

## **Do teachers have the power to shape their curriculum? Expectations and responsibilities in Eikaiwas**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research aims to investigate the perceived responsibilities and roles of teachers working in a small, English-language private school undergoing an overhaul of its curriculum. Using research diaries and interviews between the researcher and teaching peers, and the researcher and school manager, this action research study investigates how each stakeholder envisions their role within the classroom and school, as well as their perceptions of the new teaching materials and updated teaching methods. Through analysis of interviews, research diaries, and test scores, it is evident that the teachers' primary concerns are not with the material's pedagogical focus but with the volume and complexity of material. The study provides a snapshot of a small school undergoing great change. The changing environment and stakeholders' attitudes are analyzed and reflected upon, but this study does not track student outcomes long-term, nor how the teachers have developed their teaching and classrooms.

Keywords: action research, Eikaiwa, teacher beliefs, teaching in Japan, new teaching materials, teacher expectations, stakeholder expectations, private education, teacher autonomy, meeting students' needs, learner adaptation

### **INTRODUCTION**

The introduction of new learning materials to any learning environment is difficult for all involved, but necessary if teachers and other stakeholders wish to utilize the most up-to-date and pedagogically-sound materials available. Due to the exponential increase in the importance of English in East Asia (Bolton, 2008), particularly amongst young learners, the methods and materials used are vitally important to meet both national educational standards and learners' personal expectations. Teachers, learners, parents of young learners, and private institute owners all have a stake in the implementation of the best teaching resources and methods available, but also have a variety of preferences and needs to be fulfilled. Although a considerable amount of research has been devoted to the theories that underlie the study of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), less attention has been paid to the

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practical application of these theories in educational contexts, which may have differing values and concerns.

The results of this research project highlight several ways that a sample set of stakeholders responded to new materials and lesson goals being introduced into a Japanese private education institute (*Eikaiwa*). This action research project was conducted by an instructor within an *Eikaiwa* as a complete-member-researcher (Adler & Adler, 1994), in order to provide an ‘insider’ perspective (Mertens, 2005, p.383) on the implementation of new teaching materials and an exploration of surrounding issues.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **EFL Focuses**

Throughout the years, theorists have discussed at length the evolving ways to best approach foreign language education (Mitchell et al., 2014). Educators and learners have come to recognize a need for real-world language awareness and practical applications in EFL teaching environments, resulting in tests and study materials aiming to meet these needs. Throughout Asia, a persistent perceived weakness in spoken fluency is being addressed through ‘conversational’ English language instruction focused on student-teacher and student-student activities. This approach aims to increase linguistic output in EFL students, shown to result in target language development (Hakuta, 1986; Wong Fillmore, 1979). More recently, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has also been employed in many settings to engage students and develop interest in inter-cultural exchange, particularly amongst unmotivated students (Banegas et al., 2013; Coyle et al., 2010). However, when employed by teachers unfamiliar with the approach, CLIL can be perceived to have “no explicit link to unit- relevant formulaic sequences and language targets” (Le-Thi et al., 2017). These sequences and language goals are “deemed as highly valuable to EFL learners” (Le-Thi et al., 2017) while its apparent absence in CLIL results in a lack of engagement from students, and poor implementation by teachers.

### **The Japanese Context**

In the traditional Japanese education model, the role of a teacher is as a presenter of information with students responsible for noting and memorizing that information to achieve success. This classroom format references “ingrained notions of appropriate classroom behavior” (Rowland & Barrs, 2013), encouraged by “the family, the school, the community, the country, all of which are linked” (Hood, 2003, p. 113). These education models are familiar to parents and are still widely used within the Japanese public school system. However, they do not provide easy integration of English-only classes focused on communicative language teaching, sociolinguistic-based activities, and CLIL approaches. Daulton (2007) describes the Japanese EFL classroom as characterized by, “its dependence on grammar-translation and ... taciturn students,” and limited by “self-efficacy, fear of failure, anxiety, and intolerance of mistakes.” Japan has been steadily slipping further down the “low proficiency” band, ranking 55th internationally, according to EF Education First’s 2020 English Proficiency Index (2020), despite the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science

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and Technology's (MEXT) continued attempts at reform and assertions regarding the necessity for Japan's continued English-proficiency improvements (MEXT, 2014; Butler & Iino, 2005). Yet communication-focused English teaching still "poses a serious challenge to those who follow a traditional mode of classroom organization" (Penfield, 1987), leaving teachers struggling to accommodate learning and classroom teaching preferences while delivering materials designed for a very different learning environment.

Aside from mainstream public schooling, it is estimated that 70 percent of Japanese children will attend some form of private institute at some point in their education (Bray, 2007), with this figure steadily increasing year on year. Eikaiwas are seen as a necessary tool to supplement insufficient or lacking public school education and help students pass necessary university entrance exams. Most Eikaiwas offer a range of classes from young nursery to adult classes, though there is often a necessary divide between child-focused and adult-focused Eikaiwas. These schools usually offer a small staff of native English speakers and/or bilingual Japanese teachers and focus on communication skills via engaging, enjoyable lessons. However, with little professional oversight (Lowe, 2015), assessment of teaching validity or review is often lacking with Eikaiwas' continued business being reliant on student enrollment numbers. Because of the lack of consistency between Eikaiwa chains, parents must assess an Eikaiwa's value according to personal perceptions. As such, Eikaiwas aim to present 'fun' classes to keep students happy, complete all activities in colorful textbooks, assign certain volumes of homework per week, and achieve performative-focused English output from the students. Classes are expected to follow scheduling guidelines and timetables, allowing students to make up missed lessons with another teacher, and move between classes fluidly.

## **Materials and Reception**

If teachers wish to be effective in the classroom, they require support with not only what to teach, but how to teach required materials (Shulman, 1986). This support is particularly relevant when introducing new material, allowing it to be incorporated smoothly and be embraced by teachers. Shen, Yuan, and Ewing (2015) assert that accessibility, reliability, and relevance of materials are extremely important to both EFL learners and teachers. Because the students and parents mostly interact with the teachers and are considered 'the face' of the Eikaiwa, teachers' perceptions of the new materials are key to understanding the dynamic between stakeholders. In a private-company learning environment, such as an Eikaiwa, teachers are led to lean more heavily on the supplied materials in a multitude of ways. These can include lesson consistency, lesson planning, time-saving, additional resources, pacing, language presentation methods, lesson aims, and target language. Without explicit teaching goals or outside stakeholders' assessment, teachers rely on materials to dictate their teaching process meaning that teachers can come to judge their efficacy according to how well students learned and responded to the material.

## **Self-Study and Action Research**

Private children's education is a driving force in the future of English language skills in Japan as it is such a major component in English education. Rigorous research conducted by Eikaiwa teachers can lead to greater knowledge of their perceptions and practices. While

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many articles convey the importance of research, action research is highlighted as a uniquely important path to addressing teachers' concerns and developing a deeper understanding of interrelated educational factors (McKay, 2006). Action research has the explicit goal of studying and improving pedagogical practices that are truly context-focused (Banegas et al., 2013; Burns, 2010; Johnson, 1992) and may seem more relevant to Eikaiwa teachers who otherwise rarely engage in research unless encouraged by outside authorities (Borg, 2009). A systemized approach to research encourages "a type of inquiry that... can be shared with others" (Johnson, 2003, p. 1). This approach may be deemed as more relevant to Eikaiwa teachers without formalized training or qualifications, or a lack of engagement with academic realms.

Prior to the implementation of the new teaching materials, it was unclear as to what issues would arise throughout the process. As this catalyst unfolded, responsive research methodologies and data collection were employed, including ones that recognize the complete-member-researcher (Adler & Adler, 1994). Research into current practice, self-evaluation, and training can "build teachers' self-efficacy for teaching [English Language Learners] by not just covering the required content, but by being conscientious in how the curricula are organized and delivered" (Jimenez-Silva, Olson, & Jimenez Hernandez, 2012). By using action research, the evolving themes and topics were taken into account in direct response to the relevant stakeholders, while "...encouraging teachers to become their own classroom researchers can have a beneficial effect in all areas of the curriculum. In particular, it has a great potential for professional self-development and renewal" (Nunan, 1990, p.75). Action Research allowed the teachers and manager to guide the research according to what became evident throughout the process, allowing them to better explore their practice in a meaningful and directly relevant way.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Environment**

The Eikaiwa in focus offers weekly, 50-minute, lessons for one to eight students with a native-English-speaking instructor. The language center is located in a middle-class, suburban neighborhood in Japan. Students range from Elementary to Middle School-aged Japanese children who receive 1-3 hours of EFL instruction of varying quality and focus through their school and are accustomed to the Japanese educational system. As the Eikaiwa is a private institution, the focus is split between providing quality EFL instruction, meeting parental expectations, reputational competitiveness, and profitability. Through guidance from the Eikaiwa owner, the three instructors (including the researcher) were encouraged to focus on spoken output, student engagement, general adherence to prescribed classroom materials, and positive test outcomes, though exact methods used are at the discretion of the instructors.

**TABLE 1**

### **Participant Profiles**

Manager and Business Owner	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3 (Researcher)
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Teaching Experience			
20 years Eikaiwa teaching in Japan	20 years Eikaiwa teaching in Japan, 10+ years at Eikaiwa in question	5 years Eikaiwa teaching in Japan, 4 years at Eikaiwa in question	2 years teaching in Japan at Eikaiwa in question, 4 years teaching in South Korea, 1 year teaching in Australia
Formal Qualifications			
Young Learners training offered through JALT seminars	None	Bachelor's Degree in unrelated field	TESOL certificate, CELTA, undergoing Master's Degree in Education

## Teaching Material Changeover

Previous materials employed by the Eikaiwa consisted of the English Land collection (Pearson, 2019a). These materials included a range of beginner-level class books, homework books, flashcards, teacher's books, and audio CDs. Each chapter, to be completed over four lessons, would generally include vocabulary words, a grammar point, and a short phonics section. Testing within these materials was straightforward (Nakamura, 2005) and with little effort, students were easily able to, and were expected to, achieve 100% scores. These materials had been used at the Eikaiwa for approximately 6 years.

The manager's decision to change materials was made due to discontinuation from the publisher as well as a belief that the material and rate of progression were insufficient – particularly when aligned with the Junior English Test (JET's) expected outcomes. The JET, offered by the Eikaiwa yearly, aims to measure young learner's English communicative proficiency and use, rather than rote memorization and reading comprehension (Features of JET, n.d.) and is part of the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) system, a popular standardized test used for school and university admissions in Japan as well as by employers. Through interviewing the manager, it also became clear that she believed students would be interested in the online components and that some parents had requested more challenging materials.

The new collection, Poptropica English Islands book series (Poptropica), is designed for a daily-lesson class load which progresses at a fast pace and assumes some amount of English use outside of the classroom (Pearson, 2019b). This learning environment did not match the one-a-week EFL environment of the Eikaiwa. Pearson (2019b) also promotes student engagement and critical thinking; a less common lesson style in Japan. Poptropica features a set of course books, homework books, and teaching materials both online and physical. While teacher's books were available, they were not provided for the teachers in this study. Poptropica used a 'blended learning' approach. Each unit contained (a) vocabulary and grammatical structures implicitly introduced via a dialogue between characters; (b) a lesson discussing social values, a cross-curricular study or CLIL based section; (c) a phonics component; (d) and a unit review (Lochowski et al., 2017). A communicative, sociolinguistic

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approach was employed through a task-based or personalization activity in each unit. An online portal was available for both students and teachers allowing for presentation via interactive whiteboards, assigning and tracking additional homework, and access to additional materials. Teachers in the Eikaiwa were expected to adapt these materials to the Eikaiwa system and switch to the new materials through the spring break.

## Data Collection Methods

Throughout the data-collection process, a research diary (Appendix A) was kept using “moderate participation” (Spradley, 1980), detailing teacher meetings – a fixed, weekly occurrence. Discussion topics included in-classroom behavior, instructor concern, issues that arose and how they were dealt with within the teachers’ classrooms, as well as notifications and event planning. To add to this research diary, weekly reflections were also recorded using a *Reflection – Critical Discussion – Issue Identification – Solution Proposition – Implementation* process adapted from Adler and Adler (1994). The reflections were helpful in analyzing ongoing issues with a particular focus on using physical learning materials (e.g., undelivered books, website logins, student access codes, and tablet Wi-Fi connectivity), student behavior, student difficulties with material, the adaptability of the learning materials, and practical ways these issues were addressed. These reflections were drawn from explicitly stated issues (e.g., teacher to teacher or student/parent to teacher), non-verbal student reactions, lesson participation, homework completion, and perceived instructor stress levels.

These research diaries and weekly reflections helped highlight topics and questions, which were then raised via recorded, casual interviews held with fellow teachers and the manager. Though the research diaries and reflections prompted some questions in the interviews, interviewees’ unexpected responses lead to more personalized and informative topics of conversation. These interviews provided valuable perspectives and areas of concern, and allowed for the recording of a wider range of reflections and approaches (Adler & Adler, 1994). Each perspective helped to identify or solidify concerns and misunderstandings that arose throughout the diary-taking stages and weekly staff meetings.

The research period spanned the introduction of the new materials, culminating in the Unit 1 test (Lochowski et al., 2017). Students’ responses to the test topics and difficulty, as well as their test outcomes, were reflected on and discussed in staff meetings. These reflections and results informed areas of growth, weaknesses, and potential future areas of focus within the Eikaiwa, while also providing a snapshot of student progress over the research period.

## FINDINGS

Through the study of new materials being introduced into a school, various expected and unexpected areas of interest were able to be addressed. Upon beginning the project, it was expected that the main areas of focus would be a comparison between old and new materials, how the teachers implemented these changes, and how the changes would be reflected in students’ test outcomes. However, through research diaries, reflections, and in particular the interviews, several new topics and concerns were raised that proved to be vital to the material changeover and a much more informative area of study.



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It soon became clear that there were misconceptions and differing perceptions regarding language learning pedagogy, the roles and responsibilities of the teachers, the value and use of the language being taught, and the validity of the materials. Weekly research diaries documented teachers' implementation of the new materials and concerns going forward while the interviews explored how teachers regarded their roles in the classroom and business at large. Knowledge gathered throughout the research project provided reflections grouped into a multiple of inter-linking themes: the materials, lesson planning and approaches, utilization or non-utilization of materials, roles and responsibilities of a teacher, handling varying proficiencies in the classroom, self-efficacy, and how teachers approach their classes' needs.

## **Materials**

In weekly meetings, teachers showed positive attitudes to the modernization of materials and themes, but mixed attitudes towards the difficulty and volume of content. "I: Do you think this material and change in focus is more appropriate for our students? T1: No, I don't. Sorry, [manager]!" (Appendix C, 5:15-6:20). Negative feedback for the new materials often stemmed from the increased lesson-planning requirements and uncertainty with what sections needed focus and how to teach them. There was a stark difference to the previously used materials regarding expected test outcomes and language retention rates that was reflected in tests' perceived difficulty and results. Much of this had to do with progression and pace as the materials were promoted for use with five-a-week lessons rather than once-a-week lessons. The difficulty with teaching at this rushed pace was reflected in T1's interviews: "There's more in the book, but it means there's more to remember but you don't have any extra time to remember it. So sometimes less is more" (Appendix C, 6:21-7:20). Despite these hurdles, all teachers acknowledged the need for raised language requirements and confidence in handling any related difficulties. Attempts were made to redecorate classrooms with posters and language used in the books, demonstrating teachers' willingness to progress with the materials in the future.

## **Lesson Planning and Approaches**

The manager expressed an assumption that newer, more detailed materials would require less planning requirements and time (Appendix B), however this was not reality for teachers. "Before, there was a lot of time to fill. Now, we're always rushing, and going through things too fast so we can just finish the pages. There's no time for games or review or anything. It's so much more stressful" (Appendix C, Teacher 2's Interview). With some lessons, teachers expressed confusion over expected lesson outcomes, and the best approach, "I don't think they learn much from the 'social skills' page. They're not really here to learn about playing safely in the park or sharing with their friends" (Appendix C Teacher 2's Interview). During these sections, they focused on pleasing parents, rather than the lesson outcomes. "So we just go through it quickly so they can finish their homework" (Appendix C Teacher 2's Interview), but accepted that lesson focus will improve with time and unit pacing adjustments. Unlike English Land materials, the desired outcome and process for each activity was reported as non-intuitive and involved a more communicative focus rather than explicit memorization of a set of vocabulary and one grammar point. Teacher Guides were

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available through the online teaching mode accessible via a tablet, but usually consisted of directions such as “complete Activity 4” and write “T for True, or F for False.” It was unclear if more detailed guidance and lesson goals were provided by the physical teacher guides, which the school did not purchase.

## Utilization or Non-Utilization of Materials

Parents, students, and teachers showed a large-scale acceptance of familiar material forms (e.g., flashcards, provided posters, audio CDs, and textbooks and homework books) but minimal to no usage of new material forms, namely online access to audio files, activities, and teaching guides (Lochowski et al., 2017). The Poptropica series included a digital version of the student book, which would allow a teacher to display the same materials on a screen or projector. As the school did not have screens or computers, an Amazon Fire tablet with a 10-inch screen was purchased for each classroom, along with portable projectors. Though students showed initial excitement for the inclusion of a tablet in the first lesson, they showed little interest in the simple, repetitive matching activities and quickly lost interest in viewing the book via a small screen rather than their own book. Internet speed issues also caused long delays when using the online materials, which greatly disrupted the flow of the lesson. These digital resources were largely abandoned by teachers within the first two weeks.

There were also low sign-up rates amongst parents/students for online games, materials, and additional homework activities – only 10% of students had created logins by the end of the study – despite this being a deciding factor for management during curriculum selection process and in previous complaints from parents on the low volume of homework.

There was always a pocket people that demanded more, now that’s reflective of where English Land was inadequate. [A]ll you had to do is draw four lines you were done [with] your homework, right? [They] have a lot more writing or exercises in Poptropica. There’s a lot more writing that’s necessary. You couldn’t do your homework just in 5 minutes anymore, right? ... For people who thought that English Land was enough, [they] will probably have a bit of a surprise. (Appendix B)

## The Role and Responsibilities of a Teacher

This research highlights the differing opinions of the manager and the teachers when it comes to the teachers’ roles.

**TABLE 2**  
**Comparison of the Manager’s and Teachers’ Expectations**

Management’s Expectations of Teachers	Teachers’ Self-perceived Expectations
Lesson Outcomes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● An education focus</li> <li>● Care for individual learning needs - as far as is possible in this environment</li> <li>● Practicality of language learned</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Students learn some amount of language in each unit, with good recall of at least one language point</li> </ul>



- Parents see their child performing some amount of language during Parent Observations
- Achieving good student test outcomes in the JET

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#### Student Fulfilment

- Student engagement and involvement in a stress-free environment
- Setting students up to achieve individual goals, regardless of level
- Overall, keeping students and parents happy
- Students have fun, at least for part of the lesson

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#### Business Goals

- Responsibility for marketing, enrolment rates, business concerns etc. lie with management, not teachers
- Students enjoy the lesson enough not to withdraw

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#### Teachers

- Teachers learn from test results and adapt their teaching where necessary

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Overall, teachers expressed a desire to keep both students and parents happy through a combination of fun classrooms and high test scores. When asked what they were responsible for, T1 answered (Appendix C): “If the kids don’t enjoy my class, then they’re not gonna want to come. If parents are not happy, they’re gonna make a complaint. And if [the manager]’s not happy, she’s gonna complain. So I have to keep them all happy.” Meanwhile, the manager expressed a need for Japan to become more globally minded and for students to feel that foreign languages were achievable and relevant. The manager, reflecting on how some parents respond with fear when faced with English (Appendix B): “Well there’s the general kinda consensus that... well the parents just kinda think... it’s not part of my life.” Teachers were focused on dealing with day-to-day teaching concerns centered on their students’ immediate needs while also feeling responsible for the functioning of the business. However, the manager expressed concerns regarding the overall perception of English in Japan and how students could achieve long-term English educational goals.

### Varying Levels of Proficiency in Classrooms

Through staff meetings, interviews, and informal comments between lessons, teachers reported a wide range of student responses. When faced with raised language output expectations, some students showed difficulty retaining content and recognizing contextual use. Students showed a lessening interest in classes and difficulty in following activities without heavy prompting. However, some students showed a great amount of adaptability and language expansion supported by the plethora of materials.

The Unit 1 test results (Table 3) also helped highlight the students who were not able to follow more involved contexts that required independent thinking and judgement. The difficulties in addressing such students’ learning needs were discussed in group and one-on-one meetings. Concerning one student whose parent had contacted us regarding his difficulties:

- Concern 1. Students feeling like they didn’t know ‘the answer’ in class.
- Concern 2. Students not knowing what was being asked of them within lesson activities / not sure of the expected activity outcome. E.g. Students/parents unsure of the purpose of CLIL lessons.
- Concern 3. Students, particularly those with previously-identified learning difficulties, unable to comprehend the lesson. (Diary, Unit 1 Week 3, Appendix A)

Through the manager’s interview (Appendix B), in regards to this topic, the manager commented that although “there is an individual attention to our students [and] their education learning needs,” it is a group lesson so “there are limitations” (Appendix C) as to how much the lessons could be customized or paced. In such cases, it was suggested to revert to simple rote-memorization focused lessons in order to keep the student happy and enrolled. “As a proposed solution for concern 3, and as a possible explanation for concern 1 & 2, the Eikaiwa owner suggested a return to call-and-response activities, Teacher-led drilling exercises, and direct and grammar-translation methods” (Diary, Unit 1 Week 3, Appendix A).

It was also noted that students in the lower levels, Poptropica books 1 and 2, were quickly able to adapt to the new materials whereas students studying books 3 through 6 were struggling with the volume of presumed language awareness and critical thinking skills. While this was an expected outcome, the students’ difficulties highlighted the insufficiencies of the previously used English Land series. However, despite some students’ perception that the materials were a lot more difficult, test results showed high percentage scores (Table 3 below). It was hoped that this will develop a sense of achievement and self-efficacy in the students as well as the teachers.

**TABLE 3**  
**Unit 1 Test Scores and Average Test Results, Organized by Level**

	Reading & Writing	Listening & Speaking	Total score (%)
Poptropica Level 1*			
Student 1	14	13	100
Student 2	14	13	100
Student 3	14	13	100
Student 4	14/14	11/13	92
Average			98%
Poptropica Level 2*			
Student 1	15.5	23	87.5
Student 2	16	21	84.0
Student 3	15	23	86.3
Student 4	16	22	86.3

Student 5	14	22	81.0
Student 6	14	21	79.5
Student 7**	10	12	50.0
Student 8	17.5	22	89.7
Student 9	18.5	24	96.5
Student 10	12	21	75.0
Student 11	16	24	90.0
Student 12	13/20	22/24	79.5
Average			82.1%
Poptropica Level 3*			
Student 1	19	19	92.5
Student 2	12	18	73.0
Student 3	13	19	78.0
Student 4	13	18	75.5
Student 5	17	17	83.0
Student 6	20	18	92.5
Student 7**	6	14	48.5
Student 8	14	19	80.0
Student 9	22	19	93.0
Student 10	15	19	83.0
Student 11	15/22	19/19	83.0
Average			80.2%
Poptropica Level 4*			
Student 1	17	17	83.0
Student 2	18	17	85.0
Student 3**	7/24	12/17	46.5
Average			71.5%
Poptropica Level 5*			
Student 1**	13	16	57.0
Student 2	22	A***	A***
Student 3	20/26	24/25	86.0
Average			71.5%

*Note:* Test scores from Interviewer's students only.

\* Test provided by Lochowski et al. (2017).

\*\* Noticeable outlier within the class scores.

\*\*\* Student absent from class and unable to complete test at later date.

## Student and Parent Reception

Students showed a generally positive opinion of the stories, characters, and themes presented in the textbooks, finding them to be engaging, practical, and relatable. However, the first, more conventional, half of the unit was better received than the second half, which introduced social skills and CLIL. The first half of the unit contained more explicit language goals such as new vocabulary words, matching activities, and grammar-orientated gap-fills. In the second half of the unit, “students showed a great deal of difficulty with reading comprehension and activities where they were asked to predict, explain, or extrapolate further information from reading/listening,” becoming visibly confused by, and disengaged with the lesson (Appendix A). The varying levels of proficiency within classes were seen more starkly in this part of the unit. Teachers, while having mixed opinions of such lessons, were unable to dedicate enough class time to exploring these topics and completing projects. As Para (2017) asserts, time and effort should be given to ensure materials are “appropriate and adapted to the learner’s needs, wants and proficiency level” in order to “to prepare our students for future autonomy and give them access to an accumulated capital or information, interest, culture, and pleasure.” Teachers affirmed that as they became more familiar with teaching these materials, and students became more invested in the books, the non-explicit-language-learning materials would become more valuable in the classroom.

The varying levels of proficiency could also be seen in the Poptropica unit test. Completed over two pages in two days, it was a much longer and more detailed test requiring comprehension of longer texts, grammatical accuracy, and individualized speaking and writing output (Lochowski et al., 2017). Due to highly-achievable and slowly progressing language goals in English Land, there was the expectation that all students could achieve 95-100% in unit tests (Table 3). However, the raised expectations had mixed results in classes, with some students excelling in the new goals and advancing impressively, and others showing definite signs of lowered self-efficacy. Some classes showed positive responses to more communicative, interpersonal language goals. Examples of these occurrences were noted in the research diary (Appendix A):

After listening to the dialogue ‘This is my brother, Joe. He has short, dark hair, and glasses.’ ‘Cool!’ Students began mimicking ‘Cool!’ Using the same tone and – unprompted – used it to respond to other [students] spoken production throughout the rest of the lesson showing a great deal of intuitive, accurate usage. (Unit 1 Week 3)

Alternatively, one group of students was observed chanting ‘I don’t understand! I don’t know!’ under their breath, and one child came to tears during the unit test. With these increased requirements, teachers became increasingly concerned with changes in students’ self-efficacy and enjoyment of lessons. This change in student behavior was of particular concern to teachers, as they frequently voiced the need to ensure students were having fun during the lessons as part of their teaching responsibilities. The materials were specifically chosen for the raised expectations, and the school owner fully predicted difficulties faced by students, particularly those in the higher levels who experienced a larger gap in assumed prior knowledge. However, as the unit 1 test results show, the test scores did not decline as dramatically as expected at the higher levels (Table 3). Teachers became aware of the need to

examine how they benchmark success, and how their teaching needed to be adapted to achieve these educational goals.

As an almost silent stakeholder in this study, the parents' responses were the most difficult to define. The new materials were largely chosen to meet several parents' preferences, such as wanting more time-consuming and difficult homework as well as modernization via the online components and materials. However, whether due to disinterest or difficulty navigating the technology, very few parents signed their children up for the online materials. The manager offered free IT support for parents who were able to bring their device into the school, but participation in these sessions remained quite low. The online games also proved to be either non-language-learning related, or either too glitchy or too repetitive to keep student attention.

### **Self-efficacy and Perceived Autonomy**

Teachers voiced various opinions on how best to run their classes but expressed a lack of authority in regards to what or how their students learn. Little thought was given to communicative language goals and how the materials might be useful in a real-world environment. Teachers frequently mentioned feeling beholden to the manager's expectations, parents' perceptions and making sure students completed the workbooks, completed the homework, and passed the tests. However, both teachers did not bring up whether the material would be sufficient or relevant to a students' long-term language development or overall communicative abilities. "I don't think they learn much from the Social Skills [CLIL] page. They're not really here to learn about playing safely in the park, or sharing with their friends. So we just go through it quickly so they can finish their homework" (Teacher 2's Interview, Appendix C). Teachers described an environment where the teaching materials explicitly dictate what and how the students learn with little flexibility. This is also reflected in teachers' passivity towards the changing of curriculum content stating that they are beholden to pleasing the parents and completing all activities in the books accurately and as prescribed. During the interview, the interviewer mentioned the Eikaiwa encourages teachers to match each others' pace and complete the book by the end of the year, to which T2 responded that this was also a way to keep parents happy, however "they don't really know English, so they want to see the [workbooks and homework books] finished... I try to finish the books, and make sure all the questions are filled in" (Appendix C). A focus on completing the books as a way to appease parents is at odds with what the manager stated was her overall vision for the company: "It's more of a feeling that if you're providing quality education, then the business side will take care of itself." And in regards to the contents of the lessons: "So all in all, education. Quality lessons. A fun environment but not just fun games but you know what I mean? That there is an individual attention to our students,... their education learning needs" (Appendix 2).

The manager and teachers also expressed some surprise and confusion about being the topic of study and regularly expressed that they had nothing of worth to add when approached for interviews. Some reluctance can be interpreted by T2's request to not have their interview recorded, and rather summarized in writing. While the teachers in question were practiced at performance evaluation through external sources, such as student test results, classroom behavior, and re-sign rates as well as feedback from the manager, they seemed not to have engaged in self-evaluation or any level of academic engagement. Despite

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the manager attending occasional book publishing fairs and a few JALT (Japan Association for Language Teaching) young learner training seminars, T1 and T2 had not participated in any research, further training, or discussion groups related to education. It is hoped that the reflection offered through the interviews, as well as the perception that a small Eikaiwa is a focus of study and interest will generate further engagement with pedagogy and the academic world as a whole. Research and awareness can develop teacher professionalism through co-developed educational teams, which drive forward context-responsive pedagogies (Banegas et al., 2013) and encourage the professionalization of Eikaiwa teachers.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Practical Concerns**

The most commonly brought-up topic both in meetings and interviews was the volume and difficulty of language introduced in each lesson. Upon reflection of the test, and a clearer understanding of what the test is targeting, teachers were able to recognize ways in which they could reinforce the target language taught in the first half of the unit through the second half, and that the long-term aims of the material will only develop with time and engagement.

The low buy-in for the online materials reflects not criticism towards modernizing classroom delivery methods, but more about technological limitations. To take full advantage of the resources, a large and costly overhaul of the classrooms would be required, including new internet connections and TV screens, while the benefits of these upgrades were not deemed to be proportionate to the costs.

### **Research Concerns**

Efforts were made to record and relate information gathered objectively; however, the nature of an insider/ self-reflective study means this research was conducted through a subjective lens. Weekly research diaries and reflections were kept throughout the process to track topics arising from the material changeover, as well as to record and elaborate on developments. By the nature of this type of research, an insider research project will reflect the values of the researcher. Some such concerns over bias also emerge from the teachers' role within the study as employees of a business. Teachers may have felt pressured during the interviews to express ideas that aligned with either the school's expectations or to accommodate the needs of the research or otherwise felt unqualified to speak negatively against what they could see as a voice of authority (the published textbooks and their prescribed teaching approach).

This study spanned the first unit of a completely new curriculum meaning that teachers had little time to adapt and reflect on these changes. Teachers had had minimal preparation time before term started. Access to online previews was only provided a few weeks prior and some books arrived several weeks into the term. A reluctance to discuss negative aspects of the materials may have stemmed from a sense of inevitability towards proceeding with what was being asked of them.



## **Teacher's Priorities**

Teachers have repeatedly stated their concern with external impressions of language learning, which is at odds with the new material's focus on comprehension, communication, and practicality. The minimum requirements were low in the previous teaching materials and easily achievable with small amounts of rote-memorization meaning the teachers were relied upon to supplement their lessons through extra language input, building on language scaffolds taught in the books, unstructured conversation time, and games. Either guided by or supported by the new materials, teachers will be able to explore the benefits surrounding other teaching methodologies such as the scaffolding required to achieve more difficult activities and the sociolinguistic/communicative activities through critical thinking and personalization activities. It is also hoped that through the research findings and the consequential opening of lines of communication, teachers will develop more confidence and autonomy. This can also be fostered through the initial year of the new program. As the manager was not teaching any Poptropica materials, they greatly relied on the teachers' input. Adapting materials to specific learning contexts is a vital component to planning any lesson (Dejica-Cartis, D. 2012) and does not imply that the materials are defective or entirely inappropriate. These discussions and negotiations on how the new materials are handled will lead to, and are reliant on, a teacher's confidence and ability to determine their classes' needs.

## **Limitations and Further Research**

A background aspect considered in this study involved how teachers prepared prior to the new school term. Due to the late selection of materials, lack of available previews online, and conflicting teacher priorities, a large amount of time was dedicated to understanding the online portal, rather than thoroughly examining the materials. Limited opportunities to discuss concerns, teaching approaches, and potential difficulties lead to greater stress over lesson planning and goals. This lack of preparedness surely colored teachers' perceptions of the materials and led to a reactive approach to teaching. Unfortunately, as the management was responsible for deciding to change the materials, and what they would be, the teachers were afforded the least amount of time to prepare for the changeover, a situation which may be highly applicable to any teachers in the same position.

To gain a true understanding of how to optimize the adoption of new materials, more could be learned from recording 6-month, 12-month and 18-month results from students and feedback from teachers. Provable data collected over time, such as tracking improvements in JET results, would increase teacher confidence and waylay parents' concerns, build student self-efficacy. These results could, in turn, be used to promote the school within a highly-competitive Eikaiwa market and feed into student and teacher efficacy, as well as student and parent customer loyalty, thereby allowing for improved educational and business outcomes.

Through the interviews, it became clear that there were miscommunications between the teachers and the manager on what their roles and responsibilities were. In such a small work environment with teachers who have worked at the school for such long periods, there would inevitably be some crossover in roles, and teachers would feel some anxiety regarding student enrollments as it has an immediate effect on job security. However, if the manager and teachers were to develop a set of educational goals and learning principles, these could be

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communicated clearly with the parents and would help the teachers in refocusing their intent and ensuring that they were meeting expectations.

## **Research Validity**

Through newly opened lines of communication and increased confidence, it is expected that teachers will be able to renegotiate their position within the school with management providing support as to how better to revitalize and improve their pedagogy and practice within the new framework. The research findings investigate not just how teachers implement materials, but how they evaluate their roles, and themselves as educators. Through raised learning expectations, teachers were able to move away from the limited role of direct language input in a teacher-lead classroom and into a level of professional authority. It is expected that this process will continue throughout the pilot year. While this research was not initially conducted with any explicit aims beyond discovery and observation, the act of investigation and self-reflection had an effect nonetheless. As a teacher at the Eikaiwa, the researcher had a vested interest in more deeply understanding the material changeover, as it directly impacted their day-to-day, as well as helped in their personal growth as an educator. “Researchers should engage in research not only to produce knowledge but also to make positive change in the lives of those who participate in research, change that the participants’ desire and articulate for themselves” (Moje, 2000: 25).

## **Reflections on Findings**

Teachers were far more concerned with the practicalities surrounding their teaching of Poptropica rather than the pedagogy underlying their teaching and how this would alter their classrooms. Teachers were concerned with how the materials and more strenuous class load would be felt by the students and the knock-on effect this might have on enrollment rates. Their practical concerns included planning for the lessons, workbook completion, keeping parents happy, and how to support retention of vocabulary. They approached the changeover of material with a more passive approach, simply deciding that they would do their best to “get through” the materials. They seemed to undervalue their classroom skills and techniques, choosing to let the prescribed teaching materials guide what and how they would teach. Teachers did not embrace the section of each unit focused on developing social skills and English learning through content. Instead, they skimmed over the materials and helped students fill in answers, regardless of student comprehension. This way of approaching the materials demonstrated a distancing between their daily classroom concerns and the educational focuses the manager expressed in Table 1. There were also low rates of utilization of the online resources by both teachers and students, reinforced by parents’ reluctance to engage with the online resources. Despite the teachers’ hesitations, students showed a mostly positive reaction to the new challenges, achieving acceptable results and mostly being able to engage with a drastic shift in focus. Results in JET test, further unit tests and long-term learning outcomes were not able to be measured because of the short time frame for this study, but more relevant was the teachers’ confidence that with some practice and adjustments they would be able to teach the materials in an enjoyable and beneficial way.

## CONCLUSION

This research explored the Eikaiwa's goals and educational approaches through the lens of teachers' day-to-day experiences implementing a vastly different set of teaching materials. Many of these findings were unexpected and helped redefine the study's focus. Throughout the research process, it became obvious that teachers' concerns largely revolved around external expectations, lesson planning, and volume of required content, rather than the change in educational approaches and pedagogy utilized by the new teaching materials. This realization helped management to further address the concerns around teacher responsibilities, required support, and business optimization.

Research such as this paper bridges the gap between ideal teaching theories and realistic applications within multi-focused learning environments and promotes teachers' self-analysis, critical evaluation of teaching practice, and examination of prior-held beliefs. Critical, formalized, self-reflection "is more likely to change and improve our practices than is reading about what someone else has discovered of his teaching" (Corey, 1953, p.70) and is valuable to teachers in all settings. Particularly within the realm of EFL teaching, Eikaiwas and other such private institutions are sometimes considered entirely independent of modern pedagogy and practice, and of no import to academic review, and as such there is little uptake in academic engagement from Eikaiwa teachers. Such research into a long-overlooked form of English Education, particularly such a prevalent one, will help to raise the bar for language education and learning outcomes in Japan.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A - Weekly Notes and Research Diary

Welcome Unit - April 1-6 <sup>th</sup>	
General Notes	
<p>New books were generally well received by students.            Students showed engagement with colourful materials and characters.            Attention was drawn to the comic, and students shown that the story continues throughout the book.            The first week of class focused on meeting new students, establishing basic rapport, handing out schedules and books, and other administrative needs.            Great concern expressed by teachers regarding volume of workbook materials.            Confusion regarding dissemination of Student Access Codes for online component.</p> <p>Staff meeting - Majority of time spent learning how to access the Moodle, create classes, understanding the process for students to join online classes, and discussion on how to help parents join online classes. Staff agreed to create online classes hand out access codes by the end of the month, but that parents would be responsible for signing up their students, as it would take a dedicated lesson for teachers to do so.</p>	
Solution Implementation	Solution Notes
First week, no solutions to be implemented	First week, no solutions to be implemented
Issues	Notes and Proposed Solutions



<p>1. Absentees As this week falls within the Spring vacation period for school children, many children were absent for the first class.</p>	<p>1. Absentees are able to have ‘make-up’ lessons with other classes however they must complete the work the class is scheduled for, no the materials they missed. This means some students will not cover the ‘welcome unit’ material. This material may be reviewed by teachers in their class if deemed necessary, or done as a review activity before the unit 1 test.</p>
<p>2. Missing homework books The majority of homework books did not arrive at the school on time.</p>	<p>2. In my class, photocopies were made of the welcome unit homework and given out, however only activities with no audio component could be completed. I decided homework was important particularly with the new books as the welcome unit served as a review of assumed prior knowledge the students did not have. T1 and T2 decided to skip homework as it was not assigned for the welcome unit in the previous curriculum.</p> <p>Postal tracking indicates that all homework books will arrive before next week’s classes.</p>
<p>3. Timing As the Welcome unit is intended as a review of previously covered materials to be completed over several lessons instead of one, all teachers found themselves rushed through the materials without time for further engagement, checking understanding or additional games. This was exacerbated by the additional administrative needs of the first lesson. Particularly for levels 3-5, teachers were unable to finish the unit in one lesson. This raises issues, as some topics from the welcome unit are included in the unit 1 test.</p>	<p>3. Material not covered this week can be covered next week in addition to unit 1, week 1 materials, or skipped if the teacher deems them to be irrelevant.</p>
<p>4. Lack of prior knowledge Seen particularly with levels 3-5, the welcome unit included activities featuring phrases and grammar structures unfamiliar to students without an explanation, example or lead-in. e.g. Poptropica 4 Welcome Unit taught 4 new adjectives using a small sample image and the word. The following activity required students to look at two characters and write 4</p>	<p>4. Teachers were unprepared to introduce a new grammar structure to students and so had to either improvise or skip the activity. I spent half the lesson teaching and practising this structure with students, however this meant only half the Welcome unit was completed.</p> <p>For other such assumed prior knowledge, teachers must read through the workbook, homework book and tests for the entire level</p>

<p>comparative sentences such as: Uncle Rob is older than Mike.</p>	<p>before making a judgement call on whether it can be skipped or not. Extra support will be given during the test and homework for such questions.</p>
<p>5. Online component A training session was held last year to familiarise teachers with the system, however this information was mostly forgotten, and not all questions could be answered due to the school not having all available information. There is also great concern that parents will not understand how to sign up, despite an information sheet in Japanese.</p>	<p>5. The institution has deemed the online activities to be optional activities (unlike completion of homework) and thus some leeway has been granted in setting up and preparing these materials. Parents will be sent an instruction sheet on how to create profiles and sign-up to online classes, but it is expected that a large segment of parents will be unable to complete this due to computer illiteracy. The teachers and institution agree that it is too time-consuming to do this for each student and that parents need to take this responsibility.</p>
<p>6. Unfamiliarity with audio files Teachers have not had time to listen to all audio files for all levels, and so could not judge prior to the lesson whether it was necessary or not. E.g., level 2 reviewed numbers 21-50 through a 6 minute audio file listing the numbers.</p>	<p>6. After hearing the audio file, teachers instead opted to have students read the numbers aloud in following classes, a much faster method that incorporated a wider variety of language skills than passive listening. Teachers are showing preference for omitting the majority of language files in preference for their own methods, and only using the audio files for the comics or conversation segments, which include background sound effects and character dialogue.</p>
<p>7. Use/non-use of tablets as teaching materials In lieu of a teacher's book, Poptropica includes an interactive online Moodle which guides the class and teacher step-by-step through the book and includes some additional matching or gap-fill activities. However, no teachers have incorporated this element thus far, choosing to use their own decisions and the student workbook to guide the activities in the lesson.</p> <p>This online component is designed to be used with a smart board or TV screen at eye-level in the classroom. The Eikaiwa has neither of these, instead opting for a 10-inch tablet in each classroom and small, portable projectors.</p>	<p>7. With a large volume of material to be covered this week, teachers were reluctant to introduce an additional, untested, and potentially unhelpful element into the classroom. When the schedule is more fixed and other issues resolved, the introduction of this will be reconsidered.</p>

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<p>8. Homework For students who had homework books or were given photocopies, that homework must be marked the following week. The large volume of work assigned indicates that marking will consume a larger part of the 55 minute lessons.</p>	<p>8. Teachers and management agreed that instead of individually marking each students' homework, the school will implement a self-checking system. The teacher will read/show examples of correct answers and students will mark or correct their own work using a red pencil. Any students with a large volume of incorrect/incomplete homework will then receive individual attention only when necessary.</p>
<p>Notes for upcoming weeks</p>	
<p>Unit 1 Week 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This week will be more reflective of a normal week teaching the Poptropica materials</li> <li>- Lessons will need to include some material not completed in the Welcome unit</li> <li>- The books will begin featuring 'new' material, and teachers must familiarise themselves with this</li> <li>- Teachers can begin adapting their own teaching styles to the materials and determine what areas need additional work/more focus</li> </ul> <p>Solutions to implement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All students should receive and begin completing homework tasks</li> <li>- My classes will begin the self-marking homework process</li> <li>- Teachers can trial limited inclusion of online activities and replacing read-aloud activities with listening to audio files</li> <li>- Parents will begin signing up for online classes</li> <li>- Teachers must begin reading ahead to determine what assumed prior knowledge needs attention</li> <li>- Attendance rates will rise as Spring vacation in Japan is coming to an end</li> </ul>	

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<b>Unit 1 Week 1 - April 8-13<sup>th</sup></b>	
General Notes	
<p>Students remain interested in new materials.            Students were interested in the ongoing story/comic.            This week focused on developing familiarity with new structure and expectations.            Less workbook material to be covered, teachers voiced lessening concern.            Student Online Access system being developed.</p> <p>Staff meeting - Focused on how students were adapting, and how to handle low attendance rates from the first week. Raised concern over handwriting/readability of homework, especially in students who did not complete a year of Phonics prior to joining the Poptropica levels.</p>	
Solution Implementation	Solution Notes
<p>All students should receive and begin completing homework tasks.</p>	<p>Majority of students completed Welcome Unit homework, with accuracy rates of about 75%. Most errors occurred when students did not fill out entire question. E.g.: (homework book text in bold)</p> <p><b>What time is it? It's one o'clock.</b>  <b>What time is it?</b>     two  <b>What</b>                    ?     three</p> <p><i>[Adapted from Poptropica]</i></p> <p>Time was spent in class ensuring students filled out entire answer in red, to encourage them to be more aware in the following week.</p>
<p>My classes will begin the self-marking homework process.</p>	<p>Students were uncertain on how to mark questions correctly, and seemed somewhat hesitant, though all classes were following along by the end of the marking time, and understood the need to write the correct answer in red where needed.</p>

<p>Teachers can trial limited inclusion of online activities and replacing read-aloud activities with listening to audio files.</p>	<p>Limited success. Though students showed initial excitement for the inclusion of a tablet in the lesson, they showed little interest in the simple, repetitive matching activities. The Moodle organises lessons into single-page groupings, which means teachers must navigate three separate ‘lessons’ and wait for them to individually load within one of our classes. This was time consuming, distracting and left a lot of dead-time for students in the lesson.</p> <p>However, using the audio files from the Moodle was faster and more convenient than playing them from physical audio CDs, as long as Internet connectivity was stable.</p>
<p>Parents will begin signing up for online classes.</p>	<p>Management decided to create a Japanese-language how-to guide for creating student accounts, which should be completed in the next 1-2 weeks.</p>
<p>Teachers must begin reading ahead to determine what assumed prior knowledge needs attention.</p>	<p>Referencing the “scope and sequence” alongside the unit tests has been a good reference point.</p>
<p>Attendance rates will rise as Spring vacation in Japan is coming to an end.</p>	<p>Attendance rates have risen, in some cases this means the entire class is 1 week behind schedule.</p>
<p>Issues</p>	<p>Notes and Proposed Solutions</p>
<p>Class time spent on homework marking - this week spent around 8-10 min of each class to mark and correct homework.</p>	<p>As students become more comfortable and confident with how to mark, this can move faster. When students have not fully answered a question, write example on WB so they can correct faster.</p>
<p>Large volume of new vocabulary in first week - concern over retention rates.</p>	<p>Gap-fill activities and task-based activities can be used as spoken review using target language at beginning of next class.</p>
<p>Underutilisation of flashcards.</p>	<p>Flashcards not used in previous lesson when vocab. was introduced can be used in above review activity.</p>
<p>Optimised use of online system.</p>	<p>Review units ahead of time to find any activities that are new or different activities than those included in the book, rather than just word-picture matching games.</p>

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Set up/prepare for students to have online access.	Create and assign homework to online classes in preparation for when students begin to have access.
Notes for upcoming weeks	
Be conscious of how often/confidently students use the target language throughout the remainder of the unit, after being introduced to it in the first week of this unit. Discuss handwriting and related issues in next staff meeting, and brainstorm possible ways to improve writing in select students.	



<b>Unit 1 Week 2 - April 15-20<sup>th</sup></b>	
General Notes	
<p>Online access will soon be granted to students.            Students showed good recall of large volume of new vocabulary from first two weeks.            Students were interested in the ongoing story/comic.            Some levels introduced new sentence structures while some levels did not.            Less workbook material to be covered, teachers voiced lessening concern.            Other teachers showing little to no use of online materials.            Teachers note that grammar structures and vocabulary are a lot more closely related to every-day language requirements.</p> <p>Staff meeting - Ensuring online classes were made for students to join, noting the gap between some students who are thriving on new material and some students who are struggling. Discussion about practising for the JET test later in the year: Concern that it is an additional time-consuming activity in an already full schedule, but also confidence that the new curriculum more closely aligns with the JET test expectations. Most of meeting dedicated to non-Poptropica-level students.</p>	
Solution Implementation	Solution Notes
<p>Students becoming more familiar with how to self-mark in class, though some homework activities are not ideal for this type of marking.</p>	<p>E.g., some questions have various answers that could be correct, meaning the teacher needs to review all answers and encourage students to mark it correct. This is confusing for some students who have been taught to think there is only one correct answer.            Hopefully, this will build students' confidence, particularly in speaking where there is no one set answer.</p>
<p>Greater use of provided audio files where possible, and ensuring the availability and reliability of these files and audio-playing equipment.</p>	<p>Some CDs had been burnt with incorrect track numbers, and some players are not loud enough/skip often. This has been largely solved.</p>
<p>No new vocabulary and few workbook activities were introduced this week, allowing for review using flashcards.</p>	<p>Students showed mixed levels of recall. Students with familiar lexical sets (toys, classroom objects, etc) showed good recall whereas new areas of vocabulary not related to previous study was more difficult for students (e.g., adjectives describing personality, daily activities).            Greater exposure to these new areas of study feature later in the books, reinforcing the language.</p>

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One new structure/activity purposefully excluded by teachers due to it not being covered in the test and the large volume of new, difficult material in that lesson.	See below, in “Issues”.
Issues	Notes and Proposed Solutions

<p>Introduction of new, complex grammar concepts with insufficient controlled-practice activities or examples. Previous week students learn:</p> <p><b>How many ___ are there? There is one flower. There are two flowers.</b></p> <p><i>[Adapted from Poptropica 3]</i></p> <p>Students can grasp the concept easily, but recall is spotty when including other adjectives in sentence, e.g. <b>“There is pink are 3 flowers.”</b> However, instead of reviewing/reinforcing this grammar in the second week, students are presented with several new structures:</p> <p><b>Are there any rocks? Yes, there are. No there aren’t. Is there a pond? Yes, there is. No there isn’t. Is there any wind? Yes, there is some wind. No, there isn’t any wind. There are some rocks. There aren’t any rocks. There is some wind. There isn’t any wind.</b></p> <p><i>[Adapted from Poptropica 3]</i></p> <p>This large volume of new vocabulary was daunting and confusing for students unfamiliar with the concept of countable vs uncountable nouns.</p> <p>The workbook featured a grammar box with one set of examples, immediately followed by a pair-work speaking activity where students had to guess which picture out of four their partner had chosen using the grammar box as guidance.</p> <p>At the bottom of the page an additional activity was included, asking students to choose a location (examples given were library, park, school or museum - all unfamiliar to students) and have their partners guess the location they were thinking of and included an additional new structure:</p>	<p>The target dialogue the students were to produce was:</p> <p><b>A: Is there any wind? B: No, there isn’t. A: Is there a river? B: No, there isn’t A: Are there any books? B: Yes, there are some books. A: Is there a teacher? B: Yes, there is. Where are they? A: They’re in a classroom!</b></p> <p><i>[Adapted from Poptropica 3]</i></p> <p>This large number of new structures was extremely difficult for students. They were also introduced to the concept of uncountable nouns with out any previous examples in the text or additional words that could be used in place of “wind”.</p> <p>Students were not sufficiently set up to achieve the task-based learning activity with any level of accuracy or confidence.</p> <p>Instead, I gave students a brief introduction to “some” for when you don’t know exactly how many, and “any” for question/negative forms. Instead of pair activities, I played the role of “B” speaker. I laid out all the vocabulary cards covered so far and had students select which card they wished to ask a question about. I would then guide them in asking the question. The <b>“Where are they? They’re in a house.”</b> structure was completely skipped after making sure it was not in the test.</p> <p>Some students were able to recognise and start producing the pattern independently, and some classes were able to have a student play the role of B, though none were able to achieve the activity in independent pairs.</p>
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<p><b>Where are they? They're in a house.</b></p>	<p>This method was able to be shared and used successfully by T1 in his classes that week, though unfortunately not with T2.</p> <p>This activity should have been a 10-15 minute activity, whereas all classes took at least 30 minutes, meaning the comic (the second half of that lesson's assigned materials) was completed in 5 minutes or less.</p>
<p>Audio clips used in previous materials were delivered in a slow, clear, and repetitive manner. However, Poptropica uses a variety of speakers using different structures in a more natural and native way and at a faster speed with natural pronunciation.</p> <p>Students are asked to match people with physical descriptions. Example from previous books:</p> <p><b>This is my uncle. He is tall. He has brown hair.</b> <b>This is my aunt. She is short. She has long hair.</b> <b>This is my brother. He is cute. He has glasses.</b></p> <p><i>[Adapted from English Land]</i></p> <p>Example from Poptropica: <b>This is my brother, Joe. He has short, dark hair, and glasses. Cool!</b> <b>My aunt Sarah is great. She's very beautiful.</b> <b>The handsome man is my uncle.</b></p> <p><i>[Adapted from Poptropica]</i></p>	<p>When audio clips were first used, students seem a little overwhelmed and confused, though even on the first listening they were able to answer most questions correctly.</p> <p>Now they are aware of the higher expectations, they visibly have to pay closer attention and often ask for it to be repeated. However, this heightened level of listening difficulty pushes their abilities and also encourages them to use the language more naturally, mixing in expressions they already know and responding more naturally.</p> <p>It moves students away from the call-and-response, teacher-led lessons towards more natural conversation. It also develops stronger listening skills, necessary for the JET test and real-life situations.</p> <p>For homework, students are encouraged to listen several times if they don't understand completely. In class, if students show hesitation then the audio can be repeated in segments, or the teacher can repeat it in a slightly slower, clearer voice.</p>
<p>Notes for upcoming weeks</p>	
<p>Students will be given login guides for the online portal, which hopefully will be completed and logged in to throughout Golden week (April 27th - May 6th).</p> <p>Due to the upcoming holiday, students will have an opportunity to makeup skipped homework, particularly in the Welcome unit. That means teachers will have to spend more time this week reviewing and explaining the activities, plus additional time marking it on the first week back.</p>	

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<b>Unit 1 Week 3 - April 22-26<sup>th</sup></b>	
General Notes	
<p>Low sign-up rate for online students.            No staff meeting on Friday due to holidays.            Inclusion of project-based Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) lesson.            Students showed a great deal of difficulty with reading comprehension and activities where they were asked to predict, explain or extrapolate further information from reading/listening.            1:1 meeting with Eikaiwa owner regarding teaching styles and classroom aims (further notes below).</p>	
Solution Implementation	Solution Notes
<p>Introduction of large volume of new grammar structures/concepts - students were unable to complete homework tasks relating to the new language, with many students not attempting answers or showing little engagement or input.</p> <p>Instead of admonishing students or assuming they should have been able to complete the work themselves, homework-checking time was spent redoing the answers with overt help and support from the teacher.</p>	<p>The amount of time spent on redoing homework activities greatly reduced available lesson time, however it was deemed necessary to support and encourage otherwise dis-heartened students and reinforce ideas such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There may be a variety of ‘correct’ answers</li> <li>- Any attempt is encouraged, regardless of outcome</li> <li>- Many answers and hints can be found in the classbook with careful reading</li> <li>- The activities may be difficult, but are achievable with support</li> </ul>
<p>Detailed listening activities with diverse use of language.</p> <p>When completing activities related to previous classbook materials, listening activities were played again, though the classbook did not call for it.</p> <p>Students showed more engagement with the audio and recognition of language used in context after having attempted the homework and giving time for the language to ‘sink-in’.</p>	<p>Some students also showed great awareness for, and engagement with, the discourse markers used in the dialogues, often repeating them outloud and mimicking them with other students. Students also showed a great understanding of and ability to recognise prosody elements such as pitch, length of sounds, and pauses.</p> <p>E.g., After listening to the dialogue ‘This is my brother, Joe. He has short, dark hair, and glasses.’ ‘Cool!’ Students began mimicking ‘cool!’ using the same tone and – unprompted – used it to respond to other students spoken production throughout the rest of the lesson showing a great deal of intuitive, accurate usage.</p>
Issues	Notes and Proposed Solutions

<p>Low rates of homework completion and accuracy.</p>	<p>Students were not given make-up homework or instructed to complete/correct unfinished work, instead told to focus on the homework for this lesson (3-4 pages).</p>
<p>CLIL - unfamiliar learning style for students, assumed world-knowledge unfamiliar to students - little time available to engage with the material and complete projects.</p> <p>Example: students were to look at two pieces of art (<i>Reading girls</i> by Renoir and <i>Pink Roses</i> by Van Gogh) and discuss the images. Both painters were unfamiliar to Japanese students, though could be assumed knowledge for many students worldwide.</p>	<p>Without a clearly stated language target, many students remained silent and were unable to respond past answering simple answers, showing obvious reluctance to an answer they might think was 'incorrect'.</p> <p>As this was a new activity style for students, many leading questions were asked, e.g., Is it (does it make you feel) sleepy? What are they looking at? Is it (the picture) sad or happy?</p> <p>Students were then asked to create art works using 'warm' and 'cool' colours, though not all classes had enough time to do the project.</p>
<p>Concern is had amongst teachers over the upcoming unit test, as it will be used as a litmus test by not only the administration but also the parents, particularly those new to the school.</p>	<p>Due to the large volume of new material and assumed knowledge contained in the Welcome unit and Unit 1, and the speed at which the lessons moved through the material, there is great concern over the test scores.</p> <p>These concerns are exacerbated by the week-long vacation between week 3 and week 4 (test week). Students will be given review activities in week 4, but due to the extended length of the test, the review will only be approximately 10 minutes.</p>
<p>1:1 Meeting with Eikaiwa owner</p>	



Due to contact from parents over class difficulty, concern from the researcher over some students' levels, and a number of students withdrawing from classes, a meeting was held between the researcher and the Eikaiwa owner.

Concern 1. - Students feeling like they didn't know 'the answer' in class.

Concern 2. - Students not knowing what was being asked of them within lesson activities / not sure of the expected activity outcome. e.g. students/parents unsure of the purpose of CLIL lessons.

Concern 3. - Students, particularly those with previously-identified learning difficulties, unable to comprehend the lesson.

As a proposed solution for Concern 3, and as a possible explanation for concern 1 & 2, the Eikaiwa owner suggested a return to call-and-response activities, Teacher-led drilling exercises, and direct and grammar-translation methods. These teaching methods are almost exclusively used in the Japanese Education system (though this is beginning to change) and so are thought of as the ideal and only way for students to learn by parents and some students. It was suggested that these teaching methods would be best for students who fell under concern 3, and a preference for / familiarity with these methods with the other students in question.

Concerned with this response and recommendation of teaching methods by the Eikaiwa owner, this prompted a larger conversation on the teaching pedagogy preferred within the Eikaiwa. The owner expressed her understanding of the issue within a Japanese context, but reinforced her awareness that traditional Japanese learning styles and outdated EFL pedagogy was insufficient for delivery of the new teaching material, preparation for the JET test, and as a path to EFL as a whole. She expressed her wishes for this style of teaching to only be used when addressing concern 3, and that concerns 1 & 2 would simply take time and patience from parents and students in a changing educational landscape. She stated that communicative, task-based learning activities should be used in the classroom with a focus on spoken fluency, and reading and listening comprehension.

#### Notes for upcoming weeks

The completion of the Unit Test (Unit 1 Week 4) will be the completion of the research project, noting the adaptation to the new teaching materials, the difficulties faced by students and teachers, and the opportunities offered by the new materials and how teachers can best utilise them. The Unit 1 test is predicted to be difficult for students, though will highlight the aims and trajectory for students throughout their education through the new material. It can also be used to assess how teachers approach the materials and what areas need more focus and attention, such as providing more grammar scaffolding or increased repetition of the vocabulary.

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<b>Unit 1 Week 4 - May 7-11<sup>th</sup></b>	
General Notes	
First week back after 10-day national holiday. Unit 1 test. Interview with co-workers. Additional students leaving the school (noted below in “Issues”). Request from Eikaiwa owner to make lessons more dynamic (noted below in “Issues”).	
Solution Implementation	Solution Notes
Continued issue of homework volume/unfamiliar activities.	In some instances, it proved faster to write answers on WB, so students could self-correct faster/whole class was not waiting on 1-2 students to self-correct. However, this meant little feed-back from the teacher, no opportunity to elicit answers from students, and re-inforcement that there was only 1 correct answer, rather than language negotiation and room for level-appropriate mistakes.
Due to holiday, no class was held with 2 key students who were the topic ‘of concern’ addressed in the 1-to-1 meeting with the Eikaiwa owner.	These issues and new approaches will be addressed after unit 1 test is complete, allowing a comparison of approaches through test scores and a ‘fresh start’ with the new unit.
CLIL lesson and projects. Implied that more meaning to these lessons could be gained by students through the projects.	During the meeting, teachers were asked to prioritise the group-project element of the CLIL lessons, particularly those with a poster-element as a way to give students a mental-break from tightly controlled study and a sense of achievement/something to display in classrooms.
Parents unsure how to sign up to online access, despite a step-by-step guide in Japanese.	Two parent information nights will be held by the Eikaiwa owner in order to provide support and answer any other questions about the new materials.
Issues	Notes and Proposed Solutions

<p>‘Personalisation’ homework questions. When asked to complete personalisation elements of homework, most students did not complete it, again expressing uncertainty over what was required and unfamiliarity with vocabulary, despite completing similar activities in class.</p> <p>E.g., on a social-skills lesson about ‘being a good person’: <b>I share my (toy) and (toy) with (friend) and (friend).</b> <b>Draw yourself sharing with your friend.</b></p> <p><i>[Adapted from Poptropica]</i></p>	<p>This is a relatively new activity/topic for the students, one they have only approached through careful guidance of teachers once in class. It is believed they will grow more familiar now they have seen it before.</p>
<p>3 students withdrew from the school this week. It is unusual for this many students to leave so early in the year, as they have so recently paid for their books.</p> <p>2 students (brothers) stated ‘family-life issues’ (clash of schedule, no one to pick up after class, etc.).</p> <p>1 student stated ‘the class is not fun anymore’ as the reason for withdrawing.</p>	<p>‘Family-life issues’ while may be true, is an often-used excuse as a way of saving face or not offending someone.</p> <p>During the meeting, teachers discussed that little to no time was available in lessons for ‘games’. Previously, due to the low volume of new target language each unit, much of the lesson time was dedicated to review and task-based ‘games’, which students greatly enjoyed.</p>
<p>Unit 1 test week The unit 1 test week includes 2 workbook pages to be completed as review along with the test. The test is made up of approx. 10 activities covering listening, speaking, reading and writing. Each activity was comprised of 5-8 questions (e.g., One activity had 8 “match the question to the answer” questions). Listening activities were also significantly more difficult than those in the workbook, requiring students to listen for gist and gather meaning through context. Each audio clip was replayed 2-3 times for each class.</p> <p>Due to the length of the test, only 1 of my 13 classes was able to complete the review workbook pages and entire test, though this class only has 1 student.</p>	<p>For unit 1, teachers will have to stretch the review/unit test over 2 weeks. If this occurs each unit without an adjustment to the yearly schedule, units will either need to be skipped or left undone.</p>

Eikaiwa owner requested that classes incorporate more games and become more dynamic, using any opportunity possible to do an activity as a game rather than book work.	Teachers felt there was no time or opportunity to do this so far, but that they would try with unit 1 and this might become easier as they became more familiar with the new materials.
Notes for upcoming weeks	
This week was intended to be the final week of research, but due to the unit test requiring 2 weeks to complete, next week will be the final recorded week for the study, concluding in collection of test results from all teachers.	
Therefore, no new changes will be implemented in the upcoming week. Methods and lesson plans used for this week will be used again next week in order to prepare the class for the second half of the test, as they were this week.	

## Appendix B - Manager's Interview

*Note about the transcription: The following conversation was transcribed and analyzed for information related to the research questions and content. They purposely do not include discursive features such as overlaps, interruptions, and pauses. Names of the teachers have been replaced by number designations.*

(M=The manager of the Eikaiwa; I=interviewer)

0:00 - 0:11

I: Okay, so I spoke to Teacher 2 and Teacher 1, and a lot of this stuff we've spoken about before. We've already talked about a lot together, but I thought I should do it formally as part of an interview so I'm not just trying to put words in your mouth or recall things.

M: I understand.

I: So I'm really focusing on the implementation of the new materials. Like how the teachers adapt to it, how we bring it into the school, how the teachers have dealt with a different style in a different type of book, how we think that reflects on the students. Rather than the student test results or anything like that...

0:39 - 1:11

M: ... Well the first thing was like deciding like what the textbook was, that was a big part of the process. Well, like what textbook is good. Right? Like I didn't bring in a lot of other textbooks like to the school to show but when we were at, uhh... I don't think you were part of it. Actually, it was before you came. We all attended like, um, a conference. And then they had like a, a book area like as like Teacher 1, Teacher 2, I think [previous teacher] was also there at the time I... we looked at all the textbooks there...

1:28 - 4:10

M: ... We just couldn't find something that was: one, comprehensive enough, two, that we

liked the images... just everything like there was something wrong with it. Right? Then [previous teacher] said to me: “A long time ago, we, we did some like just pilot project work for Longman when they were trying to launch their app.” So we had some exposure to Poptropica probably about ten years ago, actually. Yeah, so [previous teacher] said: “Why don’t you give Poptropica a look at? Right?” So I went to the bookstore one night in [city where bookshop was located]. I found all of the levels so I sat down for a couple hours actually, went through each book, right? I thought this is it. This is it. How did I get the photocopies for you guys?

I: I think there was online sample units?

M: That’s right. I really wanted the textbook selection to be more of a team effort, but just because of not being able to go to a bookstore, you know, just not having the reach to it. I did kind of make that decision on my own but I brought... so the first step was to bring to the staff the samples to get people’s reaction, right? In the staff meeting the feedback was predominantly positive. Some of the concern was the jump. Also the amount of content in one unit. So those were some of the concerns but overall compared to what we had looked at two years ago at that conference? Completely different reaction. So that’s why I decided to go ahead with that after everybody had, everybody in the staff meeting, after looking at the sample that yes, it was probably the way to go particularly compared to English Land. The only other concern was that, was the phonics practice. Actually English Land is much better for their phonics component because they’ve got those umm the flashcards. They’ve got the mini cards, it’s like one whole lesson is dedicated to just that one section so... which I think is good after kids have gone through phonics for one year.

4:11 - 6:23

I: And not all of our students go through the Finding Out phonics book. [1-year phonics course prior to starting English Land/Poptropica]

M: Umm not all of them. But if it’s possible, like if there a late starter? The possibility of him not doing phonics is possible. Just because of time constraint, you know, like they can’t come at the time that we have those classes offered it but as a rule before going into to our like serious textbooks, they need to do phonics. I: Have some grounding in phonics at least. So what were the things that attracted you to the new books?

M: The staff were quite accepting of the textbook it in itself in the initial stage.

I: So when you... when you first went to [city where bookshop was located] and you pulled off all those books off the shelf, what were the things that really attracted you to the set of materials?

M: First of all, the language, it’s like... comparing it to English Land... like “computers” [flashcard image of a computer] are this massive box, you know? You know they have like “surfing the Internet”... like the language itself is more reflective of the society we’re living in now. I just liked... like there was the science projects, there was the poster projects, the values and the morals values aspect to it... It wasn’t just about learning English. Like there was other like just to refer to multiple intelligence. There’s like the other ways to reach kids rather than just textbook work, which I thought would be kind of a different kind of food, just add a little bit more to what we have been teaching without... like... extra prep on the teacher's part, but you can do those things in the class. But you need, as a teacher, you need to make the effort to look things up, photocopy, make the materials... to do that whereas within

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this textbook series it's already there, yeah? You know, I like the chants, you know, I didn't see those chants in the beginning, but I could catch them online.

6:23 - 8:51

I: So the chant's catchy...

M: Yeah, the characters, that was the other thing. I just like that the characters were generic, you know, they weren't related to any kind of popular theme that's trendy now, you like Disney Land.

I: It also means it has a bit more staying power, like you don't need to know those Disney movies, right?

M: English Land was the only textbook that was like that. Kind of like, and, if boys didn't want to do Cinderella, or well not Cinderella but wanted the girl princesses, right? It was just, it was broader. What really got me was the online component. So regardless if parents don't know how to do it or don't want to do it. It's okay. It's not part-and-parcel of the course itself. This is just one extra element, you know that the kids have can have access to. Because all kids learn differently, kids have got their noses in their, you know, in their devices all the time, right? So why not have it in there for English, you know, just provide a pathway. After every parent's observation we would do the questionnaire. There was always a pocket people that demanded more, now that's reflective of where English Land was inadequate. There wasn't like, you know, all you had to do is draw four lines you were done [with] your homework, right? Like it's really not a lot of homework in English Land. [They] have a lot more writing or exercises in Poptropica. There's a lot more writing that's necessary. You couldn't do your homework just in five minutes anymore, right? So I thought.. ah, in terms of customer expectation, and sometimes it can be demand as well... I thought that this would be more adequate in terms of satisfying people. For people who thought that English Land was enough, will probably have a bit of a surprise...

8:52 - 11:55

M: ...But, man here in Japan we've got what coming up? We've got World Cup rugby, now we've got the Olympics coming up. In 2025 in Osaka there's the World Fair. I mean, so like there's... or 2023? Anyway it doesn't matter when it is but it's coming. So English more, more is going to be a reality more than it is now. Japan compared to other Asian countries is lagging way behind.

I: I've sort of been looking into policy changes in education in Japan which happened like five to ten years ago, but then you don't quite see it. Like they changed the policy. But they don't really see why they have to change, so they aren't really changing in the classroom. Maybe these international events might be like: Oh no, it's not good enough we need to change for everyone's benefit.

M: I'll give you another example of a couple moms here the other day, downloading the apps [Poptropica online applications], right? So, so, she just did 'get', then it loaded in English and she like [jumps back, hands in surprise] a big physical reaction to it all being English. So even like, English is still not considered like, part of the world here, you know?

I: Even though there is such a high sign up for Eikaiwas and GS [Global Studies/English class] in school, like... Where do you think that...disconnection between like, personal rejection to English from the parents in their everyday life whereas they're constantly pushing the kids to go to these English...?

M: Well there's the general kinda consensus that... that well the parents just kinda think you

know, like there's just like... it's not part of my life. I do the intakes with the parents and they'll say: oh, I don't understand English at all. They're very upfront about that. I just think that they think that we need to take care of this situation for their children. It's not like: Let's do it! Kinda thing.

11:56 - 13:56

I: The test results, like unit test results from Poptropica. In English land, it was easy for kids, even the ones struggling, to go home with a nineteen out of twenty. Because it was, if you could match one of the pictures to the words the other two were pretty obvious. Or like, you can kind of just guess your way through the true-false look for a couple of key words and be fine without actually having to read much of it at all. Poptropica's very different with the.. there is comprehension that is needed.

M: How long is the test? How many pages?

I: Two pages for each unit.

M: Two pages... ah so one unit test is two pages.

I: Yeah, and EL [English Land] had three sections, like there's a match the vocabulary thing, and then like a reading or a reading and then a phonics question at the end.

I: Poptropica is like six questions per page, each of those has five or six, up to eight things you have to match.

I: And the difficulty [level] is actually testing their knowledge of the language that they used. Like you can't really guess your way through the vast majority of it.

M: So you have to have a comprehension of the... you have to have a solid comprehension of how to read the words.

I: How to read the words and what is the meaning behind those words.

M: mmm, mmm.

I: Do you think they will be a lot of, like a lot of feedback or concern from parents who see a difference in test results coming back to them? Because all they see is the number at the end of the page, right?

M: hhhmmm...

I: I know it's a bit hard to predict, we haven't sent a lot of results back yet, but...?

13:59 - 16:01

M: I don't know if there will be a lot of reaction from the parents. What I'm hoping is that there be a reaction from the teachers. Like that... I'm not yeah, I'm not worried about the reaction from the parents. I'm not. What I'm worried about is the reaction... but what from the test results from Poptropica unit one is there is a realisation of: What I need to do more of in that unit to make the test successful.

I: How I need to shift my teaching.

M: We cannot teach Poptropica in the same way that English Land was taught. There's just way too much information. There's a lot of uh, targets, language targets. So I think, based on the amount of information in that unit. How do you recycle it into the next class like so that you know that when they come... it comes time for the test that they have retained that. So you can't just do it once, do it once, do it once and then test cuz they're not going to remember what was done in that first lesson. They do it once, recycle some, teach more, recycle more, teach more, recycle all of it. Then so like building blocks to the last stage, right? So I guess I'm not so concerned about... because I think that eventually the test results will improve if the teachers make that realisation that: "okay, I got to get these kids more



ready for the test”.

I: Like what did I miss from last time? How can I do it?

M: That’s right. That’s what I’m most concerned about, is that area there. The test results from unit one will provide that area of what inadequate in the teaching...

16:03 - 20:07

M:...Does that answer your question? But yeah, that’s like, if, IF the test results don’t improve over time, then I would be concerned about parent’s reaction. I think a good test result is, not always indicative, but quite indicative of how it’s being, how the material’s being taught, reviewed, contained.

I: So from, from my lessons, like in EL I would be very careful to not teach for the test, I would rather teach the material which translated into good test results. I think it might be a little bit of the other way around [with Poptropica], like what are actual targets for this unit? Find that information from the test, then really focus on that as being the core of the lessons. And do the surrounding material that’s in the books, but really refocus on what I’m spending more time on in the unit.

M: I haven’t had a really really good look at the tests. I have looked at them, but they seem to really reflect the material that’s being taught in the textbook.

I: For the first half of the unit, I’d agree but for the second half of the unit, I’d say not so much. The CLIL.... the content language integration segment, like what they’re learning about dinosaurs, learning English through learning about dinosaurs, the, the values and shared... that part of the unit doesn’t relate very closely to the language targets for the unit. And it’s not really reflected at all in the test.

M: So that actually is a good thing, cuz that would be a lot to have on the test.

I: Yes. As an EFL place, it has a lot of new language, it’s a lot of difficult-to-express concepts for the kids. So that would just be like, not the basis around the rest of our lesson.

I: Shifting angle a little bit, teachers roles in the classroom, particularly in an Eikaiwa setting, where students are coming for 50 minutes, once a week.

M: Are you speaking generally or about here?

I: Both, but what is our role...

M: In terms of the textbook?

I: In terms of the textbook, in terms of the Eikaiwa as a business...

M: The first thing that pops into my head is: teach quality lessons, engaging lessons... like the teachers are not expected to work on sales or try to get new sign-ups or... like there’s trial lessons and stuff like that. But in terms of the business side, there isn’t so much of a responsibility. The responsibilities more on lesson planning, on student care, that you know... They are mostly group lessons, so within a group lesson that you have like, you know you there’s a there’s a balance of how much time you spend with each child. Of course, some children do require more attention. How you balance that sort of thing. I guess the main focus is just on education. Even though it is a business, it’s not a school, it is a business...

20:08 - 22:31

M:...However, there’s not a there’s not so much of an expectation to do business, other than like if a new customer comes in, you greet them, give them a form to fill out, like that sort of thing, if you have any questions, you contact the owner, whatever, right?

I: It’s more of a feeling that if you’re providing quality education, then the business side will take care of itself.

M: It’s always been the approach. That, that yeah, we... we give a lesson of real English.

English that you can use, and if it's done in a... fun, not like... pressurised kind of environment, that we are sensitive to each individual student, you know... like that's why we have staff meeting. We talk about individual students, you know, if somebody's not getting it, how can we support them, you know like that. So I think that. Yeah it like... it's... try to care. You know, my role in that is to provide the teachers the opportunity to bring problems or whatever situations to me. You know, we can solve it. I don't have direct contact with the students. So I rely on teachers to to recognise that sort of thing. Or I often bring it up in staff meeting. Like are you having any troubles with students, you know, so particularly with the shift, I'm... I'm even more sensitive about that sort of thing. So all in all, education. Quality lessons. A fun environment but not just fun games but you know what I mean? That there is an individual attention to our students, their learning needs their education learning needs. Because it is group lessons there are limitations. Like the whole thing with [student name, student who has been struggling greatly with new materials and lesson style], stuff like that. He signed up for a group lesson, so it is cheaper than having a private lesson. So in that sense I'll often switch over to a bit to the business head, just say what you know, like we can't necessarily just tailor that whole lesson around him just because he is the only student in the classroom. So so I'm so sometimes I kind of rock back forth a bit in that sense.

I: But that's that's...

22:32 - 26:11

I: ...As a teacher that's a decision I can sort of hand off to you. And sort of say: here's the situation... it's not that I'm not taking responsibility for that solution. But it's like, you tell me what to do I'll follow your guidance.

M: Oh, yeah, so I guess sometimes business does come into it, but I would say that it's it's not, it's not the main thing.

I: So when you talk about quality education, there's many different types of English lessons... you can go to ones tailored towards proficiency, overall fluency in the language, tailored towards like getting good test results, ones tailored towards: this will make their parents happy, parents who have no English proficiency themselves...

M: All of that. There's not one thing I would say: no. We are business, we have to make parents happy. They want to see their kids speaking in English, right? That's why we do speeches, right? And not only just for that, but like, this whole speech thing, the whole thinking behind that was like that kids just are constantly drilled how to do a quick kind of self-introduction. What's your name? Err, err, err...No. How old are you? I'm 8.

I: There's that confidence with language output.

M: Yes. And if there's anything you can do good in a foreign language, that's the one thing you want to be able to do, is your self-introduction. So that why I pound away at that, I want them good at speaking it. It just keeps you know, as you know in speaking Japanese, when you can feel confident doing something, it just continues to grow.

I: You feel that you can reuse parts and...

M: Yes, so for that so we do parent observation, or we prepare for those speeches for parent observation. That's part of the pleasing to parents, you know, so there is that aspect, definitely. They want to see results, right? A little bit of pressure on the kids to produce, right? Which I think is good.

I: So we've we've been talking a lot about the JET test which has a lot more....ah... Compared to English Land, it's a lot more of a natural, everyday use of English like in Poptropica. And so Poptropica feels like it's heading towards the JET test requirements.

M: Yeah, I really feel it fills that gap. Not perfectly, but a lot better than we were doing. I was concerned about that for a long time but wasn't really sure how to fix it without having to get teachers to do a lot more prep work.

I: Yeah without having to create a lot of content ourselves.

M: Yeah. So what else did you say... proficiency? Yes, of course. Like I I see the HV [Happy Valley, materials for pre- phonics and Poptropica levels] kids, you know, they're speaking in class, using those targets and stuff like that that result in the in the Elementary classes now is a little bit different because it's going into Poptropica and hoping that there'll be more, more English in the classroom. That's... it's been very interesting for me to see.

*[The manager and I talk off-topic for a few minutes.]*

28:37 - 31:25

I: Back to implementation of the new materials...

M: Hell! Hell times two! It's been a hard transition. It's it's not been easy at all and I haven't had too like, float that boat so much. You know, it's been on the backs of the teachers, you know, like basically you had to learn a whole new textbook series, you know, and still... like it'll take a year essentially to get through like the entire book. For me, when I first started even English Land. Do you know it took me maybe about two or three years before I actually like, got the hang of it, or just even got good at teaching it, you know? Like towards the... after like teaching Finding Out [Phonics textbook] for about eight years, I got freaking awesome. Like my kids could, like, spell anything. So I got to be a better teacher over the years, right? I think that's going to be the same. We're not going to become great at the end of one year with Poptropica. It's going to take time. So, which... I guess it's like the teacher turnover every year would be problematic, so... with a textbook like this just the enormity of it. Maybe the second time through it would be much better, the first time going to be a bit rocky unless you're the type of teacher who really, like, pours over the teacher's manual, really understands: "Okay. I got accomplish this in the, in the, in the unit", right? There are those types of teachers. I don't think I have those types of teachers really on staff so much, kind of the trend in the whole Eikaiwa world now is to... Is to create textbooks with teacher's manuals that you don't really need a super skill teacher to teach it. This is the way the whole textbook development has been because 20 years ago, there were no teaching materials in the Eikaiwa world like nothing. Since you know, so it's really changed. Like if somebody gave me Poptropica 20 years ago, I'd probably just like throw them down on the floor and kiss them, you know "you've just given me a piece of gold!", if you just give me everything that I will need at any stage in my lesson... but to be bluntly honest, teachers have become really lazy. Maybe it's just that we're a digital society now, I don't know, but yeah like 20 years ago, I never even had a photocopier or really access to the Internet at all times, you know, like...

31:26 - 33:50

I: Let alone a book and a whole set of materials that takes you step, by step, by step, throughout each lesson.

M: Yeah. Yeah. So so this type of textbook does... even though there is a lot there to teach... In my opinion, it's kind of good for a teacher who doesn't necessarily know how to do prep or doesn't want to do prep. There's enough stuff to get you through a lesson there that would basically cover all your bases. So for me as a business owner, I feel a little bit more secure by

having this text book out there regardless of the teacher.

I: It sort of standardises all of the lessons as well. Well, my next question was going to be: If you had a new teacher tomorrow that you had to train, how would you train them in Poptropica. But it seems like you're saying it kind of teaches itself.

M: That's right. So it requires less training. That's the trend now. The textbook producers are producing these textbooks. So that an unskilled teacher can actually go in and do a good job.

I: So when we were introducing it, when you were introducing it to us - me, Teacher 2 and Teacher 1, like we were sort of in an odd situation where... English Land, there wasn't the option of continuing it if we needed to, it was going out of print.

M: Well actually, there was a second edition being released, but it was... It was crap. Yeah, it was absolutely... I would not spend... I thought it was worse than the first edition.

I: It went downhill.

M: Just like, oh my God, now like, before there was like targets, stuff like that. But even... text on the page was like, gone.

I: More of a... let's look at pictures.

M: Yeah, or like the teacher would really have to plan a lot to get through a lesson right?

Whereas like, you up the book in Poptropica you can see like, four, five lessons, you know like, you know, not lessons but like activities that you can do, so...

33:50 - 36:01

I: If you had the opportunity to implement Poptropica again, is there anything different you would do?

M: Like from the bare-bones? If possible, like, start a year before. Just start going through the textbook in staff meetings, become familiar with the targets, how to teach it. That's what I think. We just went into it running, you know? We had no time to prepare for lessons, stuff like that.

I: It also seemed like there was not much available to preview till you had signed up ordering books and things. Like they had sample units, but there wasn't much to look at.

M: You kind of had to make the commitment to doing it before you had access to... like i think in hindsight, I could have contacted the people earlier and said: "Okay we're going to go with this is their stuff that you can give us to get ready." Yeah, that would have been a much better approach. I think just, just to get everybody ready. Cuz we're kind of just doing it as we go. Step by step, unit by unit, you know or even six months or a couple of EP [event planning/staff development] days, you know just spend... Like I know that we did take time, we took one EP day and spent it on Poptropica.

I: But a lot of that time was spent getting the online system up and running, right?

M: That's right, it's quite involved. So if it were a textbook like English Land, probably one day would've been enough or maybe two days. But with a textbook like this, it needs more time to get ready, to understand materials. First of all, getting the materials. Having a set of textbooks, like going through them, each level. Because we are familiar with level 4 in English Land, right? Like what type of targets were there, right? Looking at Poptropica for what's different, you know, like comparing what we have been teaching to what we will teach to see what the job is going to be like...

36:01 - 38:27

M:...For those students coming out of English Land 3 into Poptropica 4 kind of thing. Right? So I think as a teacher just being more mentally prepared for what you're going to have to do.

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So or yeah, like what you have to contingency plan for it cuz I think: “Oh, my students are not going to know all of this stuff,” right? So we’ve had no like kind of prereview into that at all, right?

I: At least not a preview across the board at all the levels and all the ones we’re going to do. Not just a sample unit in the middle of a book.

M: So your project is on about transition and implementation of a textbook. Definitely that would be more beneficial if that step have been taken for the teachers, you know? And ultimately, if the teachers are more prepared then the students are going to benefit from that, and that makes better test results, and that makes parents happy... blah blah blah it goes down the line, right? So implementing: a minimum 6 months. Cuz if it’s a once a week meeting that sort of thing, like there’s only like certain chunks you can do.

I: Is there anything you would like... Longman, the content creators, publishers... Is there anything they could have done to help you transition?

M: To tell you the truth is all very confusing in the beginning, the online system, the apps, like it was really unclear in the beginning. But I don’t know if that was just me not understanding, or... Like every time I contacted the people they were like... it was one lady that, she was really really helpful. Maybe not? Like ultimately if somebody to come out and like did a demonstration... that would have been perfect, right? But I don’t know if they have that available to them, you know?

I: You said you went to a book fair at the teacher conference... are there other companies that had a person with the stall saying: “Here are our materials, here’s how you teach them”?

38:27 - 40:28

M: Ahhh, no. There’s not really somebody there like there are sales people. They know the product but how to teach it perhaps not.

I: They’re sales and marketing.

M: They’re sales and marketing, yeah. So how to actually go about teaching... some of them are former teachers. So yeah, they don’t really go that far. Now, sometimes the publishers, not at that conference, but publishers will have certain special events for launching... like they’re going to launch a new textbook, they’ve got like a whole day seminar on the textbook. That’s when you would be able to. If they had perhaps provided something like that, it would have been better. Like why did I choose English Land, right? I don’t remember how many years ago, maybe twelve years ago or more? It was a Longman... English Land was Longman, right? I think so. Right, it was called their Kids Fair, or something like that. That’s when they launched English Land. The whole day, the whole seminar, the one- day seminar was completely dedicated to showing you how to use this textbook. What games you can do? What activities? How do you teach the reading section? That sort of thing, right? How do you use the teacher’s manual? Just one day spent on promoting this textbook. Very well done. It was very well done. Then what I really liked about it was that they were selling these like packs. It included the teachers cards, the manual, everything. Everything.

40:29 - 43:56

I: This was a time when there wasn’t that type of thing in Japan.

M: So for ichi-man-en [10,000 yen, approx. \$100USD], you could buy one...I’m sorry, I don’t remember but yeah... I just remember that: wow! This is a really good deal!. It’s got everything in it, CDs, flashcards, everything, right?

I: You can sort of, put it in your classroom and go.



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M: Yeah, like it's all ready to go. So Poptropica, I think if they had had, like, one of those like days dedicated to just, like, promoting that textbook, how to set it up, this is the online stuff... that would have been perfect.

I: Like I'm kind of imagining that it would be useful for Poptropica to have a...like a video series of like, today we're... I'm going to show you how I teach unit one page one. Then go through the stages of like, first I'm going to do an introduction, then I'm going to get the class to do this... just as a breakdown of how they see their materials being approached. Yeah, it just doesn't seem like there is much like that. I mean teacher teaching videos. Not how to be a teacher, but how to teach these materials. Yeah. Because jumping into it, we were like, okay, well, here's the materials. You kinda almost have to work backwards to see: What am I going to do to reach the result which is this page in the book. Not as the Eikaiwa owner, but just as someone who's been teaching for very long time... So part of what I'm talking about in my report is professional... professionalism in English education. Like, part of my research is ... uhm, researching teaching practice makes you self-evaluate more and makes you feel more like a professional in a career that you are trained in, you are an expert at... not an expected like you have expertise in these things, that kinda stuff. How do you see professionalism changing in Japan particularly in the private segment? Like, I feel like there's more English teachers coming in. Maybe ten years ago there were less qualified... a smaller of less qualified teaches. But that's changed over time or...

M: Definitely the bar has been raised in terms of qualification. I don't know if there's less or more teachers coming cuz there were a lot of teachers in years gone by. But... so even fifteen years ago, compared to now, like you could just get off an airplane, approach a school, be hired instantly. You really didn't have to have any credentials and certainly no training. You could be considered a teacher.

I: Just, be foreign.

M: Yeah, so definitely that world has changed. There's definitely parents demands, like, have been a factor in raising the bar in terms of professionalism with teachers. Also just a lot of, ummm...

43:57 - 47:00

M:...Teachers who have been here for longer amounts of time who have decided to make this a career, and not just: oh, I want to travel in Japan for a year, kind of thing. Actually want to make it into a business, an education have also wanted to raise the bar of professionalism so that you can weed out those people who just want to come in, you know, spend a year with you, get a Visa or whatever, right? So there's been...

*[Pause to greet someone at the door]*

I: Sorry, it's going longer than I thought...

M: That's ok. I belong to ETJ [English Teaching Japan], I belong to two groups within... we have some Facebook groups. Right? One of them is the ETJ School Owners Group. The school owners also have that there's a group that kind of manages the school owners group. So we're all School owners, right? So so we often have like these conversations about how to hire a good teacher, the problems in the classrooms that we have with whether it be the customers, or with teachers, or whatever. Before, that didn't exist. There were no associations to help us try to become better at our jobs. Now there is that whole support network that has been created. Like, very grassroots. Created a kind of system, but... it started out as grassroots

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but now it's become very professional. Where people learn about like a like a statistics, you know, I like keeping numbers you know, like entering data things that we never considered a before, you know? So definitely on a business part as well... the education component is included in that business structure. We talk about everything... from... health and safety concerns, to insurance, to how to file your taxes, like, properly, you know? Like, should I incorporate or not? Should I not incorporate, you know? These types of conversations never happened. We didn't even have the support systems.

I: And then that's sort of filtering down through the, through these people that are running it, down to the owners, down to the teachers... of like raising the quality, here are our targets, here are our goals.

M: That's right. At the business level, the bar has raised. So basically what happens then is then: owner start wanting to have more qualified teachers, right? It's been an amazing trickle-down effect. So probably a lot of that influence's because of a ETJ.

*[Interview is interrupted by a phone call, so interview ends.]*

## **Appendix C - Teacher 1's Interview and Teacher 2's Notes**

### ***Teacher 1's Interview***

*Note about the transcription: The following conversation was transcribed and analyzed for information related to the research questions and content. They purposely do not include discursive features such as overlaps, interruptions, and pauses. Names of the teachers have been replaced by number designations.*

(T1=Teacher 1; I=interviewer)

*[Teacher 1 asks what I want him to talk about in the interview]*

0:00 - 2:26

I: So basically it's about, like, how do teachers best adapt to new materials. Like, everyone has their own way that they teach, their own ideas of what's good teaching, and sometimes that is supported or restricted by the materials they're trying to use in the class. So, how does the new materials change your way of teaching, what's it like getting used to materials? Is there anything we could have done better when, when implementing the new stuff? It's pretty broad topic.

T1: Where do you want me to start?

I: If you wanna go you can go, or I can just ask you questions...

T1: You should just ask me questions, keep it short, to the point.

I: OK, so how do you think that the new materials have changed your way of teaching?



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T1: I don't think they've changed my way of teaching at all.

I: OK, so in class, what are, like, the steps that you would go through during the lesson.

T1: Exactly the same as I would have done beforehand, just may a slightly shorter version. Definitely warm up activities stuff like that, yeah? And then go over the main vocabulary that comes up in the lesson and the dialogues that the pages are trying to teach, which is their target language. Yeah, just motor through it like that. So warm up, vocabulary, activity, speaking or reading activity, try to finish up with something fun? See you next week same time same place, you know?

I: So with the previous materials, there were only, what, like, eight vocabulary words, and a very short question-answer for like, ninety percent of English Land. Poptropica has, like, a lot more.

T1: A lot more vocabulary, a lot more target language and stuff as well, yeah? Just try to do it a little bit faster. Seriously, just try to do it a little bit faster.

I: So instead of doing a five-minute activity, or a ten-minute activity, you do it in like three or four minutes?

T1: Exactly. So a ten-minute activity's gonna become a five-minute activity, if that. A writing activity, whereas I might've let it go for ten minutes, is now getting timed on the timer. Three minutes, ready? Go.

2:27 - 3:06

I: So that's... they're doing a lot less physical writing? Like, instead of doing six different sentences or, you know, practising...

T1: Definitely, definitely less. And yeah, I don't know, in a bad way, they're definitely being encouraged to complete that writing faster than I'd normally let them, which means less focus on the actual penmanship stuff, strike order, stuff like that so I can get through it.

I: Just pushing them to get through it, get it done.

T1: Yeah.

I: And so, like, previously, there was maybe one target... is that her?

*[Knock on the door. Interview was interrupted by a customer, a new recording was started after a class]*

0:00 - 0:26

I: Ok, so I sorta forgot where we left off....

T1: uhhh... routines and stuff

I: Yeah yeah. Yeah, so what was your main priority in the previous classes? Like were you focused on just getting through the book? Where you wanting the kids to be able to have really fast recall? Were you really concerned with phonics?

0:30 - 1:31

T1: My last focus, I would say is... I suppose one main focus was to try make sure that the kids remembered as much as they could from a very short lesson. Number two, getting the book finished. That's more of just that the workplace requirement though.

I: Was that with the previous materials or with this material?

T1: Both. It's continuously gonna be like that, because that's one of the things that the school offers to the parents. That we will finish the book by the end of the year. You know? So yeah, and trying to make sure the kids retain.... something. Anything, from the lessons.

1:10 - 2:05

I: It seems like a lot of your kids have really good, fast recall. Like, if they've started in class, they can just spit it out immediately.

T1: Sometimes. Some kids.

I: Is that like, what you think your main role is? To get students to be able to focus on the target language and spit it out as quickly as possible when asked the target question?

T1: Ah mate, if you ask them a question real naturally, casually like this, and they spit out the answer you were expecting them to spit out, one that they have remembered in that situation, is fantastic.

I: As a teacher, what sort of... what do you see your main responsibility being?

2:06 - 2:58

T1: Make sure nobody dies. [Laughs] To make sure they wash their hands after going to the toilet then touch me.

I: Don't pick your nose and then touch me.

T1: As an Eikaiwa teacher? What's my goal?

I: Yeah, like what's your role?

T1: My role is to try to teach them English. As simple as that. To try teach them something in English.

I: OK, so do you see the... like your, like, your focus being towards the children? Being towards the parents? Or being towards the school? Who do you have to answer to the most?

T1: All.

I: It's pretty evenly...

T1: If the kids don't enjoy my class, then they're not gonna want to come. If parents are not happy, they're gonna make a complaint...

3:06 - 4:02

T1:...And if [the manager]'s not happy, she's gonna complain. So I have to keep them all happy. All the time. It's just, no one cares about my happiness [laughs].

I: What about Teacher 1's happiness?!

T1: What about me? Yeah, so all three are equally as important in this.

I: So from my from my classes, I see that because we have more to do in the book, and it's more difficult work, then the fun activities sort of...get reduced? Which is what we were talking about at the meeting last week. [Unit 1, week 4] So kids are having less fun, but maybe more... more taught to them. And parents might see that as: My kid's not having fun, but maybe their test result's gonna be better.

T1: That problem definitely comes up.

I: So, [the manager] also has to weight up: if they're not having fun they'll withdraw, but we do want to show that our school gets good results. How do you feel about that balance?

4:06 - 5:03

T1: Well, you know what old saying, please some of the people some of the time, but you can't please all of the people all of the time, right? That's a real difficulty, you know? Like,

some kids progress from, like, you know, kindergarten and lower level classes into higher-level classes without worrying about, like, how many games they're playing. And other another kids, they just want to come here to play games. So that's really really difficult. Regardless of their level and that, for me, I just always try to make sure there's at least one activity, but it can't be games all the time.

I: They take away something enjoyable from the lesson.

T1: I want them to try and take something away. Anything. So even if I've just been a clown and they've laughed at me... Like, they've gone home saying: oh, Teacher I's stupid. But in a good way. But those kids who're like: oh oh oh! I'm not having fun anymore!... Well, wake up and smell the coffee.

5:15 - 6:20

I: Do you think this material and change in focus is more appropriate for our students?

T1: No, I don't. Sorry, [manager]! I don't, and the reason I don't is because we only get 55 minutes to do these classes, yeah? And if we've got... 6 or 7 kids in the class, with homework to be checked, with more dialogues to try to retain... memorise if you even want to say? And use, in and out of the context how the book's giving it to you. I think what we doing at the moment... as fun as it looks and it does look nice. It is presented nice, and it is definitely a lot more than what we did before but maybe it's too much to do in 55 minutes. And more that we try to do with the kids 'specially since our lesson have to change week by week by week to get that book completed. I think they're going to get less out of it...

6:21 - 7:20

T1:...There's more in the book, but it means there's more to remember but you don't have any extra time to remember it. So sometimes less is more.

I: So, remembering things week to week is really going to suffer...

T1: Well it's important. A lot of learning or teaching is getting people to memorise things, right? We don't want everybody to just be... robots that just like, spit out set dialogues with no expansion to it whatsoever.

I: So, the biggest, the most difficult thing with the new books is just the volume of work, do you think? Or is it the type of activity?

T1: Well, it's not necessarily the volume of work... the other thing is for us, in this particular case example. We continuously go for textbooks that have a series, right? ...

7:22 - 8:54

T1:...So it's great if you start at level one, and end up at level six, because you've gone through the programme. The books, for example, say a book two or a book three will review work. And kinda like, questioning presented in the book should have already been covered in books, like, one and two. But now, changing over from English Land. Like English Land two, they're now doing Poptropica three. There's lots of new language in there that wasn't presented to them in the English Land book so the it's more difficult. If they start from the beginning, go to the end, fair enough. But if you stop halfway through a series, start a new series, there's always gonna be big... Swiss cheese holes.

I: Do you think that will get... as you said, as kids move through the levels, students who've started with Poptropica one are going to be much better at Poptropica five than our current line. Do you think that's the only way it will change? Or do you think us getting more used to the materials will also make things easier?

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T1: Ah, both, yeah? Because it will make the teachers here, and if [the manager] continues with the series for years to come, the teachers will learn: oh well that works, that doesn't. This is beneficial to do in the classroom, this can be skipped. So of course it will work out eventually.

8:59 - 9:53

I: So with the new materials, they have two parts of the unit that I'm really interested in. One is the, like, learning social skills, like, being a good child...

T1: Sharing... yeah.

I: Yeah, like, don't play at the park at night by yourself, yeah..and a second part which is, like, learning English through studying a topic. So, like, there's a page about dinosaurs, they read about dinosaurs to do a dinosaur activity. And the idea is to pick up English through learning a separate... a third thing. Which, those two things, EL didn't have at all. Do you think those are useful? Do you think they're not useful?

9:54 - 11:50

T1: Oh, definitely, because I come from a thematic-based teaching background or whatever. That you teach them a topic, or one topic that everything's focused the language around.

I: Yeah, you were talking about teaching kids about space and science.

T1: It's focused, and directed.

I: So, in our context in this Eikaiwa, do you think our students get much out of it?

T1: You're gonna have to come back to Japan and ask me in two-year's time, or something. Hard to say. Hard to say. We're only just now starting to do this. It's only gonna take teachers such as yourself and myself and Teacher 2 and [the manager] to also remember those points. So Pop 2 had a separate focus topic. Just talking about dinosaurs, did the kids get anything from that? In 6 month's time, 7 month's time, a year's time, you need to ask those kids questions about that yeah? Did they remember it? If they did without any prompting or gesturing or anything, just remember we talked about dinosaurs? What dinosaurs did we talk about? When did they live? What did they eat? And they remember it, then you can ask that question. Right now, I can't see why it should be benefiting them.

I: So you touched on like, marking homework before.

T1: I hate it.

I: We have so much to mark now.

T1: I'm only glad we don't have to take it home like real teachers... anyway...

I: So how accurate are your students' homework, are the filling it out a lot, is there a lot that's not done.

T1: Lower levels, they're not having a problem with it, like the Upper Levels...

11:54 - 12:52

T1:...As I'm sure you'll probably agree with me, and Teacher 2 would probably say the same thing.

I: [Poptropica] 3 and 4 seem to be the real difficult...

T1: Yeah, 3 and up. They're having a crack, but because they never covered these kind of language points before now, then they're having problems. Like I said before, if they start off on Poptropica 1, and went through the series, then those ways of having the questions posed to them, and language patterns they would've covered. But they didn't cover it in their book before, so now they're having more problems in answering.

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I: It's like, it's brand-new material to them. Do you think that will get easier as we get to unit 3, unit 5 and unit 8?

T1: For some kids yes, and for some kids no.

I: There's some who're going to be left behind?

T1: Unfortunately yes. There's some who will always be left behind.

12:54 - 14:36

I: Yeah, so when we were bringing in the new materials, we sort of, had a look at the books, sorta flipped through them but we didn't have... like Teacher 2 noted that we didn't have access to the online stuff until really late. We didn't have access to, like, the teachers guides or whatever until like...

T1: Never. [*Referring to the fact that the teachers did not have any printed teacher books*] We still don't have access to them now.

I: Do you think there could've been a different, or a better way to introduce the materials to the teachers?

T1: Yeah. Like, make that decision a year before hand, then start buying it, then use EP [Event Planning/Staff Development] days for, like, prepping better.

I: What would that better preparation look like?

T1: Well, for example... well I don't know if the manager knew English Land was gonna finish. So the whole reason why Poptropica came along is that you can't buy English Land anymore. If you could still buy English Land, guess what we'd still be teaching this year. And again, and again, and again, and again. But you know...

I: It was kind of a necessity.

T1: But you look in a textbook, it's bright, it's cheerful, yes it looks like there's more language that the kids will pick up from, there's an online component kids, can do it outside of the classroom and stuff like that. Yeah, but like what's happening now, until you buy everything and start teaching it, and going through all the nitty-gritties...

14:36 - 16:34

T1:...You don't know how it's going to work out. So, in hindsight, it would have been nice if a decision had already been made on the textbook a lot earlier. For whatever reasons, then we spent the year not wondering not: "What are we gonna do next?" but actually, you know, start thinking about, like, what we're gonna do next.

I: Yes, I was sort of like one of my argument is that...

T1: Forward thinking?

I: ... that we should have sat down and like, mapped out a lesson. Like, if this is the three pages covering today, how am I going to teach this, sort of what's the timing... and that would give us an idea of what the rest of the year would look like.

T1: Theoretically it's possible to do that, yeah.

I: But just, practically, we didn't have access to it.

T1: This whole year is the experiment, yeah? This year is a whole experiment. Until we've taught the whole different books at the different levels, you know, in it's entirety. Like, we don't really know.

I: Something that came up with Teacher 2 was, um, sort of, how has it changed your day-to-day? And he was saying there's a lot more to prepare.

T1: I don't think so, yeah? Preparation-wise, I think, I think I actually I get prepped easier for Poptropica than I did for English Land.

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I: Because for EL there was a lot of space to fill? Whereas that space is filled up in Poptropica?

T1: Just less to pull out of the drawers, and that, yeah? Don't need phonics cards, don't need separate phonic picture cards. I have the vocabulary cards, I have the book, I have the CD, I have my general plan of attack then just doing it, yeah? So I think it's actually easier.

16:36 - 18:47

I: When we first started doing it, you said some of the audio tracks were a bit of, like, a surprise? Do you, like... go through, listen to the tracks ahead of time, or we don't have enough time to do that?

T1: Umm... *[laughs]* sometimes. Sometimes I do, and sometimes I don't, to be honest. Is *[the manager]* going to listen to all of this? Are you gonna tell on me?

I: I'm a secret mole.

*[laughter]*

T1: It depends how much time I've got on my hands. How can I say... like, the listening and stuff like that for Poptropica... it's fine, it's like straightforward. It's always pretty fast. *[I've]* just been surprised by some of the music. A bit strange.

I: Little funky tunes *[laughs]*

T1: Yeah, like, some kids think they're too cool to do stuff like that in a classroom, you know? It's kinda interesting to see how they reacted to this music. Some kids kinda seem to be having fun, and other kids kinda show that: OK, if I show you I'm having fun listening to this music, then I'm not really cool anymore. So I'm gonna sit here with a look on my face like... Yeah, I hate English.

I: For me, it's hard for me to sell that it's a fun tune that I enjoy, a lot of the time.

T1: Just fake it, it's what I'm doing with this whole life. Wow, that was excellent! Let's listen to it one more time! I like to sing along with this in my free time.

I: Last topic: The tests.

T1: I hate them already.

I: A lot of mine are taking two lessons, they're just going to have to be done over two lessons. What do you think your results are going to be like? You've started to see a couple of them come back, right?

18:49 - 19:48

T1: Yeah. Interesting. Well, with the English Land testing... OK, it was always only twenty points, and very easy to mark as well. You know, like, these new tests don't have spaces mark stuff. I don't know. The test all have different scores as well. They're not standard in that respect. Again, some kids are going to do fine with it, other kids are not.

I: I feel like with the EL it was, even for kids who were really struggling in class, there was a lot of sort of, hints, and it was pretty obvious...

T1: And it also followed the same format. I think that these tests that we're going to have this year, which is a good thing as well, take slightly different approaches. OK, here you gotta read, complete and colour or whatever. This time, we've gotta listen, comprehend, and colour or something like that.

19:51 - 21:35

With it not being exactly the same format, you know, I think it would be a little bit more challenging for the kids. They don't become complacent like: OK, but I just need to do this.



They're gonna need to maybe pay a little bit more attention. Dunno, time will tell.

I: Do you feel any pressure from parents to get good test results?

T1: Of course. It's all they really care about. My kid can't speak [profanity]-all English but they can pass Eiken 1 [*standardised Japanese English test*] if it's written on a piece of paper. If they can read it, answer it, pass: that's great. We're going on holiday in Hawaii, and my Eiken pre-one kid can't even order his pancakes at the restaurant. Of course, parents just want pass results. Seriously, it's huge.

I: So, like, they're not so interested in: is my kid actually able to speak English?

T1: They really only care twice a year when they come for visiting. If their kid's not talking in the classroom then they're gonna say, like: my kid's not talking in the classroom.

I: And like, of the parents who do come, and of those who came who are actually paying attention, not on their phone the whole time, those are the parents you have to care about.

T1: You have to care about them all. All. Because it only takes one other parent saying to another parent... my parents are really not thinking about anything whatsoever and then another parent of comments on something [*clicks fingers*]. It starts something, so you gotta care about them all during observation.

[*Teacher 1's students begin arriving, so interview ends*]

### **Teacher 2's Interview**

[*Below is a summary of the interview addressing the list of questions written by the interviewer following the interview. At the request of the interviewee, a recording and transcript were not made. However, permission was given for information from the interview could be collected, used and referenced in the study.*]

#### **List of questions.**

Further questions were asked throughout the interview according to responses and topics brought up by the interviewee. The questions below formed a framework of areas to cover in the interview.

#### **Teaching.**

1. How do you see your role as a teacher?
2. How do you think parents and students see English and English teachers?
3. What were your teaching priorities with the previous materials?
4. What are they now?

#### **Poptropica.**

5. What are your opinions about the new materials?
6. Do you think the materials are appropriate/better for the students than previously used materials?
7. Do you feel like you use the materials to their full extent?
8. What are your biggest difficulties with new materials?

#### **Lesson Planning, Homework and Tests.**

9. Have you noticed any changes in your teaching or lesson focus?
10. What are your opinions on the CLIL materials and "social skills" lesson in the unit?



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11. How has your lesson planning changed?
12. Do you feel pressure to show good test results to parents? Do you think this material will be beneficial to the JET test results?
13. Do you think these above questions will change with time?

***New Material Introduction.***

14. How could the materials be changed to make it easier on new teachers?
15. How could the school have handled the incorporation of new materials?

***Summary of answers.***

Teaching - My role as a teacher is to provide an opportunity for Japanese kids to spend time with a native English speaker. My classes need to be fun and the students need to learn something. I also have to keep the parents happy, but they don't really know English, so they want to see the books (workbook and homework books) finished, and as long as the kids don't hate the class, that's fine. They want to just hand their children over to us to learn a bit of English, they don't want to get involved in any of it. As far as the parents and school are concerned, my role with the new material is exactly the same. I have to get the kids to finish the work and make sure they don't want to quit.

Poptropica - I think the new books are good. They're really difficult, for the kids and us, but they're good. They have a lot more English, and it's a lot more interesting with the cartoons and topics. But it's really too hard for them. A lot of kids aren't learning anything. Like, there were kids who didn't learn anything from the old materials even though they were a lot easier, and some students are doing really well with Poptropica. But some kids just don't get it, and they never will. And it's even harder for them with the new books. I try to finish the books, and make sure all the questions are filled in, but we never have time for the group activities, or to really go over the homework, or practice things from last week. To be honest, I haven't even looked at the online stuff, I have to spend so much time preparing for the lessons, there's no time. And it's not the most important part. Some of the book activities we go through quickly because it's too hard or not interesting, and it's not in the test. It's definitely a lot of work, there's just too much in there.

Lesson Planning, Homework and Tests - My lesson planning has changed a lot. Basically, with the old materials, I didn't need to prepare much, I knew each lesson I would do some vocabulary, practice the questions and answers, do a bit of writing and phonics, then play some games to help them remember everything. As long as the flashcards were out, I didn't really need anything. Every lesson was basically the same and I didn't have to think about it much. With the new material, there are so many different things. I don't know what I'm teaching each day, I have to spend a lot of time getting ready. My lesson planning time is much, much longer. I suppose that will get better after the first unit when I get used to it. But there's just so much more. Before, there was a lot of time to fill. Now, we're always rushing, and going through things too fast so we can just finish the pages. There's no time for games or review or anything. It's so much more stressful.

The CLIL materials are a bit weird. There are so many new words that they don't know, they don't seem very interested. I basically just go through it with them, and whenever they don't know a new word, I tell them it in Japanese. I think it's ok, they might find it interesting after the first few units. But there are always kids who are just not going to get it. They'll never get it or find it interesting, no matter what the materials are. I don't think they learn much from the "social skills" page. They're not really here to learn about playing safely in the park, or sharing with their friends. So we just go through it quickly so they can finish their homework.

Some parents care about the unit tests but not many. And a lot of parents don't really care about the JET test. They just want their kid to study English, they don't really understand what they have to do. Only some parents care, and they're the ones who get the test prep books. But usually they just want their kid to go to class, they don't really care what they do there. Even with the parent observation, they only want to see their kid speaking a bit of English, but they don't understand what their kid's saying anyway. And most parents don't even attend or pay attention anyway. As long as their kid finishes their book, so they know they're not doing nothing in the class.

Introducing New Materials - Honestly, we could've done it much better. We didn't have all the books before the start of the year, we had no idea what they were like besides some samples. We should've started looking at them like 1 year before we changed. Then we could plan it better and we would know what to do. Some books we didn't even have them till the first week of class. And we're still not getting any Teacher's Books. It's not too hard to follow the book, and just do everything in it, but it's a lot of planning before class, and you never know what's going to come next. Sometimes I have no idea what the answers are till we do the activity together in class. I wish we had started months earlier, and had all of the books, homework books, CDs, tests and stuff so we could go through it together. A lot of the homework is really hard, too. They should make it easier for the students to understand what to do. They're always confused and their parents can't help them. Even when we show them in class, they forget when it's time to do homework. Some more examples and easier instructions and activities would be better.