Active-stakeholder perspectives on the alignment and coherence of an EMI Academic Writing course: A curriculum-analysis case study in a Japanese university

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Abstract

This research reports on a curriculum analysis of an English Medium Instruction (EMI) introductory academic writing course (nominally referred to as the E-AW course) operating in a Japanese university. Routine surveys conducted by the university concerning the E-AW course commonly reported lower-than-hoped degrees of attainment, knowledge retention, and perception of learning value. To examine suitability for function, this research explored student and instructor perceptions of the internal alignment or 'fitness' of the E-AW course and its external 'fit' – or coherence – with other courses in the wider curriculum. This exploration was based on principles theorised from the Constructive Alignment (CA) framework, chiefly (i) Clarity of Knowledge, (ii) Authenticity/Relevance of Knowledge, and (iii) Bridging of Knowledge. Finally, suggestions were provided for future curriculum development based on the research findings and a holistic understanding of formative environmental and institutional factors.

The research employed a convergent mixed methods design, which provided the flexibility to collect and explore data on plural research objects – i.e., the E-AW course and its fit within its curriculum – from enrolled students and course instructors. Student-participants completed the Constructive Alignment Learner Experience Questionnaire (CALEQ) (n = 397) focused on the E-AW's internal alignment, and volunteers further responded to an Email Questionnaire (n = 8) inquiring into their perception of external coherence between the E-AW's learning objectives and other courses. The final stage gathered, via Semi-Structured Interviews (n = 6), perspectives from E-AW course instructors on the course's internal fitness and its external curricula fit.

All three stages provided 'slices' of knowledge from both groups of participants, which converged to depict perspectives on the E-AW course's alignment and coherence, and resulted in the following findings. First, students and instructors considered the E-AW to be well-aligned internally. Second, however, students and instructors were unsure whether the E-AW's targeted skillset (i.e., deductive logical structure and citation conventions) was coherently utilised or referenced in the wider curriculum. Identified

reasons for this lack of external coherence included: (i) a lack of official connection for skills taught between distinct courses; (ii) a lack of communication between the instructors of said courses; (iii) the potential decrease in comprehension due to the use of English via EMI; and (iv) the potential for the 'academic writing' skillset to be subsumed by the 'language' in which it is taught.

Accordingly, the study recommends the following regarding development of the E-AW course-in-curriculum. First, curricula should be constructed considering the coherent connection across course boundaries of skillsets and knowledge. Second, coherence between course administrators and instructors ought to be fostered through communication. Third, institutions in non-English-speaking nations operating EMI courses should emphasise the transferability of skills and knowledge taught in those courses.

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Chapter 1. Introduction of Study

This thesis reports on a convergent Mixed Methods Research (MMR) investigation into the alignment and coherence of a Japanese university's EMI introductory academic writing course (named 'English: Academic Writing' (E-AW)) and the curriculum in which it is situated. This study began out of a sense of duty to develop specific existing curricula while understanding the specific contexts in which they are situated (Deng, 2018). The author thus conducted an internal curriculum design analysis to ascertain the extent to which active stakeholders (i.e., students and instructors) perceived the target course to be coherently aligned (i) internally, with regard to its objectives, learning activities, assessment, and feedback, and (ii) externally, in relation to the relevance of its taught objectives to other courses in the wider curriculum. The terms 'internal' and 'external' alignment, informed by theorized principles of Biggs & Tang's (2011) learning-systems theory of Constructive Alignment (CA), refer respectively to the basic 'fitness' of the E-AW course's structural aspects and the degree to which the course's taught academic writing skillset is perceived to 'fit' with other courses (both those taught in the native Japanese and those taught in English) in the surrounding curriculum. To provide the highest degree of anonymity to its participants, this study refers to the university in which it was situated as Very Japanese Academy (VJA).

1.1. Researcher Background and Positionality

Since graduating from university in the UK, the researcher has worked in Japan for over 15 years in national and private elementary, junior and senior high schools, and universities. As a result of my work experiences at all levels of the Japanese education system, I am familiar with the workings of Japanese higher education institutions (HEIs) and the typical paths students have taken to arrive at them. As a researcher-practitioner, my experience and understanding of the Japanese educational system require that I outline three positional considerations that underlie this research project.

First, I am cognizant that, regardless of the many criticisms that I may be able to point to regarding Japan's way of doing things as a society, Japan works. This is not to

blithely say that it is perfect, for nothing is. Indeed, everything could undoubtedly stand some reflective improvement as time and tides change. Furthermore, it is vital to remember that not all problems may be sought nor solved with a singularly univariate lens. As a researcher-practitioner, I must acknowledge that the educational system I have taken an interest in does not need complete de- and re-construction. At the beginning of this project and its conclusion, they appeared to be functional though needing some kind of bonsai-tree style adjustment. Thanks to this investigation, I believe that at least some points for potential adjustment have been revealed.

Second, to the extent possible in a nation not that of one's birth, I could be considered a 'knowledgeable insider' within the research context. It would be amiss not to mention that while others in said context may consider the researcher 'knowledgeable,' reliable, and independent enough, thanks to my fluency in Japanese, it would not be entirely accurate to label me an 'insider' culturally. Despite this aside, as a researcher-practitioner conducting research at my place of employment, it is necessary to be ethically careful regarding issues of guilty knowledge (Williams, 2009) and neutrality (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). This ethical caution compounds with the previous acknowledgment regarding the state of the target research context and system.

Thirdly, considering my research subject and process, my positionality is necessarily influenced by my nature and office. Regarding my nature as a cultural outsider here in Japan, I must carefully couch my research in an investigatory and diagnostic mindset. To critically engage with identified issues is important, though setting out purely to criticize and deconstruct social, cultural, or political aspects of the context from the get-go would, apart from being definitionally opposed to constructive, achieve little impact here. As an institutional insider and an EdD student, my offices require that I prioritize my duty toward practical-yet-theorized improvement and development. Indeed, as Hanks (2018) points out, in attempting to improve existing practices, it is imperative that as much of the 'what' of a context – including, in order, its curriculum-level aspects and its socio-cultural underpinnings – be researched prior to establishing 'so-what' conclusions and 'now-what' suggestions and implications.

Therefore, while recognizing that it would be nigh impossible to remove all value judgments from educational inquiries such as this (Holmes, 2020), as a (relatively) young researcher-practitioner in a cultural context not of my own, I have taken care to engage with this investigation from as epistemologically and ontologically central a position as possible, and to be consciously aware of my lived experience to date, my worldview and position both within the institution and its broader society.

The impetus for undertaking this research thus stems partly from my own personal and professional experience as a teacher, partly from a respectful yet growth-minded philosophy, and partly from a personal desire to find things out. VJA, akin to most modern HEIs, commonly assesses the courses it offers through generic end-of-semester student surveys, though it does not routinely analyse or evaluate courses, or its overall curriculum, based on stakeholders' perspectives beyond this. Therefore, informed by an active-stakeholder focus (Altbach, 2015; Hanks, 2018), this investigation was an instantiation of my drive to consider the perceptions of students and instructors. By considering the perceptions of such active stakeholders on the internal alignment of the E-AW course and the degree to which it is perceived as coherent with VJA's wider curriculum, this exploration of how the target course's fitness and the degree to which it is connected, or fits, grows from a consideration of the ways in which elements of curricula are constructed, as well as why and how they fit with the broader curriculum, with sufficient account taken of extant situational factors balanced against consideration of theory and literature. Indeed, as urged by Deng (2018), studies of curricula should have a strong relationship with educational theory as well as "the inner work of schooling that are defined by *specific* curriculum content or material, *specific* students, and *specific* teachers within a *specific* instructional context" if they are to deal with functional and practical issues (p. 705). In so considering the actual extant curriculum, students, and teachers in the target research context first, instead of beginning with the purely theoretical, this investigation necessarily emphasizes practical curriculum development aspects over theoretical curriculum understanding.

1.2 Research Background

Higher education institutions (HEIs) in Japan are under pressure to reassess the effectiveness of their curricula and courses as increasing centralized accountability, drives for globalization, increasing levels of enrolment, and a nationally declining population act upon them. On top of this, Japan has several notable socio-cultural factors that mark it as relatively unique. These include how its HEIs operate compared to other modern economies, particularly regarding international-focused education.

One of these operational features is a recent tendency to create semi-independent 'quasi-departments' to deal with the Ministry of Education's (MEXT) graduation requirement of a certain number of foreign-language credits. Understandably, increasing the number of jurisdictions increases the difficulty of inter-department cooperation and course-and-curriculum construction. Literature regarding Japanese HEIs suggests that this 'silo-mentality' – i.e., the lack of clear and well-defined links between different classes across departmental or jurisdictional lines – mirrors the multiple departments of corporate entities in the world of work (Tett, 2015). However, unlike businesses, university departments are notably more insular and defensive of their own 'territory' (Schaefer, 1990). Moreover, this arrangement appears to be at cross-purposes with the majority of curriculum development literature, which states the need for student-centred, constructive curricula based on a series of core intended learning objectives (Tyler, 2013; Dewey, 1972), designed with a carefully considered degree of commonality, coherence, and contiguity (Posner & Strike, 1974).

Another notable operational feature is that two primary forces characterize Japan's education system; socialization (Shimahara, 1986; Warrington, 2006; Hane, 2013) and exam preparation (Berwick & Ross, 1989; Sato, 2009; Miura, 2010). On the one hand, Japan's school system actively fosters Confucian group harmony and interdependence (Hess, 1991; Hane, 2013) to maintain the nation's self-professed stable and hierarchy-based society (Meyer, 2014; Hofstede, n.d). On the other hand, this socialization commonly results in a teacher-centred system (King, 2013). Alongside said

system, the primary method for evaluating learning in Japan's schools is standardized exams, commonly held at the start, middle, and end of each thrice-yearly semester (Berwick & Ross, 1989). Entry to the next stage of the educational system is achieved through similar high-stakes entrance examinations (Miura, 2010). This exam emphasis supports an extensive, extra-curricular cram-school system that most students attend after school (Hirst, 2013).

It is thus not entirely surprising that non-Japan-centric educational approaches at the secondary (Sato, 2009) and tertiary levels (Ohmori, 2010) are slow to find purchase. Indeed, resistance to cultural practices and artefacts which are non-Japanese remains strong. Japan's socio-cultural homogeneity and wariness of the uncertain or unknown (Meyer, 2014; Hofstede, n.d) extends to foreign languages. This includes English, which despite a visible profile in both Japan's society (Seargeant, 2009) and education (Clark, 2005), remains a peripheral, distinctly 'non-Japanese' entity (Yamagami & Tollefson, 2011). Most literature regarding the university's position (particularly in the undergraduate stage) in Japan paints a somewhat bleak picture. Commentary on general (McVeigh, 2001), language (Tajino, 2019), and academic writing (McKinley, 2013) education suggests low degrees of academic drive (MEXT, 2012a, 2012b), autonomy (Todo et al., 2016) and self-focused motivation across many institutions and their enrolled students. On top of this, the spread of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) courses continues apace (Dearden, 2014; Galloway, 2020), with many courses – including the current research's target E-AW course – encountering less-than-optimal outcomes, in addition to problems of attainment, retention, pass-rates, and lowered success in subsequent courses.

1.3. Research Setting

Japan's similar-and-yet-separate socio-cultural context requires a degree of background understanding before researching concerns such as education. As dealt with in Chapter 2, much of this uniqueness stems from its populace's particularly homogenous ethnic nature and the lengthy self-enforced cultural isolation leading up to

the Meiji Reformation in the mid-late 1800s (Hane, 2013). Even today, student cohorts in Japanese universities, despite policies and measures intended to improve 'internationalization,' remain remarkably uniform in behaviour and outward international posture (Yashima, 2002; Aubrey, 2015; Nowlan, 2017).

VJA, a large national university in central Japan, is thus relatively typical. The vast majority of its yearly 2600 undergraduate intake is Japanese. As part of the required 'general studies' courses, operated by a quasi-department, for newly enrolled first-year students, the target course operates as an EMI-based English general-purposes academic writing course (hitherto referred to as the E-AW course). It runs alongside an English academic reading course through the Spring and Autumn 15-week semesters, once a week for 90 minutes, and yields two credits per semester (which constitutes a third of the required English credits needed for graduation). Though E-AW courses share a single syllabus, three different textbooks are used each semester, chosen by the administrative committee to broadly represent the preferences of science, medical, and humanities departments, respectively. Courses are conducted in sections of 20 students each, dividing a common-core class in half, with one half being taught by a non-Japanese teacher of English and the other half being taught by a Japanese teacher of English.

The E-AW course was reformed into its current version in 2016. Internal issues identified via assessment of course completion student surveys and attainment grades highlight, chiefly, (i) a lower-than-hoped degree of attainment, (ii) low retention between Spring and Fall semesters, and (iii) a lower-than-hoped degree of student perception of 'learning value.' Furthermore, external problems attached in part to the E-AW course include reviews from subsequent English Content courses. Nominally taught via a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) based approach, English Content courses in the second year suggest that students are not sufficiently prepared to meet said courses' academic requirements. Furthermore, VJA is a central member of the Japanese Ministry of Education's (MEXT) Global 30 (MEXT, 2009), Go Global (MEXT, 2012a), and Top Global Universities Projects (MEXT, 2014), which aim to foster Japanese students with abilities suited to engagement in the growing academic international

community. Thus, the foundational importance of academic skillsets (Schaefer, 1990; McKinley, 2013; Tajino et al., 2010) was recognized, and focus on this overarching goal imbued the E-AW course with a clear purpose (Tajino, 2019). Indeed, this objective is referenced in the quasi-department literature (Appendix 1) and the extant syllabus for the E-AW (Appendix 3).

Due to these identified institutional problems facing the E-AW course, the researcher hoped that an in-depth exploration into its operational realities through the perceptions of its active stakeholders would help to analyse the course's internal 'fitness' and its external curriculum 'fit' and lead to practical course-in-curriculum development suggestions for improvement to issues detected. In addition, knowledge generated from this inquiry could be significant to institutions in similar situations whose curriculums are providing EMI courses to their non-native English-speaker enrolment.

1.4. Research Questions

As outlined above, I believed a closer, more holistic look at extant courses and the curricula they operate in was needed to tailor better their systematic connections and alignment towards the learning needs of their enrolled students. Brief, routine analyses commonly stop at identifying functional symptoms, such as lower-than-hoped attainment, retention, learning value, lowered success in subsequent courses, and lack the depth needed to ascertain the root causes of these problems. These gaps in knowledge and practice led to the creation of the guiding questions underpinning the investigation:

- *Is the E-AW course being taught well? If not, why not, and what could be done to fix this?*
- *Is what is being taught in the E-AW perceived as valuable? If not, why not, and what could be done to fix this?*

These guiding questions were considered based on educational theory and resulted in the following primary research questions:

RQ1. How do enrolled students view the degree of constructive alignment in the E-AW course?

RQ2. What issues do the students perceive with the E-AW course in relation to coherence with the wider curriculum?

RQ3. What issues do the instructors perceive with the E-AW internal course alignment and external coherence with the wider curriculum?

Thus, the current research intended to analyse, holistically, perceptions of the E-AW course's 'fitness' and its 'fit' within its curriculum surroundings through theorized CA principles. Accordingly, these research questions will enable the researcher to explore active stakeholders' perspectives of that target course's internal alignment and external coherence within VJA's wider curriculum.

1.5. Research Organisation

Chapter 1 serves as the introduction to this thesis. It briefly outlines background to the research, its purpose, its potential significance, and describes the research setting and guiding research questions.

Chapter 2 examines the wide-ranging bodies of literature underpinning this inquiry. As an exploration of an intact educational context imbued with unique sociocultural factors and aspects, the current study needs to consider such concepts while constructing its foundations and framework. Thus, literature focused on Japan's socio-cultural and educational characteristics is first considered to situate the target course-in-curriculum. Literature on curriculum development and relevant educational theory was similarly reviewed. Following this establishment of the target context, Biggs & Tang's (2011) rugged-yet reliable Constructive Alignment (CA) design principles are theorized into the guiding alignment-and-coherence framework for this internal course-vis-a-vis-curriculum inquiry.

Chapter 3 considers the researcher's philosophical perspective, pragmatism, and the decisions informing the study's design and methodology. Following a brief overview of pragmatic research philosophy, the first part of this chapter outlines the inquiry's mixed-methods convergent design intended to capture deep 'slices' of data from multiple active-stakeholder perspectives. Next, the quantitative and qualitative analyses employed to interrogate the data and validity, reliability, and ethical concerns are explained. Finally, recruitment, language issues, and ethical concerns are discussed.

Chapter 4 discusses the data ('*what*'), the findings ('*so what*'), and the implications ('*now what*') of the stage 1 survey. The quantitative CALEQ data are first checked for internal reliability via standard EFA and Oblimin Rotation analyses, following which the question items are analysed using descriptive statistics. Finally, notable findings covering stakeholder perceptions on the internal 'fitness' and external 'fit' of the target E-AW course are revealed.

Chapter 5 presents the research data, findings, and implications for practice (at both a practitioner and an institutional level) for the stage 2 email questionnaires and stage 3 semi-structured interviews. The primary focus is placed on the discussion of said findings – viewed through the theorized CA principles of (i) clarity, (ii) authenticity/relevance, and (iii) bridging of knowledge – in relation to existing literature and theory. Following this, curriculum development implications for practice ('now what'), tempered with curriculum-understanding insights made possible by this study's holistic coverage, are offered concerning i) the connectivity between the target E-AW course and VJA's extant curriculum, ii) communication and collaboration between departments and colleagues, and iii) the treatment of EMI-based courses in VJA and similar Japanese HEIs.

Chapter 6 concludes the research and, along with a discussion of the study's limitations, considers future avenues of inquiry – explicitly concerning the target research context and generally in similar Japanese HEI contexts – in response to the research findings.

Chapter 2. Review of Relevant Literature

This investigation conducted an exploratory analysis into the degree of stakeholder-perceived internal and external alignment and coherence of the E-AW course in its curriculum. Therefore, the author gave due consideration to unpacking what is meant by curriculum, alignment, and coherence, questioning why these aspects are essential for learning and understanding the cultural currents underlying the target research context. Thus, to sufficiently explain the logics underpinning the current research, consideration was first given to the definitions and priorities in the investigation's frame (i.e., curriculum development over curriculum understanding). Next, the author determined that due to the detective-diagnostic nature of the inquiry, there was a need to provide a more holistic understanding of the target course-in-curriculum in question. Accordingly, the author first explored the socio-cultural and institutional factors prompting the selection of the target skillset (i.e., basic academic writing) and the E-AW course's implementation (i.e., via EMI). Following this, literature concerning curriculum development was reviewed, and the study's theoretical frame, Constructive Alignment (CA), was examined, critiqued, and theorized into the investigation's core principles. It was hoped that this approach would guide us through the study's theoretical underpinnings, towards the reality in which the current research was situated and ultimately provide the groundwork for discussing the identified issues in the target course-in-curriculum and implications for the improvement of future practice.

2.1. Framing an Investigation into an Education System

As outlined previously, as an EdD research thesis, this investigation emphasized what Deng (2018) has termed 'curriculum development' over 'curriculum understanding.' A focus on curriculum development, in Deng's (2018) terms, suggests prioritizing the core curricula components of an educational context as-it-is, while curriculum understanding – which examines concerns such as gender, power, and identity – tends to turn a more theoretical, deconstructionist eye towards to the target

context. Such a balanced framing, Deng (2018) states, would be beneficial to research that is primarily "concerned with practice to advance education" (p. 691), which the relation, or theorizing, of theory with "practice in an eclectic, creative and innovative manner" (p. 707) may help to bring forth. It is important to state categorically that such an arrangement does not seek to ignore or marginalize socio-cultural factors and theories potentially operating in any given educational situation. Based on his socio-cultural understanding of the target context, the author – on top of acknowledging that any given situation likely has multivariate reasons for its existing as it does – believed that a more neutral, diagnostic, detective-like approach to a practice-orientated research project would be likely to yield better results both in terms of theoretical clarity and real-world impact.

Based on Deng's (2018) conceptualization of investigations concerned with curriculum development, the current research endeavoured to consider both the theories concerning the more functional and structural aspects of a given curriculum and the specificities – stemming from the socio-cultural and environmental factors – imbued within said curriculum. While doing so, however, the author was acutely aware of the range of aspects potentially in play and focused on the most salient for clarity. Accordingly, the decision was also made to commence with a brief overview of the background factors to understand better the environmental and institutional situation that led to the E-AW course-in-curriculum being created as it was, which continues to influence its daily operational reality.

2.2. Curriculum Understanding

This section on curriculum understanding examined the socio-cultural factors constructing the environmental and institutional 'milieu' (what and where) in which the target course-in-curriculum is situated. This understanding of this situational presage would provide deeper insight into the investigation's findings. Here again, with an awareness of the need for clarity and brevity, the author focused on the most salient aspects underpinning the target context. Consideration, therefore, was focused on

Japanese society and its treatment of 'English', as well as the content of the target course (i.e., basic academic writing conventions) and its mode of delivery, EMI (English Mediated Instruction). The degree to which each of these aspects might impact the perception of alignment and coherence of the E-AW course was unknown when commencing this investigation. Nevertheless – as the findings demonstrate – it would have been unwise to begin this inquiry without considering the factors and trends underpinning it.

2.2.1. Japanese Society & Education

Though an advanced economically-developed country and one of the G7 nations, Japan nevertheless represents several stark differences in social, cultural, and educational parameters from its Western counterparts, from grade school to university level. The Japanese education system's focus on time spent on proper process (Shimahara, 1986; Hess, 1991) and lecture-exam modes of learning (Shimojima & Arimoto, 2017), together with its hierarchical and risk/other-averse sociocultural norms (Meyer, 2014), exerts a strong influence on the hue and treatment of all educational activities conducted within it.

Japan's Sociocultural Characteristics: Education

Commentary on Japan's education system indicates exceptionally high enrolment rates, retention, daily attendance, and equality of opportunity (Fujita, 2004). At the same time, critics can point to a teacher-centred system (Sato, 2009), evidencing high levels of conformity (McCreedy, 2004), exam-focus, and stress (McVeigh, 2001). As Okano (2009) notes, while one may be tempted to pick a side in this debate, it is possible to hold that both views of Japan's education system are true, with elements "both conducive and counter-productive to students' learning" (p. 95). Though the university system is somewhat less clearly defined – with 75% of all high school graduates matriculating upwards leading to a near-saturation level of enrolment (Goodman, 2010) in a 'time in-between' the pressures of entrance examinations and the world of work (Warrington, 2006; Ryan, 2009; Sugimoto, 2010) – research into university enrolment in

Japan (Unemori et al., 2004) suggests vocational motivations, not philosophical or developmental, are the primary reason students enter Japan's universities. Indeed, the previously detailed effects of the exam- and teacher-centred educational system are believed to result in less motivated, less autonomous university students compared to other similar nations (Todo et al., 2016). Under these conditions, it is perhaps not surprising that even MEXT's white papers focus on the lowered degree of academic endeavour (2012) noted at their HEIs. One must simultaneously acknowledge, however, that the Japanese education system, though relatively well-suited to domestic Japan (Sato, 2009; Seargeant, 2009; Stewart, 2009) as evidenced by its producing literate, numerate, and well-socialized members of Japanese society (Okano, 2009), may well engender some potential problems for learning opportunities conducted within it. Therefore, a degree of appreciation for this point and the nuances of the positive and negative aspects of the Japanese education system will certainly aid our understanding of the in-situ course-in-curriculum.

Japan's Sociocultural Characteristics: International Posture

Much research into Japan's international posture, as well as domestic social issues, has identified a notable attitude towards that which is considered non-Japanese. Kariya & Rappleye (2020) summarise this attitude as having a "highly selective opening to the world" (p. 45). Japan's physical closing of its borders – known as the *sakoku*-period from 1633 to 1853 – leaving them open only at specific government-controlled ports to international trade and interaction still looms large, with many contemporary researchers of international posture continuing to attribute Japan's 'selective opening' to this period (Laver, 2011). Geographically separated from the mainland to a higher degree than all other island nations (Diamond, 1997), as Ito (1998) states, this physical and voluntary *sakoku* distancing of itself for over 200 years has:

> "… created a uniquely homogenous culture and parochial mentality…
> (which) still lingers and underlies the modern Japanese way of thinking and

behaving. This mindset is not only ubiquitous in the business sector but is also prevalent in Japan's education, and societal systems." (p. 13)

While, in reality, modern Japan is a curious melting pot of domestic tradition and foreign-tinged contribution, it is important to note that this mixture is certainly not free-flowing. The selective opening to the outside world reveals a desire by the Japanese to have whatever enters do so "on their own terms" (Laver, 2011, p. 189). This common tendency tints the import of foreign artefacts, ranging from the physical (such as medicines, clothing, and food) to the conceptual (e.g., ideas on religion, etiquette, politics, and educational directives). One should note here that this is not purely a function of Japanese/non-Japanese; "markedness" (i.e., a demarking separation of in-is/out-not classification), discussed notably by Seargeant (2009) and Kamada (2011), also occurs as a routine practice within Japanese society itself, with people of one group (perhaps, the Light Music Club) becoming more self-conscious in their speech and action (Yuen, 1996) around those not part of their immediate "circle" (Sugawara, 2005, p. 27). Suffice it to say, Japanese commonly and strongly denote what actions, agents, and artefacts are and what they are not. This marking in particular, and the unique cultural background of Japan in general, has led to some notable differences regarding how English relates to Japanese society and education.

Thus, it is important to consider the perception, or perceived representation, of what English 'is' in wider Japanese society. A central part of this representation, as noted by Yashima (2002), is that "for many… English symbolizes the world around Japan, something that connects them to foreign countries and foreignness of 'strangers'" (p. 57). Seargeant (2009) points out that regarding the place of English in society, the 'in-is/out-not' markedness holds considerable sway when considering what being Japanese 'is.' As emphasized further by Yamagami & Tollefson (2011), English is not only 'not' Japanese, but it 'is a gateway to opportunities and existences seen as outside of the Japanese norm. It could be, and in fact has been (Reischauer & Jansen, 1988), suggested that the degree to which one was passionately interested in learning and assimilating 'English' – and all that it socio-culturally entails – one might find oneself increasingly

outside what it was to be 'Japanese' despite still being a native citizen residing within its borders. Indeed, it would not be a stretch to speculate that while people within such a culture may differ in their degree of international posture (Yashima, 2009) – a series of factors with which one might ascertain one's self-perception as a member of an international community – the range in which they do differ would be lower relative to other, less socio-culturally homogenous countries. Much research into the degree to which university students study abroad would appear to confirm these two intertwined points. In fact, the number of students that Japan sees study abroad each year remains low, in both real and relative terms (McNeill, 2010; Lassegard, 2013). A further consideration is that English itself is often construed as a representative of an increasingly globalised world; that is to say, the increasing advance of globalisation represents both a direct economic opportunity and an indirect threat to national identity (Yamagami & Tollefson, 2011). Burgess et al. (2010), in examining the ongoing globalisation reform of the higher education sector, suggest that the overall nature of the policies combines a "nationalistic 'closing in' with a cosmopolitan 'opening up'" (p. 461) itself indicating that the concepts of globalisation/internationalization – and thus English both as an artefact and ability – is itself not necessary, nor desirable, for the average Japanese citizen.

Japan's Sociocultural Characteristics: Exam-focused Education

Another notable facet of Japan's sociocultural characteristics is the nature of its education system. The use of high-stakes tests from junior high school on up has proven quite intractable, for though MEXT has issued recommendations and guidelines in attempt to reduce schools' reliance on tests as a measure of ability and a selection method for the next stage of education (i.e., entrance tests), there appears to have been little action to change the system (Yashima, 2002). Japan's educational philosophy regarding assessing memorized knowledge via exams has an entrenched history and is one of its founding, central characteristics (Tsuneyoshi, 2001). The exams themselves, particularly the all-important university entrance exams, are commonly criticized for focusing mainly on multiple-choice questions (Brown, 2002; Brown & Yamashita, 1995;

McVeigh, 2001; Wray, 2008; Ryan, 2009). As these tests are the be-all and end-all, representing the culmination of study for students within the Japanese education system, Wray (2008) suggests – and Sato (2009) agrees – that the effect is that elementary and secondary schools in the education system hold the unavoidable responsibility of preparing students for said exams instead of MEXT's laudably-intended modernising guidelines. Indeed, commentators assess that large class sizes (Kurihara, 2008; Nishino, 2011), this entrenched extrinsic need to focus on 'standard' test-centric teaching styles (Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004; Sato, 2009; Cook, 2009), little to no English-teaching training for teachers (Nishino, 2011; Yamada, 2005) in addition to the lack of resources – chiefly, funding, and time within the teachers' day-to-day schedules (Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004) – contribute to the outcomes falling far short of the intended development targets. This tends to result in students treating knowledge learned in school as 'knowledge for exams' instead of 'knowledge for life', and English is no exception. Abstracted and decontextualized to the point where it has all but been "stripped of its function as a system of human communication" (Ryan, 2009, p. 408), it is perhaps not surprising that once the university entrance exams have concluded, students' external motivation to learn English has been reported as decreasing dramatically (Berwick & Ross, 1989; Miura, 2010). As Kellem & Tsukamoto (2013) note, after this goal has been achieved, "it is questionable how many students will maintain their motivation to study English" (p. 80). This resulting perceptions amongst students due to this intersection of sociocultural norms and expectations commonly comes into conflict with MEXT's internationalization policies.

2.2.2. Internationalization Pressures

In the field of higher education, 'internationalization' may be defined as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (Knight, 2015, p. 2). While this is a general summary of the concept, a more nuanced approach to internationalization within individual nations' education systems would be more in line with Altbach's (2015) definition; "the specific policies and initiatives of countries and

individual academic institutions or systems to deal with global trends" (p. 6). With specific reference, then, to the Japanese context, as highlighted by MEXT's policy documents, the Japanese process of globalization/internationalization in education is governed by the following expressed goals (Aspinal, 2010):

1. The development of Japanese citizens who can live in the international community.

2. Promotion of international exchange and cooperation in education, sports, and culture.

3. Promotion of student exchange.

4. Expansion of Japanese language education for foreigners.

5. Improvement of education for Japanese children overseas and children returning from overseas.

While much research has been conducted across all these stated objectives, the most relevant to the current investigation is "the development of Japanese citizens who can live in the international community" and "the promotion of international exchange and cooperation in education, sports and culture." The directions taken under these directives differ depending on the HEI, though they generally reference improving students' academic abilities and awareness as 'global citizens' (Yonezawa, 2010). Indeed, a series of high-profile additional funding programs – including the Global 30 (MEXT, 2009), Go Global (MEXT, 2012a), and the Top Global Universities Project (MEXT, 2014) – intended to improve on these points continue to operate. Rose & McKinley. (2018) summarised that these programs' objectives range from general concept- and trend-changes. Examples might include increasing the number of inbound/outbound study-abroad students, establishing partnerships, raising students' TOEFL or TOEIC test scores, and increasing the number and purpose of English-taught courses. With an onus on this last point, Japan's policies regarding the internationalisation of its HEIs are held to have brought about a more aggressive increase in English-Mediated Instruction (EMI) at the institutions enrolled in globalisation/internationalization-orientated funding programs.

2.2.3. English-Medium Instruction (EMI)

The core definition of EMI is the use of the English language "to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English" (Dearden, 2014, p. 4). This definition, when applied to courses of education, encompasses the follow aspects; (i) that instruction for said course is conducted in English, (ii) that English, as a language, is not being 'taught', (iii) English development and acquisition is not a primary intended outcome, and (iv) English is not the mother tongue of those who are enrolled in the course. As such, EMI courses are often conceived and created in very similar veins to English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses, including the -General (EGAP) and -Specific (ESAP) variants (Wingate & Hakim, 2022). And yet, the key difference here is the situation of 'English', for while it is of course assumed – often by administrators and bureaucrats – that there will be some language improvement purely through experience, the content is the primary 'taught' focus of the course. Such a situating can be understood when viewing explanations of the course, its syllabus and curriculum. Indeed, as pointed out by Pecorari & Malmström (2018), to offer a slightly higher-resolution definition of the 'English' in EMI one might suggest that "English skills are not specified as a curricular outcome, are rarely planned for, and are not systematically taught, but which are nonetheless expected to be acquired" (p. 502). As will be examined in the last section of this chapter, when all of the identified threads of our situational milieu are woven together, this understanding of EMI will be necessary as it aids its own situating within the network of operational necessities and expectations within the wider Japanese context.

Indeed, the push for internationalisation is tied to the role of English in Japan's HEIs and, more recently, the expansion of EMI programs at its universities (Kirkpatrick, 2011). Wilkinson (2013) notes that EMI programs have become "commonplace in many institutes of higher education where English is not the native language" (p. 3). As previously discussed, the idea that "English" equals "non-Japanese" – and thus "international" – is, though surface-level, an understanding difficult to avoid (Seargeant, 2009), and not just in the Japanese context. Even less than a decade ago, inquiries

suggested that roughly half the total number of non-native English-speaking students are taking classes in English (Ball & Lindsay, 2013). Similarly, a wide-ranging study by Dearden (2014) found that EMI was officially present in the education systems of 51 of 55 countries surveyed. Research by Rose & McKinley (2018) suggests that while EMI was prominent in the previous stages of Japan's ongoing tertiary-level internationalisation programs (i.e., Global 30 and Go Global), current documents do not refer to it directly. However, despite this lack of explicit mention of EMI in current policy documents, after its initial aggressive instantialisation, the prevailing drive towards it continues. For the near future, at least, Dearden (2014) notes that it is "doubtful that countries, certainly in the tertiary phase will seek to reverse the decision to push forward" (p. 33) by providing EMI courses.

In attaching the foreign language "English" to the instruction of necessary content, knowledge and skills, EMI carries with it a range of perceived advantages and disadvantages. A primary benefit of teaching and learning through EMI is noted by Macaro et al. (2018) to be that "English as an international language was an essential constituent of the internationalisation process" (p. 51). This operates both as a functional artefact of an administrative directive and also as a path to improving, through contact frequency, the English abilities of students enrolled in EMI courses (Chapple, 2015). This perception has been uncovered in several studies; Çağatay (2019) highlighted that most Turkish university students believed EMI helped improve their English ability and made it easier to access discipline-specific materials. Such points are echoed by Earls (2016) for economics students in Germany and business instructors in Korea (Byun et al., 2010). A further extension of this particular benefit is the enhancement of career opportunities after graduation (Galloway et al., 2017, 2020; Macaro & Akincioglu, 2018). This is a powerful draw, highlighted in almost every country surveyed in broad-spectrum studies such as Dearden's (2014), as well as in nation-specific inquiries: Costa & Coleman (2013), focusing on Italy, point to the "near-necessity of English proficiency for graduate employability (p. 4); in China, Hu et al. (2014) refer to the institutional and social perceptions of the "power of English proficiency to

enhance graduates' social mobility and employment prospects" (p. 559); and in the Netherlands university administrators report that "graduates may find their employability limited if they cannot handle their academic learning" in English (Wilkinson, 2013, p. 11). Another benefit, as pointed out by Tsuneyoshi (2005), would be the expansion of access to potential international students attending said HEI; the university could be more easily 'internationalised' were more of its courses delivered in the current global *lingua-franca* (English).

On the other hand, there are several notable downsides and critiques to consider (Saito, 2013). Central amongst them are the repercussions to individual students' grades – and thus potential academic and vocational progression – that would arise when their upon-entry English ability (itself influenced, as discussed, by many socio-cultural factors in addition to prior learning) is insufficient to meet the requirements of a mandatory credit-bearing course (Chapple, 2015; Aizawa & Rose, 2019). Indeed, for reports focused on the Japanese context, Selzer & Gibson (2009) and Burgess et al. (2010) note that students commonly experience great difficulty without sufficient linguistic support in their own language. It should not, then, be surprising – particularly, as discussed previously, when considering Japan's socio-cultural and educational stances vis-à-vis English – that EMI may have markedly negative impacts on student performance in courses that employ it. As both attainment of knowledge and grades are frequently linked to interaction with course content, if a student is 'resistant' to English, disciplinary, communication, and motivation issues (Galloway et al., 2017, 2020) are more likely to arise in an EMI course. Again extending from this core demerit of EMI is the shift in the focus of the instructors of EMI courses. It would not do, from a learning- or matriculation-perspective, for students enrolled in EMI courses to not understand the content to the point that they (potentially) fail (i) to pass the course-final assessment, nor (ii) to retain knowledge important for future courses of study. Thus, operationally, it is common for institutions and instructors to take after-the-fact steps to mitigate the difficulties of EMI-based courses. Rose & Galloway (2019) report that course planners and teachers frequently simplified content and the language in which it was delivered

and decreased the overall coverage of their EMI courses. While this makes sense from a cognitive-processing perspective, it appears to be a situationally-forced compromise. Galloway's (2020) research on Vietnamese and Thai HEIs highlights that it is not uncommon for teaching assistants to translate utterances after the lecturer speaks in English. A final disadvantage of the inclusion of EMI in courses is, in fact, the burden that it places on the instructors (Dearden, 2014; Symon & Weinberg, 2013). Inquiries suggest that, for Japanese natives, concerns with their English abilities might hinder their teaching (Tsuneyoshi, 2005; Chapple, 2015). Further, the "enormous workload" (Chapple, 2015, p. 7) of teaching courses with EMI may lead to (or stem from, or potentially both) a lack of collaboration between other instructors and those delivering content with EMI (Galloway et al., 2020). Despite predictions of the continued pace of uptake in EMI worldwide (Dearden, 2014) – echoed in Japan, where nearly 30% of all undergraduate degrees have at least one course taught via EMI (Galloway, 2020; Chapple, 2015) – there is a poignant need to contend with such issues.

Thus, despite the potential drawbacks of introducing an EMI-based course, an HEI might hold that EMI is a "relatively simple and cheap solution" (Hamid et al., 2013, p. 11), particularly when viewing its noted advantages alongside external requirements (i.e., the need for English- and foreign-language credits to accredit students for graduation) and pressures (i.e., the drive for internationalisation/globalisation) extant in the Japanese tertiary-education context.

2.2.3. Academic Writing

While much focus is given to Japan's less-than-flattering TOEFL scores (Yokogawa, 2017), another identified area in literature where Japan's university students fall short of internationally recognised academic standards is that of academic writing skills (McKinley, 2013). As a component of academic products – including reports, articles, and presentations – in the international community, the ability to write in a deductive logical fashion while integrating and citing external sources of information is a vital skillset (Swales & Feak, 1994; Polio & Shi, 2012; Johns, 1997).

Writing itself is, arguably, not something that people have a natural, biologically coded "predisposition to acquire" (Kaplan, 1987, p. 12); unlike our ability to speak, it is taught in schools and educational institutions (as a form of 'powerful knowledge,' in a way, which has become normalised in contemporary modern economies). Though definitions of academic writing may vary from institution to institution, some features separate it from the unique styles of writing taught and commonly utilised through the Japanese education system. Indeed, Reichelt (2011) reminds us that in the Japanese context, "linguistic, historical, political, economic and educational factors exert their influences on the daily realities of teaching" (p. 17). This is especially relevant for teaching academic writing in undergraduate and post-graduate university settings. Conflicting policies of instruction and assessment, combined with a lack of students' prior experience of writing in their own language (Leki, 2001), provide quite a challenge for writing instructors to overcome.

The primary identified writing style of Japanese students' prior learning in middle and high school is ubiquitous *kansoubun.* The *kansoubun* – translated, when it is, as an "impressionistic essay" (Jarrell, 1998) and written with the characters for *feelings-thoughts-text* – is the primary writing activity in elementary, middle, and high schools. Indeed, the *kansoubun* is so ubiquitous that it remains a staple writing assignment in university settings (Miller, 2013; Fujieda, 2012), perhaps in settings where the instructor does have time to have students plan, outline, write and revise a piece of academic writing. Indeed, this noted lack of writing instruction experienced by students on genres other than the *kansoubun* (Hirose & Sasaki, 1994; Hirose, 2005) commonly results in relatively little prior knowledge of logical structure and conventions in most new university undergraduates. Chief among the demonstrated deficits in knowledge are (i) continued use of interactive and subjective language, (ii) a lack of planning, and (iii) a lack of overall organisation (Jarrell, 1998; Hirose & Sasaki, 1994; Hirose, 2005), which can also be seen to "merely transcribe spoken colloquial dialogue" (McKinley, 2013, p. 199). In addition to these general background features, literature also suggests that

Japanese writing may have issues with the concept of quotations, citations, and plagiarism.

Citing external sources of information is a complex academic practice that takes many iterations of experience, instruction, and output to become sufficiently skilled. Accordingly, literature on academic writing in the Japanese undergraduate context commonly highlights issues with students' citation behaviours. At a general level, several studies suggest that though Western cultures emphasise individual production and ownership of text, Asian cultures have more allowance for shared use of other authors' writing (Bloch, 2001; Pennycook, 1996). While this observation is criticised as over-generalized and too often attributed to a monolithic, static view of socio-cultural norms (Kubota, 1998; Liu, 2004), low awareness of the need for proper citation remains common for students either untrained in academic writing conventions (Kamimura, 2014; Kobayashi, 2010; Shibata, 2011; Teeter, 2015) and students who view that a given writing assignment "has no significance" (Bloch, 2001, p. 220). Unfortunately, these concerns are both relevant to newly enrolled first-year university students. In addition to this resistance to engaging sufficiently with learning opportunities and requirements, other reasons for a somewhat higher degree of tolerance for 'borrowing' (i.e., plagiarising) amongst Japanese students than American students, as uncovered by Rinnert & Kobayashi's (2005) study, could include (i) students' attempts to recreate a pre-existing phrase or idea perfectly (Dryden, 1999) (a common focus of Japan's Confucian-heritage education system), as well as (ii) a lack of confidence in their linguistic ability (Kamimura, 2014). However, interventional studies suggest that when sufficiently instructed, Japanese university students can utilise proper academic citation conventions (Kamimura, 2014; Sadoshima, 2014; Teeter, 2015; Nishigaki, 2012).

Thus, according to McKinley (2013), when considering academic writing, newly enrolled Japanese university students generally need the following: (i) an explanation of the difference in genre and purpose between the subjective, unstructured *kansoubun* and objective, organised academic writing; and (ii) explicit instruction on "highly structured formulas … that require concisely stated and supported arguments" (p. 204).

Echoed by other studies on the benefits of outlining (Hirose & Sasaki, 1994; Shekarabi, 2017) and targeted feedback (Colpitts & Howard, 2018), these two main functional aspects broadly cover the main identified features of general academic writing. Unfortunately, however, as the literature suggests, Japanese students have had scant little instruction in this regard before enrolling in university. Therefore, the provision in the first year of university for a foundation of the basics of academic writing would seem vital for their academic growth and development (Fujieda, 2012). Indeed, as such standards become globalised (Okuma, 1994), mastery of academic writing basics is essential for university students in Japan who are interested in postgraduate education and who "foresee roles for themselves in international academic communities" (Tajino et al., 2010, p. 14). Given that academic endeavour is the beating heart of scientific, technological, and theoretical advances in our contemporary societies, it is hard to disagree on this point.

2.2.4. Summary

In summation, any educational context in Japan constitutes a unique blend of socio-cultural and institutional factors that craft the nature and hue of artefacts and their treatment. A heavy focus on the lecture-exam mode of teaching, with the attainment of exam-assessed grades as the primary evidence of learning, combined with a risk-averse approach to non-Japanese behaviours and concepts, has implications for mitigatory pressure against the Ministry of Education's (MEXT) espoused drive for internationalisation. Though both are noted as possessing beneficial aspects, EMI and academic writing face difficulties in implementation due to the extant socio-cultural and institutional factors concerning English. It is essential to acknowledge that these issues remain in play despite the inquiry's focus on educational theory and curriculum development.

2.3. Curriculum Development

As this study analysed an extant course-in-curriculum, literature about curriculum conception, construction, and coherence was explored and questioned.

Based on the definitions and concepts drawn from this review of curriculum theory, Constructive Alignment (CA), the primary theoretical framework for the investigation, was similarly examined in a subsequent section. Its primarily course-internal principles were theorised into an extended, external consideration of the coherence between a given course's learning objectives and other courses in the wider curriculum.

2.3.1. Curriculum

As a central aspect of formal education – the primary function of which is to serve as a relay for the "transmission of knowledge from one generation to another" (Young, 2008, p. 1) – the curriculum is an essential point of embarkation for investigations into educational contexts and the perspectives of their stakeholders. An institution's curriculum functions at the macro level as a collection of learning units or modules designed to develop a specific set of abilities and knowledge in individuals who enrol in it (O'Neill, 2015). A curriculum is similarly described by Richards et al. (1993) as a learning program that "states (i) the educational purpose of the program, (ii) the content teaching procedures and learning experience which will be necessary to achieve this purpose, and (iii) some means for assessing whether or not the educational ends have been achieved" (p. 93). The curriculum, and its attendant aspects, must be sufficiently questioned, contextualised, and considered when investigating any learning environment.

2.3.2. Constitution of a Curriculum

A curriculum is generally defined along the lines previously specified by Richards et al. (1993), with other education researchers either expanding or simplifying its primary specifications. A curriculum, according to Bobbit (1918, referenced in Angulo, 1994), is made up of experiences meant to develop students' skills as well as a number of training initiatives that schools use to cultivate such skills. According to Tyler (2013), who shares this point of view, curriculum refers to all of the educational experiences that are designed, overseen, and evaluated by the institution in order to assist students in achieving particular academic objectives. As we move towards more detailed

guidelines, Montoya (1997, citing Taba, 1974) asserts that a curriculum is a comprehensive learning plan made up of a number of components, including the definition of goals and objectives, the choice and organization of content, the incorporation of learning and teaching patterns, and a program for results evaluation. Young (2008), discussing theoretical externalities and influences upon curricula, suggests that curricula specify "how and what knowledge is acquired, and how it should be paced, sequenced and assessed" (p. 7). Some commentators scorn the idea that curricula should feature objectives at all, suggesting instead that teaching systems should be more organic and individual to each teacher, akin to a "conversation," by claiming "curriculum-as-experience" rather than "curriculum as plan" (Pinar, 2012, p. 1). Nevertheless, it remains the case that most in-service curriculum references and guides feature as practical components a mixture of objectives, practice, and assessments (Richards, 2017; Leibowitz et al., 2017). Curricula are thus generally defined by a wide range of education researchers and commentators as being concerned with knowledge selection, organization, sequencing, and assessment to best transfer said knowledge to students enrolled.

2.3.3. Questioning of Contemporary Curriculum Approaches

Theoretical discussions over what curricula are and how they operate within education have seen input, problematisation, and criticism from various schools of thought throughout academia. One such point is the notion that, while holding that the role of formal education is the transfer of knowledge from older generations to the younger, curricula present in schools and HEIs assume that knowledge can be subdivided into curriculum knowledge (i.e., knowledge which, through its worth and value, requires that it be taught through schooling) and non-curriculum knowledge (i.e., knowledge which can be readily sourced and attained at home)(Young, 2008). A central question, then, when regarding the knowledge taught in educational institutions is, as Pinar (2012) notes, "what knowledge is of most worth?" (p. xv). The answer to this question of what knowledge is the most worthwhile objective of a curriculum depends on the socio-cultural and political situation in which the target curriculum exists. Even a lay observer

would admit that one is unlikely to craft a standard definition when considering the multitude of different nations and cultures worldwide. Thus, it is essential to recognise that any given curriculum – as indeed is the case with this study – likely exists due to a series of factors and influences within the broader socio-cultural context of a given nation and institution.

Curriculum theorists take a variety of stances on this matter, in some ways similar yet often divergent. For example, Tyler (2013) postulates that while there may be no predetermined answer, curriculum designers tend to balance consideration between (i) studies of the learner (i.e., interests, experiences, and cognitive development aspects), (ii) studies of contemporary life (encompassing socio-cultural aims and values) and (iii) specialised knowledge (i.e., valuable and usable subject matter). Further, in considering the category of 'specialised knowledge,' Tyler (2013) suggests that said specialised subject knowledge is often considered depending on how it can answer the question; "what can this subject contribute to the education of people who are not to specialise in it?" (p. 27). We could thus infer that curriculum knowledge is commonly separated from general knowledge yet should aim to inform and link back to the learners' experiences in broader society.

From this general foundation, one might view this separation through various lenses. Young (2008) does so via the distinction between context-dependent and context-independent, determining that the latter could also be termed "powerful knowledge" (p. 14). Context-dependent knowledge (i.e., non-school knowledge) is more commonplace, practical knowledge that can be readily acquired outside educational institutions (e.g., how to change a bicycle tire). Conversely, context-independent knowledge (such as research methodologies, citations, and types of data) tends to (i) reside in specialist communities and institutions, and (ii) be more generalisable scope and therefore able to command more influence on real-world application. Thus, as it is not readily acquirable through daily non-scholastic experiences, Young (2008) terms such knowledge as powerful. Powerful knowledge is described as providing "more reliable explanations and new ways of thinking about the world," and it is embodied in

developed economies as "specialised knowledge" from a range of different scientific fields and domains (p. 14). Young adult learners attend HEIs as they commonly serve as the gateway to the world of work. Here, they can acquire such powerful knowledge and, importantly, be accredited in their acquisition; though it may be possible to develop powerful knowledge outside of a scholastic curriculum, one will not quickly receive socially recognised certification should one do so. Richards (2017) muses that as the skillsets to be taught in a curriculum commonly are, upon graduation, to be deployed in an existing and increasingly competitive and globalised social system, the objective knowledge ought to be authentic (i.e., genuine and of use within said system). Thus runs the more common – or traditional – conceptualisation of the rationale for the contemporary arrangement of disciplinary knowledge in curricula.

Pinar (2012), however, takes a more expansive philosophical view on curriculum content, and is particularly critical of programs of study focused ultimately on objectives and assessment as they are "designed to yield an extrinsic profit" (p. 190, citing Oakeshott, 1959). In Pinar's (2012) view, curricula ought to be considered a conversation, framed as being an "intellectual adventure" (p. 188) which, while "not conforming to a predetermined end" (p. 193), strives to help learners arrive at "understanding the relations among academic knowledge, the state of society, processes of self-formation, and the character of the historical moment in which we live" (p. 190). Curriculum content, then, should not only impart knowledge to have learners "informed" (Pinar, 2012, p. 195) about the academic fields under study, but take care not to render this knowledge "out-of-context" (p. 194), as is commonly the case with curricula centred around exams and tests. Similarly critical, yet concerned with categorising knowledge, we find Bernstein. Bernstein's (1975) theoretical examination of knowledge as arranged and treated in discrete educational curricula – i.e., science, humanities, technical – suggested that the separation of knowledge engendered by such treatment led to the creation of perceptive, affective, and cognitive barriers in the minds of students enrolled with them. Moreover, this categorisation would mitigate against the transfer of knowledge across perceived disciplinary boundaries in students' minds, rendering it

unlikely to achieve a sufficiently holistic knowledge base. Though this is an interesting theory, and it may play a part of sorts in educational contexts the world over, it is not the chief focus of the current study. In sum, then, despite being highly sceptical of the traditional status quo, most theoretical critics of curricula as they currently exist retain the idea that disciplines of technical knowledge should be specifically contextualised and linked to life outside of the classroom, the school, and into broader society to enhance learners' understanding.

Indeed, though these theoretical issues concerning curricula are undoubtedly informative, several further perspectives and criticisms of curriculum as a practice require consideration. First, we might consider the issue of 'curriculum coherence.' Coherence in a curriculum essentially seeks to have the effort of higher education aligned to move towards a more holistic and human graduate, an effort achieved by carefully selecting and curating the core skills and knowledge present throughout the entire curriculum. Schaefer (1990), writing on the subject many moons ago, notes that while the degree of 'academic freedom' in the multiplying departments and sections of HEIs worldwide has undoubtedly increased along with the expansion in enrolment, the curricula in said HEIs had simultaneously become fractured and incoherent. Essentially, due in part to this separation or 'silofication' into smaller and smaller territorial units – which, Schaefer (1990) notes, must defend this distinctiveness in a battle for funding and commonly do so by further emphasising their uniqueness in a cycle of ever-expanding orbital-separation – one student who graduates from a given university with a degree in, say, English Literature, could have almost nothing in common (in terms of learning experience) with another student from the same major. This notion of coherence in the curriculum is not particularly new nor radical; as Schaefer (1990) suggests, it is an attempt to return to the basic foundations of a good education. Indeed, when considering the basic design of the curriculum, Posner & Strike (1974) note two primary factors, commonality and temporality, which influence the connectivity and coherence of an educational program. Commonality in a curriculum is higher when elements of the curriculum are repeated in different sub-sections of the curriculum;

temporality points to whether these related elements are concurrent or subsequent (i.e., occurring simultaneously or in a linear sequence) and either contiguous or non-contiguous (i.e., occurring directly in sequence or interspaced with other non-related elements). While the specific focus on these specific aspects of a curriculum continues to be debated, Posner & Strike (1974) suggest a higher degree of commonality (i.e., the repetition of related concepts) and temporal connectivity between said elements in the curriculum leads to more significant repetition and potential for learning. The need not only for repetition (Bruner, 2001; Wogan & Waters, 1959; Bromage & Mayer, 1986) but the actual application of taught skills significantly affects their uptake. According to recent research, the frequent requirement of taught skills is believed to increase the likelihood that they will be retained and drawn upon (Joyce & Calhoun, 2010). Though dealing more with the functional and structural, Posner & Strike's (1974) consideration of opportunities for commonality (repetition) in a curriculum echo that of Schaefer (1990). However, the former merely prescribes a sound learning principle, while the latter laments its lack in the curricula he perceived. Similarly, that diffusion between faculty and departments leads to a less cohesive, less engaged approach to education on the part of the instructors – and, in turn, by students – is a core contention of Fullan & Quinn (2016), who consider meaningful communication and the creation of a coherent, common purpose essential for curriculum change and development. Though differing somewhat in their espoused philosophical intents, Schaefer (1990), Fullan & Quinn (2016), and Posner & Strike (1974) can all be said to be promoting the same remedy for what they perceive to be a systemic issue with the enactment of contemporary curricula in HEIs worldwide.

Critique of this more 'traditional' curriculum arrangement may continue from additional viewpoints. One such questioning is, akin to Pinar (2012) above, the noted increase in the 'performativity' of assessment-orientated curricula. As access to and enrolment in HEIs has increased in conjunction with the increasingly porous nature of our internet-connected world, some commentators note that knowledge is becoming not so much realised by newly enrolled students as merely reproduced. Wisker (2005)

suggests that this lack of creativity in today's hyper-complex and interlinked societies requires a rebalance. An emphasis not just on replicating knowledge but also on chances to innovate and constructively create knowledge should be reintroduced into educational curricula. This focus on creativity-fostering curriculum design is strongly linked to critical-thinking skills, and even in existing curricula, appropriate learning activities can encourage students to "explore answers for themselves" (Ogunleye, 2002, p. 6). Indeed, is it not the aim of education worldwide to inculcate creativity and critical-thinking skills in its students? Perhaps, though, such a one-size-fits-all claim cannot be held to be the case for different institutions, let alone societies. This raises a second curriculum question; to what extent can a curriculum from one national context be applied to another? In questioning this aspect of curriculum theory, consideration of culturally specific values, structures, and norms is essential. Craft (2003) points out that there are "distinct cultural identities both within and between nation-states, as well as different traditions and value sets" (p. 121). It necessarily follows that cultural relevance would likely render a given curriculum approach more (or less) appropriate and effective in different national contexts (Soto, 2015), as each society would imbue its education systems with distinct and unique values (Meyer, 2014; Hofstede, n.d.). Curricula are not simply pre-packaged woods (framework) that can be planted in any soil (context) without a second thought to their assimilation and integration (alignment and coherence). However, it is undoubtedly the case that much of what is taught in modern HEIs is done with an 'internationalised' world in mind.

While Pinar's (2012) and Bernstein's (1975) critiques are well-founded, particularly when viewed through a particular lens, they tend to focus more on the theoretical and ideal than the actual and pragmatic aspects of creating a functional, useful curricula system rooted in reality. Though worthy of keeping in mind, as this investigation sought to concentrate on the functional aspects of curriculum development to detect, diagnose, and hopefully prescribe actionable remedies to issues identified in the target research context, the theory, focus, and level of analysis were kept within a similarly realistic and pragmatic scope.

2.3.4. Curriculum Development: Focus and Analysis

Across a wide range of perspectives and commentators, Richards et al.'s (1993) curriculum definition – i.e., a purposeful program with prescribed content and appraisal of performance – holds relatively well as a baseline description of the key aspects of an educational program. Thus, in examining the development and design of educational programs, it is important to focus on how the objectives, supporting content, and assessment of learners' performance vis-a-vis the objectives are conceived of and determined.

A curriculum's learning objectives are traditionally arrived at by asking questions and combining the answers to form a considered, coherent plan. Concerning curriculum content, its selection is commonly balanced between the practical 'needs' of society and students (Tyler, 2013), with outcomes – or objectives – linked to this content. This consideration of the desired outcomes in both curricula and syllabuses is essential, for as Dewey (1972) states, "to foresee the terminus of an act is to have a basis upon which to observe, to select and to order objects and our own capacities" (p. 103), and determining the terminus of an act (i.e., the objective) itself is commonly achieved by considering the surrounding situation and moving towards something that will be useful within it. As such, the overall learning outcomes of the curriculum are determined by the institution's values and its assessment of the needs of the learners (Tyler, 2013) stemming from the society in which they are embedded.

Following the identification of the objectives, the nature and format of the assessment – i.e., the method of determining if enrolled students have met the intended objectives – are decided, and subsequently so too are the learning activities with which students can learn the required skills and knowledge to meet the target objectives. After these primary pillars are determined, many methods and criteria exist to develop a curriculum's educational activities. Out of the main philosophies of learning – namely (i) behaviourist (learning is defined as a change in behaviour in response to stimuli, brought on by repeated experiences of stimulus-response-reinforcement), (ii) humanist (self-

initiated, meaningful, and affective learning, with a goal toward personal development), (iii) cognitivist (rational knowledge processing, focused on sense-making), (iv) social-cognitive (learners learn from peers (Merriam et al., 2007) – Soto (2015) identifies cognitivism and constructivism as being the primary guiding frames with which contemporary curricula are created, though, as previously discussed, there are of course extant socio-cultural influences (Barbour et al., 2010) which may make unique modifications to these curriculum-development methods.

In addition to developing new curricula, it is routinely necessary to review and analyse extant curricula to determine if they are operationally fit for purpose and see how the written plan is enacted. Jansen & Reddy (n.d., p. 6) offer three central questions with which to approach the analysis of an existing curriculum as follows:

1. [External] What is the *impact* of your curriculum?

2. [Internal] Does your curriculum satisfy acceptable *design* principles?

3. [External] Is your curriculum *policy* relevant?

After selecting the aspect of curriculum analysis – impact, design, or policy – a researcher would then investigate the target aspect to determine whether the target curriculum was functioning viably. Thus, as conducted in the current study for VJA's extant E-AW course-in-curriculum, a curriculum design analysis may cover many concepts that need to be selected and accounted for. As discussed in the next section, however, this investigation was primarily concerned with the target course-in-curriculum's internal alignment and external coherence.

2.3.5. Summary

This section shows that many influences impact selecting a curriculum's baseline objectives, assessments, and activities. In addition, *what* an extant curriculum consists of cannot simply be stated without exploring the processes behind *why* it came to be in its current form. Furthermore, a curriculum must be designed with sufficient

consideration given to the relevance/value of target skills and provide constructive connections throughout the curriculum to foster experience with said skills. Finally, the curriculum development in each institution is strongly linked to the surrounding pre-existing milieu of socio-cultural and educational factors in which the institution operates (Soto, 2015; Dewey, 1972; Tyler, 2013). Like every other artefact, a curriculum is a product of its environment (*what* and *where*) and the needs requisite within it. The previous curriculum understanding section covers these general environmental factors operating in Japan and its HEIs. An exploration and theorising of the primary theoretical frame for this study – Constructive Alignment (CA) – follows forthwith.

2.4. Constructive Alignment

The Constructive Alignment (CA) model for course and curriculum conceptualisation, design, and delivery (Biggs & Tang, 2011) – is a well-known and widely-utilized framework in HEIs and other learning organisations worldwide (Loughlin et al., 2021). The primary feature of CA is the considered and deliberate alignment between the core constituents of a course of study, chiefly (i) intended learning outcomes (ILOs), (ii) teaching-learning activities (TLAs), and (iii) assessment tasks (ATs) (Biggs & Tang, 2011), based on the aim to provide knowledge which is not only useful within the immediate course but also beyond its confines. While this may seem elementary, as Biggs & Tang (2011) discuss, many curricula and syllabi could stand to have their learning objectives, activities, and assessment methods audited based on these basic tenets. Indeed, as there will always be individual differences between learners, Biggs & Tang's (2011) CA theory intends to strengthen the conception, creation, and consideration of the learning "system" in educational courses and curricula (p. xx). Thus, as its core principles, CA aims (i) to align the central learning activities and assessments in a given educational course to clear objectives, which in turn are both (ii) authentically and relevantly aligned to real-world practices beyond the classroom, thus (iii) providing valuable and utilisable knowledge and skills by bridging the common study-reality gap "between a static body of declarative knowledge and personal action" (Biggs & Tang, 2011, p. 97).

2.4.1. Components of Constructive Alignment

Theory

The theoretical roots of CA are strongly represented in the existing literature and educational theory, drawing from the constructivist philosophy of learning. Despite this theoretical underpinning, however, its intent is eminently practical. Constructivist learning theories consider learning to be "the construction of meaning from experience" (Merriam & Bierema, 2013, p. 36). For young adult learners seeking to learn skills for their futures, "learning… is a process of negotiation, involving the construction and exchange of personally relevant and viable meanings" (Candy, 1991, p. 275). Accordingly, Biggs & Tang (2011) hold that "what the student does is actually more important in determining what is learned than what the teacher does" (p. 97, citing Shuell, 1986) and seek to consider this as one of the prime questions in all stages of the learning process. The student-centred focus inherent in CA has theoretical implications regarding the learning approach, and the potential for motivation, engendered within each student studying within courses based on it.

Generally, the degree to which learners learn from a course depends on their motivation and depth of approach to learning concerning the course content. These learner factors activate *after* (Wen & Johnson, 1997) the environmental and institutional influences in the situational presage and are thus positively or negatively influenced by students' perceptions of them (Biggs, 1987). While such perceptions are often outside of an instructor's control, that students' attainment is in part a function of their attention – which is, in turn, a function of their motivation to learn and attendant learning strategies – is expressed clearly within educational literature (Ramsden, 2003; Marton & Pang, 2006; Atherton, 2013)

Motivation is an integral part of most theories of learning. One may think about the behaviourist law of preparedness for a direct example. This idea, which was put forth by Thorndike, contends that forcing someone to study when they are not mentally prepared to do so will result in "inhibited" learning (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 279). This is

supported by Schunk (2012), who claims that someone is unlikely to learn from a lesson or experience if they aren't ready to do so (p. 75). Interestingly, studies on experimental learning approaches typically fail to take self-actualization or intrinsic motivation into consideration, despite Maslow's (1943) assertion that it is certainly a crucial component of learning. As Marton & Pang (2006) note, for students to learn it is necessary "that the students are *paying attention,* that they are *trying* to learn..." (p. 217). Moreover, a large part of paying attention and trying to learn will hinge on whether the learning opportunity is perceived as valuable to the learner.

A learner's approach – ranging from deep to surface – is also commonly theorised as influencing their attainment of said target objectives (Marton & Saljo., 1976; Entwistle & Ramsden, 1983; Ramsden, 2003; Atherton, 2013). Deep learning approaches toward the knowledge offered in a learning opportunity are categorised via the following aspects. Students who actively want to learn, not just formulae or artefacts for exams but concepts and principles that can be applied to reality outside of the course context, will be intrinsically curious and desire to 'master' the content as best as they are able. This does, of course, depend to some degree on students having a suitable foundation on which to base their understanding (Ramsden, 2003). As pointed out by Vygotsky's (1978) "Zone of Proximal Development" theory of learning, the target knowledge needs to be located sufficiently near, conceptually, to the student's prior knowledge. Research into learning approaches suggests that the more students approach their studies with this mindset, the more likely they will engage deeply with the course content and attain higher course grades (Ellis et al., 2008). As a result, the deep learning approach can be summed up as one in which the student (i) concentrates on what is signified, (ii) tries to relate their prior knowledge to the new knowledge (Schunk, 2012), (iii) organizes knowledge into a practical, functional worldview, and (iv) approaches the new knowledge with an intent to learn it (Marton & Pang, 2006).

Conversely, surface approaches are thought to be identified by the following aspects. Atherton (2013) identifies a primary anchor for these aspects as being that students treat learning as an "external imposition," viewing the new knowledge offered

primarily as necessary for short-term assessment (Ramsden, 2003). As such, learners' approaching a learning opportunity in a surface fashion tends to rely on focusing on the formulae (i.e., motions to be reproduced) to solve a problem or task, as well as merely memorising these marked actions for deployment in end-of-unit assessments (Alexander et al., 2009). This mindset also commonly extends beyond the immediate course. The treatment of courses, modules, classes, and learning activities as separate, and not acknowledging that the present class content may be linked to past and future concepts, indicates surface-level approaches to learning opportunities. Students who are highly anxious about their learning context, as well as those generally cynical of education (Ramsden, 2003; Biggs & Tang, 2011), tend to have a shallower degree of engagement with learning opportunities offered, as do those who have a high degree of time-pressure potentially caused through a focus on extra-curricular activities such as socialising, sports (Warrington, 2006; Landsberry, 2018) or other necessities that exist in their wider environment.

Although this deep-surface conceptualisation has been criticized as being underdeveloped (Haggis, 2003), the 'overly simplistic' factors that have been identified as possibly resulting in surface-level learning approaches—chiefly (i) a lack of time, (ii) a view of education that prioritizes assessments, and (iii) generally low levels of ability and motivation—are consistently present in overloaded courses and incoherent curricula. Indeed, as discussed in detail by both Biggs & Tang (2011) and Ramsden (2003), the creation of courses of education that actively encourage surface-level approaches via reliance on the lecture-exam paradigm – in which students actively do very little – runs a significant risk of creating a mere one-use bullet of knowledge to be fired at an exam and subsequently forgotten, its propelling motivation dispersed with a bang and the effort holding the whole thing together being discarded like spent brass.

It is precisely this exam-motivated, surface-level approach, typically demonstrated by less academically minded students, that CA was conceived to help learn alongside more academically driven students (Biggs & Tang, 2011). By providing (i) constructive learning experiences with (ii) clear links to (iii) authentic and relevant skills

and knowledge (thus simultaneously useful both inside and outside the classroom), CA helps close the learning gap between these types of students. The selection of useful – i.e., authentic and relevant in so far as it can be used or referred to in situations beyond the immediate course – helps raise the student-perceived *value* of the learning opportunity (Feather, 1982; Ramsden, 2003). Additionally, the constructively aligned learning and teaching activities help students to *expect* to succeed when they apply themselves sufficiently to the task at hand. As Biggs & Tang (2011) put it, given the modern nature of both incoming students and the world into which they will eventually graduate:

> "…bridging that gap (between declarative and procedural knowledge) has traditionally been left to the student to do, 'out there,' after graduation. That job should be done before graduation." (p. 97)

Thus, though CA's principles were constructed with an individual course in mind for execution, they are eminently applicable to broader contexts – such as programs and curricula – within education in general.

Practice

Constructively-aligned individual courses consist of three main aspects; i) the ILOs, ii) TLAs, and iii) ATs. These three elements must be carefully and correctly aligned before issues of teaching mode, manner, and rapport are considered. First, as discussed in the previous section, learning outcomes are typically defined as knowledge or skills that learners are held to have acquired after learning has occurred. Akin in principle to 'beginning with the end in mind' (Covey, 2013), HE curriculum and syllabus designers should, when operating under CA principles, begin to construct their courses of study by identifying what they intend that the learners become able to achieve. This can be a complicated task at a curriculum level; nevertheless, it is a core necessity. To begin with, in our complex and porous postmodern society (Barnett, 2004) it is recognised that education serves active and passive stakeholders (Bayer, 1996). Furthermore, as researchers such as Entwistle & Ramsden (1983) note, studies into university students'

perceptions of necessary post-graduation knowledge and skills (Carnevale et al., 1990; Kelley & Gaedeke, 1990; Duke, 2002; Hyman & Hu, 2005) strongly suggest that curricula outcomes need to be authentic, relevant, valuable, and clear to the learner. These principles are central to CA (Biggs & Tang, 2011) as a theory-based course and curriculum design framework. In constructing the ILOs for a constructively-aligned course of education, syllabus designers must specify what the prospective learner should have learned by completing said course.

Second, when considering the ATs for a course of study, it is important to remember that from a student's perspective the assessment essentially *is* the course (Ramsden, 2003). Acknowledging this is a foundational part of CA course design, which Biggs & Tang (2011) acknowledge (as cited above). Thus, with this mindset, a student who knows that multiple-choice test on definitions from the textbook determines 80% of the final grade of a course will be less likely to engage with classtime lectures, activities, and homework. Since the ATs are expressly and purposefully aligned with ILOs in a constructively aligned course, this disconnect should not happen (or at least be somewhat mitigated) and has implications for the depth of learning approach utilized by enrolled students.

Third, CA seeks to align the ILOs and the ATs to actual TLAs (teaching-learning activities). For ILO-aligned ATs to be supported, TLAs must be created to allow students the chance to learn knowledge and skills directly relevant to them. Much research on selecting TLAs exists, generally advising an active, application-focused approach to in-class experiences (Karns, 2005; Young et al., 2003; Young, 2005) with an eye on maintaining motivation (Ames, 1992; Blumenfeld, 1992; Lengnick-Hall & Sanders, 1997; Yair, 2000). In line with the core tenet of education that learning is not teacher-focused but learner-focused, Biggs & Tang (2011) compare different learning activity types. Chief among the list of methods to avoid is the lecture, for it does not allow learners to engage with the material actively and constructively interact with their peers. Instead, it is recommended that students are encouraged to 'learn' a skillset by actively 'doing' it, or at least a constituent part of it.

These three aspects, supported by formative feedback, make up the internal alignment matrix of a course of study and are commonly depicted as follows:
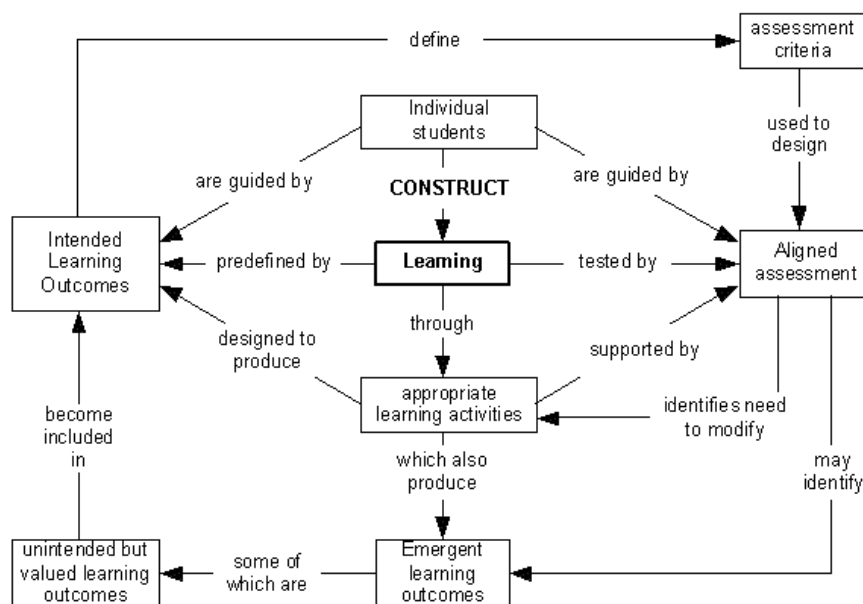
Figure 1. Concept Map of (Course-Internal) Constructive Alignment

This basic CA framework covers the base concerns of most contemporary university-based study programs. CA's framework has become widely known and utilized, based as it is on strong theoretical foundations with practical applications (Loughlin et al., 2021). In fact, as Yamamoto & Bysouth (2015) argue, CA principles are so central to the concepts of course-internal 'professional teaching' and course-external 'coherence' in educational curriculums that they are all but taken for granted, and their absence can be highly detrimental to learning.

2.4.2. Constructive Alignment: Applied Research

CA has been evaluated positively through many studies, directly through application and indirectly by guiding course-in-curriculum development. Studies investigating the change from extant to CA-style courses, such as Wang et al. (2013), have found generally raised engagement levels and higher-order learning approaches in learners enrolled within them. Scouller (1998), inquiring into the degree to which

assessment methods influenced learners' approaches and engagement, demonstrated that surface-level memorization strategies predicted better multiple-choice question text performance, but worse essay performance. The inverse was true for deep-level cognitive approaches. Similarly, Trigwell et al.'s (1999) research on teacher-centred, traditional "transmitting knowledge" lecture-approaches versus interactive "student-centred" teaching-approaches found that learners demonstrated a substantial shift towards the adoption of surface-level engagement with the teacher-centred approaches. On the other hand, a notable, though less pronounced, positive shift towards deep engagement with interactive approaches was identified. With regards to using CA's principles as guides to explore and improve teaching, Yoon & Gruba's (2017) study into teachers' pedagogical claims about their teaching – that found that teachers in a course mostly 'aligned' their TLA's between learning outcomes, course requirements and students' interest – demonstrates the importance of understanding the operational realities of an active course before CA implementation. Ruge et al. (2018), in a cross-institutional study into top-down and bottom-up approaches to overhauling extant courses and curricula in two Australian HEIs, suggest that while positive changes were indeed made (with student satisfaction and performance increased), situation constraints often led to an application 'gap' at the administration level. Furthermore, using a quantitative look at CA-based courses, Tepper's (2010) model suggests that adherence to the structural categorizations of the ATs and TLAs will engender more efficient alignment of the course. Finally, as Biggs & Tang (2011) note, practical, justifiable, and beneficial outcomes-based approaches to course and curriculum development, such as CA, appear more frequently in HEIs as the need to actually demonstrate skill acquisition increases.

Much of the positive feedback on the adoption of CA in HEIs could stem from the fact that the primary thrust behind CA as an approach is that while it is linked firmly to relevant learning theory, the instantialisation of CA is eminently practical. This blending, with an eye more on the practical or applied end of the spectrum akin to Deng's (2018) advice, has several notable practical considerations for use in HEIs in addition to its

central principle of alignment. First, focusing on only five or six ILOs for the course helps mitigate something that all teachers wrestle with daily; bloated and overloaded course syllabuses written by administrators, with too many stated objectives and too little time. Gardner (1993) states definitively that "the greatest enemy of understanding is coverage" (p. 24). Biggs & Tang (2011) similarly conceive of the syllabus as a rectangle, where "the area (breadth X depth) remains constant" (p. 122), and that a leaner, more focused course of study tends to lead to better, deeper learning. Second, the inclusion of clear rubrics for the ATs that detail students' levels of attainment has been shown to not only aid learners in (i) perceiving the links between ATs (their focus) and the ILOs (the teacher's focus) and (ii) being able to reflect on their own attainment by themselves, but also improves the cohesion of the learning experiences across different classrooms. With criterion-referenced assessment, the "ball is in the student's court" (Biggs & Tang, 2011, p. 39), and the course-level system becomes more procedurally equalised irrespective of different teachers. Third, it is eminently beneficial in improving the accessibility (i.e., reducing the cognitive distance or mental buy-in) required of learners to learn, chiefly by levelling the playing field. On balance, more learners from both poles of the motivation spectrum would be able to get the most out of the learning opportunity in question. Biggs & Tang (2011) raise, describe, and explain the concept of academically-motivated, deep-approach inclined students and credit-motivated, surface-approach inclined students. The raising of this issue, based in part on the worldwide trend of tertiary education systems expanding enrolments from elite (0-15%) through mass (16-50%) to universal (over 50%) (Trow, 1999) percentages of cohorts, is done not in order to blame those less motivated students. Though Biggs & Tang (2011) softly lament such students' lack of academic commitment, they expressly argue against "simply dismissing" them for it (p. 41). Instead, curriculum developers must determine how best to adapt systematic course-in-curriculum construction and teaching approaches to aid and accommodate them. For practising instructors, such aid in providing for their students' need for clear, authentic, and relevant knowledge and skills would be of great benefit.

2.4.3. Criticisms of Constructive Alignment

Alongside these notable contributions, some practitioners discuss difficulties in implementing CA in their educational contexts. Researchers also put forward critiques of the approach itself.

Regarding implementation, either when using a top-down or a bottom-up approach, Ruge et al. (2018) point out that there is often trouble applying CA principles at an organizational level. In bottom-up cases, the teaching staff commonly found it challenging to persuade administrators to permit, or foster, change to a CA-based course of study, and similarly – in top-down approaches – there was resistance to change from part-time or contract instructors, more noted when there were (i) few incentives to switch to CA, and (ii) scant training to do so.

Turning more towards theory, Wikhamn (2016) suggests that, on the one hand, CA certainly can increase the procedural rigour and transparency of courses-in-curricula that implement it. On the other hand, the adoption of a systematic theory-based practice that seeks to integrate and align ILOs, TLAs, and ATs could usher in a potentially punishment-orientated working culture in which teachers' TLAs "that do not support the learning goals will face the risk of being seen as inefficient or useless" (Wikhamn, 2016, p. 5). A more scathing critique by Burnett (2018) decries CA as a pervasive fetish, hell-bent on entrenching control firmly in the hands of the administrators and instructors:

> "Where a curriculum has been designed based on learning outcomes that have been the sole prerogative of institutions and/or teachers; and where learning experiences are then logically designed to reflect those outcomes; and where assessment is only concerned with the attainment of the original outcomes, then teacher-learner relationships can hardly be constituted as democratic." (Burnett, 2018, p. 7)

While perhaps demoting the concept of reality-linked standards of achievement a bit too strongly, such a critique does strike a poignant note regarding an idealized

depiction of elite academia in the era of universal-enrolment. In a similar vein, other critics have declared that having fixed and determined outcomes "is frankly behaviourist in terms of stimulus and response" (Jervis & Jervis, 2015, p. 9). As such, they claim it is not constructive, though this critique is also somewhat moot if one holds the objective of an educational course/curriculum to be to impart and foster new knowledge or skills. Additionally, as HEIs continue to be assessed more on both internal and external governance factors, Clarke (2013) opines that some enactments of CA may come to feel like a "second-order workload… associated with accountability" (p. 231). Admittedly, though overbearing administrative oversight would certainly not incentivize many instructors, accountability stands as the cornerstone of all interaction in a civilized liberal society. As such, this gripe is itself a second-order consideration when aiming to better learning systems through coherent alignment, as its creators intended (Loughlin et al., 2021). Many of these critiques of CA are thus to a degree understandable. A considered, aligned, and transparent system means that an individual instructor's flexibility may well decrease (Burnett, 2018). Perhaps, in addition, the messy yet unique day-to-day "accumulation of individual and collective experiences" (Kelly, 2012, p. 89) that also constitute teaching and learning (in the minds of some) may be less accounted for. However, this does not mean that they are not present. It could simply mean they are outside the scope of what CA encompasses. Indeed, as Biggs & Tang (2011) state, the procedurally equitable focus of CA is "on the design of a teaching and learning system, not on the student as a 'person'" (p. xx). Thus, while it may restrict some instructors from certain styles or modes of 'teaching,' it does so with an eye on pragmatic, procedurally equitable guidance, not punishment.

2.4.4. Theorising Constructive Alignment Principles

The forest of information, factors, and aspects regarding any given social or educational context necessitates a 'theorizing' of these concerns into a sufficiently wieldy logic to consider, analyse, and approach said context. Theorizing is itself a somewhat abstract term and practice, distinct from the more established 'theory' (which, one might suggest, could be the ultimate result of repeated and honed

'theorizing'). While theorizing should be consistent and coherent – i.e., as compatible as possible with reality and the data that the study of said reality produces – theorizing may change, or take different views of, more established theories to provide new perspectives. Indeed, theorizing aims to contribute to extant theory by addressing gaps in the literature, offering a new type of explanation, or attempting to account for changes in the context in question (Hammond, 2018). Though the author acknowledges that in social (and by extension educational) situations – with their infinite individual diversity in infinite combinations – a univariate lens would likely fail to explain or help improve every aspect, focus must be maintained to construct an inquiry and comprehend its findings sufficiently. To provide and maintain this focus for the current study required that the high-resolution information and literature covering the target context's curriculum development and understanding aspects be creatively theorized into more low-resolution ideas and principles. This was not done to strip the background from these ideas themselves but to shift the investigation into a suitably abstract level of understanding with which we can loosely identify – and hopefully solve – problems with the target course-in-curriculum context. It is hoped that the author's doing so can help clarify the discovery process throughout this investigation.

Based, then, on the central theoretical framework of Constructive Alignment (CA), the following CA Principles were theorized; (i) Clarity of Knowledge, (ii) Authenticity/Relevance of Knowledge, and (iii) Bridging of Knowledge.

Clarity of Knowledge

Clarity of Knowledge – which could well be termed Clarity of Instruction – is a course-internal CA principle. This principle means clear, objective-focused instruction presenting definitions, examples, multiple and varied chances for practice, and feedback on the production of a specific knowledge or skillset. This principle essentially overlaps with the technical and internal part of CA. ILOs are clearly defined, the ATs link directly to these ILOs, and the TLAs accurately provide scaffolding and 'micro-assessment' style experiences leading to these ATs, all of which are melded together with focused

formative Feedback. This internal CA principle is drawn from much of Biggs & Tang's (2011) own theorizing – supported in turn by the notions of student-based learning (Ramsden, 2003), engagement and motivation (Wang et al., 2013), and the value-expectancy theory (Feather, 1982) – and is backed up by real-world data. The clarity of the taught knowledge is important in providing aligned learning opportunities to acquire purportedly authentic/relevant (i.e., externally valuable) skillsets. Thus, this principle's simple, guiding question could be: "*Is the E-AW being taught well? If not, why not, and what could be done to fix this?*"

Authenticity/Relevance of Knowledge

Authenticity/Relevance of knowledge is a two-step external principle, with the second step contingent on the first. A broad range of inquiries into university students' perceptions of knowledge and skills (Carnevale et al., 1990; Kelley & Gaedeke, 1990; Duke, 2002; Hyman & Hu, 2005) strongly suggest that curricula outputs need to be authentic and relevant (and thus valuable) to the learner. This principle is essentially concerned with the degree to which the knowledge or skillset taught in the immediate classroom can be considered authentic (i.e., in that it exists beyond the classroom in the real world) and relevant (i.e., does not just exist but is useful and referred to within a sufficiently contiguous timeframe). For example, knowledge of a foreign language will always be 'authentic.' However, the degree of perceived 'relevance' may differ on the temporal, spatial, or political qualities of the language in question (i.e., learning Latin or learning Chinese) as well as on the positionality of the learner (i.e., are they intending to travel around Asia or to study fossils). Thus, though the perception of authenticity should be a relatively straightforward bar to clear, the perception of relevance would likely depend on the distance, either spatial or temporal, between the time of learning and the time of potential use. Such a concept underpins curriculum and program construction (Posner & Strike, 1974), which is itself underpinned by the need for repetition for learning (Bruner, 2001; Wogan & Waters, 1959; Bromage & Mayer, 1986). This principle itself ties into learning theories such as the 'law of readiness (Merriam et al., 2007), as well as the theory that unless viewed as sufficiently important students

enrolled in a given class may not actively try to learn the target content (Marton & Pang, 2006; Schunk, 2012), instead seeing it as in 'imposition' of sorts (Atherton, 2013). With reference to both curriculum development as a system and as a conduit for useful, powerful knowledge, this need for authenticity and relevance is admitted by most of CA's critics; chiefly that students are not likely to want to learn in a classroom that which they do not see as aligned with potential use beyond said classroom (Kelly, 2012; Jervis & Jervis, 2015; Burnett, 2018). Within a curriculum, then, a taught skillset may be seen as *authentic*, and yet due to the arrangement of courses in the wider curriculum which might subsequently use or refer to it, it might not necessarily be seen as *relevant*. As such, two guiding questions underpinning this principle could be, respectively:

- *"Is what is being taught in the E-AW course sufficiently authentic (i.e., theoretically of use beyond the classroom)? If not, why not, and what could be done to fix this?"*
- *"Is what is being taught in the E-AW course sufficiently relevant (i.e., practically used or referred to, in a timely manner, beyond the classroom)? If not, why not, and what could be done to fix this?"*

Bridging of Knowledge

If authenticity is that a skill is theoretically valuable, and relevance is that it is pragmatically useful in the immediate curriculum (i.e., writing skills learned in one class are used and referred to in other classes), bridging is the inter-class connections that carry this knowledge from where it is taught (i.e., the E-AW course) to where it is used (i.e., nominally, other courses in the curriculum). This could range, incrementally, from (i) a more passive set of connections, such as communication and tacit understanding of courses beyond one's own on the part of instructors, through more (ii) specific links and references to part of what was taught in preceding courses (though still potentially at an unofficial, non-designed level), to (iii) actual coherence of core skills planned and designed into the curriculum. These aspects themselves would be necessarily supported by the previously mentioned (i) faculty communication and awareness, and (ii) direct

reference to prior learning and instruction. Though in turn built on the prerequisite that a given taught skillset be both authentic and relevant, the bridging of knowledge can significantly influence how instructors teach a class and how students perceive the content of said class. As noted by Fullan & Quinn (2016), teachers who are positively engaged not only in their own classes but also collaboratively in the system of classes surrounding their own are better able to cultivate and sustain student learning and engagement. The bridging of knowledge, though not as directly defined as here, is a crucial concept underpinning CA; as noted by Biggs & Tang (2011), the gap "between a static body of declarative knowledge and personal action has to be bridged" (p. 96). As there is a tendency for less-academically minded students to take a surface approach to new knowledge taught in classrooms as being merely declarative and as used primarily for assessment (particularly, as discussed, in Japan), the bridging of knowledge between courses of education in which it is relevant should serve to promote awareness of it. Accordingly, a guiding question for the curriculum-development-focused principle of the bridging of knowledge could be; *"Is what is being taught in the E-AW course sufficiently bridged (i.e., expressly linked or supported between courses)? If not, why not, and what could be done to fix this?"*

2.4.5. Applying and Assessing Constructive Alignment Principles

Perhaps in different wording though similar in form, the theorized CA principles of (i) Clarity of Knowledge, (ii) Authenticity /Relevance of Knowledge, and (iii) Bridging of Knowledge are commonly assessed and applied both course-*internally* (i.e., within a single course) and course-*externally* (i.e., between multiple courses at a curriculum level).

Internal Application and Assessment

Designing and assessing courses to be constructively aligned is generally achieved through active, informed consideration and "transformative reflection" (Biggs & Tang, 2011, p. 45) on the part of curriculum planners. Indeed, informed consideration and assessment should be centred primarily on the learners themselves. As a student-

centred outcomes-based approach is built around the constructive learning experiences and perceptions of those enrolled in a tertiary-level course combined with their attainment of a criterion-referenced skill, not prioritizing their input would be to upend the thrust of CA's core learner-centred principles.

On this note, Biggs & Tang (2011) suggest several methods for inquiring into learners' perspectives on current and newly aligned courses of study. Surveys focused on said perspectives, interviews, and focus groups conducted with students from the course in question, and ongoing study diaries or portfolios (p. 286), are some of these more common methods. Indeed, while there is no one-size-fits-all method, several existing survey instruments are designed to check course alignment. Biggs & Tang (2011) mention two such survey instruments directly and have taken part in developing a third. First, the Learner Experiences Inventory (LEI), which is a five-aspect Likert-scale questionnaire, and asks students to consider; (i) what they are learning, (ii) how they are learning it, (iii) how well they are learning it, (iv) how they feel about their learning, and then to (v) reflect on their learning (Biggs & Tang, 2011, p. 285). A truncated 12-item version called the Learning Experiences Inventory in Courses (LEI-C) similarly assesses how clearly students perceive the learning requirements, how they should learn for them, and the assessment criteria. Wong et al. (2014), in performing a series of factor analyses on the engagement-measuring instruments in this LEI-C survey, found that the instrument was statistically capable of determining two bands of clarity of perception regarding a target course of study. Accordingly, it can be considered a valid and reliable tool to investigate the quality of the transmission of the course components (i.e., ILOs, ATs, and TLAs) to the students. Furthermore, this survey has proven a reliable, practical measure of students' perception of CA in their enrolled courses (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Second, similar to this instrument is another survey named the Constructive Alignment Learning Experience Questionnaire (CALEQ); this instrument incorporates teacher feedback as a question factor. According to the project's authors, Fitzallen & Brown (2017), the trials demonstrated that the instrument could be considered a helpful tool for collecting information on learners' experiences of constructively aligned courses.

Finally, Biggs & Tang (2011) mention Biggs's (1992) SPQ, as well as a shortened version of the SPQ – the R-SPQ-2F (Biggs et al, 2001) – which both were initially attached to the 3P framework. The more compact R-SPQ-2F covers two factors from the original SPQ pertaining to engagement and has seen broad use in assessing students' depth of engagement with their learning.

Of these measures, the CALEQ seemed the most suitable for the target research context primarily due to its express focus on perceptions of internal alignment (as opposed to the depth of approach such alignment elicits as with the SPQ measures), its inclusion of Feedback question-items, and the clear, simple language in which it is written. These particular points permit this instrument inquire into all aspects of CA to be considered in a given educational context, and do so in a way accessible to those – such as students – who are likely unfamiliar with expressly academic terminology. Beyond these situational considerations, the CALEQ, though not as widely utilized as the SPQ and its variants, nevertheless has demonstrated reliability in inquiring into several aspects of student perceptions on the internal alignment of educational courses.

First, Akbay's (2022) study into student perceptions of the alignment of an online course utilised the CALEQ to establish (i) whether or not students considered the course to be suitably aligned, and (ii) which items – ILOs, ATs, TLAs, and Feedback – provided the largest influence in this regard. Multiple linear regression modelling revealed that the TLAs being positively aligned had the most positive impact on positive impressions of ILO clarity; that is to say, if the activities and assignments experienced in the class were correctly constructed, it helped students more clearly understand and appreciate what they were supposed to learn. Second, Strømme et al (2023) ran several iterations of the CALEQ across multiple courses and determined that the CALEQ's items and reliability was valid for use in uncovering student perspectives on the alignment of the ILOs, ATs, TLAs, and Feedback in a given course of education. Additionally, their analysis suggested that a strong connection existed between positively aligned TLAs and the ILOs of the course, echoing that of Akbay's (2022) study above. Finally, in a multi-focused study by Roßnagel et al. (2021), the CALEQ provided quantitative data on the student-

perceived alignment of ILOS, ATs, TLAs, and Feedback permitting cross-referenced hierarchical regression analysis in conjunction with questionnaires on motivation and mental workload. Here, the CALEQ data shed light on strong positive links from both ILO clarity and Feedback to motivation, helping to demonstrate their importance for aiding engagement with (and attainment from) taught material. Thus, though the findings from each use of the CALEQ may have highlighted different links and connections between the items, these studies all confirmed the reliability of the CALEQ's construct and its primary focus on the internal alignment of a given course of education. As such, given that the focus of the current study is perceptions of CA in the target research context, the CALEQ appears a suitable choice of data collection instrument.

External Application and Assessment

The course-*external* application of CA's principles of authenticity/relevance and bridging of knowledge has not yet become a theory with a single, unified definition (and attendant procedure) to the degree it has for course-*internal* use. This is likely due to Biggs & Tang's (2011) intent for individual teachers to focus on what is needed in their immediate teaching contexts, of which they, at least purportedly, are in charge. However, several suggestions are made regarding how CA principles may be used externally, at the wider curriculum level, where multiple courses of study should cultivate a shared body of knowledge. Biggs & Tang (2011) themselves stress that though it is of paramount importance for individual teachers to construct and align their courses to knowledge and skillsets which are authentic and relevant, there is little they may do in the short term to account for the potentially un-aligned reality of other courses beyond their jurisdiction. Edstrom (2008), in endeavouring to bridge the potential gap between one course and others in a given curriculum, terms this proposed constructive alignment of courses-in-curriculum (viewed, at a lower resolution, based on their ILOs) as 'systems alignment.' However, Jervis et al. (2006) caution that it is unlikely to be easily achievable due to the organisational aspects involved. What is worse, Biggs & Tang (2011) reluctantly admit the potential for students to quickly dispense with the authentic and relevant knowledge and skills learned in a well-aligned

individual course upon contact with an unaligned, non-contiguous, and incoherent curriculum is not, to put it politely, slight. Indeed, echoing the concerns of Schaefer (1990), due in part to the increasingly 'silofied' nature of academic institutions, departments, and sections (Tett, 2015; Fullan et al., 2016), there is likely to be little coherence in a given curriculum without firm and continued collaboration from the get-go. Even the most carefully cultivated seeds face difficulties blooming in indifferent soil, particularly should their fostered characteristics be unaligned with those in the loam itself. And thus, a particular skillset, carefully selected as valuable both within and without academia due to its authenticity (i.e., is identified as being necessary across a range of academic and vocational tasks) and constructively taught via a sufficiently-aligned system within a given course's classroom, may not have opportunities for use in the short term and thus run the risk of becoming perceived as irrelevant.

Therefore, although admittedly a design issue, the external coherence of a course-in-curriculum is nevertheless of theoretical import when holistically considering, exploring, and analysing educational contexts. However, as there do not appear to be any general quantitative instruments to hand to gather data with regards to a course's external coherence with its wider curriculum, it would likely be necessary to utilize qualitative methods – akin, perhaps, to Anderson's (2010) study – tailored to the specific educational context and content.

2.4.6. Summary

Constructive Alignment (CA) was chosen as the primary theoretical frame for this course-and-curriculum design-focused inquiry due to its broad, systematic-design view on educational programs. Constructive Alignment's treatment of the ubiquitous aspects of educational courses, as well as the guiding principles of authenticity – and value – of knowledge taught, and clarity of connection, serve to create a procedurally equitable educational system that seeks to constructively 'bridge' knowledge from a given classroom into the rest of the institution and the wider world. A simple visual

representation of this theorised construct, with its constituent parts, could be created thus:
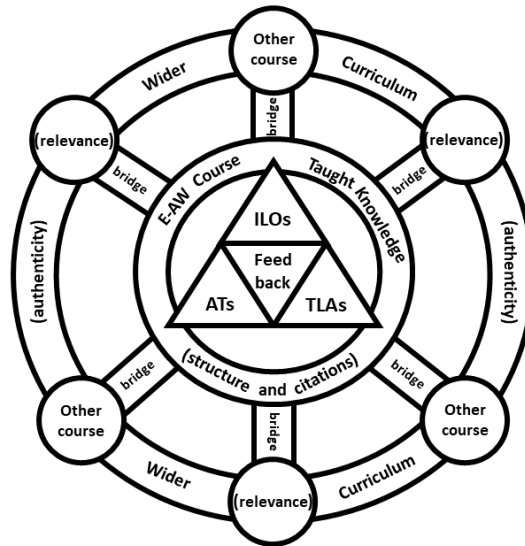
Figure 2. Visual Representation of Theorised CA Principles (author-created)

Here, we can see the central core (in this case, the E-AW class) made up of ILOs, ATs, and TLAs, all of which are connected and supported by Feedback (i.e., clarity of knowledge). Outside this central core of taught knowledge – in this case, the basic deductive logical structure and citation conventions required of academic writing – we can see the outer rim, which represents said knowledge interacting with the world beyond the immediate classroom (i.e., the authenticity of knowledge). On this rim are nodes representing other classes and courses within the wider curriculum in which the target course is situated (i.e., the relevance of knowledge). Between the central core (the E-AW class) and the nodes (other classes in VJA's wider curriculum) on the outer rim, we can see bridges representing the knowledge transfer from the core to the nodes (i.e., bridging of knowledge). This diagram, though simplistic, thus represents the theorised internal-alignment and external-coherence principles under investigation in this study.

The external coherence of a course's ILOs with contexts outside the immediate classroom is vital in constructively developing learners' knowledge and motivation via the authenticity and relevance of the knowledge taught. Courses and curriculums that cannot achieve this risk creating mere standalone instances of learning with little incentive for enrolled students to retain taught knowledge and skillsets beyond their course-final assessments. As a theoretical framework, CA and its theorized principles are sufficiently flexible yet targeted to consider such concerns of course-in-curriculum alignment and coherence. This is particularly the case when considering courses whose ILOs – i.e., basic structural and citation conventions required for university academic writing – are necessarily of practical utility beyond the immediate classroom. Here, we turn our attention to understanding some of the salient social-cultural features of the target research context.

2.5. Theory in Context

This section incorporates the points revealed in the reviews of curriculum development and curriculum understanding literature to explain and conceptualize the current research's target; VJA's EMI E-AW course in its curriculum.

Background

The target E-AW course was reformed and recreated in 2016, and is operated by the Foreign Language Division (FLD) of a sub-department, hereafter termed New General Studies Department (NGSD). VJA formed the NGSD in 2013 to create and conduct general studies courses for 1st-year students and provide expanded elective courses for 2nd, 3rd, and 4th-year undergraduates as required, with the core personnel of the FLD being drawn from existing administrators and instructors. The NGSD's espoused mission statement sees them running courses to "teach the basic knowledge and methodologies that are common among a wide range of cross-disciplinary fields and foster rich humanity by providing students with opportunities to come into contact with advanced learning and culture" (Appendix 1). Operating under this remit, the FLD's

stated operational purpose concerning its curriculum duties is as follows (translated from Japanese):

"Before learning knowledge specialized for each profession, such as researchers, computer engineers, international business, lawyers, and medical professions, Japanese students at VJA must master the basic academic skills that everyone must acquire before graduating from university. This is because there is an increasing need to strengthen not only English proficiency but also general academic skills in order to engage in academic research in an internationalized society or to play an active role in various fields of society" (Appendix 2).

VJA's English-language curriculum, advertised with the tagline "Learn in English", encompasses four types of courses; (i) the target mandatory E-AW course, (ii) the concurrently-run mandatory E-R course for all newly enrolled students in the first year, (iii) the elective E-Skills, and (iv) elective E-Content courses available for students from their second year. A simple diagram of the successive sections of VJA's English-language curriculum would arrange these courses as follows (Figure 3):

1st-Year, Spring Semester	1st-Year, Fall Semester	(Primarily) From 2nd-Year
E-AW (I) 2-Credits	**E-AW (II)** 2-Credits	E-Skills & E-Content
E-R (I) 2-Credits	**E-R (II)** 2-Credits	
TOEFL ITP (April)	TOEFL-ITP (December)	
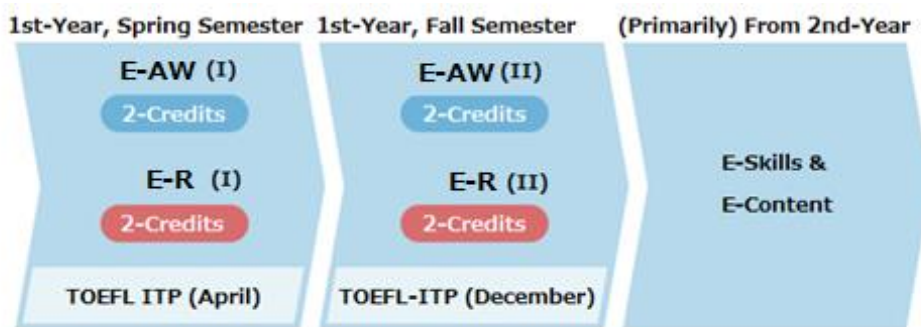
Figure 3. VJA's "Learn In English" Curriculum (adapted by author)

The E-R course is a mandatory English Reading course, which runs in both the Spring and Autumn semesters for 2 credits per semester. The E-R course is run under

the jurisdiction of the Humanities Division (HD), and therefore is currently not connected to the NGSD nor the FLD despite operating with a relatively similar mandate as a required general-studies course for newly enrolled first-year students. The E-R reading course's syllabus is not standardized; each individual instructor has the authority to select their own materials and write their own syllabus. As such, beyond the espoused objectives of "aims to cultivate academic education through academic reading that targets English books" and "academic reading aims to strengthen reading comprehension that captures the meaning of English sentences", each section of the reading course is unique to the teacher that leads it. While the reading materials for the E-R course are English-language, the syllabuses are written exclusively in Japanese by the HD's individual teachers and there are no directives to teach in English.

The elective E-Skills courses focus on a range of academic skills, including seminar participation, test-taking, research projects, presentations, and run as one-semester courses in both the Spring and Autumn semesters for 2 credits per course. The E-Skills courses are aimed both at undergraduates and graduates; while separate course-codes exist, it is quite possible for second-year students to be in the same room as masters or doctorate students, with no formal prerequisites for enrolment. The E-Skills courses were first created in 2016 by the FLD as supplementary electives, and are taught primarily by non-Japanese teachers of English. The E-Skills syllabuses are curated by the FLD administration courses are all EMI courses.

The elective E-Content courses are a wide-ranging choice of EMI-mode electives, run as single-semester courses in both the Spring and Autumn semester for 2-credits per course. The E-Content courses are managed by multiple faculties, with their content being under the purview of the course instructors, and are open to all undergraduates from their second year and above with no formal prerequisites for enrolment. E-Content are EMI courses, and are the flagship part of VJA's English-language curriculum. The E-Content courses are highly specialised. The majority of the E-Content courses are under their specific faculty's jurisdiction, though a sub-set of the E-Content courses – with the course-tag "Seminar" – are run by the NGSD affiliated Japanese researchers.

In addition to these English-language courses, each first-year student enrolled at VJA takes roughly 14-16 courses each week, resulting in the average student clearing almost half of the required credit load in just one year. Though the courses that each student takes differ depending on their department and major, as university courses they purportedly aim to support the students' subsequent study so it would be acceptable to hold that they would require academic conventions such as structured writing and citations.

Curricular Conception and Value of the E-AW Course

As one of the Global 30 universities selected by MEXT, VJA is under higher-than-normal pressure to internationalize its campus and education policies toward the development of Japanese citizens who can live in the international community (Aspinal, 2010), and to avoid, according to Tajino (2019), sleepwalking into creating yet another 'English for No Purpose' course of study. While it is possible to consider that the application of EMI as a delivery method may merely, as Hamid et al. (2013) and Chapple (2015) suggest, have been an act of expediency on behalf of the curriculum planners, when one considers that existing external accountability pressures emphasize need to 'internationalize' the motivations for such a decision are understandable. Thus, the practical skill of academic writing was selected (Tajino et al., 2010). As covered, it is a core scholarly skill due to integrating external sources of information into a logical, organized piece of writing (Johns, 1997; Polio & Shi, 2012). These two points form the core of deductive logical structure, used in academic discussions, presentations, and other vocational contexts throughout society, and are essential for critically considering information (Swales & Feak, 1994; McKinley, 2013). Though provided with little instruction on academic writing through their prior schooling, Japanese university students are increasingly required to produce such deductive reports and dissertations throughout their undergraduate career (Kubota, 1997) and are unable to avoid the need to do so in post-graduate and international study (Fujieda, 2012). Thus, the decision by VJA's administration to refocus and reform the E-AW course in 2016 certainly makes sound curricular sense (Dewey, 1972; Tyler, 2013), for it aims to provide practical and

'powerful' (Young, 2008) knowledge to students enrolling in their university. The course's objectives are authentic, practical, and of merit, particularly to potential future international academics, and therefore should be conducted as well as possible. Thus, as stated, through stakeholder-based consideration of the 'fitness,' of the target E-AW course and its 'fit' in its curriculum, the author sought to identify alignment and coherence issues within this context through the theorized lens of CA's principles of the (i) clarity, (ii) authenticity/relevance, and (iii) bridging of knowledge, judged these issues against the extant situation and literature, and offered tentative suggestions for improvement.

2.6. Summary

Literature was reviewed to gain insight into constituent sociocultural and institutional factors pertinent to the scope and intent of the current research. The influence of these factors on the constitution of the target research context, the E-AW course relative to VJA's broader curriculum, suggests that issues with the fitness and fit of said course may arise amongst the learners in relation to potentially low motivation and surface-approach, stemming from prior experience with a primarily lecture-exam based education system, scant prior writing instruction, anxiety and avoidance relating to English as a language, as well as a teacher-centred view of education.

Along with the visual representation created (Figure 2), overlaying the metaphor of a tree (i.e., the E-AW course) within a wood (i.e., VJA's wider curriculum) may aid our conceptualisation of the target education situation. Our tree, newly planted in an extant wood, has been set down in relatively difficult soil. Nevertheless, it carries many expectations for the knowledge (i.e., an academic writing skillset) it is to cultivate and how it ought to integrate with the other trees (i.e., other courses) in the wood around it. By inquiring into the perspectives of the intact E-AW course-in-curriculum's active stakeholders (i.e., the instructors and students experiencing life under the tree), this investigation aimed to aid in the development of a deeper understanding of the internal alignment (i.e., fitness) of the target course and its external coherence (i.e., fit) within

its curriculum, sufficient to draw theoretical implications and offer solutions for issues identified. To what extent does our metaphorical tree connect (i.e., bridge its knowledge) with the others in this metaphorical wood, provide a canopy under which students may learn and find access to other trees, and what factors may hinder this connection? As a budding horticultural detective, then, the author set forth to ascertain these connections and uncover issues lurking in the undergrowth.

Chapter 3. Research Design and Methodology

This chapter examines the rationale for this research's approach, design, and methodology and discusses their connection to the framing literature and theories from the previous chapter. Following a brief outline of the study, supported by reviews of both pragmatism and Mixed-Methods Research (MMR), the author considered sampling and ethical concerns, then piloted and adjusted an exploratory convergent style design intended to gain insight into the three guiding research questions; chiefly:

1. How do enrolled students view the degree of constructive alignment in the E-AW course?

2. What issues do the students perceive with the E-AW course in relation to its coherence with the wider curriculum?

3. What issues do the instructors perceive with the E-AW course alignment and coherence with the wider curriculum?

3.1. Research Design Overview

This investigation's convergent MMR design consisted of three stages; (i) a quantitative survey, (ii) a qualitative email questionnaire inquiring into students' perspectives on the E-AW course's internal 'fitness' and external 'fit' respectively, and (iii) semi-structured interviews with E-AW instructors. The first-stage survey focused on the participants' perspectives on the degree to which the target E-AW course's objectives, assessment, learning activities, and feedback were aligned via an existing *Likert*-scale Constructive Alignment Learner Evaluation Questionnaire (CALEQ) (developed by Fitzallen & Brown (2017)), as well as inquiring as to what they believe was the most important skill that they learned from the course. Following completion of the survey, student-participants were invited to take part in the second stage, a qualitative email-questionnaire, which inquired on the degree to which they considered what they learned in the E-AW course was either used or referred to (directly or indirectly) in the

wider curriculum (in so far as they have experienced it). Finally, in the third stage, instructor-participants were invited to undertake a qualitative semi-structured interview to investigate their perspectives on the internal alignment of the E-AW course and its external coherence, or 'fit,' with the wider curriculum. As per the MMR-convergent design, the data collected from all three stages was analysed independently and then interpreted. Doing so provided a holistic series of interconnected active stakeholder perspectives on the degree of alignment and coherence of the target E-AW course-in-curriculum. While this research necessitated a broad coverage of student and instructor populations, its methodological procedure was considered sufficient for the task.

3.2. Research Philosophy – Pragmatism

The author crafted the current enquiry around the pragmatic research philosophy. Pragmatism first emerged as a defined research philosophy independent of the common positivist and phenomenological, primarily due to the deliberations and beliefs of American philosophers Charles Peirce, William James, and John Dewey in the early 20th century (Gray, 2014). The impetus for this creation of a "middle position" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17) philosophy was the perception that research results were not sufficiently tied to subsequent, actionable implications (Hildebrand, 2003). Cohen et al. (2011) imply that the driving principle here is that "thought should lead to action, to prediction and problem-solving" (p. 35). Indeed, pragmatism specifically concerns itself with taking a practical approach to a "practice-driven" problem (Denscombe, 2008, p.280); this, again, strengthens its appeal for the current inquiry as it aims to produce knowledge fit and tailored for creating action in the target context (Gray, 2014). As Johnson & Onwuegbuzie's (2004) summary states, then, pragmatism provides:

> "a useful middle position philosophically and methodologically; it offers a
> practical and outcome-oriented method of inquiry that is based on action and
> leads, iteratively, to further action and the elimination of doubt; and it offers a

method for selecting methodological mixes that can help researchers better answer many of their research questions." (p. 17)

This eclectic methodological mixing is a highly useful feature of pragmatism. It is also important to note here that while the pragmatic perceptions of this reality differ from individual to individual, the inanimate artefacts in a spatial locale of said reality remain shared and stable (Patel, 2015). Put another way, pragmatism acknowledges both "an external world independent of the mind and that lodged in the mind" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 48). This was determined to be particularly important to this research project, as the research target is an extant, intact and operational course-in-curriculum, experienced by individual students and instructors, and their 'perceptions' help to make up the 'reality' concerning it.

3.3. Mixed Methods Approach: Convergent Design

Mixed Methods Research, hitherto referred to as MMR, came into being due to similar circumstances to the pragmatist philosophical approach, with centrist, less-ideological researchers sceptical of paradigm puritanism enforcing the separation of quantitative and qualitative methods. Currently, MMR has moved beyond being recognized as a "third major research approach or paradigm" (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 113) to be more commonly utilized in complex research than single-paradigm designs (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). This is mainly the case in social science fields such as education, which are, as Sammons (2010) points out, "continuously subject to change and so are inherently dynamic in nature" (p. 701). MMR's ability to deal flexibly with such dynamism is acknowledged by Creswell & Creswell (2018) in their defining MMR as an approach to investigations that involves:

> "collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two forms of data, and using distinct designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks. The core assumption of this form of inquiries is that the integration of qualitative and quantitative

data yields additional insight beyond the information provided by either

the quantitative or qualitative data alone" (p. 25-26)

Indeed, one of MMR's key features is its potential to reinforce research design with methods from one paradigm covering the weaknesses of the other (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). Onwuegbuzie & Johnson (2006) suggest that this commonly involves a selection and mixture of methods that have "complementary strengths and overlapping weaknesses" (p. 51). This notion of mutual support is expanded into five primary purposes (Gray, 2014, citing Greene et al., 1989); these are (i) triangulation, (ii) complementarity, (iii) development, (iv) initiation, and (v) expansion. The first two purposes, triangulation, and complementarity, focus mainly on supporting and covering blind spots in methods from different paradigms. Common examples of blind spots could include quantitative questionnaires' inability to gather nuanced information on an issue (Creswell, 2015) or the potential for respondents to answer according to what they perceive the most socially desirable option to be (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). Conversely, though purely qualitative investigations may gain a deeper insight into participants' perspectives, they may suffer from higher levels of subjectivity from a smaller sample size, leading to restricted applicability outside of the immediate context (Creswell, 2015). In contrast to the purposes of triangulation and complementarity, initiation aims to uncover new angles and insights into the research target. Development sees data collected by an instrument from one paradigm used to help the creation of another method, and expansion uses a mixture of research methods to 'expand' and shift the scope of the inquiry through subsequent stages.

As for any research inquiry, there must be a sound rationale for selecting the philosophy, methodology, and methods upon which said inquiry would be conducted. Indeed, as Creswell & Creswell (2018) state, "mixed methods researchers need to establish a purpose for their mixing, a rationale for the reasons why quantitative and qualitative data need to be mixed in the first place" (p. 48). Thus, with regards to this investigation, the author selected MMR due to several inherent advantages offered by a mixture of both types of data: chiefly (i) complementarity and triangulation, in that

one set of results can be elaborated and enhanced by another; (ii) expansion, in that the scope of the inquiry can, through subsequent stages, be expanded to cover different identified knowledge targets and participants; and (iii) an acknowledgement of the dynamic nature of the target research context and the ability to deal with it accordingly.

MMR, incorporating many methods, also has many named variant archetypes that may be employed depending on the research question, target, and context. For example, while a sequential exploratory design may have proven viable should this inquiry have focused on a sole research question about a singular target on a single population of stakeholders, as this study sought to investigate the active stakeholder perspectives of both students and instructors regarding the E-AW course's alignment and its coherence, a convergent mixed methods archetype was selected. In a convergent mixed methods design, qualitative and quantitative data are gathered concurrently, examined independently, and then combined. The intended stages of this study were pre-constructed and adjusted, thanks to the thorough review of curriculum development literature and initial data gathered from a small-scale pilot study. Each stage was deployed in close sequence, thus allowing for responses from one set of data to help modify subsequent data-collection instruments as the need arose.

A convergent MMR approach provided the following benefits to this study. First is the functional requirement that the perspectives of both the students and instructors primarily focus on the target E-AW course and curriculum (*what*) at the culmination of a given academic year (*when*). Data collection delay would likely make clear focus on the same semester challenging to achieve. Second, convergent MMR approaches allow a balanced consideration of quantitative and qualitative data across research questions and populations in a 'multilevel' design (Gray, 2014). This contrasts with sequential explanatory's primacy of quantitative data and sequential explanatory's primacy of qualitative for single-issue research questions. Third, convergent MMR aims for more holistic (albeit perhaps less deep) insight into research issues-in-context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The structuring of the current study's deployment of the convergent MMR approach could therefore be pictured as in Figure 4:
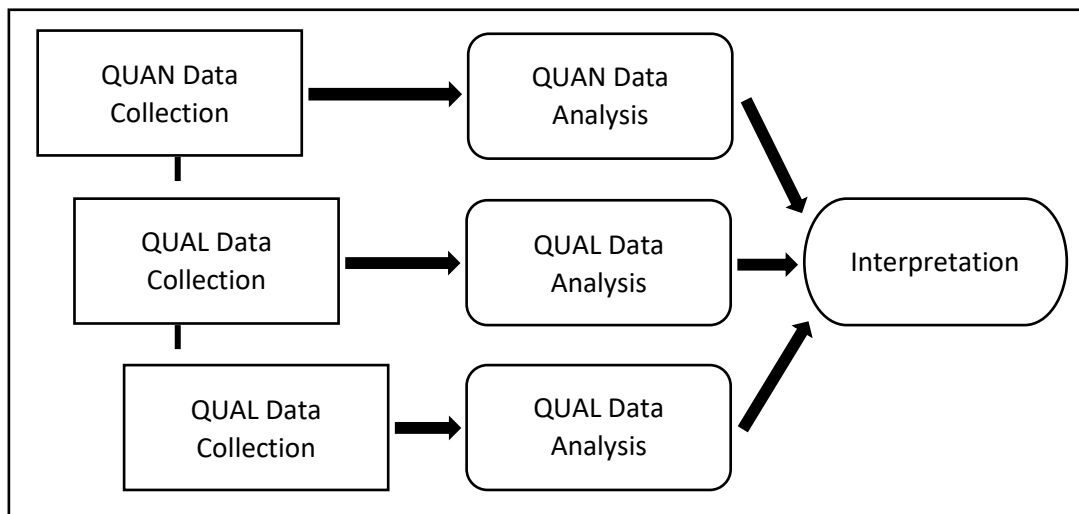
Figure 4: Convergent MMR deployment in the current study

3.4. Sample

This investigation sought to uncover active stakeholders' perspectives concerning the degree of constructive alignment within the E-AW and its coherence beyond it in the wider curriculum. Thus, it made sense to draw the sample for the study from students and instructors experiencing this context first-hand. However, due to access issues imposed both by VJA policies regarding research as well as the measures in place as a result of the Sars-Cov2 pandemic, it is necessary to state that it was in fact not possible to recruit students in their second year of study or beyond. This particular limitation will be addressed further in the final chapter, and this section will engage with the sample as is.

Recruiting students enrolled in the E-AW held several benefits and drawbacks, essentially relating to temporality. Regarding disadvantages, by situating data collection in the first year, the student-participants would have had only one year of concurrent experience with the wider curriculum. This would lower the range of courses they will be able to consider as coherently aligned (or not) with the E-AW course. On the other hand, student-participants should be able to recall better the E-AW course objectives, assessments, activities, and feedback, and more clearly conceive of the links between what they have just learned in the E-AW course with the surrounding courses and

curriculum. In addition, though the prospective student-participants will have experienced only one of four years of university study, due to the focus on job-searching in the final years of Japan's HEIs it is common for students to take almost half of the required credits in that first year (Ito, 2018). Thus, while the depth of experience may be lacking, the author determined that the intersection of conceptual clarity and breadth of experience provided collection data at the end of the first year of study balanced out.

The instructor-participants were drawn from instructors who teach the E-AW course. While there were arguments for recruiting participants from other courses in the wider curriculum to examine opinions on coherence from multiple embedded perspectives, the research was centred on the experiences and perspectives of active stakeholders in the E-AW course to paint a clearer picture via unidirectionality. The E-AW instructors were mostly part-time, though efforts will be made to recruit part-time and full-time instructors.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

As an integral aspect of the planning and design of the current investigation, care was taken to address ethical concerns and considerations both at the target research site (VJA) and at the University of Liverpool (UoL). However, the ethical clearance processes were quite different at each institution, and their technicalities limited the scope of the inquiry.

VJA's ethical clearance protocols took precedence mainly in determining the nature of the inquiry and the level of access to prospective participants under its jurisdiction. VJA's processes differed depending on the information sought in the proposed research. For example, if a research project sought information of an educational nature – determined as personally identifying information linked to grades – the research must not be published outside of VJA's bulletins. Furthermore, due to the layers of jurisdiction, an annual cross-department ethics board must consider ethical clearance for research conducted by external actors – i.e., practitioners not employed

by the target department or institution. In addition, participation in cleared research must be (i) voluntary and (ii) informed; as such, the Participant Information Sheets (PISs) and Participant Consent Forms (PCFs) (Appendix 6) constructed by the author were necessarily approved by VJA administrators.

UoL's ethical protocols fell under the jurisdiction of the VPREC, the Virtual Programmes Research Ethics Committee, and inspected the research proposal for a series of criteria required for ethical approval. Chief among these requirements were considerations of (i) informed consent, (ii) the right to withdraw from the research, (iii) conflicts of interest on behalf of the researcher, (iv) the language barrier implicit in the research context, and (v) provisions for anonymity and confidentiality. Thus, to deal with the potential language barrier, the functional components – i.e., all research documents and data-collection methods – were deployed in Japanese (the mother-tongue language of the research context). Options were, of course, provided for the same documents in English, permitting participants to respond in the language of their choice. Although the researcher has near-native fluency in Japanese, care was taken to have all documents and responses proofread and translated by a qualified linguist unaffiliated with UoL, VJA, and the research field. This was to ensure confidentiality, though also to mitigate against the potential for bias and guilty knowledge; if a translator were to have knowledge of the research and the participants, there could be a chance, though slim, that they might apply such knowledge to their translations, thus damaging the accuracy and integrity of the translations (Williams, 2009). With the translator's help, technical terminology inherent in the survey, email questionnaires, semi-structured interview script, supporting PISs, PCFs, and correspondence documents were identified and modified to facilitate understanding on behalf of the participants. The PCFs and PISs were also designed to account for UoL's VPREC and VJA's ethics committee requirements. In all stages of the research was the proviso that participants may withdraw at any time should they wish to, along with measures to ensure the utmost anonymity and confidentiality. This was partly achieved via the use of a GDPR-certified online survey

software (SurveyMonkey); besides the fact that they were students enrolled in the E-AW course, the researcher would have no way to determine who each respondent was.

To avoid problems inherent in power dynamics and relationship risks throughout the research, the researcher did not send participation invitations to the students enrolled in his own classes. As for the follow-up email questionnaire stage, while the email addresses of the voluntary participants were nominally collected to take records of informed consent and coordinate the participation briefing and responses, the student-participants' names were anonymized at the point of data collection. Similarly, the researcher mitigated power-dynamic and relationship risk by inviting instructors of the E-AW course who were senior, in both rank (i.e., tenured instructors, professors) or experience (i.e., length of time employed at VJA). All correspondence was conducted using a VJA-authorised email address. All research participation was conducted after the conclusion of classes; no in-class time was used for either the survey or the email questionnaire, and the semi-structured interviews were conducted remotely at times expressly chosen by the instructor-participants.

3.5. Quantitative Survey Design and Piloting

Fine-tuning via a small-scale pilot study is very important in any research design. Surveys have several implicit strengths and weaknesses as a staple quantitative data-collection method. Surveys can be deployed to a large population relatively quickly and completed at little cost of resources, and in so doing provide statistical evidence for broad trends and perspectives in a given population (Wisker, 2008; Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). However, due to the one-shot nature of questionnaires, they carry a range of weaknesses, chiefly (i) the potential for unmotivated respondents, (ii) the potential for socially desirable answers, and (iii) the potential for "survey fatigue" should the questionnaire be too long (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). As such, the author sought to create an efficient, engaging questionnaire, incorporating the open-ended questions and the CALEQ multi-item *Likert*-scale questions.

3.5.1. Survey – Single items

Several open single-item questions were included to gather insight into the participants' understanding of the educational objectives of the target E-AW, as well as to provide a section for free comments:

1. In your own words, what was the most important thing that you believe you learned in this course?

2. Feel free to write comments, thoughts, criticisms, and questions about the objectives and content of this course.

3.5.2. Survey – multi-scale items

The author determined that an existing 20-item instrument, Fitzallen & Brown's (2017) Constructive Alignment Learner Evaluation Questionnaire (CALEQ), would be suitable to inquire into the enrolled students' perspectives on the degree to which the ILOs, ATs, TLAs, and Feedback are in alignment in the E-AW course. While other instruments have been developed, most notably perhaps Biggs's (1992) SPQ and R-SPQ-2F (Biggs et al., 2001), the technical language, the lower degree of specific focus in the questions, and the lack of consideration of the feedback aspect was judged to render them less effective in this context. The CALEQ's four five-point *Likert*-scale batteries (Appendix 4) were suitably simple yet on point, with an estimated survey completion time of 10 minutes. The author translated the original CALEQ questions into Japanese with the translator's help.

3.5.3. Administration and results of the pilot study

After attaining ethical approval, the author conducted a pilot study, intending to 'test-run' the survey design and protocols. The study was conducted with 40 students drawn from two class sections. The parameters of the class sections were in a similar context (i.e., another of VJA's EGAP curriculum courses) and learning situation for them to be suitable as a substitute target with which to test the intended data-collection

instrument (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010; Wisker, 2008). The participants in this pilot study were recruited via the same process as that which was to be used in the main data-collection stage, via email invitation from their instructor at the end of classes for the semester, with the same protocols guaranteeing anonymity and acknowledgement of ethical risk. As with the main data-collection stage, pilot-study participants accessed the survey digitally via a link in the invitation email, though in addition to the CALEQ multi-scale item battery and the open single-scale questions, several feedback questions on the comprehensibility of the survey items – an essential consideration when conducting technical, bi-lingual research (Cohen et al., 2011) – were included. These were – translated into Japanese – as follows:

1. In your opinion, were any questions difficult to understand? If so, why?

2. In your opinion, did any of the questions overlap with each other? If so, which questions?

3. Did you experience frustration or tiredness while answering the survey? If so, why?

4. Do you have any other comments about the survey?

Regarding responses to the primary survey questions, replies from the participants demonstrated consistent understanding with relatively few incomplete submissions and an average completion time of roughly 12 minutes (though, admittedly, this includes the time to answer necessary feedback questions). Furthermore, "survey fatigue" appeared to be relatively low (Gray, 2014) due to the survey's streamlined, 5-items per section construction. The responses to the above feedback questions provided insight into the specific Japanese wording of several of the survey items; in particular, some pilot-study participants highlighted difficulties in understanding some of the generic English-to-Japanese lexical chunks, such as 'course documents' and 'stated objectives' as translated directly from the original CALEQ battery (Fitzallen & Brown, 2017). These words were raised for discussion with the translator. As a result, the

decision was made to specify 'syllabus' and 'course objectives' and add parenthetical explanations.

The author also conducted a Cronbach Alpha internal consistency analysis of the CALEQ questions. Before use in the main study, these CALEQ items needed to be individually tested to determine if their responses could be considered consistent and reliable. Cohen et al. (2011) state that a suitable baseline correlation alpha value should be at least 0.67 (p. 263); Kline (1999) similarly categorizes those between 0.7 and 0.9 as good, and those that are over 0.9 demonstrate excellent reliability and correlation between common items. The responses from the pilot survey returned the alpha values shown in Table 1:

Scale	Cronbach Alpha
Intended Learning Objectives (ILOs)	0.842484 (Good)
Teaching-Learning Activities (TLAs)	0.895264 (Good)
Assessment Tasks (ATs)	0.93657 (Excellent)
Feedback	0.916267 (Excellent)

Table 1. Cronbach Alpha Results for the Pilot Study (CALEQ)

These Cronbach Alpha test values suggest that, as concluded by Fitzallen & Brown's (2017) confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on the CALEQ, it should prove suitable as a data-collection instrument inquiring into students' perspectives on the constructive alignment between objectives, assessment and learning tasks, and feedback within the target E-AW course.

The pilot study provided insight into issues of comprehensibility within the language of the survey. It demonstrated that the CALEQ battery shows potential for reliably unveiling participant perspectives on the internal alignment of the target course.

Therefore, with the aid of the translator, the author made modifications to the quantitative survey stage of the research.

3.6. Stage One: Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis

3.6.1. Quantitative Survey: Data Collection Process

The quantitative survey for the first stage was adjusted based on feedback from the pilot study participants. Assistance was sought from 12 E-AW course instructors by email halfway through the semester. The email invited them to help distribute the quantitative survey introduction announcement, attendant PISs and PCFs, and the link to the survey. The author provided a summary of the project to the instructors in this email; they were informed that the survey would take roughly 10 minutes, following which a link-based invitation to participate in the qualitative email-questionnaire stage would be offered. Unfortunately, three of the 12 contacted instructors declined to help distribute the research invitation. This left nine instructors (five full-time, four part-time) attached to 47 sections (of the entire 130 sections of the E-AW course operating at any given time), creating a prospective sample of 940 student-participants of the total enrolled 2600 E-AW population. Of this potential 940 student-participant sample, the first-stage quantitative survey received 413 responses, of which 16 responses were incomplete, and thus rejected from the final total. This left 397 complete responses to the quantitative survey. Initial quantitative analyses, consisting of descriptive statistics and Cronbach Alpha correlation tests, were conducted via Survey Monkey and Microsoft Excel's data-suites, with further statistical analysis conducted with JASP software.

3.6.2. Reliability of Survey

Akin to the pilot survey, a Chronbach's Alpha internal consistency analysis was run on each scale (Table 2):

Scale	Cronbach Alpha
Intended Learning Objectives (ILOs)	0.88093 (Good)
Teaching-Learning Activities (TLAs)	0.89972 (Good)
Assessment Tasks (ATs)	0.92406 (Excellent)
Feedback	0.91486 (Excellent)

Table 2. Cronbach Alpha Results for the Main Study (CALEQ)

Since the results for each scale returned either 'good' or 'excellent' (Kline, 1999), Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Oblique Rotation (OBLIMIN) were conducted in order to consider how many factors could be thought to have been operating within the survey and to what degree they may be considered as correlated.

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Factor Analysis is a series of statistical operations commonly carried out by software, which are:

> "…applied to a single set of variables when the researcher is interested in discovering which variables in the set form coherent subsets that are relatively independent of one another. Variables that are correlated with one another but largely independent of other subsets of variables are combined into factors." (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007, p. 607)

Indeed, as Field (2009) phrases it poignantly, "in factor analysis we take much information (variables)… and reduce this mass of confusion into a simple message (fewer variables)" (p. 666). There are several types of factor analysis, including Principle Component Analysis (PCA), Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).

EFA is generally employed when one wishes to uncover the factor structure of a measure to examine its reliability. This leads to checks of the degree to which common patterns and responses to the measure load onto the individual items in the survey. This is often used to eliminate items from the survey that draw from more than one factor. EFA is customarily done when researchers have no fixed hypotheses about the underlying factors inherent in their measurement instrument. It can also be used to 'rediscover' or 'reaffirm' said factors when the measure is deployed in a new context. Though it should be noted that CFA is more commonly used for this purpose, CFA requires that analysis uses an a priori fixed number of factors. EFA permits researchers to investigate and experiment with the PCA's output and determine the number of factors that best 'fit' the data from their measurement instrument by looking at said eigenvalues and data. As the measure – the CALEQ battery of questions – is being deployed into a relatively new context (i.e., a course-in-curriculum in a Japanese HEI), an EFA was determined to be more suited to the current research.

EFA has three main steps; in order, these are (i) determining the number of factors, (ii) selecting a method of extracting these factors, and (iii) selecting the rotation method with which to conduct the analysis.

Factor Determination

The determination of the number of factors that can be considered operating within the data-set produced by one's instrument is initially based on PCA. PCA identifies statistical patterns between the items within a given data set, establishes a set of weighted composites, and determines their eigenvalues. Eigenvalues are representative of the variances in the data – i.e., responses to the survey – due to each identified underlying component/factor. When uncovered, they show from which common factors the variances in the data mainly stem (Field, 2009). The remaining variances may be considered 'scree' or mere vector-less variable error (Cattell, 1966). Factor determination via eigenvalue scree-plots is generally accurate, simple, and thus widely

used (Field, 2009). Furthermore, eigenvalue-based determination of the number of factors is better 'in tune' with the data.

Factor Extraction

A mathematical process is used to identify the loadings for each determined factor in extracting the factors. While most statistical software has a wide range of options in this regard, after progressing from a raw PCA a standard option is to utilize either a "principal access factoring" or "maximum likelihood" method (Gorsuch, 1990). Though the choice of extraction protocol is more fraught in smaller samples, with a relatively high number of responses constituting the data-set in the current research, the "maximum likelihood" protocol proved the most reliable.

The factor extraction stage aims to achieve a state of simple structure, where most items load strongly onto just one factor and less so on to other factors in the analysis. Frequently, items that cross-load onto multiple factors, or do not load strongly enough onto a single factor, are removed from the analysis, which is then re-run to determine how the variance between items is accounted for while excluding them. When simple structure is not achievable due to the sheer number of items cross-loading onto multiple factors, it is commonly the case that the items are 'fuzzy,' in that they are perhaps not correctly worded or that the theoretical concepts underlying the items are not empirically distinguishable.

Factor Rotation

Following factor determination and extraction, the factors' rotation is conducted to "attempt to relate the calculated factors to theoretical entities" (Vogt, 1993, p. 91). Essentially, the rotation stage seeks to simplify further the 'simple structure' achieved in the previous factor extraction stage by maximizing high item-factor loadings and minimizing low loadings between items and factors (Brown, 2009). Before factor rotation, the researcher needs to decide whether they believe the factors in the analysis are uncorrelated or correlated. Based on this belief, the researcher selects either an

orthogonal rotation process for uncorrelated factors or an oblique rotation method for assumed correlated factors (Gorsuch, 1990). While this distinction remains valid in pure sciences, specifically regarding social sciences concerning humans and constructs designed to inquire into psychological or perspective-based questions, there are grounds to suggest that orthogonal rotations – for uncorrelated factors – are of little use (Field, 2009). Indeed, based partly on this point, Tabachnick & Fidell (2007) suggest running oblique rotation methods first and determining whether there is less than a 10% overlap in variance amongst the factors involved. Only in such cases does orthogonal rotation need to be considered.

As such, factor rotation aims to simplify further and clarify the structure of the operational factors within the survey. This was useful in helping the current research identify alignment factors hidden in the data beneath the initial descriptive-statistics level and provide added assurances of the reliability of the responses to the items in the CALEQ.

3.6.3. Summary

The quantitative survey aimed to determine (i) what the student-participants considered to be the primary objective of the E-AW course, and (ii) the degree to which they perceived the course – as judged on its ILOs, ATs, TLAs, and instructor Feedback – as being internally constructively aligned. The reliability of the collected data was shown to permit EFA, which could demonstrate the participants' beliefs underlying their perceptions of internal alignment. Thus, the first stage of the research was judged as sufficiently reliable to answer RQ1.

3.7. Stage Two & Stage Three: Qualitative Data Collection

As the focus of the investigation expanded from perceptions of the internal alignment of the E-AW course to its external coherence vis-a-vis the wider curriculum, the second and third stages shifted to qualitative measures to better capture depth and detail in the more subjective terrain. The second stage invited prospective student-

participants to answer a series of discussion questions in an email questionnaire. These questions inquire as to the degree they perceived the identified academic writing objectives of the E-AW to be relevant (i.e., utilized or at least referred to) and connected throughout the wider curriculum as they experienced it and elicited speculation as to what factors may influence this perception. The third stage, conducted as a semi-structured interview, invited instructors of the E-AW course to offer their perspectives on the course's alignment and coherence, reflect on the opinions of the student-participants, and speculate how issues uncovered in the process may be mitigated or improved upon. The rationale for selecting email questionnaires and semi-structured interviews as data-collection instruments, the thematic analysis methods, and the participant recruitment strategy are considered here.

3.7.1. Student Participants: Email Questionnaire

Student participants were invited to volunteer for the stage two email questionnaire upon completing the quantitative survey in stage one. To disassociate the prospective volunteers' names and email addresses from their stage one survey answers, the invitation was accessed by link, where a PIS/PCF outlined the nature of their participation. Of the 397 quantitative survey responses, 13 students indicated an initial willingness to participate, though this dropped to 11 after the first contact via email. Of the 11 student-participants who started the email questionnaire stage, only 8 completed it; two students became unresponsive after answering the first of three questions, and one student requested to withdraw. While all participants were confirmed as representative of the demographic qualities sought by the current research – i.e., first-year students who were enrolled in the E-AW course and who had completed the stage one survey – eight participants seemed somewhat low as a proportion of the total population (roughly 2600). However, given the ethical protocols and the flexibility of mixed-methods convergent design (Lee et al., 2002), analysis was conducted while acknowledging the limits that this sample size set on the generalisability of findings drawn forth.

3.7.2. Email Questionnaire Rationale

The author selected email questionnaires for the second data collection stage for several reasons. The first reason was that as the data for this study was to be collected during the academic year 2020 (amid the Sars-Cov2 pandemic), out of ethically mandated necessity, the sought qualitative data had to be collected by a method that avoided face-to-face contact. Second, of such non-contact methods, an email questionnaire was contingently selected due to the following merits. Email questionnaires are essentially expanded questionnaires consisting of several open-ended questions following a straightforward but pointed initial question (Gray, 2014). While prose-writing may take up "precious respondent-availability time" (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010, p. 37), it is possible to ask open-ended questions sequentially to avoid fatigue, as well as allow for the possibility to follow up with participants should their responses be unclear (Cohen et al., 2011). Though care was taken to design the email questionnaires as straightforward as possible, their being written – as opposed to spoken – granted greater cognitive and linguistic stability. Thus, the author judged that the email questionnaire's features suited the study's requirements and society-level pandemic situation.

3.7.3. Instructor Participants: Interview

Following the student-participant email questionnaire, the current research conducted semi-structured interviews with volunteer instructors of the E-AW course. The instructors who aided in distributing the stage one survey were contacted again via email and were invited to participate in a remote semi-structured interview inquiring into their perspectives regarding the internal alignment and external coherence of the target E-AW course. Three of the nine instructors contacted declined to participate, leaving six (four full-time and two part-time); their demographic information is displayed in Table 3:

Participant Number	Sex	Full-Time / Part-Time	Experience at VJA	Japanese / Non-Japanese	Language of Interview
1	Female	Full-Time	3	Non-Japanese	English
2	Male	Part-Time	12	Non-Japanese	English
3	Female	Full-Time	5	Non-Japanese	English
4	Female	Part-Time	5	Japanese	Japanese
5	Male	Full-Time	13	Non-Japanese	English
6	Female	Full-Time	5	Non-Japanese	English

Table 3. Instructor Participants Demographic Information

Though this sample of instructors was somewhat skewed towards full-time instructors vis-à-vis part-time instructors, this constituted 10% of the instructor population for the E-AW course. Furthermore, while acknowledging the skewness, the author hoped that the deeper institutional knowledge of the full-time instructors – particularly regarding the fit of the E-AW course-in-curriculum – would balance things out.

3.7.4. Interview Rationale

Interviews are a staple data-collection method in qualitative research, primarily because they can gather authentic, rich subjective data from participants and "probe" for further information on desired topics in real-time (Gray, 2014, p. 382). Seidman (2013) noted that interviews are utilized when the intent is to better understand the experiences of in-the-know people and the meanings or reasons they attach to that experience. In investigating a given HEI, such ' insider' information is more easily qualified in a conversation than in a quantitative survey (Wisker, 2008). Indeed, Cohen et al. (2011) state that interviews serve several functions, though they are chiefly for "…gathering data on the more intangible aspects of a school's culture, for example; values, assumptions, beliefs, wishes, and problems" (p. 199). The author thus determined that semi-structured interviews would be suitable to inquire into the perspectives on internal alignment and external coherence of active instructors

regarding VJA's E-AW course-in-curriculum, and aid in exploring trends and themes revealed by the other convergent stages of this inquiry.

Regarding the flow of the semi-structured interviews, a progressive series of questions was employed to gather insights into the targeted alignment and coherence issues. This interview style "manages to address both the need for comparable responses – that is, the same questions being asked of each interviewee – and the need for the interview to be developed by the conversation between interviewer and interviewee" (Wisker, 2008, p. 195). At the same time, it is essential not to pry untowardly into areas that instructor-participants may not be prepared to discuss. There is always a risk of revealing guilty knowledge (Williams, 2009) when investigating operational realities and policies amongst colleagues at a given institution. While one might wish to dig as deep as possible, one must be careful not to rock the boat.

Due to the restrictions on research required in the Sars-Cov2 pandemic, the semi-structured interviews were conducted remotely via the free teleconferencing software Skype. Skype is a secure video-call software managed by Microsoft. It can record the call and make it available immediately to both parties, along with screen-sharing and file-sending. As the recording of interviews, and the provision of a direct copy of the interview, are noted as necessary for this kind of research (Gray, 2014), Skype's features made it the ideal candidate.

3.7.5. Qualitative Data Collection

Stage Two: Email Questionnaire

The following procedures were employed for the email questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews.

The email questionnaire was provided in three questions, one either-or and the following two specific-open questions. The first question asked participants whether they thought that the academic-writing objectives of the E-AW course were referenced

or utilized in other classes in the wider curriculum. Based on this answer, the second and third questions were separated into two response chains (Table 4):

Q1. To what extent do you think other courses and assignments in this university reference and/or utilize the academic writing skills (structure, citation, etc.) taught in this writing listening course?	
A. I think the objectives are referenced and/or utilized.	B. I think the objectives are not referenced and/or utilized.
Q2a. What do you think are some examples of how the objective academic writing skills taught in this course are utilized and/or referenced in other courses?	Q2b. What do you think are the reasons why the academic writing skills taught in this course are not utilized and/or referenced in other courses?
Q3a. In your opinion, what could be done to make the objective academic writing skills taught in this course better utilized and/or referenced in other courses?	Q3b. In your opinion, what could be done to increase the degree to which the academic writing skills taught in this course are utilized and/or referenced in other courses?

Table 4. Email Questionnaire: Stage-by-Stage Questions

All participants who completed the email questionnaire did so in Japanese, with some differences in the length of their responses. After the data was collected, it was translated by the translator.

Stage Three: Semi-Structured Interviews

The framework for the semi-structured instructors' interview was loosely sourced from the principles of appreciative inquiry. Appreciative inquiry, commonly used in large institutions with many active stakeholders, essentially seeks a balanced reflection on the participant's positive and negative perceptions of the target artefact or issue. Though admittedly constructivist as it focuses on individuals' unique experiences and meaning-making (Crotty, 1998), appreciative inquiry acknowledges the multiple perspectives that these individuals may have when viewing the same shared reality (Patton, 2015). Indeed, as Cockell & McArthur-Blair (2012) suggest, the

constructivist aspect of appreciative inquiry – a concept permitted in pragmatic MMR – allows the researcher to sift through these multiple realities and attempt to understand them through conversation, as well as permitting constructive criticism of the research target if necessary. In blending the positive-negative reflection process with the lead-in, general, specific, lead-out format of standard semi-structured interviews, the author constructed questions for the instructor-participants interview as follows (Table 5):

General Perception Questions	*Q1. What do you feel is positive about the E-AW course? How about its stated academic writing objectives?*
	Q2. To what extent do students positively engage with the E-AW course content?
	Q3. To what extent do you feel students understand the importance of the E-AW course's main objectives (academic structure, citations)?
Course (Internal) Alignment	*Q4. Considering the ILOs, ATs, TLAs and Feedback, to what extent do you feel that these are aligned in your E-AW course?*
	Q5. Considering the ILOs, ATs, TLAs and Feedback, what do you feel you might need improvement in your E-AW course?
	Q6. Generally speaking, if it were possible, what changes would you implement with the E-AW course at a syllabus level?
Curriculum (External) Coherence	*Q7. In your view, to what degree are the courses' objectives directly referred to/used in subsequent courses? Examples?*
	Q8. In your view, what factors may decrease the degree to which students perceive the connectivity between the E-AW course objectives (academic structure, citations) with courses in the wider curriculum? Examples?
	Q9. Generally speaking, if it were possible, what changes would you implement within the wider curriculum (to deal with the issues identified above)?
	Is there anything else that you would like to add or expand on?

Table 5. Semi-Structured Interview: Stage-by-Stage Questions

Though the instructor-participants were all English teachers and were thus assumed to be sufficiently fluent for the researcher to interview in English, the questions were made available bilingually. The researcher extended to all participants the choice of their preferred language. Only one requested Japanese; their audio recording was passed to the translator for transcription and translation.

3.7.6. Qualitative Data Coding & Analysis

As both qualitative stages approached the same research context, albeit from different perspectives, the author decided to codify and analyse the data using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a "theoretically flexible" method that seeks to identify patterns and themes common across the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 77). It permits the comparison of theories and concepts drawn from the current body of literature. Analysis was initially conducted in a deductive, or "top-down" fashion, with codifying couched in themes derived from the primary theoretical framework – constructive alignment (CA) and its theorized principles – and others drawn from extant socio-cultural and curriculum factors identified as salient in the target research context. This deductive theory-driven process aimed to align themes with theory to strike a more direct path toward the research questions. An inductive approach would have the researcher initially codify data without first utilizing a 'best fit' lens. However, in this research project, all stages, questions, and data collected focused on CA's extracted principles when considering E-AW in relation to the broader curriculum. Thus, the codifying method determined that answers and utterances would be analysed in line with this framework. Should identified codes and categories have been found to not match up with the primary theoretical framework, the qualitative data collected would then be investigated with a freer, inductive grounded-theory approach drawing from situational aspects identified in the research literature.

The thematic analysis process required six stages, as outlined and described by Braun & Clarke (2006), as follows:

1. Familiarization with the collected data – this commonly involves immersing oneself in the data via "repeated reading" of the text

2. Generation of initial codes – the initial organizing of the collected data

3. Searching for themes – a second-run organization where 'codes' are grouped into common 'themes' or 'categories'

4. Reviewing themes – a third-run organization where the 'themes' are checked for support and consistency, and combined or dissolved as necessary

5. Defining and naming themes – naming and highlighting the 'essence' of each identified theme

6. Producing the report – producing a description of the identified themes, while supporting them with interesting and revealing extracts and data-points

The thematic analyses conducted for the qualitative data in the subsequent chapter provided valuable insight into the participants' perspectives regarding the E-AW course's coherence with the curriculum.

3.8. Validity and Reliability

All research must take careful steps to attain as high a degree of internal integrity as possible (Cohen et al., 2011). As Creswell (2015) notes, qualitative validity is essential, a process by which the researcher confirms the "accuracy of the findings," and reliability is said to "indicate that the researcher's approach is consistent" (p. 201). The author thus has stated his positionality honestly and has reflected on the rationale – and limitations – for the steps taken during the design of this inquiry. As stated previously, the author's selection of an MMR-convergent design stemmed from the need to compare one set of data to another and expand the scope of inquiry to cover multiple nested knowledge targets viewed from multiple stakeholders' perspectives. Furthermore, the author decided to tighten the theoretical specificity of the items and

questions at all levels to draw the participants' focus onto the alignment, coherence, and 'knowledge bridging' principles of CA. While a sequential design would have qualitative data that builds directly upon quantitative data, a convergent design compares data from parallel stages (Fetters et al., 2013). In order to achieve the comparison of perspectives on the internal coherence and external coherence of the target E-AW course, the current study employed both 'matching' and 'data diffraction' approaches as divergent methods for merging quantitative and qualitative data in a network of cumulative evidence. 'Matching' involves designing data-collection instruments to elicit data about the same phenomena (Fetters et al., 2013). 'Data diffraction' permits the potential, as with all investigations into human action, that different perspectives may not always perfectly align and permits "messy objects to be messy" when considering their relation to each other (Uprichard & Dawney, 2016, p. 20). While doing so, care was taken to ensure honesty in analysis and to maximize the 'richness' of the perspectives provided (Cohen et al., 2011). However, the semi-separate nature of the knowledge targets inherent in this study (Creswell, 2015) could have rendered the participants' qualitative perspectives less unified. Thus, despite the author's efforts to emphasize and retain the theoretical focus of the inquiry, he was careful not to discard the possibility that the lens offered by CA's principles of clarity, authenticity/relevance, and bridging of knowledge in a curriculum may not cover all that arose. Rare indeed are social problems that can be understood and improved with a single tool. However, with careful consideration, the current research design enabled the author to uncover valuable insight into the perceptions of students and instructors experiencing the E-AW course-in-curriculum.

3.9. Summary

After contemplating the knowledge targets – to whit, the perspectives of active stakeholders in the E-AW course-in-curriculum on its internal alignment and external coherence – and the needs of the study based on its scope (i.e., dealing with multiple participant samples and plural knowledge targets at or about the same time-reference), the author selected a convergent MMR design comprising of a quantitative survey, a

qualitative email questionnaire, and a qualitative semi-structured interview. For the survey, a short pilot study was conducted with 40 VJA students from a similar class context. Feedback from this pilot enhanced the comprehensibility of the questions and the language used in the main study, which was completed by 397 volunteer student-participants drawn from E-AW classes not taught by the practitioner-researcher. Subsequently, eight student participants were recruited to undertake an email questionnaire inquiring into their perception of the target course's external coherence with the wider curriculum. Next, the data were used to fine-tune questions to six volunteer instructor-participants in the third stage, a semi-structured interview. After completing the interview, thematic analyses were conducted with a deductive 'best-fit' theoretical lens to glean codes and themes that matched with the primary CA-principles framework, which provided valuable insight into the perceived coherence of the target course-in-curriculum. The findings from the data analysis were then explored in relation to extant theory in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter 4: Findings from Stage 1 – Perspectives on Internal Alignment

In this chapter, the findings from the Stage 1 quantitative survey are presented, analysed, and discussed. The data from this stage, drawn primarily from the survey's CALEQ section in addition to the first open-ended question, sought the participants' perspectives on (i) the primary Intended Learning Objective (ILO) of the E-AW course, as well as (ii) the degree to which this ILO was aligned with Assessment Tasks (ATs), Teaching-Learning Activities (TLAs), and formative Feedback throughout said course. Thus, the analyses presented in this chapter were concerned with RQ1; "*How do enrolled students view the degree of constructive alignment in the E-AW course?*".

4.1. Internal Reliability of the Quantitative Data: Exploratory Factor Analysis

Reliability

As reported in the previous chapter, the individual CALEQ scales were tested using Cronbach's Alpha and returned the following results (Table 2). According to the Cronbach Alpha tests, all four scales – ILOS, ATs, TLAs, and Feedback – had good-to-excellent internal reliability. The ILOs and TLAs reported high in the "good" range at 0.880 and 0.899, respectively. It was thus judged that further factor analysis was possible. The author conducted a factor analysis to determine (i) the degree to which the results are correlated, (ii) the factors which can be held to be operating on the results, as well as the secondary aim of determining (iii) whether the CALEQ measure itself could be considered valid for use in measuring student experiences of aligned teaching and learning in a Japanese university context. Regarding this secondary aim, as the author had been unable to find reports on its use in Japanese universities – nor, indeed, in the Japanese language – the author judged that as thorough an analysis as possible would not only ensure the reliability of the data for the current study but would also aid future inquiries in Japanese HEI contexts using the CALEQ. Fitzallen & Brown's (2017) analysis demonstrated that the CALEQ instrument had a high degree of internal reliability, a good measure of correlation, and two primary factors that could be discerned within the data. The current study thus used these findings as a basepoint.

Factorability

The author first examined the factorability of the 20 CALEQ items using several well-recognized criteria. Firstly, it was observed that 16 of the 18 items correlated at least .4 with at least one other item, suggesting reasonable factorability. Secondly, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .951, above the commonly recommended value of .6, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi2$ (6839.740) = 190.00, p < .001). Finally, the commonalities were all above .4 (Table 6), further confirming that each of the remaining items shared some common variance with other items. Given these indicators, factor analysis was deemed suitable for all 20 items.

Factor Loadings

	Factor 1 – "Core Course Components"	Factor 2 – "Feedback"	Uniqueness
ILO1	0.714		0.497
ILO2	0.737		0.377
ILO3	0.707		0.461
ILO4	0.729		0.450
ILO5	0.673		0.429
TLA1	0.868		0.310
TLA2	0.957		0.230
TLA3	0.930		0.269
TLA4	0.729		0.328
TLA5	0.773		0.364
AT1	0.692		0.348
AT2	0.689		0.362
AT3	0.599		0.403
AT4		0.426	0.429
AT5		0.532	0.410
F1		0.833	0.381
F2		0.857	0.242
F3		0.796	0.291
F4		0.820	0.352
F5		0.783	0.334

Note. Applied rotation method is oblimin.

Table 6. Factor loadings and uniqueness based on EFA with Oblimin Rotation

An EFA was conducted instead of a CFA as the primary purpose was to ascertain what factors could underpin the results present in the CALEQ. Scree-plotting and eigenvalue analysis identified two primary factors, accounting for 41% and 22% of the variance. A 4-stream manual adjustment of the factor-loadings based on each of the categories – ILOs, TLAs, ATs, and Feedback – resulted in multiple cross-loadings. Thus, the two-factor solution, which explained 63% of the variance, was preferable due to (ii) the 'levelling off' of eigenvalues on the scree plot after two factors, (ii) the insufficient number of primary loadings and the difficulty of interpreting the factors present in a forced four-factor solution, and (iii) the fact that it matched Fitzallen & Brown's (2017) solution.

While examining the correlation of the results, at more refined levels of reliability – a primary loading factor of 0.3 – cross-loadings existed in a two-factor solution with AT4 and AT5 aligning with both Factor 1 and Factor 2. At this 0.3 loading-factor level, these items did not contribute to a simple factor structure, as they failed to meet the minimum criteria of no cross-loading of .3 or above. These items, AT4 ("The grade responses that I received indicated fairly well how I had achieved what I was supposed to learn") and AT5 ("I received useful feedback on how well I had achieved what I was supposed to learn") had factor loadings between .3 and .4 on both Factor 1 and Factor 2. Therefore, the author decided to run the factor analysis at a .4 threshold and thus retain AT4 and AT5. This was mainly as while at the .4 threshold these items did not evidence cross-loading between the factors, but also that (upon reflection) the wording of AT4 and AT5 appeared to bridge the gap between assessment tasks and feedback and could thus potentially have been pertinent to further analysis.

The naming of Factor 1 and Factor 2 – given that Factor 1 covers almost all of the ILO, TLA, and AT items, with Factor 2 relating strongly to items concerning Feedback – suggested the somewhat unoriginal labels of "Core Course Components" and "Feedback" respectively. Internal consistency for each of these scales was examined using Cronbach's alpha. The alphas were high: .955 for Core Course Components (13 items) and .923 for Feedback (7 items).

Overall, these analyses demonstrate that two distinct factors – tentatively named "Core Course Components" and "Feedback" – underlay the perception of enrolled students on the degree of constructive alignment in the E-AW course between ILOs, TLAs, ATs, and Feedback. These positive-negative perceptions were determined through descriptive statistics.

4.2. Stage One: Students' Quantitative Survey

In the first stage of the research, the quantitative survey saw 397 student-participants consider the internal alignment of the E-AW course's structural aspects (i.e., the standalone 'fitness'). The survey consisted of the following sections: (i) an open-ended question asking participants what they viewed as the main thing they learned from the E-AW, (ii) the CALEQ, developed by Fitzallen & Brown (2017), consisting of 20 5-point *Likert*-scale questions focusing on the participants' perspectives on the ILOs, ATs, TLAs, and Feedback, and (iii) a final open-ended section eliciting reflective comments on the course. First, responses to the open questions were analysed for common themes in the student participants' determination of the E-AW's primary ILO. Second, as the EFA (conducted above) demonstrated the CALEQ results to have a high degree of internal reliability, the data – focused on the participants' conception of the "Core Course Components" (i.e., the ILOs, ATs, and TLAs) and "Feedback" – was analysed through standard descriptive statistics to develop the data into theory-linked findings regarding the student participants' perception of the degree of alignment present within the target course.

4.2.1. Open-Ended Questions – Perceptions of the course's educational objective

The survey started with an open-ended question to elicit what the participants felt was the E-AW course's primary objective (i.e., ILO). Responses were coded in a semantic, descriptive fashion, demonstrating a series of similar, yet subtly different, perceptions of what students thought they had learned. The second open-ended question – which provided a space for participants to write comments regarding the

course – was answered by less than 25% of the sample and excluded from an in-depth analysis.

The first open-ended question was written as follows:

> *In your own words, what was the main thing that you believe you learned in this course?*

Out of the total sample of participants (n = 397), 310 answered this question with codable responses (some of which mentioned multiple learnings), resulting in 474 identified codes. The 87 students either opted not to respond or replied with short statements or single-word variations of "*kakikata* (writing)" or "*essei* (essay)." The viable responses are displayed in Table 7:

Code	Total (n = 474)	Percentage
Structure/Organisation	160	34%
Citing Sources of Information	98	21%
Logical/Deductive Writing	73	15%
"Correct Writing"/Rules	73	15%
"English" Writing	48	10%
Academic Phrases	16	5%
Outlining	6	1%

Table 7. Codes Categorised from Open-Question 1

Responses (translated) generally could be categorized into seven discernible codes; these were (i) Structure/Organisation, (ii) Citing Sources of Information, (iii) Logical/Deductive Writing, (iv) "English" Writing, (v) "Correct Writing"/Rules, (vi) Academic Phrases, and (vii) Outlining. The author discarded the lowest two codes (i.e., Academic Phrases and Outlining) as they made up only 5% of the total. The top five codes, accounting for 96% of responses, revealed that while most of the participants

correctly identified the basic academic conventions – i.e., a deductive, logical structure and the inclusion of citations – as expressed as the E-AW course's ILO in its syllabus (Appendix 3), a notable percentage assumed that these 'rules' were expressly for 'English writing,' not for academic writing in general. Selected examples illustrating these responses are provided and demonstrate notable differences in the depth of learning approach and understanding of the E-AW course's perceived ILOs.

Evidence of Deeper Learning Approaches

The most mentioned aspect of the course that participants identified as the main thing they learned was Structure/Organisation (n = 160, 34%). Responses mentioning this commonly discussed "structure," as well as pointing out named parts of the essay:

I learned the function of each part of each paragraph of academic essays.

(I learned) how to configure each paragraph of IP, BP, CP (Introduction, Body, and Conclusion Paragraphs), and how to write citations.

Perhaps central to the reason behind Structure/Organisation being the most mentioned learning through the E-AW could be, as identified in the literature, the lack of said structure in writing in most students' prior learning (Jarrell, 1998). Similarly, the same could be said about Citing Sources of Information (n = 98, 21%). Responses mentioning this as the primary learning often stated so directly, suggesting a somewhat performative perspective on the practice, though some evidenced understanding of the purpose behind correct academic citation:

Methods for writing ITCs (in-text citations) and PTCs (post-text citations).

The basis of how to write a passage correctly to avoid plagiarism.

I learned to use citations correctly, focusing on objectivity and not just my opinion.

By being aware of not relying on phrases like "I think," I acquired the ability to write more logical passages based on evidence.

As noted in the literature, Citations are not only a new functional aspect for new first-year students in Japanese universities (Fujieda, 2012; Teeter, 2015) but also represent a fundamental change in the concepts of what is needed for 'academic writing.' This conceptual difference was mentioned by a substantial number of students (n = 73, 15%), who reported that a "Logical/Deductive Writing" style was their most notable learning from the E-AW course. Though similar, the notable difference between the "Logical/Deductive Writing" code and the "Structure/Organisation" code was that responses frequently reflected the structure and the meaning behind this structure. In addition, participants often contrasted "Logical/Deductive Writing" to the prior learning through junior and senior high schools, where they predominantly wrote *kansoubun* (impressionistic essays) and were thus being taught how to write deductively, or logically, for the first time:

I have become able to make objective passages instead of the impressionistic passages as taught in high school.

Until now, I had learned the structure of critiques in modern passages, but at most I learned the "introduction, main theory, and conclusions," so I learned the general structure of academic passages carefully and from the perspective of the writer, I had never been taught their detailed structure. Although I somehow knew the role of each paragraph, I learned for the first time in this class the connections between different sentences or paragraphs and the logical structure they form as a whole. Overall, I learned how to write consistent and logical sentences simply and smoothly.

I was able to learn not only the role of each paragraph but also the role of sentences in the paragraph. I came to understand that by including words and phrases that indicate logical relationships, the sentences would be easier to convey to the reader.

These first three perceived primary learnings, accounting for roughly 70% of the total responses, demonstrate a positive understanding of the E-AW course's stated ILOs. Further, they imply a relatively good degree of deeper learning approaches to the course objectives and content via their linking of concepts to existing knowledge.

Evidence of Surface Learning Approaches

On the somewhat less-positive end, a sizeable number of the participants referred to the 'correctness' of the writing style that they were taught in the E-AW course, thus potentially assuming that they were learning "Correct Writing" or "Rules" (n = 73, 15%). However, such responses were notably briefer when compared to other codes, with the following serving as examples:

How to write an essay correctly.

Learning the rules for writing academic texts.

Ability to write academic essays according to many rules.

Rules for writing essays.

This code, though potentially favourable in that it demonstrates an understanding that academic writing has 'rules' and 'correct conventions,' may also represent a rather surface-level and teacher-centred approach to the course. Students were primarily focused on following the 'rules' as set out and 'imposed' by the teacher, and little consideration was shown to what was signified by the taught academic writing skillset (Atherton, 2013).

Evidence of EMI Interference

Another main code was "English-Essay" (n = 48, 10%). Here, participants responded that their primary learning was the writing of an "English" academic essay, which, when examined from the perspective of the respondents' L1, suggests that the language of the essay takes the primary descriptive (adjectival) position. In other words,

these respondents likely believed that the characteristics of the essay learned in the course are mainly "English," and thus are (i) not universal 'academic' writing characteristics, and (ii) not necessarily transferable to – or indeed are specifically distinct from – "Japanese" academic writing products:

I learned how to write an English essay.

How to write formal passages in English.

How to compose passages written in English.

I learned about the composition of English passages.

Such a misconception as to the ILOs of the E-AW course is not entirely surprising, for the course itself is named "English: Academic Writing." In the same way that most people may just read the headlines of news articles or posts without engaging with the content itself, it is certainly understandable that students who are not focused on the deeper signifiers of what is being taught would mistake the features of basic academic writing – i.e., deductive logical structure and citations – as being "English" in nature (for, after all, the course is thusly named). Furthermore, the lack of prior instruction in writing genres of any sort (Hirose & Sasaki, 1994; Hirose, 2005) could indeed contribute to confusion and misattribution when students experience genre-focused (i.e., academic) writing instruction, for the first time, in a language not only foreign to them but one that had hitherto been the preserve of exams and grammar-translation exercises (Berwick & Ross, 1989; McVeigh, 2002; Clark, 2005). As would be the case in the E-AW course's EMI delivery, the required use of a foreign language to complete a new productive task could understandably cause confusion.

The author considered the codes identified from the responses to the open-ended question alongside the CALEQ responses, discussed in the following section, and theorized the primary findings and themes from the stage one survey holistically to answer RQ1.

4.2.2. Descriptive Statistics

Standard descriptive statistical analyses – consisting of minimum, maximum, mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis – were conducted on the results from the CALEQ section of the survey (Table 8):

	Min	Max	M	SD	Sk.	Ku.
Intended Learning Objectives (ILOs)						
Q1-ILO1: I had a clear idea of what I was supposed to learn.	1	5	4.26	0.79	-1.26	2.52
Q2-ILO2: I was given a clear idea of what I needed to be able to do with the topics learnt.	1	5	4.33	0.79	-1.26	1.92
Q3-ILO3: I was never in doubt about what I was supposed to be learning in this course.	1	5	4.21	0.83	-1.04	1.14
Q4-ILO4: The syllabus/materials through the course clearly outlined what I was to learn.	1	5	4.31	0.83	-1.07	0.72
Q5-ILO5: I was constantly reminded of what I was supposed to learn during the course.	1	5	4.25	0.84	-1.04	0.93
Teaching-Learning Activities (TLAs)						
Q6-TLA1: The teaching and learning activities addressed what I was supposed to learn.	1	5	4.41	0.76	-1.45	2.74
Q7-TLA2: The teaching and learning activities helped me learn what I was supposed to learn.	1	5	4.45	0.79	-1.58	2.82
Q8-TLA3: I was provided the opportunities to actively participate in what I was supposed to learn.	1	5	4.47	0.76	-1.61	3.02
Q9-TLA4: I was provided a variety of activities that dealt with what I was supposed to learn.	1	5	4.36	0.83	-1.38	2.13
Q10-TLA5: I was given clear and specific instructions as to what to do in learning what I was supposed to learn.	1	5	4.34	0.83	-1.41	2.22
Assessment Tasks (ATs)						
Q11-AT1: The assessment tasks addressed what I was supposed to learn.	1	5	4.44	0.74	-1.63	3.86
Q12-AT2: It was explained clearly to me how the assessment tasks were related to what I was supposed to learn.	1	5	4.25	0.82	-1.06	1.29
Q13-AT3: The assessment tasks provided opportunities for me to demonstrate how well I had achieved what I was supposed to learn.	1	5	4.29	0.86	-1.29	1.73
Q14-AT4: The grade-responses that I received indicated fairly well how I had achieved what I was supposed to learn.	1	5	4.25	0.86	-1.13	1.23
Q15-AT5: I received useful feedback on how well I had achieved what I was supposed to learn.	1	5	4.22	0.89	-1.02	0.66

Feedback						
Q16-F1: I received feedback that related directly to the assessment criteria.	1	5	4.17	0.97	-1.09	0.71
Q17-F2: I received feedback that was clear and specific to what I was supposed to learn.	1	5	4.20	0.87	-0.98	0.79
Q18-F3: I received feedback that helped me prepare for the next assessment task.	1	5	4.25	0.85	-1.11	1.24
Q19-F4: I could take action to improve my own learning based on the feedback provided.	1	5	4.16	0.79	-0.89	1.10
Q20-F5: I was able to make informed judgments about my own work from the feedback provided.	1	5	4.18	0.79	-0.89	1.10

Table 8. Descriptive Statistics of CALEQ Item Responses

This descriptive statistical analysis grants insight into the nature of the data set (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The skew and kurtosis of individual items were examined, and most of the items were found, on balance, to be outside of the ±1 nominally acceptable range. This is not commonly considered problematic in social research; indeed, the level of kurtosis shown in the items suggests, along with the low levels of standard deviation and high mean-averages, a tightly grouped range of data with positively aligned responses with few outlying tails. Additionally, it should be noted that as ordinal data gained from this section – i.e., 5-point *Likert*-scale items ranging from "1 – Strongly Disagree" to "5 – Strongly Agree" – the conceptual intervals between the points on the scale are not precisely defined. Therefore, as is commonly the case with *Likert*-scale surveys, the author determined that analysis focused on the grouped results at each end of the spectrum – in this case, 1 and 2 for the negative end, and 4 and 5 for the positive end – would prove sufficient to demonstrate the overall trends. Horizontal bar charts were deemed suitable to display this broad breakdown of results from the ILO (Figure 5), TLAs (Figure 6), ATs (Figure 7), and Feedback (Figure 8) items, respectively.
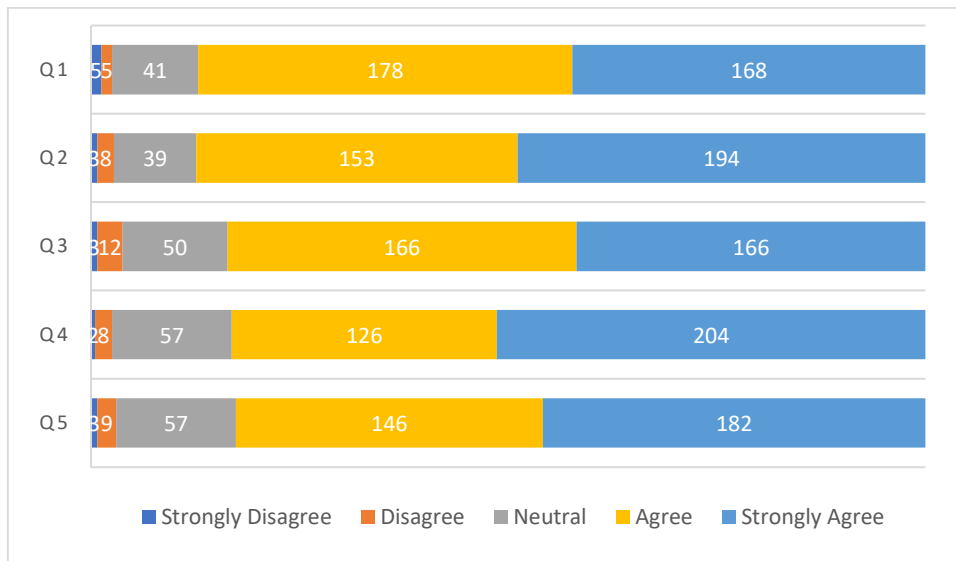
Figure 5. Results from the ILOs Section of the CALEQ

Results for the ILOs section suggest a high degree of perceived satisfaction with the alignment of the E-AW course's stated objectives. With a combined average of 4.27 (s = 0.81), a large majority of the participants responded with either "Agree" or "Strongly Agree." Notably, the question with the most combined positive responses (n = 349) was Q2: "I was given a clear idea of what I needed to be able to do with the topics learned." Similarly, the question with the most "Strongly Agree" responses was Q4: "The documents through the course clearly outlined what I was supposed to learn." Thus, while all of the items in the ILO section focus on how the purpose of the course of study is instantiated, the responses to these questions suggest that students were clearly informed of the productive objectives of the course through its materials and content. On the other hand, the question with the most negative responses – albeit relatively small at (n = 14) – was Q5: "I was constantly reminded of what I was supposed to learn during the course." Though the number of negative responses is a relatively small part of the sample, this could suggest that more focus needs to be put on how certain parts of the course link up to the overall objectives.
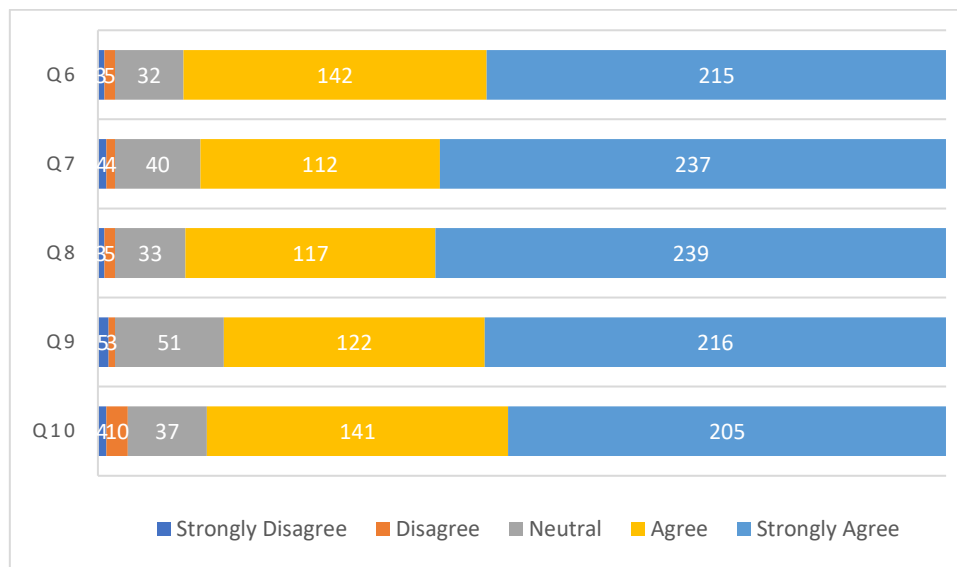
Figure 6. Results from the TLAs Section of the CALEQ

Results for questions looking into the alignment of TLAs in the E-AW course also display a positive perception by the enrolled students. The average score for the TLAs was 4.40 (s = 0.79), with roughly 88% of all respondents replying "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" to questions Q6 through Q10. Though all the questions had a similar proportion of positive responses, Q6 had the most combined positive responses (n = 357): "The teaching and learning activities addressed what I was supposed to learn." Similarly, the question with the most "Strongly Agree" responses was Q8: "I was provided the opportunities to actively participate in what I was supposed to learn." Thus, though all of the items in the TLA section focus on the activities and resources through which the course's ILOs are to be learned, these two questions, in particular, leaned the most positive intimates that the TLAs were sufficiently on point. However, the most negative set of responses at (n = 14) was Q10: "I was given clear and specific instructions as to what to do in learning what I was supposed to learn." As the instructions as to i) what to do with a learning activity, and ii) what the learning activity is specifically meant to address are vital in understanding the authenticity and relevance of the activity (Biggs & Tang, 2011) and thus influence the motivation to engage with it (Dörnyei, 2000), while the vast majority of the responses to this question were positive it would appear that this aspect of the TLAs could use more clarity in future course revisions.
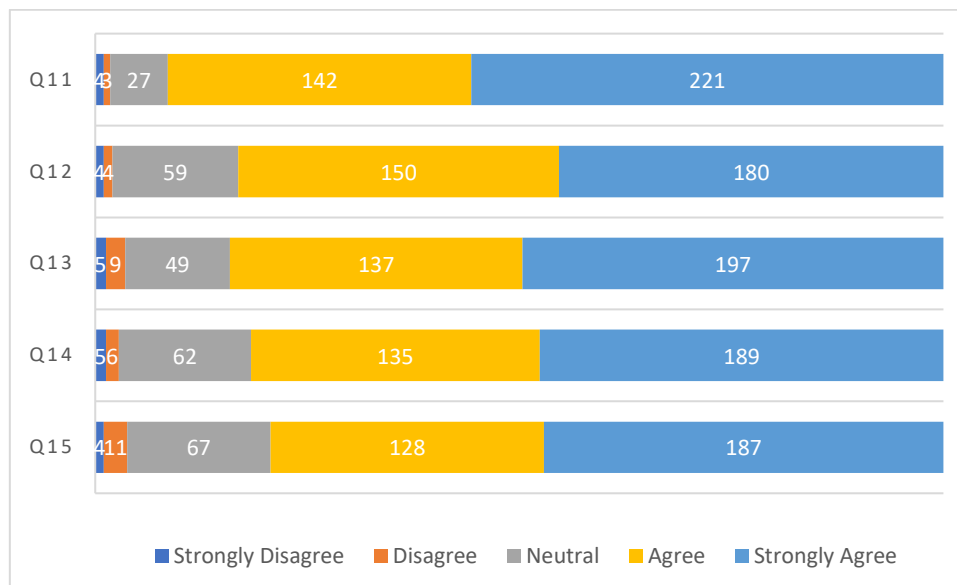
Figure 7. Results from the ATs Section of the CALEQ

Similarly, the ATs section reveals a largely positive set of responses. With a combined average of 4.29 (s = 0.84), a large majority of the participants responded with either "Agree" or "Strongly Agree." However, there was a notably higher degree of "Neutral" responses compared to the ILOs and TLAs sections. The question with the most combined positive responses (n = 349), as well as the highest number of participants who "Strongly Agree," was Q11: "The assessment tasks addressed what I was supposed to learn." This is a crucial point in CA's internal alignment principles. As students inevitably focus on the assessment (Ramsden, 2003), which provides the all-important grade, that the ATs align with the ILOs is extremely important (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Conversely, though still strongly positive, Q15 returned the highest number of "Neutral" (n= 67) and combined negative (n= 15): "I received useful feedback on how well I had achieved what I was supposed to learn." As this question inquires directly into the degree of formative feedback provided, it would appear that fewer enrolled students considered the Feedback sufficient when considered alongside the alignment of the ILOs, ATs, and TLAs.
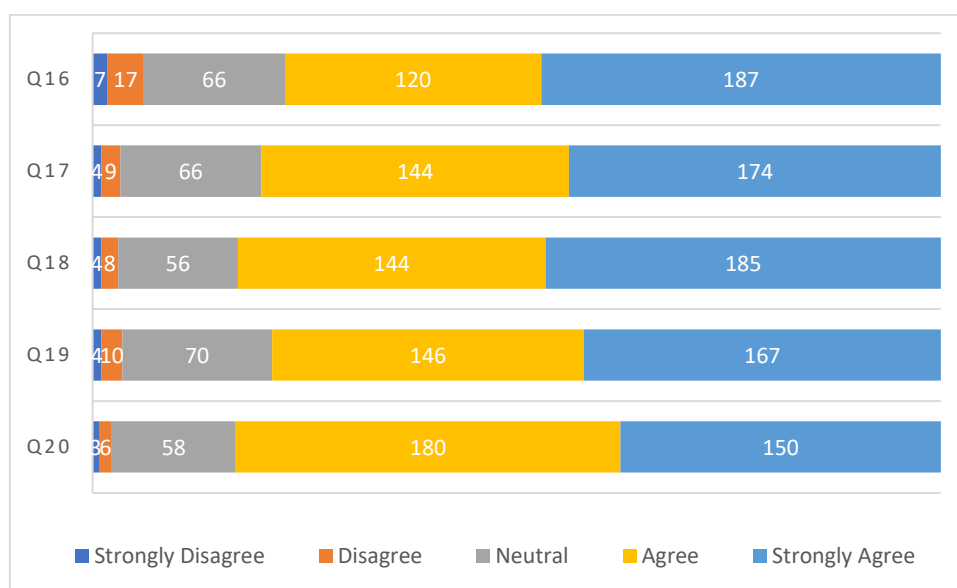
Figure 8. Results from the Feedback Section of the CALEQ

This slightly less-positive series of responses carried over to Q16-Q20 in the Feedback section. The combined average for the Feedback items was 4.19 (s = 0.87), with roughly 80% of all respondents replying "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" to questions Q16 through Q20. Q20 had the most combined positive responses (n = 330): "I was able to make informed judgments about my own work from the feedback provided." This suggests that the feedback provided was still perceived positively, though less so than the ILOs, TLAs, and ATs. Conversely, the most negative set of responses at (n = 24) – and, cumulatively, the lowest number of combined positive responses (n = 307) was found in Q16: "I received feedback that related directly to the assessment criteria." As noted in prior sections and chapters, to students, "the assessment criteria *is* the curriculum" (Biggs, 2003, p. 3). Thus, it is likely that if students received feedback that they view as insufficiently linked to their grades, they might perceive that feedback less positively.

As the descriptive level of statistical analysis demonstrated, the vast majority of the student-participants perceived the alignment of the E-AW course's core aspects positively. However, notable proportional differences, though still majority-positive, can be seen in response to the Feedback items and the feedback-related questions in the ATs items. The factor-loading of AT4 and AT5 onto the "Feedback" factor, as identified

in the previous section's EFA, supports the solid conceptual emphasis that student-participants place on their grades. This suggested that while generally viewed positively by students who undertook the E-AW course, further inquiry should focus on determining why students felt that the feedback they received was not viewed as positively aligned compared to the other course aspects.

4.3. Themes and Findings

Following the initial analyses, the author endeavoured to theorize the data collected from the open-ended and CALEQ questions into meaning-linked findings with bearing on the CA-principles, which served as the framework for this course-in-curriculum design analysis. As stated previously, as a theory-based and system-orientated course design framework CA works to provide (i) clear and constructive alignment of the core components (i.e., ILOs, ATs, TLAs, and Feedback) of a given course of study, aiming to teach (ii) authentic and relevant knowledge to university-level learners (e.g., the basic academic writing conventions of structure and citations), aims to do so through, which further (iii) strives to coherently 'bridge' the knowledge taught from the immediate classroom into the wider world. The rationale behind these considerations are based on a constructive theory of learning, supported closely by value-expectancy theory and the consideration of how this influences motivation to engage in either deeper or more surface-level learning approaches. As the inquiry into student perceptions of the internal alignment (or standalone 'fitness') of the E-AW course is primarily concerned with themes centred on the nature and clarity of the knowledge taught, the author focused on a thematic discussion of how these two CA principles relate to theory (so-what) and what implications could be extracted for the improvement of practice (now-what).

4.3.1. Clarity of Knowledge – Sufficiently Aligned, With Room for Potential Improvement

As dealt with in the literature review, the functional aspects of CA with regards to a single course of study include (i) the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) of said course, (ii) the Assessment Tasks (ATs) which determine the extent to which the ILOs

have been attained, (iii) the Teaching Learning Activities (TLAs) which help enrolled students to attain the skills and knowledge specified in the ILOs, as well as iv) formative Feedback designed to guide students towards this attainment. The degree to which these are positively aligned in the target educational context is held to aid in creating stable systems for learning, as the alignment of these core course components provides a clear, student-centred, criteria-referenced, and constructive learning opportunity (Biggs & Tang, 2011). According to the data from the quantitative survey, participants representing 397 of a roughly 2600-student enrolment rated the ILOs, TLAs, ATs, and the binding Feedback that they experienced in the E-AW course as broadly positive, which suggests the following theoretical points.

ILOs

The ILOs of a given educational course of study are the ultimate aim of said course (Tyler, 2013; Dewey, 1972). In considering and selecting ILOs, it is incumbent upon the educator to choose (i) attainable and (ii) relevant goals for the course of study, and to (iii) express these goals clearly and consistently. CA's system design helps learners attain the course goals by aligning the course aspects, focusing on "functional," procedural knowledge, and achieving clarity via consistency between said aspects throughout the course (Biggs & Tang, 2011). From a learner's perspective, the clarity of the ILOs – in conjunction with their alignment with the grade-bearing assessments – allows them to visualize their own learning and see a path forward with achievable steps to the attainment of both skills and grades (Biggs, 2003). Responses to the CALEQ suggest that the majority of enrolled learners (i) correctly understood the objectives of the E-AW course as being the much-needed (McKinley, 2013) deductive logical structure and organization of ideas supported by cited evidence, and (ii) that these objectives were sufficiently clear in their explanation by the E-AW instructors. The CALEQ demonstrates a high combined average of 4.27 for the clarity of ILOs category, with a high degree of internal consistency at 0.88 Cronbach Alpha. Of particular note were questions ILO2 – "I was given a clear idea of what I needed to be able to do with the topics learned" – and ILO4 – "The course documents clearly outlined what I was

supposed to learn" rated above this average at 4.32 and 4.31 respectively. Thus, the current research suggests that the current degree of internal alignment is suitable for creating and conveying the E-AW's learning outcomes to enrolled learners.

ATs

The ATs themselves must be aligned forwards, in that they reliably assess the ILOs of the course, and backwards, faithfully testing skills and knowledge taught in the TLAs. In and of itself, that the assessments of a course of education must necessarily achieve this is by no means an invention of Biggs & Tang's (2011) CA system, though it is noted that it is not a driving focus in all forms of education theory. Schiro (2013) notes that while educators who focus on criteria-referenced competency measurement consider assessment creation a part of systematic curriculum design, others – such as those with norm-, group-, or ideology-based notions of assessment – do not necessarily do so. CA incorporates this concept into its framing of ATs by specifying criteria-based assessment via rubrics open to the view of enrolled learners. Biggs & Tang (2011) posit that "the underlying principle is that the assessment tasks should comprise an authentic representation of the course intended learning outcomes" (p. 191) in order to align the assessment to the students' perspective as the core aspect of the course. This, in turn, echoes the summative view of Johnstone et al. (1998), who state "if there is a disjunction between the expressed learning objectives and the chosen form of assessment, students will tend to adopt learning strategies that help them complete the assessment, rather than seeking to achieve the expressed objectives" (p. 41). Biggs & Tang (2011), citing Ramsden (2003), specifically references this centrality of the ATs within a CA-framing of educational courses, stating that "from our students' point of view, assessment always defines the actual curriculum" (p. 197). This holds from multiple angles: Atherton (2013), suggests that the 'surface' approach's baseline is routed in a "fear of failure" and the need to "get good marks". Furthermore, the effect that alignment between ILOs and ATs has on student motivation and learning as a positive form of 'backwash', in that "in preparing for the assessments, students will be learning the intended outcomes" (Biggs & Tang, 2011, p. 198). Notably, if the ILOs and ATs are sufficiently aligned, the same also

holds in reverse; students who focus on the expressed objectives of the course will be, in turn, preparing for the assessment.

TLAs

The findings from the CALEQ battery suggest that students enrolled in the E-AW course perceive the assessment tasks they experienced as being sufficiently aligned. The combined average for the ATs section was high, at 4.29, with a Cronbach Alpha result of 0.89 implying a good degree of internal reliability. Of particular note were questions AT1 – "The assessment tasks addressed what I was supposed to learn" – and AT3 – "The assessment tasks provided opportunities for me to demonstrate how well I had achieved what I was supposed to learn" rated above this average at 4.44 and 4.28 respectively. While the aggregate responses for all AT question items were high, these two, in particular, returned very positive results, suggesting that the ATs deployed by the E-AW course instructors are clear and authentically-oriented per CA's principles. Conversely, the lowest-ranked AT question item was AT5 – "I received useful feedback on how well I had achieved what I was supposed to learn" – at 4.21. This somewhat lower rating, though still positive, demonstrates links to the slightly lower ratings that the Feedback question items received and is discussed in further detail later. Therefore, data implies that E-AW's ATs are sufficiently well aligned as the grade-bearing embodiment of the ILOs and the culminating task of the TLAs.

A more variable aspect of a course compared to the ILOs and ATs, the TLAs are commonly crafted following the determination of the ATs. It is often suggested to create TLAs as mini-assessments themselves; Biggs & Tang (2011) propose that doing so will help achieve a higher degree of alignment. Another principle to consider is that TLAs emphasize the active participation – the *doing*, so to speak (Shuell, 1986) – of learners in their learning, as Ramsden (2003) echoes; indeed, broad-based research suggests that most learners learn more of what they do, or teach and talk over with someone else, as opposed to merely what they passively receive (Long, 2016). Literature on this need for active participation in learning draws from various educational theories, including the

core 'constructivist' and 'humanist' approaches (Merriam et al., 2007). Biggs & Tang (2011) emphasize active learning in their CA frame which grants students chances to (i) elaborate and talk through known content, (ii) derive standards with which to judge if interpretations are better or worse, (iii) reflect on and revise said content, and (iv) apply known theory to practice with the support of their peers so long as the TLA are both active and well-aligned. The findings from the CALEQ suggest that the students perceived the experienced TLAs as being positive in these regards. The combined average for the TLAs section, at 4.40, was highly positive, with a Cronbach Alpha result of 0.92 revealing an excellent degree of internal reliability. Of note were questions TLA3 – "I was provided the opportunities to actively participate in what I was supposed to learn" – and TLA2 – "The teaching and learning activities helped me learn what I was supposed to learn" rated above this average at 4.47 and 4.44 respectively. The remaining TLA item questions ranged between 4.41 and 4.36 in cumulative average, reflecting the second-highest cumulative rating out of the ILO-AT-TLA-Feedback aspects. The positive responses suggest that the current range of TLAs in the various E-AW course-instances experienced by the student-participants survey can be viewed as sufficiently aligned.

Feedback

The combined average for the Feedback section was slightly lower than the ILOs, ATs, and TLAs sections, though it remained positive at 4.19, with a Cronbach Alpha result of 0.91 suggesting good internal reliability. Of note were questions F3 – "I received feedback that helped me prepare for the next assessment task" – and F2 – "I received feedback that was clear and specific to what I was supposed to learn" rated at or above this average at 4.25 and 4.19, respectively. These two items returned more positive results than other Feedback question-items, which suggests that the Feedback utilized by the E-AW course's instructors was sufficiently aligned towards the ILOs and ATs. Conversely, the lowest-ranked question-item was F4 – "I could take action to improve my own learning based on the feedback provided" – at 4.16. This somewhat lower rating,

though still positive, perhaps demonstrated an unfamiliarity with formative assessment/feedback as commonly used in CA.

Feedback is an essential aspect of teaching and CA. Biggs & Tang (2011) identify "formative feedback" as one aspect required for good learning contexts, stating that while "it is a pity the word 'assessment' is used" in the more field-general form of the term, formative assessment/feedback is commonly provided "during learning, telling students how well they are doing and what might need improving" (p. 64). Dunn et al. (2004) expand on the differences between formative and summative assessment, pointing out that if there exists a subsequent "opportunity for students to improve their performance on the same task, then the assessment is essentially formative" and therefore operates as feedback by enabling "students to obtain sufficient information to identify their own strengths and weaknesses in terms of current knowledge and skills" (p. 18). Indeed, awareness-raising concerning current gaps in students' knowledge vis-à-vis expressed learning aims is highlighted as a key part of educational opportunities (Boston, 2002). However, though conducting incremental improvements from feedback on the same task – such as the multiple drafts of an academic essay – is considered an integral part of good teaching in CA-based systems, such a process is rare in Japanese education. Both Matsumura (2017) and Ohmori (2010) highlight the low level of task-based learning and associated educational practices commonly found in Japan's schools and universities, and Wicking (2020) echoes the point that formative assessment is, in general, uncommon. So too, as we have seen, is the process-based creation of organized writing products and its attendant instruction prior to and while enrolled in Japanese universities (Hirose & Sasaki, 1994; Jarrell, 1998; Hirose, 2005; McKinley, 2013). Furthermore, the concept of letting a teacher see your work before it is finished is, according to a series of studies summarised by Bacquet (2020), culturally unfamiliar, and has been suggested as being somewhat problematic in the Confucian teacher-centred education system to which most Japanese students are accustomed. Indeed, this unfamiliarity with the concept of formative feedback and the incremental nature of

assignments may well explain the slightly less-positive responses of the student participants to the Feedback question-items in the CALEQ.

In summation, clear construction of activities sufficiently aligned to authentic, useful learning objectives is recommended based on the results of both broad (Kuhn & Rundle-Thiele, 2009) and narrowly-focused (Tepper, 2010) research, with many course-level inquiries pointing to higher engagement and use of deeper learning approaches in constructively aligned courses (Wang et al., 2013). Roßnagel et al. (2020), echoing similar findings in learners' perceptions of the CA of a course of study, suggest that "good course design alone – in terms of constructive alignment – may boost student motivation" to engage with the learning opportunities presented to them (p. 10). In cases where it does not, sufficient alignment of an operational learning system should lessen the irrelevance experienced by students enrolled within it (Bridgstock, 2011). As frequently pointed out, if an aspect of a learning opportunity – such as a lecture, an activity, or an assignment – does not connect to their grade for the course, likely, students will swiftly discount it as valuable to them (Ramsden, 2003; Coates, 2005). As regards student perception of value of the overall objective – pertaining to the course internally, at least – a notable theme from the data permits discussion of the authenticity and relevance of the target knowledge.

4.3.2. Authenticity/Relevance of Knowledge – Authentic, With Some Misconceptions

The open-ended question data would imply that the participants have a relatively good conceptual grasp of the intended basic academic writing skillset. The data suggest that the core aspects of this skillset, structure and citation conventions, are understood to be the primary objective by over two-thirds of the respondents (70%) when combined, though only a sub-section of these responses (15%) dug down to a deeper recognition of the implied features and uses of said skillset by considering it outside of the immediate context. Deeper learning approaches tend to be evidenced by students who actually intend to learn and use the target knowledge and skills (Marton & Pang, 2006), focusing on what is signified, reflecting on how this new knowledge fits

in with their current knowledge (Schunk, 2012) in a functional worldview. CA's framework, carefully linking authentic/relevant ILOs to representative ATs and constructive TLAs, is aligned precisely to *permit* deeper approaches to the knowledge and skills being presented, and though research does suggest that CA is successful in this it certainly cannot *guarantee* that all enrolled students approach a given opportunity in the same fashion. Indeed, though staying focused on the procedurally equitable design of the learning system, one should remember that there are more factors (than just said design) at play in influencing students' levels of learning approach, motivation, or perception of the knowledge being taught. As pointed out by Biggs & Tang (2011):

> "Students do have predilections or preferences for this or for that approach, but those predilections may or may not be realized in practice depending on the teaching context. We are dealing with an interaction between personal and contextual factors, not unlike the interaction between heredity and environment" (p. 28).

Thus, one should keep in mind the fact that 'new' knowledge – such as writing instruction about an unfamiliar genre (taught in an unfamiliar language) – will, regardless of its clarity of knowledge, instruction, or its at-the-time purported utility, interact both with a student's 'prior' and 'current' learning experiences. As such, though not at as deep a level as one might have hoped, the fact that 'structure and citation conventions' constitute the bulk of respondents' perceptions of the E-AW's primary educational objectives suggests an understanding, or appreciation, of the authenticity and relevance of the target knowledge on their behalf.

In addition, a small yet notable section of the respondents considered the knowledge to be inherently linked to 'English,' the language in which it was taught as per the EMI mode. Though unfortunate, this is quite understandable on several levels. Initially, one could consider the fact that the E-AW course's name leads with the word-tag 'English,' simultaneously denoting both the 'language' and the 'credit-group' (i.e., the classification of the credit attainable for graduation purposes) of the course. From

the outset, it would be a simple matter to assume that the 'academic writing' skillset taught on such a course would either 'belong' to 'English' (in the possessive sense) or be describable as 'English' (in the representative sense). Mix into this context the average Japanese first-year university student's prior scholastic learning of 'English' as a test-subject (Barry, 2004; Miura, 2010; Aleles, 2009) and their socio-cultural experience of 'English' as an externalized 'other' (Seargeant, 2009; Kamada, 2011), and one could quite naturally arrive at such an understanding. This influence that EMI has – potentially stemming from its dual role of 'language' and 'content' provider as in the E-AW course's case – is a theme expanded on further by students and instructors alike.

4.3.3. Implications for Practice

Clarity of Knowledge

As these findings suggest, from the view of the enrolled students the E-AW course appears to be relatively well-aligned. All the Core Course Components demonstrated positive responses, though the Feedback could stand some further adjustment, though slight, to improve the overall learning experience for enrolled students.

When looking to learn, formative feedback has a high degree of positive influence on students (Hattie, 2009). Out of the Feedback items, the lowest rated was F4; "I could take action to improve my own learning based on the feedback provided." That this item links to autonomous action on the part of the student is perhaps not entirely unexpected. Research suggests that, on balance, Japanese students show a lower degree of intrinsic motivation towards academic pursuits (Bui, 2015), as well as decreased attainment (Todo et al., 2016) and a-motivation in educational settings which require a certain level of autonomy. To be sure, courses conducted in an active, task-based mode (such as the E-AW), where a project might have multiple stages and drafts, are not the norm in Japanese HEIs (Ohmori, 2010; Matsumura, 2017; Wicking, 2020), nor are environments where students are made comfortable with making – then, of course, exploring and correcting – mistakes (King, 2013). Indeed, using error

constructively is an integral part of formative feedback, and allowances must be made to permit students to adjust to this mode of learning within the course (Biggs & Tang, 2011). This may require scaffolding with activities designed to teach the value of having one's work-in-progress looked over with a constructively-critical eye.

Authenticity/Relevance of Knowledge

Given the positive CALEQ data and its directionality implied by the responses to the open-ended question, one could suggest that the knowledge of structure and citations as taught in the E-AW classroom seems relatively well understood, at least within the classroom. However, the true test of learning – particularly with knowledge and skillsets purportedly valuable within the wider world – is whether it can have an impact beyond the classroom. Setting aside the oft-heard laments of long-since graduated students who sarcastically quip "When have I ever had to use geometry?" or "What use was studying Latin?", if a student applied themselves to learning how to write a well-organized, logical, and supported series of paragraphs in one course under the guidance of a well-meaning instructor who insisted – as per the literature (McKinley, 2013; Kubota, 1997; Fujieda, 2012) – it would be useful in their academic career, only to experience the next few years without seeing hide nor hair of it in their other undergraduate classes, they would likely (and rightly) feel hard done by. Anderson's (2010) research shows as much, suggesting that while clear instruction is necessary (so that students may expect to succeed), it must be paired with a focus on useful knowledge and skills (i.e., which are of value) (Feather, 1982).

4. 4. Summary of Findings

The analysis of the quantitative survey of student-participants resulted in the following findings. First, the CALEQ suggests that students experience two main streams operating in the E-AW course; the "Core Course Components" – covering the ILOs, TLAs, and ATs – and the "Feedback" given upon their activities and tasks conducted under these auspices. These streams suggest that the E-AW's "Core Course Components" internal alignment was perceived as strongly positive, and "Feedback" was viewed

positively. Second, though the majority of the participant responses (70%) evidenced a middling depth-of-approach to the skills and knowledge offered by the E-AW course – with the course's primary objectives identified as being "Structure/Organisation," (34%) "Citing Sources of Information" (21%) and "Logical/Deductive Writing" (15%) – a notable 15% percentage of responses evidenced a more surface-level approach to the objectives (i.e., that what was being taught was merely 'correct' or 'following the rules'), and roughly 10% of responses suggested that the writing skills and conventions taught were intrinsically linked to "English" as a language (thus confusing the 'medium' of instruction for the 'content' of instruction).

The internal alignment of the E-AW course could therefore be determined as, on balance, sufficient yet with room for improvement. However, of particular note was the identification of the interference of "English" with some students' perceptions of the E-AW course's stated and intended learning objectives. Analysis of the subsequent stages of the inquiry, continued in the following chapters, was fortunately able to glean further qualitative insight into the roots of this perspective.

Chapter 5: Findings from Stage 2 and Stage 3 – Student and Instructor Perspectives on External Coherence

In this chapter, the findings from the Stage 2 email questionnaires and the Stage 3 semi-structured interviews are presented, analysed, and discussed. Although the participants for each stage differed – respectively, students and then instructors – both stages inquired primarily as to each group of participants' perspectives on the degree of external coherence between the E-AW's output academic writing objectives and the rest of the courses in the wider curriculum. In addition, as the thematic analysis was conducted in a top-down deductive fashion, the author decided to combine the analysis of the data, the theorizing of the findings, and the implications of said findings into a single chapter to facilitate their discussion. Thus, the results of the analyses presented in this chapter were concerned with RQ2 – "*What issues do the students perceive with the E-AW course in relation to its coherence with the wider curriculum?*" – and RQ3 – "*What issues do the instructors perceive with the E-AW course alignment and coherence with the wider curriculum?*".

5.1. Stage Two: Students' Qualitative Email-Questionnaires

In the second stage, eight student participants completed the email questionnaire (Table 4). Though a larger sample of student-participants was hoped for, initial analysis suggests that even with (n = 8), a sufficient degree of data saturation – a stage at which little to no new information is uncovered (Saldaña, 2015) – had been reached. As specified by Braun & Clarke (2006), the coding process was followed along with a deductive, top-down approach in which codes and coding typologies within the transcripts of the participants' written responses were identified based on the current research's theoretical lens. A two-cycle process was used to arrive at the final codes, which saw the researcher read through the data and identify emergent trends, with a final run through the data to aid in grouping these emergent trends into categories or themes. The first cycle employed descriptive coding, assigning a word or short phrase to passages of text (Saldaña, 2015) while keeping in mind the identified theoretical

principles of CA. This was followed by several subsequent readings and a second cycle of data coding to refine and reform the codes into concise themes. In the second coding cycle, disparate codes were collected into thematic units. At this stage, codes were further tagged with the headers 'Belief', 'Perception,' and 'Suggestion,' to categorize (i) general beliefs about education, (ii) perceptions about specific issues in the target educational context, and (iii) suggestions about how these issues might be improved upon. While following this process with an emphasis on the deductive, theory-driven codifying approach, few themes were discarded. A primary criterion for all codes to be considered is that they are present in at least a quarter of the participants' responses. Only those present in three-quarters of the responses should be considered 'common' (Harding, 2013). However, this standard was not achievable due to the smaller sample size. Thus, based on the subjective consideration of the situation of the data, codes present in two-fifths of the responses were kept and considered 'minor,' while codes present in at least three-fifths of the responses were considered 'major' or 'common.' These codes were then analysed and deductively linked to the theory that they were judged to have the best fit with, resulting in (i) Course-Curriculum Coherence, (ii) Educational Theory, and (iii) Context/Culture-Specific Issues. The data for these themes and codes are displayed in Table 9:

Themes/Codes	Coverage
Course-Curriculum Coherence	
Perception: Academic Writing/Reading Not Used in Other Courses	100%
Perception: English Academic Reading/Writing Not Used in Other Courses	60%
Perception: Low Requirement of Academic Writing/Reading in Other Courses	80%
Suggestion: Increase Academic Reading/Writing Utilisation Across Curriculum	100%
Suggestion: Standardize the Definition of "Academic Writing" Across Curriculum	60%
Suggestion: Increase Connections Between Courses Across Curriculum	60%

Educational Theory (Beliefs about the current situation)	
Belief: Need for More Input/Output Opportunities to Learn/Use	100%
Belief: Need for Authenticity of Educational Input/Output to Learn/Use	60%
Belief: If Learned Skills are not Used, they are Wasted	40%
Context/Culture-Specific Issues	
Belief: Academic Writing not "Taught" in Japanese Universities	60%
Belief: Continued Use of *Kansoubun* in Japanese Universities	40%
Perception: EMI – Language (English) Overrides Content (Academic Writing)	40%
Belief: EMI – English Interferes with Comprehension & Learning	60%
Suggestion: Teach "Academic Writing" in Japanese	60%

Table 9. Stage 2 Email Questionnaires: Common Codes and Themes

This section discusses themes codified from responses to the three questions in the email questionnaires (Table 4) and subsequently extracts theory-linked findings from them. Short representative examples of the themes and their constituent codes are also provided. These findings were considered alongside those extracted from the instructors' semi-structured interviews to build a more holistic snapshot by combining the two 'slices' of stakeholder perspectives.

5.1.1. Course-Curriculum Coherence

A fundamental aspect of curriculum design is that its component units – in this case, courses operating within the curriculum – are conceptually connected (Posner & Strike, 1974; Dewey, 1972). The email questionnaires suggest that the links between the E-AW (teaching deductive logical structure and citation conventions, both as expressed in its course documents and as identified by student-participants from stage one of this research) and other courses in the wider curriculum are not perceived. All student-participants in this second stage stated that, on balance, they do not perceive the

academic writing skills taught in the E-AW course to be present in other courses. This overall perception divides down into two components; 'English' writing is not commonly required in other courses, and nor is the more general 'academic' writing – in the sense that students do not need to write extended passages even in Japanese – in an academic style conceptually similar to what they were taught in the E-AW course:

… I would say that what we are taught in the writing course is not referred to, nor used directly, in the other courses that I have taken this year. (S3)

It is because there are fundamentally few cases in which students are required to do so. The first year has just ended and I have not even written a final report for other courses, and I am not facing any other courses or lesson activities that require academic writing skills. (S2)

The student-participants suggested three main solutions regarding this perceived lack of coherence; (i) standardizing the definition of 'academic writing' across the curriculum (ii) increasing opportunities to engage in academic reading/writing, and (iii) actively creating connections between courses:

The first thing is to strengthen the collaboration between classes. (S4)

The use of academic writing skills will become more active if there is systematic direction to write reports in an academic way. (S5)

These suggestions, though likely easier to say than to put into effect, would certainly help achieve a better degree of connectivity of knowledge and skills (Posner & Strike, 1974; Schaefer, 1990; Tyler, 2013) throughout the curriculum, and by doing so would necessarily improve future students' perception of the relevance/authenticity and classroom-external value (Biggs & Tang, 2011) of the E-AW's ILOs.

5.1.2. Educational Theory

The theme of educational theory contained general beliefs about education deemed connected to the issue at hand by the student-participants in the email questionnaires. Codes covering (i) the need for repetitions of input/output opportunities in order to learn, (ii) the need for said input/output opportunities to be authentic and relevant, and (iii) the belief that taught/learned skills are forgotten if not used – all valid and verifiable tenets of education – were expressed:

> *Abilities that have been learned only once are rarely felt to be important even if they are originally needed. And this leads to a disregard for writing skills. As mentioned above, unless academic writing skills are continuously handled, their importance diminishes and their abilities cannot be maintained. (S7)*

> *… and this is not good because not being able to make use of the techniques learned here means that this 14 weeks of study is wasted. (S4)*

Some overlap with other themes and codes, notably on the connections between classes, could be found here, though the chief takeaway is that participants intimated that if skills taught *inside* the E-AW course are not sufficiently utilised *outside* said course, they may well be "wasted." This potential waste would likely be even more stark-staring should their E-AW instructor frequently extoll the utility and relevance of the target academic writing skillset.

5.1.3. Context/Culture-Specific Issues

Two main trends constitute this theme, including (i) acknowledgement of the continued use of the *kansoubun* – or 'impressionistic essay – in university, (ii) the perception that 'writing' is not 'taught' in Japanese education institutions in general, and that (iii) the EMI mode can create problems both with comprehension and conceptualization of the target academic writing skillset. These first two points strongly

echo similar concerns raised in the literature on writing instruction in the Japanese education system (Kamimura, 2014; McKinley, 2013) and may well result in the perception of the *kansoubun* as a direct – and in the immediate sense, and more viable – competitor to the academic essay as taught by the E-AW:

However, even at university the majority of Japanese will have the experience of producing impression essays that state their impressions. (S3)

Knowing that in reality these skills are necessary for all college and graduate activities, students' attitudes towards learning writing will become more serious than just using what they learned in high school. (S6)

The third point regarding EMI may well be thornier. A substantial number of the student-participants suggested that EMI could potentially cause (a) the perception that what is taught in the E-AW course is 'English' writing, not 'academic' writing, and (b) the belief that the 'English' language of instruction may be a barrier to learning. Both points would lead to the logically-offered suggestion that (iii) 'academic writing' should be taught in Japanese (though, as identified in the literature, it currently is not):

The second reason is that for a long time I mostly thought of this writing method an English method. (S2)

… this skill is universally useful in any language, but it seems that some students may not be able to understand it deeply by being taught in unfamiliar English. Since papers for other courses would normally written in Japanese, it is also necessary to be taught in Japanese and understand their usefulness clearly. (S4)

These socio-cultural points link strongly to issues identified in the literature with EMI in general (Rose, 2018; Aizawa & Rose, 2019), and more specifically with the status of English in Japanese society (Seargeant, 2009) and its education system (Clark, 2005). As comments and codes in other themes suggest, that the language of instruction is not

Japanese appears to create some distance between the concepts that the E-AW course aims to impart to its enrolled students and their perception of the relevance of these concepts in the wider curriculum.

5.1.4. Summary of Data: Stage 2 Student Email Questionnaires

The data from the student-participants email questionnaires paint a picture (Figure 9) of an admission that while the academic writing skills taught in the E-AW course may eventually be useful, there are scant few opportunities in which to use – and thus retain and improve upon – these skills in other courses in the wider curriculum. Participants broadly opine that continued reliance on the *kansoubun* 'impressionistic essay' by Japanese instructors, even at the university level, may well render the acquisition of the academic writing skillset somewhat moot, though several admit that it is still useful in their prospective academic careers. Primary methods to increase perceptions of the relevance/authenticity – and thus value – of the skills taught in the E-AW course are suggested as (i) increasing the requirement/opportunities to both write in the academic style and to read useful, authentic articles, and to do so through (ii) increasing communication, connection, and collaboration between individual courses. In addition, a high percentage of participants noted the English language – both as an instruction medium and as a socio-cultural 'other' – as a potential barrier to the acquisition of the intended learning objectives of the E-AW, suggesting that said skills be similarly taught in Japanese to reinforce their acquisition and perception of relevance/authenticity.

5.2. Stage 3: Instructors' Semi-Structured Interviews

The third stage of the research recruited E-AW course instructors for a semi-structured interview. A total of 6 participants were interviewed based on a series of CA-derived questions (Table 4). As with the email questionnaires, a deductive top-down approach to thematic analysis was conducted following the procedure suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006). The questions were constructed to match this lens, focusing on the alignment and coherence of the E-AW course. Harding's (2013) recommendations

for code-coverage were, again, somewhat muted by the relatively small sample size of 6 instructor-participants, though based on relative consideration of the dataset the author determined that codes present in either two or three of the six respondents (i.e., 33-50%) would be retained and considered 'minor,' while codes present in two-thirds of the responses (i.e., 66%) would be considered 'major/common.' As with the second stage analysis, the perception-, suggestion-, and belief-tagged codes were gathered into the themes (i) Course-Curriculum Coherence, (ii) Educational Theory, and (iii) Context/Culture-Specific Issues. The data for these themes and codes are displayed in Table 10:

Themes/Codes	Coverage
Course-Curriculum Coherence	
Perception: Curriculum Has Low Degree of Clear Connections of Core Skills	66%
Perception: Lack of Communication with Other Courses	83%
Perception: Time-constraints Prevent Use of Academic Writing in Other Courses	66%
Suggestion: Need for Clear Connections Between E-AW and Other Courses	83%
Suggestion: Need for Communication Between Courses	50%
Educational Theory (Beliefs about the current situation)	
Belief: Academic Writing not "Taught" in Japanese Universities	83%
Belief: Need for Authentic/Useful Educational Input/Output	100%
Belief: Academic Writing is an Important Core Skill	83%
Context/Culture-Specific Issues	
Perception: Students Do Not Perceive Need for Academic Writing	83%
Belief: Administrators are not Educators	33%
Perception: High Degree of Teacher Freedom in Other Courses	66%
Belief: EMI – English Interferes with Comprehension & Learning	66%
Belief: Cultural Focus on Non-transferrable Specialisation	33%

Table 10. Stage 3 Semi-Structured Interviews: Common Codes and Themes

This section considers themes codified from instructors' responses during the semi-structured interview (Table 5) and posits summarised findings for them. As they share the same lens and target as the students' perspectives from the email questionnaires, the author determined that discussion of these findings would be best conducted side-by-side, in the subsequent section.

5.2.1. Course-Curriculum Coherence

Under the theme of course-curriculum coherence, instructors broadly perceived that there is (i) a lack of communication between courses, and (ii) a lack of common core skill connection across courses. In response to these identified issues, the instructor-participants emphasized that courses operating under the same curriculum need to have actual, perceivable connections, and half suggested that, at least as a step towards achieving this, communication is needed between the various departments and instructors who manage said courses:

> *There may well be overlap with courses offered at the faculty level, but wouldn't it be great to know, to be told that other teachers in other courses were doing the same thing, or that they referred to what students had done in past courses. In my opinion, I don't think that teachers in subsequent courses have any idea what this first year E-AW course entails. (I4)*

> *So, you know more communication between the departments is definitely needed, I would say, yeah. And, and we can work on prepping them by saying, you know, making them aware of things like um, "In, in your department, things might look like this, um, when you write a research essay, it might have this structure, but we're working on this structure now, but you can still use it in this way or that way", right? (I6)*

If they want the students to really develop their writing, which some of the professors really do, um, then they should take advantage of, you know, finding out more about what we're doing, but then it's also up to the writing course administrators to disseminate that information better. (I5)

As with the students, the instructors' "Suggestions" align reasonably well with their "Perceptions," lending credence to the depiction of VJA's curriculum existing in a segmented, silofied state, with little designed connection or contact between each course. Literature on curriculum construction notably warns against such states of non-connection (Posner & Strike, 1974), as do theories considering students' perceptions of the value and relevancy of what they learn in one class vis-à-vis other classes in the university (Ramsden, 2003) and society at large (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Though unlikely that the required deep-changes needed to coherently align the core skills taught and utilized through an extant, operational curriculum can be achieved by instructors (such as the author) on their own, there are several communication-based steps – discussed in the subsequent section – which could be taken to help mitigate the perceived incoherence in between the courses-in-curriculum.

5.2.2. Educational Theory

The theme of educational theory gathered general beliefs about education deemed connected to the issue at hand by the interviewees. Such beliefs covered (i) the need for authenticity/relevance of educational input/output, (ii) that academic writing is a crucial skill in university education, and (iii) that writing skills are not typically taught in the Japanese education system:

And another thing is the citations, I think that's another area of writing, of academic studies, which is completely new to them, and whether they do it well is beyond the point, I think it's an eye-opening experience for them…
(I6)

I think the most positive aspect of it is the possibility for transferability, where for students who are in academic courses with a focus on research, and that a lot of what this institution hopes for students is that they continue in academic fields in research and postgraduate studies. The course, as a first-year course kind of introduces um, what that is in terms of structured writing, but also the whole idea around what research and writing actually is. (I4)

…there are not so many universities in Japan at which these foundational skills that are taught so well. So, I think it is very meaningful to teach the basics of academic organisation and structure and way of thinking by creating such a course. (I3)

CA's principles of authenticity/relevance and bridging of knowledge emphasize the consideration of skills that necessarily carry forward out of the classroom (Biggs & Tang, 2011) and are common throughout the curriculum (Posner & Strike, 1974). Thus, they are perceivable as valuable due to their inherent usefulness (Ramsden, 2003). Furthermore, when the need for these skills may be identifiable in external products – such as graduation theses, competency examinations such as TOEFL and IELTS, academic articles, and papers and reports for other courses – the foundation for these skills is more easily perceived as authentic/relevant (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Indeed, when students do not perceive a value, or use, for a taught skill or knowledge beyond the end-of-course assessment task and its attendant grade, the broader literature suggests there is little motivation to approach it with an eye on future retention (Ramsden, 2003; Entwistle, 1991).

5.2.3. Context/Culture-Specific Issues

The majority of instructors held the beliefs (i) that students themselves did not fully grasp the broader picture of why an academic writing skillset was – or would eventually be – important in their university careers, and (ii) that the 'English' aspect of the E-AW operated as a barrier, both in a language sense and a socio-cultural sense:

And I think, a lot of students have a bit of a… er… they have a bit of this kind of, I don't know, rejection, of this "this is how academic writing is" based on the idea that, they believe that they are going into a language course. And again, they are not quite understanding that this structure is beyond language. (I4)

Language anxiety… Like, "I'm not good at English" is what their first words to me often are in the classroom. So I think that resistance still exists, and I think it is very difficult for them to apply a lot of the useful writing skills and those E-AW objective-skills into other areas of their academic studies. (I5)

Both of these points can be said to link firmly with the other themes from the semi-structured interviews and those raised by the students in the email questionnaires. Furthermore, there is notable reference to prior research and literature on (i) academic writing instruction and (ii) the treatment of English in Japan. First, then, that the instructors accurately depicted students' perception that the writing skills taught in the E-AW are not widely experienced by students in their other courses. Though we know that the instructors know it should – at least in theory – become useful as students progress through university, this does present a difficulty in that instructors may be attempting to convince students of a benefit of said skillset that is not readily apparent. If knowledge of academic structure and citations are not required in other courses, then it is unlikely that most students would perceive such knowledge as being of use at this point in their studies. In addition, the "language anxiety" – a commonly cited feature of Japanese students regarding impediments to language learning (Kurihara, 2008) – as well as the assumption that academic writing skills, including deductive structure and citations, may be inherently linked to English could be challenging to overcome. Thus, again, it would appear that alongside the issues identified in the literature with EMI in general (Rose, 2018; Aizawa & Rose, 2019), the status of English in the Japanese education system and wider society (Yamagami & Tollefson, 2011) could well have implications for the perceived relevance of academic writing skills when taught in English instead of Japanese, irrespective of however well the curriculum is aligned.

5.2.4. Summary of Data: Stage 3 Instructor Semi-Structured Interviews

The data from the instructor interviews demonstrate a relatively common amount of scepticism regarding the coherence of the E-AW's outward-facing ILOs – chiefly, academic deductive structure and citation conventions – despite a strong belief in the necessity and relevance of these skills in the world of academia. Instructors also acknowledged that the language of instruction – the 'English' in the EMI mode – may be both a cognitive obstacle to learning as well as a socio-cultural impediment to the transfer of taught academic writing knowledge from the E-AW to other courses; put simply, students may have difficulty 'getting past' the 'English' attached to the 'academic writing.' Institutionally speaking, instructors imply that the low level of use of academic writing – or indeed reading – tasks in other courses do not impart a clear and immediate perception of value as it naturally stands and suggest that in lieu of an unlikely administration-approved recreation of the curricula links between courses greater efforts could be made to foster communication between individual instructors. As writing is held to be not generally 'taught' in Japanese tertiary education nor seemingly strictly 'required' in its earlier stages – views which overlap strongly with student-participants as highlighted in the previous section – it is perhaps understandable that while instructors are confident of their teaching in their courses, they are unsure of how it is treated beyond the confines of their classrooms.

5.3. Themes and Findings

As with the first stage, the author theorized the data collected from the second and third stages regarding the students' and instructors' perceptions, beliefs, and suggestions concerning the degree of coherence between the E-AW and the wider curriculum into several key CA-linked findings. The internal CA principle of clarity of knowledge (i.e., the clear alignment of the core ILO, AT, TLA, and Feedback components) not being pertinent in this analysis, focus was instead placed on (i) the authenticity and relevance of knowledge, (ii) the degree of bridging between course and curriculum, along with (iii) the non-CA background influence of EMI as identified by both student

and instructor participants. Though this curriculum-analysis inquiry into stakeholder perceptions of the coherence of the E-AW course-in-curriculum intended to prioritize concerns of a curriculum-development nature, that EMI was identified (by both groups of participants) as potentially interfering in students' perception of the target academic writing skillset as being authentic/relevant (and thus valuable) led the author to determine that it warranted further discussion as it related to theory (so-what) and implications for the improvement of practice (now-what).

5.3.1. Authenticity/Relevance of Knowledge – Authentic, Yet Not Perceived as Immediately Relevant

The thematic analysis of the student email questionnaires and instructor semi-structured interviews suggests that both participant groups acknowledge that the basic academic writing skillset (i.e., deductive logical structure and citation conventions) taught in the E-AW course is authentic. However, it is not perceived as relevant in the immediate sense. A series of overlapping codes combine in a numerological network of sorts to construe this perspective. First, there is the direct testimony from the student participants that there are few requirements in other courses for extended written assignments. Second, instructors are not confident that they can identify a set of standardized core skills being focused upon across the curriculum. Third, these points are coupled with the perception from instructors that students in their classes do not seem to grasp the practical utility of the skillset being taught. Forth, the student-participants intimate that these written assignments are nominally similar in form and instruction to the *kansoubun* that they have been writing throughout their junior and senior high school years. Fifth, instructors and students state that academic writing is not commonly taught in the Japanese education system. Sixth, students point out that what is learned but not used may be thought of as a wasted opportunity. These opinions can be held to circle a central perception; that the skillset taught in the E-AW is not utilized or referred to in the wider curriculum, and thus not perceived as relevant to the students enrolled in the target course.

This finding regarding the perceived authenticity/relevance of the skillset taught in the E-AW has bearings on the degree of external coherence, or 'fit,' between the E-AW course and the wider curriculum. In other words, it is concerned with the degree to which the skills and knowledge taught via the E-AW course are referenced or utilized in other classes or areas of students' curricular university careers. While such external coherence is not the chief focus of CA as a learning system, it is nevertheless an essential part of the wider educational context in which (prospectively) coherent courses are situated. Biggs & Tang (2011) thus deal with the concept and concerns of what has been termed in this paper as 'external' coherence (or 'fit') – though shares similarity with Edstrom's (2008) 'system alignment' – to a lesser degree than internal alignment. However, they stress the importance of a consistent curriculum in improving the learning system's quality and empowering students enrolled within it. Indeed, McMahon & Thakore (2006) found that along with greater coherence and clarity between learning programs came greater student engagement and depth of approach. Taylor & Canfield's (2007) research echoes this, stating that students' perspectives of 'good' teaching, standards, and assessment markedly improve in curricula with constructively aligned teaching and courses. Anderson's (2010) case study similarly found a notable increase in student attainment, retention, and satisfaction after aligning courses and objectives. Indeed, particularly when dealing with EMI courses, aligning skills and knowledge either vertically or horizontally with other courses-in-curriculum courses is a central recommendation (Yamamoto & Bysouth, 2015). Additionally, the principles of clarity and connection, of consistency and contiguousness, in a planned curriculum are noted in broader educational literature as important aspects not to be overlooked. Posner & Strike (1974) suggest that a higher degree of commonality (i.e., the repetition of related concepts) and temporal connectivity between said elements in the curriculum leads to greater repetition and potential for learning. This core concept of coherence in a curriculum is echoed by many theorists (Dewey, 1972; Schaefer, 1990; Ramsden, 2003; Tyler, 2013). Thus, one could suggest that if the skills and knowledge taught in one course in a curriculum is not just indirectly utilizable and transferable in other courses but directly necessary, then students will – if not initially but more with

each incremental experience – come to perceive the value of each intersecting learning opportunity. For, in the words of some of CA's chief critics, who would wish to strive to learn in a curriculum that is not so coherently considered and aligned? Indeed, given the lack of perceived relevance of the E-AW's taught skillset – despite its acknowledged authenticity – in the immediate educational context in which the E-AW is situated, it is perhaps not too surprising that there is little reported retention after the semester's end.

5.3.2. Bridging Between Course and Curriculum – Little Direct Connection Perceived

In part an extension to the low degree of perceived relevance of the E-AW's academic writing skillset due to the lack of opportunities for reference and use, both students and instructors imply that few direct, planned connections are evident between the E-AW and other courses in the wider curriculum. This, too, can be depicted from a mixture of overlapping codes. Initially, then, the two groups of participants intimated that there appear to be scant opportunities for both academic writing and reading; students in particular highlighted the lack of opportunity to engage with authentic articles and texts even in their Japanese-language classes taught in their own departments, and instructors voiced similar scepticism that students were being provided such opportunities in other courses. In addition, students and instructors considered there to be a low degree of standardization, partly due to high teacher freedom, not just between different courses but even between sections of the same course. Both groups of participants suggest standardizing common core concepts such as 'academic writing' to aid the transfer of knowledge between contexts. This is compounded by the perceived lack of communication between instructors of different courses. The instructors suggested that while other course instructors did not know what was being taught in the E-AW, they also admitted that they were unaware of what was being taught in other courses, departments, or year-groups. As both groups of participants believe that writing is not commonly 'taught' in Japanese universities – perhaps, as some instructors intimated, due to time concerns – it would conceivably make sense to not only provide for repeated encounters with this purported core skill in the wider curriculum, but also to directly refer back to how it was taught in the E-AW.

These points suggest that – in part understandably due to the lack of other organic opportunities to use or refer to the E-AW's output academic writing skillset – there is little bridging between the E-AW course and the rest of the curriculum.

This finding concerning the lack of planned, constructed connection between the E-AW and other courses in the wider curriculum is admittedly somewhat moot. There is likely to be little designed, built-in bridging between two hypothetical courses if the skillset of one is not used in the other. Given the degree of instructor freedom across the wide range of different departments and faculties, it would not be too unreasonable to suppose that this revealed hodgepodge – at least from the view of core academic skillsets such as academic writing and reading – has arisen from a *post-factum* conceptualization and application of a coordinated curriculum where none previously existed. To be sure, though creating change in large educational institutions is not a simple matter (Fullan & Quinn, 2016), it seems that much is yet to be done to coherently align the E-AW course-in-curriculum with the other courses in which it is situated.

The benefits for core skills being connected and sufficiently bridged to multiple courses throughout a curriculum are multiple. To begin with, research broadly emphasizes the need for repetition of taught skillsets throughout a unified program of study (Wogan & Waters, 1959; Bromage & Mayer, 1986); indeed, as Bruner (2001) points out, repetition is the "first principle" of learning (p. 1). In addition, educational theory demonstrates that frequent revision of a newly acquired skill positively influences the transfer of said knowledge and processes into learners' long-term memory (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2007). As noted in the literature and by students embedded in the target context, opportunity – acted upon – for frequent use of acquired skills is desirable, lest taught skills become viewed as 'wasted.' Connection and standardization of academic writing tasks throughout the curriculum should not only facilitate the perception of value of the skillsets taught in the E-AW, but could also move sections of the university away from continued reliance on the typically Japanese *kansoubun* – itself of little use in academia outside of the classroom and outside of the country itself (Shibata, 2011; Kamimura, 2014; Kobayashi, 2010). However, while the benefits may be

obvious from a theoretical perspective, there would likely be many practical barriers to overcome, chief among them the ingrained nature of the *kansoubun* (Jarrell, 1998; McKinley, 2013; Hinds, 1983; Hirose & Sasaki, 1994), as well as time-pressures experienced by both instructors and students alike. Thus, while the identified external coherence problems of low-relevance and low-bridging are relatively simple to diagnose, suggestions to mitigate these issues that the E-AW course appears to experience may not be as simple to implement.

5.3.3. EMI Influence – Linguistic and Socio-cultural Barrier to Perception of Relevance

The qualitative stages of the research revealed and highlighted an issue nominally outside of those from CA's theorized principles; the influence of 'English', both as a language and as a cultural artefact, upon the perceptions of the students enrolled in the E-AW course. However, more a curriculum understanding element than a curriculum development element, its presence in all three stages of the research could be said to affirm the need – as championed by Deng (2018) – for a balanced, situated consideration of any given educational context. In the milieu of near-infinite individual diversity in infinite combinations, it is highly unlikely that a univariate lens may explain every aspect of an institutional situation. Indeed, as with the previous two findings, the influence of EMI as a linguistic and socio-cultural barrier to the perception of relevance of the E-AW's taught academic writing skillset is construed from several 'slices' pointing towards the same issue. Initially, we must remember that the influence of EMI leading students to consider the objective of the E-AW course as 'English' writing, rather than a universally-applicable academic writing, was detected in the first stage survey. Subsequently, this perspective was expanded upon in the second stage email questionnaires; almost half of the student participants intimated that – at least at some stage – they believed that the structure and conventions taught in the E-AW were expressly for use in English. While it is possible that the textbooks, materials, and teaching from the numerous teachers across the range of sections surveyed may have fostered this misunderstanding, this is not the expressly stated aim in the course syllabus (Appendix 3), nor the stated intent of the course's reformation team leader who

specifies the need for an authentic academic purpose to be pursued in 'English'-tagged course (Tajino, 2019). Third, also in the email questionnaires, it was found that most participants found that the language of instruction mitigated against comprehension and uptake of the target skillset and suggested (understandably) that it be taught in their mother tongue. In addition, two-thirds of the instructors in the third stage acknowledged that English certainly operates as a linguistic barrier to comprehension (i.e., it is not the students' mother tongue) primarily, and secondarily as a socio-cultural artefact (i.e., its treatment in Japanese society and schools engenders othering of knowledge, anxiety at performance, and exam-related resistance). As such, the overlap of these common codes suggests that the 'English' aspect of the medium of instruction can cause perception problems concerning the E-AW course content.

Though not strictly a CA-principle issue, this finding is certainly referenced in the literature on the treatment of 'English' in Japan in general and in the reports on EMI in particular. As pointed out by Kamada (2011), Japan is a country where non-Japanese artefacts – in this case, English (Seargeant, 2009) – are strongly marked as 'other.' Literature on the socio-cultural roots (and the extent of their reach) regarding this is quite clear. Furthermore, as English is a skillset not nominally necessary outside of a very select range of elite-status positions and occupations (Yamigami & Tollefson, 2011), a resistance to engaging with it outside of narrowly-controlled exams (Barry, 2004; Clark, 2005; Berwick & Ross, 1989; McVeigh, 2004) by those not part of – or necessarily aiming to be part of – said elite is understandable. Similar implications are described in reports by Chapple (2015) and Aizawa & Rose (2019), including motivation and comprehension issues, respectively, and with regards to Japanese students' experiences with EMI the question of procedurally fair chances at attainment, given Japan's generally low-levels of functional English ability, is not one to be summarily ignored (Selzer & Gibson, 2009; Burgess et al., 2010). The confusion of the language-mode (English) with the educational objective (Academic Writing) is a commonly noted problem in EMI literature (Dearden, 2014; Galloway et al., 2017). Furthermore, Tsuneyoshi (2005) and Symon & Weinberg (2013) highlight that conducting classes solely via English, as with EMI, will likely prove

highly burdensome for Japanese instructors, compounding pedagogic issues and impediments present in the student cohort. These points underlying the findings suggest several pertinent issues with EMI. Chiefly, (i) that enrolled students may be inherently hesitant, or resistant, to engage with the target knowledge (i.e., academic writing) linked to English (Chapple, 2015; Galloway et al., 2017), and (ii) that students with English abilities insufficient to engage at a viable level with said EMI course's content will not be able to learn, or attain, as well as they could otherwise (Aizawa & Rose, 2019; Selzer & Gibson, 2009; Burgess et al., 2010). Indeed, as suggested by the findings, these issues are relevant to the current context, and measures to mitigate this perception must be considered.

5.4. Summary

With the principles of CA assisting in the exploration of active-stakeholder perceptions of the alignment and coherence of the E-AW course-in-curriculum, the findings (*so what*) and implications for the potential improvement of operational practices (*now what*) were considered. The viewpoints of E-AW students and instructors have provided a great deal of insight regarding whether the course is believed to be externally coherent. Though its taught knowledge and skills are seen as authentic, they are not seen as immediately relevant, and accordingly are not considered to be well bridged throughout the curriculum. While starting from stakeholder perspectives – as opposed to policy documents – may at first seem to place the inquiry on a less-than-stable footing, by inquiring directly with stakeholders embedded in the target context a richer, more realized understanding of the existing issues facing the E-AW and its fit, connecting to the wider curriculum, can be attained. Indeed, based on the data collected and analysed in this chapter, while the E-AW course's internal alignment appears sufficient, several noted issues hinder its external coherence within the wider curriculum. This result can be depicted by our visualisation diagram, below:
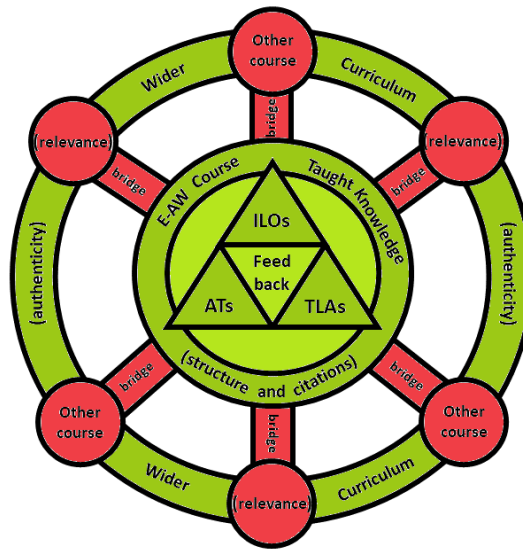
Figure 9. Clarity, Authenticity-Relevance, and Bridging of Knowledge of E-AW course

As such, discussed in the final chapter, there would appear to be several key opportunities for both VJA's administrative bodies and individual research practitioners to foster connection and coherence throughout its courses of study, thus potentially improving, in turn, stakeholders' perception of the relevance of taught knowledge and skills, and finally its retention and deployment in both domestic and international academic settings.

The current chapter discussed the findings in relation to RQ2 – "*What issues do the students perceive with the E-AW course in relation to its coherence with the wider curriculum?*" – and RQ3 – "*What issues do the instructors perceive with the E-AW course alignment and coherence with the wider curriculum?*". While the findings concerning RQ1, concerning the E-AW's internal alignment and clarity of knowledge, suggested a relatively strong degree of standalone fitness, qualitative examination of both groups of participants' perceptions on the degree of external alignment, or 'fit,' within the wider curriculum revealed issues centring on (i) connection, resulting in low perception of relevance and a lack of bridging between courses, (ii) the cognitive and socio-cultural interference of EMI as regards the target academic skillset. Implications and links with

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relevant theory are considered in the following, final chapter, along with suggestions for the future improvement of course alignment and curriculum coherence in this specific educational context.

Chapter 6. Discussion & Conclusion

In concluding this study, the author reflected on how the research's data, findings, and implications connect with the big picture in which they are situated. In brief, though this study's findings demonstrated that while the target E-AW was perceived by active stakeholders to have a relatively high degree of internal alignment, or 'fitness,' the E-AW course's 'fit' within the wider curriculum – i.e., the coherence, and thus relevance and structured bridging of its taught academic writing skillset vis-à-vis its use or reference other courses – was notably lacking. Factors mitigating the E-AW's course's curricula coherence included a lack of communication between faculty and designed connection between core skills throughout different courses, alongside socio-cultural complications with 'English' as a mode of instruction. Tentative suggestions for practice include: further inquiry into espoused and actual academic writing content throughout VJA's wider curriculum to identify opportunities for potential coherence improvements; the commencement of inter-department and section communication, via FD outreach, to raise awareness of the E-AW's output/taught academic writing skillset; and the clarification, perhaps as students exit the E-AW course, of the specification and universal utility of the academic writing skillset as it relates to subsequent (i.e., vertically coherent) courses.

As with all investigations into specific courses of education in specific institutions in specific national contexts (Deng, 2018), the unique factors constituting the target research context were given focus and linked, via theory, to instances of practice. This process has aided in uncovering the perceptions of stakeholders embedded with an intact, operational university course and curriculum. Though necessarily intertwined with said target course, this study should contribute knowledge and method concerning EMI development in similar contexts. Though this study's research limitations, discussed forthwith, do restrict the generalisability of its findings and implications, recommendations for future inquiry into the issues it reveals are also considered.

6.1. Implications and Suggestions For Practice

Through the findings displayed in this and the previous chapter, the current research provided a multi-angle holistic snap-shot of the current perspectives of active stakeholders regarding the internal alignment (i.e., 'fitness') and external coherence (i.e., 'fit') of the E-AW as it is embedded in its extant curriculum. Discussion of these findings in the current chapter has thus far focused on the implications (*so what*) of these findings in relation to extant theory and factors identified as relevant to the target context. As the next step, the author considered these findings vis-à-vis the literature and the actual situation in the target context, resulting in the following tentative implications for practice (*now what*) (Hanks, 2018). In order to provide actionable ideas on both a large and small scale, these suggestions will be considered at (i) the institutional level and at (ii) the practitioner level. As such, a degree of crossover between the following discussions was difficult to avoid.

Institutional Level

As the current research undertook a curriculum analysis, using theorized CA principles, for the E-AW course-in-curriculum in an extant and in-tact university context (VJA), priority was placed on implications for practice at the same institutional level. Curriculum development theory specifies that a target knowledge or skillset – nominally held to be 'of use' to prospective students – should be selected for realistically-rooted educational programs. Accordingly, cultivating foundational academic skills in VJA's foundation-level curriculum (Appendix 1) is a central espoused objective. Furthermore, as identified in general literature (Swales, 1990; Swales & Feak, 1994; Johns, 1997; Polio & Shi, 2012) and literature specifically referring to VJA's context (Tajino et al., 2010; Tajino, 2019), the logical and organized writing of ideas is a core skillset for academics and researchers.

The responses gathered from participants across the second and third stages of the research demonstrate that while the E-AW course's taught objectives (i.e., academic writing structure and citation conventions) were viewed as relatively authentic,

participant perception of (i) the relevance of this skillset (i.e., the degree to which it is used or referred to in other courses) and (ii) the bridging between courses of this skillset (i.e., planned and designed-in connections between the E-AW and other courses) were relatively low to non-existent. Furthermore, the curriculum-understanding issue of (iii) the socio-cultural and linguistic barrier of EMI's 'English' will likely require solutions intertwined with the preceding problems. The respective solutions of (i) increasing opportunities for use or reference of the taught academic writing skillset in other courses, and (ii) increasing connections for this skillset between courses would, in theory, provide an external need or requirement for said skillset which would increase the perception of its value (Feather, 1982), or relevancy, and thus potentially increase student motivation to engage deeply with the E-AW course content (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Indeed, the repetition of core skills throughout a curriculum is not a novel idea. It is a learning prerequisite. Literature on learning (Bruner, 2001; Wogan & Waters, 1959; Bromage & Mayer, 1986; Joyce & Calhoun, 2010) and curriculum development (Tyler, 2013; Posner & Strike, 1974; Dewey, 1972; Ramsden, 2003; Biggs & Tang, 2011) – as well as impassioned commentary (Schaefer, 1990) – emphasize this need for frequent repetition of skills and knowledge to transfer them from the short-term memory to the long-term memory where deep connections between threshold concepts and skills are made and retained for use in a broad range of contexts (Ramsden, 2003; Entwistle, 1991). Coherence of taught skills across a range of courses would thus not only aid the perception of relevancy, but it would arguably also aid in their acquisition and uptake. Such experiential repetitions (i.e., a coherent and connected core-skill commonality) throughout the curriculum could be achieved by considering instructional temporality. A concurrent approach would see the same core skill – in this case, basic academic writing structure and citation conventions – utilized or referred to in multiple courses simultaneously. A subsequent approach would see said core skill begin to be utilized or referred to in the following semester or year of study (Posner & Strike, 1974). Though any degree of coherence and connection would assuredly be better for skill uptake and retention than none, there are many benefits and drawbacks with either approach.

On the one hand, while a concurrent approach would permit a more flexible treatment of the target skillset and aid in the immediate emphasizing of the authenticity and relevance of said skillset outside of a given classroom, the clarity of knowledge in each course – as well as the specific bridging between them – may not be as readily achieved. On the other hand, with a subsequent approach the time between a student being taught said skillset (say, in the first semester or year) and its eventual opportunities for utilization (perhaps in the following semester/year) could result in improved potential for bridging between the courses in which the target skillset was taught and to be utilized as being less clearly perceived or remembered by enrolled students. Indeed, as noted by Yamamoto & Bysouth (2015), a more horizontal, concurrent integration of a course and its output ILOs into a curriculum would permit the broadening of experience and knowledge – itself not a small advantage – while a subsequent, vertical integration would allow for the expansion and deepening of knowledge "based on previous introductory courses" (p. 132). Indeed, the interference that EMI's 'English' has appeared to cast over the perceptions of the student-participants may be mitigated in tandem with such efforts. If students can be shown through multiple curricula experiences that what they are being taught in a purportedly 'English' course is of value and use in 'Japanese' courses, this particular barrier to learning should be gradually eroded. As it stands, though the focus of the current research was restricted to the first-year experience of students completing the E-AW course, it is acknowledged that they may find more subsequent, vertical coherence and connection of the E-AW's taught academic writing ILOs in their following years of study. And yet, as the findings from both groups of primary participants have demonstrated, the resultant perception of the relevance (and by extension the degree of bridging) of the E-AW's academic writing skillset was low at the end of said first year of study, despite the acknowledgement of its high clarity of knowledge and authenticity.

Recreating VJA's extant curriculum to account for the designed and planned coherence of the E-AW's output academic writing ILOs would be an extremely disruptive top-down task, not to mention that to do so would be to court accusations of favour and

bias for just one course out of many. The silofication of departments in universities worldwide has not spared VJA, and political divisions hitherto quiet or slumbering could easily be roused should one quasi-department decide to rock the proverbial boat. As such, individual and incremental outreach and communication might instead be a better place to begin a move towards the external coherence of the E-AW course-in-curriculum.

Practitioner Level

While certainly the case that large-scale changes to curriculum development strategy and policy must be conducted at the institutional level, smaller-scale changes aimed at improving the alignment and coherence of courses-in-curriculum – and accordingly enrolled students' perception of the authenticity and relevance of skills taught within – may be fostered to a degree at the practitioner level. The primary change possible here would be centred on communication between instructors of different courses. Hopefully, this would lead to awareness-raising and a better understanding of what courses in close temporal proximity (i.e., in the first year of study) and potentially vertically-linked courses could functionally and practically entail. Indeed, while primarily discovering a low degree of perceived connection between the skillset of the E-AW course and courses in the wider curriculum, the current research also highlights a lack of knowledge on behalf of current instructors regarding the nature and content of courses other than their own. That this is a default setting, so to speak, of large universities such as VJA is not particularly surprising. The literature suggests that silofication and separation in operational realities are the norm in most content-focused courses in HEIs worldwide (Brown, 2002; Dill, 1999). Communication between instructors and administrators, however, is the keystone to creating – or perhaps discovering the potential for – connections between courses; by learning through discussion of pedagogical approaches and needs across department and section boundaries, institutions can take management of changes (Brown, 2002, 2014; Senge, 1990; Shea et al., 2010). A clear first hurdle is the identified lack of a unified, coherent understanding of front-line instructors. However, though conducted at the personal/practitioner level, it is essential to acknowledge that communication between

individual instructors nominally leading to official curriculum-related proposals in VJA would be subject to a high degree of administrative oversight and consensus. The socio-cultural bounds (Meyer, 2014; Hofstede, n.d.) governing proper process, hierarchy, and uncertainty avoidance outside a specified role, are socially and institutionally strong in Japan. Accordingly, the following suggestions for practitioner-level action are tempered here by a situated understanding of such extant pressures.

Prior to both communication and action, further information would be required to clarify the perception-level findings from the current research. The practitioner-researcher could – if permitted – likely begin with clarification of the content of other courses and how they might relate to the E-AW's taught academic writing skillset. While the current research found that student-participants do not consider the E-AW's skillset relevant (nor, subsequently, well-bridged) vis-à-vis other courses in the wider curriculum, the creation of a concept or connection map (Yamamoto & Bysouth, 2015) – possibly based on a secondary document analysis supported by short interviews – would undoubtedly help to more formally situated the E-AW within said curriculum. Indeed, a broad curriculum overview could be conducted using a Coherence Framework Assessment Protocol (Fullan et al., 2016). Though rooted primarily in leadership theory, such a framework considers clarity of knowledge and a shared understanding of a common purpose central to providing sound educational systems. From here, connections – previously assumed or fuzzy – may become more apparent and could then be acted upon.

Official-level communication could – if permitted – take the form of awareness-raising of the primary ILOs of each course in the first year of study, and offer suggestions on how they might be expanded upon in a vertical coherence approach in the second year. VJA has several levels of internal Faculty Development events, bulletins, and publications, where research and analyses concerning currents and trends in the education it provides are frequently issued. With sufficient 'background negotiation' – a unique and vital aspect of Japanese organizations (Meyer, 2014) – before moves were made to publish opinion pieces, articles, or presentations in such channels, discussion

of the need for clear, considered connection of core skills between courses could potentially be fostered. Furthermore, as an internally-situated inquiry, the current research findings are linked explicitly to VJA and its courses-in-curriculum and would thus initially be used internally. Following this, however, external communication of the implications of this project's findings could be achieved through participation in the many higher-education-focused conferences throughout Japan specifically and the Asian region in general. As large adopters of EMI (Dearden, 2014; Galloway, 2020), institutions in these areas may need similar alignment and coherence guidance for the EMI courses they provide.

If permitted, actions that could be taken solely by the researcher would likely focus on collaborative coherence 'bridging' efforts within VJA's wider curriculum. For example, when the E-AW course concludes, it could be possible to create a 'summary' document detailing the course's primary objectives and taught skills, and how they may relate to other academic writing products – such as reports and presentations – where they have been identified in other departments and courses. From the reverse perspective, guidance documents for courses in the second year could clarify how and where these academic writing skills could be utilized. Though criticized by Jervis & Jervis (2015) and Kelly (2012) for being fixed and restrictive, this degree of clarity and integration could help create Biggs' (2003) 'web' of consistency that students become unable to ignore, as well as providing retrospective value to students' past efforts and experiences (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Indeed, though it may assume that coherence between courses exists, such 'mapping' and emphasis on the connections (or establishing them if necessary) between EMI courses and domestic language courses are highly recommended to aid in the conceptual bridging of taught knowledge potentially thought exclusive to each language (Yamamoto & Bysouth, 2015).

The idea that the responsibility of one who demands change ends solely with demanding said change is a somewhat childish notion. Suggestions and measures for change must be formulated and put forward, for even if they are not viable in their initial form they may be discussed, debated, and hopefully positively modified by others who

may see aspects of the big picture with more clarity and wisdom than the first mover. It is similarly the responsibility of the group to not simply enact the first likely half-baked idea put to them for consideration; sufficient care must be given to what the consequences of such an action might have on the interdependent, intact institutional framework within which everyone operates. Achieving such a suitably forward-thinking yet respectful approach to potential changes is indeed a challenge. Moreover, it is important to note that while personal growth and improvement – such as that experienced by the author over the course of this project – is no small thing, growth and improvement must be "sustained and systemic" for changes in institutions to take root (Fullan & Quinn, 2016, p. 61). As such, the strongly intertwined curricular issues with (i) connection, (ii) communication, and (iii) EMI revealed by this inquiry would no doubt require carefully considered and coordinated efforts to rectify.

6.2. Limitations of the Research

The research limitations could be categorized into methodological, scope, and framework issues, each with attendant problems and oversights. Though the priority was placed on curriculum development, care was taken to conduct a balanced, pragmatic inquiry into an intact and operational educational context. Despite this care, however, access, ethical, time, and space concerns all combined to restrict broader and deeper inquiry – both in terms of design and analysis – into the workings of the E-AW course-in-curriculum.

Framework

Though the Constructive Alignment (CA) theoretical framework is both rugged and reliable, covering core educational tenets with its primary principles of clarity, authenticity/relevance, and bridging of knowledge, the nature of the MMR convergent methodology used for the study necessitated a degree of forced focus upon these theorized principles to allow for the possibility of data triangulation between the two groups of participants. This was achieved with relative success, yet we must acknowledge that by keeping the focus on 'curriculum development' CA principles the

inquiry contingently overlooked other potential 'curriculum development' and 'curriculum understanding' issues. Future studies will be needed to focus on these missed aspects.

Furthermore, following reflection on the triangulation of collected data, it is also important that we emphasize that this inquiry, even when balanced against considerations and claims in the existing literature, provided a single snapshot of this specific target educational context. Though this certainly provided significant insight into extant issues in said context, a sufficient degree of mindfulness is needed in discussing suggestions for course and curriculum improvements in both the target and similar contexts.

Scope & Sample

Limitations of the scope of the inquiry and the sample upon which it was based should also be noted. For reasons of relatability considering the target course objectives vis-à-vis their reference/use in the wider curriculum, as discussed, both student- and instructor-participants were voluntarily recruited for a low-intrusive inquiry process from within the E-AW course for insight into their perspectives on these issues. As such, then, the (i) focus on perspectives, the (ii) situation of participants from within the E-AW course, the (iii) self- or voluntary-selection of sample participants in response to recruitment invitations, and (iv) the low intrusiveness of the investigation methods – all required by the mixture of access, ethical, time, and authorization concerns – necessitated compromises in the final form and deployment of the study. First, then, the focus on stakeholder perspectives, though in itself valuable insight into stakeholders' understanding of and response to the target educational context, could not, for reasons of ethical concern, be tethered to other measures such as grades, GPAs, or other measures of academic attainment or ability. This prevented the purposive sampling of students chosen explicitly for their lower (relative to the rest of the prospective sample) academic inclination and attainment. Thus, it closed the window of

opportunity for a more nuanced approach and consideration of a subset of enrolled students' perspectives.

Similarly, interviews and focus groups with students were not possible due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic at the time of data collection. This necessitated a change of data-collection method towards a cognitively-familiar yet low-intrusive and relatively anonymous option, which resulted in email questionnaires; though successful to a point, the scope of questions and time permissible for such a method likely constricted the quantity of information sought and received. Finally, the situation of participants in the E-AW course looking outwards from itself – though intended to permit greater proximity and clarity into the academic writing objectives of the target course vis-à-vis the wider curriculum – may well have produced a uni-directional view of the context. Though not permitted due to the access restrictions discussed in the previous chapters, posing similar questions to second or third-year students, or instructors from such courses would likely have further aided in expanding both the temporal and spatial perspectives on the alignment and coherence of the E-AW course-in-curriculum.

Methodology

The MMR convergent design utilized for this study was selected due to the need for a balanced consideration of quantitative and qualitative data across different research questions and populations in a 'multilevel' design (Gray, 2014) – in contrast to sequential explanatory's primacy of quantitative data and sequential exploratory's primacy of qualitative for single-issue research questions – as well as to allow for the functional requirement of focusing on two sets of active stakeholder participants. In aiming for a more holistic and multi-perspective understanding, the data gathered was likely less integrated and less 'deep' (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Thus, while a degree of triangulation was achieved by asking similar questions in stage 2 and stage 3 to each set of participants, the relative 'depth' of data gathered for each necessarily becomes relative 'breadth.' While it appears that the perceptions of both students and instructors

converged on common issues, there remain questions unanswered, mainly due to the theory-based focus for each method of data collection.

Although to a degree unavoidable, the issues of 'guilty knowledge,' subjectivity in responding to question prompts, and language concerns all add to potential limitations for this inquiry. Guilty knowledge – i.e., knowledge which, even if revealed through anonymous research, could potentially cause social or professional problems for participants in an embedded context (Williams, 2009) – may have arisen merely from the asking of certain questions, and while appreciative in nature and vetted through ethical review all the questions in this research touched on operational course-and-curriculum issues. Thus, though slight, all questions asked could be held to have the potential to generate said guilty knowledge. Avoidance of this on behalf of the participants may be indirect, in that participants may have responded to a survey with what they believe is the 'correct answer' (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010), or direct, such as if an interview participant requested to skip a given question. Future studies into the issues targeted by this line of inquiry should strive to mitigate such limiting concerns.

Furthermore, though all stages of the research deployed questions and sought answers in the participants' L1, Japanese, there are issues of misinterpreting or mistranslating (from Japanese back into English) and the potential for the researcher to subjectively misconstrue respondents' intended meaning. Both concerns were mitigated by recruiting an experienced professional translator, though it remains the case that research can never be entirely devoid of mistakes, bias, and misinterpretation (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010; Creswell, 2015) potentially engendered through translation.

Finally, with regards to the future deployment of the CALEQ, though it has demonstrated its broad-strokes functionality in ascertaining the degree of perceived internal alignment in a target course, it could stand further scrutiny with regards to the framing of its item-groups. As shown by the EFA both in this study and in Fitzallen and Brown's (2017) own inquiry, the four groups of ILOs, ATs, TLAs, and Feedback items more consistently return as two factors; the first consisting of the ILO, AT, and the

majority of the TLA items, with the second made up of the remain TLA items and the Feedback. The author tentatively termed these factor groupings as "Core Course Components" and "Feedback" as they conceptually overlap with Biggs & Tang's (2011) originally conceived CA components (i.e., ILOs, ATs, and TLAs) and the addition of formative Feedback component to later diagnostic instruments. While the item-groupings themselves do reveal differences in perceptions on each component – as in the case in this study – the author suggests that future deployment of the CALEQ could take the repeated EFA findings into account and consider analysing results according to the two-factor solution of "Core Course Components" and "Feedback".

Participants and Perspectives

A more nuanced limitation regarding the perspectives of unknowledgeable participants also requires consideration. Though in part due to the ethical restrictions imposed by VJA which prevented research into empirical aspects of the E-AW course (e.g., attendance, attainment, etc), the author's choice to approach potential systemic issues with the target course-in-curriculum via the perceptions of embedded stakeholders admittedly ran the risk of merely picking up affective surface issues. Indeed, despite the findings which resulted from this approach, it is certainly the case that further investigation will be required to extend the scope, perhaps into students' perspectives while in subsequent years of study, an analysis of syllabus and curriculum documents, and interviews with curriculum administrators should such be permitted. As it stands, however, the deliberate simplification of the CA principles in the theorising stage made it possible, through the careful alignment of the research questions and questions asked of participants while gathering data, to determine that even to the untrained eye there appears to be a disconnect between the authentic knowledge taught in the E-AW and its currently-perceived degree of relevance and bridging in VJA's wider curriculum.

Scope and Access

Finally, the current research was severely limited by the scope and access available to the researcher at the time of data collection. As a doctoral piece of research, there was no scope for an extended study following a sample of students through their academic career at VJA. Further, restrictions on research at VJA prevented data collection from non-related student and instructor bodies without undergoing ethics-board review (again, not possible given the time-frame required by the doctoral research process). These two points, then, precluded the chance of collecting data either in a longitudinal fashion or with participants drawn from second, third, or fourth year students, which could have shed more light on the external coherence of the E-AW course with a larger number of courses, subsequently, in the wider curriculum. Though it is the case that more than half of a typical VJA students' credits are attained in the first year, with the majority of the remainder again attained in the second year, the potential for use of academic writing conventions (i.e., structure and citations) could be held to increase as students' progress to writing their graduation thesis (though, of course, not in English) in the third and fourth years. As such, though the author was acutely aware that data from students situated in subsequent years of study may have provided different perspectives on the degree of relevance of knowledge – as well, perhaps, as the bridging of knowledge – between the E-AW and courses in the wider curriculum, it was not possible to collect such data for this research project.

6.3. Future Avenues of Inquiry

Although these limitations suggest that there may well be blind spots within the current research as planned and conducted, there are certainly several potential avenues for future inquiry addressing these limitations and expanding the areas of study. Specifically, the author believes there could be scope for studies focused on clarifying unclear aspects raised by the current study and repetition and replication of the current study both internally – at VJA – and externally in other similar institutional contexts to attempt to check findings and reliability. In addition, pending institutional authorization,

investigations permitted to incorporate measures of academic motivation, attainment, and other grade-based constructs (for example, pre-tests and post-tests to determine retention of knowledge between semester-exit and semester-entry) to stakeholder perspectives could be deployed, as well as the recruitment of student participants at different stages in their academic career.

Perhaps, as noted in Chapter 5, the first opportunity for extension of this research is to clarify the veracity of the perspectives it revealed; chiefly, the overlapping concerns of student- and instructor-participants that despite the authentic nature of the E-AW course's taught skillset there are few clear connections – either in terms of direct utilization or indirect reference – between this skillset and other courses as experienced to date. Investigations into this matter may be based on analysis of attendant secondary documents and materials related to each course, though given the degree of purported instructor freedom at VJA it may require closer inquiry. In such cases, interviews could be conducted with students, instructors, and administrators embedded in said courses. While pursuit of such information could be highly enlightening, there is, as discussed previously, the chance that it may disturb the silofied status quo. Thus, care must be taken in tactfully approaching such an inquiry.

Repetition of the current study, too, would also likely prove valuable. Internally, should the same study be conducted a few years from now, comparisons with the current findings should help determine whether the findings and the method could be considered reliable. Furthermore, though each educational context differs from the next, attempts could be made to replicate findings by applying the same methodology in other Japanese HEIs with similar characteristics (i.e., instruction of a core academic skillset through EMI). While replication of findings is noted as a general weak point in qualitative research, it is nevertheless incumbent upon researchers to reflect upon their findings from a wide range of vantage points to become best able to qualify their implications and, subsequently, their suitability for application.

Finally, should sufficient authority and ethical clearance per the target research context be acquired, future investigations may increase their resolution further by focusing on sub-sets of the broad sample recruited by the current study. Should such access be permitted, a similar version of the study may be conducted to compare responses from more- and less- academically-inclined student participants. Furthermore, with the ability to incorporate a pre-test post-test instrument into the methodology, future avenues of inquiry may be able to compare retention levels across semesters and years with the participants' perspectives on the degree of connection between the target course and other courses in the curriculum. It could also be enlightening to conduct longitudinal studies on the perceptions of different subsets of students across several years, including separations along departmental lines, to determine the degree of perceived relevance and utility the academic writing skillset has to each sub-set.

6.4. Concluding Remarks

This study, focusing as advised by Deng (2018) on curriculum development issues of a *specific* aspect of a *specific* curriculum in a *specific* institution, has achieved a high-resolution inquiry into the perceived internal alignment and external coherence of an intact and extant course-in-context. Based solely on the findings of this study, it would appear that there is cause for a degree of concern for the 'fit' of the E-AW course, particularly with regard to the implications that this perceived lack of coherence between the target E-AW course and other courses within VJA's wider curriculum may have on learning, acquisition, and retention. Educational theory, ranging from CA (Biggs & Tang, 2011) and the perception of value (Feather, 1982) to curriculum design (Dewey, 1972; Tyler, 2013), the objective importance of academic writing instruction generally (Swales, 1990; Swales & Feak, 1994; Johns, 1997; Polio & Shi, 2012) and specifically within the Japanese tertiary context (Kubota, 1997; McKinley, 2013, Teeter, 2015; Tajino, 2019), and concerns about EMI (Rose, 2018; Aizawa & Rose, 2019; Galloway et al., 2020) would suggest that this course-in-curriculum could be improved by increased communication, collaboration, and considered connectivity with other courses so as to provide enrolled students with a clear, coherent, and aligned system in which to learn

and develop themselves under the guidance of their instructors. Nevertheless, one must be cautious in rendering hasty judgment; though by the univariate measure brought by this inquiry the system appears in need of adjustment, by other measures, perhaps more locally and socio-culturally aligned, said system appears to operate well enough for immediate domestic needs.

Caution uttered, however, it is clear that when balanced against the purported intent expressed by Japan's Ministry of Education (MEXT) to internationalize their HEIs and to foster more Japanese graduates with abilities suited to the international academic knowledge community (Aspinal, 2010), more could certainly be done by curriculum planners and administrators at VJA to cultivate said core skillsets through constructive, coherent, and clear connection between their component courses. Though this may, in fact, be difficult to achieve in settings as socio-culturally stratified, specialized, and silofied as Japanese universities – particularly given their predilections with English as a foreign artefact – but difficult is not impossible. What is required is the will and fortitude to act, based on informed consideration, upon the realization of a need. Ultimately, while course and curriculum coherence may not yet be viewed as an overarching goal, we might do well to view it as one of many paths by which to better construct our institutional systems and, by doing so, improve the opportunity to learn for all enrolled within them.

This research contributes to existing knowledge of the application of EMI courses of study, particularly in similar Japanese tertiary contexts, with an eye on improving the standalone fitness and connected fit of said courses in the curricula in which they are embedded. The findings, and implications, of this study suggest that CA's core theorized principles – chiefly, the clarity, authenticity, and contiguous relevance of knowledge taught, and the degree of bridging within its situated curriculum – be carefully considered by course and curriculum planners, preferably via communication with course-teams, to provide a more accessible perceivably aligned educational experience for enrolled students. Though not immediately generalizable, it is hoped that this thesis and its considerations may prove helpful to other researchers and practitioners.

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Appendices

<u>Appendix 1: NGSD Mission Statement (Translation)</u>

The Institute for Liberal Arts and Sciences was established in April 2013 with a view to developing talented individuals who can function effectively in the international arena through their broad perspectives, extensive knowledge, and unparalleled creativity. The Institute aspires to "teach the basic knowledge and methodologies that are common among a wide range of cross-disciplinary fields and foster rich humanity by providing students with opportunities to come into contact with advanced learning and culture". (Article: Kyoto University Institute for Liberal Arts and Sciences Regulations).

Appendix 2: FLD Mission Statement (Translation)

We, the English Language Education Division, aim to help Kyoto University students develop their own abilities as subjects of language learning and acquire the ability to become independent English users. Intensive teaching of the knowledge and skills necessary for students to participate in the learning community. As students expand their horizons, we help them achieve their self-imposed goals, both academically and in lifelong learning. Before learning knowledge specialized for each profession such as researchers, computer engineers, international business, lawyers, and medical professions, Japanese students at VJA must master the basic academic skills that everyone necessarily must acquire before graduating from university. This is because there is an increasing need to strengthen not only English proficiency but also general academic skills in order to engage in academic research in an internationalized society or to play an active role in various fields of society.

(Article: Kyoto University Institute for Liberal Arts and Sciences, Foreign Language Division website).

Appendix 3: E-AW Syllabus (Translation)

Course: E-AW

Language of Instruction: English

Number of Koma/Week: 1

Number of Credits: 2

The goals of this course are to: 1) acquire basic academic writing skills, especially the skills of writing paragraphs and short essays, 2) improve academic listening skills, and 3) expand academic vocabulary. Regarding academic writing skills, students will be expected to learn how to do the following: a) focus a topic; b) organize paragraphs; c) use information sources at a basic level (i.e., quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing); d) write drafts; and e) make careful revisions. Regarding academic listening skills, students will be expected to engage in intensive listening and guided note-taking exercises using the online materials outside of class and be assessed in class. Regarding academic vocabulary, students will be expected to learn vocabulary using the " Vocabulary Database 1110" outside of class and be assessed in class. Students will also be expected to take responsibility for their own learning by reflecting on their language learning experiences and achievements through self-assessment surveys (the Can-Do Statements).

By the end of this course, students will have acquired the following skills at varying levels. Students will be able to:

- recall and use academic vocabulary.
- listen to and comprehend short academic passages.
- identify topic and supporting sentences of paragraphs.
- write a topic sentence.
- develop a paragraph with descriptive details.
- use some simple rhetorical styles.
- express ideas in coherent and ordered sentences.
- restate the main idea of a paragraph.
- express ideas in simple paragraphs.
- connect paragraphs in short essays.
- edit text under the guidance of the instructor.
- format written text appropriately and use suitable punctuation.
- write basic definitions and include these in a paragraph.
- paraphrase a variety of short texts, often using appropriate synonyms.
- take notes from short presentations, lectures, or videos.
- retrieve information sources from the Internet.

Appendix 4: CALEQ Battery Questions

1-5 / Clarity of ILOs

1. I had a clear idea of what I was supposed to learn.

2. I was given a clear idea of what I needed to be able to do with the topics learnt.

3. I was never in doubt about what I was supposed to be learning in this course.

4. The syllabus/materials through the course clearly outlined what I was supposed to learn.

5. I was constantly reminded of what I was supposed to learn during the course.

6-10 / TLAs Alignment

6. The teaching and learning activities addressed what I was supposed to learn.

7. The teaching and learning activities helped me learn what I was supposed to learn.

8. I was provided the opportunities to actively participate in what I was supposed to learn.

9. I was provided a variety of activities that dealt with what I was supposed to learn.

10. I was given clear and specific instructions as to what to do in learning what I was supposed to learn.

11-15 / ATs Alignment

11. The assessment tasks addressed what I was supposed to learn.

12. It was explained clearly to me how the assessment tasks were related to what I was supposed to learn.

13. The assessment tasks provided opportunities for me to demonstrate how well I had achieved what I was supposed to learn.

14. The grade-responses that I received indicated fairly well how I had achieved what I was supposed to learn.

15. I received useful feedback on how well I had achieved what I was supposed to learn.

16-20 / Feedback

16. I received feedback that related directly to the assessment criteria.

17. I received feedback that was clear and specific to what I was supposed to learn.

18. I received feedback that helped me prepare for the next assessment task.

19. I could take action to improve my own learning based on the feedback provided.

20. I was able to make informed judgments about my own work from the feedback provided.

Appendix 5: Statement Regarding Ethical Clearance Letter

As stated in Chapter 3 of this study, research was carried out during the peak of the Sars-Cov2 pandemic and the hitherto unprecedented restrictions it placed on the day-to-day operations of all persons and institutions. It was therefore necessary to adjust and resubmit the method and rationale for this study's data-collection, which was reviewed during the precise period of time when the University of Liverpool was transitioning its online programmes – along with its access, security, and email functions – from one service provider (Laureate) to another (Kaplan). Unfortunately, due both to personal lapses in discipline as well as technical difficulties following the transition, the official email containing the Ethical Clearance documentation was lost. Some unofficial emails – dated prior to the official VPREC announcement – regarding this study's successful Ethics application remain, with the most recent and relevant shown here:

I have reviewed David Lees' ethics paperwork highlighting the revisions due to the COVID-19 restrictions.
As VPREC Chair I am happy to approve them as minor revisions. This means that David can continue with his data collection.
I will communicate this to the committee at the 8th of April VPREC
All the best

Lucilla Crosta *PhD, MSc., BEd*
Laureate online Education, University of Liverpool Partnership
EdD Thesis Faculty Manager
EdD Honorary Senior Lecturer
EdD Thesis supervisor

Participant Consent Form (Student)

Version number & date: (4) / 29.03.2020
Title of the research project: Active-stakeholder perspectives on the alignment and coherence of an EMI Academic Writing course in a curriculum: A case study in a Japanese university
Name of researcher(s): Mr. David Lees

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated 29.03.2020 for the above study, or it has been read to me. I have had the chance to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that taking part in the study involves two voluntary stages, with the first stage being a 10-minute online survey and the second stage being a 20-30 minute, open-ended email questionnaire.
3. I understand that my participation in either stage is voluntary, and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason and without my rights being affected. In addition, I understand that I am free to decline to answer any particular question or questions.
4. I understand that I can ask for access to analysis of the information I provided as published in the researcher's thesis. I can request the withdrawal of that information if I wish at any time prior to the researcher's codification of the data, roughly one month after data collection. I understand that following this point I will no longer be able to request the withdrawal of the information I provide.
5. I understand that personal information collected about me, such as my name, signature or university email address, will not be shared beyond the researcher and their supervisors. I understand that anonymization will begin during data collection. I understand that data collected from this research will be stored digitally for six years before being erased.
6. I understand that taking part in the email questionnaire stage of the study entails the student-researcher being able to read in more detail what I think about the target E-AW course, and that the process of doing so may pose potential risks as described in more detail in the attached PIS.
7. I agree to take part in this study.

_____   _____   _____
Participant name   Date   Signature
_____   _____   _____
Name of person taking consent   Date   Signature

Principal Investigator
Dr. Gina Wisker, University of Liverpool - gina.wisker@online.liverpool.ac.uk
Student Investigator
Mr. David Lees, Kyoto University - david.lees@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Participant Consent Form (Teacher)

Version number & date: (4) / 29.03.2020
Title of the research project: Active-stakeholder perspectives on the alignment and coherence of an EMI Academic Writing course in a curriculum: A case study in a Japanese university
Name of researcher(s): Mr. David Lees

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated 29.03.2020 for the above study, or it has been read to me. I have had the chance to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that taking part in the study involves a semi-structured, audio-recorded online interview, expected to take between 20 and 30 minutes.

3. I understand that my participation in the semi-structured interview will be audio recorded. I consent to your use of these recordings for the following purposes: transcription, codification and analysis of individual utterances.

4. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason and without my rights being affected. In addition, I understand that I am free to decline to answer any particular question or questions.

5. I understand that I can ask for access to analysis of the information I provided as published in the researcher's thesis. I can request the withdrawal of that information if I wish at any time prior to the researcher's codification of the data, roughly one month after data collection. I understand that following this point I will no longer be able to request the withdrawal of the information I provide.

6. I understand that personal information collected about me, such as my name, signature or university email address, will not be shared beyond the researcher and their supervisors. I understand that anonymization will begin during data collection. I understand that data collected from this research will be stored digitally for six years before being erased.

7. I understand that taking part in the semi-structured interview stage of the study entails the possibility for the student-researcher, a co-worker, to hear what I think about the target E-AW course and students' perspectives on it, and that the process of doing so may pose potential risks as described in more detail in the attached PIS.

8. I agree to take part in this study.

_____   _____   _____
Participant name   Date   Signature
_____   _____   _____
Name of person taking consent   Date   Signature

Principal Investigator
Dr. Gina Wisker, University of Liverpool - gina.wisker@online.liverpool.ac.uk
Student Investigator
Mr. David Lees, Kyoto University - david.lees@online.liverpool.ac.uk

Participant Information Sheet (General)

Version number & date: (4) / 29.03.2020
Title of the research project: Active-stakeholder perspectives on the alignment and coherence
of an EMI Academic Writing course in a curriculum: A case study in a Japanese university
Name of researcher(s): Mr. David Lees

This Participant Information Sheet (PIS), is the first part of the process of informed consent. If
you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here,
please feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any
accompanying information.

The University of Liverpool Research Ethics Board has approved this research study. Participation
is completely voluntary, anonymous and confidential. You are free to discontinue participation
at any time during the study prior to data analysis (scheduled to take place from the end of
August 2020).

Purpose of the Study

The present study will explore active stake-holder's perceptions on the alignment of objectives,
assessments and activities in English Writing-Listening Course (henceforth E-AW) currently being
conducted at your university. In addition, the study will also explore the alignment of the EGAP
course with the rest of the university's EGAP curriculum. The degree of alignment of course and
curriculums has been identified as an important part in providing balanced, consistent and useful
learning opportunities in higher education. As the E-AW course seeks to teach students critically
important academic writing skills, it is necessary to ensure that the course's internal and external
alignment matches up with expectations. Quantitative surveys, combined with a follow-up email
questionnaire, this section of the study seeks students' perceptions on how well the E-AW
course's teaching-learning activities (TLAs) link to the assessment-tasks (ATs), and how both of
these support the intended learning objectives (ILOs) in the course itself and in the wider
curriculum. Findings from this study will hopefully be used to help course and curriculum
development in the future.

What Will I Be Asked To Do?

As first-year students enrolled in the E-AW course, your perspectives on the alignment of the
course gathered through this research project will provide insight to curriculum planners.
Hopefully, this will help improve the E-AW course and wider curriculum for newly-enrolled
students in the future. Participants will be asked to complete a survey online using a secure
survey platform. The survey is made up of a series of statements regarding participants' feelings
about the activities, assessments, and overall learning objectives of the E-AW course and the
wider curriculum in which it functions. Demographic information includes participants' gender,
nationality, year of study, and department. The investigatory statements regarding participants'
perspectives on the alignment of the course will define each term, and require that the
participants respond to each statement via a five-point Likert scale. The survey should take
approximately 5-10 minutes.

Following this, participants will also be asked whether they would like to volunteer to participate in the second phase open-ended email questionnaire. Those who volunteer will be contacted via e-mail to explain the details for the questionnaire (nominally scheduled for Feedback Week, two weeks after the penultimate class of the course). Participation in the second phase of the study is voluntary. The email questionnaire participants will respond in an open-ended, extended form to several questions based on the findings of the survey. The participants' responses will be translated, and following approval from each participant the student-researcher will codify and analyze their response. The email questionnaire should take approximately 20-30 minutes.

As instructors on the E-AW course, participants will be asked to undertake an online, recorded, semi-structured interview with the student-researcher on the topics outlined above. Hopefully, this will help improve the E-AW course and wider curriculum for newly-enrolled students and other concerned stakeholders in the future. Those who volunteer will be contacted via e-mail to setup a time and place to conduct the interview (nominally during late Septmenber 2020). Participation in the interview phase of the study is completely voluntary. Those who volunteer to participate in the second phase of the study will be audio recorded. These recordings will then be transcribed to allow the student researcher to code and analyze the results. The interview should take approximately 20-30 minutes.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary. Those reading this consent form may refuse to participate altogether, may participate in only parts of the study, and may choose to decline to answer any and all questions. As the survey is completely anonymous, the student-researcher will be unable to remove data collected from the surveys. Regarding the email questionnaire stage, while the student-researcher will take note of names during consent-giving and email addresses for coordination, the student-research researcher will not refer to the participants by name as codenames will begin anonymisation at the commencement of data collection, with participants being referred to by colours. Participants who wish to withdraw their response from the analysis of the email questionnaire stage can do so until the end of August, 2020 when data analysis is expected to begin. This can be done by contacting the student-researcher and requesting the withdrawal of your data by referencing your anonymization codename.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

Survey: No personal identifying information will be collected in the survey stage of the study, and all participants shall remain completely anonymous. Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide your gender, nationality, year of study, department as diagnostic questions.

Email Questionnaire: Only those volunteering to participate in the second phase of the study will be asked to provide their email addresses for organisational purposes, and signatures on requisite PCFs, though as anonymisation will begin at the commencement of the email questionnaires these will be automatically disassociated with any statements and opinions made. Therefore, while some personal information will be collected to a minimal degree, it will be unconnectable with data collected.

Interviews: Only those volunteering to participate in the second phase of the study will be asked to provide their email addresses for organisational purposes, and signatures on requisite PCFs, though as anonymisation will begin at the commencement of the interviews these will be automatically disassociated with any statements, opinions and utterances made. As such, while

some personal information will be collected to a minimal degree, it will be unconnectable with data collected.

Only the student-researcher will have access to the raw data on a day-to-day basis. The Principal Investigator will also be able to access the data when requested.

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

The student-researcher is fully committed to minimizing any risks to participants. Those who participate in the first phase of this study will do so digitally, asynchronously and wholly anonymously, thus mitigating psychological, relationship, legal, economic/professional, and physical risks (as outlined in the following paragraph). Participants in the second phase email questionnaire will be asked their views on the alignment of the E-AW course and wider curriculum. While considered and limited via anonymization at the data-collection stage, there are some slight psychological, relationship, legal, economic/professional, and physical risks to the participants (as outlined in the following paragraph). The digital devices used to store data collected for each stage will be maintained at the student researcher's place of residence in a locked safe-case, and after data is extracted from them it will be stored on an encrypted, password-protected external hard drive in the same safe-case.

> *Psychological* – discussion of the participants' opinions of their enrolled course cannot be considered sensitive, offensive, threatening or degrading per se, and as such should the topic under discussion should not cause untoward stress in the participants.

> *Relationship* – the participants will be recruited from roughly 50 classes across 8 different departments, thus reducing the chance that they know each other and therefore limiting the chance that relationship risks might arise from participation in either stage. Furthermore, as both stages are to be deployed online, the participants responses will be completely anonymous to other participants. The student-researcher will not have past, present or future teaching responsibilities with the classes targeted for participant recruitment, and as such relationship risks are limited.

> *Legal* – no national laws, nor institutional regulations, will be broken in the participants' joining either stage, and as such there is no legal risk to the participants.

> *Economic/Professional* – as anonymization will be conducted at the data-collection stage, and as the student-researcher will not have past, present or future teaching responsibilities with the participants, economic and professional risks – stemming from, for example, disagreement with curriculum policies and leadership decisions – will be limited.

> *Physical* – as both stages will be conducted online, with directions to respond in their own language and to do so within a two weeks, there are not considered to be any physical risks arising from participation in this research.

Participants who experience discomfort during either stage are allowed to withdraw at any time, and may freely contact (david.lees@online.liverpool.ac.uk), ii) the student-researchers' supervisors (gina.wisker@online.liverpool.ac.uk; martin.gough@online.liverpool.ac.uk), iii) the department managers (075-753-6680 ; 075-753-6772), iv) their university's own support office (075-753-6509) , or v) the University of Liverpool's Participant Advocate Office (liverpoolethics@liverpool-online.com).

As per the regulations of the target research context, there will be no direct and material benefits to the participants in the research project. However, through participation in the email questionnaire stage participants will be encouraged to reflect on their own perspectives of the target E-AW course and contribute to the improvement of said course for the students who follow in their footsteps.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

Only the student-researcher and their Principal Investigator (supervisor) will have access to the raw data collected in both the first and second phases of this study.

Any use of participants' responses in the final paper will be done so using a codename. Any information that might identify an individual will not be included.

Should a participant wish to withdraw at any point during the study, any data that can be identified as being connected to that individual (e.g., audio, transcripts, survey data connected to the individual's email address) will be destroyed. Participants are able to withdraw until the end of August, 2020 when data analysis is projected to begin.