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School Owners SIG Newsletter

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The SO SIG will be at this year's PanSIG at Meio University in Okinawa! Come see these SIG members:

Laura Macfarlane - *The People, The Product and The Principal* on Saturday, May 21 at 2:30 in room 108

Robert Sieveking - *Professional Development! The Next Step* on Saturday, May 21 at 1:25 in room 209

Also come participate in the **School Owners SIG forum** Sunday, May 22 at 1:00 in room 209

This issue also features articles by Ryan Hagglund on the importance of a productive business culture at schools and Mark Makino on the varieties of *eikaiwa* schools to be found in Japan.

Visit our website at <https://sosig.wordpress.com/> or join our facebook group, JALT School Owners SIG.



Article: School Business Culture

Ryan Hagglund

On April 1 and 2 we at MY English School had the first of our seven yearly days of teacher and staff training. For those seven days we close all of our schools and devote the full day to improving our school and ourselves as professionals. Consistent and continuous improvement is a part of our school culture.

A lot is being said and written recently in the business world about corporate culture and how important it is to the success of a business. Running a language school is an interesting hybrid in that it is both a business and educational endeavor, but luckily establishing a strong culture is beneficial for both.

One book I have read recently is *Tribal Leadership* (Logan, King, and Fischer-Wright, 2011). It highlights five different levels of culture within an organization, stating that most remain at level three while the most successful organizations move between levels four and five. For a better explanation please read the book, but organizations with cultures operating at levels four and five have members that focus on the organization as a whole, rather than themselves as individuals within the organization competing with others. It doesn't mean they lose themselves as individuals in any way, but instead focus on how the organization itself is unique and special.

I once spoke with a school owner who told me that all English conversation schools are essentially the same. I couldn't disagree more, but in order to stand out the school must have a culture that fosters a belief that their school is different—that there are aspects about it that make it better.

Some ways we have worked to make MY English School different are...

1) Hiring -

We try to make the hiring process difficult to weed out those who don't match our culture as well as create a feeling among those who did make it through that they are part of a special group.

2) Professionalism -

We try to treat teachers and staff as professionals. That means focusing less on rules and more on expectations and

descriptions of what success looks like. If teachers and staff focus on what success is rather than on specific rules to follow, they become less legalistic and more focused on results—results they often find ways to achieve themselves.

3) Professional Development -

As mentioned above, we close all of our schools seven times a year for full-day teacher and staff training. Each teacher is additionally a member of a mentorship group that helps offer support for classroom teaching and other areas. We also encourage and often pay for other professional development opportunities.

4) Growth and Responsibility Opportunities -

We have different teams that give teachers opportunities to grow and affect the school outside of simply teaching in the classroom. Currently we have a Leadership Team, Professional Development Team, and Curriculum Team with other teams likely possible in the future.

There are not many other English conversation schools, especially the larger ones, doing something similar. It does make a difference and I believe carries over to the quality of the lessons themselves and the reputation of our schools in their respective communities.

References

Logan, D., King, J., & Fischer-Wright, H. (2011). *Tribal Leadership: Leveraging Natural Groups to Build a Thriving Organization*. Retrieved from amazon.com

Article: A Taxonomy of Eikaiwa Schools 英会話教室の分類

Mark Makino

The private English teaching industry known as *eikaiwa* forms a large and influential part of English education in Japan. However, research on *eikaiwa* schools has tended to treat them as socio-cultural curiosities than educational institutions. The *eikaiwa* industry has been analyzed for its sexual and ideological underpinnings (Appleby, 2013; Bailey, 2007; Kubota, 1998; Kubota & McKay, 2009; Lummis, 1976), but only rarely have its classroom practices been treated (Kubota, 2011a). The closest the industry has had to in-depth analysis is non-academic exposés and first-person travel narratives (Currie-Robson, 2015; Kolpak, 2014). Yet to take a comparison of *eikaiwa* to fast food (Appleby, 2013) literally, *eikaiwa* are just as essential to a full description of ELT in Japan as Subway and McDonald's are to a full account of nutrition in the modern United States. The *eikaiwa* industry is no longer as large as it once was (Budmar, 2013; Clarke, 2007), but varieties of *eikaiwa* can still be found in virtually all cities and towns across Japan. This article represents an attempt to facilitate further research on the industry by separating *eikaiwa* into distinct categories. Before these categories are introduced, some generalities about the *eikaiwa* industry as a whole will be given.

First, *eikaiwa* employ native speakers (NSs) in much greater numbers than other educational institutions, and advertise themselves with reference to the supposed benefits of learning from NSs (Seargeant, 2009). NSs, typically portrayed in advertising as Caucasian males, are also used to appeal to students' romantic and globalist aspirations (Bailey, 2006, 2007; Kelsky, 2001; Kubota, 2011a, 2011b; Kubota and McCay, 2009). A particular brand of native-speakerism (Holliday, 2006) seems widespread in *eikaiwa*.

Second, *eikaiwa* are often the only source of English classes for children under the age of 10 and adults not in higher education. Although the recent trend worldwide (Enever & Moon, 2010) and in Japan ("Enhanced English Education sought", 2013) is for elementary schools to offer English at younger and younger ages, many *eikaiwa* recruit children starting at one year old or below, giving them almost a decade-long monopoly before elementary schools' Foreign Language Activities begin (Fukada, 2011). Adults also lack alternatives to *eikaiwa* when choosing to revisit English, due to the absence of a community college system (McVeigh, 2002). *Eikaiwa* are often the only venues available for prospective English learners in Japan.

Last, *eikaiwa* tend to avoid traditional, didactic approaches to ELT seen in mandatory education (Hino, 1988; Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004) in favor of broadly communicative methods. Free conversation is a very common class style (Appleby, 2013; Bailey, 2007; Kubota, 2011a; Lummis, 1976; Seargeant, 2009). It may also be significant that *eikaiwa* websites seem to prefer terms such as “fun” and “relax” to “study” or “effort” in describing their classes, which may imply that, as Kubota (2011a) concludes, *eikaiwa* may be perceived as a type of leisure rather than an intellectual undertaking.

Eikaiwa are ripe for serious study of their pedagogical practices. However, at least three factors stand in the way of this, the first being the lack of a curriculum-setting body such as the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT). While junior high and high schools have been shown to roundly ignore at least some MEXT teaching guidelines as in the case of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Nishino and Watanabe 2008), for the *eikaiwa* industry there simply are no guidelines. A study on chain *eikaiwa* such as that done by Bailey (2007) may not offer insights into non-chain *eikaiwa*. The second factor standing in the way of serious study of *eikaiwa* is the priority that these private institutions place on keeping their practices secret as well as their lack of potential benefit from research on them. As a result, *eikaiwa* have been shown to resist the attention of researchers (Kubota, 2011a). The third factor is that when discussing *eikaiwa*, there is no agreed-upon framework for classifying types of schools. *Eikaiwa* may differ in class size, educational goals, degrees of L1 use, degree of standardization across branches, and many other factors; and these differences arise with some degree of consistency across various types of *eikaiwa*, as will be explored in the following sections.

To the eventual end of facilitating research into the pedagogical content of *eikaiwa*, I will propose a preliminary scheme to use as a starting point when classifying *eikaiwa* schools. The types of schools introduced will include chain *eikaiwa* (see Appendix A), non-chain *eikaiwa* (Appendix B), and amateur *eikaiwa* before a brief note on the relatively new field of online *eikaiwa*.

Chain *Eikaiwa*

The chain *eikaiwa* schools can be found all across Japan, in towns large and small as well as in advertising on billboards and on television, giving them a cultural presence that reaches beyond their student body (Bailey, 2006; Budmar, 2013; Seargeant, 2009). This is not because chains are a majority of *eikaiwa*; METI statistics list branch foreign language conversation businesses (as opposed to head offices or single-location businesses) as 2,089 out of a total of 5,090 institutions, or less than half of the total (METI, 2012). However, these branches earned more than 765 million yen of the industry's 1.2 billion yen total, meaning that while chain locations do not outnumber single-location language schools, they substantially out-earn them. A relatively small number of chain *eikaiwa* companies seems responsible for most negative press about the industry (Clarke, 2007; McCrostie, 2014).

Pedagogically, several chains feature proprietary materials available for purchase, which hints at a secondary role for teachers as salespeople. Scheduling, which at some chains allows students to change lesson times frequently (Bailey, 2007; Kubota, 2011a), may provide convenience at the expense of continuity of lesson plans or even teachers, again increasing the need to create standardization in other ways. One of the attempts at standardization that has become widely known is the emphasis on monolingual L2 lessons (Bailey, 2007), which is portrayed as a strength in promotional materials, although it could also be construed as a result of chains' practices of recruiting teachers directly from offices in *inner circle* (Kachru, 1992) countries. The reader is encouraged to read these companies' own promotional materials in Appendix A.

There is an intermediate step between large chains and the "cottage industry" of small *eikaiwa* described in the next section, which may comprise small or regional chains as well as single-location *eikaiwa* with more than a few employees. I will attempt to provide a rubric for describing these intermediary *eikaiwa* in the conclusion of this article.

“Cottage Industry” and single-location *Eikaiwa*

The smaller, individually-owned type of *eikaiwa* has been studied by Nagatomo (2013) in which she refers to these types of *eikaiwa* as a “cottage industry”. In recent years, single-location institutions, home-based or not, have made up roughly half of the 5,090 total foreign language conversation businesses in Japan (METI, 2012), making them as numerous as their chain counterparts. Fortunately, as Kubota (2011a) discovered, single-location *eikaiwa* may be more receptive to the attention of researchers than chains have been.

In terms of educational practices at these smaller *eikaiwa*, a few things can be said as a matter of probability. Demographically, teachers hired by smaller *eikaiwa* are more likely to be long-term residents of Japan. Many individually-owned *eikaiwa* are in fact owned by their sole teachers (Nagatomo, 2013), and recruiting teachers directly from English-speaking countries as NOVA, Aeon and GABA do requires an overseas presence. Many smaller *eikaiwa* in fact play up the long residence in Japan and Japanese language abilities of their teachers. The English-only policies found at some chains may not exist at smaller *eikaiwa*; Kubota (2011a) found that some schools may conduct classes in Japanese. Unlike chains, smaller *eikaiwa* rarely publish their own textbooks and sometimes conversely promote themselves with their lack of sales pressure. A lack of multiple locations also relieves schools of the need to establish a house method to standardize their product as chains do. There is considerable diversity in L1s and backgrounds of the owners of small *eikaiwa*; some are owned by Japanese, others by long-term residents of Japan from a variety of countries. Individual school ownership may provide a means for Japanese individuals to participate in a field which otherwise favors hiring white males (Appleby, 2013; Kubota, 2011a, 2011b). *Eikaiwa* websites exemplifying each of these points can be found in Appendix B.

Amateur *Eikaiwa*

Kubota’s (2011a) study of *eikaiwa* in a mid-sized town included as subjects a “non-profit Christian Organization” (p. 477) and an informal group of learners who rented space in a community center. At a level of commercialization below that of individually-owned or cottage industry *eikaiwa* lie what I will call amateur *eikaiwa*, a categorization designed to include

eikaiwa run either by volunteers or the students themselves. Besides costs, which in Kubota's (2011a) study were a fraction of the tuition at the franchised *eikaiwa* from the same town, there are reasons to expect these *eikaiwa* to differ from more traditional *eikaiwa*. The most obvious difference is the student body; students who form their own classes are likely to be similar demographically and motivationally, as in Kubota's (2011a) group of middle-aged hobbyists. The absence of white male teachers may also preclude the sexual and political dynamics frequently observed in other *eikaiwa* research (Bailey, 2006, 2007; Kubota, 2011a; Kubota and McKay, 2009). Last, also due to the possible absence of a teacher, classes are likely to be student-centered as in the lesson outline given by the Tokyo Eikaiwa Club (<http://www.eikaiwaclub.com/>). Given the buzzword status of "student-centeredness" in current SLA writing, and particularly in light of the priority given to the characteristics of the teacher in both *eikaiwa* advertising and research, these student-organized *eikaiwa* seem a promising and unique venue for research.

Online Eikaiwa

Numerous online *eikaiwa* sites have sprung up in recent years, and traditional *eikaiwa* chains are expanding into the online world as well. For this article, a small sample of websites of exclusively online *eikaiwa* was reviewed (see Appendix C). Some aspects of chain *eikaiwa* have been transferred intact to the online format, such as the student-set schedules and possibility of different teachers for each lesson. A noteworthy difference from traditional *eikaiwa* seems to be the greater presence of *outer circle* (Kachru, 1992) Filipino teachers. Of the four sites reviewed, two promoted the benefits of having teachers from the Philippines, while the other two maintained traditional *eikaiwa*'s central place for Caucasian NSs. This may imply differences in student motivations between online and traditional *eikaiwa*, as the symbolic power of the white male NS to denote worldliness (Kubota & McKay, 2009) and gender equality (Bailey, 2007) has been one of the clearest themes of previous *eikaiwa* research. Research into the motivations and profiles of online *eikaiwa* learners and teachers could yield instructive differences with traditional *eikaiwa*.

Conclusions

In researching eikaiwa, a few characteristics emerge to distinguish schools from one another. The primary such characteristic used in this article has been their status and size as businesses. Others, often but not always correlated with that characteristic, include:

- **Hiring practices:** How strong is the school's focus on NSs as teachers? Are NSs and Japanese teachers given different responsibilities? Does the school frequently hire new teachers, and if so, how?
- **Standardization:** How strictly enforced is the school's chosen teaching method, if one exists? Does the school have its own brand, characters, coursebooks, etc.?
- **Teaching practices:** Is there a set curriculum? How is it implemented? What skills are emphasized, for what ages and for what reasons?
- **Target students:** What age are most of the students? Are students organized by age, grade, or other variables? What is the expected student turnover?
- **Advertising:** Does the school produce television commercials, billboards, branded merchandise or other paraphernalia? How does the school attempt to appeal to prospective students or their parents?
- **Administration:** Is the school owned by an individual or a corporation? How are business and curricular decisions made? Does the school employ office staff in addition to teachers?
- **Online presence:** Is the Internet a vital part of the school's operations? Are lessons or supplementary materials offered online?
- **Scheduling:** Does the school offer consistency in lesson times and teachers, or a degree of freedom for the student in choosing these? How long and how frequent are lessons?

Clearly, not all schools fall neatly into one of the categories given in the body of this article. The characteristics in the above list may serve to further distinguish individual schools from others in the same rough category.

It is to be hoped that the nascent research on classroom practices in *eikaiwa* will continue to grow. Much research to date has focused on socio-ideological aspects of *eikaiwa*. Unfortunately, the tendency to treat *eikaiwa* as pedagogically unimportant has resulted in a lack of knowledge about what really happens when people choose to study English at *eikaiwa* schools. If *eikaiwa* really is like fast food, let this article count as an early attempt to get some nutrition labels on it.

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SO SIG Officers and Contributors

Coordinator – Ryan Hagglund

At the School Owners' SIG AGM in November I became the coordinator. I first came to Japan in 1998 on the JET Program and have spent my entire time enjoying the wonderful nature of Yamagata Prefecture. After obtaining my MA in TEFL/TESL from the University of Birmingham and an MAT and Oregon State teaching certification from Willamette University I took over MY English School (<http://myeigo.com/>) in Higashine, Yamagata in 2008. Since then we have grown to seven schools in Yamagata and Kansai. I truly believe that we all benefit when the level of quality in the English conversation school industry improves and want to work to help others—and myself—better educate our students and compete with the larger chains. In addition to MY English School I also teach at Yamagata University. You can reach me at rhagglund@myeigo.com.

Membership Chair – Paul Moritoshi

Hello SO SIG members. I came to Japan in 1996 and spent three years as an ALT. In 2002, I graduated with an MA in TEF/SL from the University of Birmingham (UK), which led to a part-time university position that same year. Since then I've taught at various universities and a junior college, mainly in Okayama city. I'm currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Applied Linguistics with Aston University (UK) in the area of Project-Based Language Learning. I'm actively involved in various areas of JALT and am also the Associate Editor for *OnCUE Journal's* Professional Development section. In 2013 I started a *kojin jigyou gaisha* called P.A.S. Communication which provides both foreign language instruction and support services in a range of foreign languages. I'm now an Associate Professor at Chugoku Gakuen University. I also enjoy presenting on a range of EFL-related issues.

Programs Chair – Robert Sieveking

Hello SO SIG members. I first came to Japan in 1996 spending most of that time teaching in Okinawa. I also spent two years teaching in Korea. I have lived the past 9 years in Izumo Shimane, where I started EBS Intercultural Education Center. I have a M.A. in education with the focus on TESOL from the University of Wollongong (Australia). I'm looking forward to meeting and getting to know all the members here at SO.

Treasurer – Mark Makino

Hello fellow school owners. My name is Mark Makino and I've lived in Japan for 12 years now, 11 of those years running my own eikaiwa school in Fujinomiya, near Mt. Fuji. I got my M.A. in Applied Linguistics at the University of Leicester in 2014, writing my thesis on Japanese and native-speaking English teachers in the *eikaiwa* industry. In addition to my position at the School Owners SIG, I am President of the Shizuoka JALT Chapter, which means I get to see both sides of JALT's thrilling expense reporting process. I spend the time I have between the above activities reading and playing the guitar.

Laura Macfarlane

Laura Macfarlane resides in Hokkaido and is the owner of two schools, EFL Club and Macfarlane English School. She participates in the training of teachers, oversees operations and curriculum development, and provides counseling to her over 700 students.