.

## 7.5 Non-traditional methods and cultural differences (traditional constraint)

A large contextual constraint and expected code is that TBLT is vastly different to the educational systems employed by the Japanese. As with all educational systems, students become familiar with procedures and expectations and often struggle when placed into a system that fundamentally varies to what they are used to. Like many other Asian countries, the Japanese educational system tends to value group consensus, and employs rigid, teacher-centred teaching practices. This results in a reluctance among students to engage, interact with, or question the teacher (O'Neill, 2008). This is at odds with TBLT which encourages students to work independently in order to solve problems and come up with solutions themselves to “fill the gap”. As a result, students can be confused by and reluctant to participate in TBLT. This was supported by six of eight participants in the study through comments such as the following:

The students are very confused when we first start, because they want to be given everything, they want to learn in a controlled environment, because that's what they learnt how to do in the Japanese learning system, and when you take off all the constraints, and you say just complete the task, use any language, any vocabulary that you want, they just don't understand that and they go quiet or they speak in their native language (Cassie, turn 574).

Regardless of the country or culture, some issues in education are universal. One such issue is that if students do not know what to do, they will become bored and possibly start to misbehave. A lack of understanding of TBLT can also lead to this issue in the Japanese educational system, evidenced in the following quote: “These students I think have a little bit of difficulty because their classes normally are so structured, that they look at this as not very gaining and it's time to screw off a little bit” (Davin, turn 018). Cassie even went as far as to suggest that when students are initially introduced to TBLT, they may think that the teacher does not know what they are doing as they have not been provided with all of the information they need as they would be in a Japanese classroom. Again, this can also lead to behavioural problems which have been well documented by researchers. Tanaka (2009) states that Japanese high school students expect the teacher to assume the role of “authoritative expert” which differs to that of TBLT which involves students openly negotiating meaning. Issues that can occur due to this unfamiliarity can involve excessive classroom noise, discipline problems, overuse of the mother tongue and lack of involvement in the tasks (D. Carless, 2007; D. R. Carless, 2003).

It is a simple fact that TBLT classrooms which involve group work, negotiation of meaning, open communication and a student-centred classroom will generate more noise than a well-disciplined, teacher-centred Japanese classroom. Although this noise is generally educational and purposeful, Japanese parents and teachers with minimal understanding of the process of TBLT or what the EAL department is trying to achieve can often mistake this noise as a failing class or lack of teacher quality or control. Good classroom management is

traditionally defined in terms of volume, with students individually working quietly and not causing disruption (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996), and TBLT challenges these views. In order for the Japanese to understand what the department is trying to achieve through these processes, they need to shift their perspective and learn to separate noise of students engaged in using language to complete a task from the noise of classroom disorder (D. Carless, 2004). This will be further discussed in the “Japanese understanding” section of this document.

This difference in teaching style also brought up another expected cultural code which was that of “students having a fear of making mistakes in front of their peers”. As Cassie said: “We tell them not to worry about mistakes, when mistakes are the most important thing in their other classes. Their biggest fear that I’ve seen within Japanese culture, is the fear of mistakes and the fear of what others will think of them if they make that mistake” (Cassie, turn 592). This quote by Cassie shows just how strongly some of the NET staff feel that the Japanese students are scared of making mistakes. Of course, this means that students are reluctant to try new language which opposes the principles of TBLT. Japanese students who prefer teacher-centred learning are apathetic, and have fears of negative evaluation and making mistakes which are “unique” to Japan (Wicking, 2009). Although this large and varied list of cultural differences seems like an overwhelming obstacle to effectively implementing TBLT, both researchers in the field of TBLT and the participants of this study have come up with ideas to be able to overcome these cultural differences in order to teach communication through tasks. Wicking (2009) suggests that a degree of cultural sensitivity and willingness to engage in form-focused activities will reduce anxiety, promote teacher-student rapport, and thus lower the affective filter. This cultural sensitivity was echoed by O'Neill (2008) who believed that incorporating but not relying on some comprehensible input will help students to adjust to the progression to TBLT. This is a tactic that the EAL department has taken on board which is why the hybrid system has been implemented in order to slowly get students used to TBLT over a period of years. This not only teaches students language but also teaches them how to learn languages. Cassie (turn 662) reflected this idea with the comment: “I think, if anything, it got the students to think differently from how they’re used to learning. It showed them that being perfect and not making mistakes, is not the most important thing about learning a language. The most important thing about learning a language is to effectively communicate with another person.”

Murray had a different perspective of Japanese culture and how it should be managed in the classroom in relation to TBLT. Instead of looking at Japanese cultural behaviour in the classroom, he discussed general Japanese culture and asserted that this is not just an issue that has to be addressed in education:

Japanese people are not, they’re very focused, very direct, very good at what they do, little problems to solve where they’re not going to be judged. That’s what they’re good at, that’s why they build fantastic robots and cars and things, but for communicating person to person - they sell DVDs in Japan of hot women just nodding at the screen and looking interested, so men can practice talking in

Japanese to a woman and not being shy. What other country in the world has that? That is a unique culture. They are so shy they have to practice talking to a hot woman on a TV. It's so crazy, but this is something, that as educators, that's what we do. We find problems and we find solutions and we apply those to make sure that the next cultural group doesn't have the same issues (Murray, turn 860).

The above statement is testament to some cultural differences that Japan has when it comes to communicating. Murray postures that this is a national issue that, if real change is going to happen, it has to be discussed on the national stage: "Where's the budget going to come from? Where are the resources going to come from? It's got to be met by the top of the outside with funding and understanding and resources and time. Can we have a national set of questions?" (Murray, turn 860). These are all questions that may be very difficult to ask in a country that values its cultural identity and is not westernized. In relation to TBLT, small steps must be taken from as early as possible to assure a smooth transition into communicative language training rather than just learning knowledge and form. This was reiterated by researchers who suggest that a sudden switch to a TBLT syllabus may likely result in student anxiety and dissatisfaction, caused by discrepancies between teacher and student expectations (Burrows, 2008; Matsuura, Chiba, & Hilderbrandt, 2001). This is where the hybrid system, as well as introducing the students to these techniques earlier, becomes invaluable.

## **7.6 Japanese understanding of TBLT (institutional constraint)**

An emergent code raised by twenty-five per cent of the participants and an issue of concern is the Japanese teachers, administration and parent's lack of understanding about TBLT, how it works and its goals. The following statement relates to this theme:

I think that parents and the other teachers would have difficulty with it because it's so far out of their philosophy of what teaching is. Japanese teaching is still very much in the '60s, where the teacher has information and the students have to absorb it, and it would be a lot of work getting the rest of the administrators and teachers and parents on board with something that looks so free-form and kind of play-timey (Davin, turn 022).

Davin further discussed the fact that TBLT would not be successful in this particular school environment unless the parents and administrators saw this student-centred classroom as a legitimate form of education (turn 062). This sentiment was reinforced by Murray, evidenced through comments such as: "I think Japanese management, the decision makers, perhaps don't understand" (turn 802). Murray raised an alternate perspective that was not mentioned by any of the other participants relating to the unique context of this specific school. As there is a three-year roll over of teaching and administrative staff, Japanese teachers are in a unique situation to gain promotional positions that would be unobtainable in Japan. Principals are also under great pressure to perform well for the three years before handing over leadership to the next principal. Due to this, they are very reluctant to try

things that they do not fully comprehend as it represents taking a big risk for them, both professionally and personally when it comes to their pride. This view was expressed by Murray: “Do they really want to bring in a whole new system of English where it’s experimental, its new; the Japanese curriculum hasn’t endorsed it. You’re going to be springing so far from safety on a life-raft that it’s a big risk to their career, so the cultural thing to do is the safety” (turn 802). Murray continued this sentiment:

If they can-not f\*\*k up in the three years, they can go back potentially at the higher-grade level and a massive salary, but in Japan, things don’t really move in your career. You have to wait until someone dies to move up the ladder. But here, they come here and every year a third of the staff goes. They need to fill up those management positions, those grade leader positions (turn 802).

Although the opinion above is highly contextualised to the school in this study, to a certain extend it may also play a part in ideas of change in schools across Japan. For this to change, studies such as this one have to be conducted along with studies that prove that TBLT can have positive results on English learning within a school. As Eriko stated, “They haven’t seen studies that have contextual results. They haven’t seen an adoption in Japan, so they’re not going to take a chance with it and potentially mess up their huge career strings over here” (turn 802).

### **7.7 Rules, space and class sizes (institutional constraint)**

Class size is a big problem, because how can you monitor what the kids are doing? The kids are going to take it easy. They are going to drop the strictness that they need to produce these sounds correctly. If you’re saying to everybody “It’s not ‘s’, it’s ‘th’, ‘th’, one of the two TH pronunciations, we need to go around and monitor very closely that the kids are producing this each time and reprogramming their mouths to produce the correct phonic sounds, and you can’t give two teachers, especially when one of them is not a native as well, you just can’t do it (Murray, turn 856).

This statement effectively introduces the next constraint of “class sizes”. This includes both the physical sizes of the classrooms as well as numbers of students in each class. Although this is a constraint that can exist in any educational environment, the conditions that have led to overcrowding and smaller classroom sizes are specific to this context and processes have already been put in place to provide solutions in the future. This issue is that as this Japanese school is the only one in the region, with a recent boom in Japanese industry in the area, this has also caused a boom in student numbers which the school was ill-equipped to cater for. Although there are new buildings and classrooms in the process of being built, in the meantime, to cater for the increased student numbers, classrooms are more congested with larger numbers of students. Obviously, this has resulted in issues, not only for the EAL department, but for all educational staff at the school. Complaints relating to the physical size of classrooms and student numbers came from 75 per cent of participants, which represented a major constraint related to the successful implementation of TBLT

within the school. An example of this was Sara's comment: "Because we've got between 36 and 38 in the class and there's not enough space, so you're limited to the use of it. I can't do like a big set up, because there's just too many of them. And then I can't get them to communicate" (turn 163).

The larger the class sizes, the less time teachers have to observe each student and facilitate their learning. This results in less corrective feedback and then simple mistakes can become a habit. This view was made clear in David's statement: "The thing about doing Task is that you need the students to work together in a student-centred environment which means that you want to be around facilitating as much as possible and it's nice to give as many students that facilitation as possible, so the more students, the less time you have on each student" (David, turn 278). This sentiment is also backed up by researchers including Littlewood (2007), who noted that it is particularly difficult to implement TBLT in large classes because of logistical issues associated with students communicating in groups.

Another constraint raised by the participants was the expected code of "strict rules within the school". Although there is solid grounding for these rules to be in place, a slight relaxation of them could have alleviated some of the overcrowding problems that caused issues with TBLT. Several participants suggested that having the ability to take students outside classroom would give teachers ample space to be able to set up more realistic tasks and games. An example of this was articulated by Steven (turn 515):

At our school we're confined to our room, we're not allowed to go outside, take the kids outside. I mean, maybe we can, but it takes a lot of permission slips and we have to ask a lot of - we have to plan this way in advance and we have to make sure it's okay and that no one will get hurt, etc. So, I think we're confined to the room. I think that can be challenging.

This strictness is probably something that only relates to the specific contexts of schools in foreign countries as a lot of procedures have been put in place to protect the students and keep them safe in an unfamiliar, sometimes dangerous environment. Cassie took the idea of taking students outside of the classroom a step further: "If we are able to do more in terms of outside of the school, possibly field trips, things of that nature, where they can actually experience and view the task being done in a real-life situation. I think that can motivate them to continue to learn through a Task Based system" (turn 622). Although Japanese teachers do take students on fieldtrips, it is always planned at least a year in advance and only to Japanese companies. The EAL department taking students out of school would represent too high a risk for the Japanese management to sign off on it. This is due to many of the EAL teachers not speaking Japanese, and therefore being unable to effectively communicate with the students if there was an issue. For fieldtrips to happen, Japanese teachers would also have to go which would mean that significant changes to schedules and timetables would have to be made. An example of these strict rules having an impact on EAL teachers was mentioned by Murray: (turn 800): "We didn't have the space. We didn't have



any freedom. I asked “Can we take the kids around the school on a treasure hunt, on a photo hunt, for identifying school locations?” and we were turned down.”

### **7.8 Resources, budget, technology and top down school support (institutional constraint)**

Another constraint to the implementation of TBLT that was raised was a lack of school support from both the Japanese teachers and Administration, and also from the department management. Research has shown that although educational authorities envision a change to TBLT, the lack of top down dissemination of curriculum and resources has led to limited, sporadic, unsystematic, and sometimes contradictory dissemination of TBLT among schools (Adams & Newton, 2009; Zhang, 2007). In this study, although the curriculum and textbooks were provided by management, the lack of pre-made task lessons has been an issue for teachers who have to create the majority of lessons themselves. This was evident through participant statements such as “I would like more examples of what a project should look like from beginning to end. A well-done project and materials for future projects that we could do. I think that would be very nice to have” (Davin, turn 076), and, “Maybe sometimes a little bit of guidance. I might be on the wrong track, but we don’t get enough observation and guidance in that way” (Sara, turn 219). While this is a problem during the beginning of the TBLT program, through brainstorming meetings, and over a period of years of implementation, a sizeable resource bank of tasks should grow to help teachers in their planning. The hardest work is always with the original teachers who have to implement the idea from scratch as it takes a significant amount of time (Wakaari, 2011). These teachers also often have the greatest understanding of the methodology due to having to build it from scratch. Although this is true, teachers will always have to adapt the resources to their own teaching style and approach to TBLT.

While resources can be made to a limited extent, a related constraint that came up was that the school was not supportive enough with buying resources that could be used in tasks. This code was mentioned by over half of the participants interviewed, including Steven (turn 830) and Joshua (turn 725). Murray believed this lack of budget for resources was a passive form of resistance from the Japanese management to a new methodology being implemented that they did not really understand. This was made clear in the comment by Murray that “Just attitude of bringing in something new that is not common in Japan. The resistance is the budget. It is very small at the moment, I know there’s issues there” (Murray, turn 830). Murray goes on to reinforce that TBLT learning really needs authentic resources to be effective and discusses that if the school is not willing to provide a budget for these resources, this reflects its lack of understanding or support for the increase of English fluency that can be produced through correct implementation of TBLT:

If a child’s not stimulated, if their serotonin is not being released, if they’re not getting excited, they’re not getting dopamine drops, then the amount of language learning that they’re going to take on, is going to be much less than what could be, and the way that we kick-start that, is by having authentic materials. If the school

won't provide that, then the situation is that the school really doesn't either understand or support the level of increase in the English ability of the students as opposed to the non-conventional methodology that we would be looking to bring in and the extra drain on their resources that would cause. So, it really is, you know, it's a balancing act between budgets and effective resources to support that style of learning (turn 790).

The following comment is a good introduction into the next constraint to the implementation of TBLT within the school, "a lack of professional development (PD)". This code was mentioned by all participants with all but one in agreement that there hasn't been enough TBLT PD at the school.

I just don't think we have that much experience and we haven't had - we haven't been able to find an excellent speaker or someone that can like tell us exactly what we need to do. I think we all have an idea what Task Based Learning is, but we don't know how - we haven't had enough experience or enough information about it to know how to implement in the most effective manner and I think this will improve and in a lot of different schools, I think it will get a lot better in the future (Steven, turn 541).

The fact is that TBLT is a very complicated methodology to correctly implement and therefore needs a certain amount of support and training to go with it. After all, "how can a teacher who is inexperienced with tasks create ones that collectively engage learners, appropriately align to their level, and effectively meet shared learning goals?" (Calvert & Sheen, 2014, p. 227). This chain of thought was reflected by Steven who stated: "I think you really need to know what you're doing as a teacher. If you kind of go in there and you don't have all the resources or tools available to the students, they're really going to struggle to understand what you want them to do" (turn 487). It stands to reason that in order to implement TBLT successfully as Japan has tried to do, there would be massive amounts of training throughout the workforce, although this does not seem to have happened. In fact, research throughout Japan suggests that there has been minimal training, and although teachers have a solid understanding of TBLT, this has led to sporadic and misguided TBLT experiments being implemented in classes rather than teachers fully and correctly implementing the methodology (Andon & Eckerth, 2009).

One factor that was raised by several of the participants which can explain this lack of training is the difficulty of finding a trainer to come and do a training session at the school. Although the school signed off on this happening, management found it difficult to get somebody to come and do a session, which is strange given that TBLT is such an increasing methodology. It also has to be re-enforced that this is a slow process and not everybody can become experts overnight. As Steven said:

It's an exciting field that you're in the ESL or you want to teach kids from another country, because I think there's a lot of growth that's going to take place. But I think

right now, we're just not experts in the - there's just not a lot of information about what to do exactly (turn 517).

Eriko discussed “lesson study” or “research lesson” professional development that occurred within the Japanese departments across the school and across Japan (Fernandez, 2002). This PD involves every teacher in the school preparing two lessons per year to be performed in front of their peers, who then give constructive feedback to the teacher specific to the lesson. This gives the inexperienced teachers the opportunity to learn from watching experienced teachers in action and also the chance for them to be observed and gain useful feedback as to how their lessons can be improved. Eriko discussed that this method was very successful in her first year as it taught her the skills she needed in the classroom to become a successful teacher. In the following years, once she had refined her general teaching practices, she did not get as much out of it. This was due to a lack of experienced, trained JETs at the school to give her subject specific advice. This kind of peer PD has been argued against by some researchers who state that although the idea is sound, some peers who are stuck in their ways may give bad advice rather than seeing the value of experimenting with new, possibly more effective methods (Deng & Carless, 2010). Alternatively, Erlam's (2015) research found this peer review method of PD could keep teachers on their toes and trying to refine their methods of implementation. It could be argued that this may motivate teachers who are not actively trying to implement TBLT, regardless of having a sound understanding of it. The school at the centre of this study has an ample amount of NETs who are all in the same stage of implementation, and peer observations along with feedback may help stop teachers from becoming lazy, sliding back to their old, familiar teaching techniques. This is definitely something that could be looked into at this school and others in similar situations.

This chapter looked into the intercultural perspectives of implementing this system including the JET's, institution, culture and traditions and how these factors impacted the implementation. It began with the explanation of the context of JETs and then moved onto the fact that most participants utilised them for modelling, discipline, facilitating and also to help out students who were having trouble keeping up with the class. It was also acknowledged that the NETs and JETs communicating in English to work together is a good example of practical English being used for the students to see. This then moved onto the fact that although MEXT has made TBLT their official EAL methodology, in reality the Japanese education system has done little to move towards implementing TBLT in practice. Other cultural related issues that rose were the fact that students seemed to consider tests more important than communication which stands to reason as Japan still places such importance on their national tests along with entrance exams used to qualify for high schools and universities. Japanese student's fear of making mistakes was again cited as a cultural issue that impedes TBLT which reiterates the importance of changes made such as informal testing situations for TBLT classes. Several institutional factors were raised such as TBLT not being sufficiently supported from the higher echelons of Japanese management

through limited budget and insufficient explanations of what the EAL department is trying to implement and achieve to Japanese teachers and parents. This has the potential to lead to confusion and sometimes even contempt from the Japanese.

## **Chapter 8 – Implementation and suggested changes/improvements**

The following chapter analyses the data to find out if all participants have implemented TBLT consistently throughout the school or if some have relied on their more comfortable and traditional methods to carry them through. It then explores issues that teachers have had while implementing the change and initiatives that could be enacted in order to keep teachers accountable and using TBLT to a high standard. Finally, suggested improvements or changes are examined in order to improve the implementation in the future and provide suggestions to schools looking at making their own pedagogical changes.

### **8.1 Implementation or not?**

The final question asked to all participants related to whether or not they thought that TBLT had been implemented within the department and why or why not? There were various answers to this with no two participants coming up with the same answer. This is probably due to the fact that in these early stages of implementation, the degree to which teachers implement TBLT will vary depending on the grade level they teach. This is in line with the hybrid method that is designed to teach the students how to learn in a student-centred environment, before completely switching to TBLT. That being said, all but one participant agreed that either hybrid, or TBLT, had been implemented to some extent in each grade. This was evident in comments such as: “So, I’ll probably do a task once or twice a unit, but then I’ll try and do a lot of small little tasks, especially with the Grades 1 and 2s” (David, turn 302), and, “I would say primary school to use Task Based is 10%, maybe Hybrid is 60% and just me as the central focus, PPP would be 30%, especially in Grade 3” (Eriko, turn 521). Murray discussed some interesting examples of tasks that had already been completed within the classroom during the year, such as a Facebook task (turn 840) and a sport task (turn 840). As to how successful that implementation was, there were again a myriad of answers and reasons as to why it had or had not been fully implemented yet. Although some of these reasons have already been discussed in the “constraints” section, they need to be discussed here as they were mentioned in a different context. They were mentioned as reasons directly related to why TBLT has not yet been fully implemented within this specific school.

One of the largest complaints by the participants was the overwhelming amount of time that TBLT consumes, “not only time-consuming in terms of the students’ learning time, but in terms of teacher preparation time” (Cassie, turn 618). This comment exposes two views of time consumption: it takes a long time to complete tasks in the classroom; and it takes a long time to plan for a task. The majority of participants appeared set in their ways and compared the workload of implementing a new methodology to the older method which they have done for years, and have a multitude of ready prepared resources to use. This was evident in Joshua’s statement:

For us, we have to teach the language, and have to make sure they understand the language. Then we have to explain the activity, set the activity up, make sure they

still know what the language is and then actually carry out the activity, and if you don't finish the activity, then it's sometimes not even worth starting it, so you might even have to put it off for another week and do the explanation a little bit more. Whereas if you're doing just the normal temporal based, they're generally just seated, they don't have to move around, you give them a sheet, give them the language that they want, and it's just set conversations. There's not too much, so you only have to really cover that base language. Overall, I think actually applying the vocabulary is better than just giving someone a list of words to learn (Joshua, turn 727).

Although this teacher sees the benefits of TBLT, he reveals that it is a lot more work than PPP. It could be argued that this sudden implementation of TBLT can be quite a shock to the participant's workloads. Cassie pointed out that this will lessen over time as teachers build up a new resource library for TBLT: "It takes an awful lot of time unless it's something that they've done in the past and they make changes to it for it to adapt to their new lesson" (turn 638). Along a similar line of thought was that of Sara who said: "I think the weaknesses are that not all the things that we can want the students to know can be formed or shaped into a Task Based learning lesson" (turn 123). Teachers can often spend a lot of time coming up with task ideas to teach specific situations. This will again become easier as teachers slowly build their resource library over time and new teachers come in, providing a different perspective or new ideas to the team and methodology. Teachers need to be creative and resourceful, which is in line with Cassie's statement: "I think some of the more successful Task Based teachers tend to create the most innovative and engaging materials (turn 634)."

When implementing new ideas into a school or department, the motivation of the teachers to apply the changes is a crucial component to its success. A large issue or constraint to the implementation at the school at the centre of this study is that over half of the participants were not overly enthusiastic about the change and the added workload that came with it. This was made evident through comments such as: "I think there's not enough energy about it. Enthusiasm by the teachers" (Sara, turn 221), and, through statements by management, such as "probably the buy-in of the teachers probably was quite surprising that they - I was quite surprised how they weren't very willing to change and adapt to the Task Based" (David, Turn 322). There were a couple of reasons for this lack of motivation put forward by the participants. The first was by Murray (turn 834) who said that "It depends on the individual teacher of course, because it depends on their empathy levels if they're attuned to doing a great job. A lot of teachers over here are here on holiday teaching so that doesn't make them bad." This statement may not only be confined to the context of Japanese schools in foreign countries as schools in Japan also have English teachers who are hired from their home countries and will also consider their trip a working holiday. This does not necessarily mean that all teachers who work overseas do not work hard; it just means that there may be a higher percentage whose main priority will not be working harder than they have to at a school. It was also brought up by the participants that teachers may not be

willing to do extra work when they do not get any benefit from it. As Murray stated, this all comes down to the professionalism of the individual and “if they’re attuned to doing a great job (turn 834)” or not. On the other hand, Steven had a simpler explanation for the lack of enthusiasm: “I would say teachers are also stubborn, they want to continue to teach the same way they’ve been teaching for years and a lot of times, they resist change and they’re more comfortable just teaching the way they have always taught, and yes, I think that can be a problem” (turn 513).

“I think if you look at the teachers that have been less successful in Task Based Learning, they tend to be the teachers that draw from their previous knowledge and experiences and are unwilling or unable to adapt to something new in reference to Task Based Learning” (Cassie turn 636). The word “unable” in this statement adequately sums up the next constraint which closely aligns with the previous. Up until now, the discussion has revolved around the teacher’s attitude to change, but another important perspective to look at is their ability to change. Several teachers discussed the difficulty for teachers in changing to a new methodology of teaching when they have become so accustomed to the old one. One such example was David (turn 324) who stated that “Change is very difficult for anyone. It’s easy to do what you’re familiar with and if you’re not familiar - a lot of our teachers aren’t familiar with Task Based Learning. I think a lot of the teachers found it quite difficult to change from what they’ve always done.” This was followed up by Joshua (turn 733) with the comment: “Think if you’ve done all your teaching, if you’ve been teaching for a while, and it’s in a conventional language environment, and you’ve done your teacher education a while ago so you haven’t been indoctrinated and forced to learn all the Task Based Learning, it could be really difficult.” He went on to discuss that if teachers have built up a repertoire of resources and are very familiar with the style of teaching and then all of a sudden, are told to completely change, it can be overwhelming for them, especially with the lack of PD that was discussed earlier.

One participant was a direct example of this, honestly discussing that she did not understand TBLT enough to implement the change, so just decided to stick to the system she knew. On several occasions, she brought up that she was just old fashioned and did not want to change something that she believed worked in the first place. The following quote is an example of this sentiment:

For me it’s very difficult because for me it’s a new thing and honestly, I don’t understand it too well. Even after I got some insight on it, but I don’t understand it all that well, and I’m just too set in my old ways, and I think my ways work. I can see it working and I’m just used to that, and it’s like they say don’t go and scratch where you’re not itchy. And maybe I’m just old school (Sara, turn 177).

Although this participant believed in the methodology that she was using, research in Japanese communicative ability after years of traditional school instruction has shown otherwise (Rod Ellis, 2014). Cassie put this lack of ability or willingness of teachers to change

down to habit: “Teachers are creatures of habit. They tend to get into routines and things. They have a comfort level just like the students do. It’s about the style of teaching where many of our teachers need some motivation to adapt to something that they’re not used to” (turn 620). Being a manager of the EAL department, she also added that before implementing such a change again, she would first make sure that all of the staff were fully committed to TBLT or learning it. If the teachers could not give this commitment, she would find new teachers with experience in TBLT or the desire to implement it and take on new challenges (turn 668). That being said, as Mowlaie and Rahimi (2010, p. 1524) comment, “What teachers express as their attitude cannot guarantee whether they practice what they think or preach.”

The reasons that were raised by the participants as to the lack of TBLT implementation were quite consistent with those that were discovered in current research literature. Mowlaie and Rahimi (2010) discuss that besides metacognitive knowledge, teacher attitudes have been recognised as a significant factor in the implementation and ultimate success in the classroom. R Ellis (2013) proposed a theory behind this attitudinal teacher resistance to TBLT and suggested that it may be related to teachers not understanding how to grade the tasks in terms of difficulty. For tasks to work effectively, they need to be developed in a way that will provide learners with a reasonable level of challenge and a gap that needs to be filled, but also be achievable. This is quite some task for the teacher, especially seeing as there are currently no agreed guidelines for determining the complexity of different tasks (R Ellis, 2013). Although some researchers over the years (Robinson, 2001; Skehan, 2001) have gone some way into identifying factors that need to be taken into account, it is still not clear how tasks can be sequenced in a way that takes account of both their linguistic and cognitive difficulty (R Ellis, 2013).

A final code that arose in relation to TBLT not being implemented was that of “lack of time”. This study has already discussed time in several contexts such as there not being enough time to create realistic tasks and resources as well as the fact that teaching skills takes a lot longer than teaching knowledge. The junior high students only have NET English classes once per week. This means that the teachers only get a total of 50 minutes to introduce a task and complete it. This is an extremely difficult charge and if the task is not completed by the end of the lesson, a lot of students may have forgotten what they are meant to be doing by the next lesson. Both Cassie and David mentioned this lack of frequency as a constraint on effectively implementing TBLT. Just to make things more difficult, as the communicative English lessons are considered an “extra” and not strictly part of the curriculum, if another teacher needs to catch up on a mainstream subject such as English, Japanese or math, they will often take the EAL class time slot. These cancellations mean that if a task is interrupted, EAL teachers may not get the opportunity to carry on and complete the lesson for several weeks. This is something that can only be changed by the Japanese management team.



## 8.2 Is TBLT suited to this school?

Although several issues with the implementation of TBLT have been discussed by all participants, the majority stated that they believed that TBLT was suited to the unique context of this school environment. There were several reasons for this, ranging from the fact that the student's English ability and motivation levels are high enough at this school for a successful implementation (Eriko, Turn 373), to the fact that the students need real world practice due to the foreign context they live in:

Well, I think it can be very effective. It could be the only thing effective and the reason for that is because, they don't use English outside of the classroom. They're in a closed Japanese environment where they continue to get everything they need through using the Japanese language. You know this at least puts them in as real, as world as we can within the classroom environment and gets them to use that language (Cassie, Turn 578).

This was reiterated by Joshua, who stated that "I think it's probably the most suitable because it's a different subject. We're not in an English environment. They're not going to be able to go down to the supermarket here and do the grocery shopping in English, so if we do a task in class, at least they're getting some practice using that language" (turn 695). Alternatively, Murray believed in the methodology but didn't believe that it could be implemented without full support and budget of those in charge. Because of the lack of authentic resources and budget, he believed that it could never fully be implemented within the school (turn 790). While Davin believed that TBLT was suited for the students, he did not believe that the Japanese parents and administration would agree with it due to the methodology being "so far out of their philosophy of what teaching is" (turn 022). This is in line with what Eriko discussed earlier about the Japanese not being happy to implement TBLT as they have a textbook and curriculum they have to adhere to for national exams. Evidence of this was articulated by Eriko: "I think it's possible but I don't think the Japanese teachers will accept this way of teaching, because they have a certain curriculum, with textbooks, and which is not like - we have to think about Task Based Learning from that textbook" (Eriko, turn 381). Although it is not necessarily the Japanese who have to implement TBLT in this situation, it is still a very different system which may look strange to those in charge. This all comes back to the fact that although MEXT has released documentation stating that TBLT is the official method of teaching English, very little has been done to complement this transition, resulting in small, if any changes in Japanese classrooms. Until the necessary changes occur in the Japanese educational system to allow TBLT to flourish, it will always be an outside methodology, viewed with scepticism by the Japanese management and parents.

### 8.3 Suggested changes/improvements

When asked what could have improved the transition to TBLT, a lot of expected codes arose which closely aligned to the constraints that were discussed earlier. There were also several suggestions that had not been raised until this point, which will be discussed now. Firstly, an expected code was that teachers felt that more PD would improve their ability to implement TBLT. This was raised by almost half of the participants, evidenced through comments such as: “I think a lot of training would be helpful” (Davin, turn 072). This is a valid claim which is backed up by research in the area that argues “without institutional support, including sustained teacher education on curricular innovations, teachers can be left with instructions to use methods they do not fully understand” (Zhang, 2007). This was a topic that was also raised by the management who did not anticipate how difficult it was to find TBLT PD opportunities in the region. That being said, the manager expressed that if she was to complete the process again, “Before I made a commitment as a manager to the school to implement Task Based Learning, is to ensure that we were supplied the proper amount of professional development” (Cassie, Turn 668).

As discussed earlier, one untapped source of professional development could be right under the department’s nose. That is, implementing the same small-scale pockets of exploratory developmental work such as the ‘study lesson’ or ‘research lesson’ that is practiced extensively in Japan (Fernandez, 2002) and is also practiced at the school at the focus of this study (Eriko, turn 423). As described by Eriko, this process involves multiple teachers coming to observe a lesson and then providing feedback afterwards. This gives the teacher the opportunity to learn from other trained teachers’ advice, while also learning different techniques used by different teachers while observing others practicing TBLT. While this kind of PD has been recommended in research (D. Carless, 2012), Eriko suggested that after the first year, she did not gain a lot from it as other teachers observing her were not trained in the same subject as her. This is an issue that the EAL department will not run into as there is a larger population of teachers all implementing the same methodology across multiple campuses. It could be argued that this strategy, combined with a framework to evaluate task successfulness such as that created by Rod Ellis (2009), would provide enough support and training to successfully implement TBLT.

There were several suggestions made to improve TBLT although some are constrained by the unique context of the school and the way the EAL department fits into it. An example of this was Davin proposing that tasks could be better implemented over a period of several lessons. This may be doable in a normal situation, but due to communicative English being an extra-curricular subject, sometimes classes can be cancelled to allow for catch up in core subjects. This typically happens when there are events such as sports carnivals or school excursions. This causes disruptions that mean it can be possible for teachers not to see their class for two, possibly three weeks at a time. This does not allow for tasks to be spread over multiple lessons, so the department requires the teachers to try to implement short, one lesson tasks. This situation that is recognised as not being ideal by management, as was

expressed by Cassie, who suggested a significant improvement could be gained by higher frequency of lessons and less cancelations of English lessons. Along the same lines, Steven expressed a desire to implement simple homework for students, an act that is currently discouraged by the Japanese. This would allow students to learn some basic vocabulary necessary for the task, which would help minimise pre-teaching before starting a task, giving more time to complete the communicative aspect of the activity. Although this is a good suggestion, it is also something that would have to be raised with Japanese management. As a department working somewhat separately to the mainstream school, the ability to negotiate is minimal.

The next recommended improvement did not actually relate to the EAL department but did relate to the Japanese management. Over half of the participants quoted large class sizes and limited space as a barrier to effectively implementing TBLT. This problem has occurred due to a large increase of Japanese students in the area and the Japanese are currently rectifying the situation by building new classrooms. This will not only cater for the students who are already at the school but will also allow for a future increase of students without an increase in class sizes. Although this is occurring, in the meantime, David, Steven and Murray suggested that the Japanese should have a little more understanding as to how TBLT works and allow students to move into more spacious areas, such as leaving the class to complete activities outside. Although this suggestion holds merit, in a school that has multiple storey buildings catering for over 3000 students, this may not be reasonable and the Japanese “one rule fits all” policy may be necessary to maintain order.

Due to the school being in a non-English speaking country and also being enclosed in a very tight Japanese society, it can be argued that the EAL department English lessons may be the only time that the majority of students get the chance to practice their communicative English skills. Because of that, Davin made the point that excursions may be an effective way to allow student to interact with native English speakers to practice their English in a fun and educational way. He mentioned that this would also improve the student’s cultural understanding of different groups of English speakers as they would have the opportunity to exchange culture through games and activities. This is a great idea but would take a lot of work to organise and a lot of negotiation with the Japanese for it to be allowed. As the location of the school is in a foreign country often perceived as dangerous by the Japanese, the possibility of this being allowed would be slim. The group would also have to be escorted by both Japanese and (native to the country) teachers to make sure any problems that arose could be solved in any language necessary. Although this task may be possible in the future, it would probably be too difficult or denied by the Japanese management. Another approach could be to use technology to interact with English students in other schools. Davin also suggested an increase in the use of technology but did not connect the two suggestions together. There are a lot of schools in English speaking countries that are teaching Japanese. Getting a sister school in one of these countries would be a great way to allow students to communicate with each other in an authentic way which is educational,

fun and engaging. This could be done through students e-mailing, writing or even video chatting to each other. Class video chats would be a good way to practice communication while also exchanging culture.

Although the Japanese education system has announced a communicative focus in the English curriculum, the school has done very little to make any changes in their English department. It can be argued that this is due to forces that are not under the school's control, such as the high stakes national examinations. The school's answer to this is leaving the implementation of TBLT to the EAL department. This has left some teachers feeling as though the school is not supporting the teachers. This is evidenced through comments such as: "Well, the school's got to adopt it first. The school's got to take it from the top down. It needs to be implemented throughout the school. At the moment, we see the one coming from our side, but not from the Japanese side" (Murray, turn 836). Again, this brings up the code of "understanding" by the Japanese. Sara suggested that a little more warning of implementing new strategies by Japanese management would help the EAL department prepare and effectively implement such strategies. This is a valid viewpoint that was backed up by several of the participants and could have had very significant ramifications on how successfully TBLT was implemented.

The following comment by Murray is a perfect expression of his frustration: "I think had we given it two or three years to slowly phase it in, and then sharpen the tools as we went, it could have been more effective, but just saying like, okay four weeks into term, throw down what you want and we will develop the books as you go through. That was a big failure." (Murray, turn 844). By implementing this strategy over a number of years, it could have eliminated several of the constraints that ended up causing significant distractions over the implementation. This would have given management more time to construct more comprehensive textbooks and resources which would have taken the burden off both management and staff alike. It would have allowed for more training as the time progressed, and support for teachers who were struggling with the changes. Although all of these positives could stem from the Japanese having a little more understanding of the department, it was also mentioned by several participants that an overall increase in Japanese understanding of TBLT could have also led to a smoother transition:

Every year I've said we need quite simply a meeting at the beginning of the year with all the homeroom teachers, same time, altogether and the JET and the English teacher, and we need to say Hello everybody, my name's (deleted name), this is what we do here. This is our purpose. This is what we want the kids to do, the level we want them to get to by the end of the year. This is how to do it. This is my role. This is the co-teachers' role, the JET's role, your role can be as much or as little as you like. If you particularly want to do more, let me know, but otherwise your role will be minimum. If you want to sit at the back of the classroom and mark books, we understand you're busy, please do, and if we need help we'll call you in, discipline a child or comfort that child or explain something to a child, we can call you for that,

but otherwise just sit there and take a chill, I'll be fine with that. That would be fantastic, because what we're finding now, every year on year, and I don't know why the management is so resistant to do this, but year on year, we are getting kick-back from the individual teachers who are challenging us and what we do, even the other day, a teacher. I won't say her name, but a teacher came to me and said I'm so fed up with this other teacher in this class. She keeps coming up to me and saying I don't agree with what you're doing, you should be doing this with the kids, you should be that with the kids. I just feel that's a golden opportunity missed there, and I've said, year after year, I've been met with - complaints and why do you need that? Or, I'm sorry they just don't have the time, something like - What? They don't have f&\*^ing five minutes? They don't have five minutes for an English program, something that's going to be 80 hours over the year? Like, what the f\*\*k? (Murray, turn 822).

Murray's quote shows some of the frustration that could easily be avoided by something as simple as a meeting at the start of each year. As the Japanese homeroom teachers have a minimal understanding of English, TBLT and the EAL department's focus, this could solve a lot of issues, both now and into the future. Again, this comes back to the code of "understanding". This means, not only the Japanese having a little more understanding of the circumstances and constraints, but also the entire Japanese teacher population having a better understanding of the mission and what the EAL department is aiming for. As Cassie (turn 664) put it, "You need to get them to buy into the system, you need to get them to understand that Task Based Learning is effective. It can be very useful in terms of improving their communicative ability in real world situations, but it's something you have to stick with."

The next suggestion that was raised is very interesting, that of having "parents to step into the role of a teacher's assistant (TA)" in EAL classrooms. This idea is a product of the unique context of the school at the centre of this study but would also have to be investigated in terms of legality in this particular country. Due to most families in the school coming over on working visas, there is usually only one parent working, with the other's visa attached which does not allow them to work in the country. This usually leaves the mother at home, taking up most of the school-related duties. Due to the current large number of students attending the school, teachers are often stressed and there is a lack of TAs to help. Murray points out that "there are a lot of parents out there who would happily step into that role" (turn 818). The PTA (Parent-Teachers Association) often help at the school with activities such as the athletics carnivals and other events that occur throughout the year. Many of these parents are teachers in Japan who are unable to work in this country due to visa restrictions. Although a parent TA group is a tantalising and cost-effective idea, it would have to be researched thoroughly before being implemented.

A fact that was raised during the research was that the younger participants had an easier time adapting to TBLT, were more eager to learn new things and were more enthusiastic about experimenting with new methods. It could be argued that selectively hiring newly

graduated teachers could be a way of improving the chance of significant change being effectively implemented by a department. This is a point that is not only significant to this study, but to all schools trying to implement change. There are several advantages to hiring a newly graduated teacher. They do not have a significant reservoir of resources built up as yet, meaning that they are likely more willing to spend time making new resources to fit the desired instructional methodology. They are still malleable as in not too comfortable with the teaching style that they are used to and tend to be enthusiastic. If a department gets a core of these teachers, they can easily train new staff and develop a good workplace culture. As these teachers are inexperienced, they would still need significant training to give them the capability they need to manage a classroom effectively and confidently.

A final suggestion comes from the fact that many of the participants found it hard to change their teaching methodology. Teachers often want to continue teaching in the way that is familiar and comfortable for them. Even with significant professional development, teachers often pick up on links to what they already know or just tweak their usual teaching practices. Research has shown that with many PD initiatives, teacher knowledge improves slightly, although it appears ineffective in supporting changes in teacher instructional practices or student learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Jacob, Hill, & Corey, 2017). This sentiment was expressed by David: "I think it's change. Change is very difficult for anyone. It's easy to do what you're familiar with but I think a lot of the teachers found it quite difficult to change from what they've always done" (turn 324). As the TLBT implementation is ultimately management's responsibility, it could be argued that a solution is the management team up-skilling in change management before undertaking such a large departmental transformation. Similarly, this issue could be solved by hiring an additional change management consultant to help implement the change. This could take a lot of the stress away from the management team and allow them to focus on supporting and nurturing their team.

Evidence discussed in this chapter demonstrated that all participants have implemented TBLT to a certain level in their classes. This is in line with the hybrid methodology introducing small concepts in the younger years before moving into full TBLT implementation in JH. Although all teachers believed that TBLT was suited to the focus school, the data showed that teachers can sometimes struggle to change just as much as the students. This was evident with inconsistent effort and enthusiasm being shown towards TBLT across the participants. The data showed that the lack of effort from some staff also created frustration with those teachers who put in a lot of effort. This was due to them feeling as though their added dedication provided limited extrinsic benefits and sometimes wasn't even recognised by management. A common complaint about TBLT from participants was that it took a lot of time to properly plan and implement TBLT lessons in comparison to traditional lessons but it was also acknowledged that this will lessen over time. Suggested improvements included study lessons similar to those that the Japanese teachers carry out in order to keep classes consistent throughout the department and to

also hold all teachers accountable for planning and delivering high quality TBLT lessons. Other suggested improvements included having a meeting with all stakeholders including Japanese teachers and parents to explain what the EAL department is trying to achieve so that everybody is on the same page and making sure that all staff are fully committed to change before initiating it.

## Chapter 9 – Conclusion

This thesis is based on a qualitative case study analysing the implementation of TBLT into a Japanese school in a foreign, non-Anglophone country. With the number of Japanese students attending schools in foreign countries on the rise and a lack of research into this unique context, this study not only represents a significant contribution to knowledge but also sheds light into a little known context which can serve as an exemplar to similar schools around the world undertaking their own pedagogical endeavours. From the review of relevant literature, discussion of the evidence, and the use of Thematic Analysis, this chapter summarises the findings that were made while answering the following research questions.

1. What were the challenges when implementing TBLT?
2. What are the strategies needed to successfully implement TBLT?

Due to the research questions being inextricably linked, this conclusion will summarise the challenges that arose as well as possible changes that were and could be made to overcome said challenges.

One of the overriding themes to emerge from this study was that Japanese students are entrenched in their familiar traditional style of education which relies on rote learning and places significance on knowledge rather than communication with the use of standardised testing. Due to this, TBLT cannot simply be implemented across multiple grade levels. It needs to be introduced over a period of time in order to give students the best opportunity to adapt to the vastly different learning conditions of TBLT, compared to the more traditional classrooms that Japanese students are used to. It is important to realise that this may only be an issue in Japanese or East Asian schools due to their traditional education system and the results may be vastly different in different contexts. This case study found that the school was correct to implement a context-sensitive hybrid methodology across all grades, which introduced TBLT on a continuum from minimal with younger students to full TBLT in senior, was the best way to achieve success. When implementing this hybrid methodology, it is important to take into consideration culture, setting and teachers' existing beliefs, values and practices for the best success. This situated hybrid methodology can then be made stronger as year's progress and students became more familiar with the methodology.

The research data highlighted that several of the participants found that without specifically teaching the vocabulary needed for a task, students were unable to participate due to limited language. This led them to believing that although TBLT can be effective, it should be aimed at advanced or older students (David, turn 545; Davin, turn 058; Murray, turn 786). Participants often conflated lack of vocabulary with lack of ability which is extremely erroneous. The solution to these challenges is also a benefit to come from introducing TBLT



over a number of years. It gives students the time needed to build up a significant vocabulary base, which in turn allows them to participate in communicative activities. Introducing new vocabulary to students can be done over time, using a variety of techniques that run alongside the hybrid methodology. This can include input only tasks as well as pre- and post-task activities that focus on specific vocabulary or issues that the students came across while completing the task. Teachers can also use their pronunciation section of lesson to re-enforce integral vocabulary for the task. Once students have mastered English words, vocabulary and the initial understanding of meanings in the lower grades, it then paves the way for more in-depth tasks to be implemented. In all contexts, PD has to instil in the teachers that just because students may not have a significant vocabulary base, this does not mean that they are necessarily low-level learners. They may have come from another school and be incredibly intelligent, but just not have the vocabulary base to communicate effectively. Systems should be set in place to deal with these students so they do not fall through the gap.

A major source of frustration for both NETs and the Japanese was that the Japanese did not seem to have an in-depth understanding of TBLT, which caused friction between NET teachers and the Japanese, as seen in the following quote: "I'm so fed up with this other teacher in this class. She keeps coming up to me and saying "I don't agree with what you're doing, you should be doing this with the kids, you should be that with the kids" (Murray, turn 822). It is important when implementing anything new into a school that it starts at the top. The principal needs to have a good understanding of it, needs to support it and then needs to make sure that all stakeholders involved understand and support the move. The organisation needs to act in unison rather than being segmented as friction will occur between the moving cogs. If the school cannot come together to act as one to implement TBLT, it probably should not be implemented. It is particularly important for the Japanese teachers in the school in this study to be well informed and have a good understanding of how the lessons will run as TBLT falls so far out of their usual methodology that it may look to them as though the classes are being run incorrectly, which could possibly lead to confrontation. Although this school in this study successfully implemented TBLT, there is still a lot of work to get all stakeholders on the same page, and a suggestion was made (Murray, turn 822) that a meeting occurs at the start of each year in order to make sure that everybody understands the part they have to play. This should be conducted by the NETs along with the JETs to make sure that everybody understands exactly what is wanting to be achieved and how. It could be argued that this would eliminate a lot of frustration and lead to a smoother implementation process.

Human resources are the most important asset in a school and need to be managed accordingly. Analysis of the data detected that there is a lot of frustration, leading to discontent between staff as some seem to be doing the lion's share of the work with little to no perceived rewards. Although all staff enjoyed having full autonomy, in this study it has

become apparent that this is an advantage when it comes to creating and implementing lessons and resources, although not when it comes to implementing the TBLT methodology. It was revealed that some participants were more professional than others and worked very hard to train in and implement professional TBLT lessons while others did very little and instead just slightly modified lessons that they had already used or used lessons prepared by other teachers. Of course, this led to staff working the hardest feeling that they did a lot of extra work for very little benefit for themselves. It is management's responsibility to ensure that all staff working hard to achieve the right results are recognised in a positive way. On the other hand, it is just as important that there is some accountability for those putting in minimal effort. If none of this is implemented by management, it stands to reason that the overall effort to implement TBLT will drop to the lowest common denominator as it could be perceived that the implementation is not very important. If accountability and recognition of good work are implemented, it will force all staff to work at a higher level and work towards the highest common denominator. The idea is to encourage the top echelon of teachers to support those who are less experienced. One way that was recognised to keep teachers accountable, while also bolstering their skills, was through implementing the same small-scale pockets of exploratory developmental work such as the 'study lesson' or 'research lesson' that is already practiced by the Japanese in the school (Eriko, turn 423). This process involves multiple teachers coming to observe a lesson and then providing feedback afterwards. This gives the teacher the opportunity to learn from other trained teachers' advice, while also learning different techniques used by different teachers while observing others practicing TBLT.

Although this may be a contextual component, it was found that the youngest, most recently graduated teachers were the most enthusiastic and willing to change their practices for the best of the students. This suggests that it could be beneficial to have a couple of staff who are excited about change on the team to boost the overall morale of the department. The suggestion to use parents as volunteer TA's could also be implemented which would provide students with more support and also negate some of the negative effects of having such large classes until this problem is solved through upgraded infrastructure. Although the Japanese educational system is still very traditional, it could be argued that it is changing to a more communicative focus. Through changes made by MEXT, university entrance exams including communication and initiatives such as the focus of this study, changes are slowly being made. It is essential that all staff pedagogical are kept up to date with changes through appropriate PD to make sure that everybody has an understanding of more progressive methods and positive impacts they have on the students learning. This is important for not only NET staff, but also for JETs to make sure they are on the same page as the EAL department. It is essential that the JETs have a comprehensive understanding of what TBLT is and how it can be successful so that they can see the changes outlined by MEXT actually being implemented in classrooms. This would limit misunderstandings between departments. Although Japanese English teachers are unable to implement TBLT in

their own classes at this time due to institutional constraints, they could at least reflect on other pedagogies and where TEFL is heading in the future. It is hoped that this study will give other schools in similar contexts something to think about when it comes to TBLT, and an advantage as they will already know some of the challenges and how to overcome them before making any changes. Implementing a new methodology is a challenging task but it is also completely achievable and can be very successful within diverse contexts.

## **Chapter 10 - Opportunities for further study**

This study focused on the implementation of TBLT within a specific cultural context. Along the way, there were several other issues that arose that could become the focus of their own study in the future. Below is a list of these possible studies.

### **Study lessons**

These small-scale pockets of exploratory developmental work such as the 'study lesson' or 'research lesson' is practiced extensively in Japan (Fernandez, 2002) and is also practiced at the school in this study (Eriko, turn 423). As described by Eriko, this process involves multiple teachers coming to observe a lesson and then providing feedback afterwards. This gives the teacher the opportunity to learn from other trained teachers' advice, while also learning different techniques used by different teachers while observing others practicing TBLT. A study could be performed in order to determine the effect that these lessons have on teachers' accountability to change. Do these lessons give teachers the motivation needed in order to make them put in the effort to make effective changes in their methodology?

### **Success of the TBLT methodology**

Eriko suggested that the students at the school in this study have a much higher standard of English than those at schools in Japan. When asked whether or not this was due to the TBLT program, although attributing some of this to the NET department, she also raised that this could have been due to the unique circumstances of the school. Possible aspects that could affect this are the parents being international business people as well as living in an environment that lends itself to speaking English more often. A possible future study could be undertaken to see if it is in fact TBLT that helped these students to significantly improve English or if students just improved depending on their unique surroundings?

### **Student's anxiety levels and fear of making mistakes**

It was brought up by several participants that younger Japanese students had no fear of speaking in front of their peers or of making mistakes. This anxiety is something that develops as the students get older, as if it is learned. It was suggested that this was due to the students being indoctrinated into the very traditional Japanese educational system which does not encourage creativity, critical thinking and self-confidence. An interesting study could be to research when this fear of performing in front of a crowd materialises and why.

### **Mixed race students**

It was mentioned by Murray (turn 778) that about twenty per cent of students at the school were from mixed cultural households, usually a Japanese father and local mother. This is a very unique cultural subtext within the school that could be studied in a myriad of ways. An interesting study could be how these student perform in English compared to the Japanese students seeing as often the parents communicate at home in English as neither can speak

one another's language. This could also be compared to how well the students achieve in their normal Japanese classes. Are these children at a disadvantage when Japanese examples are used as a teaching device, if these examples are part of the household where there is a Japanese mother? This is a group of children, not traditionally "Japanese" who present with a lack of cultural understanding. They don't necessarily have low ability, but they possibly have a lack of cultural competency and probably do not understand in the so-called assumed "natural" knowledge a child would have growing up in a Japanese-only household with accompanying values, history and knowledge. Does low self-esteem develop from prejudice possibly (think about where this might come from – do the Japanese children highlight differences with these kids, are the Japanese children aware of these subtle differences, if so then it could be a parental attitude, is it something un-said among staff; if the curriculum doesn't cater for this then it could be seen as institutional prejudice). Do these children have low self-esteem knowing that they were different to classmates, knowing that they don't know Japanese customs that are usually passed down by the mothers at home. Do they know their differences and are these reinforced by the school assumption of everyone is Japanese. How is the school curriculum adjusted to cater for mixed cultural kids?

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