

# Bridging Borders

## -Interdisciplinary Perspectives in Linguistic and Cultural Exchange-

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### Abstract

This case study examines the dynamics of an English Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) / English for Academic Purposes (EAP) student exchange program involving participants from diverse backgrounds. Through dialog analysis, key findings highlight the influence on perceptions, language learning through media consumption, and the nuanced challenges faced by students from the Philippines, Papua New Guinea and Japan. Participants express their aspirations, family dynamics, and the transformative impact of studying in Australia (ESL / EAP students). The dialog underscores the significance of cultural understanding, the academic rigour of exchange programs, and the unexpected support participants receive. Implications for future programs include targeted language support, comprehensive cultural training, and tailored acculturation assistance. Ultimately, the study emphasizes the profound impact of language exchange in fostering academic growth, personal development, and cross-cultural awareness within the global education landscape, particularly for Japanese students understanding Japan's position within the greater Asia-Pacific community of nations.

Keywords: language exchange, cultural understanding, challenges and opportunities, language learning context

### Background

This study examines an exchange initiative between The University of Fukuchiyama and Central Queensland University (CQU) members, culminating in a singular meeting held in September 2023. Preceding this session at the CQU Melbourne Campus, representatives from both institutions coordinated a structured student exchange program, utilizing English as the primary medium of communication. The preparatory phases leading to the assembly involved meticulous organization by designated representatives from each academic entity, aiming to facilitate a comprehensive linguistic and cultural engagement

for the involved student cohorts. This research seeks to elucidate the dynamics and outcomes of this interinstitutional exchange, emphasizing the linguistic and communicative dimensions inherent in the cross-cultural interactions between students from University of Fukuchiyama and Central Queensland University during the meeting.

## Definition of EFL, ESL and EAP

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) characterizes the educational context wherein individuals undertake the acquisition of English in a nation where the primary language is distinct from English, such as China, Korea, or Japan. Contrarily, English as a Second Language (ESL) pertains to the circumstance where English acquisition transpires within a country where English predominates, exemplified by the USA, the UK, or, in the present context, Australia. Further English for Academic Purposes (EAP) refers to the use and study of the English language in an academic context, specifically designed to meet the linguistic and communicative needs of students and scholars in higher education. Australia has a well-developed International Education sector with approximately 746,080 International students studying in the country during 2023 (Department of Education, 2023).

In contrast to the short-term study tour students from Japan, the ESL / EAP students from Central Queensland University (CQU) are currently undertaking postgraduate degrees in English and have undergone prolonged exposure to the Australian milieu, cultivating a proficient command of the English language. Students who are admitted to study in Australian Higher Education programs (Bachelor level and above) are required to demonstrate appropriate levels of English language proficiency through a recognized and approved proficiency test such as International English Language Testing System (IELTS), Pearson Test of English (PTE) or Cambridge English (CAE) (Study Australia, 2024). International students in Australia may also undertake an approved course of study at an accredited English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students centre (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, 2023).

The juxtaposition of these distinct language learning contexts highlights the interplay between short-term linguistic immersion experiences and the more protracted linguistic acclimatization of postgraduate ESL / EAP students (Stebelton et al., 2015). This differentiation underscores the multifaceted nature of English language learning,

emphasizing the varying degrees of exposure and proficiency attainment associated with EFL and ESL / EAP contexts (Stebelton et al., 2015).

## Importance of language exchange programs

Language exchange programs play a pivotal role in fostering linguistic proficiency, cultural understanding, and personal development (Kudo & Simkin, 2003; Trede et al., 2013). These programs offer a unique opportunity for individuals to immerse themselves in an authentic linguistic environment, accelerating the language learning process. Exposure to native speakers enhances pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, and comprehension skills, contributing to a more nuanced and fluent command of the language (Fenton-Smith & Humphreys, 2017).

Beyond linguistic benefits, language exchange programs facilitate cross-cultural interactions, fostering a deep appreciation for diversity and global perspectives. Participants develop cultural competence, breaking down stereotypes and promoting mutual respect. This cultural exchange is invaluable in an increasingly interconnected world, promoting empathy and intercultural communication skills essential for effective global citizenship. Moreover, language exchange programs contribute to personal growth by challenging individuals to step outside their comfort zones, adapt to new environments, and navigate diverse social contexts. The experiences gained during these programs often lead to increased self-confidence, resilience, and a broader worldview (Scharoun, 2016; Trede et al., 2013).

In essence, language exchange programs serve as transformative experiences that go beyond linguistic development, shaping individuals into culturally aware, adaptable, and globally minded citizens (Stebelton et al., 2015; Trede et al., 2013). As conduits for mutual understanding, these programs bridge linguistic and cultural gaps, fostering a more interconnected global community.

## Purpose of the report

By examining the distinct characteristics, challenges, and benefits associated with these programs, the report aims to provide insights into the nuanced dynamics of linguistic and

cultural immersion experiences for EFL and ESL / EAP learners. Through an examination of the two exchange paradigms, the report seeks to contribute perspectives to educational institutions, policymakers, and practitioners involved in designing and implementing effective language exchange initiatives (Scharoun, 2016; Stebelton et al., 2015).

## Scope and limitations

The scope of future intensive study abroad programs between the schools involves immersive language and cultural experiences. Limitations may include logistical constraints and resource allocation. Establishing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will formalize collaboration and outline program parameters. Fieldwork opportunities, professional development initiatives, and information sharing can enhance faculty and student engagement. Cultural exchange, language practice, and fostering global perspectives will be integral to program objectives, promoting a holistic approach to global education. While the potential benefits are significant, careful planning and ongoing evaluation will be crucial to address logistical challenges and ensure the effectiveness of collaborative initiatives (Scharoun, 2016).

## EFL and ESL / EAP Similarities and Differences

Both EFL and ESL / EAP programs aim to enhance language skills, foster cultural understanding, and promote global citizenship. They often incorporate structured academic components and cultural activities. The primary distinction lies in the linguistic context, with most EFL programs occurring in non-English-speaking countries and ESL / EAP programs in English-dominant nations. Differences also arise in the immersion level and participants' pre-existing language proficiency. These nuanced variations contribute to unique learning dynamics in each context (Kudo & Simkin, 2003)

## Methodology

The case study observation involved a diverse group of individuals with unique backgrounds and objectives.



## Facilitators

Anthony Walsh- an Associate Professor from the University of Fukuchiyama. Anthony is originally from Australia but has been working as an English language specialist and academic since the year 2000. He regularly brings Japanese students to Australia on short-term study tours.

Byron Coonerty- an Associate Lecturer at CQ University, plays a crucial role in supporting students new to Australia. Byron has worked in student support in Australia for the last 15 years. Prior to that, he spent 10 years living and working in education across private industry, secondary and tertiary levels in Japan.

## International Students at CQ University

Adrienne- a first-year Master of Public Health student from the Philippines with a nursing background, demonstrates linguistic diversity by speaking English, Tagalog, and Pangasinan.

Jackie- a Masters of Accounting student from Manila, has no familial connections in Australia but has navigated language barriers by completing ELICOS before starting her Masters.

Natasha- a Master's student from Papua New Guinea with an Australian Government scholarship, aims to contribute her medical research knowledge to her home country.

## Visiting Students from The University of Fukuchiyama

Tomoko- a second-year student from Japan, aims to contribute to rural Japan through her studies in Regional Management. Her desire to participate was as a warm-up to another slightly longer short-term five-week study abroad experience in 2024.

Ikumi- Also a second-year Regional Management student who wanted to experience an English-speaking country and believed this experience would assist in gaining a global perspective as well as provide language exposure.

This diverse set of individuals highlights the group's varied backgrounds, aspirations, and challenges, showcasing the complexity and richness of the academic and cultural exchange experience (Stebelton et al., 2015). The presence of linguistic and cultural diversity underscores the importance of effective support systems and cross-cultural understanding in facilitating a positive and enriching experience for all members (Kudo & Simkin, 2003).

## Findings

The dialog reveals diverse perspectives among the participants in the case study. Adrienne's exposure to Japanese anime influences her perception of Japanese names. Jackie, a student from the Philippines, discusses her language learning experiences, emphasizing the role of English in education and the accessibility of subtitles in anime. Adrienne shares her experience of using English daily during work during a stint as a nurse working in Vanuatu.

The participants express their intentions after completing their studies. Jackie plans to return home to care for her parents, while Adrienne considers settling in Australia and working in the public health. On an Australian Government scholarship, Natasha emphasizes her commitment to returning to Papua New Guinea for a clinical placement.

Insights into the participants' family reactions to studying abroad are shared, reflecting a range of emotions from happiness to pride. They discuss the positive aspects of studying in Australia, such as the standard of education, the greater emphasis on critical thinking tasks in Australian tertiary institutions and opportunities for exposure to the wider range of cultural influences in Australia multi-cultural and immigration focussed society (Scharoun, 2015).

A shift in perceptions about studying abroad emerges as participants appreciate the school's support, activities, and empowerment. Natasha expresses surprise at the level of support, describing studying in Australia as the best experience.

The participants express a shared interest in visiting Japan, driven by admiration for its culture, technology, and entertainment. This demonstrates a level of 'soft power' that Japan has developed in recent decades, particularly among other nations in the Asia Pacific sphere (Otmazgin, 2008).

Concerning safety in Australia, Jackie mentions occasional incidents with drunk people on public transport, while Adrienne notes the absence of personal experiences with crime (Deng & Ritchie). The conversation concludes with a discussion on global perspectives, emphasizing respect, authenticity, and with Byron outlining how he has witnessed the nature of Australian society change in the last 30-40 years. He also makes some interesting comparisons and contrasts to his time in Japan and experiences of Japanese people and society.

The dialog provides valuable insights into the participants' experiences, perceptions, and aspirations during their study abroad journey. It also demonstrates the generally favourable impression most younger people across the Asia-Pacific region have of both nations, and how both Japan and Australia are viewed as leaders within the regional sphere (Otmazgin, 2008; Wilkins, 2015).

## Challenges and Opportunities

When observing the Japanese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) participants in the exchange, it was noted that they seldom offered feedback following the verbal descriptions of ESL / EAP members and often ended conversations with prolonged pauses. Despite their seemingly reserved demeanour, it is conceivable that their heart rates were elevated as they composed their thoughts before speaking. Additionally, being in a setting with individuals from varied cultural backgrounds might have prompted philological adjustments like trying to breathe (Hammer, 2007).

Whereas, while observing the ESL / EAP students, it was evident that they spoke elaborately, putting in effort to express themselves clearly and avoid any potential misunderstandings. They faced the dual pressure of articulating their thoughts effectively to EFL students and presenting themselves favourably to representatives from both

institutions. Consequently, their responses to the prearranged open-ended questions from the EFL members seemed to convey an inclination towards overcompensation for their study-abroad experiences (Hammer, 2012).

## Opportunities for Improvement:

Enhancing language acquisition in both EFL and ESL / EAP programs can be achieved by implementing innovative pedagogical methods tailored to diverse language levels. The optimization of the overall student exchange experience and the mitigation of challenges can be facilitated through the provision of support systems and cultural orientation. According to Vande Berg et al. (2009), incorporating cultural mentoring before the exchange significantly contributes to intercultural competence. While their research encompasses over sixty study-abroad programs in a broader context, the benefits of having a mentor become particularly evident when dealing with finer details.

In this scenario, a recommended approach after an EFL student poses a prearranged question is for ESL/EAP members to respond with a succinct description, coupled with comprehension checks to ensure understanding. Alternatively, introducing a pause in the conversation for translation into the native language of an EFL speaker, such as Japanese, could be considered. Protocols established before the exchange can be revisited in post-sessions to evaluate the mentee's response to cultural differences and address any issues that may arise.

## Impact on Participants

Ideally, exchange programs improve networks through the establishment of new international contacts. This viewpoint is the stance of Crossman and Clarke (2010), who highlight the significance of engaging in diverse learning experiences abroad, emphasizing that such experiences contribute to overall knowledge enhancement beyond the mere practice of language skills within one's home country.

Nonetheless, adapting to a new classroom environment is indeed a necessary process. Zhou et al. (2008) assert that students who enter universities with distinct languages and cultures must adapt to unfamiliar educational systems. This adaptation encompasses addressing various challenges associated with change. For EFL learners, with a limited command of English communication, the experience of being newcomers on campus alongside their ESL/EAP counterparts can be somewhat intimidating.

However, through this exchange, all members have the opportunity to develop resilience, independence, and heightened cultural awareness. Interactions with diverse communities and exposure to new perspectives nurture empathy, adaptability, and a nuanced understanding of global issues, shaping well-rounded and culturally sensitive individuals (Bachner & Zeutschel, 2009)

## Recommendations

Before entering the exchange, EFL learners would benefit from target language training. This can also include cultural competency training for diverse contexts such as Japanese speaking with Filipinos and people from Papua New Guinea. Japanese students' perceptions of English use tend to be focussed on the main Anglophone nations (US, UK, Ireland, Australia, Canada, New Zealand). However, use of English as a *lingua franca* grew strongly throughout the latter stages of the twentieth century and it is likely that Japanese students will use English as a shared language of communication with non-native English speakers. These may include other ESL users in their home countries, or as in this case interacting with non-native English users in a third country, typically an Anglophone nation such as Australia.

Consequently, some degree of preparation in terms of cultural competency and even being aware that non-native accents in English are just as valid as native English users' accents, as long as communication is not overly impeded. Such training would be valuable to expand Japanese EFL students' worldviews and their understanding of how Japan fits into the wider global community.

Some practical actions in this regard could include asking for clarity before using any slang term to describe a nationality. Another practical action to improve language comprehension in EFL / ESL / EAP student exchange could include having large screen

monitors with key points transcribed in live real-time. This would assist in lessening the confusion of language misunderstandings (Hammersley, 2010).

Alternatively, ESL / EAP students such as those involved in this short program could benefit from some prior training in understanding the typical traits of Japanese communication models. All of the ESL / EAP students involved in this meeting were highly interested in Japan and Japanese culture, as well as being generally quite personable and empathetic individuals. In observing the interactions between the students in the dialogs during the meeting interaction, there were only moments of small miscommunications, though it was difficult at times to ascertain the actual degree of listening comprehension on behalf of the Japanese students as they tended to rely very much on their prepared written questions. It was interesting to note that when the conversations moved away from the more structured questions and answer style dialog, and into a more naturalistic intercourse around subjects such as the Japanese anime and travelling to Japan, the Japanese students began to relax, and their fluency demonstrated marked improvement.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study examined a September 2023 exchange between institutions, providing definitions of EFL, ESL, and EAP to contextualize the investigation. Emphasizing the crucial role of cultural understanding in personal growth, the analysis of EFL and ESL/EAP highlighted their shared aim of promoting global citizenship. The observational methodology yielded findings that underscore the necessity of effective support systems for sustained international education collaborations. These insights contribute to fostering an interconnected and empathetic global community, preparing individuals to navigate the complexities of a diverse world and in particular Japan's place within the greater Asia-Pacific community of nations.

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## Appendix

### Summary / Highlights of Dialogs



**1. Tony: *What image do you get from Japanese names?***

**Adrienne:** I watch Japanese anime, so the names remind me of the characters.

**2. Tomoko: *How do you study another language?***

**Jackie:** We have our dialect in the Philippines. But, I like movies and music. All of the books in school are in English. So, we learn English growing up. I also enjoy watching animation. There are subtitles while we watch anime, so it's easy to follow.

**3. Ikumi: *How often do you use English while studying abroad?***

**Adrienne:** I only use Tagalog when I speak to people from home. I worked in Vanuatu for five years, and I can understand some of their language, but I communicated in English every day.

**Natasha:** In PNG, people use a pigeon English language. It comes from the Australian soldiers who came to PNG during WW2. But, not everyone can speak to each other in English.

**4. Tomoko: *What do you do if you can't understand English?***

**Adrienne:** If I don't understand, I always ask a question to make sure we are on the same page.

**5. Tomoko: *Do you want to return to your hometown after university?***

**Jackie:** I want to return home and care for my parents.

**Adrienne:** If there are opportunities to settle in Australia, I will become an Australian and travel back to the Philippines for holidays. I want to work in government.

**Natasha:** I am on a scholarship and must return to PNG for a clinical placement. I need to go home for two or three years. I love her country and want to live there.

**6. Ikumi: *What was your family's reaction when you said you wanted to study abroad?***

**Natasha:** I was already living alone, so they were happy. But, I am single and not married, so it was exciting. Mainly, because I got a full scholarship. But, the living part of being abroad was a little sad for them.

**Jackie:** My family were happy because of the opportunities in Australia. Families are very close in the Philippines, and even distant relatives are considered close.

**Adrienne:** My parents are very proud of me. But, we miss each other at Christmas and birthdays. The parties and Karaoke sessions are fun, and I miss them. The sacrifice will be rewarding, and studying abroad is part of starting a career.

**7. *Tomoko: What is the good point of studying in Australia?***

**Jackie:** I think the standard of education. It's different from the Philippines. I find it refreshing. There are also many more opportunities to get accredited so you can work worldwide. If I study in the Philippines, I need to do extra examinations to qualify to work as a nurse overseas.

**Adrienne:** In the Philippines, we do a lot of quizzes, and teachers always stay on the textbook. Whereas in Australia, there are more critical thinking and analytical thinking tasks. I'm glad I did the ELICOS (English Language Intensive courses for overseas students) before starting my master's. We wrote a report using citations and references. Also, we worked on listening, reading and speaking skills. I did a ten-week course before going into the Masters. It was a good chance to refresh my academic skills because I had been working for ten years.

**Natasha:** In the health sector, you need a license to practice, so in PNG, I can work. But, in Australia, there are higher levels of education. So, I need to complete the Australian exams. In the Australian classrooms, you analyse the information based on case studies. This is good because I can see how everything is connected. In PNG, classes are separated and don't have the same technology. We don't have things like Zoom classes. We are just getting used to new Tech. Also, during COVID-19, I was a health worker, so I couldn't visit my family and had to stay at the hospital.

**8. *Ikumi: Has your image of studying abroad changed from before you came to Australia?***

**Jackie:** Before coming to Australia, I thought I would have to work and study all day. However, the school has provided activities like day trips to the countryside, parties and events. I have also gone to conferences that help to empower women. These activities are supportive, and I wasn't expecting much help.

**Natasha:** I am not sure about other universities in Australia. But at CQU, they continuously check up on me and ensure I'm okay. I never imagined it was going to be so good. Studying here is the best. There is also an Academic Learning Centre to help with schoolwork, which is helpful. On top of that, my hometown is tiny, so I was surprised at how big the city of Melbourne is. However, my friend from Shanghai said the opposite.

He thinks Melbourne is only a fraction of his city. Anyway, I have visited many cities in Australia, but I love Melbourne the most.

**Adrienne:** I heard Melbourne was Australia's number one best city to study. But, I thought I would have trouble with the culture. But, many people are from different countries, and everybody respects each other. So, you can be proud to come from a foreign country. Another point is the staff at the university helped me with accommodation and finding a job, so I think it's excellent. I didn't expect it to be as it is, even though I read it's a multicultural society.

**9. *Tomoko: What other countries would you like to visit?***

**Everybody:** JAPAN!

**Adrienne:** Everybody loves anime.

**Natasha:** My dad works in technology, so I have wanted to go to Japan. I like the way Japanese people carry themselves. I want to see the way they interact.

**Adrienne:** I love the respect and honour Japanese people practice, primarily, with your parents.

**Jackie:** I want to see One-Ok-Rock live in Japan!

**10. *Ikumi: What kinds of crimes are common in Australia?***

**Jackie:** Sometimes there are drunk people on public transport.

**Adrienne:** I have never experienced any crime but have seen car accidents. I take the bus to work, and if there are drunk people, the driver won't let them get on the bus.

**11. *Ikumi: What kind of person has a global perspective?***

**Jackie:** Someone who can respect and hold themselves with anyone from another country.

**Adrienne:** Authentically standing up for who you are and where you are from. Even if you are in a different culture, you must be respectful.

