
Feature Article

Migrant Teachers Navigating Cultural Roles in an Outsourced University English Program

Elliot J. Clark
Asia University

This study explores the perspectives of six migrant English language teachers in a Japanese university's spoken communication course, focusing on their beliefs about the purpose of English classes and their perceptions of student engagement with cultural topics. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the author's teaching peers while working at the university through a dispatch company. Although the goals of the institution emphasize practical communication skills, many of the teachers seem to see their role as fostering intercultural understanding, leading to tensions when students favor familiar, Japan-centric topics. Findings suggest that the teachers situate themselves as both language instructors and cultural mediators, although perspectives are conflicted. Some appear to have internalized native-speakerist assumptions, while others question the feasibility of cultural learning within the course's constraints. Frustrations arise when students struggle to engage with foreign cultures, rely on simplistic cultural comparisons, or reinforce an in-group/out-group divide. The study identifies curricular inflexibility and low teacher autonomy as key issues. These factors are potentially leading to misalignments between teacher expectations, student interests, and curricular goals. The study concludes that outsourcing the course may be inhibiting the adoption of a contextually appropriate approach.

本研究は、日本の大学の英語コミュニケーション科目における6名の外国人英語派遣講師の視点を探る。半構造化インタビューを通じて、英語教育の目的や文化的話題に対する学生の関心を調査した。派遣先の教育機関は実践的なコミュニケーション能力の育成を目的とするが、多くの講師が異文化理解の促進も重要と捉え、それに対し学生が日本中心の話題を好むことに葛藤を抱いていた。本調査から講師の役割認識には個人差があるが、講師たちは自らを語学指導者であると同時に文化の仲介者として位置づけていることが示唆される。一部はネイティブ・スピーカー主義的な考えを内面化する一方で、他は文化学習の実現可能性が、カリキュ

ラムの制限により懐疑的な意見もみられた。学習者が異文化への関与に苦戦したり、文化を単純な比較に還元したり、内集団／外集団の区別を強化したりする場面では、講師側にフラストレーションが生じる。また、カリキュラムの柔軟性不足、教師の裁量の制限が鍵であると認識しこれらが教師の期待・学生の関心・カリキュラムの目標の間にミスマッチを生じさせる可能性がある。本研究は、当該科目の外部委託が、文脈に即した教授法の採用を妨げている可能性があると結論付けている。

Migrant teachers are often employed to teach English communication classes in Japanese universities. The way in which they view their roles is likely to be shaped not only by personal teaching philosophies but also by institutional expectations and societal discourses about the value of native-speaker teachers. Course objectives typically include improving students' oral communication skills and preparing students for participating as global citizens (Rivers, 2013), aligning with the goal of cultivating "global human resources" (Burgess, 2012, p. 79): people who are equipped with the language and intercultural skills to facilitate cross-border economic activity. However, Japan has relatively poor foreign language outcomes and low levels of immigration; it is also geographically isolated, and there are many practical and economic barriers to studying abroad (Burgess, 2012). Under such circumstances, migrant teachers and their students may come to see their English classes not only as spaces for language learning, but in part as unique venues for exploring foreign perspectives.

Despite the significant influence that migrant teachers may have in their students' intercultural education, their views on their roles' cultural purposes remain underexplored in the academic literature. Typically, investigations of their roles in Japanese English language teaching (ELT) tend to focus on native-speakerist structures, which position native English-speaking teachers as ideal language models and keys to accessing Western culture (Holliday, 2005). Matikainen (2015) provided insights into how teacher and student views of cultures of learning are sometimes misaligned. Furthermore, Stapleton's (2000) survey of migrant English teachers working in Japanese universities revealed that most of the respondents saw the teaching of *small c* culture as part of their role. However, fewer studies have investigated how migrant teachers view their English classes' *big C* cultural purposes or how they perceive student interest in

cultural topics.

The present study¹ employed a peer interviewing method to uncover the attitudes of six teachers in the author's former context of a spoken English communication course. As the course was run by a dispatch company, this study also investigated some of the possible effects of the little-studied trend of outsourcing language courses in higher education (Goodhew, 2025). This study is likely to be of interest to teachers reflecting on their own cultural roles, as well as to decision makers considering how to integrate culture into the curriculum.

English for Intercultural Education and Native-Speakerism

The integration of culture has long been considered important to language teaching as it relates to the *small c* of “culturally influenced beliefs and perceptions, especially as expressed through language, but also through cultural behaviors that affect acceptability in the host community” (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993, p. 6). The more concrete *big C* aspects of culture, such as history and geography, although potentially interesting to discuss, are considered of less importance to language teaching as “they do not provide an intimate view of what life is really like in the target culture” (Purba, 2011, p. 51).

The issue of integrating culture in ELT is complicated by English's status as a common international language spoken by people with diverse cultural backgrounds. Hollenback (2017) found the simplification of culture along national lines in textbooks unsatisfactory in furthering learners' intercultural communication. Furthermore, the approach of associating cultural learning with English learning has been critiqued for reinforcing perceptions of English as tied to inner circle (Kachru, 1985) English-speaking cultures. Kubota (2002) argued that an approach to internationalization that foregrounds inner circle cultures, rather than fostering a truly global outlook, more accurately results in anglicization. In the Japanese context in particular, there is a concern that the blending of cultural and English learning frames anglophone society as a foreign other. Such a framing risks the perception of English as existing outside of the mainstream of Japanese society, potentially restricting its adoption (McVeigh, 2002; Seargeant, 2009).

A further complication for the integration of culture in ELT is the central role of native English-speaking teachers, who are prized for their authenticity as linguistic and cultural models (Seargeant, 2009). Despite extensive critiques of native-speakerism, this ideology continues to influence ELT in Japan (Toh, 2019), as it does in many other contexts (Hopkyns, 2022). This paradigm contributes to the sense that English is owned by its native speakers (Matsuda, 2003) and ignores the growth of English as an international language between outer and expanding circle English speakers (Honna & Takeshita, 2014). Moreover, native-speakerism privileges Western TESOL methodology, inhibiting the development of more contextually appropriate approaches (Holliday, 2005; Toh, 2019).

The EC Program

The English Communication (EC) program at X University (XU; both pseudonyms) provides a case study of how native-speakerism and assumptions about English's cultural role may play out in a university setting. Designed primarily to improve students' spoken English communication skills, the program lacks explicit *big C* cultural goals. However, the ambiguous yet constrained role of its teachers risks the reproduction of default assumptions about their cultural purpose.

XU is a public university. Its undergraduate students do not typically major in English but are required to gain four credits of English Communication (henceforth EC) to graduate. Most students' spoken ability corresponds to CEFR B1 descriptors. Weekly 90-minute EC classes are provided by a dispatch company, ABC (a pseudonym), which oversees the curriculum and employs the instructors. EC instructors are required to be native English speakers with a bachelor's degree and either a year's experience teaching at a university or a basic teaching certificate (e.g., CELTA). These requirements are lower than the typical requirement of a relevant master's degree for directly hired faculty (Butler, 2019). ABC has created a marketable service by implementing standardized lesson plans and assessments. However, this rigidity also reduces teacher autonomy and entrenches a static Western TESOL curriculum and methodology. Furthermore,

EC is often formally referred to as NSE (presumably Native Speaker of English). The idea that the instructors' linguistic or cultural status is more important than their pedagogical expertise is therefore implicit at an institutional level.

Studies indicate that under disempowered circumstances, migrant teachers may come to identify as cultural and linguistic resources, or even entertainers, rather than educators (Breckenridge & Erling, 2011; Simmons & Chen, 2017). Furthermore, a working environment that prizes foreign teachers' exotic nature leads some to embrace their celebrity status and others to resent it (Rivers, 2013; Simmons & Chen, 2017). This situation is likely to shape how the EC teachers perceive their role and therefore how they engage with their students.

The goals of EC focus on oral communication skills, critical thinking, learner autonomy and communicative competence. The curriculum is typical of communicative language teaching, with minimal *big C* cultural content present in the course textbooks. Students can sometimes decide what topics to discuss. Research suggests that Japanese university students tend to select topics which are close to their own lives, preferring local topics to international ones (Wolf, 2013). A similar pattern can be observed in EC students' end-of-semester presentations on topics freely chosen by students, which frequently center on Japanese culture, student life, or social issues. Given that EC teachers may see themselves as responsible for encouraging a global outlook due to their institutional framing, student and teacher priorities on topic selection are likely to diverge. This divergence suggests a point of tension in the program, which inspired the present study.

The study focused on the following two research questions:

- What do the migrant teachers in the course believe to be the purposes of their English classes, particularly in relation to culture?
- What opinions do they have of the content of student in-class production, particularly in relation to students' approaches to cultural topics, and what tensions arise as a result?

Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design, using semi-structured interviews to explore how migrant teachers in the EC program perceive the purpose of their classes and their students' interest in cultural topics. A qualitative approach is well-suited to this type of inquiry as it allows for an in-depth exploration of individual perspectives. Semi-structured interviews are especially appropriate for their ability to provide flexible questioning while maintaining consistency across participants (Dörnyei, 2007; Patton, 2002).

Participants and Data Collection

I recruited participants from among my EC teaching peers. Of the sixteen instructors, eight volunteered, and six were selected as representative of EC in terms of experience, nationalities, education levels, and gender balance. Five men and one woman were selected. All participants were from a variety of inner circle English-speaking countries, although Participant 4 reported growing up not speaking English at home. The sample represents both typical gender imbalances (Nagatomo, 2016) and the bias towards inner circle native-speaker teachers in Japanese ELT (Hashimoto, 2020).

All participants provided written consent after reviewing a research description outlining the aims of the study. I have obscured the participants' names, genders, and nationalities and any other identifying elements in the demographic information (Table 1) and the results to ensure their anonymity. All interviews were conducted in person, totaling 238 minutes of data. I used an interview guide structured around an opening statement, background questions, content questions, suggested probing questions, and an open-ended closing question (Dörnyei, 2007). The content questions can be found in the Appendix. As I was a peer in the program, I leveraged acquaintance interviewing advantages, such as shared experiences and established rapport, to produce candid responses (Garton & Copland, 2010).

Data Analysis

I manually transcribed all interviews into a spreadsheet, marking pauses and laughter before making analytic memos summarizing each interview (Dörnyei,

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Length of service in EC	Length of teaching career in Japan	Prior English teaching experience	Academic qualifications
1	2.5 years	28 years	JET Program, eikaiwa, ELT management, kindergarten	Bachelor's degree, master's in TESOL (in progress)
2	0.5 years	16 years	Eikaiwa, corporate, other universities (through ABC)	Bachelor's degree
3	2.5 years	9 years	JET Program, universities (through another dispatch company)	Bachelor's degree
4	2.5 years	4 years	School teaching (in home country), eikaiwa	Bachelor's degree, master's in TESOL (in progress)
5	1.5 years	6 years	Eikaiwa, other universities (through another dispatch company and ABC)	Bachelor's degree
6	2.5 years	17 years	Eikaiwa, kindergarten, ALT in public and private schools	Bachelor's degree

2007). I then began a thematic coding process (Saldaña, 2016):

1. Pattern coding: I identified the main themes inductively from the data rather than using predetermined categories.
2. Category development: I grouped responses into broader themes related to teaching purposes and general topics.
3. Subcategory refinement: I made distinctions between general themes (e.g., “familiar topics” vs. “challenging topics”) and specific subtopics within each theme (e.g., “university life” vs. “social media” for familiar topics).

4. Problem identification: I highlighted specific areas of tension, such as teacher frustration with topic selection.

This process allowed for the emergence of key themes related to teaching objectives and student engagement, allowing me to identify points of interest in the teachers' responses in relation to the study's research questions.

Results

The teachers' beliefs about the purposes of their classes broadly fell into two categories: (1) developing their students' spoken communication skills and (2) cultivating global human resources. Their perspectives on student topic selection focused on (1) familiar topics, (2) challenging topics, (3) Japan-centric topics, and (4) topics on foreign countries and culture.

Beliefs About the Purposes of University English Classes

All the teachers described speaking skills as a core focus, often positioning university ELT as a corrective to students' prior English instruction. Participant 1 (P1) explained that "One of the reasons is for them to be able to realise it's not a subject and use it as a tool for communication." P2 similarly noted that "Many haven't experienced a class where they take the lead." There was, therefore, a general support for ABC's communicative Western TESOL methodology among the teachers.

Beyond communication skills, the teachers also emphasized intercultural communication, framing the course within broader internationalization-through-ELT discourses. P3 speculated, "[XU] really do want to balance that idea of being able to communicate and encouraging flexibility and freedom of thought and expression, and I think there is a bias towards English being that kind of forum."

Preparing for the workforce and studying abroad were highlighted as other key purposes, although some teachers expressed doubts that their students really need English for their future careers. Economic and systemic barriers to travelling and studying abroad were cited by the teachers, as well as the effects of COVID-19 on student interest in going abroad. P4 suggested that even absent practical barriers, students may be unlikely to go overseas, observing that "They

love Japan. Japan's got everything they need, and they're not dissatisfied with their conditions." Despite these doubts about student interest in engaging with the world outside of Japan, there was a broad acceptance that the course has cultural aims in addition to its linguistic aims, with P6 stating that they believed "[XU] want us to keep it outside of Japan."

Perspectives on Student Topic Selection

The teachers had mixed reactions to students' topic preferences, particularly the tendency to choose familiar or Japan-centric themes. Some accepted this as a natural willingness to communicate strategy, while others expressed frustration. P5 determined that students may gravitate towards familiar topics because of their limited language ability, observing that it "takes the edge off" when their discussion partners share contextual knowledge. Conversely, some teachers expressed boredom with hearing the same topics repeatedly or acknowledged that other teachers may be bored. P3 explained as follows:

You do kind of have to pressure [students] to dig deeper, or maybe even ban certain topics [...] You might have heard this speech way too many times, so you yourself are afraid of being bored to death or grading them negatively because you are disinterested.

Most teachers also indicated that they believed that students should be pushed towards challenging topics, but there were concerns that introducing unfamiliar topics into the curriculum poses risks. While P4 thought that students ought to be challenged, "topics that can polarise or disrupt the harmony" often lead to "silence" when they are presented. There were, therefore, indications that student interest and willingness to communicate clash with teacher interests and objectives.

Participants also highlighted that students frequently choose topics related to Japan, either out of national pride or shared familiarity, but they also expressed frustration with such themes. Although acknowledging that "it's good to be able to describe your culture," P1 described the tendency to talk about Japan as "annoying," preferring that students "get out of their comfort zone." Other teachers indicated frustration with student tendencies to reinforce stereotypes

about Japan or make simplistic cultural comparisons. P6 described one example: “They go ‘Japan has four seasons.’ I go ‘So does [my hometown]!’ They go ‘But we—’ ‘No! We have the same exact seasons in [my hometown]!’” P4 similarly noted that sometimes students express surprise when foreign teachers demonstrate basic knowledge of Japan:

They seem very surprised when I tell them my favourite food in Japan is tonkotsu ramen, because they feel as if I’m not supposed to be able to like that or know that it exists, even living in the country for four years.

Therefore, although the teachers seemed to have mixed feelings about Japan as a topic for pedagogical reasons, there were also signs that they may feel alienated by the insider–outsider distinction that discussions about Japan are perceived to reinforce.

In almost all the participants’ testimonies, there was either an expression of personal frustration or an acknowledgement that frustration is felt by others around how students approach foreign countries and cultures. P1 said that students are “naive” when it comes to other countries, while P3 believed that students are interested but are limited by their knowledge and need more input. P6 focused on how students tend to overlook diversity in Anglophone culture in favor of cultural reductionism, concluding: “I think they don’t understand that most other countries are not homogenous like Japan.” P6 elsewhere referred to being a “cultural attache,” despite also expressing disapproval of the idea of pushing global topics in English language instruction. Showing similar skepticism, P4 questioned whether a migrant teacher-led English class alone can cultivate a global mindset:

I think the thing that produces a global mindset is actually being global, going to another country, getting another perspective, experiencing that culture firsthand. We can try to simulate it by exposing them to these topics but it’s [...] just going to go into that box of foreign stuff.

A degree of ambivalence was therefore shown by the teachers towards the idea of students exploring both Japanese and foreign cultural topics, especially as doing so is often found to reinforce rather than erode in-group/out-group divides.

Discussion

Although the teachers firstly highlighted the linguistic goals of the course, they unanimously seemed to believe that EC also had both *small C* and *big C* cultural goals. Without a clear institutional mandate, the instructors may have concluded that their classes should have a cultural dimension from their institutional framing as native speakers, their beliefs about the purpose of university, broader societal discourses on ELT, the implications of their presence as foreigners in the classroom, their perception of student needs and interests, or their experiences as migrants in Japan. While *small c* intercultural competence is widely accepted as an important element of ELT (Byram, 2021), integrating *big C* culture appeared to be creating tension. While the teachers on the course were keen for their students to engage with international culture, their students were led by knowledge and interest to engage more with local and familiar topics.

Several instructors expressed frustration with students' stereotypical representations of both foreign and Japanese culture. Their frustrations seemed to stem from their outsider status in their own classrooms as well as students' lack of cultural knowledge. Cater (2020) observes that repeated exposure to well-worn essentialist cultural narratives, such as the belief that only Japan has four seasons, has "a slightly alienating effect" (p. 65) on migrant teachers. There were signs in the present study that these beliefs were contributing to teacher burnout. Kubota (2002) warned that native-speakerist ELT may encourage dichotomous comparisons between Japan and an essentialized West. Although the teachers did not see themselves as the source of this tendency, and some pushed against the idea of being cultural attaches, their responses also often aligned with assumptions that internationalization is best facilitated by migrant English teachers. While the teachers seemed well intentioned in their aim to encourage deeper engagement with foreign culture, it was clear that they were having limited success within the confines of this weekly spoken communication course.

The prescriptive nature of the curriculum, organized by the dispatch company ABC, may contribute to the tensions between teachers and students. The curriculum provides little *big C* cultural content, yet the students seemed

to be expected by some of their teachers to exhibit deep cultural knowledge in their final presentations. Stapleton's (2000) survey found that teachers tended to integrate culture "randomly" (p. 301). Similarly, in this study, despite the lack of opportunities to introduce cultural elements during the semester, the teachers appeared to focus on culture when both teachers and students had greater freedom to do so. Involving instructors in decisions about the curriculum may lead to a more considered, satisfactory approach to exploring culture. Furthermore, a post-method approach, which emphasizes locally adapted methodologies (Canagarajah, 2006), could provide a more effective and achievable alternative to teaching intercultural communication than uncritically applied Western TESOL. Within an English as an International Language (EIL) framework, rather than simply learning about other countries, emphasis would be put on learning English for "self-explanation and mutual understanding across cultures" (Honma & Takeshita, 2014, p. 66). Nevertheless, since the university and ABC do not require EC teachers to be active scholars in applied linguistics, both the course designers and the instructors may be unaware that alternative paradigms to Western TESOL exist, particularly as EIL remains underrecognized in Japanese ELT (Toh, 2019). This gap underscores the potential value of empowered teacher-researchers in shaping university policies and reveals the limitations of relying on dispatch companies to administer standardized university courses.

This study's findings contribute to the literature exploring migrant teacher experiences within single institutions (Rivers, 2013; Stewart & Miyahara, 2011) and build on research on teacher views on culture in Japanese ELT (Matikainen, 2015; Stapleton, 2000). However, the focus on a single course run by a dispatch company means that the findings cannot be used to make generalized conclusions about other migrant teachers in other university settings. The use of peer interviewing may also have led my participants to give socially acceptable answers.

Future research could build on my findings by doing the following:

- Investigating EC student perspectives about how they see the role of culture in their English classes.

- Examining classroom interactions and evaluation feedback to see whether the tensions revealed in this study are present in class or reserved for teacher-to-teacher discussions.
- Repeating the study in other university settings, particularly those with greater pedagogical flexibility and more academically engaged teachers, to see if the results differ.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the ambiguous cultural role of migrant teachers. Previous research suggested that migrant teachers often find themselves occupying unclear professional roles as cultural ambassadors and entertainers as well as language teachers (Breckenridge & Erling, 2011; Simmons & Chen, 2017). This same tendency was present in this study. Furthermore, an inflexible curriculum, coupled with frustrations about student's lack of cultural knowledge, seems to have led to misalignments between teacher expectations, institutional objectives and student interests. This situation has perpetuated default assumptions about the role of native speakers in Japanese ELT, inhibiting moves towards more contextually appropriate approaches to teaching intercultural competence.

These findings do not necessarily indicate that migrant teachers should be excluded from their students' broader intercultural education. Rather, they expose the tensions that may arise when migrant teachers are constrained as educators due to an overemphasis on their native speaker status and a tightly controlled curriculum. Addressing these concerns may be unrealistic within the institutional framework of a university course run by a dispatch company. Directly hiring faculty members with academic backgrounds in TESOL to teach these classes would likely result in improved teacher autonomy, responsiveness to student needs and academic engagement. Making such changes could advance X University's ELT practices and better serve its students and teachers, as well as Japan's broader internationalizing efforts.

Note: 1. This article is a revised version of the author's master's dissertation

completed at the University of Birmingham.

References

- Breckenridge, Y., & Erling, E. J. (2011). The native speaker English teacher and the politics of globalization in Japan. In P. Seargeant (Ed.), *English in Japan in the era of globalization* (pp. 80–100). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230306196_5
- Burgess, C. (2012). Foreigners reluctant to come, Japanese reluctant to leave: The uchimuki discourse as a cover for Japan's failure to secure and cultivate "global human resources." *The Study of International Relations, Tsuda University*, 39, 79–97. <https://tsuda.repo.nii.ac.jp/records/36>
- Butler, C. (2019). The ronin teacher: Making a living as a full-time part-timer at Japanese universities. In P. Wadden & C. C. Hale (Eds.), *Teaching English at Japanese universities: A new handbook* (pp. 25–32). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315147239>
- Byram, M. (2021). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence: Revisited*. Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781800410251>
- Canagarajah, A. S. (2006). TESOL at forty: What are the issues? *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(1), 9–34. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40264509>
- Cater, M. (2020). Japan has four seasons: Nihonjinron and native-speakerism at the eikaiwa gakkou. In D. Hooper & N. Hashimoto (Eds.), *Teacher narratives from the eikaiwa classroom: Moving beyond "McEnglish"* (pp. 64–72). Candlin & Mynard. <https://doi.org/10.47908/13/5>
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies*. Oxford University Press.
- Garton, S., & Copland, F. (2010). 'I like this interview; I get cakes and cats!': The effect of prior relationships on interview talk. *Qualitative Research*, 10(5), 533–551. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794110375231>
- Goodhew, M. (2025). Dispatch language companies at Japanese universities: An underexamined relationship. *The Language Teacher*, 49(3), 19–22. <https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTTLT49.3-3>

- Hashimoto, N. (2020). Foreign enough: Migrant nonnative English-speaking teachers in eikaiwa. In D. Hooper & N. Hashimoto (Eds.), *Teacher narratives from the eikaiwa classroom: Moving beyond “McEnglish”* (pp. 51–63). Candlin & Mynard. <https://doi.org/10.47908/13/4>
- Hollenback, M. D. (2017). A critical look at culture in EFL textbooks in Japan. In P. Clements, A. Krause, & H. Brown (Eds.), *Transformation in language education* (pp. 260–265). JALT.
- Holliday, A. (2005). *The struggle to teach English as an international language*. Oxford University Press.
- Honna, N., & Takeshita, Y. (2014). English as an international language and three challenging issues in English language teaching in Japan. In R. Marlina & R. A. Giri (Eds.), *The pedagogy of English as an international language* (pp. 65–77). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-06127-6_5
- Hopkins, S. (2022). A global conversation on native-speakerism: Toward promoting diversity in English language teaching. In K. Hemmy & C. Balasubramanian (Eds.), *World Englishes, global classrooms: The future of English literary and linguistic studies* (pp. 17–33). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-4033-0_2
- Kachru, B. (1985). Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: English language in the outer circle. In R. Quirk & H. G. Widdowson (Eds.), *English in the world: Teaching and learning the language and literatures* (pp. 11–36). Cambridge University Press.
- Kubota, R. (2002). The impact of globalization on language teaching in Japan. In D. Block & D. Cameron (Eds.), *Globalization and language teaching* (pp. 13–28). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203193679>
- Matikainen, T. (2015) Cultures of learning in Japanese EFL classrooms: Student and teacher expectations. In S. Horiguchi, Y. Imoto & G. S. Poole (Eds.), *Foreign language education in Japan: Exploring qualitative approaches* (pp. 103–117). Sense Publishers. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6300-325-4_7
- Matsuda, A. (2003). The ownership of English in Japanese secondary schools.
-
-

-
-
- World Englishes*, 22(4), 483–496. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971X.2003.00314.x>
- McVeigh, B. J. (2002). *Japanese higher education as myth*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315703169>
- Nagatomo, D. H. (2016). *Identity, gender and teaching English in Japan*. *Multilingual Matters*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.27080057>
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Purba, H. (2011). The importance of including culture in EFL teaching. *Journal of English Teaching*, 1(1), 44–56. <https://doi.org/10.33541/jet.v1i1.51>
- Rivers, D. J. (2013). Institutionalized native-speakerism: Voices of dissent and acts of resistance. In S. A. Houghton & D. J. Rivers (Eds.), *Native-speakerism in foreign language education: Intergroup dynamics in Japan* (pp. 75–91). *Multilingual Matters*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.27080058.11>
- Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Seargeant, P. (2009). *The idea of English in Japan: Ideology and the evolution of a global language*. *Multilingual Matters*. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.29308455>
- Simmons, N., & Chen, Y. W. (2017). “I never wanted to be famous”: Pushes and pulls of Whiteness through the eyes of foreign English language teachers in Japan. In S. Toyosaki & S. Eguchi (Eds.), *Intercultural communication in Japan* (pp. 224–237). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315516936>
- Stapleton, P. (2000). Culture’s role in TEFL: An attitude survey in Japan. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 13(3), 291–305. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908310008666605>
- Stewart, A., & Miyahara, M. (2011). Parallel universes: Globalization and identity in English language teaching at a Japanese university. In P. Seargeant (Ed.), *English in Japan in the era of globalization* (pp. 60–79). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230306196_4
- Toh, G. (2019). *Effecting change in English language teaching: Exposing collaborators and culprits in Japan*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-138-00000-0_4
-
-

org/10.1007/978-3-030-15261-1

Tomalin, B., & Stempleski, S. (1993). *Cultural awareness*. Oxford University Press.

Wolf, J. P. (2013). Exploring and contrasting EFL learners' perceptions of textbook-assigned and self-selected discussion topics. *Language Teaching Research, 17*(1), 49–66. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168812457535>

Author Bio

Elliot Clark has been teaching English in Japan since 2014 and is currently a Visiting Faculty Member in the Center for English Language Education at Asia University in Tokyo. His research interests include teacher cognition and institutional and cultural issues in ELT. clark_elliott@asia-u.ac.jp

Received: March 13, 2025

Accepted: December 6, 2025

Appendix

The main content questions from the interview guide are shown below.

1. What do you consider to be the purposes of English language classes in Japanese universities?
2. What topics do you find your students to be the most motivated to talk about in English?
3. How interested in topics concerning foreign countries and cultures, like travelling abroad and foreign entertainment, do you consider your students to be?
4. How interested in topics which are more focused on Japan do you consider your students to be?
5. What other considerations should there be besides student interest for choosing topics for university English classes?