

**THE REALITY OF ENGLISH CONVERSATION CLASSES: A STUDY IN A  
SOUTH KOREAN UNIVERSITY**

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by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Government Language Planning and Policies (LPPs) have affected how English is learned and promoted in South Korea. One result has been requiring university students to take English conversation classes. However, it was through personal interactions with these classes that the focus seemed to be on general English proficiency rather than on conversation learning. Additionally, it seemed that conversation classes were not guided by any acknowledged goals or an evaluation process of those goals, which seems to have generated much divergence across these classes. This led to an examination of what conversation classes are in a local Korean university. Five research areas were investigated: the standards which teachers are to meet in conversation classes, the role of these classes, the teachers of conversation, the expectations of conversation classes as held by students, teachers, and administrators and the construct of conversation. Three questionnaires were designed to gather quantitative and qualitative data in these areas. It was found that the observed divergence is caused by a lack of standards to meet, an economically driven role, a leveling system based on receptive skill testing, differing expectations and a simplistic understanding of the conversation construct. Much awareness and discussion is needed to create a conversation-learning environment in university conversation classes if that is to be the goal. The limitations are acknowledged in this study as well as recommendations for further research.

## **DEDICATION**

To my best friend and husband who inspires me to be a better person.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

LPPs	Language Planning and Policies: to refer to government policies related to how native and foreign languages are used and learned in a country.
ELT	English Language Teaching: the profession of teaching English as a second or foreign language.
MoE	Ministry of Education: the government branch that oversees elementary, middle and high school education in South Korea.
NEC	National Education Curriculum: the centralized curriculum used in South Korea.
CSAT	College Scholastic Ability Test: a university entrance exam taken by all high school students.
NESTs	Native English Speaking Teachers.



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

English conversation classes became a requirement for university graduates in South Korea in the 1990s (Kim and Margolis, 2000: 30) and it is in the Korean university context that this research takes place. These mandatory classes are a result of government language planning and policies (LPPs) that strongly encourage the development of English oral communication skills, which promote fluency over accuracy (Kwon, 2000). Ricento and Hornberger (1996: 404) state that linguistics is rarely the primary agenda of LPPs but rather societal issues such as globalization, cultural values and traditions take precedent (White et al., 1991: 171). Therefore, LPPs can be idealistic and inherently problematic if framed and implemented without consideration of its implications and affects on the stakeholders involved (Nunan, 2003: 591). Nunan (2003: 590) argues that descriptive data is needed to document English related educational policies so ELT (English Language Teaching) professionals can understand what governments, bureaucracies and industries want to achieve and in turn help them realistically achieve their policy mandates. Therefore, it becomes necessary for ELT professionals to understand the need for English and how English is used in non-native English speaking countries. In this case, the researcher took government policies into account when investigating the need and use for English conversation classes in the research setting.

This study developed as a result of the researcher being assigned English conversation classes in a Korean university. After some classroom exposure, I realized that ‘conversation’ was not necessarily the outcome. There seemed to be a mismatch between the course title and the learning context. The context was characterized by the following: 1) low English proficiency levels amongst many students, 2) class sizes of 25 or more, 3) scheduled class times of two 50-minute sessions a week or one 2-hour session once a week, 4) a designated general English textbook and 5) the wider environment where English tends not to be used socially among Koreans (Park and Oxford, 1998: 108; Jeong, 2004: 34). Therefore, English is learned in a “target language (TL)-removed context” (Graves, 2008: 155), which means that English is acquired in classrooms that are separated from English using contexts. This setting exemplifies how policy rhetoric of making communicative competence can be problematic when the

classroom reality is not considered (Nunan, 2003: 589). The previously mentioned factors affected my English conversation classes by putting the focus on general English proficiency rather than conversational competence. The conflict between the course title and the reality of the classroom generated an investigation to find out what teaching conversation means, what university standards are in place for conversation classes, what role do these classes have at this university, who teaches these classes and what is expected in these classes. As a result, this study looks at whether or not English conversational competence can be achieved in this context.

The purpose of this study is to answer five research questions in order to understand the academic institution and in turn be able to make better and more informed teaching decisions in my conversation classes. Without this descriptive data, the present situation will continue to focus on general English proficiency rather than on conversational skills, which negates the perceived intention of teaching and learning conversation in classes titled “English Conversation”. There are other factors that inhibit conversational competence besides idealistic language policies and the aforementioned contextual characteristics. They are: 1) textbooks and approaches that misrepresent claims of producing conversational competence, 2) lack of interactional time and exposure to authentic English conversation, 3) the lack of need for English conversation within a target context of English use, 4) lack of goals, standards and direction for conversation learning, 5) mismatched expectations between students, teachers, and administrators, and 6) the contradiction between the nature of the classroom and the nature of conversation. This is not an exhaustive list but rather an illustrative list. These factors will not be the primary focus of this study, however their consideration give reason to the mismatch between the course title and the course content. Brown asserts that to understand complex issues, asking the right questions is more valuable than “possessing storehouses of knowledge” (2000: 4). So in this light, the research questions for this study on conversation are:

1. Is there a standard for English teachers to meet when teaching conversation in the researched university?
2. What role do conversation classes have in this educational context?
3. Which teachers are assigned conversation classes?

4. What are the reasons for this assignment?

5. What are the university's administrators', the native and non-native English teachers' and the students' expectations of conversation classes and how do they compare?

The study begins with Chapter 2 addressing the background of English language policies in Korea and the changes made towards promoting communicative language skills. Additionally, how these changes have affected Korean universities will be addressed. Also, the construct of conversation and conversation teaching will be reviewed. Chapter 3 presents how a mixed methods approach in interviews and questionnaires are used to gather the data for this investigation. I took a three-perspective approach to enhance a well-rounded point of view of the researched setting. Administrators, native and non-native English conversation teachers and students in conversation classes participated in the questionnaires designed for this study. The results of the data collection are discussed in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 contains a full analysis and discussion of the implications for teaching conversation in the researched context, which can be applied to the wider EFL profession in Asia where English conversation is widely promoted. The final chapter summarizes the findings of the research questions and concludes the study with an overview of its implications.

## CHAPTER 2

### DIVERGENCE IN UNIVERSITY CONVERSATION CLASSES

This review will examine English conversation as it pertains to English Language Planning and Policies (LPPs) in South Korea and its construct to better understand what it is and how it tends to be taught in the research context. LPPs are government mandates that outline how native and foreign languages should be used and learned within a country.

#### **2.1 English Language Planning and Policies in South Korea and Their Relation to the University Context**

##### **2.1.1 From Elite Access to Common Access**

Since 1883 and 1884 when the Korean-American and British-Korean Treaties were signed with America and Britain, respectively, English has become a way to diversify trade relations, modernize the Korean government, upgrade technology and science, and participate in international affairs (Dustheimer and Gillet, 1999: 2; Jeong, 2004: 40; Yim, 2007: 37; Kim, 2008a-r, 2009a, 2009b). From the first English LPP to commission a one-year translator program to advise King Gojong in 1884, several English language policies have contributed to making English the most significant foreign language in Korea (Shim and Baik, 2000: 182; Kim-Riveria, 2002: 263; Kim, 2008c). This can be seen in the private after-school industry where English is the most popular subject offered.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) has overseen seven National Education Curriculums (NEC) since 1954, (Skim and Baik, 2000: 182) which is the primary source of English LPP mandates. At first, English was an extracurricular subject, which became mandatory for middle and high school in 1969 to presently including elementary grades 3 to 12 (age 9 to 18) since 1997. The English curriculum sets the amount of English vocabulary, sentence types and grammatical and functional structures for each grade that is represented in authorized textbooks and activity types (Kwon, 2000). Kwon (2000) states that current high school graduates should have mastered 3000 English vocabulary words through 1,216 classroom hours with the expectation to engage in and thrive at learning conversation in university. In sum, English was first accessible to elite groups such as translators and government officials, but now every high school student is encouraged to be become communicative in English as a foreign language within university conversation

classes. The question is are these university classes doing what is expected of them? Are they producing conversationally skilled university graduates?

### **2.1.2 Policies That Contributed To Mandatory Conversation Classes in Universities**

Three major policy changes in the 1990s set the stage for making English conversation classes compulsory for university students. The first change was initiated by the sixth NEC (1992). It stated that interpersonal interaction skills be developed through a communicative language teaching methodology with a focus on everyday functional English (Kwon, 2000, Nunan, 2003: 600; Butler, 2005: 427). The second change was a national mandate to globalize Korea (1995) in order to become a competitive and a central player in international affairs. The mandates for students were to become proficient in English while keeping a strong sense of national identity so they can teach the world about Korea (Shin, 2003: 18; Yim, 2007: 38). The third change was to increase English communicative competence by teaching English through English as stated in the seventh NEC (1997) (Jeong, 2004: 41). These communicative themed policies impacted the university entrance exam, the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT). An English dialogue listening component was added in 1994, which claims to indirectly assess speaking abilities (Kwon, 2000). However, this indirect testing method tends to create an overreliance on a receptive skill, which is no guarantee that speaking, a productive skill has developed correspondingly. This is because language skills tend not to develop simultaneously if they are not learned integratively (Hinkel, 2006: 113). Therefore, this method might be an unreliable indication of speaking abilities. Nevertheless, the CSAT revision was the strongest initiator of change because it is the gatekeeper into prestigious universities and therefore high-paying jobs (Gray, 1999: 47; Choi, 2008: 41). The policy changes encouraged English learning as a national endeavor and refocused from linguistic competence to communicative competence, which has involved teaching reforms from grammar-translation/audio-lingual methods to CLT methods. This requires drastic changes in teacher and student roles, classroom expectations, materials, testing and beliefs about learning and teaching. Kwon (2000) claims that changes are gradually happening as the government funds various programs to strengthen the infrastructure necessary for successful English LPP outcomes.

### **2.1.3 How These Policies Have Affected Universities**

Communicative competence in English mandated in the aforementioned policies and so universities started to implement several changes to build this competence within students in order to stay relevant and competitive. First, English conversation classes became a graduation requirement (Kim and Margolia, 2000: 30). Three out of six administrators in this study stated that these classes have been compulsory for all majors in this university since 1996. However, conversation classes are not meticulously organized like the NEC. No documentation was found regarding national or institutional conversation course curriculum. Four out of six administrators stated that there is no set curriculum for conversation but rather it is the teachers' responsibility to develop their own content. Consequently, conversation classes tend to be seen as titles rather than content which makes these classes highly interpretative. This leads to divergence in conversation classes, which will be discussed in chapter 5. Next, Native English Speaking Teachers (NESTs) are primarily hired to teach conversation, as it is widely believed that NESTs have the best insight into the English language, especially in a communicative sense (Holliday, 2006: 385). The Korean government promotes this ideology by recruiting BA-holding NESTs to help fulfill English LPPs (Dustheimer and Gillet, 1999: 5). This university job advert requires any BA with some teaching experience. Also, many universities have set an English proficiency level requirement for graduation (Kwon, 2000). One administrator commented that this university does not have a proficiency requirement because it has been too difficult to determine how to test English proficiency and they are undecided on what department should be responsible for administering this test. University students are encouraged to write theses in English to be published in international refereed journals whereas all professors are encouraged to teach their subjects in English (Yim, 2007: 40). Lastly, creating research environments are encouraged to attract collaboration with oversea academics to increase the quality of academic research and English education (ibid). However, what seems to be missing in the literature is evaluations on how far universities have come in their English-directed mandates. Are these changes helping to make university students communicatively competent in English? This study tries to answer this by investigating the standards, the role and the expectations of conversation classes specifically.

### **2.1.4 Communicative Use of English in Korea**

Interestingly, English is not used for social interaction among Koreans, therefore, they do not have much opportunity to use English and this leads to a lack of communicative English skills (Park and Oxford, 1998: 108; Jeong, 2004: 43; Choi, 2008: 42). Rather, English test taking have become a vital skill in Korean society as CSAT and TOEIC scores have become the gateway to social and economic advancement and stability (Gray, 1999: 47; Choi, 2008: 39). The business sector has increased job competition by demanding English-skilled employees (Jeong, 2004: 40) so English proficiency tests or TOEIC scores are included in recruitment and used for promotional incentives (Yim, 2007: 41). Universities now offer various test preparation courses and proficiency classes to help graduates with employment (Park and Potts in Graves, 2008: 165). This is true for the university under study as indicated in their promotional booklet. Consequently, conversation classes tend to be a source of language exposure for TOEIC or company test preparation. Therefore, to raise communicative competency, testing must be developed to directly evaluate speaking rather than indirectly through listening tests. However, English is mostly used to gain a competitive edge in Korean society with minimal need for genuine English communication. This raises the question, what would conversation classes be needed for in everyday Korean life?

In summary, conversation classes are a result of English LPPs, which encourage Koreans to become more communicatively competent in English. However, this goal is inhibited by several social constraints. The testing methods, a young English teaching infrastructure and a lack of social interaction in English prevent much progress in developing English conversation skills. So, are government LPPs too vague or idealistic to implement? Nunan (2003) and Butler (2005) address this question in their studies, which include South Korea, citing a wide gap between the intent of these policies and the reality that lacks the infrastructure and direction to implement them. Nonetheless, to know how to become conversationally competent, the nature of conversation and conversation teaching must be examined to better inform university conversation classes if the goal of these classes is to make students more conversationally competent. This will be discussed in the following section.

## **2.2 Conversation Defined**

Conversation is a multifaceted construct. Thornbury and Slade point out that this complexity derives from conversation being so ubiquitous in our daily language usage (2006: 5). In other words, conversation is so intertwined with daily interactions that it is difficult to define. Also, various fields of study have informed conversation: linguistics, psychology, anthropology, and sociology (Gumperz, 1999: 98). So it becomes harder to compile a concise yet comprehensive definition of conversation. It is necessary to define conversation by its characteristics, its functions and its conditions.

### **2.2.1 Conversation Characteristics: Conversation is . . .**

Conversation is “*a type of speech event*” (Hymes in Richards, 1980: 14) that is distinct from lectures, discussions, interviews and courtroom trials. Conversation is *cooperatively constructed* which is based on contributions, assumptions, expectations, and interpretations of the participants’ utterances (Richards, 1980: 414; Gumperz, 1999: 101). Awareness of differing assumptions, expectations and interpretations would be vital for learning conversation in a cross-cultural classroom. Since conversation is cooperative, it becomes a negotiated, self-regulated process (Van Lier, 1989: 499; Nunan, 1999, 226; Sayer, 2005: 17) that is segmentally created through short, frequent turns consisting of phrases and clauses (Cook, 1989: 51; Thornbury and Slade, 2006: 13). Active monitoring is also needed to link utterances together (Brazil, 1992: 4) and is maintained through active listening (Carter, 1998: 47). This interaction means that the participants have equal rights to produce utterances (Sayer, 2005: 16). However, this feature has cultural implications for Korean students as the Korean language is based on hierarchical rules. It has been observed that any varying levels known among students such as academic year or age differences, tends to inhibit conversational flow.

This cooperative discourse is *driven by interactive rules and routines* (Dornyei and Thurrell, 1992: 3, 1994: 42) where these structures guide how silence, volume, intonation, conventional language, information and norms of interaction are used (Applegate, 1975) to organize conversation. This organization is culture-bound as conversational routines are implemented differently in different countries (Taylor and Wolfson, 1978: 272; Richards, 1980: 419). Dornyei and Thurrell (1992 and 1994) highlight the features of conversational routines as being openings



and closings, turn-taking mechanisms and adjacency pairs such as greetings and apologies. Also conversational language enables various situations such as coming into a conversation, holding listener interest, subject changing, and getting out of a conversation smoothly. These routines are signaled through specialized words and phrases to make conversation cohesive which means that conversation is *made up of linguistic features* (Richards and Sukwiwat, 1983: 114). Corpora data of authentic spoken language has informed the linguistic characteristics of conversation, which have revealed distinctive grammatical and lexical features (Carter and McCarthy, 1995; Carter, 1998; Thornbury and Slade, 2006: 40; O’Keeffe, et al., 2007: 21). Some examples include ellipsis (deliberately omit chunks of language), head and tail slots (prospectively and retrospectively topical comments), deixis (referential language of a shared environment), lexical repetition, vague language, and fillers (words and phrases that fill in pauses or buy time). Conversation is also topically unpredictable (Sinclair, 1992: 81) and therefore native speakers tend to have a “linguistic repertoire” of regularly used phrases (Gumperz in Yorio, 1980: 434) that help engineer various conversations. Therefore, these rules, routines, and linguistic features would be valuable to highlight in a conversation class.

Conversation is *social*, meaning it establishes rapport and mutual agreement, engages in phatic communication, maintains and modifies social identity and involves interpersonal skills (Richards, 1980: 420, Thornbury and Slade, 2006: 17). This social element is expressed through wishes, feelings, attitudes, opinions and judgments, which can clash with the formal nature of the classroom when teaching conversation. Cook (1989: 32) illustrates how politeness and keeping face are important social aspects of conversation. Also, conversation is *multi-sensory* (McLuham in Cane, 1998: 32). This entails paralinguistic features such as eye-contact, facial expressions, body language, tempo, pauses, voice quality changes, and pitch variation (Thornbury, 2005: 9) which affect conversational flow. It seems that culture is integral in how conversation is constructed which has implications for how English conversation is taught and learned.

### **2.2.2 Conversation Functions: Conversation is a way to . . .**

Conversation is a way to *verbally communicate* for mostly *interpersonal* and somewhat *transactional purposes* (Nunan, 1999: 228). Interactional language engages people for social

reasons as illustrated previously. Transactional language is for service encounters like buying tickets or ordering food. However, these purposes are usually intertwined (Thornbury and Slade, 2006: 20) and so the distinction between interactional and transactional language seems to be used for language learning awareness. Conversation is a way to *initiate actions through linguistic means* such as speech acts or functions (apologizing, promising, and inviting) (Dornyei and Thurrell, 1992). Functional language is used directly or indirectly in various ways and contexts and therefore functional language is neither exhaustive nor complete (Richards, 1980: 417; Cook, 1989: 28). Conversation is a way to *mark relationships*, which suspends social distance, status, and power (Richards and Sukwivat, 1983: 117) through linguistic neutrality, equality, sympathy, and antipathy (Cook, 1989: 87). So to generate conversation, these functions must be present and practiced in a conversation class.

### **2.2.3 Conversation Conditions: Conversation happens . . .**

Conversation usually happens when people are *face-to-face* (Van Lier, 1989: 492), which makes it highly interactional and social. However, Thornbury and Slade (2006: 23) point out that ‘computer-mediated communication’ (CMC) shares many conversational characteristics where face-to-face may not be the only way to have a conversation. Conversation happens when there is *a small group of people* (Cook, 1989: 51) with a minimum of two. It happens within *shared contexts* such as in situational, institutional, social and cultural environments (Thornbury and Slade, 2006: 15). Conversation happens *in real time* and demands spontaneous decision-making and improvisation leading to a very dynamic discourse (Van Lier, 1989: 493; Nunan, 1999: 226).

In summary, conversation is a specific spoken discourse that is primarily social and engaged in for social purposes and in social contexts. Conversation entails the knowledge of the language system and the factors that create socially cohesive discourse (Cook, 1989: 116). So in language teaching, Applegate stresses how:

communication can only be effective when the student is sensitive to the social and cultural aspects of language use and how these differ between his first and second language.

(1975: 271).

Conversation classes must be guided by the elements of conversation as previously mentioned and the means to generate genuine conversation. This is a complex task as will be demonstrated through the teaching approaches in the next section.

### **2.3 How Conversation Tends to be Taught**

How conversation is viewed impacts how it is taught (Richards and Sukwiwat, 1983: 124). This means if conversation is seen as an oral information exchange then it will be treated like a product. Conversely, if conversation is depicted as social interaction it will be treated as a process. Conversation classes then range from free “agenda-less discussions” to constrained drilling exercises (Brown 2001: 67) and tend to subscribe to one of three approaches: 1) the indirect approach, 2) the direct approach, and 3) a combination of the direct and indirect approaches.

#### **2.3.1 Three Approaches to Conversation Teaching**

The indirect approach is based on the idea that conversation competence will emerge from participating in interactive activities such as discussions, role-plays, information gaps, and problem-solving tasks (Dornyei and Thurrell, 1994: 41). Some methods that may be considered indirect approaches are the Oral Approach, the Audiolingual Method, Community Language Learning, and Communicative Language Teaching. If the interaction is meaningful, conversation competence will be acquired peripherally (Brown, 2001: 276). However, Nunan (1999: 240) claims that interactive activities tend to elicit reproductive language rather than meaningful ideas. The indirect approach has been seen as unstructured (Taylor and Wolfson, 1978: 31), linguistically deprived of how to engage in authentic interaction (Cane, 1998: 33) and favorable toward stronger students (Farrington, 1981: 241). Despite the critics, students may feel that their need to practice speaking is being fulfilled through restricted and unrestricted interactive activities.

The direct approach is based on a systematic conversation program of micro-skills, communication strategies, language input and processes that lead to fluent conversation, which is informed by Conversation Analysis, Second Language Acquisition and Discourse Analysis

(Dornyei and Thurrell, 1994: 40). Explicit instruction on conversational aspects combined with speaking opportunities is fundamental (Taylor et al., 1978: 34; McCarthy, 1991: 212; Brown, 2001: 277). This approach includes recording conversations to recognize student deficiencies in observing real conversational transcripts (Carter, 1998: 52; Sayer, 2005: 15), good conversationalists (Cane, 1998: 36), and the differences between non-native and native conversation (McCarthy, 1991: 121). The direct approach has been seen to over-rely on skills and strategies at the expense of linguistics and the teaching of unnecessary functional language in particular contexts (Skehan in Thornbury and Slade, 2006: 222; Yorio, 1980: 441). Cook adds that not everything about conversation can be taught, as some mechanisms are only unconsciously accessible like pausing, overlapping, and pitch rise to signal turn-taking (1989: 117).

The third approach is a combination of learner-centered training, language exposure, interactional activities and teaching conversation as a spoken discourse as seen in Thornbury and Slade's 'indirect teaching plus' (2006: 295), Celce-Murcia et al.'s 'principled communicative approach' (Celce-Murcia et al, 1997: 148) and Jane Willis'(1996) 'task-based approach'. They are characterized as highlighting specific language input and exposure to real conversation with consciousness-raising time in systematically sequenced activities. Explicit teaching is punctuated at strategic points in the lesson. Rearrangements of exposure, instruction and practice are its underlying elements. Teaching starts with teacher-student collaboration on concerns, needs, and abilities that generate the conversational content. This approach is seen to demand much teacher practice and skill nurturing (Gibbons in Thornbury and Slade, 2006: 313), learner-centered training and much motivation to collaborate in classroom decisions. However, Thornbury (1998: 110) remarks that classrooms and textbooks are still widely grammar-driven which makes any conversational approach difficult to apply.

In the researched Korean university context, conversation classes are assigned general English textbooks that claim to promote communicative skills, yet include tasks similar to Nunan's list of tasks found in popular textbooks (1999: 240). For example, 'listen to a model dialogue and repeat, interpolating own name', 'read a model dialogue and have a similar conversation using cues provided', and 'listen to the interview and ask and answer similar questions with a partner.'

These tasks may be great training-wheels for speaking, but they do not attend to conversational characteristics, functions and conditions. Also, the:

scripted dialogues rarely reflect the unpredictability and dynamism of conversation, or the features and structures of natural spoken discourse, and ... students who encounter only scripted spoken language have less opportunity to extend their linguistic repertoire in ways that prepare them for unforeseeable interactions outside the classroom.

(O'Keefe et al., 2007: 21).

It seems that the indirect approach is primarily used which subscribes to the idea that any interaction will eventually lead to conversational competence. My observation is similar to Cane's assessment that "the techniques for developing conversation skills in language textbooks still remain remarkable crude" (1998: 33) despite the research done on conversation. Plus, conversation cannot be sufficiently learned without rich language exposure, which seems to be missing in an indirect approach. Nor can foreign language proficiency be learned in 2 hours of "classroom instruction and input" a week (Hinkel, 2006: 114). Attention must be drawn to what makes conversation a specific spoken discourse as:

learners are generally aware that direct transfer of lexical and grammatical features of their L1 [First Language] may not always result in communicative success, they are often unaware that patterns of interaction may be differently structured in other cultures, and find it harder to accept, therefore, that transfer of their L1 norms can be the source of communication failure.

(Thornbury and Slade: 2006: 227).

The fact that an indirect approach is used in this context has implications for how conversation is perceived in mandatory conversation classes. Perhaps general English classes may be viewed as adequate conversation classes because no distinction has been made between conversation learning and general English learning.

### **2.3.2 Conversation Testing and Its Reflection on the Goals of Conversation Classes**

The evaluation techniques "reflect better than any lengthy statement of aims and purposes the true objective of instruction" (Valette, 1973: 407). This means the test is the best indicator of what is intended in a class. For example, oral interviews have been the most common way to test oral proficiency (Van Lier 1989), however this evaluation lacks the integrity of testing conversation competence. Interviews involve an unequal relationship, unequal chances for construction, topic constraints, and the absence of routines. This means that conversation

abilities are primarily assessed on linguistic structures, which becomes an inaccurate assessment of their conversational capabilities (Valette, 1973). This tendency is a result of communicative testing methods failing to provide precision in what conversation competence is (Savignon in Celce-Murcia et al., 1997: 143). Van Lier (1989) says that conversation can be tested but it is difficult to attain validity and reliability in its evaluation. The variation involved in conversation could be a major reason. He suggests that teachers:

must also become serious students of natural conversation so that we can distinguish the trivial from the fundamental and tasks necessary to measure skills from unfair demands.

(ibid: 505).

Additionally, when the construct of conversation is explicit, students and teachers will know the specific foci for the class and the test (Moritoshi, 2001: 17). Therefore:

any language teaching approach must be accompanied by language tests that adequately measure the learning outcomes promoted by the particular program; otherwise the wash-back effect of tests drawn from other approaches or methods will undermine the program's effectiveness

(Celce-Murcia, et al., 1997: 143).

It becomes necessary to match the test with the goals of the conversation class so that the integrity of learning conversation can be maintained.

### **2.2.3 The Dichotomy in Conversation Classes**

There are several significant reasons for ambiguity in conversation classes at this university. First, communicative-based textbooks are used to indirectly focus on conversation (Cane, 1998), which tends to substitute interaction tasks for conversation learning. For example, Moritoshi's (2001) study on conversation classes found that the assigned textbook did not develop conversational capabilities within his Japanese students despite the dialogue practicing and free conversation activities. Consequently:

just because a given task calls for the students to engage in conversation, it does not mean that it will necessarily generate 'natural' interaction.

(Sayer, 2005: 21).

Second, an unclear definition of oral proficiency (Van Lier, 1989: 492) leads to an obscure "definition of what constitutes 'communicative competence' for foreign language learners," (Butler, 2005: 441). This may have a role in why no proficiency levels have been set at this

university (section 2.1.3). This then makes it difficult to have measurable outcomes for conversation classes. Third, conversation classes tend to have vague goals like ‘promoting learner fluency’ (Sayer, 2005: 14), which generate multiple interpretations and outcomes based on personal views of what conversation classes should be. Conversation classes then might become a misnomer for general proficiency-focused classes, in which case, changing the course title would be beneficial (McGregor, 1974: 349). Lastly, mismatched goals and expectations between teachers and students constrain speaking opportunities, making it difficult to get students talking (Folland and Robertson, 1978: 281; Hofstede, 1986: 303; Torps, 1991; Peacock, 1998; Littlewood 1999). Contributing to this is the conflict between the nature of the classroom and the nature of conversation (Cook: 1989: 116). The classroom has a very specific and controlled discourse (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1992), which tends not to be conducive to socially interactive conversation. Conversation is free, spontaneous, social and equal among participants whereas the classroom involves order, planning, and an asymmetrical teacher-student relationship, which usually makes the discourse one-way.

This section revealed a continuum on which conversation is taught which illustrates how complex conversation learning is in a classroom. Learning conversation in a first language is nurtured within a socio-linguistic rich community over years and years (Lightbown and Spada, 2006:1-9) whereas learning conversation in an EFL classroom lacks the same intensity of language input. Therefore, the classroom seems to be a place for conversational awareness whereas conversation is developed and practiced in the world beyond the classroom. Also, there is a need to define conversation classes through valid and reliable testing which must become more widespread within Korea. Until then, conversation classes will continue to be divergent. The following chapter outlines the method of how conversation classes were investigated in this research setting.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN AND ADMINISTRATION

A cross-sectional study was implemented through self-report questionnaires to answer the research questions outlined in chapter 1. In other words at one point in time participants commented on their beliefs and opinions of conversation classes in a questionnaire format (Dornyei, 2001: 194, 207).

#### 3.1 The Areas of Research

The five researched areas:

1. Conversation as a construct: It was necessary to ask the three groups how they define conversation to assess how similar or different their interpretations of conversation are. The respondents wrote key words or phrases to describe conversation as a type of spoken discourse. The response was so extensive that the most frequent words were counted to observe a collective understanding of conversation.
2. Standards for conversation classes: A standard is used to mean “a level of quality or achievement, especially a level that is thought to be acceptable” (Collins COBUILD English Dictionary for Advanced Learners, 2001).
3. Role of conversation classes: The reasons for having conversation classes were investigated to gain an understanding of the role of these classes.
4. Teachers of conversation classes: This area examined what native and non-native English teachers tend to teach and the reasons for their assigned classes. This seems to have implications for what is taught in conversation classes.
5. Expectations of conversation classes: Direct questioning of expectations and belief items were used to assess what is expected in a conversation class. The belief items were used as an indirect reflection of expectations, which may or may not have a correlation.

#### 3.2 The Research Participants



This study was carried out in a large and well-respected Korean university, where data was collected from administrators, ELT teachers and university students. Six administrators (4 Koreans, 2 foreigners) participated in this study. Twelve out of sixteen native English teachers and three out of ten Korean English teachers volunteered. This means that 57.6% of the English teachers in the English Language Department participated in this study.

The university students are required to take four one-credit English conversation classes over their first and second years in addition to two English elective courses: reading and writing, listening, speech or movie English. There are three levels of proficiency: low (Beginner), mid (False Beginner) and high (Pre-Intermediate/Intermediate) levels. The students are level tested at the beginning of their first year, which is based on a grammar and listening test. This leveling process is problematic for conversation classes as there is no direct speaking assessment, therefore, resulting in mixed-level classes. The mid and high levels are assigned communicative-based textbooks whereas the low levels use grammar textbooks and are taught in Korean. So the mid and high level students were chosen for this study, as these classes are known to be speaking-focused and more conversationally oriented. There were 98 mid level and 109 high level first years with 90 mid level and 85 high level second years student respondents. The student sample accounted for 11.9% of the total student population enrolled in first and second year conversation classes (3201) in spring 2009. The aim was to collect a minimum 60 and maximum 100 student samples from each level and year to increase the representativeness of the first and second year population since large numbers have a greater probability of making the data more significant (Henerson et al., 1987: 86; McDonough and McDonough, 1997: 160). However, the non-inclusion of the low levels can be seen as a limitation in this study as they are labeled conversation classes despite their grammar-focus.

### **3.3 The Research Materials: Self-Report Questionnaires**

Three self-report questionnaires were designed to be similar to each other so that the three groups, the students, the teachers, and the administrators could be accurately compared to one another (Appendices I, III, IV). Each questionnaire had a quantitative (Section I) and a qualitative (Section II) component to increase richer data and expression of opinions (Dornyei,

2001: 193; Henerson et al., 1987: 61 McDonough and McDonough, 1997: 176). An “post hoc item analysis” (Dornyei, 2001: 202) was regrettably not conducted on the questionnaires to prevent unnecessary or contentious items from being used, which is another limitation in this study. The quantitative section contained between 17 and 25 opinion items based on a Likert scale from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”. The student questionnaire contained an additional Likert scale option of “I don’t know” to enhance valid data as students may not have been aware of the differing elements in a conversation class. The qualitative section of the questionnaires contained between 3 and 13 open-ended opinion items. The quantitative and qualitative items were based on 12 themes (a. through l. in Table 3.1), which were derived from the 5 researched areas. The themes ‘testing’, ‘textbooks,’ ‘conversation students,’ ‘beliefs,’ ‘goals,’ and ‘needs’ were added to the 5 research areas to further inform the researcher of the nature of conversation classes in the researched context. Table 3.1 depicts how the 12 themes were distributed in the three questionnaires. It also shows that research questions 1 through 4 can be answered without reference to the students whereas question 5 entailed direct and indirect investigation of expectations through responding to beliefs about conversation classes.

Table 3.1: The themes used in the three questionnaires

<b>Research Q.</b>	<b>Theme Item</b>	<b>Student Item</b>	<b>Teacher Item</b>	<b>Administrator Item</b>
<b>1. Is there a standard for English teachers to meet when teaching conversation in the researched university?</b>	a. Standards in a conversation class		Section I #20, Section II #2	Section I #19, Section II #1
	b. Testing Conversation	Section II #2	Section I # 21, Section II #7,9a-c	Section I #20, Section II #2,12
	c. Textbooks			Section II #11
<b>2. What role do conversation classes have in this educational context?</b>	d. Role of Conversation Classes	Section I # 15,18	Section II # 6	Section II #3,4
	e. Who takes the conversation classes		Section I #22	Section I #21, Section II # 8a,b, 9a,b
<b>3. Which teachers are assigned to teach conversation?</b>	f. Who Teaches the conversation classes	Section I #11	Section I #5, Section II #1a	Section I #5, Section II #10a
<b>4. What are the reasons for the</b>	g. Reasons for Teacher Assignment		Section II #1b	Section II #10b

assignment?				
<b>5. What are the university's administrators', the native and non-native ELT teachers' and the students' expectations of conversation classes and how do they compare?</b>	h. Expectations of a conversation class	Section II #1	Section II #5	Section II #5
	i. Beliefs about a conversation class			
	<i>Teaching Culture</i>	Section I #13	Section I #2,14,18	Section I #2,14,17
	<i>Conv. Approaches</i>		Section I #4,11	Section I #4,11
	<i>Textbooks</i>	Section I #1,6,7	Section I #1,6,13	Section I #1,6,13
	<i>Topic Selection</i>	Section I #3,9	Section I #8,16	Section I #8
	<i>Authentic Conv.</i>	Section I #14	Section I #19	Section #18
	<i>Interactional Roles</i>	Section I #2,4,5,8	Section I #7,10,12,15	Section I #7,10,12,15
	j. Goals for a conversation class	Section I #10,16	Section I #9,17,23	Section I #9,16,22
	k. Students Needs in a conversation class	Section I #12	Section I #3,24	Section I # 3,23
l. Definition of Conversation	Section I #17, Section II #3	Section I #25, Section II #8,10	Section I #24, Section II #13	

Section I was used so that the three groups could respond to a diversity of beliefs on conversation classes, which were not addressed in the open-ended items. Knowing their beliefs on what should happen in a conversation class might indicate what is expected in them. Several beliefs about conversation classes were examined. First, cultural awareness is an important factor in having successful communication so teaching Western culture was addressed. Next, conversation teaching was explored as it pertained to teaching approaches, textbooks, topic selection, and generating authentic conversation. Last, how students and teachers should interact in a conversation class was investigated. The qualitative responses from section II of the questionnaires were designed to help interpret the quantitative answers from section I. However, some qualitative and quantitative questions were not inter-relatable, making it difficult to compare the results, which was another limitation in the study (Creswell, 2009: 214). For example, section I, statement 3 on the teacher and administrator questionnaire:

*Students are unaware of spoken grammatical features such as vagueness, ellipsis, and head and tail slot fillers.*

could not be interpreted by any open-ended items, so it could only be a stand-alone number.

### **3.4 The Student Questionnaire and Its Administration**

The questionnaire was written in English with a Korean translation to prevent any misunderstandings of the questions being asked. The students were asked to write English-only responses because the researcher did not have the resources or the funds to translate any written Korean responses. Nonetheless, the written feedback proved to be insightful despite the students' limited abilities. The student questionnaire was piloted on 77 students who were similar to the student sample. The pilot was used to improve the questionnaire and to practice the procedure of the questionnaire administration. The pilot data revealed some inconsistent and confusing answers so some stylistic and wording changes were made to questions to enhance clarity and response accuracy. Once these were amended, the questionnaire proper was administered.

The student sample was based on a voluntary procedure. Five classes from each level and year totaling 20 classes were then selected, which means a convenience sampling technique was used (Nunan, 1992: 142; Creswell, 2009: 148). This technique gave a large enough sample so that there would not be an over-reliance on one teacher's class approach. To increase the return rate, native and non-native English teachers were asked to voluntarily administer the student questionnaires during their class time. Since the teachers endorsed the questionnaire during class time, the students were encouraged to participate but were not forced. Ten native teachers and one non-native English teacher volunteered to give the questionnaire. From the 467 questionnaires that were distributed, 382 students responded. Table 3.2 gives a breakdown of the investigated classes. It also shows the student sample and the teachers who administered the questionnaire. For example, T1 represents one teacher who gave the questionnaires to 2 classes. One class was a mid first year with 26 students, but only 17 students took the questionnaire while the other was a mid second year with 21 out of 22 respondents. To prevent an over-reliance on one teacher's conversation class approach, 4 to 5 different teachers were asked to administer the questionnaire to each class level.

Table 3.2: Student questionnaire administration by volunteer teachers

<b>Conversation Class Level</b>	Mid First Year	High First Year	Mid Second Year	High Second Year
<b>Teacher Volunteers with Student Sample and Class Size</b>	T1 (17/26)	T2 (29/31)	T1 (21/22)	T8 (21/26)
	T2 (20/25)	T6 (21/27)	T8 (18/23)	T5 (17/18)
	T3 (17/25)	T7 (11/15)	T9 (20/23)	T9 (22/26)
	T4 (25/28)	T5 (28/30)	T10 (16/23)	T11 (8/14)
	T5 (19/25)	T5 (20/22)	T2 (14/15)	T11 (17/24)
<b>Return Rate</b>	98/129 = 75.9%	109/125 = 87.2%	90/106 = 84.9%	85/108 = 78.7%

Since eleven teachers participated in the questionnaire administration, a student questionnaire procedure (Appendix II) was written to maximize the uniformity of the administration across the twenty classes. After each class was finished, the teacher was debriefed on how the questionnaire went, how closely they followed the procedure, and if there were any problems or confusion during the administration. The consensus was more time was needed due to student limitation in writing English-only responses to the open-ended questions. The teachers were able to give between five and fifteen more minutes after the allotted twenty minutes. In the questionnaire procedure, it was unclear whether a strict adherence to the twenty minutes was to be followed or whether more time could be given. In this case, the teachers gave more time to increase adequate and complete answers for better results. The time to complete the student questionnaires would need to be amended to allow for extra time if needed in future studies.

### 3.5 The Teacher Questionnaire Administration

An email was sent to each university English teacher informing them of the research project that would involve their help. The questionnaire (Appendix III) was attached to the email so they could look it over in advance. A printout of the questionnaire was put on each teacher's desk to make it easily accessible as well as encourage a response. To enhance confidentiality, the completed questionnaires were placed in a manila envelope, which was located on the conference

tables in the teachers' offices. Nine days were allotted to fill out the questionnaire. Three more emails were sent as a reminder and as an encouragement to participate in this project. The response rate was 57.6%; 12 out of 16 native English teachers and 3 out of 10 Korean English teachers responded. 75% of the native English teachers could be considered a representative sample, however, only 30% of the Korean English teachers volunteered. This sample size was not large enough to gain a representative sample of the Korean teacher perspective, which would be needed to sufficiently answer research question 5. Due to this limitation, the results for question 5 cannot be conclusive but rather suggestive at best.

### **3.6 The Administrator Questionnaire Administration and Their Interviews**

The administration questionnaire was given to 6 administrators. They were chosen because of their English fluency and their influence on English conversation classes. There is an institutional and a cultural hierarchy that should be followed so the Foreign Head teacher was consulted on how to proceed with administering the administrator questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire and interview questions (Appendix IV) were attached to an explanatory e-mail to the Foreign Head teacher, who then distributed the questionnaires to three of the six administrators. Through him, three appointments were arranged for twenty-minute "semi-structured interviews" (McDonough and McDonough, 1997: 183). The other questionnaires were hand delivered by the researcher and interview appointments were made with the three other administrators. The administrators were open, honest and willing to participate in this research. An interview method was chosen for two reasons. First, there were few administrators so interviewing them individually was a manageable option and second, to be able to ask follow up questions to gain further insight into the nature of English conversation classes. The quantitative section of the questionnaire was filled out individually and sent back to the English department office for collection. This would ensure their anonymity. During each interview, extensive notes were taken to enhance accurate data collection. Once the interview was finished, the notes were reviewed and revised to ensure the short-form words were accurately transcribed. The interviews took place over a three-week period.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE RESULTS OF THE THREE PERSPECTIVES

This chapter outlines the dataset. The data was calculated to gain percentages rather than averages as this most accurately represented the findings (McDonough and McDonough, 1997: 141). The calculations were double checked by adding the numbers to see how close to 100% they were. The percentages were within an accuracy of - 0.3%.

#### 4.1 The Construct of Conversation

The top ten frequent words and their frequency counts elicited from the students and the teachers are shown in Table 4.1. The student levels and years are indicated at the top of the table. The decision to use the top ten words was made after observing the student data. The low frequency words (1, 2, 3, 4 frequencies) made any kind of description convoluted. So the top ten words were used to form a common core for the description. The students' and the teachers' frequencies were compared because their sample sizes were large enough to observe commonalities. The words in capital letters represent its lemma. This means that TALK included word-forms such as 'talk,' 'talks,' 'talking,' 'talked' or in the case of COMMUNICATE, it included 'communicate,' 'communicating,' 'communicative,' and 'communication.' The lower cased words represent its one word-form. The words in bold indicate the commonalities shared between and with the students. The students shared 7 out of 10 words whereas the teachers shared 2 words with the students.

Table 4.1: Student and teacher top ten word frequencies to describe conversation

#	<u>Mid 1<sup>st</sup> Year</u>	<u>High 1<sup>st</sup> Year</u>	<u>Mid 2<sup>nd</sup> Year</u>	<u>High 2<sup>nd</sup> Year</u>	<u>ELT Teachers</u>
1.	<b>TALK</b> (22)	<b>TALK</b> (28)	<b>TALK</b> (23)	EXPRESS (22)	INTERACT (13)
2.	<b>SPEAK</b> (19)	<b>COMMUNICATE</b> (15)	<b>COMMUNICATE</b> (18)	<b>TALK</b> (17)	interesting (8)
3.	<b>UNDERSTAND</b> (16)	<b>SPEAK</b> (15)	<b>SPEAK</b> (15)	<b>COMMUNICATE</b> (15)	informal (7)
4.	<b>LISTEN</b> (15)	<b>dialogue</b> (12)	EXPRESS (11)	<b>dialogue</b> (12)	FLOW (6)
5.	<b>THINK</b> (15)	<b>LISTEN</b> (12)	<b>LISTEN</b> (11)	<b>THINK</b> (12)	question and answer (6)

#	<u>Mid 1<sup>st</sup> Year</u>	<u>High 1<sup>st</sup> Year</u>	<u>Mid 2<sup>nd</sup> Year</u>	<u>High 2<sup>nd</sup> Year</u>	<u>ELT Teachers</u>
6.	<b>COMMUNICATE</b> (14)	EXPRESS (10)	<b>THINK</b> (11)	<b>SPEAK</b> (10)	shared (6)
7.	<b>dialogue</b> (7)	<b>THINK</b> (9)	<b>UNDERSTAND</b> (8)	<b>UNDERSTAND</b> (10)	spoken (6)
8.	FEEL (6)	<b>UNDERSTAND</b> (9)	<b>dialogue</b> (7)	mind (7)	<b>THINK</b> (5)
9.	say (6)	rapport (8)	language (7)	SAY (7)	spontaneous (4)
10.	opinion (5)	opinion (6)	say (7)	<b>LISTEN</b> (5)	<b>communication</b> (3)

The students mainly used synonyms to describe conversation whereas the teachers did not. For example, the students focused on the act of speaking as in ‘talk,’ ‘speak,’ ‘say,’ ‘communicate,’ and ‘dialogue’ whereas the teachers used ‘spoken’ to encompass the act of speaking. A list of the administrators’ description of conversation is shown below. The bolded words indicate the words shared with the students. The administrator list: *interactive, participating, personal, accurate, express ideas, **communication**, give and take, topic-driven, **listening** to each other, fun, fluent, and communication is more than words.*

The three groups showed a simple but uniform description of conversation. Their description indicated conversation as verbal communication that entails thinking, understanding, and listening between at least two people as illustrated through the students’ use of ‘dialogue,’ the teacher’s use of ‘shared’ and the administration’s use of ‘participating.’ Interestingly, the student questionnaire revealed uncertainty about the interactive nature of conversation, as 36.1% of the students were neutral or unsure of whether English conversation could be practiced alone. 21.1% agreed that it could whereas 42.5% disagreed.

#### 4.2 Standards for Conversation Classes

It was found that there are no management instantiated standards for teaching conversation. Teachers are expected to set their own standards for students to meet in their individual conversation classes. There are assigned textbooks for conversation classes that try to match each proficiency level. The textbooks are decided by teacher committees, which are initiated by the foreign head teacher. When asked if a university standard should be met when teaching



conversation classes, 4 out of 6 (66.6%) administrators and 6 out of 15 (40%) teachers agreed while 1 (16.6%) administrator and 8 (53.3%) teachers were undecided and 2 (13.3%) people disagreed.

### 4.3 The Role of Conversation Classes

The administrators and the teachers offered three main possible roles.

- First, conversation classes are seen to further globalization policies. Improving English conversational competence is viewed as helping Korea become more globally competitive. Conversation skills are observed to be the biggest challenge for Korean students.
- Second, conversation classes are thought to help improve TOEIC scores and help students acquire a job.
- Third, these classes are viewed as financial investments where one administrator said that government funds are granted for offering English courses and that conversation classes are the cheapest credit offered. Some teachers added that conversation classes are seen to attract more students and prestige.

When asked if conversation classes should be optional for university students, 5 out of 6 (83.3%) of administrators and 6 out of 15 (40.0%) teachers disagreed whereas 1 (16.6%) administrator and 7 (46.6%) teachers agreed and 2 (13.3%) teachers were neutral on this issue.

The students were asked to rank why they were learning English conversation to further observations about the role of conversation classes. Table 4.2 presents these rankings. It shows that the majority of students are learning conversation for their future jobs. This finding is supported by some quantitative data, as 89.8% of the students felt that speaking English will be important after graduation. More specifically, 42.6% would like a job that requires them to speak English while 27.8% do not want this requirement in their future jobs. The other students (29.3%) were unsure.

Table 4.2: Student ranking of reason for studying conversation.

<p><b>Please rank the following statements from the most important (1) to the least important (4) for you.</b></p> <p><i>a. I am learning English conversation for my degree requirement.</i></p> <p><i>b. I am learning English conversation for my future job opportunities.</i></p> <p><i>c. I am learning English conversation to improve a test score like TOEIC or TOEFL.</i></p> <p><i>d. I am learning English conversation for personal satisfaction.</i></p>					
<u>Ranking</u>	<u>Mid 1<sup>st</sup> Year</u>	<u>High 1<sup>st</sup> Year</u>	<u>Mid 2<sup>nd</sup> Year</u>	<u>High 2<sup>nd</sup> Year</u>	<u>Total</u>
<b>a</b>	2	3	2	3	<b>2</b>
<b>b</b>	1	1	1	1	<b>1</b>
<b>c</b>	3	4	4	2	<b>3</b>
<b>d</b>	4	2	3	4	<b>3</b>

#### 4.4 The Teachers of Conversation Classes

It was found that both native and non-native English teachers are given opportunities to teach conversation classes if they have TESL/TEFL certification. This certification was not specified. The administrators expressed that native speakers tend to teach the mid and high level classes whereas Korean English teachers teach the low levels. It was mentioned that this system supports the strengths of the teachers and the students. Some administrators and teachers felt that low levels focused on grammar and were taught in Korean while mid and high levels had a speaking focus, which were taught in English. One administrator added that conversation classes are by title only. This means that conversation classes tend to encourage more speaking rather than focus on gaining conversational competence.

When the teachers were asked why they had been assigned to conversation classes, 10 out of 15 (66.6%) responded it was due to being a native speaker where five others said it was due to their qualifications such as having a TESL/TEFL certificate and teaching experience. One teacher stated that being newly employed meant that easier classes were assigned to him, referring to

conversation classes as being easier and writing classes being harder. The students, the teachers and the administrators were asked if native English teachers were preferred to teach conversation classes. The majority in all three groups agreed. 65.0% of students agreed while 9.7% disagreed and 25% were unsure. 9 out of 15 (60%) teachers agreed while 4 (26.6%) disagreed and 2 (13.3%) were neutral. 4 out of 6 (66.6%) administrators agreed while 2 (33.3%) were neutral. These numbers seem to affirm the system currently in place.

#### **4.5 The Expectations of Conversation Classes**

Observations will be made on how matched the expectations are of conversation classes between the administrators, the teachers, and the students in the following chapter. Presently, examples of the feedback will be illustrated. The administrator data showed no commonalities among what they expect to see happening in conversation classes. Illustrated below are the comments made by the members.

*“Ideally, there should be a 15 or less student ratio to 1 teacher. Also teachers need many approaches in the classroom and should be able to use multi-media to provide better lessons and materials.”*

*“For students to get grades and run the classes like a classroom. Really, there are no expectations apart from making the customers happy.”*

*“For the upper 10% of students to be challenged and prepare for TOEIC and for the other students to have exposure to diverse classes.”*

*“For students to speak English fluently.”*

*“For students not to have fear of talking and to not be intimidated by foreign teachers.”*

The teachers’ data expressed three main themes in their expectations: 1) to teach, 2) to give speaking opportunities and 3) to build student confidence. Below is a representative sample of the teacher feedback, which illustrates the elements within each theme.

##### To Teach:

*“Present material in an appropriate manner.”*

*“Teach class.”*

*“Provide an overly structured set of lessons and thoroughly prepare students for exams, to fairly yet subjectively assess students.”*

*“Present vocabulary and conversation structures in an interesting and fun way so students can practice and develop those skills individually, in pairs and collectively.”*

*“To give minor explanations, point out universal mistakes everyone makes and tailor corrections for individual students.”*

*“To help better students’ understanding on how to interact in English.”*

*“To help students learn to build correct sentence replies.”*

#### To Give Opportunities for Speaking:

*“I expect to give opportunities to talk and give basic vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and sentence structure information for speaking.”*

*“Provide opportunities for conversation and interact with students.”*

*“I expect to give students the opportunity to learn some vocabulary and some language chunks and I expect that some of them will take that opportunity some of the time.”*

*“I expect to let students use English to express what they feel and think in a meaningful way.”*

*“To facilitate English conversation but realistically go through the book and make it meaningful and entertaining.”*

*“To build them up from semi-controlled activities to free practice as students seem to want free talking but it generally lapses very quickly into L1.”*

#### To Build Confidence:

*“I expect to help build confidence, to be relaxed, be able to laugh and enjoy the class as they progress.”*

*“To improve student confidence and have a positive impact on them.”*

*“I expect students to enjoy class.”*

The students’ data revealed the greatest number of expectations, which is depicted in Table 4.3. The slashes represent the absence of a particular theme within a class level. The students shared ten expectations across all classes. The ranking from most common to least is:

1. Improve conversation competence (36.1%)
2. Have speaking opportunities (13.4%)
3. Meet and talk with a foreigner (11.1%)
4. Improve confidence (8.8%)

5. Improve Overall English Ability (7.8%)

6. Talk freely on any topic (4.8%)

7. Reach personal goals (2.4%)

8. Improve pronunciation (2.2%)

9. Increase vocabulary (2.3%)

10. Get a grade (1.4%)

Table 4.3: Student expectations of conversation classes

<b><u>Student Responses</u></b>	<b><u>Mid 1<sup>st</sup> Year</u></b>	<b><u>High 1<sup>st</sup> Year</u></b>	<b><u>Mid 2<sup>nd</sup> Year</u></b>	<b><u>High 2<sup>nd</sup> Year</u></b>
<b>Improve Conversation Competence</b>	34.4%	27.1%	45.6%	37.5%
<b>Meet and Talk with a Foreigner</b>	13.9%	16.2%	7.6%	6.7%
<b>Class Activities</b>				
<i>Have Speaking Opportunities</i>	19.3%	17.8%	4.3%	12.5%
<i>Talk Freely on any Topic</i>	5.3%	3.8%	7.6%	2.8%
<i>Access Real Conversation</i>	/	/	1%	1.9%
<i>Cultural Awareness</i>	1.0%	3.1%	/	4.8%
<i>A Positive Class Atmosphere</i>	/	/	/	6.7%
<i>Have High Level Instruction</i>	/	/	/	1.9%
<i>Increase Vocabulary</i>	1.0%	1.5%	1.0%	5.7%
<i>Improve Pronunciation</i>	4.3%	1.5%	3.2%	0.09%
<i>Improve Reading Skills</i>	2.1%	/	/	/
<i>Improve Grammar</i>	/	1.5%	1.0%	0.09%
<i>Play Games</i>	/	0.07%	1.0%	/
<b>Improve Confidence</b>	5.3%	8.5%	14.1%	7.6%
<b>Improve Overall English Ability</b>	6.4%	11.6%	8.6%	4.8%
<b>Have Fun</b>	/	3.1%	/	/

<u>Student Responses</u>	<u>Mid 1<sup>st</sup> Year</u>	<u>High 1<sup>st</sup> Year</u>	<u>Mid 2<sup>nd</sup> Year</u>	<u>High 2<sup>nd</sup> Year</u>
<b>To Reach Personal Goals</b>	3.2%	1.5%	2.1%	2.8%
<b>To Get a Grade</b>	2.1%	1.5%	2.1%	0.09%
<b>Incomprehensible Response</b>	15%	4.6%	3.2%	2.8%
<b>No Response</b>	2%	1.5%	1%	0.09%

‘Improve Conversation Competence’ indicates the students’ desires to improve their speaking skills or raise their conversation ability. Many stated that they want to become fluent or to be able to freely talk in English. ‘Meet and Talk with a Foreigner’ exemplifies how students expect to have a native English teacher who they can interact with. ‘Improve Confidence’ exemplifies their expectation to rid their fear of speaking and of foreigners and to become self-confident in their English ability. ‘To Reach Personal Goals’ refers to individual students, who each had different goals to achieve in a conversation class, for example, to prepare for a trip to Europe, to discover something about their personality, and to get ready for a job. The other categories are self-explanatory.

#### **4.5.1 Beliefs about Conversation Classes as an Indication of Expectations**

The responses to the quantitative section of the questionnaire could be a reflection on the expectations of conversation classes. Table 4.4 displays the three groups’ responses. ‘Ad.’ indicates the administrators’ answers while ‘T.’ and ‘S.’ refer to the teacher and student answers respectively. Since the questionnaire items for each group differ slightly in number and wording, Appendix V shows the amalgamation of the questionnaire statements that are organized according to Table 4.4. The slashes represent the absence of the statement in a particular group. The categories are organized by the research themes. For example, *Standards* (1) include ‘Testing’ whereas ‘Culture’, ‘Approaches’, ‘Textbooks’, ‘Topic Selection,’ ‘Class Interactions,’ ‘Needs’ and ‘Goals’ are a reflection on *Expectations* (4) of conversation classes.

Table 4.4: The results of section I of the questionnaires

Questionnaire Item	Agree			Neutral			Disagree			Unknown
	Ad.	T.	S.	Ad.	T.	S.	Ad.	T.	S.	S.
1a) Standards	66.6%	40.0%	/	16.6%	53.3%	/	16.6%	6.6%	/	/
1b) Testing	50.0%	6.6%	/	0.0%	13.3%	/	50.0%	80.0%	/	/
2a) Role of Class	16.6%	46.6%	/	0.0%	13.3%	/	83.3%	40.0%	/	/
2b)	/	/	2.9%	/	/	4.8%	/	/	89.8%	2.2%
2c)	/	/	42.6%	/	/	23.2%	/	/	27.8%	6.1%
3) Conversation Teachers	66.6%	60.0%	65.0%	33.3%	13.3%	17.5%	0.0%	26.6%	9.7%	7.5%
4) Expectations										
4ai) Culture	16.6%	6.6%	/	0.0%	20.0%	/	83.3%	73.3%	/	/
4aii)	83.3%	53.3%	/	16.6%	26.6%	/	0.0%	20.0%	/	/
4aiii)	83.3%	66.6%	76.1%	16.6%	6.6%	13.3%	0.0%	26.6%	6.4%	3.6%
4bi) Approaches	16.6%	46.6%	/	83.3%	26.6%	/	0.0%	26.6%	/	/
4bii)	16.6%	33.3%	/	66.6%	46.6%	/	16.6%	33.3%	/	/
4biii)	16.6%	66.6%	/	50.0%	20.0%	/	33.3%	13.3%	/	/
4biv)	0.0%	6.6%	18.7%	16.6%	20.0%	28.1%	83.3%	73.3%	46.8%	6.1%
4bv)	83.3%	20.0%	/	16.6%	6.6%	/	0.0%	73.3%	/	/
4bvi)	/	/	22.4%	/	/	11.2%	/	/	59.0%	7.1%
4ci) Textbooks	50.0%	40.0%	13.6%	16.6%	33.3%	20.1%	33.3%	26.6%	61.7%	4.3%
4cii)	16.6%	33.3%	21.7%	50.0%	33.3%	22.3%	33.3%	33.3%	19.6%	36.1%
4ciii)	83.3%	73.3%	49.6%	16.6%	13.3%	21.6%	0.0%	13.3%	16.8%	11.7%
4di) Topic Selection	50.0%	13.3%	48.8%	50.0%	66.6%	31.1%	0.0%	20.0%	17.4%	2.4%
4dii)	/	20.0%	5.5%	/	40.0%	18.7%	/	40.0%	72.7%	2.8%
4ei) Class Interactions	83.3%	80.0%	56.8%	0.0%	6.6%	24.5%	16.6%	13.3%	16.1%	2.3%
4eii)	33.3%	6.6%	49.5%	0.0%	13.3%	30.4%	66.6%	80.0%	16.7%	3.1%
4eiii)	50.0%	60.0%	39.9%	50.0%	13.3%	35.3%	0.0%	26.6%	19.6%	4.9%

Questionnaire Item	Agree			Neutral			Disagree			Unknown
4eiv)	16.6%	20.0%	35.8%	16.6%	0.0%	26.5%	66.6%	80.0%	33.3%	4.1%
4fi) Goals	16.6%	13.3%	/	50.0%	20.0%	/	33.3%	66.6%	/	/
4fii)	83.3%	20.0%	48.1%	0.0%	46.6%	28.7%	16.6%	33.3%	15.9%	7.0%
4fiii)	33.3%	66.6%	/	16.6%	6.6%	/	50.0%	26.6%	/	/
4g) Needs	100%	93.3%	/	0.0%	0.0%	/	0.0%	6.6%	/	/
5) Construct Check:	/	/	21.1%	/	/	27.9%	/	/	42.5%	8.2%

The significance of the results presented in this chapter will be analyzed and discussed in the following chapter while observing the implications of what conversation classes mean in this university.



## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF THE CONVERSATION RESEARCH

This chapter looks at the significance of the data by discussing its implications and answering the research questions.

#### 5.1 A Uniform Perspective of Conversation

The administrator, teacher and student data revealed a uniform yet simplistic concept of conversation (Table 4.1 and the administrator word list). All three groups defined conversation by using words and ideas closely related to linguistic research (section 2.2). Words such as 'TALK' and 'SPEAK' revealed that many respondents defined conversation as a speech event. Other words such as 'LISTEN', 'THINK' and 'UNDERSTAND' revealed an understanding of conversation as a cooperative event. Another highly used word was 'COMMUNICATE.' However, this did not indicate whether they understood the function of conversation as being social, phatic or to maintain friendships (Malinowski, 1999: 302). 'Dialogue,' 'shared' and 'participating' did indicate the communicative aspects of conversation and its condition as a shared context with two or more interlocutors. The primary types of words that were used were verbs and adjectives with some nouns. The verbs highlight the actions used in conversation such as 'talk,' 'listen,' 'understand' and 'communicate' while the adjectives and nouns describe the atmosphere of conversation as in 'informal,' 'interesting,' 'personal,' 'fun,' 'rapport,' and 'opinion,' (Thornbury and Slade 2006: 20,21). This simplicity is understandable as conversation is such an everyday common event that while they know how to do it, they have not thought about what it exactly is.

The students seemed to have the most simplistic description of conversation as they used five synonyms to describe the act of speaking as in 'talk,' 'speak,' 'say,' 'communicate,' and 'express' in their top ten frequent words. Also, a strong uncertainty of the conditions of conversation was revealed, as over half the students were neutral or agreed that conversation could be practiced solitarily while the others disagreed (Table 4.4, 5). This split suggests that English conversation may be viewed as an academic endeavor rather than a social practice. It was previously stated that Koreans do not tend to use English socially with each other but rather

to gain high test scores (Park and Oxford, 1998: 108, Gray, 1999: 47, Jeong, 2004: 43, Choi, 2008: 40). Therefore, it would be valuable for teachers and administrators to discuss and collectively establish the concept of conversation and bring this into the classroom to generate conversational characteristics, functions and conditions. A consensus reached among the teachers and administrators prior to the start of the course on what conversation is, both as a construct and as a course, would also help to clarify things for the teachers. Having a locally inspired definition rather than assuming what others know about conversation would inform student knowledge, course standards, goals and outcomes. This would also create more cohesive learning, especially in a loosely defined class such as conversation. This consensus would also help define what conversation classes really are.

## **5.2 The Standards to Meet in Conversation Classes**

It was found that no university-sanctioned standards are in place for conversation classes, which means that there is no universal level of quality, skill or ability to maintain across these classes. This leaves conversation classes with limited consistency or accountability within the English language department. One of the only consistent characteristics is the general focus on speaking. However, what ‘speaking’ means to both teachers and students has been shown to be different. The results on expectations (section 4.5) revealed that students see conversation classes as a means to improve their conversation skills whereas the teachers and administrators see these classes as something more general.

Due to inconsistency and unaccountability, one very big question is left. When conversation classes are associated with fulfilling government policies, how can a policy mandate be met without a way to measure its success or failure? This answer involves the important issue of having expressed or acknowledged purposes and goals for conversation classes. As:

their chief value is in helping teachers identify more clearly, prior to instruction, the kinds of changes which should be promoted in learners.

(Popham, 1974: 69).

The other vital issue requires having measures in place to assess the extent to which those goals have or have not been met. Without stated purposes, goals and an evaluation process for conversation classes, these classes can become meaningless. Consequently, there seems to be a

wide gap between what language policies want and what is actually interpreted and implemented in an institutional context. It would seem that the national Korean mandate of becoming conversationally competent in English (Kim and Margolis, 2000: 29, Kwon, 2000) is lacking in specific goals and direction which leaves local teachers with the task of figuring out what conversation classes are, their purpose, their outcome and assessment of them (Ricento and Hornberger, 1996: 417).

Within this research area, the data presented a desire from the teachers and administrators for standards. However, the observed split between agreed and undecided responses with few disagreeing (see Table 4.4, 1a) shows that open discussion on what standards are, the intention for them, what they could be and how they could be implemented and evaluated would be required to make any changes. Standards can have a negative connotation for teachers as they may feel that their creativity may be stifled or that they might be forced into “an unyielding straightjacket where spontaneity is scorned and rigidity revered” (Popham, 1974: 69). It might be seen that standardization does not take into account the differences in teaching styles, ways of learning, and student needs, abilities and interests. What is needed in this researched context is a balance between having freedom and creativity with accountability and consistency across conversation content and assessment supported by a defined course with measurable goals that reflect student needs. In this way, standards can have a positive effect by bringing organization to conversation classes yet keep teacher initiatives and creativity. However, a supportive atmosphere, collegiality and cooperation among staff are vital (Park and Oxford, 1998) to establish and maintain standards for conversation classes.

Having implicit or explicit course standards, goals and assessment criteria, seem to be a part of a cultural system (Holliday, 1992). Being a foreigner and an outsider in this context means having no access to the long-standing, culturally accepted way of doing things. Therefore, a reliance on personal experience and informally gathered information is needed for teaching conversation at the researched university. This ultimately leads to presuppositions and the implementation of individual standards, goals, outcomes and assessments. Thus much diversity in conversation teaching is created and continued across conversation classes.

### 5.3 The Roles of Conversation Classes in the Research Context

The data showed that the primary role of English conversation classes is not to build communicative competence. The data did show that the main role of conversation classes is more related to economic factors. Administrators and teachers felt that conversation classes help Koreans advance economically as a nation. Learning to speak English facilitates integration into the global market because English is viewed as a global language. Having English classes also provide certain economic benefits such as financial support from the government. Moreover, since TOEIC scores are the primary requirement for domestic high paying jobs (Yim, 2007: 41), these classes are seen to help Korean students become more competitive in pursuing future employment. Thus, securing a job is the most important endeavor for Korean graduates and therefore, conversation classes help facilitate job opportunities. This financial role then seems to reflect of the uses of English in Korea as mentioned in section 2.1 and is an indication of the context where:

the purposes of learning a language in TL-removed contexts are varied, but the thrust is to learn language to communicate, to improve one's economic prospects, to expand one's horizon's both literally and/or figuratively to be a global citizen.

(Graves 2008: 156).

Students ranked securing a job as the top reason for learning English conversation (Table 4.3). A high percentage of students also felt that speaking English would be important after graduation and aid in getting a job (Table 4.4, 2b). Many students want a job with an English-speaking requirement while some are undecided or don't know yet (Table 4.4, 2c). This observation has implications for making English conversation classes mandatory rather than optional as these classes may increase graduate employment. Even though teachers were split on the idea of making conversation classes optional, the majority of administrators felt they should be mandatory (Table 4.4 2a). So one must ask, what should Korean students be learning in English conversation classes if their main reason for learning is to get a job in Korea? It should be considered how English speaking is used in the Korean job market and then classes should be tailored to address those needs. Perhaps these classes should become more specialized for specific majors that use English. This would seem more beneficial and productive for students, as they would have a target use for English outside of the classroom.

#### **5.4 Teachers of English Conversation Classes**

The data showed that native teachers felt that they are assigned to teach English conversation classes based on two factors: whether they are a native speaker or whether they have experience in teaching English. The Korean English teacher data expressed the second factor as the primary reason. The administrators reported that they assign low and some mid level conversation classes to Korean English teachers and mid to high level classes to native English teachers. It was through these statements that conversation classes were questioned on what they really are. Low level classes were said to be grammar-focused whereas mid and high level classes were speaking-focused. Low level classes might not be considered conversation classes whereas the others might be viewed as speaking classes without specification to conversation. Additionally, it was mentioned that conversation classes are by title only. So it seems that developing conversational skills is not the outcome in these classes. Consequently, since no standard exists for mandatory conversation classes, it is difficult to know what these classes really are and what is to be accomplished in them. This issue demands much needed discussion among the administrators and teachers especially, as they are the implementers of nationally influenced university policies. Staff discussions are necessary for stating what conversation classes are at each level and possibly need to be redefined if the content does not match the title. Perhaps titling these classes *English Speaking* or *Interactional English* would be more suitable. The emphasis could be on verbal exchanges, restricted spoken activities and pronunciation. This type of course could be a stepping-stone for eventually learning English conversation. It would help students gain confidence in the simple act of speaking English while encouraging them to try speaking. Of course, defining what English speaking is and how to test it would need to be considered.

#### **5.5 Three Perspectives on Expectations of Conversation Classes**

When investigating expectations, it was observed that the administrators did not share any commonalities with each other while the teachers shared three common themes and the students shared ten themes across the class levels (section 4.5). It is interesting to note that the administrators were so divergent in their expectations, which seems to reflect why conversation classes are seen in such a diverse way. Conversation classes have simply not been defined at the

top management level even though they are a graduation requirement. It also seems that the administrators are disconnected from each other where their duties may not involve discussing particular course expectations and therefore course standards, definitions, goals, and evaluations. Further study into the management structure and style of this university would be needed to make any definitive connections here. The teachers and students on the other hand had more cohesion in their groups, which may show a collective understanding of these classes as they directly participate in them.

### **5.5.1 Mismatched Expectations**

A major contrast in expectations was evidenced in the data. Between the administrators and the teachers, there were no expectations to develop conversational competence but rather to use various methods, provide English exposure, give grades, teach lessons, build confidence and provide speaking activities. This may reflect an important factor being that the reality of student proficiency levels may not be at a level to engage in English conversation as a socially cooperative discourse among seen equals. This may refute the claim that high school students graduate at a pre-intermediate level in English (Shim and Baik, 2000: 184).

Contrastingly, the most common student expectation is to increase their conversational skills where many want to become fluent English speakers (section 4.5). In fact, their top three expectations focus on being able to practice conversation in class. There seems to be a mismatch in expectations between students, teachers and administrators, which has serious implications for language learning, teacher/student motivation, class satisfaction, and course outcomes (Peacock, 1998). Therefore, discussing and making teacher and student expectations explicit is the key to increasing class cohesion and positive outcomes (Torps, 199: 115; Peacock, 1998: 245; Littlewood, 1999: 244; Nunan and Lamb, 2001: 29, 45). However, the teachers may feel that pursuing conversation skills is an expectation too high for what actually can be accomplished in 2 hours classes per week (Hinkel, 2006: 114). The learning ideals and the reality of the context must be reconciled between the teachers and students which first comes from defining these classes, their goals, outcomes and assessment (Popham, 1974; Graves, 2008: 165). Then expectations can be bridged between teachers and students.

Few administrators and most teachers agreed that most students are unable to have simple conversations upon course completion whereas 3 administrators and 4 teachers disagreed, showing a split in opinion (Table 4.4, 4fiii). This may be attributed to how administrators are removed from these classes while the teachers are directly involved in these classes and therefore have firsthand insight into student capabilities. Conversely, most administrators, few teachers and nearly half of the students felt that conversation classes prepare students to speak well with native speakers whereas few students and many teachers expressed their uncertainty (Table 4.4, 4fii). This shows a split between the teachers and the administrators with the majority of students. Why do the students and administrators feel that these classes are preparing them well to speak with foreigners when the teachers seem to feel the opposite? Does this reveal differences in how successful conversation is interpreted or in how English conversation competence is viewed? These contrasting opinions show that conversational competence has not been defined nor accurately measured and therefore, is not expected in conversation classes as most teachers and few administrators felt that students could not demonstrate this competence to begin with. So focusing on general proficiency and completing the assigned textbook then seem to be more attainable outcomes, which is the root of this investigation. Consequently, it seems that university graduates tend not to be as conversationally skilled as government LPPs intended.

Through investigating expectations from three perspectives, it can be observed that commonalities do exist between administrators, teachers and students, yet more divergence is present in this case. Students seem to have a more detailed account of what they expect in conversation classes, which can be insightful for teachers and administrators. Their expectations also reveal how they view English conversation classes as an opportunity to talk with others, as a way of learning language and culture and as way to earn certification to further their personal achievements. The teachers and the administrators express their expectations in general terms, which can lead to mismatched ideas of what conversation classes really are, what should be done in them and what can actually be accomplished. With the students' specific expectations and the teachers' general expectations, open communication and discussion would be a valuable endeavor to bridge the gap between their expectations.

### **5.5.2 Matched Expectations**

The teachers and the students along with a comment from one administrator share one common expectation, to improve student confidence in speaking, in language learning and in interacting with a native speaker. It seems that low self-confidence is a crucial issue as all three groups expect to improve it. This can be seen as an indicator of where English learning presently is in Korea. Section 2.1.1 mentioned that government policies began to focus on communicative language skills over a decade ago. Today, these policies seem to still be in an underdeveloped state, as testing practices have not incorporated direct speaking assessment. This is exemplified in the level testing at this university. Also, there seem to be social pressures that inhibit speaking skill development as Koreans tend not to use English with each other and conversation teaching or speaking-focused classes tend to be taught by native English teachers rather than Korean teachers. These factors then demonstrate that confidence in speaking must continue to be nurtured, as it is an important element in language learning (Brown, 2000: 146).

The teachers and the students both expect a high frequency of speaking opportunities in conversation classes yet, what this means needs to be clarified. Some teachers commented that speaking opportunities involve sharing feelings and opinions, using new vocabulary words or phrases, or participating in pair or group work while some students felt that speaking opportunities are just being able to use English, practicing real or natural conversations with a partner, or just talking with the teacher and other students in pairs, groups or freely with anyone. The nature of interaction is similar for students and teachers but the content or topics seem to be different. The students were vague on topical focus. For example, one teacher mentioned that students want to talk freely but when given the chance, they don't seem to take advantage of it as they quickly revert to speaking Korean. In this case, the cause might be a confidence issue as:

One of the major obstacles learners have to overcome in learning to speak is the anxiety generated over the risks of blurting out things that are wrong, stupid, or incomprehensible. Because the language ego that informs people that "you are what you speak," learners are reluctant to be judged by hearers.  
(Brown, 2001: 269).

Many students expect to have free conversation opportunities without textbook direction (Table 4.3) however, there seems to be confusion about what that really means and entails. So again, student-teacher discussion is necessary to address activity types and the reasoning for them in addition to what content or topics are to be covered in conversation classes (Peacock, 1998: 245).



The next section furthers this investigation in an inferential manner by trying to extrapolate expectations from stated beliefs about conversation classes. There are some significant findings that can inform conversation teaching as well as gauge the commonalities between the involved groups.

### **5.5.3 Beliefs about Conversation Classes**

The three themes researched were: 1) teaching culture, 2) teaching conversation as it pertains to approaches, textbooks, topic selection, and generating authentic conversation, and 3) interactional roles of students and teachers. These themes address some of the issues in teaching conversation, which try to ascertain what students, teachers and administrators believe or expect should be happening in a conversation class.

First, teaching culture is felt to be very important as each group strongly agreed that knowing Western culture is necessary and relevant for learning English conversation (Table 4.4, 4aiii) while the administrators and the teachers strongly felt that teaching socially appropriate, culture-bound language is an important part of these classes (Table 4.4, 4ai and 4aii). A small percentage of students actually expect to learn about Western culture (Table 4.3). This commonality is significant because it has implications for learning English conversation as it may contrast with Korean conversation. Also, since language is culture-bound, learning the cultural linguistic relationship may strengthen learning or help students become more effective communicators if that is the goal of conversation classes (Taylor and Wolfson, 1978: 33, 34; Richards and Sukwivat, 1983).

The next issue deals with teaching conversation. There was no consensus among the teachers on whether conversation should be taught directly or indirectly where the percentages were nearly evenly spread across agree, neutral and disagree (Table 4.4, 4bi and 4bii). This suggests that much diversity and uncertainty continue to be present in conversation classes and that there tends not to be an exclusive way to teach conversation. This also shows that:

If difficulty with 'conversation classes' is widespread, so too the desire of students to converse successfully in the language they are learning.

(Cook, 1989: 116).

This may also reveal the tension that tends to exist between the nature of conversation and the nature of the classroom (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1992, Thornbury and Slade, 2006: 243). The administrators were strongly neutral on either approach, illustrating the differences between administrative and teaching roles or the distance between their duties and the classroom.

A divergence was present when asked if studying textbooks is the best way to learn conversation in an EFL context (Table 4.4, 4ci). The teachers had no consensus on this issue while half the administrators agreed and most students disagreed. This suggests a strong mismatch between the groups on how conversation should be taught and whether or not textbooks should be used. Since textbooks are the primary content for conversation classes at the researched university, there seems to be a need for discussion on the role of textbooks in the classroom and the differing ways to teach and learn conversation.

Strikingly, most students, teachers and administrators agreed that students could learn authentic conversation in the classroom (Table 4.4, 4biv), suggesting that despite textbook use, genuine communication can be generated in a class. Additionally, the administrators were strongly neutral whereas the teachers and the students expressed no consensus on whether textbook dialogues are how native English speakers converse, however, each group felt that these dialogues are useful models for learning conversation (Table 4.4, 4cii, 4ciii). So discussing the nature of native conversation with students would be beneficial in order to make the lesson a valuable opportunity to learn conversation. This requires a direct approach to teaching English. It was also felt by nearly all of the teachers and administrators that increasing exposure to authentic conversation was needed (Table 4.4, 4g). This would help validate classroom opportunities to encourage feelings of naturalness in conversation learning, which follows McCarthy's advice (1991: 145).

Interestingly, 59% of students feel that there is no correlation between their confidence in their grammar level and confidence in their speaking ability (Table 4.4, 4bvi). This suggests that student confidence involves more than possessing linguistic knowledge.

Topic selection was a neutral issue for the teachers whereas the administrators and the students showed a slight desire for teachers to choose the conversation topics (Table 4.4, 4di). This may

suggest a preference for traditional teacher-directed classes but the division also suggests that there may be openness to student-directed classes. This suggestion is supported by 72.7% of the students showing a dislike of studying the same topics year after year (Table 4.4, 4dii) as the first and second year conversation textbooks cover the same topics. Creating a more student-centered class may bridge student and teacher beliefs and expectations and lead to a more cohesive learning environment (Nunan and Lamb, 2001; Thornbury and Slade, 2006: 316). Interestingly, 6 teachers also demonstrated a desire to have topic variation whereas 6 were neutral on the issue and 3 do enjoy teaching the same topics year after year (Table 4.4, 4dii). The numbers suggest that teachers need to be aware of students' dislike of topic repetition and discuss their possible topical mismatched expectations.

The last issue addresses interactional roles. Who should interact with whom has the potential to be greatly mismatched between the teachers and the students. First, most teachers and administrators and the majority of students agreed that students should talk more than the teacher in a conversation class (Table 4.4, 4ei). However, the majority of students expressed that they should mainly talk with the teacher whereas they were undecided about student-student interaction being predominant in a conversation class (Table 4.4, 4eiii). Also the students showed no consensus on whether sitting in groups was an important way to learn conversation (Table 4.4, 4eiv) while the teachers and administrators both felt that student-student interaction should be exploited in conversation classes (Table 4.4, 4eii, 4eiii and 4eiv). This demonstrates that many students seem to be unsure as to what type of interaction is the best for gaining high levels of English conversational ability. As previously mentioned, most students expect to improve their conversational competence but many seem to be unsure as how to best achieve this. Also, most students demonstrated that they prefer a native English teacher (Table 4.4, 3) but many don't know how to develop their skills with a native English speaker. Therefore, learner training and "learner self-direction" would be a valuable and beneficial endeavor to help students develop their language abilities in and outside the classroom (Oxford, 1990: 1-22).

It is my assumption that these beliefs further informed the student and the teacher expectations. The administrators' responses mostly matched the teachers' responses and therefore are included here with the teacher commentary. Many of the teachers expect to teach Western culture through

various approaches with possible textbook use, which can generate authentic conversation. The students expect to increase their conversation skills, which involves learning Western culture, however it may not be attainable if textbooks are used and topics are recycled. Both teachers and students expect speaking opportunities yet how this can be maximized remains uncertain as students expect to interact primarily with the teacher and the teachers expect student-student interactions. In conclusion, the expectations and beliefs discussed here show more open communication and sharing expectations and beliefs are needed between students and teachers to maximize conversation learning.

This study shows that in the researched Korean university context, gaining conversational competence seems to be an ideal endeavor. Government LPPs mandate it, but do not have detailed goals on how it can be achieved. Many students have come to expect to gain conversational skills yet English conversation tends to be viewed as an academic undertaking used in test taking as indicated in sections 2.1.4 and 5.1. So, realistically, general English proficiency tends to be the focus in conversation classes as there is an inefficacy in such limited contact time (2 hours per week). Therefore, teachers and administrators tend to have more general expectations for conversation classes where a more attainable outcome is for students to participate in speaking activities to improve general proficiency rather than to attain conversational skills. So if English conversation skills are necessary for university students, they must seek other opportunities for this development outside of the university context.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

This study originated from the observation that the researcher's English conversation classes in a Korean university were not generating conversational learning but rather general English learning. Several observed contextual factors seemed to be involved in why this was. For example, many low English proficient students, large class sizes, minimal class time, general English textbooks, and the absence of a context for using conversational English outside of the university classroom. To further inform what conversation classes seem to be in this situation, 5 research questions were prepared and an examination of the Korean context was reviewed. Three questionnaires were designed to obtain the three perspectives involved in conversation classes: the students who took them, the teachers who taught them and administrators who have influence on conversation classes. Both quantitative and qualitative questionnaire items were used to enhance the insight into the opinions and beliefs held by the questionnaire respondents. Percentages were used to represent and analyze the data.

The data in this investigation showed that conversation is a title used to encourage speaking in class that may or may not be conversational in nature. This is because the main role is to prepare graduates for future employment where a TOEIC score tends to be required. This means that knowing how English is used in the Korean job market becomes necessary to inform what conversation classes can become which would work towards an English language context outside of the classroom. There are no standards to maintain in these researched conversation classes, therefore much diversity results in what these classes become for individual teachers where the university leveling system and who is assigned to teach conversation classes has implications for what is focused on. What people might assume from the title 'conversation' is a speaking expectation so many students have assumed that conversational competence is the primary goal, yet teachers' and administrators' expectations differ as they tend to focus on general language learning and completing the assigned textbook rather than on the construct of conversation as detailed in sections 2.2.1 to 2.2.3. The striking theme throughout this research is that discussion between administrators, teachers, and students must be initiated to make these classes count for something, whether it is indeed English conversation or preparation for how English is most

likely used in Korean employment. At present, there is a high level of unstructured speaking related English themed classes with little accountability and immeasurable outcomes.

This study illustrates that conversation classes will continue to be divergent unless a consensus among ELT teachers and administrators is reached on defining these classes. This definition must be informed by details of government mandates that influence English language policies, the knowledge of constructs used in policy rhetoric, the uses of English in the Korean job market, the needs of the students, and the context that these classes are placed in. Once a definition has been established, then more consistency can be generated through goal setting and its assessment, valid testing, and appropriate course content. These considerations will affect the success or failure of these classes and therefore will determine how worthwhile, relevant and applicable they are for students and teachers. If students expect to improve their conversation skills in a class titled 'conversation,' it becomes the teacher's responsibility to use the construct of conversation to guide the content and its assessment so that this class becomes what it is titled as. As a teacher-researcher, becoming informed on what it means to teach conversation and what English conversation is needed for in Korea, generates better informed teaching decisions in these classes.

More questions have been raised throughout this study, which means further research is needed to answer them. These questions relate to the evaluation and the assessment of conversation classes that have originated from government LPPs. The questions are:

What is the context for English use in Korea?

What are conversation classes needed for in everyday Korean life?

How can government English LPPs become more realistic and appropriate to implement throughout Korea?

Are English LPP directives for universities helping students become communicatively competent in English?

Are university conversation classes doing what is expected of them?

Are conversation classes producing conversationally skilled university graduates?

This study has brought an awareness of the state of conversation classes in a Korean university. The next step would be to evaluate how to make conversation learning more attainable or to reassess the need for English conversation skills and create more realistic and purposeful English classes that can be attainable within the university context.

## APPENDIX I

### THE STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

#### A Questionnaire on English Conversation: A Student's Perspective

##### 영어회화에 관한 설문조사: 학생의 견해

The purpose of this questionnaire is to research students' beliefs and expectations of English conversation classes offered at this university. 이 설문조사의 목적은 대학에서 받는 영어회화 수업에 대한 학생들의 신념과 기대를 조사하는 데 있습니다.

I would like to ask you to help me by answering the following questions about English conversation. This is **not** a test so there are **no** right or wrong answers. Also your name is not needed. Please give your answers **honestly** as this will ensure the success of this questionnaire. Thank you very much for your help. 영어회화에 대한 다음의 질문들에 성실히 답해 주시기 바랍니다. 이 설문조사는 시험이 아니기 때문에 옳고 그른 답이 있는 것이 아닙니다. 따라서 이름은 적지 않으셔도 되며, 이 설문조사의 효율성을 위해서 성심껏 답변해 주시기 바랍니다. 이 설문조사에 응해 주셔서 감사합니다.

#### **Section I: Beliefs About English Conversation Classes** 영어회화수업에 대한 신념

Please indicate your opinion by choosing a response (1 through 5 as below) and writing the number in the space after the statement. Please use the whole of the scale. 영어회화 수업 방법 및 내용에 대한 여러분의 의견을 묻는 질문입니다. 아래의 표를 보고 여러분의 의견을 번호로 각 설문 옆에 써 주세요. 1번~5번까지 골고루 사용해 주시길 바랍니다.

- |   |
|---|
| 1. Strongly Disagree. 강하게 부정한다.             |
| 2. Disagree. 부정한다.                          |
| 3. Neither agree nor disagree. 부정도 긍정도 아니다. |
| 4. Agree. 동의한다.                             |
| 5. Strongly Agree. 전적으로 동의한다.               |
| 6. I don't know. 잘 모르겠다.                    |

**For example** 예: *Summer is the best season.* 여름이 가장 좋은 계절이다.   1  

**This means that I strongly disagree that summer is the best season.** 이것은 여름이 가장 좋은 계절이라는 의견에 강하게 부정한다는 뜻입니다.

1. Studying textbooks are the best way to learn English conversation. 영어교과서를 공부하는 것이 영어회화를 배우는 가장 좋은 방법이다. \_\_\_\_\_



1. Strongly Disagree. 강하게 부정한다.
2. Disagree. 부정한다.
3. Neither agree nor disagree. 부정도 긍정도 아니다.
4. Agree. 동의한다.
5. Strongly Agree. 전적으로 동의한다.
6. I don't know. 잘 모르겠다.

2. In a conversation class, students should talk more than the teacher. 회화수업에서 학생들은 교사보다 더 많이 얘기해야 한다. \_\_\_\_\_
3. The teacher should choose the conversation topics. 교사가 대화의 주제를 골라야 한다. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Students should mainly have conversation with the teacher. 학생들은 주로 교사와 대화를 해야한다. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Students should mainly have conversation with other students. 학생들은 주로 그 반의 다른 학생들과 대화를 해야 한다. \_\_\_\_\_
6. Textbook dialogues are useful models for learning English conversation. 교과서에 나와 있는 대화지문들은 영어회화를 배우는데 아주 유용한 표현들이다. \_\_\_\_\_
7. Textbook dialogues are how native English speakers talk. 교과서에 나온 대화지문들은 원어민들이 사용하는 표현이나 지문들이다. \_\_\_\_\_
8. Sitting in groups is not a very important way to learn conversation. 그룹 별로 앉는 것이 회화를 배우는 데 아주 중요한 방법은 아니다. \_\_\_\_\_
9. I enjoy talking about the same topics year after year. 난 매년 같은 주제들에 대해 얘기하는 것을 좋아한다. \_\_\_\_\_
10. Conversation classes prepare me for speaking well with native English speakers. 회화수업이 내가 원어민과 얘기를 잘하도록 준비시켜 준다. \_\_\_\_\_
11. A native English teacher is the best person to teach me conversation. 원어민이 나에게 회화를 가르치는 가장 좋은 사람이다. \_\_\_\_\_
12. Being confident in my grammar level means I am more confident speaking English. 내가 문법에 자신이 있다는 것은 내가 말하기에도 더 자신이 있다는 것을 의미한다. \_\_\_\_\_
13. Knowing about Western culture is necessary for learning English conversation. 영어회화를 배우는 데 있어서 양의 문화를 아는 것이 필요하다. \_\_\_\_\_
14. I cannot learn real conversation in a classroom. 난 교실에서 실제적인 영어회화를 배울 수 없다. \_\_\_\_\_

15. After I graduate, speaking English will not be important for me. 졸업 후에는, 영어 말하기가 나에게 중요하지 않을 것이다. \_\_\_\_\_

16. I want a job that requires me to speak English. 난 영어 말하기를 필요로 하는 직업을 가지고 싶다. \_\_\_\_\_

17. I can practice English conversation by myself alone. 난 혼자서 영어회화를 연습할 수 있다. \_\_\_\_\_

18. Please rank the following statements from the most important (1) to the least important (4) for you. 아래의 항목들에 여러분이 가장 중요하다고 생각하는 것(1)부터 가장 덜 중요하다고 생각하는 것(4)까지 순위를 매겨 주세요.

I am learning English conversation for my degree requirement. 나는 나의 학위취득을 위해 영어회화를 배우고 있다. \_\_\_\_\_

I am learning English conversation for my future job opportunities. 난 더 폭넓은 취업기회를 위해 영어회화를 배우고 있다. \_\_\_\_\_

I am learning English conversation to improve a test score like TOEIC or TOEFL. 난 토익,토플 등의 공인시험 점수를 더 잘 받기 위하여 영어회화를 배우고 있다. \_\_\_\_\_

I am learning English conversation for personal satisfaction. 난 자기만족을 위하여 영어회화를 배우고 있다. \_\_\_\_\_

## Section II: Expectations of Conversation Classes 영어회화 수업에 대한 기대

Please answer the following questions by writing a personal response. 아래의 질문에 본인의 의견을 적어주세요.

1. What do you expect from an English conversation class? 영어회화 수업에서 무엇을 얻기를 원하나요?

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2. How are your conversation skills tested? 여러분의 영어회화 반에서는 회화실력을 어떤 방법으로 테스트를 하나요?

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3. What is conversation? Write up to 5 key words or phrases that **describe** conversation, as opposed to another type of speaking, for example a speech or an argument. 대화란 무엇일까요? 말하기 또는 대화를 나타낼 수 있는 다른 단어를 최대 5개 까지 써 주세요.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Again, thank you so much for your help!! 감사합니다!!!

## APPENDIX II

### THE PROCEDURE FOR ADMINISTERING THE STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

#### Student Questionnaire Procedure

Please follow the steps as closely as possible as this will ensure consistent results.

**Step 1:** Introduction – Please tell the students what they will do and why. Of course, the students have a choice to participate in this project. Stated below is what I told my classes.

“Today we’re going to do something a little different. A teacher is doing a research project on what students think about English conversation classes. Your honest opinions are very important for this research. So this teacher has asked me to give you a questionnaire to help with the research. I think this is a good chance to help as it may help English teachers and students in future conversation classes. You have a choice to participate in this research. Now, I am only the messenger of the questionnaire. That means that I will not read your questionnaires. I will just give you the questionnaires, collect them and give them back to my colleague.”

Then hand out the questionnaires.

**Step 2:** Instructions – Briefly show the students the five sections of the questionnaire and give brief instructions as everything is translated in Korean. Please highlight that the students **must answer the open-ended questions in English**. They can use their cell phone dictionaries or electronic dictionaries. If they can’t write a sentence, ask them to write key words about what they want to say. I do not have the resources to allow for Korean written answers. Feel free to answer any questions that the students may have. Everything should be clearly laid out. In piloting the survey, the only question I got was, “Can I use my dictionary?” So, I don’t anticipate any confusion. However, if there is any confusion, please make a note of it and please let me know. Also, highlight that the students should **answer every question**. Don’t leave any questions blank!!

**Step 3:** Time – The questionnaire takes 20 minutes to fill out.

**Step 4:** Collection – Collect the questionnaires and I would kindly request that you put them on my desk in Room 218 or on the conference table in Room 218. Thank you!

## APPENDIX III

### THE TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

#### A Questionnaire on English Conversation: A Teacher's Perspective

The purpose of this questionnaire is to research teachers' beliefs and expectations of English conversation classes offered at a university.

I would like to ask you to help me by answering the following questions about your English conversation classes. Your name is not needed, however, for research purposes, please indicate your nationality. The responses from this questionnaire will not be given out. However, the results will be used in a research paper. Also, please give your answers honestly and sincerely as this will ensure the success of this research. Thank you very much for your help.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Nationality: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Section I: Beliefs about Conversation Classes**

Please indicate your opinion by choosing a response (1 through 5 as below) and writing the number in the space after the statement.

1.	Strongly Disagree
2.	Disagree
3.	Neither agree nor disagree
4.	Agree
5.	Strongly Agree

**For example:** *Summer is the best season.*   1  

**This means that I strongly disagree that summer is the best season.**

1. Textbook dialogues are how native English speakers talk. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Referencing native English culture is irrelevant in my conversation classes. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Students are unaware of spoken grammatical features such as vagueness, ellipsis, and head and tail slot fillers. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Teachers should focus on the direct teaching of conversation. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Preferably, native English teachers should teach conversation classes. \_\_\_\_\_
6. Studying via course books is the best way to learn English conversation in an EFL context. \_\_\_\_\_
7. In a conversation class, students should talk more than the teacher. \_\_\_\_\_
8. The teacher should choose the conversation topics. \_\_\_\_\_
9. Completing the course book is the primary goal in my conversation class. \_\_\_\_\_

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neither agree nor disagree 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

- 10. Students should mainly have conversation with the teacher. \_\_\_\_\_
- 11. Conversation should be taught deductively. \_\_\_\_\_
- 12. Students should mainly have conversation with other students. \_\_\_\_\_
- 13. Textbook dialogues are useful models for learning English conversation. \_\_\_\_\_
- 14. Pragmatics is an important part of my conversation lessons. \_\_\_\_\_
- 15. Sitting in groups is not a very important way to learn conversation. \_\_\_\_\_
- 16. I enjoy teaching the same conversation topics year after year. \_\_\_\_\_
- 17. University conversation classes prepare students for speaking well with a native English speaker. \_\_\_\_\_
- 18. Knowing about Western culture is necessary for learning English conversation. \_\_\_\_\_
- 19. Students cannot learn authentic conversation in a classroom. \_\_\_\_\_
- 20. There should be a university standard to meet when teaching conversation classes. \_\_\_\_\_
- 21. Conversation tests should be standardized. \_\_\_\_\_
- 22. English conversation should be an optional class for university students. \_\_\_\_\_
- 23. Upon completing the required conversation classes, most students are unable to have simple conversations in English. \_\_\_\_\_
- 24. Students need more exposure to authentic English conversation. \_\_\_\_\_
- 25. Teaching conversation is an ambiguous task. \_\_\_\_\_

**Section II: Approaches to Conversation Classes**

Please answer the following questions by circling one response or by writing a personal response.

- 1a. Do you teach conversation classes in this institution? Yes / No
- 1b. If 'yes', why do you think you have been assigned to teaching conversation courses?

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- 2. What is the standard for teachers to meet when teaching conversation classes? (standards)

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3. What should your students be able to do after completing your conversation class? (goals)

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4. What do most of your students need in a conversation class? (needs of the students)

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5. What do you expect to do in your conversation classes? (expectations)

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6. Why do you think English conversation classes are on the curriculum? (role)

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7. How do you test your students' conversation skills? (testing)

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8. Some claim that teaching conversation is an ambiguous task. Why do you think that is?

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9a. Do you think conversation tests should be standardized? Yes / No

9b. If 'yes', why?

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9c. If 'no', why not?

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10. Write 8 key words that **describe** conversation, as opposed to another type of speaking, for example a speech or an argument.

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	

Please return the questionnaire to either Room 101 or Room 218 in 진리 건 by putting it in the manila envelop on the conference table(s). Thank you so much for your time and help!!



## APPENDIX IV

### THE ADMINSTRATOR QUESTIONNAIRE AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### A Questionnaire on English Conversation: An Administration's Perspective

The purpose of this questionnaire and interview is to research the administration's beliefs and expectations of English conversation classes offered at a university.

I would like to ask you to help me by answering the following questions about English conversation classes. Your name is not needed nor will the responses from this questionnaire be given out. However, the results will be used in a research paper. Please give your answers honestly and sincerely as this will ensure the success of this research.

#### **Section I: Beliefs about Conversation Classes**

Please indicate your opinion by choosing a response (1 through 5 as below) and writing the number in the space after the statement.

1.	Strongly Disagree
2.	Disagree
3.	Neither agree nor disagree
4.	Agree
5.	Strongly Agree

**For example:** *Summer is the best season.*   1  

**This means that I strongly disagree that summer is the best season.**

1. Textbook dialogues are how native English speakers talk. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Referencing native English culture is irrelevant in conversation classes. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Students are unaware of spoken grammatical features such as vagueness, ellipsis, and head and tail slot fillers. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Teachers should focus on the direct teaching of conversation. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Preferably, native English teachers should teach conversation classes. \_\_\_\_\_
6. Studying via course books is the best way to learn English conversation in an EFL context. \_\_\_\_\_
7. In a conversation class, students should talk more than the teacher. \_\_\_\_\_
8. The teacher should choose the conversation topics. \_\_\_\_\_
9. Completing the course book is the primary goal in university conversation classes. \_\_\_\_\_
10. Students should mainly have conversation with the teacher. \_\_\_\_\_
11. Conversation should be taught deductively. \_\_\_\_\_

1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neither agree nor disagree 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree

12. Students should mainly have conversation with other students. \_\_\_\_\_
13. Textbook dialogues are useful models for learning English conversation. \_\_\_\_\_
14. Pragmatics is an important part of conversation classes. \_\_\_\_\_
15. Sitting in groups is not a very important way to learn conversation. \_\_\_\_\_
16. University conversation classes prepare students for speaking well with a native English speaker. \_\_\_\_\_
17. Knowing about Western culture is necessary for learning English conversation. \_\_\_\_\_
18. Students cannot learn authentic conversation in a classroom. \_\_\_\_\_
19. There should be a university standard to meet when teaching conversation classes. \_\_\_\_\_
20. Conversation tests should be standardized. \_\_\_\_\_
21. English conversation should be an optional class for university students. \_\_\_\_\_
22. Upon completing the required conversation classes, most students are unable to have simple conversations in English. \_\_\_\_\_
23. Students need more exposure to authentic English conversation. \_\_\_\_\_
24. Teaching conversation is an ambiguous task. \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this questionnaire to Room 103 in 진 리 켄 by placing the questionnaire in the teachers' mail slots and address the envelop to Rachel. Thank you very much for your help.

## **Section II: The Interview Questions about English Conversation Classes**

1. Is there a standard for English teachers to meet when teaching conversation here at this institution? If 'yes', why have the teachers not been informed of the standard(s)?
2. Should conversation tests be standardized? Why or why not?
3. When did this institution first offer English conversation as mandatory credits for students?
4. Why are English conversation classes mandatory for university students? (role)
5. What does the administration expect to see happening in a conversation class? (expectations)
6. What should a student be able to do after completing the mandatory conversation classes? (goals)
7. What do university students need in a conversation class? (needs of the students)
- 8a. Which majors must take English conversation classes? (who takes the classes)
- 8b. What exempts a student or a major subject from taking mandatory conversation classes? (who doesn't take the classes)
- 9a. What percentage of the student population is enrolled in English conversation courses?
- 9b. How many students are enrolled in English conversation classes?
- 10a. Which teachers are assigned conversation classes?
- 10b. What are the reasons for this assignment?
11. How were the current conversation textbooks chosen for the curriculum?
12. How should English conversation be tested? (testing)
13. What key words describe conversation as a type of spoken discourse?

## APPENDIX V

### THE AMALGAMATION OF SECTION I OF THE THREE QUESTIONNAIRES

#### Section I: The three questionnaires.

1a) <b>Standards:</b>	There should be a university standard to meet when teaching conversation classes. (Ad.19, T.20)
1b) <b>Testing:</b>	Conversation tests should be standardized. (Ad.20, T.21)
2a) <b>Roles of Class:</b>	English conversation should be an optional class for university students. (Ad.21, T.22)
2b)	After I graduate, speaking English will not be important for me. (S.15)
2c)	I want a job that requires me to speak English. (S.16)
3) <b>Conversation Teachers:</b>	Preferably, native English teachers should teach conversation classes. (Ad.5, T.5) / A native English teacher is the best person to teach me conversation. (S.11)
4) <b>Expectations:</b>	
4a) <b>Teaching Culture:</b>	
4ai)	Referencing native English culture is irrelevant in my conversation classes. (Ad.2, T.2)
4aaii)	Pragmatics is an important part of conversation lessons. (Ad.14, T.14)
4aaiii)	Knowing about Western culture is necessary for learning English conversation. (Ad.17, T.18)
4b) <b>Approaches:</b>	
4bi)	Teachers should focus on the direct teaching of conversation. (Ad.4, T.4)
4bii)	Conversation should be taught deductively. (Ad.11, T.11)
4biii)	Teaching conversation is an ambiguous task. (Ad.24, T.25)
4biv)	Students cannot learn authentic conversation in a classroom. (Ad.18, T.19) / I cannot learn real conversation in a classroom. (S.14)
4bv)	Students are unaware of spoken grammatical features such as vagueness, ellipsis, and head and tail slot fillers. (Ad.3, T.3)
4bvi)	Being confident in my grammar level means I am more confident speaking English. (S.12)
4c) <b>Textbooks:</b>	
4ci)	Studying via course books is the best way to learn English conversation in an EFL context. (Ad.6, T.6) / Studying textbooks are the best way to learn English conversation. (S.1)

4cii)	Textbook dialogues are how native English speakers talk. (Ad.1, T.1, S.7)
4ciii)	Textbook dialogues are useful models for learning English conversation. (Ad.13, T.13, S.6)
<b>4d) Topic Selection:</b>	
4di)	The teacher should choose the conversation topics. (Ad.8, T.8, S.3)
4dii)	I enjoy teaching the same conversation topics year after year. (T.16) / I enjoy talking about the same topics year after year. (S.9)
<b>4e) Class Interactions:</b>	
4ei)	In a conversation class, students should talk more than the teacher. (Ad.7, T.7, S.2)
4eii)	Students should mainly have conversation with the teacher. (Ad.10, T.10, S.4)
4eiii)	Students should mainly have conversation with other students. (Ad.12, T.12, S.5)
4eiv)	Sitting in groups is not a very important way to learn conversation. (Ad.15, T.15, S.8)
<b>4f) Goals:</b>	
4fi)	Completing the course book is the primary goal of conversation classes. (Ad.9, T.9)
4fii)	University conversation classes prepare students for speaking well with a native English speaker. (Ad.16, T.17) / Conversation classes prepare me for speaking well with native English speakers. (S.10)
4fiii)	Upon completing the required conversation classes, most students are unable to have simple conversations in English. (Ad.22, T.23)
<b>4g) Needs:</b>	Students need more exposure to authentic English conversation. (Ad.23, T.24)
<b>5) Conversation Construct Check:</b>	I can practice English conversation by myself alone. (S.17)

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