

# Serious Leisure: A Diary Study of Self-directed Learning and Motivation in *Eikaiwa*

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While English conversation (*eikaiwa*) schools are widespread in Japan, little research exists on learner motivation in these settings. This exploratory study based on one learner's L2 diary entries and reflective comments investigated the motivational factors contributing to her self-directed language learning efforts while studying at an *eikaiwa* school. In this study, I also sought to evaluate the potential pedagogical applications of learner diary writing in *eikaiwa* as well as the practical affordances and constraints specific to that context. The data revealed that the learner's motivation was influenced by a variety of interrelated social and personal factors. There was also evidence that suggested that although simple enjoyment was an important factor for her motivation to learn, she also showed signs of significant investment in an imagined community. Furthermore, in contrast to some academic studies portraying *eikaiwa* as a site for hedonistic "casual leisure" rather than linguistic development (Kubota, 2011), the participant engaged in an extensive amount of self-directed learning along with an impressive degree of metacognitive self-awareness. This, along with several points of crossover between English learning and Hawaiian culture—a central element of her self-identity—suggested that her self-directedness represented an example of "serious leisure" or a "leisure career" (Stebbins, 2007). Regarding the secondary focus of the study, the diary writing process was found to fulfill a number of practical pedagogical functions such as maintaining student-teacher communication and providing opportunities for meaningful production of the L2.

英会話学校で英語を学ぶ学習者が増えているにもかかわらず、このコンテキストにおける学習者動機付けの研究は数が限られている。本研究は、英会話教室に通うある1名の学習者対象に、彼女が日記に記した内容や内省的なコメントから自律学習に影響を与える動機付けの要因を明らかにしたものである。さらに本研究では「日記」を一つの教授法と捉え、その実用化の可能性も追求した。本探究の結果から、学習者の動機付けの要因は相互的に作用する様々な社会的、個人的要因に影響を受けていることがわかった。また、この学習者にとって「単なる楽しさ」は学びの上で重要な学習動機の要因であるが、それと同時に、imagined communityへの「投資」(investment)の兆しもデータから示された。遊び的な要素を多く含むと捉えられてきた英会話学校の学習環境 (Kubota 2011年)とは対照的に、さらに、当該学習者の英語学習は彼女のメタ認知的な認識を示し、自律学習者としての道を辿っていたことが本研究からみてとれる。さらに当該学習者は、英語学習と彼女の自己アイデンティティでもあるハワイ文化が重複しつつもあるが、象徴しているStebbins(2007)がいうところの「本格的な娯楽」(serious leisure)または「娯楽キャリア」(leisure career)を象徴していることもわかった。本研究の第二の焦点はその研究方法にあり、日記を書くプロセスは生徒と教師間のコミュニケーションを維持するだけでなく、外国語教育においては実践的かつ教育的効果を促進する場を提供できることが明らかになった。

## Keywords

diary, motivation, self-directedness, identity, *eikaiwa*

## キーワード

日記、動機、自己志向、アイデンティティ、英会話

This paper describes an exploratory study that emerged from one private conversation school (*eikaiwa*) student's self-directed efforts to develop her English proficiency through writing L2 diary entries. Encouraging language learners to write regular diary entries in their L2 can not only provide significant practice time for production of the target language, but can also open up a "private dialogue between a student and teacher" that can be "about almost anything that the learner would like to know or discuss" (Peachey, 2004). Greater opportunities for learners to have rich, meaningful contact with the target language outside of a formal classroom space would arguably be one of the most desirable prospects for language teachers in most, if not all, EFL context educational institutions. Furthermore, gaining insight into the myriad influences on learners' fluctuating motivational states could

provide educators with tools that could be used to bolster and sustain their learners' efforts as self-directed learners away from the confines of the classroom.

Using diaries as a means of gaining insight into the individual experiences of teachers or learners is especially valuable within *eikaiwa* schools as they arguably represent a context overlooked within Japanese English education and research. Tensions created from opposing business and educational concerns within these institutions (Bossaer, 2003; Hooper & Snyder, 2017; Nuske, 2014) mean that the *eikaiwa* context is distinct in many ways from the traditional conception of an educational institution (Kubota, 2011). However, despite the reported idiosyncrasies that in some ways set *eikaiwa* apart from established conceptions of "school" or "education," Seargeant (2009) maintains that *eikaiwa* schools are in fact the "most visible context in which the actualities of language learning within Japanese society clash with current trends and recommendations in contemporary TESOL theory" (p.94). Due in part to a marginalized position "at the bottom of the EFL hierarchy" (Nagatomo, 2016, p. 56), the experiences of language learners and teachers in this context have largely been absent from academic inquiry (Lowe, 2015).

One area that is often central to diary studies and that has received very little attention in *eikaiwa* is self-directed language learning (SDLL). In SDLL, responsibility for decision making is given over to the learner, "with or without a variable degree of participation" by another party, such as a teacher, who may act as a "helper in response to requests for information or advice" (Holec, 1996, pp. 89–90). Both pedagogical practice and action research relating to SDLL are desperately underdeveloped in *eikaiwa* with schools often unaware of the role of out-of-class study (Brown, 2005) and the benefits SDLL can offer learners, including more developed meta-cognitive skills and greater motivation and confidence (Du, 2013; Victori & Lockhart, 1995). Furthermore, schools and students alike have been known to passively resist the notion of autonomous learning as it arguably runs counter to the business model of mainstream *eikaiwa*: language acquisition as easily consumable product (Hooper, 2017; Makino, 2016; Sapunaru-Tamas & Tamas, 2012). Learner diaries can stand as an expression of SDLL as well as potentially providing a teacher or researcher insight into what factors might influence language learning motivation (Matsumoto, 1989). Due to the relative lack of academic attention towards *eikaiwa* students, what influences their language learning, and their degree of self-directedness, diary studies could be a valuable tool in bridging the gap in this particular context.

This study examines the diary entries of one self-directed learner in a small *eikaiwa* school. The learner, of her own volition, completed one English diary entry a day over approximately one year while attending regular weekly classes at the school. As an *eikaiwa* teacher, I felt that this represented a truly exceptional case of self-directed study in a context with little extrinsic pressure from the classroom or the institution as a whole. The diary entries were subsequently examined for themes related to the student's motivation for SDLL and language learning in general. SDLL was identified as an area of interest in this study due to the lack of research in the *eikaiwa* context and the relatively low degree of engagement in SDLL by *eikaiwa* students (Brown, 2005; Hooper, 2017; Makino, 2016). The student was subsequently given several opportunities to explicitly reflect on the process she engaged in when writing the diary, what insight she gained into her learning style, and how she was able to sustain her out-of-class efforts over an extended period of time. In this study, I endeavored to gain insight into the motivational processes behind this learner's self-directedness and the potential benefits of diary writing as a pedagogical tool. In addition, I attempted to document the process of conducting learner focused research in an *eikaiwa* setting.

Through highlighting the unique constraints involved and proposing approaches to circumvent them, it was hoped that this investigation might encourage others to explore the possibility of conducting more learner-focused research in *eikaiwa*.

## Learner Diary Studies in Research and Pedagogy

Learner diaries have been used to give learners opportunities to reflect on language learning success and to allow them to explore learning strategies and emotional states (Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik, 2014). In the fields of TESOL and SLA, introspective (diary writer as researcher) and non-introspective (researcher investigating a diarist-learner) diary studies have provided glimpses into elements of language learning usually obscured from direct view such as motivation, anxiety, identity, cultural sensitivity, and learner perceptions of instructional methodology (Carson & Longhini, 2002; Hilleson, 1996; Iragui & Lindsay, 2015; Peck, 1996; Porto, 2007). Rather than producing generalizable results that can be applied to language learning in a wider sense, diary studies offer a means of gaining a deeper, highly contextualized understanding of individual learners' needs and behaviors that "objective" tools like questionnaires and observations fail to register (Allwright & Bailey, 1991; Iragui & Lindsay, 2015; Tanaka, 2009).

There is a distinction, however, drawn by Bailey (1991) between an "ordinary" diary written by a language learner where there is no control over content and the explicitly reflective "learner diaries" used in more formal diary studies. Additionally, a number of educators and researchers claim that due to the primary reflective goal of "learner diaries," language corrections should not be made, the diary may be written in the learner's L1 or L2, and they must be written as close as possible to the learning time they are referring to (Bailey, 1991; Peachey, 2004; Rubin, 2003). These points predominantly address utilization of learner diaries as a formal research instrument and strive to lessen some of the concerns of researchers regarding diary usage due to inherent validity and subjectivity issues such as the issue of diarists' perceptions or memories being unreliable (Tanaka, 2009).

In contrast to the formal SLA-focused research previously described, some diary studies exist that shine light upon the value of diary writing as a more practically focused pedagogical tool serving as an avenue for productive language practice and a means to review previously studied material. Vajirasarn (2014) conducted a study in which 17 Japanese university students were asked to write a one-page journal in English that reflected on their language learning experiences in which the students were allowed to write general diary entries about daily life, yet received explicit instruction to focus on describing their language learning. Finally, a post-semester questionnaire revealed that, for many students, the journal represented a useful means by which to review the lesson content as well as a valuable opportunity for writing practice. One student in the study responded that the journal writing was beneficial in three different ways: as a means of reviewing lesson content, as writing practice, and as a means of communicating with the instructor.

I think writing (a) journal is useful to my learning because I can review what I learned today and practice writing. It becomes a chance to think back (on) the lessons. Moreover, I feel that I can make conversations with my teacher every lesson. Though it is demanding for teachers, language learners can get benefits from the journals. (Vajirasarn, 2014, p.115)

Contrary to the Vajirasarn's expectations, the students that participated in this study perceived the practical aspects of journal writing (recollection of lesson content and opportunities for written self-expression in English) to be of greater value than solely reflecting on their own learning strategies. This is relevant to this study in that it reflects Haruka's initial motivation for writing her diary—an opportunity to review lesson content and to write in English about topics that personally mattered to her.

Vajirasarn's findings are reflected in Pierce's (1994) diary study of adult immigrant language learners where it was found that, despite students being told that they could write their

entries in their mother tongue, the participants “were adamant that they wanted practice writing in English, and asked for regular feedback on their writing progress” (Pierce, 1994, p. 23). Furthermore, the researcher stated that although other studies recommend that language in diary entries should not be corrected, her participants specifically requested feedback on grammar issues. Finally, she claims that, if implemented in a supportive classroom environment with a reduced teacher–student power differential, teachers may be surprised at the level of writing students produce.

Focusing more on learner motivation, Matsumoto (1989) carried out a diary study of a Japanese college-level student with the intention of exploring what factors influenced the learner’s L2 classroom learning experiences during an eight-week ESL program in the United States and how the act of keeping a diary may have facilitated that learning. Through this approach, Matsumoto sought to examine the dual purpose that diaries can potentially serve by identifying how learner diaries can be used as a tool for teachers and researchers to identify what is going on with learners “behind the scenes” in terms of motivation, anxiety, or self-image, while simultaneously acting as a guide or tool for the learners themselves.

In terms of the act of diary keeping being an effective practice for language learners, this study, to a certain extent, mirrored Vajirasarn’s (2014) findings, stating that “most of the benefits of journal-keeping rest on those of the act of writing itself” (Matsumoto, 1989, p.187). It was suggested that the act of diary writing allows the learner to organize their thoughts and explore their achievements and problems within the learning process. However, this study proposes that any learner diaries would have to be compulsory assignments as it is unlikely that they would commit to written reflection of their learning experiences by their own volition. The findings from Vajirasarn (2014), Pierce (1994), and Matsumoto (1989) suggest that diary writing may be perceived by learners as beneficial purely as a means of expressing themselves in written English. In addition, the act of reflecting on their learning in written form, while certainly providing researchers with a rich source of data, may primarily serve learners as a valuable record of errors and experiments with language as well as broader struggles and victories in the target language.

## Learner Motivation in *Eikaiwa* and the Need for Research

In *eikaiwa* contexts where learners are not formally required to engage in any out-of-class learning, it can be difficult to persuade learners to keep explicit reflective diaries. *Eikaiwa* represents one context where students are in fact “clients” and often hold significant power over instructors (Bueno, 2003; Bueno & Caesar, 2003; Hooper & Snyder, 2017). Taken from Bueno and Caesar’s (2003) collection of *eikaiwa* teachers’ narrative accounts of their professional lives, one teacher while describing the expectations of employees in a chain *eikaiwa* highlights in a tongue-in-cheek fashion the customer-centered, retail-esque approach that pervades the industry:

Remember the golden rules (who can forget). Total Customer Satisfaction. The Customer is Always Right. Yes! Just like WalMart! That was it! Whatever the customer wants, the customer gets. (Bueno, 2003, p. 103)

Furthermore, a number of studies concerning learners within this specific context demonstrate that rather than a desire for SLA, the primary impetus for enrolling in *eikaiwa* schools is the desire for an entertaining, hobby-type experience. Also, in many cases, students wish to avoid an academic style of learning or out-of-class study (Kubota, 2011; Sapunaru-Tamas & Tamas, 2012).

Kubota's (2011) study of *eikaiwa* students and their motivation for attending classes indicated that participants identified a variety of factors outside a commitment to improving language development as reasons for enrollment. *Eikaiwa* was posited in this study to be a form of "casual leisure" (Stebbins, 2007) where students were often "unable to articulate their clear purpose of learning *eikaiwa*" (Kubota, 2011, p. 480) and were largely attending classes to socialize or for temporary exposure to "a captivating space removed from learners' daily life" where "white native speakers are constructed as an exotic icon to be consumed" (Kubota, 2011, p. 486). Several other accounts of *eikaiwa* learners reinforce Kubota's findings (Brown, 2005; Hooper, 2017; Makino, 2016). Relating more specifically to opportunities for self-directed language learning, Brown (2005) found that staff and students in a large chain *eikaiwa* were often unaware that materials for out-of-class study existed and, even after learners were introduced to resources (e.g., graded readers), few utilized them consistently. Makino (2016) attempted to encourage greater student engagement in out-of-class study in another *eikaiwa* by providing a number of free online resources for vocabulary study; however, student buy-in was extremely limited and participation quickly dwindled.

Although *eikaiwa* represents a multibillion-yen industry in Japan (METI, 2005) and despite the fact that such schools can be found in every major town or city in Japan (Bailey, 2007), research on learners and teachers in this context is relatively sparse. A study by Lowe (2015) found that of 134 articles published in *JALT Journal*, *eikaiwa* schools featured in only three studies. The limited attention that this educational sector has received in the literature can be explained in a number of ways. One factor may be that of image. Due to its overtly commercial nature and due to a lack of properly-trained teachers, some researchers and commentators have likened *eikaiwa* to the fast-food industry (Appleby, 2014; McNeill, 2004) and, while often exhibiting no more serious problems than Japanese compulsory English education, it is at times perhaps viewed as "somehow crasser because it is private enterprise" (Makino, 2015). Another more practical issue is related to access for researchers. In Kubota's (2011) study, she experienced several occasions where schools refused her access to their students or teachers. Kubota encountered many obstacles in getting permission to collect data from larger, franchised schools and was, instead, forced to approach participants through more casual, personal connections. A further explanation for the proportionally small amount of research coming from the *eikaiwa* classroom may stem from the type of teacher that inhabits it. Many *eikaiwa* teachers are young, relatively untrained, and their time in Japan, or indeed within English education in general, is often fleeting and on "the bottom rung" of professional Japanese ELT (Bueno & Caesar, 2003; Nagatomo, 2016).

The above accounts of *eikaiwa* classrooms and learners depict the industry as a site of mere *edutainment* far removed from the real "*eigo*" or serious English study taking place in Japanese universities and schools (Nagatomo, 2016; Hiramoto, 2013) and, due to a variety of factors, it is largely absent from most academic enquiry in Japan. That being said, the economic scale of the *eikaiwa* industry, as well as the responsibility it carries as one of the sole post-tertiary points of contact for Japanese people wishing to start or continue their language studies means that more research and development is necessary in order to better understand the attitudes and motivations of learners in this setting.

## Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

1. What key motivational factors can be identified from the learner's diary entries and how were these factors influential in sustaining the learner's self-directed language learning?

2. What considerations emerge relating to the viability of learner diaries as a pedagogical tool and for learner-focused research in the *eikaiwa* context?

These research questions were selected as it was believed that they would provide insights into both the pedagogical and research potential of learner diary writing. Perhaps more importantly though, it was also decided that the unique characteristics of language instruction in *eikaiwa* schools made it vital that any findings or implications be firmly rooted in the *eikaiwa* context.

## Haruka

The participant (Haruka) was an *eikaiwa* student in her mid-forties who was attending one weekly hour-long conversation class as well as regularly attending an additional 25 minute “mini-private” class roughly once every two weeks. She had enrolled at the school in October 2015, approximately six months prior to the beginning of her diary writing, and had early on expressed a desire to engage in out-of-class learning via vocabulary flashcard apps and extensive reading with graded readers that I provided. Haruka was a homemaker and mother who also ran classes teaching Hawaiian and Tahitian dance and culture in her free time. She had one son, a high school student, who was preparing to take his entrance examinations for university during the time she was writing her diary. Also, at the time of this study, she was studying Hawaiian culture and language and was extremely invested in working towards gaining an official qualification to teach classes in this field. Apart from English classes attended as part of her compulsory education approximately 25 years earlier, Haruka had no experience of studying English before enrolling in the *eikaiwa*. When she initially enrolled, she was informally evaluated by the school and placed in a class for beginner students. Her personality could be described as extremely positive, energetic, and outgoing. Four other members (two male high school students, one male university student, and a female full-time worker) attended a set group class with Haruka and she quickly built friendly relationships with everyone. On March 6<sup>th</sup> 2016, Haruka began submitting daily written English diary entries for me to read and check for lexico-grammatical accuracy each week directly after class. Haruka initiated the diary writing and there were no prompts from the teacher related to desired content or any explicit requirements for reflection. Haruka’s diary writing continued until February 9<sup>th</sup> 2017 when I completed my contract at the school.

## Motivation for the Study

Approximately six months into Haruka’s diary writing, it became clear that she might represent a fascinating and exceptional example of self-directed language learning that stood apart from much of what I had experienced in *eikaiwa* teaching. Subsequently, she was asked to consent to use of her diary as research data for a project on motivation. After securing (written) consent, Haruka provided past diary entries from which copies were made of each daily entry. At the end of the diary writing period in February 2017, she agreed to fill out a reflective questionnaire in Japanese (Appendix 1) on her experiences writing the diary. Then, in May 2017, Haruka was asked to reread her diary and answer some reflective questions on what she had learned from reading her own entries (Appendix 2). All of this L1 data was translated using an online professional translation service. In addition to the diary entries, Haruka completed two reflective questionnaires which were also examined for references to emergent diary themes as well as her thoughts and attitudes regarding the diary keeping process, self-directed study, and her experiences in the *eikaiwa* class. My positionality within this study is perhaps somewhat unorthodox due to its evolving nature throughout the research process. This study was initiated due to recognition of Haruka’s commitment to her

self-directed study that occurred when I was her teacher. The data collection therefore took place in this setting. However, data analysis and the development of any conclusions from that data took place after I had left the *eikaiwa* school and had started work in another institution. Therefore, it must be taken into account that this study comes from the perspective of both teacher and researcher.

## Examining Haruka’s Diary

In total, Haruka wrote 337 diary entries from March 2016 to February 2017. From this raw data, 75 entries (22.6%) containing any reference to language learning were set aside for further analysis and subsequent coding for emergent themes. Nine recurring themes were identified through this process:

1. self-analysis/ monitoring of learning strategies
2. teacher-related
3. classmate or social group-related
4. enjoyment/fun
5. Hawaiian culture/hula
6. her son’s studies
7. progress
8. anxiety
9. problems/difficulties

One external coder was employed to code an additional copy of the data according to these nine themes. The external coder was consulted and any disagreements over coding were discussed until a consensus was reached. Upon finalizing the coding, the frequency of each theme was calculated, with one or more mention per daily entry counting as one. Therefore, if enjoyment/fun was mentioned at least once in every entry (75), the frequency would be marked as 75 (100%).

## Findings

**Table 1.** *Frequency of themes coded from Haruka’s diary entries*

Theme	No. of entries
Self-analysis/ monitoring of learning styles and strategies	44 (58.6%)
Enjoyment/fun	35 (46.7%)
Problems/difficulties	35 (46.7%)
Teacher-related	32 (42.7%)
Progress	20 (26.7%)
Anxiety	19 (25.3%)
Hawaiian learning/hula	18 (24%)
Classmate/social group-related	17 (22.7%)
Son’s studying	9 (12%)

From the nine thematic codes identified during the first phase of coding (Table 1), upon discussion with the external coder, two categories were identified relating to factors that were

perceived to be underpinning Haruka's learner motivation - 1) Language learning as social practice and 2) English as "fun", "life", and "serious leisure" (see Table 2). Language learning as social practice was comprised of the three main social influences that appeared to be influencing Haruka's language learning—me (her teacher), her classmates, and her son. The second category was comprised of two elements that were perceived to have been influential on her view of English learning as a form of "serious leisure"—the role of enjoyment/fun and her interest in Hawaiian culture/ hula.

**Table 2. Coding for Analysis of Research Question 1—Haruka's Motivation**

Haruka's Motivation	Themes
Language learning as social practice	teacher-related, classmate/social group-related, son's studying
English as "fun", "life", and "serious leisure"	enjoyment/fun, Hawaiian learning/hula

In order to address what purposes Haruka's diary entries served as a pedagogic or research tool, in the same manner as in Table 2, the coded data was analyzed together with the external coder to identify any salient categories that may have existed (Table 3). It was interpreted that two categories could be seen in the data. One category was centered on the idea of her diary being a line of communication with me (her teacher) based on instances where she attempted to relate problems she experienced, concerns about class, and expressions of gratitude to me. The second category was defined as her diary acting as a point of contact with English outside of the *eikaiwa*. The coded data for this category largely consisted of Haruka analyzing her engagement with English inside and outside of class and writing down her ideas on learning strategies she intended to try.

**Table 3. Coding for Analysis of Research Question 2—Learner Diaries as Pedagogic and Research Tool**

Learner Diaries as Pedagogic and Research Tool	Themes
Diary as line of communication	problems/difficulties, teacher-related, progress, anxiety
Diary as point of contact with English	self-analysis/ monitoring of learning styles and strategies

In the following section, I will present and discuss excerpts from Haruka's diary entries and reflective questionnaires in an attempt to address my first research question:

*Research question 1. What key motivational factors can be identified from the learner's diary entries and how were these factors influential in sustaining the learner's SDLL?*



From my interpretation of the coded data, two salient themes relating to her motivation and self-directed learning emerged from her diary entries:

1. Language learning as social practice
2. “Fun”, “life” and “serious leisure”

## Language Learning as Social Practice

A consistent vein that ran through all Haruka’s entries was the vital importance of human relations for her language learning. One of the most common themes that emerged from the diary was her perception of me as an influential figure in her learning development and motivation. Often she referred to me as a friend rather than an educator and it was often my personality or attitude rather than just my teaching approach that she marked as a source of motivation.

*I got vitality very much by talking with Dan! I felt that I love his personality very much. I’m thankful for his kindness and his pleasant lessons. March 17<sup>th</sup> 2016*

*I participated in the Tuesday class of Dan for a makeup lesson today. I was nervous until I went for the lesson, but I didn’t have any problems. Because there was Dan, I felt relieved and was able to enjoy. August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2016*

Of course, because Haruka knew that I would be reading these entries, there is an indication that she wanted me to understand the degree of importance my presence or support for her learning experience held. Furthermore, her reflective responses showed that the support of a trustworthy teacher was essential for her continuing her English studies.

*It’s hard for me to study by myself. Speaking English is communication for me. To keep studying, I need some support from someone I can rely on. If I have that study environment, I think I can continue studying. Reflective Questionnaire 1, February 2017*

In addition to her perception of the teacher as a key influence, her *eikaiwa* classmates were also shown to be important figures with whom she wanted to create bonds through a shared educational pursuit. Throughout the year, Haruka fostered these relationships through actions such as chatting after class and bringing in snacks for everyone to share.

*I feel that it is special about the encounter with people and I’m thankful for the encounter with my classmates. They are not only the classmates and are people who are special to me. October 8<sup>th</sup> 2016*

*I prepared a Halloween gift and handed it to my classmates. Because everyone seemed to be delighted with it, I was very glad too. This is my gratitude to Dan and my classmates. Always thank you everybody. October 28<sup>th</sup> 2016*

One student in particular, Masaki, gradually became an important peer to Haruka because he attended her son’s high school, was highly motivated, usually sat next to her in class, and often stayed behind to chat with her after the class had ended.

*I’m talking with Masaki after the English conversation class every week. Though he is the same age as my son, he is my friend and he is a younger person than me but is a very reliable friend. When I talk with him, I can get a lot of something. Because he helps me in the class, I can have lessons always happily. Thank you Masaki. October 21<sup>st</sup> 2016*

Here she once again highlights the importance of, not only the teacher but also, her classmates in creating an atmosphere where she felt comfortable pushing herself and interacting with others using English.

*I was able to want to speak English more and more because I had a good teacher and good classmates who listened my talk. And because they listened properly to my English and also understood so I was able to continue studying English. I think that it is my motivation. Reflective Questionnaire 2, May 2017*

Haruka's diary entries revealed an additional social relationship outside of the English school that also may have played a role in sustaining her language learning motivation. Her son, a high school senior, was preparing for his university entrance examinations and Haruka made several references to the demanding schedule that he had to endure in order to gain acceptance to a good university. She expressed determination to provide both practical and moral support throughout.

*My son took many tests at cram school this morning. He takes many tests not only at high school but also at the cram school! Because he plays soccer too, it is very hard. So I want to support him anytime. And I want to study English and Hawaiian language hard for me together with him. April 24<sup>th</sup> 2016*

Several of her entries suggested that she may have viewed her own language study efforts as a way of providing motivation or moral support for her son. Moreover, Haruka stated that his hard work was a source of inspiration and encouragement that aided her in her own endeavors as a language learner.

*I'm feeling that it is really hard for him and I respect him. Because he makes an effort, I'm thinking that I must make an effort too! October 29<sup>th</sup> 2016*

The relationships that Haruka had with her teacher and her classmates were perhaps the most decisive factor in her experience as a language learner and permeated, in different ways, many of her diary entries. Through her diary one can observe various instances where Haruka displayed a clear sense of investment in the classroom community. For Haruka, her classmates and teacher acted as role models, confidants, counselors, and most importantly, friends. Even social relationships entirely detached from the *eikaiwa* were influential in sustaining her motivation. The effort that her son was making in preparing for his university entrance exams also inspired Haruka to push herself harder with her own studies. Furthermore, the presence of Masaki, who was at the time experiencing the same trials as her son and was very close with her, may have acted as a bridge between their (Haruka and her son) dual endeavors.

## English as "fun," "life," and "serious leisure"

One characteristic of the *eikaiwa* class experience that Haruka appeared to deeply value was the idea of learning being "fun". In her diary entries, she often claimed that speaking English was pleasurable for her and that English conversation or communicative tasks that I prepared were more enjoyable than textbook exercises. Although on one level we can see that Haruka tends to favor communicative tasks and free conversation over grammar-focused textbook activities, this represents only a very limited snapshot of what drives her as a learner and indeed as a person.

*I talked with everybody and I could learn English and really enjoy it. When I could talk in English, it was very fun. May 27<sup>th</sup> 2016*

*I was tired from my English conversation class and my brain didn't work, but the lesson was very fun as usual. August 5<sup>th</sup> 2016*

As was discussed in the previous section, many entries further support the idea that social relations in the classroom were important for Haruka in creating an atmosphere where she could enjoy her English learning. On numerous occasions, her enjoyment seemed to stem purely from interaction with myself or her classmates rather than resulting from a specific task or methodological approach.

*Though a lot of English words don't come out smoothly yet, it is very fun to talk English with Dan. September 29<sup>th</sup> 2016*

*Because I was able to meet everybody, I was very glad. And it was a very enjoyable lesson. August 19<sup>th</sup> 2016*

Haruka's reflective responses further supported the interpretation that she believed that both "fun" and membership in her social group were central to her learning motivation.

*At first I think that it is important that oneself enjoys study English. It is because I can't continue it if it isn't fun. And a teacher is really important to me because it's up to teacher what kind of lesson to do. I had a good teacher and classmates. It is very important to me that whom do I meet there. Not only I learned English with them, but also the life. I want to learn English as the life, don't want to learn English as the study. Reflective Questionnaire 2, May 2017*

The final two sentences of Haruka's reflection are interesting because they raise the importance of language learning to her as being inseparable from interpersonal relationships and the world beyond the classroom. Her opposing categorizations of "English as (the) life" and "English as (the) study" suggest that she sees the existence of two types of English learning—one for communicating and creating relationships with others and one for academic purposes. Her apparent desire to learn English for communicative, rather than academic, purposes had been suggested in a number of her diary entries.

*Until now, I didn't want to speak English as much as possible, but now I want to go to a foreign country and want to speak English. June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2016*

*And I will continue to study English so I will be able to speak English well. Then I meet many special people and want to make friends more. January 1<sup>st</sup> 2017*

This distinction between study and life also runs parallel to the perceived dichotomy within Japan between "eigo" (academic, test-focused study reminiscent of Japanese junior high school/high school English education) and "eikaiwa" (communication-focused English learning that is often taken up as an extra-curricular activity or hobby) (Nagatomo, 2016; Hiramoto, 2013). Haruka's rejection of English as "study," that seemingly runs counter to the significant amount of time she spent developing her own linguistic competence, may therefore instead represent a rejection of the "eigo" she encountered during her formal education.

The importance of socializing in tandem with language learning is also raised in Kubota's research on *eikaiwa* schools where it was found that the classroom was largely a hobby-like setting more for "socializing with like-minded people" than "developing linguistic skills as an investment to raise cultural capital" (Kubota, 2011, p. 480). In the case of Haruka, however, rather than taking precedence over linguistic development, it could be argued that the social interaction in her classes instead acted as a catalyst for enhancing and maintaining her motivation for language learning.

A final significant influence in Haruka's life and indeed on her language learning that is observable in several diary entries is her deep passion towards Hawaiian culture. As mentioned previously, Haruka works part-time as a teacher of Hawaiian dance and culture as well as studying for further qualifications in this area. Through her diary entries the profound impact this passion has on her daily life is clear and at times can be seen as crossing over into her efforts learning English. There were also a number of occasions where Haruka attempted to integrate her dual interests of Hawaiian and English learning in order to motivate herself further.

*I learned Hawaiian language in the first class. I learned articles, singular and plural form of nouns, and adjectives today. I was able to understand the difference between English words and Hawaiian words. March 20<sup>th</sup> 2016*

*I decided to read a Hawaiian book to study both English and Hawaiian culture. Though it is a difficult book for me, I'll try it!!! April 3<sup>rd</sup> 2016*

Haruka also found that improvements in her English ability afforded her greater opportunities to engage with the world of Hawaiian culture more deeply through shared language. She also started to notice benefits from studying the two languages simultaneously and she was able to transfer many of the skills she had learned from English class into her Hawaiian language learning.

*I could understand a little English that Kumu (Hula teacher) used today. March 27<sup>th</sup> 2016*

*(about Hawaiian language classes) "It is very difficult unlike English. However, I think that I can understand both more because I'm learning English too! I'll study hard more to understand both. September 16<sup>th</sup> 2016*

As Haruka's entries show, although the pure enjoyment derived from her *eikaiwa* classes was an important factor for her, on a deeper level, she saw her English learning increasingly as an expression of her "life". Furthermore, various facets of her English learning had arguably begun to permeate her endeavors as a student of Hawaiian culture and may have actually afforded her greater opportunities to engage with that adopted imagined community.

One of the most influential reasons for carrying out this study on Haruka's SDLL and language learning motivation was due to her approach being so markedly different to the majority of students I encountered in my *eikaiwa* classes. Just as in Kubota's (2011) study, a great many students were not attending the classes to develop their English language/conversation skills but rather as a simple pastime where they could socialize with foreign instructors or like-minded people. Haruka's case, while by no means generalizable, arguably resembles a different type of mindset to the "casual leisure" (Stebbins, 2007) found in Kubota's study and the majority of my own *eikaiwa* experiences.

"Casual leisure" is described as an "intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable core activity, requiring little or no special training to enjoy it" (Stebbins, 2007, p. 38). Haruka's references to fun and enjoyment throughout the diary may represent to some an indication that her approach to her *eikaiwa* classes was in fact merely hedonistic and more "casual." However, this fails to take into account the hours of solo out-of-class language study that she engaged in of her own volition and the clear emotional investment she had in her linguistic development and the continuation of her learning community. Just in the same way that her Hawaiian culture study had become an integral part of her identity, permeating almost every facet of her life, her English learning had become more akin to "serious leisure."

Stebbins states that “serious leisure” is “the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that people find so substantial, interesting, and fulfilling that, in the typical case, they launch themselves on a (leisure) career centered on acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience” (Stebbins, 2007, p. 5). The position of the learning of Hawaiian culture and language in Haruka’s life constitutes both a leisure and actual career as she taught hula and culture classes as a part-time job. One can also observe how her English learning gradually fed into her Hawaiian leisure career in a number of ways (Figure 1). Her developing English skill and motivation allowed her greater access to her English-speaking Hawaiian culture teacher, afforded her opportunities to study both areas simultaneously through English-language books on Hawaii, and improved her understanding of the linguistic structure of the Hawaiian language. In this way, her English learning became another complementary form of “serious leisure” that ran parallel to her engagement in Hawaiian culture. In addition, the relevance of English to her Hawaiian studies and the access it provided to her hula teacher could mark it as a “regime of competence”—a skill that is marked as valuable and that affords enhanced participation in a particular community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 6). Haruka’s remarkable motivation in *eikaiwa* could therefore be seen as an example of “investment” (Norton, 2001) linked to desired membership in two imagined communities: a community of English speakers (Kubota, 2011) and a community of experts on Hawaiian culture.

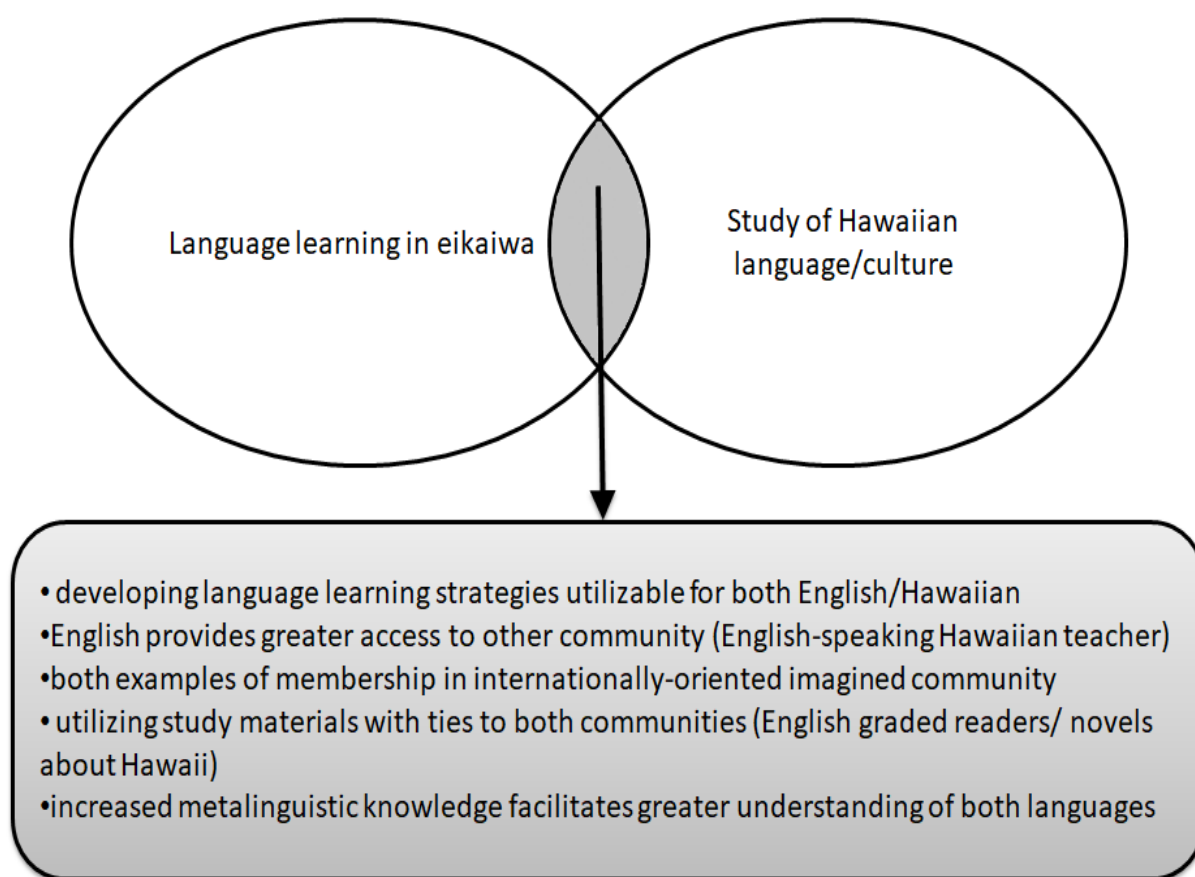


Figure 1. The interrelation of two forms of “serious leisure”

Haruka’s diary entries, therefore, reveal that her motivation for language learning, both in and out of class, was mediated by social ties and responsibilities that she marked as valuable. Furthermore, rather than existing as a formalized academic subject tied to the classroom,

English learning was perceived as an enjoyable means of expression where she could further deepen existing and new social ties in a wider international community. Development in her English ability also acted as a means of facilitating a “leisure career” based on her investment in an imagined Hawaiian cultural community.

In the following section, I address my second research question:

*Research question 2. What considerations emerge relating to the viability of learner diaries as a pedagogical tool and for learner-focused research in the eikaiwa context?*

My analysis of identified two salient roles that diary writing fulfilled in her context as an *eikaiwa* student in Japan.

1. A line of communication with her teacher
2. A point of contact with English outside of class time

### Diary as line of communication

A sizeable number of diary entries included references to problems or anxieties that Haruka was experiencing in her daily life, through her self-study attempts, and within her participation in the *eikaiwa* class itself. As Haruka knew that I would be reading entries weekly, one possible role of the diary may have been that of a sounding board as she was able to reveal insecurities or concerns to me that in a regular class setting might otherwise go unnoticed.

*I had an English conversation class at night, but I was very tired and I couldn't really think. Besides I could not do the homework too. I beg your pardon Dan. I want to finish homework till the next class!!! April 28<sup>th</sup> 2016*

Sometimes these entries addressed me directly whereas on other occasions she spoke about me in the third person even though it was understood that only I would read the diary. These third person references to me were often quite personal or complimentary and perhaps the altered perspective created a degree of distance when relating these more emotionally weighted sentiments.

*Then Dan might leave (school's name) and might become a university teacher, I heard it and felt really lonely. But I know it is a very splendid thing for Dan! but I was shocked. Dan is a No.1 English teacher for me and this class is my favorite class too. May 20<sup>th</sup> 2016*

The diary also potentially served a more practical purpose in that it allowed Haruka to communicate what she perceived to be her weak points and what areas she may have wanted to spend more time on during class. Moreover, one can see in this type of entry examples of reflection and self-analysis that traditional learner diaries explicitly attempt to elicit.

*It is the past participle which I am weak in that I am studying now! Because I am unable to memorize grammar, it is my weak point. I'll study English little by little from now on and want to learn more grammar. Yeah! May 26<sup>th</sup> 2016*

*Studying the textbook is very difficult for me, but English conversation is very fun. June 9<sup>th</sup> 2016*

These excerpts illustrate incongruence in the perceptions Haruka held regarding the approach she felt was necessary in order to develop her own English proficiency. Despite the fact that these entries were under two weeks apart, she appears to contradict herself, first embracing and then partially rejecting the grammar-centric material found in the class text-

book. These inconsistencies were often addressed within informal advising sessions held with me as her diary entries were being checked.

Although the style of her diary writing diverged from traditional explicitly reflective “learner diaries” (Bailey, 1991; Tanaka, 2009), a great deal of reflection and self-monitoring clearly occurred in her entries. On a number of occasions and with no direction from me, Haruka independently engaged in a significant degree of deep reflection concerning her language learning motivation, anxiety using the target language, the difficulties and successes she experienced, and the value that English held for her personally.

Another key avenue of communication between Haruka and me came not from the diary itself but from the time spent checking her entries for grammatical accuracy after the weekly group lesson. At this time I was also able to discuss some of the points she raised in her entries and hold something akin to a learner advising session (Kato & Mynard, 2016). During these sessions, I would discuss any anxieties or questions that came up in Haruka’s diary, offer her encouragement and support, introduce additional self-study resources, and raise open questions designed to stimulate self-reflection. In several diary entries and in her first reflective questionnaire, Haruka marked these communicative feedback opportunities as being central to her continuing to write the diary and expressed gratitude to me for taking extra time to check her writing. As she knew that I would be reading these comments, they may have also served as a means of ensuring my continued support for her out-of-class study.

*Dan was always looking forward to my diary, encouraging me, and supporting me. That was the most important thing for me. I’m very grateful to Dan who was happy to spend his time for me after class. Reflective Questionnaire 1, February 2017*

The time that I spent with Haruka after the lesson every week allowed me to simultaneously check through her entries and offer my perspective on any reflections or problems mentioned in them. These advising sessions were marked as a key source of motivation by Haruka in her reflections on the process. However, despite the positive motivational effect that these checking/advising sessions may have had on Haruka’s learning, on a more practical level, it is important to note that, due to extremely high workloads experienced by many *eikaiwa* teachers, this time-consuming approach may not be viable for busy instructors.

## Diary as Point of Contact With English

In the first reflective questionnaire, Haruka stated that what led her to start writing her diary was a desire to improve her grammar which she believed would in turn help her develop her speaking proficiency. The notion of the diary being explicitly reflective was not mentioned at all in her account. Instead, Haruka identified the main benefits of the diary as ease of review and personalized nature of the content.

*If my speaking is corrected, I can’t remember what was corrected later on, so I thought that getting my writing corrected is better. I thought that it would be easy to write and review because writing a diary is writing about myself. Reflective Questionnaire 1, February 2017*

In her second reflective questionnaire, when asked what she noticed about herself as a learner, Haruka claimed that she needed to have continued contact with English in order to maintain her progress and, through this, her motivation. As she generally only met for one hour-long class per week (to which she later added an extra twenty-five-minute private class), she felt that she needed more sustained engagement with English. This desire for consistent contact with English can also be seen in her diary entries as she refers to using vocabulary flashcard apps as well as graded readers and other literature to supplement her in-class

study. In this way, her diary became another means of sustaining contact with English in an EFL environment with few opportunities to do so.

*I think that it is important that I continue studying. I don't speak English every day. Therefore it is important that I continue studying English and to speak English more. Besides, it is the most important that I enjoy it and do it. It leads to the motivation. Reflective Questionnaire 2, May 2017*

Additionally, Haruka often used the diary to reflect on lesson content as well as her feelings, failures, and successes from her regular *eikaiwa* classes. Entries arguably provided an opportunity to revisit concerns or new ideas that had arisen from the *eikaiwa* classes.

*I thought about learning English. When I hear the English sentences everybody speaks, I don't think about some grammar. When I understand the English sentences, I choose the words I understand from there and guess. March 19<sup>th</sup> 2016*

*I explained the game's rules to everybody in English, but I couldn't do it well. I am worrying whether other people understand my English. I will gain more confidence and want to speak English. June 24<sup>th</sup> 2016*

Haruka stated that the diary was primarily a way to practice grammar and vocabulary and that her continuing to write entries hinged upon me checking for any language errors she made. Each entry was written completely in the L2 for the purposes of improving linguistic accuracy or complexity. Although this approach ran counter to many of the recommendations for learner diaries found in much of the literature (Bailey, 1991; Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik, 2014; Rubin, 2003), the fact that Haruka dictated the conditions of the diary writing (L2 only, grammar correction) is a result of the power differential that exists between student (customer) and teacher (provider) in *eikaiwa* schools. Despite any resistance a teacher may have to a particular learning approach, in *eikaiwa* the customer often has the final word in what goes on in class. This, of course, can also affect research in an *eikaiwa* setting. The diary was also, through Haruka's wishes, free in terms of content with no prescriptive requirements for her to reflect on her language learning. The fact that Haruka was able to write about whatever was on her mind, rather than answering reflective questions, arguably sustained her motivation as it made writing in English easier while also offering me a window into her life outside of the classroom. Allowing me access to the daily ups and downs in her life further built on our close teacher-student relationship that she valued so much. This might go some way to explaining why Haruka, of her own volition, completed almost a year of daily L2 diary entries with no external pressure whatsoever from her teacher or the school.

## Conclusion

Haruka's diary entries and later reflections provided a valuable opportunity to examine and reflect on one learner's motivation and identity, the role of the teacher, and indeed opportunities for even "serious leisure" within the *eikaiwa* context. Personally, I found the use of Haruka's learner diaries as a research tool to be both valuable and problematic. The rich, personal reflections and metacognitive awareness that Haruka included in her diary entries were a compelling data source that revealed a great deal about how individual cognitive and emotional factors shaped her language learning motivation. On the other hand, the close teacher-student relationship that we had caused me a great deal of insecurity and stress as I attempted to separate my roles as teacher, researcher, and friend whilst juggling issues of validity and ethics. Haruka trusted me enough to share substantial amounts of personal information with me and vice versa. At times, during the analysis stage of this project, I became



concerned about where the line was between personal and professional relationship. I sometimes felt guilty that I was unintentionally exploiting the close ties that we had built in order to conduct this study and gain access to her private thoughts and feelings. In this sense, the trust that Haruka expressed as she confided in me through her entries became somewhat of a double-edged sword, providing valuable insights into her learner self while also challenging my positionality as a teacher-researcher.

This study represents just one specific case of language learning motivation and self-directed learning, and is therefore not designed to produce any generalizable results. Haruka was a mature student who had started studying English of her own volition and who exhibited an extraordinary degree of self-directedness and investment in language learning. This, of course, may not be the case with other learners who may not display the same enthusiasm for learner diaries and might lack the same deep insights into their learning orientations, beliefs and attitudes. This study does, however, reveal some encouraging evidence supporting the use of learner diaries in *eikaiwa* as both a pedagogical tool and a source of personal information about learners for use by teachers and researchers alike. Due to the unique nature of learner motivation and the reversed teacher/student power dynamic within *eikaiwa* as well as the relative paucity of studies into the context, it is hoped that this study will stimulate further learner-focused, classroom-level research into *eikaiwa* in the future.

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## Peer Review Process

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## Appendix A

### *Haruka Reflective Questionnaire 1 (February 2017) (English translation)*

1. Why did you decide to start writing your diary?

I wanted to study grammar more to speak English. If my speaking is corrected, I can't remember what was corrected later on so I thought that getting my writing corrected is better. I thought that it would be easy to write and review because writing a diary is writing about myself.

2. Was writing a diary helpful to you? If so, why?

It's been very useful. But it's thanks to Dan's help. If I just write a diary by myself, I never know if my writing is correct or not. But Dan corrected my writing, and I could make use of my mistakes next time. Also, I could pick up some correct grammar and words from it little by little. When I found out I wrote okay, I got more confident.

3. Was writing a diary difficult for you? If so, why?

It took me a long time to write a short diary because I didn't have much grammar knowledge or vocabulary and I had to use apps and so on. It was really hard at the beginning. But it became fun because I wanted to study grammar and vocabulary and I started to understand them little by little.

4. How did you continue writing your diary every day without giving up?

I was able to have my own time one day a week, and I wrote the diary then. Dan was always looking forward to my diary, encouraging me, and supporting me. That was the most important thing for me. I'm very grateful to Dan who was happy to spend his time for me after class.

5. Do you intend to keep writing your English diary? If so, could you explain why?

As I'm not able to speak English well yet, I want to keep writing a diary to improve my English for as long as possible. Because Dan said he would support my diary writing and my study, I'm sure I can keep going. It's hard for me to study by myself. Speaking English is communication for me. To keep studying, I need some support from someone I can rely on. If I have that study environment, I think I can continue studying.

## Appendix B

### *Haruka Reflective Questionnaire 2 (May 2017)*

1. What did you learn about your language learning motivation?

- I was able to understand English by talking English about myself.
- I was able to want to speak English more and more because I had a good teacher and good classmates who listened my talk.
- And because they listened properly to my English and also understood so I was able to continue studying English.

- I think that it is my motivation.
2. What did you notice about yourself as a learner?
- I think that it is important that I continue studying.
  - I don't speak English every day.
  - Therefore it is important that I continue studying English and to speak English more.
  - Besides, it is the most important that I enjoy it and do it.
  - It leads to the motivation.
3. Were there any other points you noticed that were important to you?
- At first I think that it is important that oneself enjoys studying English.
  - It is because I can't continue it if it isn't fun.
  - And a teacher is really important to me because it's up to the teacher what kind of lesson to do.
  - I had a good teacher and classmates.
  - It is very important to me that whom I meet there.
  - Not only I learned English with them, but also the life.
  - I want to learn English as the life, don't want to learn English as the study.

May 19 2017