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# The Perceptions Of Former Japanese High School Graduates Regarding Student Autonomy: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study

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# THE PERCEPTIONS OF FORMER JAPANESE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES REGARDING STUDENT AUTONOMY: A QUALITATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and friends who supported me through this process. The meaning of their support is immeasurable. Furthermore, they always gave me confidence throughout this journey. I always have belief in myself, but that extra confidence instilled in me by them was essential.

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study examined the open-ended interview between the researcher and participants to investigate the perceptions former Japanese high school graduates had as it pertains to the development of student autonomy. One interview was used for each of the four participants in the study. Over a four-week period the transcribed interviews were analyzed and coded. Across all four interviews key themes emerged, including (1) Opinions in High School Classes, (2) Independent Thought While Doing Class Activities, (3) Talk Time Between Teacher and Student, (4) Experience Doing Group Work, (5) Teacher Control in the Classroom, (6) Answering Questions Wrong, and (7) Student Autonomy in High School. The two findings revealed that using lecturing as the mode of teaching creates a lack of student autonomy development. Secondly, the next finding indicated that a passive student does not coincide with that student being autonomous in the classroom. Implications for Japanese high school students suggest that Japanese high school students are more productive when engaged by one another as well as the teacher. Implications for Japanese high school educators indicate that teachers could benefit from using different teaching techniques instead of focusing on teacher-centered learning. Implications for MEXT focus on the need for professional development to help instructors succeed in developing student autonomy. Further research is needed to examine the development of student autonomy in Japanese high school classrooms.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Omura et al. (2018) notes that Japan is a nonconfrontational society; keeping opinions private that may cause conflict and displaying amicable manners in public is held to a high standard in this country. Jarolmen (2020) revealed that cultures that focus on the needs of the whole limit individual sentiment to keep peacefulness among the group and avoid anything that would cause confrontation between two people. Japan's idea of confrontation is not a physical or verbal assault, but rather disagreements, or the rejection of doing something that is asked (Takamatsu et al., 2021). Even responding with the word "no" can make one seem like an unpleasant person to others. Ueda (1972, as cited in Aizawa & Whatley, 2006) highlighted that in Japanese culture, even saying the word *no* can make one seem unfriendly or be taken as being very hurtful by the recipient. In addition, there is a long history of respecting the elders in Japan. This goes beyond family members and elder statesmen, extending to people who are older and in a higher position than a respective individual (Ngan, 2020). These cultural norms are part of Japanese life.

The field of education in Japan is affected by these practices; teachers as well as students follow the cultural norms (Kanazawa, 2020). According to Kuramoto and Koizumi (2018) the Japanese education system has six years of primary school, three years of middle school, and three years of high school. The size of the school differs depending on the location, but by law there should be 12–16 classes at the primary, junior high, and high school level (Yamasaki, 2016). Furthermore, on average, elementary and junior high schools have 12 classes with 300 students, and high schools have 16 classes with 600 students (Yamasaki, 2016). Cultural norms affect these three levels of schooling, and the cultural norms of avoiding confrontation, not

challenging elders, and not being opinionated are held in high regard in the classroom (Kanazawa, 2020; Ngan, 2020). According to Matsuyama et al. (2019) teacher-centered learning is still happening in Japan, and it focuses on learning only from the teacher and accepting the instructor's point of view.

Existing literature focuses on the shift toward western style pedagogy in Japanese classrooms. The specific literature is on the Japanese education system (Kuramoto & Koizumi, 2018; Leong, 2016; Sanders & Ishikura, 2018; Yamanaka & Suzuki, 2020; Yamasaki, 2016), covering the formation of the education system post-war, the introduction and responsibilities of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) and the different types of schooling systems throughout Japan. Next, teacher-centered learning (Cave, 2016; Kanazawa, 2020; Ngan, 2020; Ogihara, 2017) focused on the old learning system with promise of change in the future. Student-centered learning (Juliaty et al., 2019; Kubota et al., 2019; Waniek & Nae, 2017) was well defined, its use in elementary schools was noted, and the parents' support of it was explained. The research on student autonomy (Matsuyama et al., 2019; Nakata, 2011; Tokida & Tsubaki, 2016) covered the teacher and the student in terms of how this style of learning affects both in the classroom.

Western style pedagogy encompasses student-centered learning, which produces an active learner who thrives in group collaboration, critical thinking, and autonomous learning environments (Li et al., 2012). The shift toward western style pedagogy in Japanese classrooms is not happening in high schools, and this is producing students who lack the ability to express themselves, which is not suitable in the 21st century workforce (Harada, 2018). Zhou and Li (2019) pointed out that businesses desire employees who are individually able to learn, grow, and use their previous knowledge to contribute to the company.

## Definition of Terms

*Cognitive constructivism***:** In the educational sense, cognitive constructivism embodies the autonomy of students to learn on their own with the help of the teacher (Powell & Kalina, 2009).

*Globalization:* Globalization is the dominant impact the west has on the economy, science, culture, and politics in other nations. This includes a wider range of communication systems, world collaboration, and improved technology (Rezaei, 2018).

*MEXT:* The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) is a governing body in the Japanese government that deals with international relations pertaining to the five categories (Takayama, 2007).

*Student autonomy:* This is a learning style in which students take control of their learning by grasping knowledge in the classroom and explaining it on their own (Lin & Reinders, 2019).

*Student-centered classrooms:* This is a learning environment in which the teacher and student work together to understand information (Garrett, 2008).

*Teacher-centered classrooms:* This is a teaching environment in which teacher instruction is given only through lecturing. Students are accepting knowledge without response, and instructors are active through verbal communication (Serin, 2018).

*Western style pedagogy:* This style of learning focuses on a student-centered pedagogy involving student and teacher as facilitators, critical thinking, group collaboration, and autonomous activities that require problem solving (Li et al., 2012).

## Statement of the Problem

Harada (2018) noted that Japanese high schools are centered on the teacher lecturing, exam preparation, and student memorization. This approach produces students who lack

autonomy in the classroom. Instead of a student-centered approach that uses the cognitive individuality of the student as the basis for learning, a teacher-centered approach that focuses on rote learning continues to flourish in Japanese high schools (Harada, 2018). A possibility why this is happening may be that traditional culture overrides future change, and the switch to a more student-centered learning environment has not happened (Ngan, 2020).

According to Takayama (2007) the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) took action in 2002 and created *yutori,* which is a word referencing curriculum change. This change emphasized the importance of moving from teacher-centered learning to a student-centered approach. The reason why this change occurred is because teacher-centered learning does not promote an autonomous student (Waniek & Nae, 2017). Cave (2011) described an autonomous Japanese student as one who has individual thought and uses this cognitive ability as a learning premise for acquiring knowledge in class. Teacher-centered learning focuses on the teacher lecturing the class, and students using memorization methods to learn, which lead to a passive learner (Nakata, 2011). The reason this shift happened is because students were not autonomous thinkers, and this led to a lack of creativity and self-expression in social and business situations (Wanieck & Nae, 2017). There was no importance put on students being autonomous because Japanese employers were more interested in their employee's college credentials over their skill, and this created young workers who could not perform in the modern workforce (Wanieck & Nae, 2017). Student autonomy is a skill that is fostered by the teacher in the classroom (Marshik et al., 2017). Student autonomy is explained by Holec (1981, as cited in Lin & Reinders, 2019) as the student being in control of his or her own learning, and this involves understanding learning targets, keeping track of personal progress, and being able to

understand and explain the material. Student autonomy reflects what a student-centered classroom is all about (Lin & Reinders, 2019).

Kubota et al. (2019) describes student-centered learning as a pedagogical style that implements student autonomy, and this autonomy promotes elevated thinking. With student-centered learning the teacher takes a facilitator role, which allows students to solve problems on their own, and this brings about autonomy (Juliaty et al., 2019). This autonomy is represented by the student initiating inquiry independently and in a group. The teacher-centered approach in Japanese high schools is creating citizens who do not have discernment, analysis skills, or opinionated expression (Harada, 2018). The lack of these skills produces individuals who cannot sustain themselves in the business world (Harada, 2018). Currently, Japanese companies are seeking individuals who can learn on their own, motivate themselves, set individual goals, and be in charge of improving their development (Zhou & Li, 2019). According to research Japanese students do not have these skills due to the cultural norms that limit individuality, restrict decision making, promote harmony, and stress reliance on the teacher in the classroom (Ngan, 2020; Takamatsu et al., 2021). Even with the implementation of student-centered learning in the Japanese school system, the existing literature does not demonstrate that the teaching style actually followed in Japanese high schools is a student-centered approach that supports the development of their students' autonomy (Harada, 2018).

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of former Japanese high school graduates who participated in teacher-centered classrooms as it pertains to the development of student autonomy.

## Research Question

The qualitative phenomenological study was guided by one research question:

How do former Japanese high school graduates describe their lived experience of learning in a teacher-centered classroom as it pertains to the development of their student autonomy?

## Conceptual Framework

Ravitch & Riggan (2016) explain that in a conceptual framework the interest in the topic, relevancy of methodology, and the choice of design are clearly stated. Coming from a viewpoint of a western educator who lived in Japan for more than five years, there has been a strong attraction to this topic because of the personal involvement the researcher has of being part of the push toward western-style education in Japan. Western-style pedagogy in non-Asian countries is a student-centered approach to teaching where the individuality of the student is the focus of how they learn (Hui et al., 2012). On the other hand, eastern-style pedagogy uses a teacher-centered approach in which the teachers have autonomous dominance over student learning, and students are not seen as equal partners in learning (Hui et al., 2012). As reported by Tsuchimochi (1982) the west has affected Japanese education for some time, centered around study abroad programs, pedagogy, and improved technology in the classroom. Prior to the researcher's arrival in 2015, the west had an influence on Japanese education, but the shift toward western-style pedagogy in the classroom was not sought out as it is currently. The topic of interest in this study matters because the shift toward western-style pedagogy in Japanese classrooms is not happening in high schools, and this is producing graduates who do not possess the ability to use individual thought processes to make insightful decisions in the business world (Harada, 2018).

The theoretical lens through which this study was viewed is the cognitive constructivism theory. Lourenco (2012) defined cognitive constructivism as a theory that focuses on student autonomy in a social setting. Furthermore, cognitive constructivism can be used to examine how students learn, and how teachers facilitate their autonomous learning (Powell & Kalina, 2009). As it pertains to the classroom, cognitive constructivism embodies the instructor facilitating an autonomous student by using open-ended exploration activities in which students utilize their own thought processes to learn (Ultanir, 2012). Even with the group component in the classroom, Piaget theory supports student collaboration because it can strengthen student autonomy as cited in (Green & Gredler, 2002). This theoretical approach gives a significant view that can help answer questions about teacher-centered classrooms as it pertains to student autonomy in Japanese high schools.

## Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

The researcher is aware of the assumptions involved in this study. The investigator is a western instructor who has used a student-centered style as a pedagogy method for class instruction. One assumption was that the participants were truthful in their responses. It is possible that volunteers had ulterior motives, or simply wanted to give answers that they think are expected of them. Another assumption was that it is important that the investigator did not cast the opinions of the participants on a bigger population. Furthermore, it is possible the sample experienced the approach that is being assessed. A biased lens was considered, and thoroughly set aside to conduct this research fairly.

Two limitations are addressed in this section. First, reproducing this research could be an issue because of the investigator's prior experience as an educator in Japan. Creswell (2005) discusses the importance of reproducing the research, and how explaining limitations can aid in

successful replication. The way the researcher investigates and interprets information may be different from another investigator who has not lived in Japan. To mitigate this, the researcher disregarded all biases obtained through previous interactions with Japanese natives both in and out of the classroom. Bloomberg & Volpe (2016) discuss the next limitation, which is the generalizability of the results. To mitigate this, the intent of this study was not to collect data from many volunteers, but rather to go in-depth with a small number of participants to understand the intricacies of the Japanese high school learning experience as it relates to student autonomy.

The scope of the study was limited to former Japanese high school students who had attended the Lambert English School site. This is a small sample. It is important not to make recommendations that represent the whole of Japan given the small sample size.

## Significance

The potential significance this study provides in relation to answering the research question, and addressing the problem is an insight into the drawbacks of teacher-centered learning as it pertains to student autonomy. These drawbacks could be used as data for Japanese high schools to reevaluate their high school pedagogy as it pertains to student autonomy in the classroom. Data will be evaluated on how students learn autonomously. This could lead to Japanese high schools taking an in-depth examination of student-centered learning and implementing this pedagogy style in high schools.

Additionally, data from this research could affect the importance Japanese high schools place on preparing students for college entrance exams. The continuing of the teacher-centered approach is intertwined with how students prepare for standardized tests, and teachers spend time lecturing students on how to perform well on these tests. Harada (2018) confirms that the

primary focus of high schools is to get students ready for university entrance exams by lecturing them. These tests scores are like a badge that follows the student their whole life because it affects the college they go to, the company they work for, and social status (Vellaris & Willis, 2013). If the results from this study are used as a means of changing pedagogy in Japanese high schools from teacher-centered to student-centered, then it is possible that less emphasis will be put on exam culture, and this could change the requirement colleges want for entrance.

Students being put in leadership roles in the classroom, and teachers engaging students as a facilitator is a learning dynamic that needs to be examined. The benefits of student-centered learning as it relates to autonomy are clearly displayed in research, and MEXT has supported this style of learning (Yamanaka & Suzuki, 2020); however, it is not happening in high schools. As it relates to the business world, Zhou and Li (2019) stated that an autonomous employee is what is desired by companies, and Harada (2018) reported that Japanese students are not prepared to work autonomously in current business models. A closer look is needed to know what is happening in Japanese high school classes as it relates to student autonomy.

## Conclusion

Teacher-centered education flourished in Japan throughout the 20th century (Yamanaka & Suzuki, 2020). In the early 21st century MEXT members gathered and decided on a curriculum change that focused on a student-centered approach. This was the introduction to western-style pedagogy in Japanese schools. The problem is that teacher-centered learning creates a lack of student autonomy in the classroom (Harada, 2018). The phenomenological study will give an in-depth look into the student's perspective of current learning experiences.

This phenomenological study's purpose was to report the experiences former Japanese high school students had in teacher-centered classrooms as it relates to student autonomy.

Research is lacking on the high school class environment; therefore, a study on student learning as it pertains to student autonomy took place. To present a complete understanding of the learning environment in Japanese high schools, this phenomenological study answered one important question. Furthermore, it was important to conduct this phenomenological qualitative study to develop insight regarding the views former Japanese high school students have of their learning experiences.

This study gave insight into the teacher and student dynamic as it pertains to student autonomy. The next section will give a careful analysis about the shift toward western-style pedagogy in Japanese classrooms (Chapter 2), then the methodology and data collection methods will be presented (Chapter 3); interpretation of data is next (Chapter 4), and future recommendations and suggestions conclude in Chapter 5.

# CHAPTER 2

# LITERATURE REVIEW

Educational reform has happened throughout history. Martinez et al. (n.d.) discuss educational reform as pertaining to shifts and evolution in the school system's philosophical principles, student protocol, instruction, academics, administration, and organizational hierarchy. Educational reform impacts students learning, and this can affect the future generation. This focus of instructional change is on the country of Japan, and the literature focuses on the shift toward the change.

Specifically, this literature explores the shift toward western-style pedagogy in Japanese classrooms. Suansing (2017) explains that educational institutions in the west put more importance on students communicating in classroom discussions, expressing opinionated responses, and using their natural mental thought processes. The students are an integral part of the classroom. As Japan is becoming more open to the west, it has adopted western classroom principles that the country believes will benefit the future generation (Yamanaka & Suzuki, 2020).

Although there is evidence of openness with minimal change to the Japanese education system in the 20th century, the background concerning this embrace of western pedagogy happened in the early 21st century. According to Takayama (2007) a new proposal for the school curriculum in Japan happened in 1998, and this turning point led to changes in the Japanese school curriculum in 2002. This announcement sparked opinionated outbursts from the Japanese society, and the importance of education reform, and the effect it could have on the country, was brought to light. After the changes were announced to the country, a national debate ensued, and this entailed educators and researchers discussing the achievement level of Japanese students

(Takayama, 2007). Academic scores were declining and student creative ability was not being utilized in the classroom; the consensus was that change needed to happen (Yamanaka & Suzuki, 2020). Through challenging discussions like this, reasons for stances on reform emerge.

The research is limited because there was limited data on how Japanese high schools have benefited from this shift. In this review, research from historical sources as well as up-to-date scholarly work was used to assess the topic at hand. The four relatable themes in this literature review are (1) Japanese Education System; (2) Teacher Centered Learning; (3) Student Centered Learning; (4) and Student Autonomy.

## Conceptual Framework

The investigator is a native English speaking instructor who used student-centered teaching while working at various Japanese educational institutions. In terms of school level, most of the researcher's classroom experience has been with Japanese high school students, and this is what garnered interest in the topic. The methodology is relevant because a qualitative study uses open-ended questions that allow volunteers to expand on their experiences (Jackson et al., 2007). In this study participants were interviewed and given time to express themselves freely without being forced into choosing an answer. The study used the phenomenological design. Phenomenology focuses on the details of the participant's lived experience (Goulding, 2005). Furthermore, phenomenology can be descriptive, which takes away researcher bias and uses categorization methods for organizational purposes (Neubauer et al., 2019).

## Theoretical Framework

Sharkins et al. (2017) describe the classroom characteristics of cognitive constructivism as an educational atmosphere in which the teacher aids in the student building knowledge and developing into an autonomous learner. The theoretical framework of cognitive constructivism

explains the development of student autonomy and highlights the benefit of student-centered learning as it pertains to student autonomy. Powell and Kalina (2009) discuss how cognitive constructivism uses inquiry-based methods, uses the teacher as a guide instead of an autonomous dictator, and fosters reasoning abilities to promote student-centered learning. Kambara (2020) added to this point by emphasizing how the constructivism view centers on student-centered learning, which aids in individual growth. This gives understanding as to why there has been a shift toward western pedagogy in Japanese classrooms, because Japanese classes focus on direct instruction from the teacher, and this seriously affects how students learn on their own (Kambara, 2020).

Ultatnir (2012) discusses how Jean Piaget, the founder of cognitive constructivism, raves that student learning occurs when students can grasp knowledge, meaning, and understanding through autonomous activities. As noted by Powell and Kalina (2009), from the idea of constructivism Piaget developed cognitive constructivism, which centered on autonomously grasping knowledge. Piaget identified four stages of development. First is the sensorimotor stage (zero–two years old), which focuses on children learning about their environment through their sensory faculty (Powell & Kalina, 2009). In the preoperational stage (two–seven years old), children understand language but are not ready to comprehend the thoughts of others. Next, the concrete operational stage (seven–11 years old) encompasses children swapping their natural thought processes with their own individual analysis. In the formal operational stage (eleven years–adult) a person uses an elevated critical thinking process to figure out difficult situation (Powell & Kalina, 2009).

Piaget uses this as a background to the theory so that instructors understand these stages in order to choose methods to use at each stage to promote student autonomy (Powell & Kalina,

2009). In addition to this, Piaget reinforced the importance of assimilation and accommodation in the development of intellectual capacity (Ultanir, 2012). Piaget defined assimilation as students having their own knowledge, and accommodation as when known information is edited to process new information (Ultanir, 2012). In addition, Piaget acknowledges that social interaction in the classroom occurs, but it is up to the learner to build knowledge on their own from that experience (Powell & Kalina, 2009). Further, Ulatnir (2012) emphasizes how Piaget encourages independent and collaborative experiences in the classroom to enhance student autonomy.

Understanding the entirety of the cognitive constructivism theory will put teachers in in a facilitative role, resulting in developing student autonomy (Green & Gredler, 2002). The relevance of Piaget's theory with this study is that it details the limitations teacher-centered learning has on student autonomy while highlighting the ways instructors can elicit autonomy in students, resulting in a student-centered approach (Ulatanir, 2012). Jean Piaget is the founding father of constructivism, and even though people have subtracted from and added to this concept it is still used in pedagogy today (Powell & Kalina, 2009).

There are some weaknesses that could affect the benefits this theory offers. Time, class preparation, and reflection are factors that could negatively affect progress if not addressed (Brau, 2018). Brau (2018) confirms this by reporting that extra time is needed for the learner to grasp the cognitive constructivism way, and the given class period may not be enough time to accomplish this. Furthermore, there is a greater responsibility on the instructor to spend more time outside of class on preparation (Brau, 2018). And, importantly, the teacher needs an adequate amount of time to reflect with students (Brau, 2018).

## Japanese Education System

The structure of the Japanese education system was put in place after World War II (Yamasaki, 2016). This involved secondary schools and vocational schools being joined as one unified high school, elementary schools were standardized as six-year institutions, and junior high schools were three-year programs (Yamasaki, 2016). Kuramoto and Koizumi (2018) reiterate the formation of the education system post-war. From 1949 to 1953 universities and graduate schools were established (Yamasaki, 2016).

Before World War II Confucianism had guided the education system, in that instructors took on the role of authoritative rulers in the classroom while students were seen as submissive learners (Ngan, 2020). During the 1970s, heavy importance was put on school exams, and it created problematic pressure on students to succeed in entering reputable colleges (Nomura, 2017). Due to pedagogy focusing on test taking, there was more emphasis on students learning without thinking because a good memory was enough to pass standardized examinations (Yamanaka & Suzuki, 2020). Agarwal (2019) highlights how Bloom's Taxonomy does list recall and retrieval on the list of the order of learning, but it is on the lower end of learning and does not facilitate cognitive autonomy. As it pertains to the Japanese education system, Bloom's Taxonomy rates memorization as an unsuitable method to promote student autonomy. Throughout the 2000s, Japan had a desire to reach the level of their western counterparts in relation to the economy, and the same has happened with their education system (Yamanaka & Suzuki, 2020).

### Role of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT)

The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) has reformed education in Japan every ten years since 1947 (Yamada, 2021). MEXT is in control

of curriculum reform at the primary, junior high, and high school level (Kuramoto & Koizumi, 2016). Generally speaking, primary and junior high schools enroll 300 students while high schools enroll 600 students (Yamasaki, 2016). MEXT oversees the curriculum guideline at each level of schooling, and pays one-third of instructors' and administrators' salaries (Yamasaki, 2016). Since the start of the 21st century MEXT has been trying to develop curriculum that steers away from passive students in the classroom (Yamada, 2021).

For Japanese students, going to school is an uncomfortable and high-pressure environment where the teachers strenuously focus on passing standardized tests (Harada, 2018). This makes the learning environment stressful and worrisome for the pupils. Park and Butler (2010) discuss how MEXT created a Rainbow Plan to identify educational strategies to raise the standard of academic skill. This plan made sure that instructors are put through professional workshops; furthermore, parents started to gain trust in the system and there was an advancement in the development of international universities. A plan was set for the future of education for the next one hundred years (Park & Butler, 2010).

MEXT understood that reform still needed to happen to address methodologies in the classroom (Yamanaka & Suzuki, 2020). Waniek and Nae (2017) identify these changes as students learning on their own, having a mind that thinks outside the box, and understanding how to solve problems without help from the teacher. MEXT was at the forefront in addressing the changes that were needed for reform (Yamanaka & Suzuki, 2020). Takeuchi (2019) expresses the importance of understanding that education reform is not something that happens very fast with little effort, and all bodies involved with the transition should continually track the development of the students. Switching the focus to student-centered learning is a process that

takes time, and according to Leong (2016), MEXT is the chief organization in Japan that controls, mandates, and tracks matters pertaining to educational reform.

### *Public School in Japan*

Cave (2011) explains that Japan was worried because the education system in public schools came from the military regime, and the school system had no authority over what information was used, how it was learned, and how it was taught in class. MEXT developed strategies to reform classroom teaching in public schools. Regarding public school teaching, Oga-Baldwin and Nakata (2015) expressed that elementary school education in Japan was different from junior high and high school in that it focused on student-centered learning. Elementary schools focused on group discussions, critical thinking, limited help from the teacher, and student opinionated answers which brought about an autonomous learner (Cave, 2011).

Inoue et al., (2019) evoke this autonomy-based system in public elementary schools that involves a teacher presenting inquiry-based problems, student individual or group solving time, and a class discussion at the end. The Japanese elementary school lesson system exemplified how to promote student-centered learning (Inoue et al., 2019). Even though there are standardized tests that the upper grades must take, it is not clear why the inquisitive style of learning stopped at the start of junior high school.

Cave (2016) notes that junior high schools in the Japanese public school system are less about class discussion, and self-expression, and more about exam preparations. Students quietly listen to the teacher talk for the duration of the class whether it is for core courses or high school exam preparation; and going over the information inquisitively is left to the students (Cave,

2016). Some junior high school students shed some light on how they felt about their junior high school experience in the public school system before reform.

In 2003 Morita (as cited in Tomari & Kudomi, 2007) discussed a Japanese junior high school student struggling because the pace was too fast, the current curriculum did not foster learning, and this showed that grades were the most important aspect of learning in junior high school. Furthermore, the student had no desire to attend school because of feeling like a failure. In 2003 another student, according to Morita (2003, as cited in Tomari & Kudomi, 2007) reported that class instruction is too fast, difficult to understand, and felt teachers should be more involved in student learning. If students could confidently comprehend the material, then there would be more interest in going to school; however, difficulty in learning leads to students not wanting to study (Morita, 2003, as cited in Tomari & Kudomi, 2007).

Integrated Studies (IS) is a program set up for public school students to choose which classes they were interested in, and they also felt more freedom in how they learned (Park & Butler, 2010). After the implementation of Integrated Studies (IS) classes in junior high schools, students experienced a more autonomous school experience (Park & Butler, 2010). IS classes promoted student autonomy, which led to improved critical thinking (Nomura, 2017). In addition, it was reported that there was more collaborative learning going on in junior high schools, and there was more communication between student and teacher (Saito & Sato, 2012).

### *Entrance Exams*

As noted, Japanese high schools in the public school system focus on entrance examinations and lectures. Harada (2018) noted that Japanese high school students are good at answering test questions, but are limited in oral and written expression. Focus on rote learning has affected how Japanese students express themselves (Nakayasu, 2016). The main priority for

high school students in the public school system was to pass the exam to enter the university, and as a result MEXT has decided to make changes to this one-way path into universities; and the two major overhauls in place are centered on reforming the university entrance exam, and the courses of study (Nakayasu, 2016). Both changes center on developing an autonomous student (Nakayasu, 2016).

The entrance exam being used to assess autonomous thinking uses essay questions with different themes instead of the standard fill in the blank answer sheet, which gives the students an opportunity to express what they are thinking in written form (Nakayasu, 2016). For students to know where they are regarding their critical thinking skills the Central Education Council (CEC) has posited the idea of a test that can give the high-school students an idea of their skill before they enter university (Nakayasu, 2016). To expand on this Harada (2018) discusses how the standard used in the high school curriculum in public schools is being critiqued; entrance exams along with other curriculum changes will be transparent in the year 2030.

### *International Schools in Japan*

Educational reform has brought about private international schools in Japan, and the student body consists of foreign students as well as Japanese native students who have lived abroad (Tanaka & Kutsuki, 2018). MEXT has had a great impact on the rise of international schools because of the importance it puts on English being taught as a subject in the future (Tanaka & Kutsuki, 2018). These international school classes are taught in English, and although expensive, these schools offer Japanese students a different style of education, while the public school system is still working on reform.

Lowe (1999, 2000 as cited in Mackenzie, 2009) reports that some people feel being educated in an international school gives students an upper hand in being able to adapt and be

successful in an international economy because of the focus on student-centered learning. It is to be noted that using the word international does not necessarily mean a better quality of education is provided, and in some cases the term international is used as an advertising ploy to attract parents (Mackenzie, 2009). Bunnell et al. (2016) noted that some international schools cater to the needs of the parents while others put profit over education.

### *International Baccalaureate (IB) World Schools in Japan*

The Japanese government is also in support of International Baccalaureate (IB) schools (Sanders & Ishikura, 2018). According to Sanders and Ishikura (2018) IB is an international education model that provides schools around the world with pedagogy, curriculum, and testing methods. These schools go even further than private international schools in that they belong to a worldwide community, and there is a rigorous process candidate schools go through before being accepted as an IB school (Lakes & Donovan, 2018). These schools focus on student work in the community, global awareness, problem solving abilities, creativity, exceptional thinking, and group collaboration, all of which promote student-centered learning (Haywood, 2018). A plan called the IB School Projects was set in 2011 to have 200 IB schools in Japan, and as of 2018, there are 36 (Sanders & Ishikura, 2018).

Japan has embraced this system and is trying to get Japanese universities to accept IB graduates. Sanders and Ishikura (2018) discuss how Japanese universities in the past were only concerned with examination scores to consider admission, but now they are considering using a more comprehensive approach that involves more skills than test taking ability. Because of the western approach to teaching in IB classes, IB graduates prefer to attend university outside of Japan (Sanders & Ishikura, 2018). Their education has prepared them for a global community in which their autonomous skills are highly admired (Sanders & Ishikura, 2018). Universities in

Japan are still trying to diversify and globalize their education (Sanders & Ishikura, 2018). A diminutive amount of Japanese private and national universities are on the level of schooling an IB student would desire (Sanders & Ishikura, 2018). These schools have been accepting of these students, and further discussing this, Sanders and Ishikura (2018) mention how private universities understand the IB program and are more flexible in admitting IB students. Usually the government makes, or suggests changes to higher education institutions, but when it comes to the International Baccalaureate program, private universities are at the forefront of accepting these students (Sanders & Ishikura, 2018). One reason why national universities have not stepped forward is that they do not want to affect the quality of the institution by changing admission requirements (Sanders & Ishikura, 2018).

### *Higher Education in Japan*

In 2010, MEXT implemented the Global 30 Project, and this plan involved high ranking Japanese universities offering some English-only instructed degree programs as well as other local universities to offer mandatory English core classes (Mckenzie, 2017). The goal is to change high-ranking national universities into high-ranking global universities. According to Yonezawa et al. (2009) internationalization of Japanese universities is urged by the government for the economy to be sustainable. Yamada and Yamada (2016) report that teaching practices in the eastern side of the world focus on the teacher instead of the student, but as higher education institutions become global campuses, western teaching and learning practices that focus on student-centered teaching will come into existence in Japanese universities. The purpose of this is for Japanese universities to be formidable in administering student-centered learning so as to be noticed as a global educator (Kusumoto, 2018).

Transforming Japanese universities into global institutions that have a high standard of education is the result desired through educational reform (Rose & McKinley, 2018)). Japanese universities are underperforming in a global sense, and to combat this they have implemented nationwide plans that hire top foreign instructors and develop more English degree programs (Futao & Kiyomi, 2020). Mckenzie (2017) mentioned that the Japanese government is seeking to internationalize higher education, and this move is expected to bring in more than 200,000 foreign students. More focus has been on internationalizing schools over universities, but since 2008 there has been emphasis on higher education (McKenzie, 2017). MEXT, and others who support curriculum reform in higher education acknowledge teacher-centered learning needs to be replaced by student-centered learning in the university system (Kusumoto, 2018).

### *English Language Education in Japan*

During the late 19th century Japan desired useable information from the west that could help their society, and in order to understand this written information, the Japanese government would translate each English word into Japanese (Morita, 2017). This translation method was used in English classes whereby the instructor teaches English using the Japanese language, and students learn words by translation, and this creates a teacher-centered environment where teachers just give students information (Morita, 2017). According to Esaki and Shintani (2010) in 2003 a plan was put in place by MEXT that focused on revamping English education within five years. Although this was a step forward, this English class based on communicative skills limits the Japanese students' learning because teachers focus only on the communication of English, which neglects many student activities and instruction that uses student-centered teaching principles (Esaki & Shintani, 2010).

Native-English speaking instructors teach English in Japan, but the communication-only emphasis in public schools uses the team-teaching method, and this often results in instructors being used as translators (Rao, 2020). Foreign instructors from English speaking countries are used for vocabulary translation and vocabulary pronunciation. There was western presence from a teaching viewpoint, but confusion and a diminished role usually put the native English-speaking instructor in a submissive or inactive position, resulting in teacher-centered instruction (Rao, 2020).

### *Globalization in Japanese Education*

Globalization is happening rapidly, and Japan, from an educational standpoint, is adapting to the change (Yamanaka & Suzuki, 2020). Moriata (2014) expressed the idea that Japanese students need to have intercultural communication to set them up for success in this globalized world. Yamada and Yamada (2016) reported that these days schools are being pushed by the Japanese government to make their school curriculum and teaching better in order to fall in line with global standards of education that promote student-centered learning.

Globalization brings foreign students into the country and creates opportunities for Japanese students to learn outside of the country. Hiroshi (2018) noted that MEXT carried out a policy to raise the number of Japanese students studying abroad from 60,000 in 2010 to 120,000 by 2020, and MEXT had a plan to increase the number of international students from 124,000 in 2010 to 300,000 in 2020 (Hiroshi, 2018). MEXT is also promoting internalization by increasing the funding for universities to accommodate international students (Hiroshi, 2018).

Yamada and Yamada (2016) endorsed the needed involvement of higher education institutions, and show how the increase in international students, relationships with foreign universities, and implementation of study abroad programs make Japan an international

educational hub. Asaoka and Yano (2009) reported that globalization is occurring around the world, and this cross-cultural interaction is needed for Japan to mingle in the global community.

Yano (2011, as cited in Morita, 2015) mentions that sufficient English language skills for business situations, discussion skills, and presentation ability are lacking among the native people, and because the English teaching is so limited, students feel it is useful only for university entrance exams. In 2013, MEXT tried to highlight the importance of English proficiency in youth, and the implementation of English class in schools was done in hope of creating a global mindset (Suzuki, 2017).

McClung (2019) discussed the study "Impact of English Language Teachers' Technology-Based Pedagogical Choices on Japanese Students," which was done at ABC University in Kansai that used an interactive learning approach in the English classes. This study was done on ten English teachers who were teaching first year Japanese undergraduate students. McClung (2019) discussed the fact that the teachers felt that classroom technology mixed with teacher interaction provided more learning options, increased student engagement, helped with comfortability doing presentations, and promoted student-centered learning.

## Behaviorist Theory and Teacher-Centered Learning

The behaviorist theory is the basis for the teacher-centered approach, and this theory focuses on passive students responding to stimulants in the environment (Serin, 2018). The stimulant focused on is an active lecturer who is the main source of knowledge (Serin, 2018). Furthermore, Serin (2018) stated how there is no student autonomy because there is a lack of critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving activities in teacher-centered learning. Emaliana (2017) described teacher-centered learning as a pedagogy in which instructors take on an authoritative role and provide submissive students with the correct answers. To go further,

teacher-centered learning creates an environment where instructors answer every question a student has, and teachers dominate every student learning experience (Emaliana, 2017). This is because the teacher is seen as the expert in the field of knowledge they are teaching, so everything revolves around the instructor leading (Mascolo, 2009).

## Teacher-Centered Learning in Japan

Teacher-Centered learning created an atmosphere in which the student's role was listening, and being submissive to the authoritative instructor was the norm (Ngan, 2020). As reported by Cox and Yamaguchi (2010) Japanese students depend on the teacher for everything in the class, and studies show American instructors feel the Japanese students lack autonomy in learning. The result of this was students having problems with being self-reliant in class. Cave (2016) talks about how changes to teacher-centered learning in the Japanese classroom were at the forefront of plans in the twenty-first century.

Nakata (2011) declared that nationally Japan is in a time of change regarding their education field. The former way of education based on memorization and lecturing is looked at as a traditional custom that is outdated, and instead the value of student independence is sought (Nakata, 2011). Before Japan's concern with adapting to globalization, their education culture was all about performing well on standardized tests, and this style of education matched up with their hierarchical tradition because students took on a passive role to authoritative instructors (Yamanaka & Suzuki, 2020). Waniek and Nae (2017) mentioned that Japan realized traditional teaching philosophies do not foster problem-solving skills or rational thinkers, which are essential qualities that lead to autonomy in business. Not only was student creativity lost in this teaching style but the desire to be an independent thinker was not there. As time has passed MEXT noticed that passing tests was not the only thing important for students, and Japan had

created an educational system where global recognition of high standardized test scores was more important than classroom learning (Nakayasu, 2016).

## Influenced by Culture

Throughout Japanese culture, students rely on the instructor for learning and take a submissive role in the classroom (Kanazawa, 2020). Ngan (2020) illustrates how Confucian heritage has a strong hierarchy system, and this system was adopted by Japan. The adherence to this historical norm is how the learned behavior of hiding one's feelings in public came about, and this affected the teaching field (Ngan, 2020). The effect put students at the bottom of the K–12 hierarchy and passivity led them to abstain from challenging the instructor or starting new discussions (Ngan, 2020). The Japanese word *honne* talks about how someone truly feels about something, and the word *tatemae* describes how one behaves in public (Collier & Hernandez, 2016). The classroom is a public space where culture affects how students expresses themselves in this educational environment.

### *Collectivism*

Throughout Japanese traditional culture, Japan has identified as a collective society that follows cultural norms, and these norms focus on group concord instead of individual liking (Ogihara, 2017). This has created a society where individuality is based on collective thought (Omura et al. 2018). Individualism has surged among the people because of urbanization (Ogihara, 2017). Japanese society's economic growth and the urbanization that came with it created more importance on individualism. For example, sizes of households decreased due to divorce, media uses the term individual frequently, and social values are focusing on individuals (Ogihara, 2017).

### *Individualism*

Furthermore, individualistic ideology has spread to the school system, which promotes autonomous and eccentric students (Ogihara, 2017). This spread has given individual confidence in the young generation to express themselves and according to Omura et al. (2018) younger Japanese people are starting to be expressive in their individualism. For example, instead of worrying about others' needs first, the younger generation are more direct in conveying their thoughts (Omura et al. (2018). The strong cultural norm of collectivism is still prevalent in Japan. Individualism is coexisting with collectivism in Japan, but most people are skeptical of the benefit individualism has because of the damage it can do to relationships (Ogihara, 2017).

### *Communication in the Classroom*

In Japan there are strong cultural norms, and traditions that spill over into the education system. Specifically speaking, keeping the peace and avoiding confrontation are longstanding traditional values in this society (Omura et al., 2018). This refers to avoiding any situation that would cause disagreement between two or more people (Takamatsu et al., 2021). Jarolmen (2020) referred to these disagreements being brought about by opinionated thoughts, attitudes, or judgments that break unity. These practices have spilled over into the classroom, and it has created an environment where the teacher-centered style of teaching is the authoritative mode in which students learn (Ngan, 2020). This type of learning puts the student in a submissive position. Ngan (2020) confirms this by mentioning that Japanese teachers are viewed as authoritative leaders in the classroom who are not to be questioned.

According to Takamatsu et al. (2021) harmony is very important in Japanese culture. Like-mindedness is sought over individual opinions, and because of this Japanese people seek unity instead of having disagreements because of a difference in opinion (Takamatsu et al.,

2021). Takamatsu et al. (2021) acknowledge that the way someone honestly feels is reserved for those close to them; therefore, the Japanese are rarely expected to show how they really feel about something in public. Family relationships, best friends, and dating are the outlets for true feelings to come out, and even in these types of relationships people are still reluctant to express themselves because the norm has trickled down into their private lives (Takamatsu et al., 2021). As noted earlier, social norms are expected in public settings, and the classroom is a public environment. There is a level of understanding as to why these cultural norms have been used in Japanese learning environments. Japanese students are not expected to express their true feelings in the classroom, and because of cultural norms, it is understandable why teacher-centered instruction was prevalent (Ngan, 2020).

**Teacher-Centered Learning Transformed**

Japanese instructors are culturally tied to the traditional military mindset, which focuses on ruling, and respect in the classroom (Ngan, 2020). This came from the philosophy of Confucianism, which has been a stronghold in Japanese society (Ngan, 2020). As it pertains to education, Confucianism focuses on morals, and to achieve this the thought is that a power structure that uses unequal relationships will have stability (Ngan, 2020). In schools this inequality is between teacher and student. Teachers ruled the class talk time, and this created an atmosphere where the student's role was listening and being submissive to the authoritative instructor. As reported by Cox and Yamaguchi (2010) Japanese students depend on the teacher for everything in the class, and studies show American instructors feel the Japanese students lack autonomy in learning. The result of this was students having problems with being self-reliant in class. Cave (2016) talks about how changes to teacher-centered learning in the Japanese classroom were at the forefront of plans in the twenty-first century.

Lesson study is a process that started in the early twentieth century, and it involves a harmonious collaboration among teachers (Duez, 2018). During this collaboration instructors discuss teacher observation plans, curriculum, instruction, and student learning (Duez, 2018). Instead of focusing on how better test scores can be achieved, the teaching system is looking at how they make students active learners (Waniek & Nae, 2017).

Lesson study in Japan is a popular tool that focuses on classroom instruction in order to make instructors better (Hiebert & Stigler, 2017). This lesson study among teachers involves reviewing learning goals for students, and teachers collaborating on curriculum (Takahashi & McDougal, 2016). Hiebert and Stigler (2017) suggest lesson study highlights are using planning to improve teaching, observing lessons to record student action, and using information from critiques to alter lesson plans. The author refers to professional development, and how the teachers use data to become better. The teachers assess their colleagues in classroom settings, and their teaching skills are evaluated by using the student test scores as a guide (Hiebert & Stigler, 2017). The literature shows the student-centered learning part of the lesson study is negating teacher-centered learning because of the change MEXT is implementing in the education system.

The idea of sharing information, adjusting class instruction to help with student learning, and knowing what learning goals to address are part of professional development (Takahashi & McDougal, 2016). A significant point to consider is that this lesson study is used with k–8 schools (Hiebert & Stigler, 2017), which points out that high schools are not using this system. In general, the style of teaching in Japanese high school classes is teacher-centered, and the student's role is listening to lectures, and memorizing information (Kusumoto, 2018).

Furthermore, the dominance of talk time by the teacher creates an environment where students do not individually express themselves (Kusumoto, 2018).

## Student-Centered Learning

According to Serin (2018) student-centered learning occurs when students take over their learning with an inquisitive approach, and this brings about an autonomous learner. As students use their thinking to understand knowledge they expand their individuality, and even collaborative activities in the classroom increase individual self-confidence (Serin, 2018). Mascolo (2009) detailed the roles the teacher and the student have in this symbiotic relationship. To start, teachers facilitate students to be in control of rules, instructors encourage multiple responses from students, students choose how they will complete an assignment, students select topics to learn about, and autonomously students let the instructor know when they are ready to move to the next learning objective (Mascolo, 2009). Emaliana (2017) added that student-centered learning is an environment where the instructor can assess the needs of each individual student and use this data to promote effective learning.

## Student-Centered Learning in Japan

Student-centered learning is a known learning approach in Japan due to this active learning approach being used in elementary schools (Kubota et al., 2019). To keep elementary students engaged, an active form of learning is used in K–5 schools. The active form of learning is multifaceted and is labeled as student-centered learning (Kubota et al., 2019). This means that students use inquiry-based methods to deal with problem solving, and instead of the instructor spewing out the answer upon request, the student works on open-ended problems autonomously (Juliaty et al., 2019). There is also a group component to student-centered learning, which centers on student-student learning relationships (Kubota et al., 2019). Piaget's cognitive

constructivism theory also acknowledges learning autonomously from this group concept (Green & Gredler, 2002).

**Parental Support and Student-Centered Learning**

Velliaris and Willis (2013) mentioned that before this push for education reform, Japanese parents were supportive of the examination-based teaching style, and the reasoning behind it was that the exam grade of the student reflected on how the family was judged. The family name can take a hit or be revered depending on how well the child does on these standardized school examinations (Velliaris & Willis, 2013).

For some time, Japanese parents have been more interested in their children being part of a student-centered classroom environment (Mackenzie, 2009). In a study, forty-four Japanese parents were interviewed from the cities of Sendai, Osaka, Hokkaido, Hiroshima, Saitama, and Tokyo, and Gordon (2005) elaborated on this study by detailing the fear parents have of their children going through the public school system, and not being able to choose alternative schooling due to financial issues. Seventy-six percent of the parents stated that the image of teachers has worsened over time, and the parents felt that elementary school teachers foster the children correctly, but junior high and high school teachers focus on exams, behavior, and club activities over better classroom instruction (Gordon, 2005).

Takashi et al. (2010) reported on a study done in 2006 that consisted of 2000 Japanese parents who had children in preschools, elementary schools, and junior high schools. The ratio of parents to youngest children in each of the schools was 500 in preschools, 1000 in elementary schools, and 500 in junior high schools. At the conclusion of the study, it was found that only 25% of parents were satisfied with the school system, and 24.3% were satisfied with the teachers (Takeshi et al., 2010). Alternative schooling like private schools and international schools are

gaining popularity; although expensive, the Japanese families that can afford the cost are taking advantage of their existence (Mackenzie, 2009). Parents are unhappy with the curriculum the public school is offering and are seeking a more global education that focuses on student-centered learning, which will allow their child to succeed anywhere in the world (Mackenzie, 2009).

MEXT has backed the rise of international schools not only because of the different pedagogy practices, but also because of the English instruction (Tanaka & Kutsuki, 2018). Japanese parents send their children to international schools to experience a different curriculum, but they also get to experience a heavier involvement with the school (Bunnel, 2018). International schools are an alternative form of education to which Japanese parents have access. A study was done on six international schools in Japan, and in this research 192 females and one male were included in the study (Mackenzie, 2009). The research focused on why the parents chose this type of schooling for their children. A scale of (1–5) was used with 5 being the highest mean score. English education, westernized curriculum, and international education all scored 4.2 or higher showing the importance of alternative schooling (Mackenzie, 2009).

## Student Autonomy

Tanyeli-Zeki and Kuter (2018) described student autonomy as a style of learning in which students take responsibility for their own learning in a multifaceted way. This is done by students figuring out the aim, understanding progression of understanding, deciding which learning tools to use and how to use them, and being able to analyze the understood knowledge in a coherent way (Tanyeli-Zeki & Kuter, 2018). Furthermore, student autonomy encompasses instructors guiding students to a higher standard of learning and critical thinking (Willison et al., 2017). In addition to this, Doman et al. (2020) discussed how teachers who foster student

engagement, free expression, and the ability to choose a learning dynamic reflects an autonomous classroom. The research shows the many aspects of student autonomy, and the importance of the teacher's role in fostering this learning approach in students.

## Student Autonomy in Japan

According to Rundle (2017) the importance Japan has put on peacefulness, hierarchal respect, and group agreement makes student autonomy unsuitable as it pertains to following tradition. The western-style approach to education uses the instructor as a facilitator to promote student autonomy; however, Japan has followed the ideas of Confucianism, in which the teacher should never be questioned because of their vast knowledge on topics (Rundle, 2017). Another characteristic of the Japanese student is comfortability in being silent, and this silence in the classroom negates autonomous learning (Kim et al., 2016). Overall, the research shows cultural values have promoted an autonomous teacher and a submissive student as it pertains to learning in the classroom.

MEXT acknowledged the importance of an autonomous student (Tokida & Tsubaki, 2016). Cave (2011) confirmed the need for education revision in Japan, and the topic at hand was nurturing future learners who could think on their own, have a creative mind, and be comfortable with their individuality. Student independence is facilitated by the instructor's style of teaching, and this affects how the student learns. Specifically, Lu and Wang (2021) focused on this by discussing how teacher facilitation leads to student autonomy, and this autonomous approach to teaching helps students develop their inner thinking skills. According to Reeve and Jang (2006) controlling teachers force students to do what they tell them to do, and this hinders the student from developing that internal thought process. This means teachers who control everything in their classes limit the students' opportunity to elevate their autonomous skills. Also, when class

activities are presented, the student looks for guidance instead of self-initiation (Reeve & Jang, 2006).

**Teacher Autonomy to Student Autonomy**

Teacher autonomy is a way to promote learner autonomy, and Nakata (2011) defines teacher autonomy as teachers being independent in their own lives and transferring that independence to their role as a colleague and a teacher, an attitude that filters down to the student. According to Matsuyama et al. (2019) theories behind using student-centered teaching comes from the west, and teacher-centered instruction is still prevalent throughout Japan. This results in a classroom where the focus is on the teacher leading, and this does not promote student autonomy (Matsuyama et al., 2019).

Nakata (2011) studied eight Japanese high school teachers, and they were interviewed by answering a questionnaire on promoting student autonomy in class. It was found that most teachers did not use learner autonomy strategies even though they knew the benefits, and Nakata (2011) reported that the data showed many of the Japanese teachers understood the benefits of learner autonomy but did not use the practice in class. In addition, the quantitative data reflects that culture affected how the teachers taught, and their own experience as students in the past had an impact on how they taught students. The study showed that the teachers understand how teaching autonomy promotes learner autonomy, and they are using this to think about their teaching practice.

Cox and Yamaguchi (2010) reported on the study "Japanese Nursing Students' Perceptions of the Teaching Performance of an Intercultural Teacher" conducted in Okinawa. An American intercultural instructor was teaching their classes using western-style pedagogy with an interactive approach, and there was an interpreter present due to the fact the students were not

fluent in English (Cox & Yamaguchi, 2010). At the end of the four-day, three-hour sessions a survey was given to the students. Reported by Cox and Yamaguchi (2010) the data was collected using a 1–7 scale with 7 being strongly agree, and 1 being strongly disagree to attributes that promoted student autonomy in the classroom. All scores ranged between 5–7 showing the students favored the autonomous pedagogy style (Cox & Yamaguchi, 2010). The students noted that their intercultural teacher's western-style practices helped them be anxious to participate in class, be less teacher dependent, and more expressive of their personal opinions (Cox & Yamaguchi, 2010). This research has given thought to using more intercultural teachers in the Japanese education system to promote student autonomy (Cox & Yamaguchi, 2010).

**Critical Thinking and Student Autonomy**

The importance of critical thinking was brought to light in Japan, and MEXT supported critical thinking as a useful skill that helped students break down problems, which improved autonomous decisions (Tokida & Tsubaki, 2016). In addition, MEXT thought this autonomous characteristic was a necessary skill for every college student to require (Tokida & Tsubaki, 2016). Changes in the curriculum gave Japanese teachers the time to work on student independence, aid teachers with some schoolbooks, and entrance exam requirements had sections devoted to student autonomy (Cave, 2016). This reform started in the early 2000s, when MEXT made changes to the school curriculum. Saturday school was cut, instructional hours in core subjects were cut, and more interesting subjects were added to help assist in student autonomous creative thinking (Park & Butler, 2010).

What really spearheaded this movement was the creation of the Integrated Studies (IS) class, which was a program that gave students autonomy to learn about things that interested them in a classroom where true learning occurred (Park & Butler, 2010). A study of elementary

school and junior high school students showed the IS class ranked three, and five respectively out of 10 as students' favorite subjects. Park and Butler (2010) reported that when students were questioned about the IS class, they viewed the freedom to choose what to study, experiencing individual research, and having a stress-free learning environment as the reasons why it was appealing to them. This showed that when given the opportunity the students will use their creative minds to learn (Park & Butler, 2010). This IS experience relates to the Cognitive Constructivism Theory, which Lourenco (2012) explained by saying that instructors support learner autonomy and student success in the right environment.

Baeten et al. (2016) notes that keeping student attentiveness by stimulating the mind is beneficial to student-centered learning, and teachers should use different techniques to achieve this. This is where critical thinking activities come into play. Salmon and Barrera (2021) argue that when instructors ask good questions it stimulates critical thinking in the student's mind, and this leads to the student asking questions, which results in the beginning stages of student autonomy. Interestingly, English education in Japanese high schools have labeled critical thinking as an important learning point, but textbooks issued by MEXT do not have activities that stimulate this autonomous skill (Kusumoto, 2018).

## Conclusion

Since the late 19th century, Japan has focused on education reform. Change has been difficult due to strong cultural and traditional principles tied to the educational system, and these principals came from how the Japanese empire affected the education system (Ngan, 2020). The formalities of respect and leadership in the military were taken on by the education system, and this is how teacher-centered learning started in the classroom (Ngan, 2020). As time has passed,

openness to new educational pedagogy has emerged. Yamada (2020) mentions that currently the older way classroom pedagogy is changing from the inflexible style it originated from.

Knowing about alternative teaching methods and using them are two different things. According to Nakayama (1989) the evolution of the Japanese education field can be put in two categories. Initially time was spent on analyzing western pedagogy, and some ideas were thought to be useable, and the other category that came later was using western academic principles (Nakayama, 1989). MEXT along with the Japanese government have put in policies to ignite reform (Leong, 2016; Yamada & Yamada, 2016).

The literature review explored how the themes of the Japanese education system, teacher-centered learning, student-centered learning, and student autonomy have solidified the shift toward implementation of western-style pedagogy in Japanese schools. The literature review gave insight into the shift toward western-style education in Japanese classrooms. Further study should be done on students that have attended high schools. A lack of researched data prohibits a final analysis on this topic. This is a start, but an examination of Japanese high school classes as it pertains to student autonomy in teacher-centered classrooms is needed.

# CHAPTER 3

# METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the methodology used for this qualitative study regarding the perceptions of former Japanese high-school students regarding student autonomy. The shift in western-style pedagogy has not yet manifested in Japanese high schools (Harada, 2018). The cognitive constructivism theory was used for this study, and Green and Gredler (2019) describe cognitive constructivism as the basis for teachers being aides in the classroom to facilitate independent learning. In addition, the theory promotes gaining autonomy through student-centered learning (Ulatanir, 2012). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of former Japanese high school students as it pertains to student autonomy. This in-depth study uncovered the nuances of this classroom experience, and the focus was on how the student viewed the teacher's role as well as their own in the autonomous learning process.

This chapter is divided into sections. In the first section, the design of the study was addressed as well as the research question. The next section discussed the site information as it relates to the common place each participant has experienced, the number of participants in the study, and their unique characteristics. The sampling method section is an in-depth look into how the investigator selected participants. The instrumentation and data collecting procedures section focuses on the tool used for collection, and how the results were recorded. The data analysis section describes how the researcher coded the results and used a software program for categorizing information. Following this, the limitations section addressed factors that could affect the research. Next, the ethical segment focused on participant rights and bias. Lastly, a summary of the concepts closes out the chapter.

## Research Question and Design

This research aimed to answer the following question: How do former Japanese high school graduates describe their lived experience of learning in a teacher-centered classroom as it pertains to the development of their student autonomy?

Qualitative research was the methodology of choice. Jackson et al. (2007) defines this research method as one that focuses on people, and their experiences within a setting. It also lets participants fully explain themselves with open-ended answers instead of forced choices (Jackson et al., 2007). This allows a more detailed response from the participants about the experience. Qualitative research continues to seek information, and expand upon the topics of the study. To further highlight this point, Campbell (2014) notes that qualitative investigators use data that fully represents the participants viewpoint and uses this information to categorize topics.

The phenomenological design was chosen because it allows full expression from the participants about their lived experience. Phenomenology is defined as a research design that reveals the intricate details behind a subjective experience and gives quality time to each participant for them to reflect on their experiences (Goulding, 2005). Edmund Husserl is the founding father of phenomenology, and he focused on the descriptive form of phenomenology, which details the subject's accounts without bias from the researcher (Neubauer et al., 2019). In addition, descriptive phenomenology uses categorization methods to organize the participant's views (Neubauer et al., 2019). Husserl's version of phenomenology fits this study because the researcher is seeking to describe the lived experiences of the participants without bias.

## Site Information and Population

The setting chosen for this study was not a designated area, but rather the common environment the participants have experienced. This common environment is being a native of Japan who has formerly experienced being a high school student in the Japanese education system. The population was recruited from Lambert English School (LES), an academic English institution that the participants previously attended. This school is not a high school; rather, LES provides an academic English language program that uses an interactive approach to enhance student learning. Furthermore, the school specializes in helping students who are trying to enter an international school, high school graduates who seek university education in English-delivered degree programs, and adults who seek comprehensive language instruction. This site is physically located in Shenzhen but also has a global online platform. Online students are excluded from this study.

The director of the school gave the investigator permission to contact former Japanese students (Appendix A). LES provided to the researcher a list of former Japanese students with their names and email addresses. This list of former students along with their contact information was given to the researcher by a LES representative from the student affairs department (Appendix A). The list had contactable Japanese students who graduated from the program between 2016–2019, and are 18 years of age or older. There was a goal of three to five participants being used for the study. The reason this location was chosen is because of its Japanese student population, and the fact that students enter this program after graduating from Japanese high schools.

## Sampling Method

According to Vasileiou et al. (2018) participant numbers in qualitative research are small, and there is no set number one must adhere to. The main point is getting enough information from each participant, and the more useful information collected results in less need for more participants (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Specifically with phenomenology, Sebele-Mpofu (2020) mentions that in-depth interviews bring about a lot of data, and normally six participants is sufficient to achieve saturation. Being that the investigator used English speaking participants who have experienced learning in Japanese high school classrooms, there was a limited number to choose from nationally. However, their vast experience of the student-teacher dynamic in Japanese classrooms was sufficient to do the study.

The investigator used a non-probability sampling method to recruit appropriate members. The kind of non-probability sampling used in this study is purposive sampling. In purposive sampling the investigator selects participants who can relate to the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2006). Creswell (2006) explains this by mentioning how qualitative research involves selective research so as to get accurate results, and purposive sampling does this by selecting volunteers who understand what is being researched. This was done by gathering a pool of applicants who experienced being a Japanese high school student in teacher-centered classrooms.

Because of the researcher's understanding of the Japanese education system and experience teaching Japanese students, the investigator had a good understanding of what subjects need to be used in the study. In this case, students who can speak English are necessary because that is the researcher's native tongue. Also, the participants need to have experienced learning in a teacher-centered Japanese high school classroom. This is because the volunteers can expand upon the topic regarding student autonomy in the classroom. Finally, the participants

must have graduated from high school after 2010, because that is the year MEXT reformed the curriculum, and pushed for an autonomous student (Yamada, 2021). In the case of the study, variance should not be an issue because participants graduated from high school between 2015 and 2018.

## Instrumentation and Data Collection Methods

Administrating the phenomenological design requires thoughtful questions from the investigator, and thoughtful answers from the respondents (Jackson et al., 2016). For this to be achieved, closed-ended questions reflective of quantitative methods could not be used because closed-ended questions force the participant to choose one of the several answers given by the researcher. This goes against phenomenology and the qualitative approach because the interviewees are limited in their choices; therefore, do not get to fully express themselves (Jackson et al., 2016). Jackson et al. (2016) further expounds upon the use of open-ended questions by discussing how quantitative research forces participants to choose answers with no room to elaborate on their answer, while a qualitative study using a phenomenological design gives the volunteers the freedom to deeply express themselves. To understand the lived experience of Japanese high school students learning from the teacher as it pertains to student autonomy, a phenomenological design was used to allow full expression of thought from the respondents.

The contactable list of possible participants provided to the researcher by the representative in student affairs had the participant's email contact information. The researcher reached out by email to the sample no more than two times to confirm contact (Appendix B). Attached to this email was an information sheet (Appendix C), which participants returned. If the participant responded and accepted, they were notified that the mode of the interview would be a

Zoom audio call. A link to the audio call was sent with the notification. This was due to the dispersed location of participants. Sweet (2002) mentions how phenomenologists should use telephone interviews instead of face-to-face interviews when participants are out of range to meet.

The respondents understood that their participation was voluntary. The researcher had one interview per participant, and each interview was no longer than one hour. The interview consisted of a series of questions about their background and provided an overview (Appendix D). Once the researcher felt the participants had a clear understanding of what was being asked in the questions, the investigator began setting the discussion to center around the experiences the volunteers had with student autonomy in teacher-centered classrooms.

The interview protocol was constructed this way so the volunteers could comfortably speak about their background first. This provided rapport between investigator and volunteer. Next, the investigator chose to explain the research question so the participant fully understood the topic. These initial stages in the interview process led to the main part of the interview, which centered on details in the classroom (Appendix D). The researcher chose this method to ensure comfortability and understanding.

Each participant was audio recorded using Zoom and this saved recording was transcribed by the investigator using the third-party transcription service Transcription Live. Under the member checking protocol, participants checked the transcripts for accuracy if they chose to do so. The investigator contacted the participants through email communication, and included transcribed data as an attachment for each participant. Participants confirmed accuracy of the data with the researcher. Once confirmation was attained the researcher analyzed the data. The data was stored in the researcher's computer on an encrypted audio/video file.

## Data Analysis

All data collection was completed before analysis began. Data analysis on this qualitative study required a thematic analysis of the interviews. Sundler et al. (2019) explains a thematic analysis as one that a phenomenological study uses to categorize topics in transcribed interviews into meaningful themes. A phenomenological approach allows respondents to express themselves fully, and this expression needs understanding. To do this, coding was used to explain data. Saldana (2015, as cited in Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019) describe coding as a means of identifying themes with descriptors that represent commonalities, or differences among responses.

This phenomenological study went in-depth to discuss the lived experience of the participants. Thematic analysis allowed the researcher to thoroughly analyze the data, because this method of analyzing covers a wide range of pattern identification. Clark (2017) insisted on this by mentioning the importance of flexibility in thematic analysis because it reaches understanding of the experience the participant had, the perceptions of the participant, and the sentiment of the participant during the experience. Interviews were the tool used in collecting data, and they were transcribed so thematic analysis could be applied to the text. The process of transcribing interviews started with an audio conversion software that changes audio conversation into written form. After this process, the investigator assigned themes to the text.

### NVivo Software

NVivo is a computer software that assists with qualitative coding. Careful grouping of information and assigning labels is part of deciphering open-ended responses from the participants. NVivo does this by providing the researcher with an organized platform to store data and themes (Phillips & Lu, 2018). The themes are extracted by identifying commonalities

among participants by using transcribed data. Following this the investigator stored the themes along with notes on the themes in NVivo. Phillips & Lu (2018) report that NVivo is a software program that allows the user to input categorized data along with their meanings so the researcher can have an organized visual representation of codes and themes.

NVivo was not involved in the process of coding, or developing themes, but it is responsible for storing the information in an organized way. It is important to note that all information selected to be coded was done solely by the investigator. This was done by identifying common information among participants and grouping them into phrases or words (Sundler et al., 2019). Furthermore, the labels and themes used to code the transcribed interview was developed by the researcher. This means the investigator came up with the terms that name the different categories (Saldana, 2015, as cited in Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019).

## Limitations

According to Price and Murnan (2004), limitations in research are uncontrollable factors that could affect the outcome of the research. In the past qualitative research has been seen as a lower tier research method which was not detailed enough to produce data that could be applied in a general sense (Houghton et al., 2013). It is said qualitative research is too subjective, cannot be generalized, and uses a lot of bias, and because of this a tougher standard was sought by qualitative researchers to defend the accuracy of their data (Houghton et al., 2013).

Specifically speaking, phenomenological designs have limitations. Wilson (2015) discusses these limitations first as needing patience from the participants and the researcher. This means information cannot be quickly gathered, so tolerance and calmness are required. The investigator must slow down the pace of information gathering for the volunteer to follow a patient path. Second, phenomenology dives deep into the participants' experience, so

confidential information may not be easy to obtain (Wilson, 2015). This is why comfortability between participant and researcher is necessary to uncover in-depth data. Finally, the researcher must know when to stop gathering data (Wilson, 2015). At some point repetition of similar information may occur and in this situation the researcher must move on to uncover new data.

All volunteers were notified of the necessity for in-depth answers and lengthy time requirements needed to get accurate data (Wilson, 2015). To cover all facets legitimizing the quality of qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985, as cited in Houghton et al., 2013) used the terms credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability to strictly evaluate the research.

**Credibility**

Credibility focuses on the believability of the research. Korstjens and Moser (2018) report that credibility speaks to the truth of the research and ensuring this truth can happen by a variety of means such as member checking, lengthy engagements, or observations. This phenomenological design used member checking and long-term engagement to ensure data validity. Bradbury-Jones et al. (2010) elaborate on how member checks involve the researcher verifying interpreted data with participants, and this validation of themes strengthens the credibility of the research. In addition, the investigator kept participants engaged and involved throughout the duration of the study in order to achieve accuracy.

**Transferability**

Transferability is needed to apply the data to people outside the test group. Since qualitative research does not use a big sample size, critics feel that the data results cannot be applied generally. To combat this, a more extensive approach to research is done by investigators. Munthe-Kass et al. (2019) points out that certain procedures that attain

transferability incorporate abundant information about the study, and when replicated a similar observation will take place. In this study all data was strictly coded and labeled with themes. The researcher meticulously went through each open-ended response and categorized major themes. Also, all similarities and differences were transcribed. Coupled with this, purposive sampling led the researcher to choose participants who understood the research. Their English level and academic experience were all considered. These steps taken by the investigator were to ensure transferability in similar research done in the future.

**Dependability**

Dependability centers on the research being reliable. Korstjens and Moser (2018) explain dependability as a standard of consistency that links data analysis with the design of choice. In this research the phenomenological design was used to give participants the opportunity to fully express their lived experience in an open-ended format. This open-ended format was an in-depth interview with continual back and forth discussion. For participants to be selected for this study, they had to be a native of Japan, have experience learning in a Japanese high school classroom, and be fluent in the English language. Thematic analysis was the data analysis method of choice because it allowed the researcher to go through the transcripts and categorize information into themes. These themes gave insight into the phenomenon of learning in a Japanese high school classroom. Other researchers should be able to conduct this research with the same variables, which should yield similar results. Koch (2006, as cited in Cope, 2014) discusses that through the concept of the investigator's procedures and themes, a study is reliable if the details of the study were able to be replicated using the same variables. With this research all variables enable this research to be replicated by other researchers who use the same protocol.

### Confirmability

Confirmability is a standard in qualitative research that makes the process of the research transparent. Abdalla et al. (2018) explains confirmability as a process that details the nuances of the research from the beginning to end. Any type of preferences as well as the researcher's inference and steps in the process should be documented. Triangulation was used for confirmability in qualitative research (Morse, 2015). The volunteers were allowed to participate in member checks to ensure the data collected represents the participants' accounts. To add to this, clear steps in the research were taken from beginning to end and are available in the form of an audit trail (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommend keeping a record of all research undertakings so it can be repeated or revised in the future.

## Ethical Issues

Ethical concerns are part of a qualitative study. Eide and Kahn (2008) note that ethical issues can arise in qualitative research because of the deep interaction with people. This is because this style of research deals with people communicating back and forth with each other. Ethical factors to account for are ensuring the participants enter the research on their own will, making sure they have a good understanding about all phases of the study, treating the participants kindly, and making sure confidentiality is enforced. These steps are noted in Walker (2007) as the researcher being benevolent, having the ability to know when the participant is uncomfortable, providing volunteers with enough information to decline or accept involvement, and protecting the identity of participants. It is up to the researcher to ensure all ethical concerns are addressed.

In this study the investigator used the *Belmont Report* (1978) to make sure top priority is placed on ethics. All participants were given an option to participate in this study, and if they

chose not to, there were no penalties, or defamation of character. In addition, after the commencement of the study, participants were allowed to withdraw at any time. This was done by providing an information sheet for the participants. The researcher made sure all volunteers were treated in a humanitarian manner. Next, all individuals participating in this study were not in any kind of mental state that their autonomy would be affected. All participants were treated equally, and this involves equal distribution of benefits and responsibility.

Finally, the names of the participants were protected, and no information about their personal information was made public. All data was coded, and numbers anonymously represented each participant. In addition, transcripts did not contain any personally identifiable information about the participant. Further, all information was stored on an encrypted file located on the researcher's password protected computer. After completion of transcription, the video recording and master list was destroyed.

Sanjari et al. (2014) sums up these ethical precautions as the researcher ensuring the participant is well informed, keeping proper care of all recorded information, avoiding wrong interpretations, expressing care for the volunteer, and managing potential personal relationships with participants.

## Summary

To conclude, the aim of this section was to discuss the methodology used in this study. This qualitative study used a phenomenological design to understand the learning experience former Japanese high school graduates had as it pertains to student autonomy. Purposive sampling was used in the selection of participants. The participant pool were all native Japanese students who have been educated in a Japanese high school classroom, and were all recruited from the same source. Data was collected in the form of an interview and prolonged engagement

with participants. This information was interpreted using thematic analysis, and the themes that developed from this analysis were used to better understand the experience. All transcribed information and themes were stored in an organized way using the NVivo software.

Limitations are part of qualitative research, and they were addressed using the standards of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Ethics is a concern in qualitative research, so the researcher ensured that confidentiality, anonymity, knowledgeable consent, bias, and comfortability were all addressed to maintain accuracy.

# CHAPTER 4

## RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the lived experience of former Japanese high school graduates who participated in teacher-centered classrooms as it pertains to the development of student autonomy. Four participants were chosen to get a focused look at the dynamic of student autonomy in teacher-centered classrooms. The research question that guided this study was:

- How do former Japanese graduates describe their lived experience of learning in a teacher-centered classroom as it pertains to the development of their student autonomy?

To answer this question, this qualitative study utilized an open-ended interview to allow participants to fully express their opinions (Appendix D). In addition, this form of methodology not only gave participants a chance for a detailed response but also allowed them to expand on the topic. Jackson et al. (2007) explains the qualitative methodology as one that allows full explanation from participants due to volunteers responding with open-ended answers instead of forced choices. Coupled with the qualitative methodology, the phenomenological design specifically allowed the volunteers to have full expression about their lived experience in regard to student autonomy in Japanese high school classrooms. The phenomenological approach provides adequate time for participants to reflect on their experience (Goulding, 2005). The volunteers were able to do this during the interviews.

After the interviews were conducted and the conversion of audio interviews into written form was complete, the researcher began analyzing the transcripts. Thematic grouping and coding were used to complete the analysis of results.

## Analysis Method

In this study, four participants were available to participate in the study. Collection of data from the four volunteers allowed a careful examination that produced themes.

### Data Collection

The researcher contacted 23 former Japanese high school students who graduated from LES between 2016 and 2019 and are 18 years of age or older. Four participants responded to the interview invitation. The four potential participants who responded back did so based on the information sheet. The interviews were audio/video recorded using the Zoom communication software program. After all interviews were completed the researcher sent the audio recordings to Transcription Live to get a written transcription of each interview. Following this, the researcher started the member check process by sending each participant their personal transcript, and this was done to allow volunteers to validate and/or change information. Finally, all participants were assigned numbers as identifiers to protect their privacy and confidentiality.

### Demographic Information of Participants

Table 1 represents the demographic information collected during the interview from each participant. The information includes the participant number, age, education status, and employment status. It should be noted that respondents are non-native English speakers and this may account for the brevity in a few of their responses. Historically, Japanese culture and social norms are known to limit individual thought (Omura et al., 2018 ); however, in the literature, Omura et al. (2018) reported that the younger generation are more direct in conveying their thoughts. The participants in this study were direct and confident with their responses but as aforementioned, English being a second language could be the cause of brevity in one or two of

the responses. There is a possibility the language barrier prevented more depth; however, almost all of the responses were answered and explained by the participants.

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographics*

| **Participant #** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Age** | 23 | 22 | 24 | 22 |
| **Gender** | Male | Female | Female | Male |
| **Education Status** | Full time student | Full time student | Full time student | Full time student |
| **Employment Status** | Not working | Employed Part time | Not working | Not working |

## Coding

This qualitative phenomenological study gave participants a platform to go in-depth about their lived experience. In order to capture full expression of the volunteers, thematic analysis allowed for a wide range of pattern identification. Furthermore, this analysis method not only touched on the experience the participant had but it also allowed a review of the perception and sentiment of the participant during their experience. Upon completion of data review, topics were categorized into themes, and descriptors were applied to assist in identifying the data.

All interviews were manually coded, and the cognitive constructivism theory provided a lens through which the research question helped guide the analysis. There were four total participants and one interview done with each participant. The participant's responses were received in an open-ended format. The cognitive constructivism theory promotes facilitative roles that allow students to express themselves fully (Kambara, 2020). Each interview was

analyzed after the completion of all interviews. Extensive analysis was done on finding commonalities among all participants' responses. This type of analysis is a thematic analysis whereby topics are transcribed into themes (Sundler et al., 2019). The researcher noted key words and phrases in each of the participant's responses and as a group these findings were categorized into a specific theme. Differences, although not many, were discovered, and were included in the grouping of commonalities under the same theme. After pattern identification was completed, descriptors were used to label each theme. Seven working themes emerged that pointed to the lived experience of teacher-centered classrooms in Japanese high schools as it pertains to student autonomy. These themes were organized in NVivo software with descriptors assigned to represent them. NVivo was used only for organization purposes. The researcher grouped similar patterns of information into a labeled theme. Organizing this in NVivo allowed the investigator to easily reference data in Chapter 4.

**Overview of Key Themes**

The seven themes connect as evidence to the purpose and research question in this study. Theme 1 (opinion in high school classes) illustrates the expression of opinion in high school classes. Theme 2 (independent thought while doing class activities) displays the thought process involved in completing class activities. Theme 3 (talk time between teacher and student) focuses on the talk time between teacher and student within a given class period. Theme 4 (experiencing doing group work) highlights the topic of group work in the classroom setting. Theme 5 (teacher control in the classroom) discusses teachers' control over student learning. Theme 6 (answering questions wrong) denotes feelings in regard to expressing wrong answers in the classroom. Theme 7 (student autonomy in high school) discusses the presence of student autonomy in

Japanese high schools. The table below highlights the key themes and the participants' responses.

**Table 2**

*Participant Results (Similarities/Differences)*

| Key Themes | Similar response | Different response |
|---|---|---|
| **1. Opinions in high school classes** | Participants (1,2,3) did not experience expressing their opinion in high school classes. | Participant (4) discussed a personal trait of being shy as a reason to not express opinions, but reiterated that expressing opinion did not happen among the other classmates |
| **2. Independent thought while doing class activities** | Participants (2, 3) experienced using independent thought while doing class activities in only 1 class.<br>Participant (4) had class activities but does not remember using their own thoughts to solve problems. | Participant (1) did not experience doing any class activities in class |
| **3. Talk time between teacher and student** | Participants (1,2,3,4) all agreed that teachers dominate the talk time by 90 percent or more in class | It is to note that participant 4 expressed the English class led by a foreign teacher was 50/50 teacher to student talk time |
| **4. Experience doing group work** | Participants (3,4) did not experience group work except in 1 class<br>Participant (1) has no memory of group work | Participant 2 mentioned that group work was a new concept in the school but was rarely implemented |
| **5. Teacher control in the classroom** | Participants (1,2,3**)** experienced the teacher always being in control of the classroom | Participant (4**)** alluded to teacher control but focused on the students not interrupting the class as the reason why |
| **6. Answering question wrong** | Participants (1,4) discussed the negative effects of being wrong, such as being judged and embarrassed. | Participant 2 had no comment on this subject.<br>Participant 3 focused on keeping a positive classroom no matter right/wrong answer |
| **7. Student autonomy in high school** | Participants (1,2,3) did not experience student autonomy in high school | Participant 4 experienced student autonomy in only 1 class (English Class) |

## Presentation of Results/Findings

### Theme 1: Opinions in High School Classes

This theme was used to understand the volunteers' experience regarding expressing their opinions in Japanese high school classrooms. Specifically, regarding key phrases mentioned when describing how often opinions were expressed in the classroom, participants used phrases that indicated they were unable or rarely able to express themselves. Participant 1 used the phrase "no need," Participant 2 stated "didn't express my opinion," and Participant 3 mentioned "didn't experience." Participant 4 focused on his personality as a factor for not expressing his opinion, but when discussing his classmates, he said "don't happen often" as it pertains to expressing opinions in the classroom.

When describing the lack of expressing opinions which affect engagement between teacher and student, Participant 2 and 4 stated this respectively:

> Actually almost I didn't express my opinion because like the teachers don't need to have like our students' opinions. (Participant 2)
>
> Basically students listen to their teachers and then like if there's something they don't understand, like they would raise their hands, but like it's not—it would be like—it happens sometimes but it don't happen often. (Participant 4)

Collectively, these responses indicate the rare instances of opinion expression in the classroom. The participants express the lack of value their opinion has in a teacher-centered setting. The lack of importance put on students expressing their opinions was also noted and this comes from Japan having a collectivism culture.

**Theme 2: Class Activities**

This theme encompasses the participant's rare experiences as it pertains to thinking while doing class activities. When describing thinking while doing class activities, the key phrases mentioned by participants showed how rare thought provoking class activities were. Participant 1 mentioned "no class activities," Participant 2 said "just one class." Participants 3 and 4 similarly stated "depends on the subject."

When describing using individual thought while doing class activities to develop autonomy, Participants 1 and 4 mentioned:

> There were no class activities, goal was to enter university and pass the exam. (Participant 1)
>
> It depends on like class**,** but like mostly I didn't like think about it really. It's just like listening what the teacher said and then like using those—gathering information from textbook and then like then applying this information to my assignments. So I think I didn't really think about it. (Participant 4)

Both participants alluded to the lack of thought during class activities. In addition, both participants focused on course completion because of the teacher's directive. The participants note the instructor being more focused on what is to be learned instead of how students are learning. Participant 1 did not experience using thought while doing activities because he did not even experience doing an in-class activity. Participant 4 discussed classes in general and discussed that even when class activities occurred, no individual thought was used while learning.

The responses from participants show the lack of consistency in all classes in regard to thinking while doing class activities.

**Theme 3: Talk Time Between Teacher and Student**

This theme was used to capture the ratio of talk time between student and teacher in Japanese high school classrooms. Phrases mentioned by participants showed there was not a balance in talk time between teacher and student. When describing the ratio of talk time between student and teacher for this theme, volunteers stated percentages that showed dominant lecture time by instructors. Participant 1 stated “95 percent teachers,” Participant 2 mentioned “over 90% teacher,” Participant 3 said “80% or 90% are like teacher,” and Participant 4 stated “100% the teacher.”

When describing the ratio of talk time between teacher and student, the teacher was portrayed as the one mostly talking during class. Participants 1 and 4 said:

> 5 percent students, 95 percent teachers**.** (Participant 1)
>
> Definitely the teacher’s talking most of the time. And also it depends classes, but like for example English classes more have a time like to like talk. Students talk a lot. But like it's kind of mind, whereas I would say 60% from teachers and then 40%, or like almost 50/50 in my English class, but like the other classes like history or math, those science, like almost 100% the teacher spent his time talking. (Participant 4)

While Participant 1 expressed teachers dominating talk time in all of his classes, it is noted that Participant 4 discussed how one class was different from all the other classes in regard to percentage of talk time. Participant 4 took special English classes where talk time was even between teacher and student; however, that class was taught by a western instructor from a native English speaking country. In regard to Participant 4’s other classes, his answer was similar to

Participant 1. The responses from participants clearly display teachers talk most of the time in the classroom as it pertains to a balance between student and teacher talk time.

**Theme 4: Experience Doing Group Work**

This theme was used to look at similar and different experiences of group work among the participants. Words and phrases classified in this theme were done so because they all focused on the minimum, and in some instances no collaboration with other students in the classroom. When describing the experience of group work in the classroom, participants used terms that showed a lack of this style of learning. Participant 1 stated “no memory of group work,” Participant 2 mentioned “It was not normally.” Participant 3 used the phrase “not a lot,” and Participant 4 mentioned “but like the other classes not really.”

Regarding the experience of students engaging in group work as a means to use collaboration to develop autonomy, Participants 2 and 3 stated:

> It was not normally, but I felt like the teachers really tried to do the group work in the class. (Participant 2)
>
> Not a lot. But I remember the science class has the many teamwork because we have the math class and math we have to work in the group and the teacher didn't control a lot. But other subjects are mostly lectures so we didn't discuss in the group. (Participant 3)

Participant 2 noted the effort of instructors to try and implement group work even though it was rare. Participant 3 alluded to a specific class that used group work but emphasized the other classes did not use group work. From the responses, the participants expressed the lack of group work as a whole in high school classes.

**Theme 5: Teacher Control in the Classroom**

Phrases identified when describing teacher control in the classroom by participants showed why students do not have control in their learning. The reason why these key phrases were organized in this theme was because they allude to always following the teacher without interruption. Student responses were unanimously in agreement that teacher control was a dominant feature. Participant 1 mentioned “just follow what teachers say,” Participant 2 said “I think teacher,” Participant 3 stated “mostly the teacher controls the class.” Conversely, Participant 4 focused on the student side of it by mentioning “don't want to like interrupt the lectures.”

When describing how much control teachers have in the classroom, in addition to the limit it puts on students controlling their learning, Participants 1 and 4 mentioned:

> The student just follow what teachers says and just install the information, the knowledge. Teachers are powerful or more powerful than just being a guide, I would say pretty much teacher controlling our study, our learning. (Participant 1)
>
> Like student basically feels they don't want to like interrupt the lectures or something like this. Yeah. (Participant 4)

Participant 1 alluded to why the teacher controls the classroom by discussing the power the teacher has and the importance of listening to the instructor’s knowledge. Conversely, Participant 4 takes the approach of the student by focusing on their reluctance to interrupt the teacher. Based on the responses, the volunteers indicated the teacher always controls learning in the classroom.

**Theme 6: Answering Question Wrong**

This theme highlights the participants' discomfort about being wrong when asked questions in class. Key phrases discussed by participants when describing answering questions incorrectly displayed the negativity surrounding answering questions wrong. Participant 1 mentioned "don't express, don't want to share, embarrassing" and Participant 2 did not have an answer. Participant 3 used phrases like "not like the correct or it's correct, should accept this answer." When Participant 3 discussed her current situation in college she stated "feel more free, feel much comfortable, get self-confidence." Participant 4 said "being judged by others."

Regarding answering questions in class incorrectly and the negative feeling that comes with it, Participant 3 mentioned:

> So yeah, even it's not like the correct or it's correct, I think they should accept this answer and then give their advices. And they should make the environment to like talk freely in the class. I feel much comfortable than high school class because as I said before that I can talk anything in the class**.** So like I feel more free to talk about my opinion in the class and I'm not be scared or like be ashamed in the class. So it was good to get self-confidence. Yeah, self-confidence. (Participant 3)

The response from Participant 3 showed her dislike for being judged by giving wrong answers, her desire for a classroom that accepts wrong answers without being judged, and her happiness with her current school that allows her to be comfortable while answering questions incorrectly.

**Theme 7: Student Autonomy in High School**

Thematic information gathered when describing student autonomy in high school by participants captured the absence of autonomy in their experience. This theme was chosen to categorize the similarities in these responses because these words and phrases showed there was not autonomy in the participants' final assessment. Participant 1 mentioned "not seen student autonomy in my high school," and Participant 2 as it pertains to the special English class stated "think about by ourselves, there's the English native speaker, only in that class." Participant 3 mentioned "my high school experience opposite," and Participant 4 said "was not student autonomy."

When describing the experiences of developing student autonomy in high school, Participants 2 and 4 stated:

> I think in the English class we had to think about by ourselves because there's the English native speaker." "So like I think, think only in that class, we had to think about by ourselves because he never speaks Japanese. So only that class we had a student autonomy. (Participant 2)
>
> I would say most of classes I have taken at my high school was not student autonomy. (Participant 4)

Participant 2 recalls having some thought-provoking moments in her English class that may have led to student autonomy. Interestingly, that class was taught by an English native speaker, and Participant 4 has discussed the differences in the way his English class was taught in earlier themes. In regard to this question, Participant 4 indicated the majority of classes did not use student autonomy but was not specific if the English class was the one that did.

## Summary

The result from this qualitative phenomenological study connects to the purpose of the study, which investigated the lived experience of former Japanese high school graduates who participated in teacher-centered classrooms as it pertains to the development of student autonomy. Data analysis on the four participants produced seven themes: Opinions in high school classes, Independent thought while doing class activities, Talk time between teacher and student, Experience doing group work, Teacher control in the classroom, Answering questions wrong, and Student autonomy in high school. Each of these themes contributed to understanding the participant's lived experience in similar and different ways. The results answered the study's research question in reference to learning in a teacher-centered classroom as it pertains to the development of student autonomy. Chapter 5 discusses the findings, implications, and recommendations.

# CHAPTER 5

# CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experience of former Japanese high school graduates who participated in teacher-centered classrooms as it pertains to the development of student autonomy. This qualitative phenomenological study investigated four former Japanese high school graduates to get a better understanding of autonomy development.

The research question that guided the research, data, and analysis was

- How do former Japanese high school graduates describe their lived experience of learning in a teacher-centered classroom as it pertains to the development of their student autonomy?

The conceptual framework included the cognitive constructivism theory. This theory is centered on how students learn from teachers who facilitate their autonomy in the classroom (Powell & Kalina, 2009). A review of the literature displayed four areas of research supporting this study. The specific literature is on the Japanese education system (Kuramoto & Koizumi 2016; Leong 2016; Sanders & Ishikura, 2018; Yamanaka & Suzuki, 2020; Yamasaki, 2016), teacher-centered learning (Cave, 2016; Kanazawa, 2020; Ngan, 2020; Ogihara, 2017), student-centered learning (Juliaty et al., 2019; Kubota et al., 2019; Waniek & Nae, 2017), and student autonomy (Matsuyama et al., 2019; Nakata, 2011; Tokida & Tsubaki, 2016), all of which are important to researching this issue.

Four former Japanese high school graduates participated in this study. Participants were selected from a list given to the researcher by Lambert English School (LES), and after contacting the potential participants, they agreed after looking over the information sheet. Data originating from a single interview for each participant was collected. Data analysis started with

coding and seven themes originated from this process. Thematic analysis allowed for similarities and differences to emerge among the participants' responses.

## Interpretation and Importance of Findings

The research question, the literature review, and the theoretical framework that is linked to the conceptual framework are all linked to the themes discovered in the study. Analysis and evaluation of the data produced findings.

### Finding 1 – Teacher Lecturing: Experience With This Mode of Teaching Contributed to Lack of Student Autonomy Development.

According to the participants, the first finding suggests that students who are used to lecturing lack development of student autonomy. All participants had memories of teachers dominating the speaking time in class. Theme 3, talk time between teacher and student, illustrates this point as it discusses the high percentage of teacher talk time in the class versus student talk time. This finding is consistent with existing literature. Ngan (2020) illustrated how Japanese instructors are dominant speakers in the classroom and the students are submissive listeners.

The data from the study highlights that teachers are the ones talking most of the time in class (theme 3). As seen in the literature, Cave (2016) reported that Japanese students quietly listen to the teacher for the duration of the class time and try to understand the class material on their own outside of class. Juxtaposed to Piaget's cognitive constructivism theory, instructors should be facilitators instead of lecturers to develop student autonomy (Green & Gredler, 2002).

This pedagogy style, the cognitive constructivism theory, advocates why data from theme 3 does not develop student autonomy. Theme 3 indicates that teachers are talking most of the time while students are silent. The data from theme 1 (opinions in high school classes) suggest

that students rarely express their opinion. Existing literature supports this by discussing how rote learning in Japanese high schools has limited students' expressing their opinions in the classroom (Nakayasu, 2016). Data from theme 1 along with the correlating literature go against the cognitive constructivism theory, which promotes student expression in the classroom (Powell & Kalina, 2009).

Finally, students are not encouraged to collaborate with one another during class, as evidenced in theme 4 (experience doing group work). In the literature, Kubota et al. (2019) discussed how lack of collaboration among students goes against student-centered learning and this does not promote autonomy development. Contrastingly, Piaget's cognitive constructivism theory supports group collaboration as a way to develop student autonomy (Ulatanir, 2012). The participant's data in theme 4 displays why autonomy development is not happening based on the instructional values the cognitive constructivism theory places on collaboration among students. Group work is a part of student-centered learning, and this type of learning promotes critical thinking, student engagement, inquiry, and teachers who are facilitators, which leads to autonomy development (Kambara, 2020).

**Finding 2 – Passive Student: Experience With This Style of Learning Does Not Coincide With an Autonomous Student.**

This finding was established from the lack of expression in the classroom in combination with teachers being heavily in control of the class. All four participants' data suggest that they were accustomed to the instructor controlling all aspects of the class (theme 5). Participants reported that teacher control of learning limited student self-expression. In the literature, Yamanaka and Suzuki (2020) noted that authoritative Japanese instructors fostered passive students. Contrastingly, the cognitive constructivism view supports inquiry-based methods that

produce an expressive student in the classroom (Powell & Kalina, 2009). Furthermore, being an active student fosters student autonomy according to the cognitive constructivism theory (Ultanir, 2012). The participants in this study noted that they did not have an opportunity to exhibit independence in the classroom (theme 5).

## Implications

The findings from this qualitative phenomenological study demonstrate how some teaching practices should be avoided while other teaching practices should be incorporated to aid in the development of student autonomy.

### Implications for Japanese High School Students

Results from this study suggest that Japanese students are more productive in the classroom when they are engaged by one another as well as the instructor. The participants alluded to the benefit of group work and communication with the teacher. Specifically, this was displayed in theme 3 (talk time between teacher and student), theme 4 (experience doing group work), and theme 5 (teacher control in the classroom). This finding aligns with Kubota et al. (2019) who detailed the importance of group work and engagement as beneficial to the student.

Japan's history of cultural norms focuses on keeping opinions private when in a public setting (Omura et al., 2018). Even with the cultural norms intact, the current study suggests that students want to be more vocal in the classroom. The study showed that Japanese high school students can benefit from using independent thinking and self-expression. This was shown in theme 6 where participants touched on the negativity surrounding vocalizing wrong answers. The participants' responses in this theme show that if all answers were free of judgment a more positive classroom would emerge and students would be more comfortable in their self-expression. As students transition from high school to college and then on to the workforce, a

developed student autonomy will provide society with an individual who is an autonomous thinker, confident in self-expression among others, and confident in decision making (Cave, 2011). This finding affirms the literature as Zhou and Li (2019) discussed how Japanese businesses are seeking workers who are autonomous learners and thinkers.

**Implications for Japanese High School Educators**

The findings from this study indicate that Japanese high school teachers could benefit from using an array of teaching techniques that promote student autonomy. These important teaching techniques reported by Domen et al. (2020) promote engagement, with students openly expressing themselves, and the use of multiple learning styles that develop students who are in control of their own learning. Instead of focusing on the teacher-centered style of learning, the study suggests that students do want to be more involved with their own learning if given the opportunity. This is valuable for the students as well as the instructors. This is in conflict with the current teacher-centered learning model, which puts the student in a submissive position as solely a listener (Ngan, 2020). Furthermore, an autonomous teacher produces an autonomous student (Nakata, 2011). Teachers benefit from promoting student autonomy because it promotes autonomy in their professional environment (Nakata, 2011). Japanese high school teachers should reflect on this mode of teaching because it can help them in the same areas that it would help the students. Participants in this study mentioned how most Japanese high school classes did not support their autonomy development.

**Implications for MEXT**

The current study indicates that factors contributing to the development of student autonomy are lacking in Japanese high school classrooms. According to Leong (2016) MEXT is the overseeing body in Japan that handles all matters pertaining to educational reform. MEXT

needs to implement professional development for the instructors to aid them in adapting this style of teaching. This can help the transition to be smoother, and encouragement from MEXT about the significant benefits of autonomy development can be helpful in motivating the instructors to fully adopt these changes. Wenger (2000) reported the importance of district-created professional development that brings educators together for a shared goal. As discussed in the literature review, MEXT understands that the focus needs to be on students learning independently, being problem solvers, and having high-level thinking as it pertains to learning in the classroom (Waniek & Nae, 2017). These elements that MEXT referenced are what the participants in this study were lacking in their high school learning experience.

## Recommendations for Action

This study is a sample that was aimed at gathering data surrounding the development of student autonomy in teacher-centered classrooms. The results showed the weaknesses of teacher-centered learning as it pertains to the development of student autonomy. The value of the results was to develop significant themes that could be used to implement strategies to promote student autonomy in Japanese high schools. If school officials take a close look at the data, an understanding of the weakness in teacher-centered learning may be noticed. MEXT is in control of education reform in Japanese high schools (Leong, 2016). Proper instructor training developed by MEXT could improve the implementation of student-centered learning practices that lead to student autonomy. Contrastingly, the literature points out that professional workshops that promote student-centered learning are not used in Japanese high schools (Hiebert & Stigler, 2017).

The principal recommendation from this qualitative phenomenological study is that instructors and MEXT are encouraged to collaborate to bring about student autonomy in the high

school classroom. This supports existing literature because MEXT is currently working with Japanese high schools to bring about student autonomy in the classroom (Yamada, 2021). Currently, MEXT is aware of needed methodology reform in Japanese high schools to develop student autonomy (Yamanaka & Suzuki, 2020). By the use of classroom observations, school officials can get a clear view of the weaknesses surrounding teacher-centered learning and how it does not promote student autonomy.

The development of student autonomy starts with teachers promoting student engagement in the classroom, opinionated expressions, and independent choice as it pertains to different student-centered learning tools (Doman et al., 2020). With this information MEXT can address these issues using teacher training. Furthermore, instructors should make a point to understand the value of an autonomous student. With data readily available, along with the support of MEXT, only actions from teachers in the classroom stands in the way of progress.

## Recommendations for Further Study

Regarding the recommendation for further study, school officials representing Japanese high schools should replicate this study in each district. Only a small population was used in this study. From this point, a larger sample size from current Japanese high school students could yield more accurate results. In addition, further studies that encompass the whole of Japan as it pertains to the high schools is recommended. The reason for this is to see if this is a nationwide problem. Next, adding Japanese high school teachers to the study based on age difference may bring about new data to assist in developing student autonomy. The reason for this suggestion is age may determine open-mindedness to promoting student autonomy. Also, expanding the number of interview questions or developing a new set of questions may elicit more open ended responses that could aid in providing solutions for autonomy development in Japanese high

schools. Finally, asking the same interview questions in Japanese could bring about new data because participants may be able to add more depth in their responses using their native language in comparison to using English.

Gender was taken into consideration on the instructor side and the student's side. Coeducation is the norm in Japan and there is no reported stigma toward having a male or female teacher. Due to urbanization and economic growth, individualism is being promoted equally for men and women in Japan (Ogihara, 2017). Furthermore, the participants did not express gender being any factor in helping or hurting their autonomy development.

The setting was conducted at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was a historical time period. This was also looked at by the researcher for further studies. There has been no research indicating that COVID-19 has affected the lack of autonomy development in Japanese high schools. Also, the participants did not discuss any information about COVID-19 currently affecting the lack of student autonomy in Japanese high schools.

The goal of future studies should be to identify weaknesses in teacher-centered learning as it pertains to the development of student autonomy. Although modifications can occur through new studies, this study has shown enough reason for further scholarly research. Identical studies done in school districts across Japan may back the findings in the initial study done by the researcher, that teachers lecturing and students being passive in the classroom does not lead to autonomy development (Nakata, 2011).

As scholars add to the methodology, more information will be available on autonomy development in Japanese high schools. Adding to the methodology may pinpoint a pattern showing why there is lack of autonomy development, and that pattern can be used as part of the solution in upcoming reform. Interestingly, one way in which data can be compared is schools

that are connected by way of being in the same district. A meta-analysis can be used to analyze the results of all the studies. If data yield similar outcomes, then MEXT officials can uniformly implement changes.

## Conclusion

Japanese high school students are under an immense amount of pressure to perform in order to get into a good university (Nomura, 2017). The problem is that companies are seeking employees who are autonomous. Currently, Japanese high schools use teacher-centered learning, and this style of teaching does not promote the development of student autonomy. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of former Japanese high school graduates who participated in teacher-centered classrooms as it pertains to the development of student autonomy. This qualitative phenomenological study was guided by one main research question:

How do former Japanese high school graduates describe their lived experience of learning in a teacher-centered classroom as it pertains to the development of their student autonomy?

The literature review focused on the shift toward western-style pedagogy in Japanese classrooms. The benefits of this shift in elementary schools and in some special programs in middle schools was noted in the review. The intent of this shift is to promote student autonomy. Japanese high schools have not fully adopted student-centered learning with emphasis on developing autonomy. This qualitative study was done to highlight the importance of developing student autonomy in Japanese high schools.

Seven themes that emerged from four interviews resulted in two substantial findings that are unsupportive of cognitive constructivism. They contribute significantly to the lack of

development of student autonomy. These findings are teachers lecturing and students being passive in the classroom. Sharkins et al. (2017) noted that the cognitive constructivism theory promotes autonomous learners, teachers as facilitators, and active students. Information gained from this study can be used by future researchers investigating autonomy development in Japanese high schools. The researcher recommends that Japanese high school districts, leaders, and teachers use the data to pose insightful questions. MEXT, which links school districts together, oversees the curriculum at the high school level (Kurmoto & Koizumi, 2016). MEXT could be the governing body that replicates the study and uses the findings to initiate reform in Japanese high schools. This will bring about solutions to improving the development of student autonomy in Japanese high schools.

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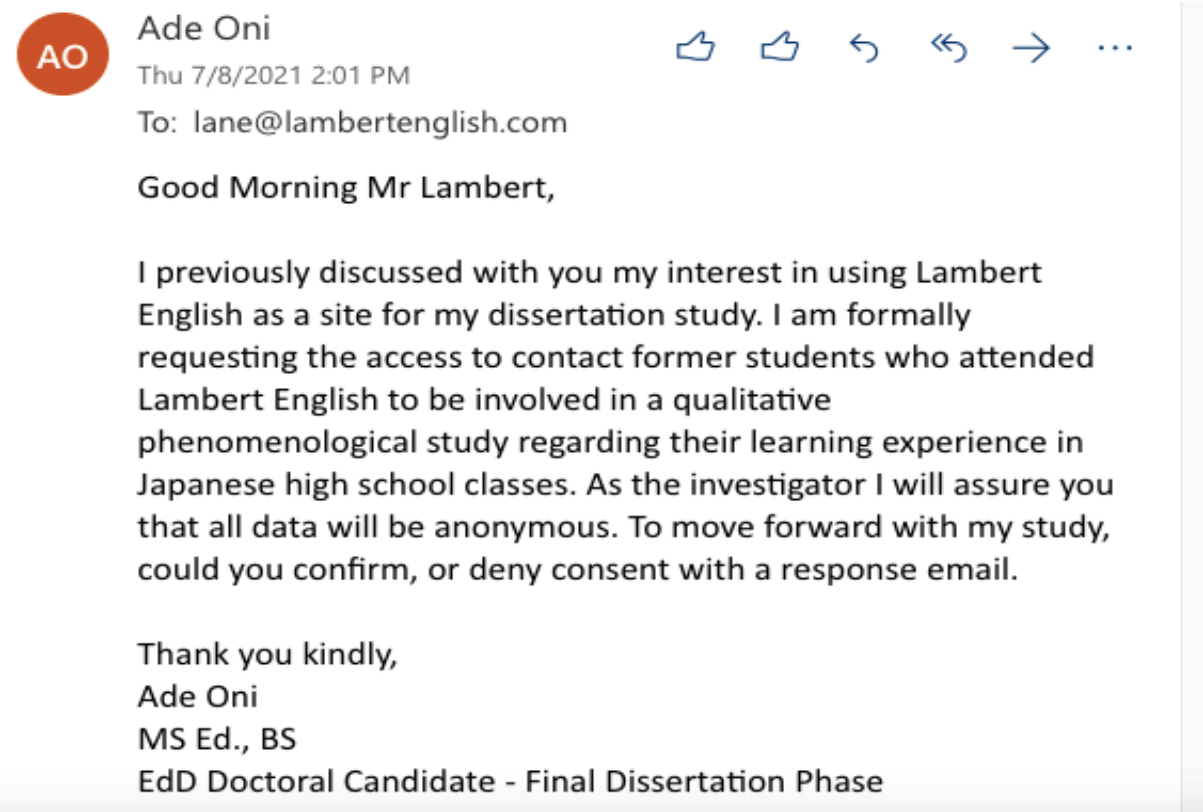
# APPENDIX A

## PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH/APPROVAL FROM SITE

**CEO/Director of School**



AO

Ade Oni

Thu 7/8/2021 2:01 PM

To: lane@lambertenglish.com

Good Morning Mr Lambert,

I previously discussed with you my interest in using Lambert English as a site for my dissertation study. I am formally requesting the access to contact former students who attended Lambert English to be involved in a qualitative phenomenological study regarding their learning experience in Japanese high school classes. As the investigator I will assure you that all data will be anonymous. To move forward with my study, could you confirm, or deny consent with a response email.

Thank you kindly,
Ade Oni
MS Ed., BS
EdD Doctoral Candidate - Final Dissertation Phase

LL

lane lambert <lane@lambertenglish.com>

Thu 7/8/2021 6:54 PM

To: Ade Oni

Hi, Ade,

Certainly. You are approved to use our data and I'll provide a list of willing students for you to contact. Let me know if you need anything else.

Lane Lambert

AO

Ade Oni

Sat 8/14/2021 5:47 AM

To: lane lambert <lane@lambertenglish.com>

Dear Mr Lambert,

Thank you for allowing me to use your site in my study. Can you put me in touch with someone in the organization who can provide the list of former students that I can contact?

Thank you kindly,
Ade Oni
MS Ed., BS
EdD Doctoral Candidate - Final Dissertation Phase

**From:** lane lambert <lane@lambertenglish.com>
**Sent:** Monday, August 16, 2021 11:57 PM
**To:** Ade Oni <aoni@une.edu>
**Subject:** Re: Permission To Conduct Research for Dissertation

Hi, Ade,

Sure. Please contact [redacted] at her email and let me know if you have any problems with communication/language. I've asked her to get you whatever info you need and to ask me if she has any questions:

[redacted]

Best regards,

Lane Lambert

# APPENDIX B

## INTRODUCTORY EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear prospective participant,

My name is Ade Oni, and I am a doctoral candidate attending the University of New England. I am currently conducting my dissertation study, which focuses on the experience Japanese high school students have in teacher-centered classrooms. LES has given me your information to ask if you are willing to participate in my dissertation study. The study will be about 2 months long and it will involve me asking you about your experience as a high school student. Specifically, if you allow, I will conduct one interview on your autonomy development as a Japanese high school student. I will protect your privacy and your name will remain anonymous. I will gather data by recording one Zoom interview lasting about an hour long. I have attached an information sheet to this email for you to look over. After looking over the document, if you accept, please email me to schedule the interview. I will then be in touch for our first interview.

Thank you for your time,

Ade Oni

MS Ed., BS

EdD Doctoral Candidate

# APPENDIX C

## INFORMATION SHEET

**Project Title:** The perceptions of former Japanese high school students regarding student autonomy: a qualitative study

**Principal Investigator(s):** Ade Oni

**Introduction:**

- Please read this form. You may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to give you information about this research study
- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during, or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

**Why is this research study being done?**
The purpose of the research will be to understand the lived experiences of former Japanese high school students in teacher-centered classrooms as it pertains to student autonomy.

**Who will be in this study?**
Former Japanese high school students who are 18 years or older, and that attended LES between 2016-2019

**What will I be asked to do?**
You will be asked to take part in a Zoom interview that will be recorded. The session will not be longer than 60 minutes

**What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?**
There is a slight risk of a breach of confidentiality related to taking part of this study. If you feel uncomfortable, you may elect not to answer the question and you may elect to withdraw from the study. If a withdrawal happens, then all data will be deleted and not used in the study.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?**
The results from the study could aid Japanese high schools in curriculum reform

**What will it cost me?**

There is no cost on your part.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

The investigator will ensure that the records from this study will be kept as confidential as possible. The study will be held in a private area where others cannot listen to the interview. Also, participants will be given the option to turn off the Zoom camera during the interview. Only I will have access to the files and any audio tapes.

**How will my data be kept confidential?**

Your data will be anonymised – your name will not be used in any reports or publications resulting from this study. All digital files, transcripts, and summaries will be stored in an encrypted file on the researcher's password protected computer. In addition, they will be given codes and stored codes and stored separately from any names or other direct identification or participants. Any copies of research information will be kept in encrypted files at all times. Upon completion of transcription and verification by the participant, the video will be deleted. There is a master list that includes the participant names and email information. That information will also be destroyed after transcription and verification by participants.

**Whom may I contact with questions?**

- The researcher conducting this study is Ade Oni
- For more information regarding this study, please contact Ade Oni – aoni@une.edu

# APPENDIX D

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**Introduction-** I would like to go over the information sheet and allow you time to ask any questions or bring up any concerns. Now that we have finished going over the information sheet, I want to make clear that this interview is not about your experience at LES. This interview is solely about your experience as a high school student. All the questions that I ask you are only in reference to your experience in high school. Do you have any questions before we proceed?

**1**. Can you tell me about yourself by discussing your age, gender identity, education status, and employment status?

**2.** When did you graduate from high school?

**3**. Can you explain what it is when students are controlling their learning?

**4**. Can you explain when teachers are in control of student's learning?

**5.** After the participant answers I will expand on both and bring in how teacher-centered learning and student-centered learning describe both pedagogy styles. Then I will ask the participant for an example of both

**6.** What was your experience of expressing your opinions in high school classrooms (**This starts gathering info on autonomy development).**

**5**. How often were you using your own thinking to understand, and solve class activities? I will follow with discussing the teacher completely explaining everything versus the student having to figure out the activity with little guidance. **Using this to gather information on autonomy without using the word autonomy, I want their natural unedited answer without me using the word autonomy.**

**7**. Please compare teacher talk time to student talk time during your time as a high school student. **Engage participants to learn more about who controlled the learning.**

**8.** Group work is when students work together in class. What do you remember about how you learned while working in groups?

**8 continued.** Expand on this and ask participant about using their own thinking to support group goals. Also ask participant about teacher involvement in group work.

**9**. Can you explain to me what student autonomy is?

**9 continued**. (Follow-up to question 8 if they answer no) – Student autonomy is when students have an active role in their learning. They use their thinking along with the guidance of the teacher to learn in class. This involves problem solving, reading on their own, and working in groups. The student talks more than the teacher, and the teacher gives assignments that stimulate independent thinking. The teacher is not lecturing the student, and the students are sitting quietly in class.

**9 continued. Now that you understand this, can you explain your experience with this style of teaching in high school classes?**

**10. (Follow-up question 8 if they answer yes)** – Please explain it to me so I know that you understand what student autonomy is. **If they still do not understand refer to question 9 explanation, and if they do understand ask them this –**

**Now that you understand this, can you explain your experience with this style of teaching in high school classes?**

**11**. Currently, how do you feel about using your autonomy to help you in your everyday life (school, work, dealing with people)?