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Contents

Student Power: The Driving Force in Self-Access Centers

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It gives us great pleasure to present to you the fourth issue of the JASAL Journal. This collection encompasses a variety of articles: a research paper, discussions of practice, reports on conferences and a panel discussion, as well as a book review. While the genres may vary, a common theme runs through them: the invaluable contribution of students to the daily operation and long-term success of self-access centers.

Students who regularly participate in self-access centers bring so much with them: energy, knowledge, skills, talents, creativity. They bring diversity—of language, culture, learning styles, experience and perspective. Self-access centers thrive on diversity and dynamism. As educators, we work to ensure that students have opportunities to share these attributes in environments that foster freedom of expression. In complementarity, we strive to put in place programs, activities and events, which invite student engagement. Students who actively engage in such an environment can be awarded with affordances for language learning, metacognitive growth and self-actualization. Regular participants come to self-access centers as students, but leave as learners.

The key to success in self-access centers is engagement that taps into student potential and power. Because not everybody will choose to participate in the same way or to the same degree, it is essential to provide possibilities for engagement on multiple levels. On the level of the individual learner, as **Motomura** notes in her book review, the fundamental role of self-access centers is to encourage students to assume responsibility and take direction of their learning. Self-assessment is an important feature of self-directed learning. **Cotterall**'s article illustrates the creativity and enthusiasm learners can bring to this process. On the administrative level, **Yamashita's** article highlights how self-access participants can provide administrators and their fellow learners with insights, support and even inspiration. On the level of day-to-day operation, there are numerous possibilities for engagement ranging from serving as peer tutors—as students did in **McCrohan and Caldwell's** center—to actively participating in the face-to-face or online services, such as those discussed by **Hayashi, Nehlah, and Wolanski** in this issue. On all of these levels, the success of programs and daily activities is reliant on the energy and resources that students bring to them. Therefore, it is imperative that learners have the opportunity to engage in ways that enable them to exercise their attributes and which, at the same time, foster their linguistic, metacognitive, and personal development.

This Issue

The articles in this issue explore the following themes:

- *Self-assessment*. **Cotterall** argues that, as a support for self-directed learners, teachers have a responsibility to encourage them to engage in self-assessment.
- *The role of peer tutors*. In their research paper **McCrohan and Caldwell** examine the beneficial and even crucial role peer tutors can play in delivering lessons in self-access centers that lack the resources to hire professional language educators.
- *Online and face-to-face hybrid approach in delivering self-access center services*. In their practice article **Hayashi, Nehlah, and Wolanski** take readers behind the scene as they examine the decision-making process behind the new approach and how staff went about the implementing of an onsite-online system.
- *The vital role of students as staff members in self-access centers*. In her conference report **Yamashita** argues student staff members have the requisite abilities, insight and enthusiasm to "create motivating, enjoyable and challenging learning opportunities" for their fellow learners.
- *Lessons learned during the pandemic concerning the use of technology in language education*. In her report on the recent International Association for Language Learning Technology (IALLT) conference, **Ijiri** focuses on how lessons learned during the pandemic provide insight into how technology might change the landscape of language learning forever.
- *The defining features of self-access centers in Japan*. In his report on a panel discussion at the IALLT conference, **Cameron** summarizes the participants' key points surrounding the goals and foundational operating principles of self-access centers in Japan.
- *The conceptualization of "language education spaces" in the U.S. in comparison to other international contexts*. In her book review, **Motomura** notes that the key difference between language centers in the U.S. and those in other parts of the world is that the latter are conceived as self-access centers whose prime goal is to promote self-directed learning.

Like Ducks to Water: Language Learners and Self-Assessment

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Sara Cotterall is a language researcher, teacher educator and editor. From 2005–2008 she was Associate Professor in the English Department at Akita International University in Japan; she has also taught at universities in Australia, China, New Zealand and the United Arab Emirates. Her publications focus on learner autonomy, academic writing and doctoral education.

A growing interest in learner autonomy amongst language teachers is reflected in the frequent inclusion of this term in the titles of language learning and teaching publications, conferences, and research projects. This suggests that traditional approaches to language teaching are giving way to an approach which seeks to involve learners in the decision-making process surrounding their learning. One key means of engaging learners in decision-making and thereby promoting learner autonomy involves teaching learners how to actively engage in assessing their own learning. However, published accounts of language teachers encouraging self-assessment are rare. While Tassinari (2016) argues that empowering learners to self-assess represents a significant challenge for language educators, teachers should be encouraged to learn that simply starting to talk to learners about assessing their learning is a valuable first step:

> … the most important aspect of strategic learning is not the exact nature of the specific techniques that learners employ but rather the fact that they *choose to exert creative effort* [emphasis added] in trying to improve their own learning … The essential aspect of empowering learners is *to set into motion the self-regulatory process* [emphasis added] rather than to offer the instruction of a set of strategies. (Tseng, Dörnyei and Schmitt, 2006, p. 95)

In this short article I argue that language teachers have a responsibility to activate in their learners a process whereby they begin to manage their own learning. While there are many ways in which this can be done, I present three examples here from a course which encouraged learners to develop ways of managing all aspects of their language learning. In presenting these examples, I wish to emphasize not so much the individual measures designed by the learners, but rather their willingness and ability to participate in the process. As my title suggests, despite having no prior experience of assessing their learning, these learners took to self-assessment "like ducks to water."

First, I review some key ideas about self-assessment explored in the research literature, and about the link between self-assessment and learner autonomy. Next, I provide some background on the context in which the course I report on was delivered. The third section presents and discusses three measures of learning designed by the learners.

Previous Research in Self-Assessment and Learner Autonomy

Henri Holec (1981), considered by some to be the founder of learner autonomy in language learning, considers self-assessment—both monitoring and evaluating learning—a key characteristic of learners who take charge of their learning. However, in most educational settings, assessment is the exclusive prerogative of the teacher. This is unfortunate since self-assessment imparts many advantages to the learner including helping them identify their strengths and weaknesses, alleviating their feelings of fear, anxiety and frustration, learning to evaluate the effectiveness of their communication, raising their awareness of the learning process and enhancing their knowledge of the range of possible goals in language learning (Li & Zhang, 2021). It is also possible that self-assessment increases motivation.

Assessment specialists draw a distinction between assessment as an internal self-directed activity and assessment as an external other-directed activity. Benson (2011, p. 168) argues that, from a learner autonomy perspective, "the formative aspects of internal assessment are of greater significance than learners' ability to match their own assessments with external assessments of their proficiency". In other words, learners who are trying to improve their learning are likely to principally be interested in determining how well they can perform a learning task. They may also be interested in comparing their performance on a particular task on one occasion with their performance on a previous or subsequent occasion. They are considerably less likely to be interested in the correlation between their assessments and those of external tests or examinations.

However, traditional language teaching tends to focus more attention on external summative assessments of proficiency. As a result, learners fail to develop any internal criteria for evaluating their performance. In Japan, for example, where the data for this study was collected, English language learners are constantly reminded of external measures of their proficiency such as their TOEIC or TOEFL scores. One of the participants in the study described this phenomenon in her language learning journal:

> I didn't think about plans or strategies … when I was in high school … I only
>
> studied the assignment that teachers gave me without thinking about any plans.
>
> And I only thought about results … I didn't care why I made a mistake or which
>
> English knowledge was lacking for me. I didn't evaluate my improving by

evidences [sic]… I found that my past way was very useless for improving my

English skill

But unless learners learn to reflect on why they make mistakes, what knowledge they lack, and how their performance falls short of their goals, they will forever be dependent on their teachers to evaluate their performance and progress.

Studies have confirmed, however, that learners are capable of carrying out self-assessment (Tassinari, 2016; Mazloomi & Khabiri, 2018; Duque Micán & Cuesta Medina, 2017). In a project aimed at introducing self-assessment to learners of Japanese at an Australian university, Thomson (1996) found that many learners lacked confidence in their ability to assess their learning. She argued that although language learners continuously assess their own performance internally in the classroom and in real-life interactions, they do so unconsciously, and therefore often develop negative attitudes to the idea of formal self-assessment. This suggests that it is essential to provide adequate support when introducing self-assessment to learners for the first time.

In the strong version of self-assessment, the procedures adopted to measure learning are determined by the learners themselves. Holec (1985, p. 142) argues that if self-assessment is to be successful, the procedures must be "relevant to the learner in question and to the particular learning in which he [sic] is engaged." In other words, successful self-assessment requires learners to monitor and evaluate their performance on tasks that are important to them, using criteria that match their learning goals. The logical conclusion, as Benson (2011) indicates, is that "because of this need for relevance … assessment of self-directed learning must be carried out by learners themselves" (p. 171).

The next section of the paper will illustrate what can happen when learners with no previous experience of self-assessment are encouraged to experiment with designing their own measures of learning on tasks that are important to them, using criteria they design themselves.

Learning Context

The self-assessment experiences discussed in the next section of this article are drawn from a self-directed language learning course offered as part of an EAP programme at a Japanese university. During their first semester in the EAP programme,

learners were required to take a course called Self-Directed Language Learning—the course which this paper discusses. The course had three principal objectives. First, it set out to help the learners improve their English language skills. A basic principle of the course was recognition of the fact that any group of learners reflects diverse needs, abilities and learning styles. Each learner in the course was therefore required, with support and assistance, to design their own individualized learning programme and to use the language learning resources provided in carrying out their programme.

The course's second objective was to introduce the learners to new strategies for learning English. Teachers aimed first to raise learners' awareness of strategies they were already using, and then to encourage them to evaluate their effectiveness. Throughout the semester, new strategies were periodically highlighted during "10-minute lessons" at the beginning of classes. This was done to expand learners' overall strategy repertoire and to remind them to think about how well the strategies they were adopting matched the tasks in which they were engaged.

The course's third objective was to develop learners' metacognitive knowledge in relation to language learning. Enhanced understanding of the language learning process is essential if learners are to successfully manage their ongoing language learning. Therefore, throughout the course, in different ways, attention was paid to key elements of self-directed learning such as needs analysis, goal setting, planning, material selection, strategy development, and progress monitoring.

The course took place in a self-access centre for three hours each week for a period of 15-weeks (one semester). The Centre was equipped with personal computers, an extensive library of books and journals, DVDs of films and popular television series, current affairs magazines with accompanying audio recordings of interviews and newscasts, and a reference library of dictionaries, encyclopedias, and study skills materials. While learners worked on their individual learning programmes, they were also encouraged to talk to each other and the teacher about the materials they had chosen and the strategies they were adopting.

During the first few sessions of the semester during which the material for this article was gathered, the teacher (the author of this article) outlined and demonstrated the process of needs assessment and goal setting, and helped individual learners identify

suitable materials to work with. Once the learners were working on their individual learning programmes, the teacher began to focus on strategies for measuring progress, reasoning with the learners that unless the activities they were engaging in were actually improving their skills, they were wasting their time.

The learners were encouraged to focus on progress monitoring and self-assessment in three ways. First, they were encouraged to think about and discuss different ways of measuring progress. Second, measures of learning that learners on previous courses had produced were distributed and discussed as a means of stimulating experimentation and creativity. Finally, the teacher prompted learners to provide evidence of learning progress in their learning portfolios. Here is a fairly typical exchange with a learner recorded towards the end of a session:

Teacher:	What did you work on today?
Learner:	I watched the DVD "Friends".
Teacher:	How is that helping you improve your English?
Learner:	I can listen better now.
Teacher:	Do you mean that your listening skill has improved?
Learner:	Yes.
Teacher:	How do you know? How can you *prove* that to me?
Learner:	I don't know.
Teacher:	Well, let's think of some ways to gather some evidence that you understand more when you listen now than you did, say, last week

While the learners found this kind of questioning challenging at first, the measures of learning presented in the next section indicate that by the end of the semester, many of them had developed excellent ways of recording evidence of their learning progress.

Examples of Learner-Designed Measures

This section of the paper presents three learner-designed measures of learning. Examples from three different skill areas—vocabulary learning, reading, and listening—

have been chosen in order to give an idea of the range of different assessment procedures devised.

Assessing Vocabulary Learning

Many learners on the course sought to expand their active and passive knowledge of vocabulary, particularly academic vocabulary. Nation (2001) claims that knowledge of the 2000 most frequent words in English, and the 570 words included in the *Academic Word List* (Coxhead, 1998) provides 86.6% coverage of academic text. Most of the learners in the course were familiar with the 1000 most common words in English but had only partial (receptive) knowledge of words in the 2000-word list and Academic Word List. Given their university's requirement that they study in an English-speaking country for one year of their undergraduate degree, vocabulary expansion was an important learning goal for most of the learners in the course.

While many learners were willing to spend time on vocabulary learning, it rapidly became apparent that their strategies focused exclusively on receptive tasks, such as repeating words aloud or writing words in notebooks with translations, and that they rarely revisited words they had previously "learned." Consequently, I encouraged them to think of ways of monitoring and evaluating the success of the strategies they were adopting, in order to determine whether they were spending their time profitably or not.

One learner who was keen to demonstrate that the words and phrases she was learning from watching DVDs were becoming part of her active vocabulary, designed a table where she could record evidence of her learning. An example of how to provide evidence of vocabulary learning and use was designed by a learner who wanted to demonstrate that the words and phrases she was learning from watching DVDs were becoming part of her active vocabulary (see Table 1). Accordingly, in the table she designed, the third, fourth and fifth columns record details of the time, place and situation in which she subsequently used each word or phrase. The fifth column is particularly interesting in that it represents feedback on her use of the target item, either her own or provided by the person with whom she was communicating when using the vocabulary item. Over time, a table such as this could be used to document the use of target items on different occasions and in different situations, reflecting the learner's growing familiarity with the word or phrase.

Table 1

Example of How to Evidence Vocabulary Learning and Use

Word or phrase	Date learned	Date used	Situation	Comment
or else	June 18	June 21	In an e-mail	I used it and she used it too!
inseparable	June 20	June 21	In reading class	They understood!
blot out	June 25	June 25	Chatting with my friend	He said "cause I'm shy" when I told him not to blot out his face

Assessing Reading Ability (Skimming)

For all university learners, reading large amounts of text efficiently and effectively is a key skill. However, during their years at secondary school, most of the Japanese learners in this course had only ever been exposed to very brief texts in English, which they had usually been asked to translate. Therefore, when faced with lengthy academic texts in English, many learners had difficulty recognising the overall text structure, identifying key information, and understanding the ideas presented.

Consequently, one learner in the course chose to work on her skimming skills by using newspaper texts. Although she initially encountered significant difficulties with the vocabulary used in the newspaper texts she chose to work with (*The Guardian*), she soon learned to guess the meaning of words that were not critical to understanding, thereby learning to tolerate a certain amount of ambiguity. The measure of learning that she developed (see Table 2) was a simple table which listed the title of the story she had read, and five global questions based on each story—Who (was it about)? What? When? Where? and Why? The learner gave herself a limited amount of time to skim read the article, then put it away and tried to answer each of the five questions in note form. When she had finished, she would look back at the article, check the accuracy of the information she had recorded and search for any details that she had been unable to locate.

Finally, she scored her efforts by placing a tick in the table for each type of information she had successfully identified.

Table 2

Measure of Skimming Ability

How much did I understand?

(3D-12)

Date	Title	Who	What	When	Where	Why
31-5	Irish court allows girl to travel for abortion	√	√		√	
31-5	Teenagers airlifted off moor	√		√		
31-5	Twin attack on Taliban	√	√	√	v	
07-6	Employees must show right to work	√	√			
07-6	Japan's "secret language weapon"	√	√		√	
07-6	Study finds "economic apartheid"	√	√		√	
14-6	Row on Aboriginal schooling	√	√	√	√	
14-6	Animals get in the pink	√	√		√	
14-6	25 years for killing of earl	√	v		√	
21-6	Media ignores allegations	√	√		√	
21-6	French right poised for parliamentary victory	√	√	√	√	
21-6	Laid-off tea pickers dying	√	√	√	√	
28-6	Putin warned at EU summit	√	√	√	√	
28-6	Factional violence and Israel; strikes	√	√	√	√	
28-6	One-child policy spurs riots in China	√	√		√	

The data contained in Table 2 is interesting for a number of reasons. First, it indicates that the learner found it easiest to identify *who* each story was about. Presumably, this can be explained by the tendency for newspaper texts to present the key information (including the identity of the protagonist) in the first few paragraphs. Second, the table suggests that it was easier for her to identify details of *what* the story was about and *where* it happened than for her to identify *when* it occurred. This is an intriguing finding. Perhaps details about the protagonists, topic, and location of the story were more saliently presented than information about when it occurred. It is also possible that details

of when the story occurred were not provided in 8 of the 15 stories listed, but this seems unlikely. Clearly, further investigation is needed to explain this outcome.

Third, the fact that the column headed up "Why" was never completed became a talking point between the learner and the teacher, with the learner hypothesising that newspaper stories are principally concerned with reporting events that occur and the details surrounding them, rather than with hypotheses of why they occur. She pointed to the example of the second story in her table—"Teenagers airlifted off moor"—where the reason for rescuing the teenagers was obvious from the rest of the story (the threat of danger) and did not need to be stated explicitly. This example illustrates the way in which, by generating her own measure of learning, the learner began reflecting on how the text was organized, which may subsequently have enhanced her comprehension of other types of texts.

Assessing Listening Ability

A third activity which many of the learners engaged in during self-directed learning sessions was watching DVDs to improve their listening skills. While the learners clearly enjoyed this activity, as their teacher, I was also keen for them to find ways of demonstrating that watching DVDs was helping them improve their listening comprehension. One learner did this in a very creative way. Example 3 shows the graph she produced to plot the percentage of each episode of the television series "Full House" that she felt she had understood. First, she watched the excerpt in English without subtitles, and then watched it again with subtitles (in English). Naturally, her comprehension improved from the first to the second listening. However, what her graph demonstrates most dramatically is a significant improvement over time in her ability to understand what she was listening to the first time she listened (i.e., without subtitles). Whereas in mid-September the learner understood 70% of the DVD without subtitles, by early December, she reported that she could understand 90%.

Some critics may claim that the learner measures presented here simply record subjective judgments of performance and therefore may present unreliable assessments. However, I argue that the very process of encouraging learners to think about monitoring and evaluating progress is beneficial to their learning. Furthermore, in the context described here, there was no incentive for learners to inflate assessments of their ability.

In fact, the tendency I noted throughout the semester was that learners systematically underestimated their skill levels.

Table 3

Measure of Listening Improvement
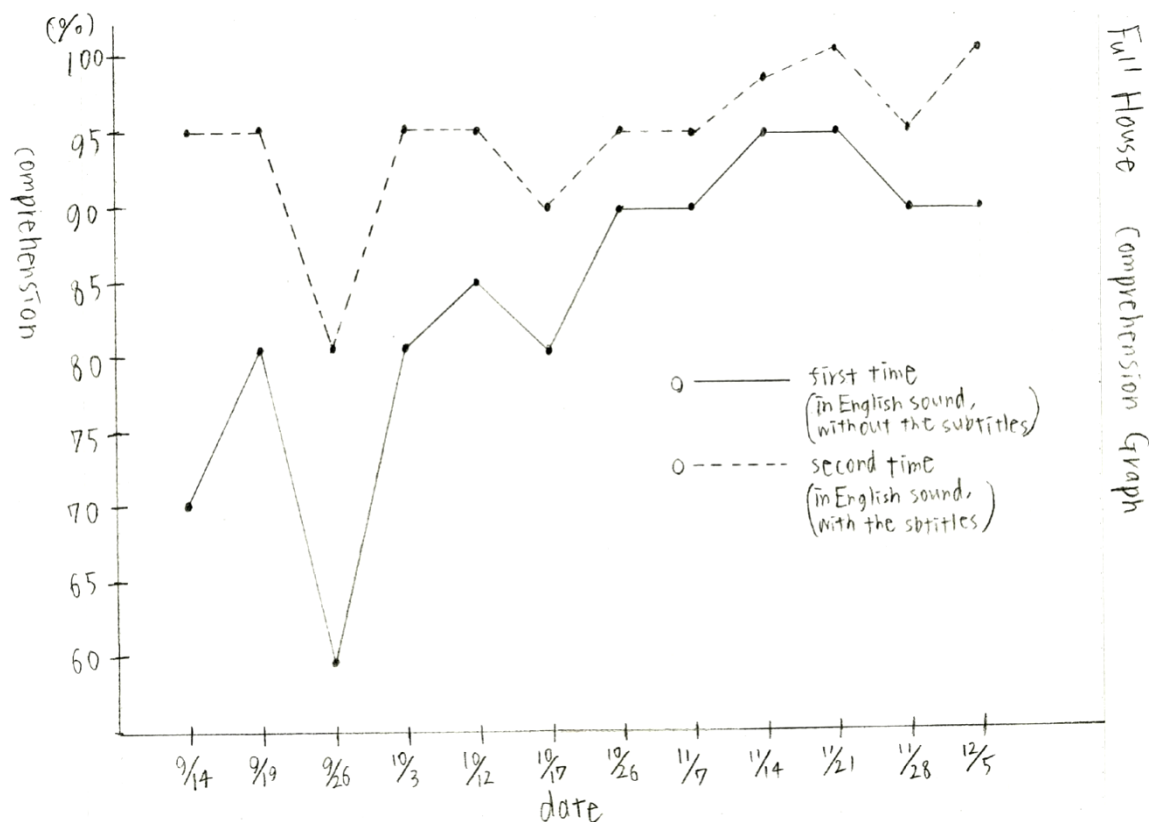
Conclusion

In this article I have tried to demonstrate the way in which learners, even those who are the products of a traditional education system, can be ready to exert creative effort to improve and manage their learning. The willingness of these learners to embrace the challenge of producing their own self-assessment measures, and the variety of measures they came up with are sources of encouragement for teachers who are committed to adopting more learner-centred approaches to language learning. Perhaps, the teacher's key responsibilities are not only to "set into motion the self-regulatory process" (Tseng et. al, 2006) whereby learners learn to manage their own learning, but

also to create a supportive learning environment which promotes such action (Cotterall & Murray, 2009).

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Using Peer Tutors to Assist with Examination Preparation Classes in a Self-Access Center Setting

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Abstract

Peer tutoring has a long and valued history in the field of education, including second language acquisition in Western countries. However, in a Japanese context, peer tutoring is not as well-known or utilized. This paper describes the results of a pilot study into the use of peer tutors in a program run by a self-access center which helps students prepare for the TOEIC Speaking & Writing (TOEIC S & W) examination. Over the course of one semester, five peer tutors helped prepare students for the speaking section of this examination. Using a post-course questionnaire combined with student and peer tutor interviews, it was found that students participating in these classes believed the peer tutors to be capable of helping them with the test format and requirements, vocabulary, and grammatical points. In particular, the students felt that they benefited from Japanese language support with vocabulary and grammar. However, both the peer tutors and students did not feel confident in the peer tutors' instruction for pronunciation and intonation. Both believed that it was more beneficial for students for these skills to be taught by a native English-speaking teacher.

ピア・チューターは，欧米諸国の第二言語習得をはじめとする教育分野において，長い歴史と評価を受けてきたが，日本ではあまり知られておらず，十分に活用もされていない。本稿では，セルフ・アクセス・センターが運営する TOEIC Speaking & Writing (TOEIC S & W)の試験対策プログラムにおいて，ピア・チューターがどのように支援を行ったかを調査した予備研究の結果を報告する。1 学期間に，5 人のピア・チューターがスピーキング・セクションの対策を行った。コース終了後のアンケートと参加学生とチューターのインタビューの結果から，学生は，ピアチューターがテストの形式やテスト対策、語彙、文法を十分にサポートできると考えていることがわかった。特に，語彙や文法については日本語でのサポートが有益であったと感じた。しかし，ピアチューターも学生も，発音やイントネーションの指導には自信が持てず，英語を母国語とする教師が指導した方が学生にとって有効であると考えていることが明らかになった。

Keywords: peer tutoring, autonomy, examination preparation, TOEIC speaking & writing

Teaching examination preparation classes can be a stressful and time-consuming ordeal for both teachers and students, especially when the examination in question tests students' productive skills of speaking and writing. While Japanese university students are experienced test takers having already navigated the examination-driven high school curriculum leading to university entrance tests, their experience has mainly focused on the more passive skills of L2 (second language) reading and listening, and they are often novices when it comes to testing their L2 productive skills, particularly speaking. This may cause high levels of anxiety in students and to alleviate this anxiety, many students need considerable support from the teacher. However, in larger classes this is usually difficult to achieve, but using peer tutors may be one way to provide students with the attention needed. Apart from providing additional attention, there other benefits to using a peer tutoring system. Peer tutors may often be easier to understand than teachers, especially when the teacher and student do not share the same first language. Furthermore, peers may be in a better position to identify and understand the other student's situation (Lockspeiser et al, 2008).

Because of the advantages offered by this teaching methodology combined with limited staff resources and scheduling conflicts, it was decided in 2019 to adopt a peer tutoring pedagogy in the teaching of the TOEIC S & W (Test of English for International Communication Speaking and Writing) classes in the self-access center (SAC) located on the campus of a national university. With the introduction of a new teaching strategy to these classes, it was deemed important to assess its efficiency. Students enrolled in the course were asked to complete a post-course questionnaire, and 13 students and peer tutors were interviewed. This allowed us to examine how students felt about taking a course with a peer tutor, if they would be willing to take a course with one in the future, and how peer tutors assessed their own teaching and learning.

Literature Review

Peer tutoring has a long and valued history especially in Europe and North America. For decades, the Western world used a 'Mutual' or 'Monitored' approach to education to instruct the vast numbers of poorer children. As early as the late 18th century, scholars such as Andrew Bell "developed a system of tutelage in which older boys were used as instructors for the younger ones" (Tompson & Coppa, 2003, p.122). As time went on, the title of Mutual Education evolved into what is currently known as Peer Tutoring. MacDonald (2000) referred to tutoring as "an act which facilitates or provides a structure for another's learning,

adding that a "tutor is a person, who, in a structured and supervised educational context, enters into a peer teaching and learning relationship with one or more others" (p.6). In the Western world tutors and tutees may have a relationship different to those in Asian countries. Peer tutors, because of being closer in age and experience, can easily create a good relationship with their tutees, yet, at the same time, are acknowledged as having the expertise to teach (or tutor) students. In Japan, teachers are given the honorific title of *sensei*, meaning teacher or more precisely 'master'. Teachers are seen as possessing correct and accurate information pertaining to education. In explaining the differences between Asian and Western educational environments Roberts and Tuleja (2008) stated that, "A more individualistic and independent (Western) concept of identity tends to encourage students to give feedback and to readily participate in classroom discussion; a more interdependent (Eastern) concept of identity encourages students to listen and to not offer feedback" (p. 477). Johnston and Ochitani (2008), wrote that this can lead to "students nodding their heads in agreement during a session when they do not understand a tutor's comments, or students not asking for elaboration even when they do not understand" (p.7). On the other hand, Ishikawa (2012) felt that peer tutoring was beneficial to break down the norms of most Asian educational systems when he wrote, "Peer advisors are potentially friendlier, more sensitive to the cultural background of learners, and better able to create a supportive and collaborative learning atmosphere than teachers taking an advisor's role" (p. 94).

In a Japanese context, with the move towards a more active learning environment there has been an increased interest in peer tutoring as a means to "develop building confidence and self-esteem, enhancing team-working skills, and developing leadership skills" (Mynard & Almarzouqi, 2006, p. 14). Peer tutoring is now becoming a part of both regular university classes and those in a SAC. Bradford-Watts (2011) reported on the successful implementation of a peer tutoring system at a tertiary education institute in Japan. She found that this system appears to have had positive effects on attitudes towards learning, learner self-development, and the classroom atmosphere. Manning (2014) found that using some form of peer support enhanced student experiences and learning outcomes in their self-access learning center. In addition, he found that a peer-support system may encourage a maintained focus on learning while developing social relationships, a very important element in a vibrant SAC environment. However, he did point out that even trained peer tutors themselves are also in need of support from the SAC staff and teachers: "Creating a formal system of support, with appropriate roles and responsibilities distributed between students and teachers,

can facilitate effective teamwork and help ensure that appropriate forms of support are being offered" (p. 53).

Like any teaching methodology, peer tutoring is not without its problems. The most commonly reported areas and those identified in this study, include both tutor and tutees' commitment, communication issues, time management in particular with regard to training and support of peer tutors, and lack of peer tutors' knowledge and/or ability to explain (Chai & Lin, 2013; Hill et al, 2010). However, despite these issues, most teachers and researchers (e.g. Ruegg, et al, 2017) believe that a peer tutoring system has more advantages than disadvantages, and may contribute to the development of autonomous, motivated learners. In addition, research has shown that peer tutoring is a methodology common to the SAC environment with Lassegard (2008) noting that "peer tutoring takes place at autonomous learning centres within universities" (p. 358).

Background, Participants, and Setting

Background

At this university, all first-year students enrolled in general education classes take the TOEIC L & R (TOEIC Listening and Reading) but a small number of students prepare for the TOEIC S & W test in a SAC-run course, which in 2019 adopted a peer tutoring approach in some of the speaking-section preparation classes.

The TOEIC L & R test, first introduced by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) in the late 1970s, was designed as a "test system which accurately measures communication skills in English, gives standards as to where the skills are in terms of expertise and occupation, and where they are in relation to objectives and goals" (Mitsuhashi, 2010). In response to the changing working environments since the 1970s, ETS introduced the TOEIC S & W in 2006. The TOEIC S & W tests are designed to reflect actual English usage in the workplace, though they do not require any knowledge of specialized business terms, and thus are suitable for university students who have not yet been exposed to English in a work environment. The questions are based on real world scenarios and are delivered using a computerized system, taking approximately 80 minutes to complete (TOEIC S & W Online Guide, 2021).

At this university the TOEIC S & W was first taught and taken by a small group of students in the spring semester of the 2011-2012 academic year. Unfortunately, due to financial constraints the program was put on hold until the opening of our SAC in April 2014. During that academic year, the teachers and staff at the SAC made enquiries about what kind of

courses/classes students would like to have, and we found that students were interested in improving their speaking abilities and would like to have an objective evaluation of their speaking skills. Thus, we decided to offer the TOEIC S & W to a group of higher-level students. There were 50 students in total all of whom had TOEIC L & R scores of over 550. We received positive feedback and since then, the TOEIC S & W program has grown into a regular feature at the SAC (Table 1).

Table 1

Number of Students Enrolled in TOEIC S & W Classes in the SAC

	2015*	2016**	2017**	2018**	2019**	2020***
# of test takers	50	50	30	30	30	20

Note: * Test was offered in both July (20 students) and Dec. (30 students)

** Test was only offered in Dec.

*** Online classes only due to COVID-19 pandemic test was offered in Dec.

Initially, we had hoped to offer the classes twice a year but it was difficult to find a sufficient number of students with high enough TOEIC L & R scores to enroll in this program. As a result, it was decided to offer the course only in the autumn and to limit the number of students to around 30.

The preparation classes for this are run three days a week at lunchtime (12:10-12:50) and after 5th period (6:15-7:15 pm). They are usually taught by one full-time faculty member from the General Education section with assistance from the SAC coordinator. However, in 2019 the SAC coordinator was often unavailable, and because of this, it was decided to adapt a "peer tutoring" approach to one of the lunchtime speaking classes.

Participants and Setting

The 2019 SAC TOEIC S & W class was composed of 35 mostly intermediate learners (determined by their TOEIC L & R score) from all grades and all faculties (Tables 2 & 3). Only 30 of these students actually took the test. Sixty percent of test takers were first-or second-year undergraduates.

Table 2

TOEIC L & R Average

# of students	Average TOEIC score	Range	SD
35	682.4	550-855	98.7

Table 3

Student Faculties

Agri.*	Ed.*	Econ.	Nursing	Law	Med.	Tech.
2	10	11	1	3	3	5

Note: *MA/MS student: One MA student (Education) and one MS. Student (Agriculture)

The lunchtime classes, held on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays were mainly devoted to the speaking section of the test. However, due to the issue mentioned above, the lunchtime class with the highest attendance (usually between 15-20 students attended this class) was taught by just one teacher making it challenging for that teacher to provide the individual attention students needed to do well in the speaking section of the test. However, since eight students enrolled in the 2019 course had taken the test in 2017 and/or 2018 and had achieved high scores, we decided to ask if they would be interested in becoming peer tutors for this class. Five students from the faculties of Economics (1), Education (3) and Law (1) agreed to do so. These were all third- and fourth-year students, three of whom had taken the test twice before and two of whom had taken it once.

Research Questions, Methodology, and Results

With the adoption of a "peer tutoring" approach to the lunchtime speaking classes, it was important to assess how effective students found these classes. At the end of the semester, students were asked to fill in a questionnaire detailing their experience of the classes, teaching, and test (see Appendix). The questionnaire, using mainly Likert scales, was divided into three sections: Part 1 - personal details, Part 2 - test experience, and Part 3 – peer teaching. Twenty-eight of the 35 students enrolled in the course returned the questionnaire. The questionnaires were then analyzed and the data tabulated. All comments were transcribed and translated when necessary. This allowed us to examine the following research questions:

      a. Do students believe the TOEIC S & W course is useful?

      b. Were they happy with the classes taught by peer tutors?

   c. How did the peer tutors assess their own teaching and learning during the course?

Overall, the results were very positive; students found the classes useful and the test practical. 26 of the 28 students responded that they would recommend the test to other students, and 22 said they would be willing to take the test again. The second part of the questionnaire used Likert scale items (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 2 = neither agree/disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree) to examine various aspects of the test

experience. 26 students indicated that they either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that their confidence in their speaking had improved (Figure 1).
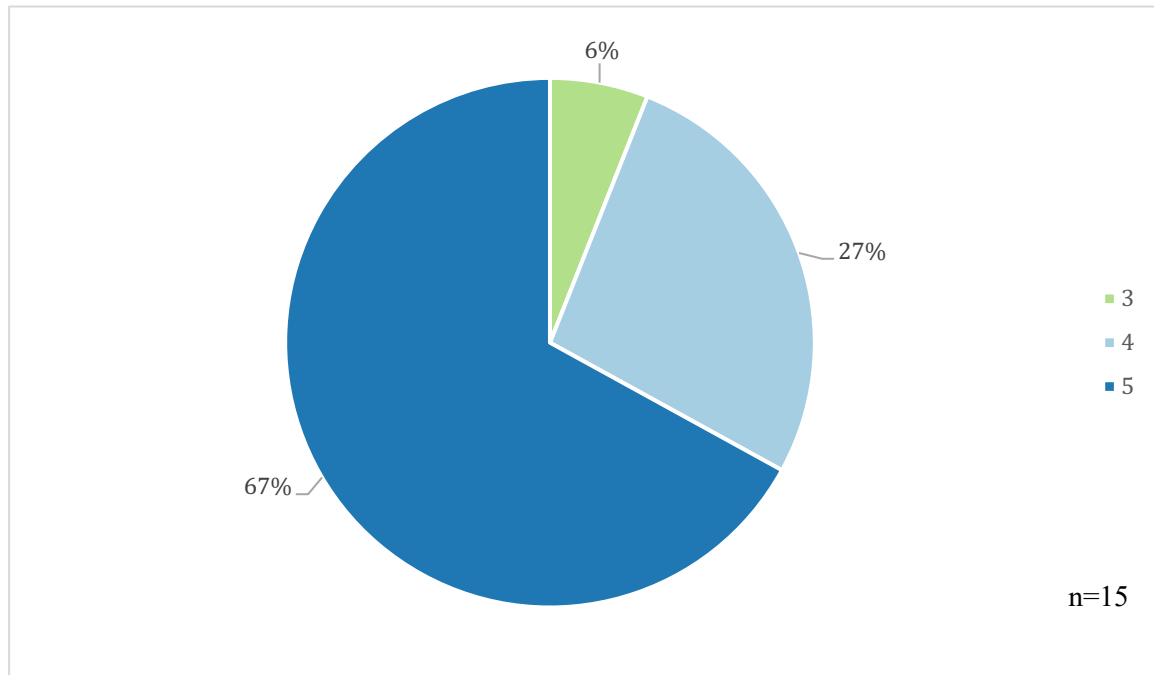
Figure 1

Confidence Improved in Speaking
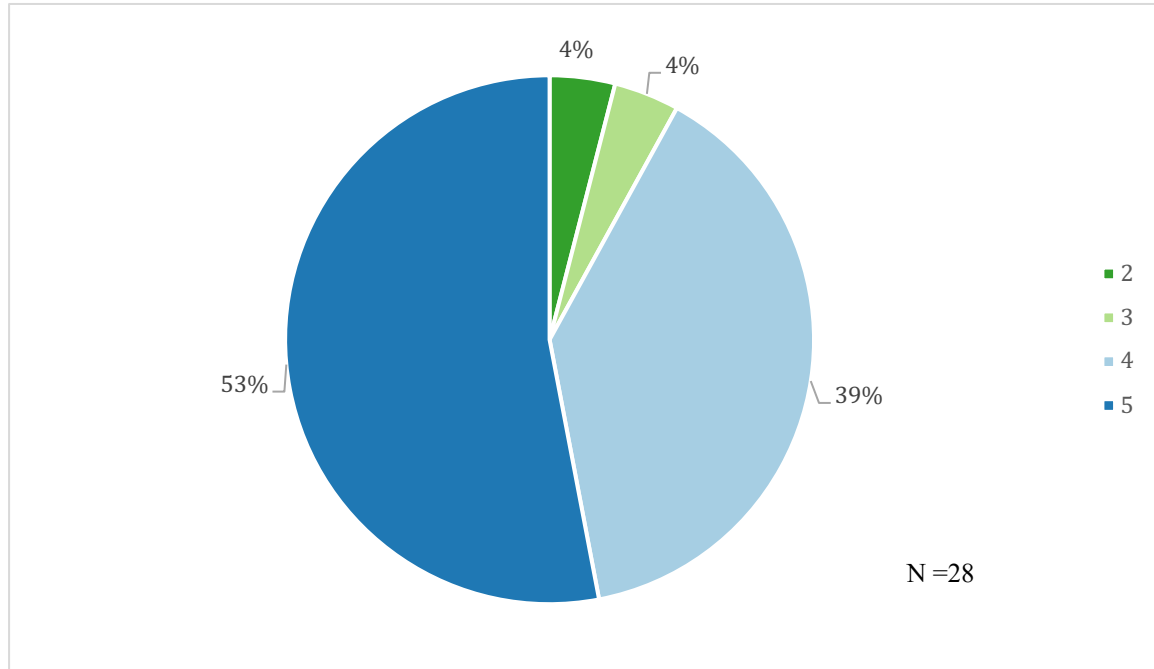
(1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree/disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)

Slightly more students "strongly agreed" that their confidence in their writing skills had improved compared with speaking. Fortunately, no students indicated that they saw no improvement in their speaking, but two students did indicate that they saw no improvement in their writing (Figure 2).

Figure 2

*Confidence Improved in Writing*
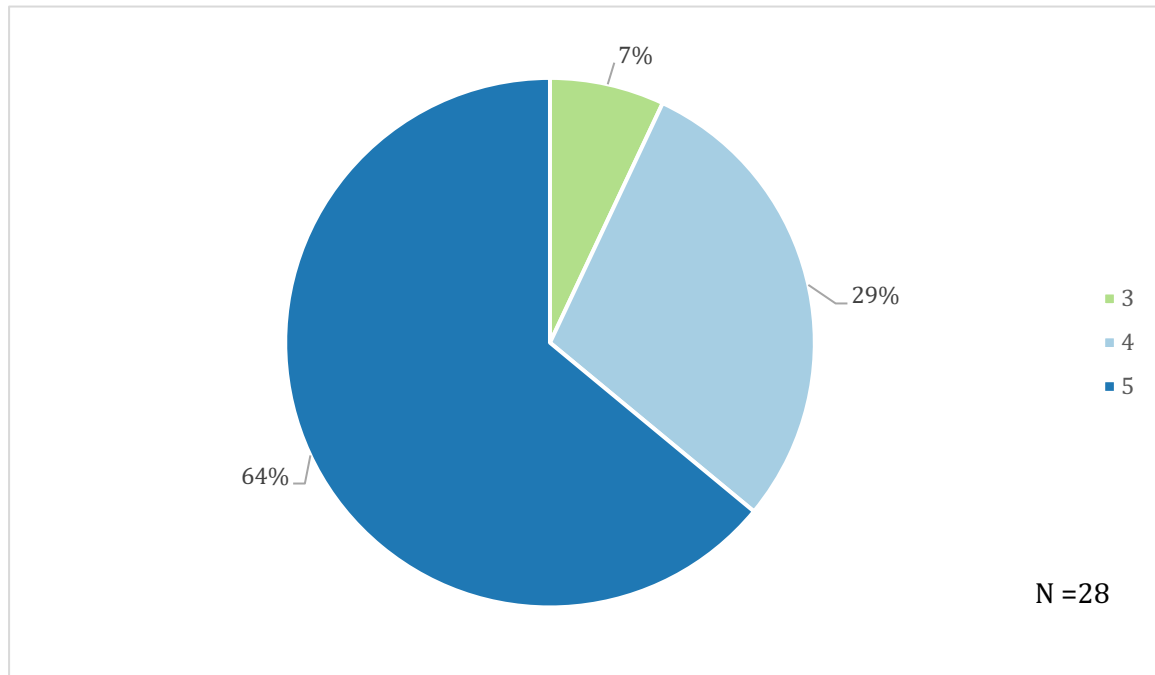
(1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree/disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)

Reactions to having classes with a peer tutor were also mostly positive. In total, 15 students took at least one class with a peer tutor, nine students took between five and seven classes, and three took more than eight. Using the same Likert scale as above, students rated highly how clearly they could understand instructions given by the peer tutors with 11 indicating that they "very strongly agreed" they could clearly understand instructions (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Students' Understanding of Peer Tutors' Instructions

(1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree/disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)

Using the same scale, they also highly rated how they perceived the peer tutors understanding of the test content and materials (Figure 4). Ten students "strongly agreed" that the peer tutors understood the test content and materials. No student responded negatively.
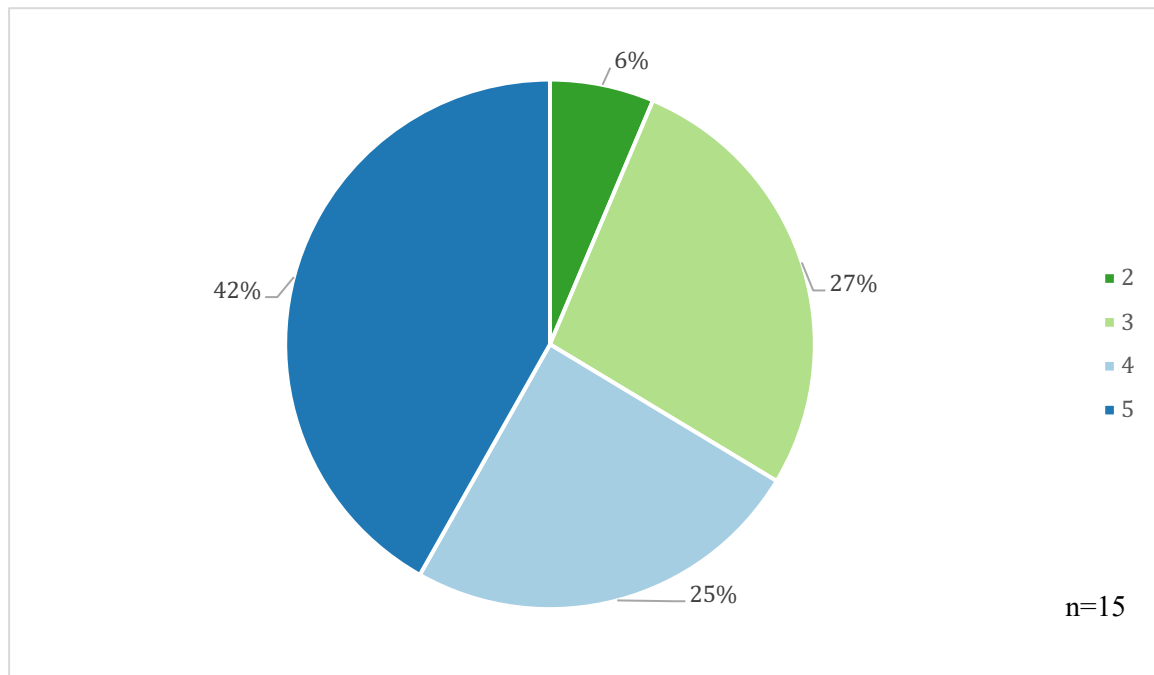
Figure 4

Students Perceptions of Peer Tutors' Understanding of Test Content and Materials
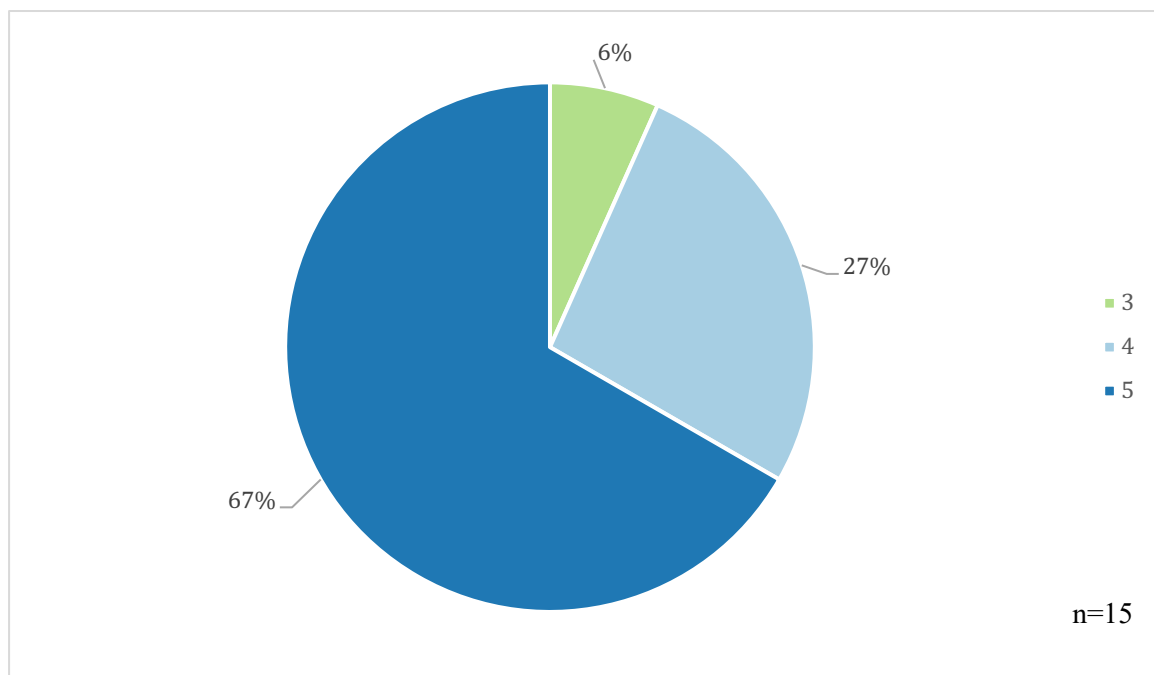
(1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree/disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)

Students also responded positively to having peer tutors help with vocabulary. 11 of 15 students **agreed with** the statement "Peer tutors could help me with vocabulary", but three students were neutral, and one student disagreed (Figure 5).

Figure 5

Peer Tutors Could Help Me with Vocabulary

(1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree/disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)

Students were slightly more negative with the same statement concerning grammar. This time, only **two** students "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that the peer tutor could help them with grammar, while seven neither "agreed nor disagreed" and two disagreed (Figure 6).
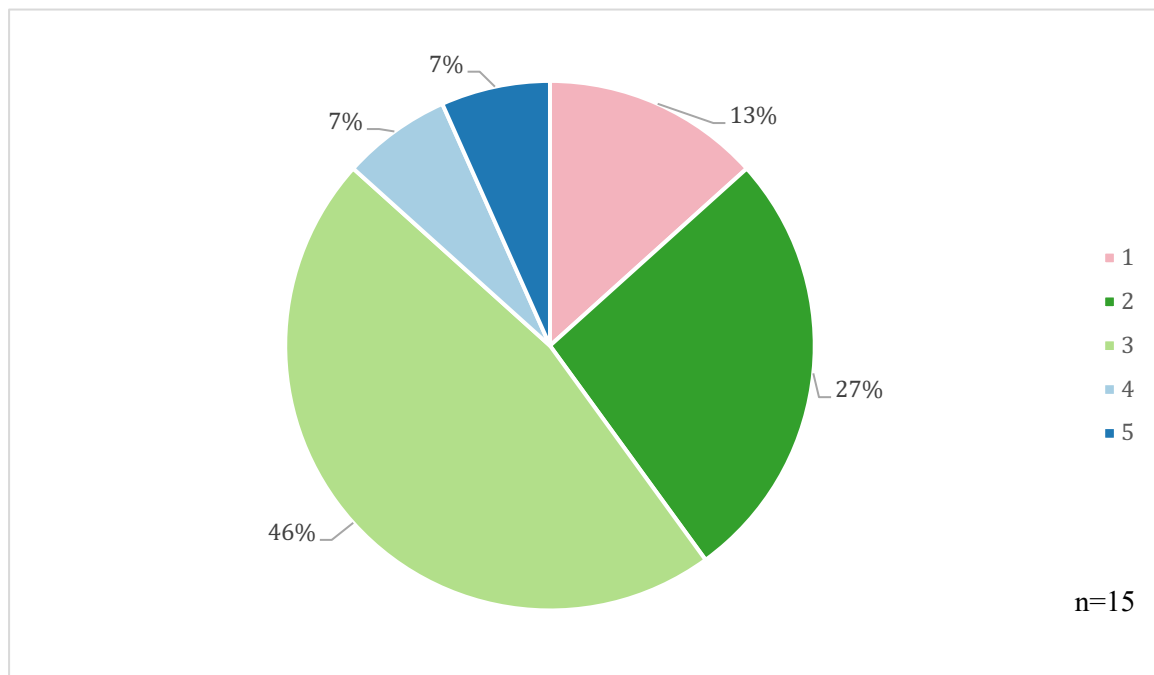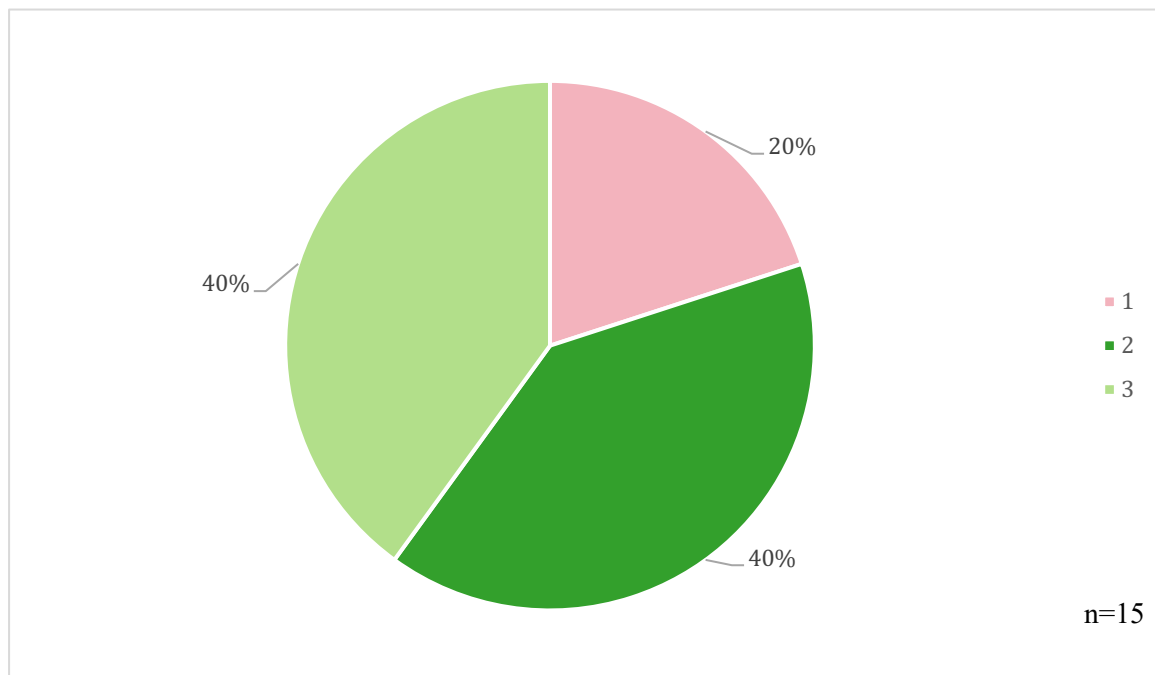
Figure 6

Peer Tutors Could Help Me with Grammar

(1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree/disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)

While the results for the sections of the questionnaire discussed so far are mainly positive, the same cannot be said for the students' perception of the peer tutors' ability to help them with intonation and pronunciation. For these categories students only used the three lowest ratings on the Likert scales (neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree). Figures 7 and 8 show these results. For intonation, nine students indicated they "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" and six indicated they "neither agreed nor disagreed" (Figure 7).

Figure 7

Peer Tutors Could Help Me with Intonation

(1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree/disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)

The results for pronunciation were marginally better. Eight students responded they "neither agreed nor disagreed" with the statement, four "disagreed" and three "strongly disagreed" (Figure 8).

Figure 8

Peer Tutors Could Help Me with Pronunciation
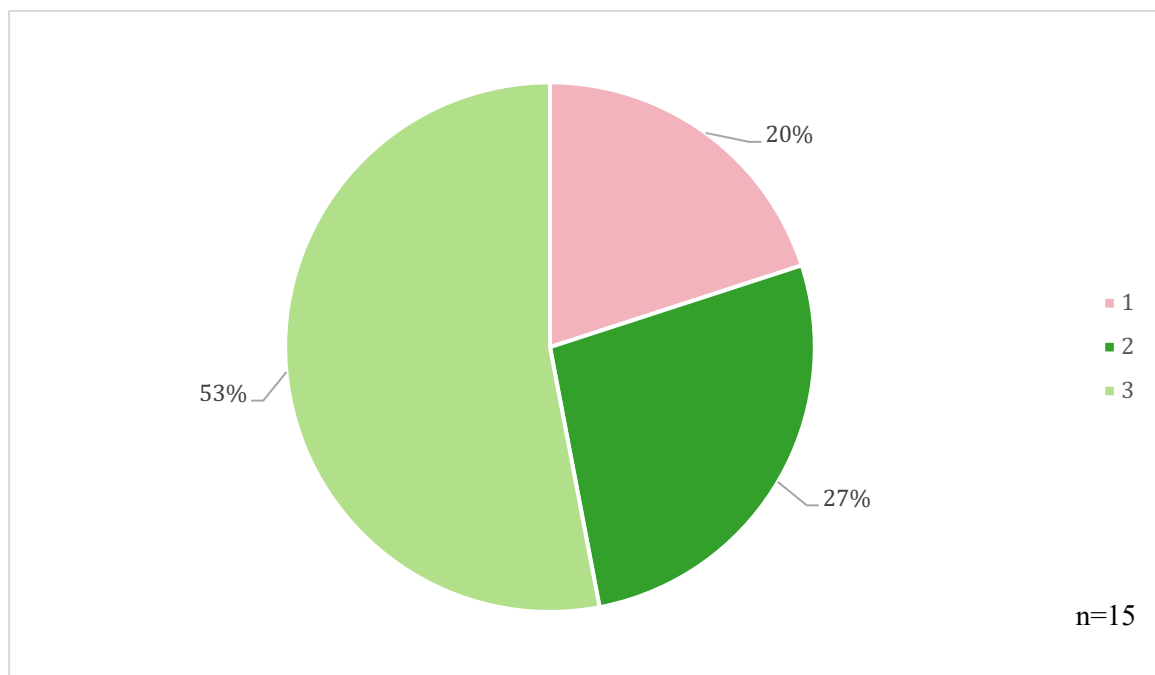
(1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree/disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)

Despite the negative results for pronunciation and intonation, the majority of students indicated that they would be willing to take a course with a peer tutor again. Only one student said they would be unwilling.

The survey results from the peer tutors showed a similar pattern. The peer tutors, who mainly used Japanese to explain grammatical and vocabulary items, expressed high levels of confidence in their ability to help students with these items. For vocabulary, four of the five tutors said that they agreed with the statement 'I could help students with vocabulary" (Figure 9).

Figure 9

I Could Help Students with Vocabulary
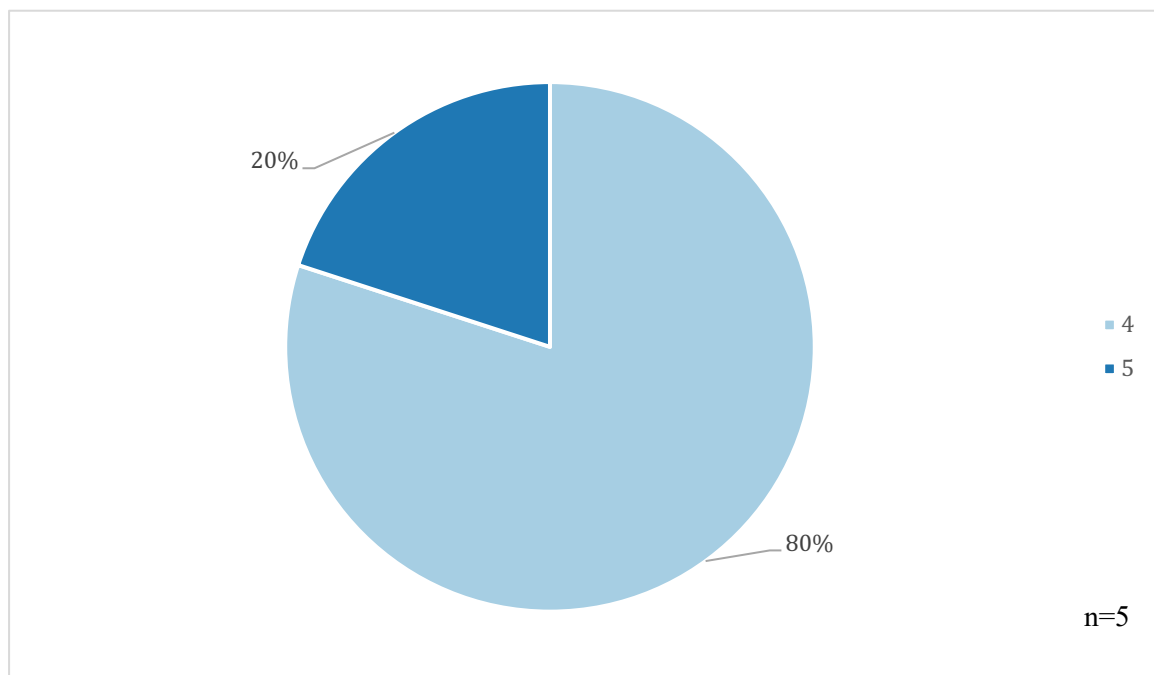
(1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree/disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)

This dropped slightly for grammar where two peer tutors agreed with the statement; two said that they "neither agreed nor disagreed" and one disagreed (Figure 10).

Figure 10

I Could Help Students with Grammar
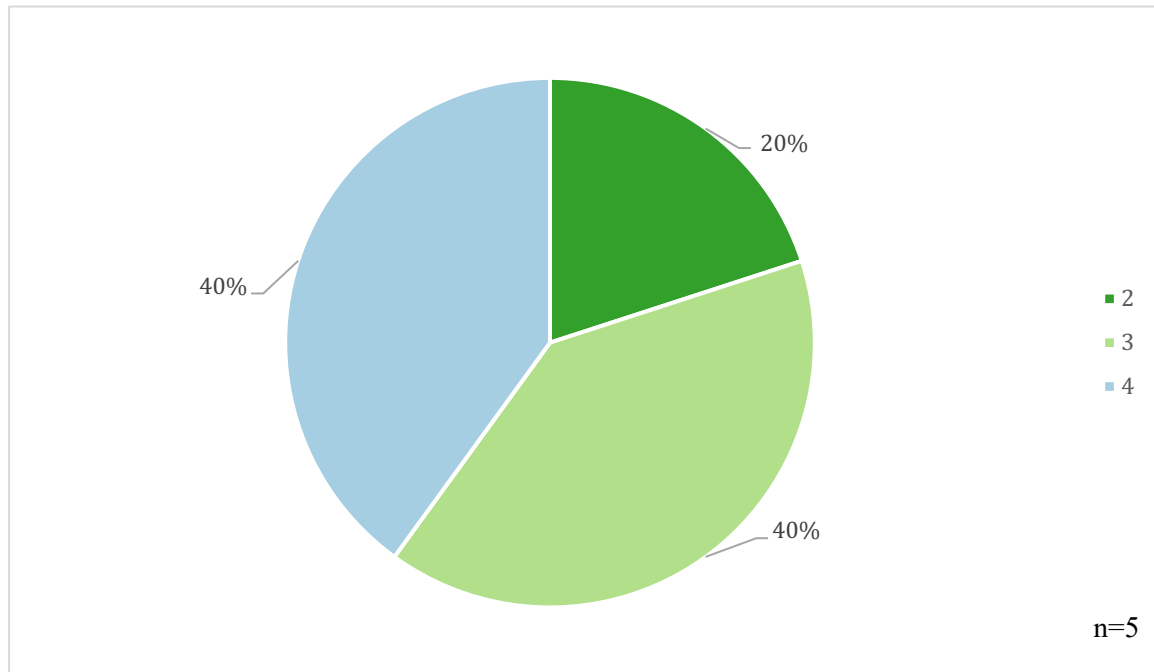
(1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree/disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)

Peer tutors also expressed some confidence in their abilities to understand the content and materials and to help students prepare for the test. Three peer tutors reported a high confidence level in their abilities to understand the content and materials and the same three students described their confidence level as high when asked to rate their ability to help students prepare for the test. However, for both of these questions, two of the five peer tutors only ranked their confidence as "neither agree/disagree" (Figure 11).

Figure 11

I Felt Confident in My Ability to Help Students Prepare for the Test/ I Felt Confident in My Understanding of the Test Materials and Content.
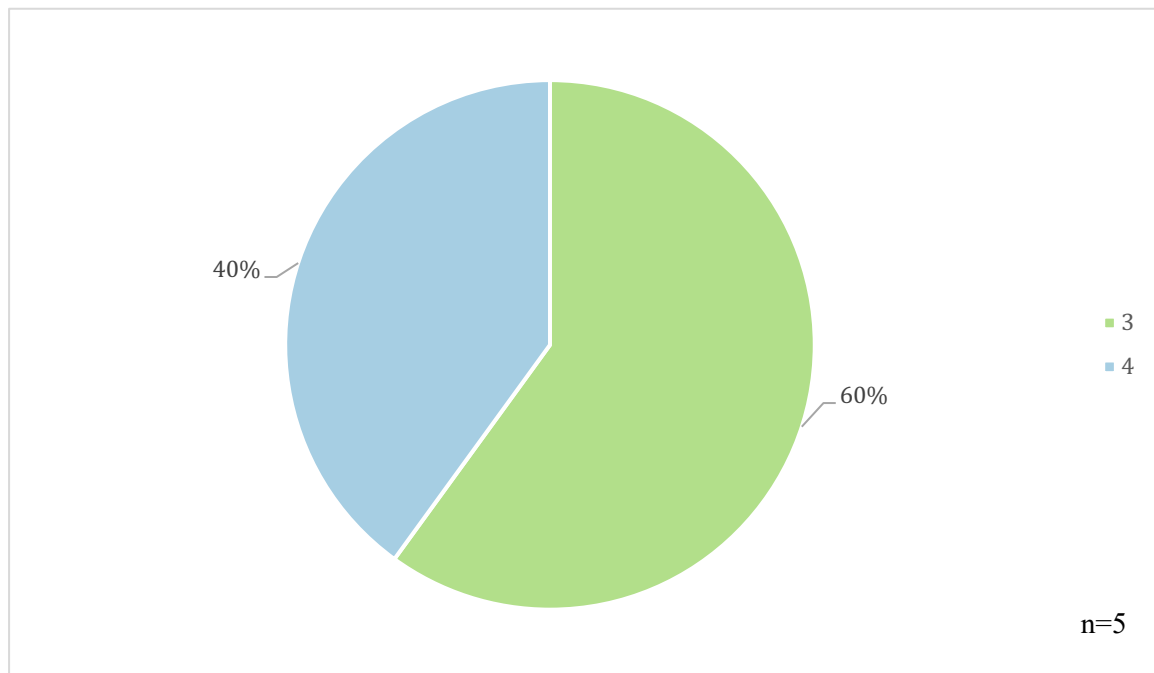
(1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree/disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)

All five peer tutors believed that being a peer tutor had improved their English language skills, and only one said that given the opportunity he/she would not like to be a peer tutor again. However, as with the feedback from the students, the results from the peer tutors regarding pronunciation and intonation was not positive. Three of the five peer tutors either answered, "neither agree nor disagree" or "disagree" when asked to rate the statements "I could help students with pronunciation" (Figure 12).

Figure 12

I Could Help Students with Pronunciation
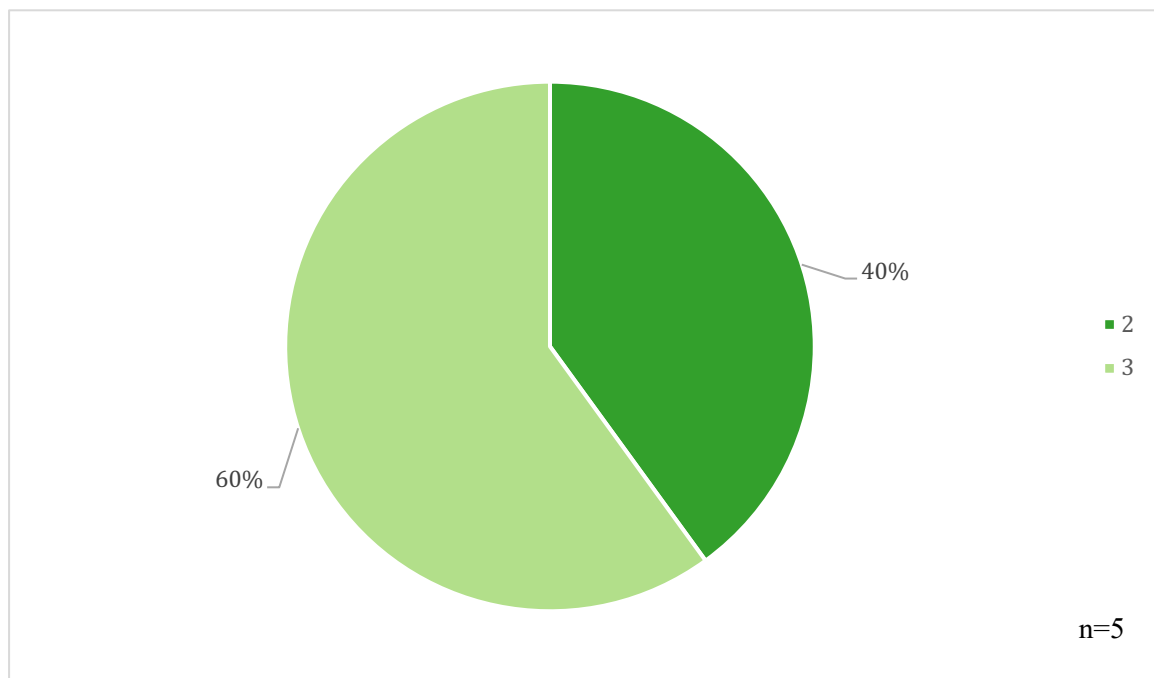
(1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree/disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)

Similar results were seen for intonation where four of the five peer tutors said they disagreed, and one strongly disagreed (Figure 13).

Figure 13

I Could Help Students with Intonation
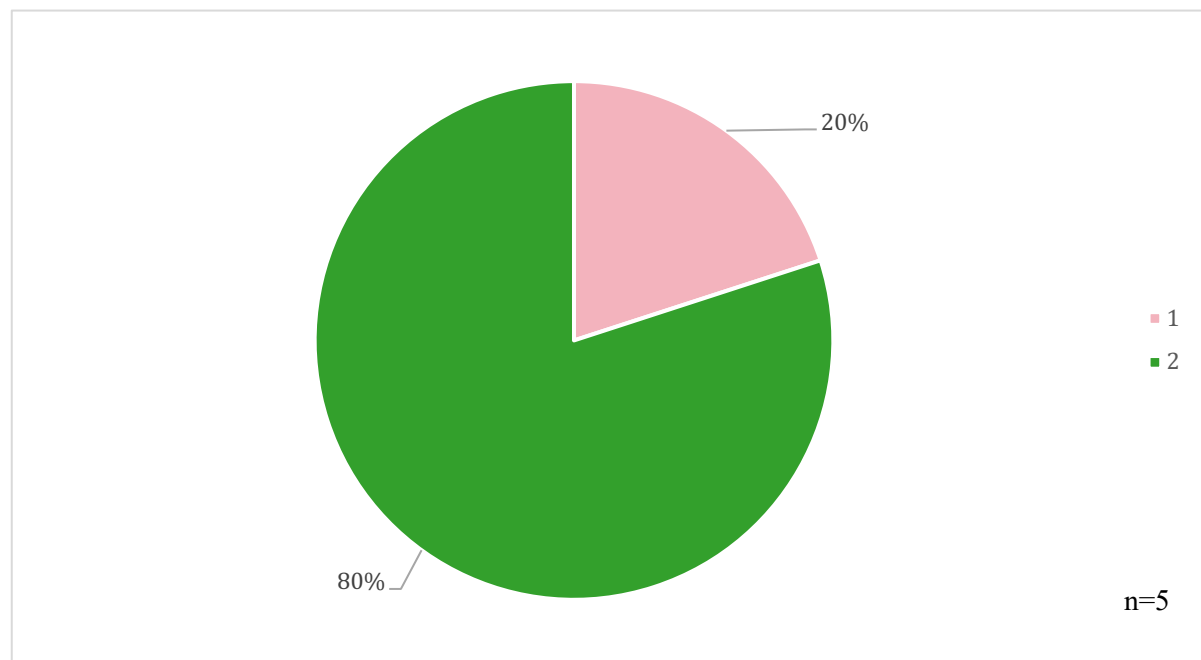
(1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree/disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)

Overall, the results were positive regarding the test and test experience, and mostly positive, apart from the teaching of intonation and pronunciation, for classes taught by the peer tutors.

Discussion and Implications for Future Research

While improving language proficiency in preparation for the TOEIC S & W test is the major aim of these classes, the SAC staff and teachers also aim to develop autonomous and confident learners, to foster a positive attitude to language learning, and to develop students' teamwork and leadership skills. The use of peer teaching within a program may have the scope to enhance these learning and student attributes.

Overall, this pilot study suggests that students are satisfied with the TOEIC S & W course offered in the SAC and believe that taking the test was beneficial to them. In the comment section of the questionnaire, some students mentioned the value of the test in helping them identify the areas of English they need to work on, and that it would be beneficial to have this extra qualification when applying for jobs. A third-year education major commented:

> From my test results I know that I must develop my intonation more. Usually I worry about pronunciation because "L" and "R" is a difficulty for Japanese. I was not interested so much in intonation. I got "good" for pronunciation

A third-year economics student commented on job hunting:

> I am a third-year student so I must do job hunting. It is very hard and stressful. I want a job with international company, and I want to use my English skills there. I think the TOEIC S & W test will help me achieve my dream. And it will make me different from other job-hunting people who have not the score for TOEIC S & W.

These comments highlight some of the reasons this course has proven to be popular with students at the SAC. From previous TOEIC S & W preparation classes we have realized that students enjoy the challenge of the examination and find it advantageous to their L2 development and possible future careers.

Of particular interest were the mainly positive reviews of the classes involving a peer tutor, including feedback received from the peer tutors. This was surprising because previous studies such as Takeuchi (2015) found that East Asian students prefer teacher feedback to peer feedback. Several students mentioned the ease of speaking in Japanese to ask questions or to confirm their understanding: "My peer tutor taught us important vocabulary in Japanese. This helped me understand completely the word meaning and when I made mistake, she corrected me in Japanese. It was easy to understand my mistake." The peer tutors also referred to the ease of using Japanese to explain vocabulary and correct mistakes. One tutor, a fourth-year education major said, "I used Japanese to quickly explain difficult words. It was

easy for them to understand. Of course, I explained the word using an English sentence because I've been taught it is important to learn in context." The same tutor also said, "Explaining mistakes is easier in Japanese. I could teach the student their weak points quickly and they understood quickly. This made the class go smoothly." This suggests that the Japanese language support is important to students, and even when peer tutors are not involved in the teaching of these classes, it would be beneficial to include more Japanese translations of key vocabulary and phrases. In addition, several students mentioned having admiration for the peer tutors and saw them as role models in terms of their language abilities and confidence using English:

> X-san is good teacher. She speaks English at high level. I hope to speak like her in the future.
>
> Our peer tutor is confidence speaking in English, but I am not. I wish I am confidence too. I think Y-san is my hero of English speaking.

These are just two of the many examples of students' comments containing references to the peer tutors as role models.

While the use of Japanese obviously offered certain advantages, it also resulted in some unique problems. In particular, both the students and peer tutors brought up the issue of what politeness level they should use when speaking Japanese. When the classes were mainly in Japanese, and the students (tutees) younger or in a lower grade than their peer tutor, students tended to use *keigo* (formal, polite Japanese) when addressing the peer tutor. Even when the peer tutors were working with older students or students in a higher grade, both tended to use *keigo*, resulting in a more formal atmosphere than is usual in the SAC. Takeuchi (2015) reported similar findings when using peer tutors in a university SAC in Northern Japan in 2013. One peer tutor said that it was only when she worked with students she knew well from the same grade that both used informal language.

Almost all the peer tutors reported benefits related to their peer teaching experiences. In particular, the three peer tutors from the Faculty of Education described how they planned and prepared for the class and felt that they had developed a greater awareness of the choices teachers must make in terms of teaching methods, materials, etc. A fourth-year education major brought up the value this experience will have when she becomes a high school English teacher:

> This was a precious experience. I felt pressure of a teacher helping students study for tests. This is the first time for me to experience this but in the future when I am a teacher at high school, this will be usual. I learned that it is

important to prepare materials completely, and to think of ways students can practice for the test.

All the peer tutors, even those who found that it was difficult, reported that they enjoyed the experience of peer teaching and learning. They also reported that it had helped them improve their English skills, developed their confidence, and made them more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses.

The one area that both students and peer tutors were critical of was the teaching of pronunciation and intonation by the peer tutors. Peer tutors lacked confidence in their abilities to help students in these areas, and during the actual classes they often called on the class teacher for help. A peer tutor from the Faculty of Law noted:

I do not have a perfect accent. I speak like a Japanese. And I don't know what is good and bad pronunciation and intonation. I said to students to shadow the audio and they will improve but I think this is not enough for big progress to happen. I believe native speakers must teach this.

Several of the students made similar comments expressing their belief that they need native-speaker teachers to teach these skills. The teachers and staff at the SAC do not hold this belief and consider proficient Japanese English speakers (which all the peer tutors were) as appropriate role models for students. We also feel it is not necessary to have a "perfect accent" as one peer tutor mentioned in order to teach pronunciation and intonation, and in fact, having a native speaker-like accent is not a requirement for this test. What these comments do indicate, however, is that this is an area where peer tutors (and general students too) need a lot more support.

In addition to the support needed in teaching pronunciation and intonation skills, developing a peer teaching system is initially very time intensive for the regular class teachers. Finding, and then training, the peer tutors took a considerable amount of time and effort, and even when the system was in place, the peer tutors needed ongoing support to design lessons, fully understand the test question requirements, and develop their own teaching styles. Usually, we met the peer tutors twice a week for around 30 minutes each time but were also available for individual help as needed. If this program had continued into a second year, we believe that continuing peer tutors would have needed less help and would have been able to assist and support new peer tutors, thus considerably reducing the burden on the class teacher.

As this was a pilot study featuring only a small number of participants there are several limitations that must be considered, primarily the lack of adequate data and statistics

on the success of the program. We had initially hoped to continue this teaching style with students preparing for the TOEIC S & W in the 2020 academic year, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting changes to the academic calendar and teaching methodologies this was impossible. Comparing this peer tutoring methodology with those at other SACs would also be of interest and may show which methods work best for Japanese university students. More longitudinal and comparative research is needed to determine how successful this methodology is in helping students prepare for a productive skills examination.

Conclusion

Even though peer tutoring does not have as long a history in Japan as in Western countries, it would appear that it can be an effective means of providing student-centered, socially-constructed foreign language instruction in a SAC. Although generalizability is limited as this study was conducted within a single institution and with a small number of participants, we do seem to have unearthed some important learning points. Peer tutors, while initially rather time consuming for regular teachers in terms of the amount of assistance and support they require, become an invaluable resource in SACs with limited staff resources. The students are able and willing to take on the role of teacher and thus are capable of leading classes, even those focused on examinations. Students were open to both becoming a peer tutor and participating in classes taught by one. Most students who partook in these classes appear to have appreciated the experience and Japanese language skills of the peer tutors, although both students and peer tutors do not feel this system is effective for teaching intonation and pronunciation skills. Moreover, in line with the philosophy of many SACs, peer tutoring fosters the development of autonomous learners who are willing to take on leadership roles, and some students saw the peer tutors as role models who provided a vision, and visual proof, of what they could aspire to become. As such, using a peer teaching system provides a student-centered approach for both the tutors and tutees, and a means of enhancing the overall leaning experience of those involved in the SAC.

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Appendix

TOEIC S & W Post-Course questionnaire

Part 1: Personal details

Name _____ Student #_____ Year_____

Study abroad: Y/N   If yes, how long? _____

TOEIC S & W: Had you taken the TOEIC S & W before? Y/N   If yes, when?

_____

On average, how many the TOEIC S & W classes did you take per week? 1   2   3   4

_____

Part 2: Test experience - Rating scale: 1 = very poor/strongly disagree, 2 = poor/ disagree,

3= ok/neither agree nor disagree,   4 = good/agree, 5 = very good/strongly agree

1. The lunchtime speaking classes were:1   2   3   4   5

2. The evening writing classes were: 1   2   3   4   5

3. The teaching was interesting: 1   2   3   4   5

4. The teaching prepared you for the test: 1   2   3   4   5

5. The materials you studied will be useful for you in the future:1   2   3   4   5

6. My confidence in speaking English improved: 1   2   3   4   5

7. My confidence in writing English improved: 1   2   3   4   5

8. I would recommend this course and test to other students: 1   2   3   4   5

9. In what way was the speaking test beneficial to you? Circle all that apply:

    A) Improved my speaking fluency

    B) Improved my pronunciation and/or intonation

    C) Improved my listening skills

    D) Improved my vocabulary

    E) Helped me speak more naturally

10. In what way was the writing test beneficial to you? Circle all that apply:

    A) Improved my writing fluency

    B) Improved my grammar

    C) Improved my spelling

    D) Improved my ability to write business letters

    E) Improved my ability to write opinion essays

    F) Improved my vocabulary

Part 3: Student teachers (Only answer this section if you took a class with a student teacher)

a. How many classes did you take with a student teacher? 1   2-4   5-7   8+

11. I could understand the student teacher's instructions: 1   2   3   4   5

12. The student teacher understood the materials well: 1   2   3   4   5

13. The student teacher could help me with: pronunciation -   1   2   3   4   5

                        intonation - 1   2   3   4   5

                        grammar - 1   2   3   4   5

                        vocabulary - 1   2   3   4   5

                        answer structure/format – 1   2   3   4   5

14: I would be happy to take a class taught by a student teacher again: 1   2   3   4   5

Part 4: Student teachers (Only answer this section if you were a student teacher)

15. I could easily give directions to students regarding activities: 1   2   3   4   5

16. I could explain grammar well: 1   2   3   4   5

17: I could explain vocabulary well: 1   2   3   4   5

18: I could explain the answer format/structure well: 1   2   3   4   5

19: I could help students with pronunciation: 1   2   3   4   5

20. I could help students with intonation: 1   2   3   4   5

21. I was confident in my understanding of the key points of each section: 1   2   3   4   5

22: I was confident in my ability to help students prepare for the test: 1   2   3   4   5

23: The preparation I received before each class was adequate: 1   2   3   4   5

24. I used mainly English/Japanese when giving direction for activities: _____

25. I used mainly English/Japanese when explaining vocabulary meaning or usage: _____

26. I used mainly English/Japanese when explaining grammatical structures.

_____

27. Being a student teacher helped me develop my English skills: 1   2   3   4   5

28. I would be interested in being a student tutor again: 1   2   3   4   5

Comments: You can write in English or Japanese

An Onsite-Online Hybrid Approach to Operating a Self-Access Learning Center During a Global Pandemic

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Abstract

During the 2020 academic year, Kyushu University made a wide range of courses available online in an effort to safeguard both students and staff from the spread of the new coronavirus, COVID-19. As reported cases began to fall, the university made strides to safely offer more face-to-face services to students from the start of the 2021 academic calendar. Kyushu University's Self-Access Learning Center (SALC) responded by adopting a hybrid system at start of the Spring/Summer semester, which allowed students to make use of the on-campus facilities while maintaining online services for those who had not fully resumed onsite learning. This report examines the decision-making process behind the new approach and how staff went about implementing the onsite-online system. An evaluation of this hybrid approach will provide valuable insight into what kind of internet-based services might prove useful for self-access learning centers to develop post COVID-19.

九州大学は、新型コロナウイルス（COVID-19）の蔓延から学生とスタッフを保護するために、2020 年度はさまざまなコースをオンラインで提供してきた。症例が減少し始めたため、2021 年度からは学生により多くの対面でのサービスを安全に提供するために努力した。九州大学の Self-Access Learning Center （SALC）では、前期の最初にハイブリッドシステムを採用することで対応した。これにより、オンサイト学習を完全に再開していない学生向けのオンラインサービスを維持しながら、キャンパス内の施設を利用することができた。本レポートでは、この新しいアプローチの背景にある意思決定プロセスと、スタッフがオンサイト・オンラインシステムをどのように実行したかを検証する。ハイブリッドアプローチの評価は、COVID-19 以降どのようなインターネットベースのサービスを開発することが SALC に役立つかについての洞察を提示する。

Keywords: online learning, onsite-online, hybrid system, COVID-19

Following the outbreak of COVID-19 at the end of 2019, educational institutions around the world shut their doors in an effort to safeguard students. In April 2020, 94.8% of schools and universities across 93% of countries were partially or completely closed (UNESCO, 2021, p. 9). Throughout the 2020 academic year, the Kyushu University Self-Access Learning Center (SALC) facilities were closed to students; however, core services were available online. The SALC's efforts to provide accessible online support for students was in keeping with COVID-19 protocols implemented by Kikan Education (the faculty that the SALC operates within) and the wider university.

The university expressed a desire to start offering more in-person classes at the start of the 2021 academic calendar, as the number of reported COVID-19 cases began to decrease. The SALC responded by developing and implementing an approach to running the center that provided both on-campus and online support. The SALC managerial staff discussed this process via video calls or through email on a daily basis throughout this period. The management was also in regular communication with faculty members in Kikan Education who support the facility, staff from the study abroad office, and the SALC's part-time teaching assistants (TAs). Key points from these interactions were noted down in order to record and evaluate these efforts. This method of information collection and self-assessment inform both the descriptive and analytical aspects of the report.

This paper starts with an overview of how managerial staff moved services online in 2020. This will be followed by an explanation of the reasons why the center decided to develop a hybrid approach in 2021 and the practical efforts taken to ensure that safe face-to-face services could run alongside internet-based activities. The focus of the report is primarily on the months of April and May as the uncertain nature of the pandemic meant that the SALC management could not be sure if procedures for on-campus learning would change as the semester progressed. Indeed, an unexpected increase in the university's onsite restrictions, coupled with personnel changes, meant that the center initially operated the hybrid approach from mid-April to mid-May. The center reverted to strictly online operations from the second half of May due to safety concerns.

The main objective of this paper is to review the process of establishing an onsite-online system; however, the final section looks to briefly evaluate the hybrid operational format to determine if similar approaches might be viable post COVID-19 and to lay the groundwork for future research into the subject.

Literature Review

Developments in education software and virtual learning platforms have made remote study a more viable option for more people than ever before. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic saw educators around the world search for e-learning options in order to adapt to the challenges they faced. Various obstacles remain for those still acclimatizing to online learning environments, including experiencing feelings of confusion and frustration at the prospect of learning remotely (Dhawan, 2020). Social interaction in a physical space remains a crucial part of a successful self-access learning center. Freimuth et al. (2021) investigated the qualities that make a learning center attractive to the student volunteers and TAs who support it. Their informants repeatedly made positive comments about the elements of a physical space itself, such as the furniture, windows, and availability of refreshments.

However, remote learning does have its advantages. Online tools can help create a collaborative learning environment, while the "anywhere-anytime" aspect of e-learning is hugely beneficial in times of crisis (Dhawan, 2020). No virtual learning environment can fully substitute for a physical space, but when learners are no longer bound by location, they save the time that would be spent in transit. "Saving time" was most cited by Kyushu University students as a benefit of remote classes (Honda & Honda, 2021, p. 113). As many as 6,272 students, or 86% of all respondents, perceived this as an advantage.

Synchronous and asynchronous are two terms that can be used to differentiate between the types of learning environments that exist in online study. Synchronous allows for real-time interactions between teachers and students, whereas asynchronous does not take place in the form of live classes but rather on platforms such as forums (Dhawan, 2020). The synchronous model best serves SALCs as it can provide opportunities for social interaction (McBrien et al., 2009).

Kyushu University SALC

Kyushu University's SALC aims to support students looking to improve their English language skills outside of a formal classroom setting. The center offers English conversation practice, one-to-one support for English proficiency tests, and study abroad consultation. Although not always a core part of the daily schedule, the SALC also hosts educationally stimulating games, lectures by visiting speakers, workshops, and events that provide users the chance to study other languages, such as Chinese and Korean. The facilities are also home to a library that stocks a range of language-related study resources.

The center is supported by a director and advisor who are both faculty members in Kikan Education. The onsite staff, all permanently based inside the center, include two managerial staff members, responsible for looking after the day to day running of the facility, and one staff member from the study abroad office, who provides information about opportunities for students to develop their language skills outside of Japan. A team of 13 to 15 TAs are charged with providing language learning support for users. The open plan layout includes office space for the three onsite staff members, an area that TAs use to provide language support, seating for self-study, and a small library.

Moving SALC Services Online: Spring 2020

In April 2020, Kyushu University started teaching the majority of classes online in order to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading on campus. In keeping with university guidelines, the SALC facilities were closed. However, the center started offering a range of remote services. Efforts were made to recreate the atmosphere of the physical space online by establishing easily accessible web-based services that facilitated a relaxed, learner friendly environment. The SALC team made use of Zoom, a cloud-based video conferencing service, to ensure that as many activities as possible would remain available to users. The SALC purchased eleven paid Zoom accounts to facilitate the transition to a hybrid operating system wherever it was feasible, while temporarily suspending activities that did not translate well into an online format, such as board games and interactive quiz sessions.

When full, unrestricted on-campus services are available to students, Kyushu University's SALC offers free drop-in English conversation sessions for students during the facility's opening hours (11:00–19:00). SALC TAs are in charge of facilitating linguistically stimulating conversations for participants. This was a core activity that the managerial staff wanted to create online as it is the most popular service with users. To recreate a somewhat similar service, two-hour Zoom sessions were set up throughout the day (11:00–13:00, 13:00–15:00, 15:00–17:00, 17:00–19:00). The TAs took charge of each time slot and were tasked with admitting students who wished to participate. The TAs were then responsible for leading conversations with anybody who joined their sessions, keeping track of the number of users, and sending this information through to management at the end of a shift. The URL links and passwords to each Zoom video conferencing session were posted on the SALC's Moodle page to ensure safety.

Response to Kyushu University Increasing Onsite Activities: **Spring 2021**

As the number of reported COVID-19 cases in the region began to decline at the start of 2021, various faculties throughout the university began looking into the possibility of holding more face-to-face classes in the coming academic year. Kikan Education followed suit by announcing plans to offer in-person undergraduate classes for the 2021 Spring/Summer semester. To prepare for the possibility of the facilities re-opening, onsite staff began discussing a range of safety measures with the SALC director and advisor, and individuals from a relevant university-based support office. The onsite staff brainstormed ideas to promote safe practices among students, such as the use of face masks and hand sanitizer. All those involved in the decision-making process referred to government guidelines that encouraged people to avoid areas with poor ventilation, large crowds, and densely congested groups. Efforts were also made to stay up to date with university-wide protocol that allowed different groups of students and staff to use on-campus facilities depending on the number of regional COVID-19 cases. Key topics that were discussed included methods to ensure that only a limited number of students would use the facilities at any one time and guidelines for cleaning the space.

Although SALC managerial staff were keen to fully re-open the on-site facilities, there remained a concern that running all services onsite could entail health risks. The SALC at Kyushu University usually welcomes a monthly cumulative total of daily users that well surpasses the 1,000 figure at the beginning of the academic year. In April and May, the center can get very crowded as the floor space is limited and students often use the onsite services for multiple hours at a time. This environment usually results in full time staff and TAs spending extended periods of time in close proximity with large numbers of students.

To abate these concerns, the SALC onsite staff agreed with supporting faculty members that conversation sessions supervised by TAs, which form a central pillar of the center's services, should remain online. The TAs were familiar with how to manage online sessions given that all the SALC services had been taking place on a virtual platform throughout the previous year. Therefore, the TAs could continue offering online language support without the need for extra training.

To ensure that the center was operating in line with the faculty's policy to increase the number of face-to-face classes for undergraduate courses, the decision was made to re-open the onsite facilities; however, temporarily the facilities would function as a library and self-study space open to a limited number of students for set blocks of time. While the onsite-

online system was in operation, one of the managerial staff members would need to be based inside the center to provide onsite support. It was felt that this hybrid approach responded well to the needs of the students and position of the faculty by providing some in-person learning support without sacrificing the safety of the TA team.

Implementation of the Onsite-Online Hybrid Approach Onsite

Attention quickly turned to implementing actionable measures that would ensure face-to-face services could take place on campus in a safe manner while also operating online activities. Before re-opening the center in a limited capacity to users, the SALC onsite staff ordered a range of cleaning materials and various pieces of equipment that would help ensure a safe learning environment. The cleaning items included disinfectant sprays and an ample supply of multi-surface cleaning wipes. The larger scale items that the staff purchased included various transparent plastic partitions, a facial recognition thermometer terminal, an automatic hand sanitizer dispenser, and an air purifier.

Once these items were delivered, the SALC onsite staff made some significant changes to the layout of the center. The electronic thermometer and hand sanitizer were set up at the entrance so that visitors could take their temperature and clean their hands upon arrival. A large plastic screen was placed on top of the reception desk, and the area where permanent staff worked was cordoned off using a retractable standing partition to help ensure fewer face-to-face interactions.

Before the pandemic, the SALC onsite staff were in charge of issuing and discharging library books. However, it was decided that it would be best to establish a self-service terminal given the circumstances. The staff moved the desktop computer used for library transactions to the front desk, created posters to explain how the system worked, and prepared drop-off boxes for returned books. In a study by Chin et al. (2020), the COVID-19 virus was found to persist in an infectious state for no more than three hours on printed paper. However, that same study found that the virus can survive for days on other paper surfaces, such as banknotes. Erring on the side of caution, staff decided that returned books would be left in the box over the weekend, cleaned at the start of the following week, and then re-shelved.

The SALC management team decided that up to five students could use the center at set times for safety reasons, and because it was a manageable number. Some seating areas were sectioned off using tape to stop students from sitting beside each other. Small plastic

dividers were set up on top of the available work desks to prevent students from interacting with each other. The time blocks when students could use the center roughly corresponded to class periods. Thirty-minute time blocks were set in between each slot so that onsite staff could clean the worktops before the next round of students entered. Due to the number of staff members available, the facilities would close at 18:00, while the online service would remain open until 19:00.

To use the facilities, students would have to pick up entry cards, which were to be kept in a standing display at the reception desk. The cards were to be stored in clear plastic pockets arranged in a square-shaped grid (see Figure 1). The vertical axis corresponded to the day of the week and the horizontal to the time period. There were five sets of cards for each time slot on every day of the coming week (excluding weekends). If a student wanted to use the facilities, they would need to locate their desired timeslot on the grid and pick up the relevant card. They would then have to show the card to the onsite staff when they used the center and drop it off in a box at the reception desk.

Figure 1
Standing Display with Timeslot Entry Cards
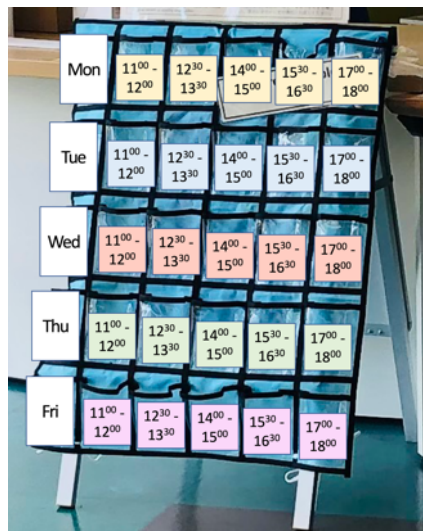
The SALC management and supporting faculty members decided that students would only be able to reserve one time slot per day and only on a day within the coming week to ensure that all users get a chance to utilize the facilities. The decision was also made to allow students to visit and borrow a book or to speak to a staff member while the hybrid system was in effect; however, these interactions were to take place while enforcing social distancing measures.

Online

The SALC managerial staff agreed with supporting faculty members that group conversation sessions, one-to-one support, language learning assistance, and educationally stimulating games would continue to take place virtually at the start of the 2021 academic year. During the previous year, the SALC online system welcomed users based far away from campus, some staying in other cities in Japan, and in a few cases students studying abroad. The level of inclusivity that the platform provided users made the decision to continue offering online support more straightforward.

As the procedures for operating these web-based services were already in place, management would need to maintain the system established the previous year. This meant that managerial staff would have to continue preparing Zoom sessions for conversation practice, post the links for each meeting on a secure site, create a schedule for TAs online work, take reservations for one-to-one appointments, and promote activities online.

Throughout 2020, the SALC managerial staff monitored the online Zoom sessions that TAs were leading in order to verify that they were engaging with participants. This involved observing sessions and occasionally joining a discussion for a brief period. The logistics of monitoring the internet-based services would need to slightly change in April 2021 as at least one of the two managerial staff members would need to be on campus to support users visiting the facilities. Staff felt that having one managerial staff member based at the campus would be enough to provide the requisite level of assistance to visitors given that there was a limited number of onsite services available. The other staff member could then operate remotely, assume greater responsibility for monitoring the online Zoom sessions, support with one-to-one reservations if needed, reply to inquiries via email, and take the lead with other tasks that could be performed remotely. This division of responsibilities would also help reduce contact between onsite staff. The center had been operating online throughout the previous year, so management were already accustomed to maintaining regular contact through scheduled Zoom meetings and emails.

The SALC managerial staff decided that they would alternate who was based on campus and who operated remotely to ensure that the workload was evenly distributed between the team. At the time that these plans were being formulated, many faculties within Kyushu University gave employees permission to conduct their work at home. This made it possible for the SALC to pursue a staff rotation policy.

Conclusion: Evaluating the Hybrid System

Due to the onsite restrictions and personnel changes, the SALC only started operating the hybrid approach from the middle of April. Then, an increase in the number of COVID-19 patients in the region meant that the SALC facilities needed to close in mid-May and the center had to start operating completely online again. Although the hybrid approach was only in place for a limited time, it proved manageable for staff. The system also served as a valuable trial run as the center had to return to an onsite-online system later in the Spring/Summer semester when the number of recorded COVID-19 cases dropped. The experiences at the start of the 2021 academic year made the transition back to a hybrid approach easier for staff to manage.

When the SALC management observed online Zoom sessions, they noticed a sense of excitement amongst TAs and students when the topic of the onsite facilities' re-opening was discussed, even if initially just in a limited capacity. This suggests that the perceived importance of physical location discussed by Freimuth et al. (2021) extends to staff and users. However, the managerial staff did observe advantages in offering online services, specifically at a time when face-to-face learning could have meant increased exposure to a contagious virus for both TAs and students. The process of developing alternatives to in-person learning gave management the chance to develop the facility's online presence. As mentioned earlier in this report, the remote learning platform also has time-saving benefits, especially for users based in locations far away from the university.

Maintaining a hybrid system can have value even when full face-to-face activities return post COVID-19. Even outside of the pandemic, students are not likely to access SALC's physical location unless they have another reason to be on the campus where the center is located. This can be a challenge for universities that are spread across different campuses but only have one SALC. For such institutions, a supplementary online service could be a valuable resource for students. Kyushu University's SALC experiences at the beginning of the 2021 Spring/Summer semester suggests that maintaining onsite and online services could be viable given the right resources. Although the uncertainty surrounding protocol regarding face-to-face interactions presented difficulties in fully analyzing the newly established hybrid system across a longer period of time, our conclusions could serve as a platform for future studies into onsite-online approaches to operating SALCs.

Acknowledgments

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JASAL Student Conferences: Providing Opportunities for Students to Learn and Grow Together

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Author Biography

Hisako Yamashita is an associate professor at Kobe Shoin Women's University and is the former president, and current Student Involvement Coordinator of the Japan Association for Self-Access Learning (JASAL). She has worked in four different SACs and has conducted over 4,300 learning advising sessions.

Students are at the heart of self-access centers (SACs). SACs are dynamic in nature. While the facilities, resources and language learning support services in a SAC provide learners with a variety of options and ways to learn their target languages, students and the community of learners who use the space bring with them creative, interesting energy and vibrations into the learning space. When SACs have active users and/or student staff members, they help create motivating, enjoyable and challenging learning opportunities for their fellow students.

In developing learner autonomy and in language learning in general, the social dimensions of learning have been increasingly recognized (Murray & Fujishima, 2016). A learning space such as a SAC can support the development of learner autonomy and language learning by developing and encouraging communities of practice. Having students' voices heard in this development process is of great importance and value. The "people" and "community" lead to the development of vibrant, successful learning spaces. Student staff are often key members of these communities.

Student staff members are usually undergraduate students who are often regular users of the SAC and enjoy being in the SAC. Many of the student staff members find SACs to be a comfortable and motivating learning space where they can find like-minded peers who strive to achieve their respective language learning goals (Thornton et al., 2021).

The ways in which SAC student staff are treated differ among institutions. Some institutions have their student staff members work under a fully-paid system and others recruit students as volunteers. A small-scale SAC, start-up SAC, or SAC with little institutional support may not have a student staff system in place, and students are often involved in doing some activities voluntarily without any formal structure or recognition from the institution. In other situations, teachers or learning advisors in the SAC may have invited SAC users to get involved in planning seasonal events for special occasions such as Halloween and Christmas—anything from decorating the space to developing games. Whatever the route and the ways in which students are involved in running the SAC, some students join simply because they enjoy being in the SAC, and some join because they want to help and support their fellow students enjoy learning English as they have and improve their language skills. Such students also want to meet more like-minded peers who are interested and motivated in learning the language.

The Importance of Information-Sharing and Communication Among Student Staff

While the student staff members work on developing their learning communities and create vibrant and stimulating learning spaces, they often work in isolated shifts and may

not know one another well. Student staff training in SACs is very important, but many SACs struggle to bring all the student staff members together at once for a meeting or a training session as everyone has different class schedules and busy lives outside the school. Therefore, SAC staff members can benefit from opportunities to communicate with other student staff members. Providing such opportunities might be one of the important roles of an organization like the Japan Association for Self-Access Learning (JASAL).

JASAL, as an academic association devoted to promoting self-access language learning in Japan, has been providing a forum for our members to disseminate knowledge and share ideas about self-access language learning, running self-access centers and developing learner autonomy since 2005. As student staff members are one of the key players in running successful SACs, JASAL has also been actively involved in supporting and providing learning opportunities for these students who are involved in SACs in universities across Japan. In 2013, JASAL supported the *Student Involvement in Self-Access Centers Conference* which was held at Nanzan Kenkyu Center in Nagoya, and the *Empowering Students in Self-Access Conference*, which was organized at Kanda University of International Studies in Chiba in 2016. In terms of student involvement in events specifically organized by JASAL, in 2015, a *JASAL Student Show and Tell* event was held at Okayama University with 13 student presentations representing seven institutions. Following up on the successful outcomes of these events, since December 2016, JASAL has been offering undergraduate student staff presentation slots at our annual conferences. Every year since 2016, we have given opportunities to students who work in SACs to present about their staff work and projects or activities they have planned and conducted in their learning spaces. We also include student staff get-together time during our annual conference so that student staff can have a chance to meet and share their challenges and their ideas with students from SACs at other universities.

Given the popularity of student presentations and their role in enriching learning opportunities for both students and teachers/advisors, JASAL hosted a larger-scale student conference, *JASAL Student Conference 2019*. Forty-six students from 13 university SACs in 10 prefectures in Japan came together and presented about their respective SACs and their projects, engaged in active Q&A sessions, and discussed action plans for their respective centers, then shared and discussed further with students from other universities. A total of 72 participants attended this student conference full of students' passion and energy.

As the Student Involvement coordinator of JASAL and the organizer of this event, I tried to make this student conference, not just a presentation opportunity, but an event that offered participating students something they could take away. I set up the activities so that I could enable the students to connect their experiences and learning, engage in reflection, develop an action plan, and potentially carry it out in order to improve their respective centers. To accomplish such an aim, I planned the event so that the student conference started with a pre-conference activity, where students were asked to set their goals for participating in the student conference and identify what they would like to ask student staff members from other universities. All the activities I developed were in a workbook which was distributed to all student participants beforehand. We included memo-taking pages so that students could take notes during presentations on what they heard and what they noticed or wondered about. After the presentations, we had very exciting Q&A sessions. Then, students were asked to engage in cross-institutional discussion sessions in which they discussed a variety of issues and questions they had, as well as heard more about the creative things other SAC student staff were doing. After that, students sat with their own school members (if they were the only one from their SAC, they joined another institution's group), and brought back ideas and thoughts they gathered from the previous interactive sessions. Then they created an action plan that they could implement at their respective schools when they went back to their SACs after the conference.

In addition to the above designated "activities," I created as many opportunities as possible for the 46 students from the 13 universities to talk with and learn from each other. This included organizing a "lunch mix chat"—setting up groups of students from different institutions to eat lunch together.

Making the action plan and carrying it out in their respective institutions was not the end. I wanted to provide an opportunity for participants to report back on their progress in a future student forum. Therefore, one month after the JASAL SAC Student Conference 2019, JASAL scheduled another student event, *Student Forum in JASAL 2019*, so that students could come back and report back on their progress in implementing their action plans that they set up at the student conference.

In the follow-up student forum (https://jasalorg.com/jasal2019-osaka-november30-december01/) held on November 29, 2019, SAC student staff from five universities who had participated in the *JASAL Student Conference 2019* did poster presentations about the progress of the action plans they had set, and engaged in an open discussion session where students could further meet, share and exchange ideas about various issues related to SAC

operations from a student staff perspective. Many JASAL 2019 participants (teachers, advisors, and administrative staff) also came to observe the student forum and had opportunities to hear student staff members' voices directly and learn about their creative ideas as well as honest reflections and thoughts about their learning spaces.

Student presentations represent "student voices." Listening to students' presentations allowed SAC faculty members, including directors, administrative staff, and learning advisors, to see their operations and the workings of SACs from perspectives that differ from their own, and provided many insights.

The survey at the end of the *JASAL Student Conference 2019* showed how much this student conference inspired both students and faculty members with new ideas and motivated them to improve their SACs. Following are some of the comments from the participating students:

Student A: "It was a great chance to know people from different university. And talk to people who have awesome ideas."

Student B: "It's great to know about other center and staff. Some university has same problem with our uni and it's helpful to talk about solution and share opinion."

Student C: "It was fantastic! I could meet a lot of people and share each experience. Each of us has different/same idea/challenge. We discussed about that to improve us."

Student D: "It was very meaningful event for me. I got so many ideas for the events. Also, I was encouraged by other participants."

Student E: "It was inspirational, with what they said 'having expected learning outcomes'."

One of the participants who was the only one who came from his university commented, "I was nervous before coming here, but it was memorable and good experience to broaden my perspective. I don't want to go back to Tokyo. Sad…" (Student F).

Since JASAL set the policy of using English in this conference (of course, students could also use Japanese as necessary), students kept everything in English and for some, this had a positive effect. Some of the comments from the student surveys show how the use of English motivated them to study even more:

Student G: "I was moved a lot. Student conference inspired me strongly. And encourage me to study English."

Student H: "I think it is stimulated. I have to learn English more…!"

We also received comments from teachers, learning advisors, and administrative staff:

Teacher A: "I was impressed that my students raised their hands to ask questions during Q&A time."

Teacher B: "This conference was a wonderful model of what a meet and share should be."

Teacher C: "Despite their initial concerns about presenting to groups from other universities, they rose to the challenge and did their best."

Teacher D: "It was fantastic to watch students discussing, how they manage their own learning."

Administrative staff A: "As administrative staff, I was very happy that my students and I could participate in this event—I have always thought it would be great if students can talk with student staff members from other university SACs."

Administrative staff B: "This kind of meeting is very effective to know different circumstances at each center and gain some innovative resolutions to develop more by stimulating one another."

From the feedback comments from students, teachers, and administrative staff, we can see the positive influences the events have had on the participants.

Student Forums Moved to Online Platform

With the COVID-19 pandemic, our plan to host the JASAL Student Conference in a face-to-face format was not possible in 2020, the following year, but instead, JASAL hosted JASAL Online Student Forums on July 4, 2020 and on February 6, 2021. In the first-ever Online Student Forum on July, 4, 2020, 22 students from seven universities, and 22 teachers and administrators from 13 universities in Japan joined. Student staff in SACs and active student users shared their online activities and issues and enjoyed coming up with new ideas. Teachers, learning advisors, and administrative staff had the chance to discuss with others but also some opportunities to observe some of the student group discussion sessions.

In our *2ⁿᵈ JASAL Online Student Forum* themed "Bringing fun and community back" in February 2021, we gave the students the opportunity to plan the forum by themselves. The forum was largely planned and run by three very capable student volunteers from three universities in Japan, who had never met each other before, but nonetheless were very interested in running such a forum. Fourteen student participants came from six universities across the country. After their active sharing and discussion time, the forum concluded with a brainstorming session focused on SAC welcome events for the new school year.

In these online forums, students shared issues and ideas for their SAC during the difficult times they faced in running student events, as well as maintaining and developing learning communities during the pandemic. The discussion topics were not rigidly set, and they reported that they talked and exchanged ideas on the kind of events suitable for using Zoom, popular online events for students, and how student staff members could promote their initiatives using SNS services, as well as how they could get regular participants involved in an event or a community. A student participant commented on the feedback survey:

> Due to the current COVID-19 situation, although it is struggle to talk [to] other people in English, I had a really great opportunity to share with other university students about each English center. I appreciated all not only group leaders but also other students in my group session. Thank you! (Student I)

While the feedback survey was distributed by the organizer for participants to fill it out, some participants raised their hands to write reflection articles of their experiences in JASAL student online events. The resulting articles were published in academic journals (Tashiro, 2020; Mizoguchi, 2021; Yamane, 2021).

The Most Recent JASAL Student Conference

The *5th JASAL Student Conference 2021* was held online on November 27, 2021. Forty-five participants including 34 student presenters and 11 teachers, learning advisors and administrative staff gathered from 11 universities in Japan and two universities in Mexico. It was a great surprise that more students than expected applied to and joined this conference. The conference started off with a warm-up activity, followed by presentations and three group discussion sessions each with different groupings of students. In a similar way to the *JASAL Student Conference 2019*, I set up the group sessions so that student participants can be in a new group every session and engage in discussions with students from as many universities as possible. The conference encouraged students to think of solutions for the issues that they have at their respective SACs, develop action plans, share them with other participants, and put their plans into action when they go back to their respective SACs.

Conclusion

No longer is a learning space a space in which students wait and receive services; rather, students play a big role in coming up with ideas to make their learning spaces and services more meaningful and enjoyable for themselves. Just as we educators learn a lot from our professional conferences, it is important that we provide opportunities for our

student staff members to also engage in inter-collegial learning experiences so they can grow as SAC student staff members to create an even better motivating atmosphere and provide energy into their respective SACs.

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Report on the 2021 IALLT Conference

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The title of this year's International Association for Language Learning Technology (IALLT) conference was *Resilience, Transformation, and Beyond*. Educators were asked to reflect on the transformations, successes, and lessons gained during the online pivot and look ahead to post-pandemic practices. This year's conference was held online, June 16–18, with pre-recorded content available before the conference on the event app, CrowdCompass. About 70 asynchronous 15-minute video sessions and 15 digital poster presentations were linked to an online schedule on the app.

Live Zoom sessions during the conference dates included plenaries, panels, and Q&A sessions for the presenters who prerecorded. There was a leaderboard for attendees to earn points by attending and interacting at the conference, a social space on the meeting platform Nooks, a paid cooking class, a virtual DIY pub crawl, a social gaming session, wellness yoga, a virtual exhibition hall, social networking coffee breaks in a lounge for impromptu meet-ups, and a closing social event hosted by the Japan Association for Self-Access Learning (JASAL) in a virtual meeting space called Wonder. For paid members, a recording of the conference events is available on-demand through the CrowdCampus app until December 2021 (Quinn & Lavolette, 2021).

COVID-19 resulted in many school and university closures and cancellations of face-to-face classes. Educators, who immediately had to deal with difficult situations, including "emergency remote teaching," began to implement computer-mediated instruction daily through online video conferencing platforms or file exchanges on learning management systems. This review focuses on three presentations that represent different points on the reality-virtuality continuum, a concept that explains a spectrum between the real world and a completely simulated world (Milgram, Takemura, Utsumi, & Kishino, 1995). On the left of the continuum is digital content mediated by the real world through the use of computers or mobile devices—for example, a student checking assignments on a learning management system. On the (almost) far right of the continuum, in a completely simulated world, students are avatars in an immersive environment—for example, off-site students' avatars in a virtual reality environment video calling with students on campus. Many presenters at the conference began by describing their experiences in brick-and-mortar schools and then discussed how learning transitioned to an

online environment. This is the case in the first presentation reviewed here: the keynote presentation by Dr. Jo Mynard, "Supporting Language Learners Beyond the Classroom: What Have We Learned from the Shift to Online Learning Environments?" This presentation covered the evolution of self-learning centers from 1960s language labs to 2020s wellbeing facilities that meet the basic psychological needs of students. In the next presentation reviewed, "Is There a Place for Online Translators in Language Courses?", panelists Dr. Florencia Henshaw and Dr. Errol O'Neill gave evidence and impressions for and against online translation (OT) for language learning. Finally, the last presentation reviewed briefly described how researchers Dr. Elizabeth Enkin and Mr. Eric Kirschling of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln used Mozilla Hubs to create a browser-based virtual reality environment embedded with target language-speaking features in "The Language Lab in a Remote Age: Building and Utilizing a Hybrid 'Smart Language Lab."

Dr. Jo Mynard—"Supporting Language Learners Beyond the Classroom: What Have We Learned from the Shift to Online Learning Environments?"

The keynote speaker from one of IALLT's partner organizations, JASAL, was Dr. Jo Mynard, Professor, Director of the Self-Access Learning Center (SALC), and Director of the Research Institute for Learner Autonomy Education (RILAE) at Kanda University of International Studies in Japan. Her presentation addressed the shift from onsite learning centers, which offer space, resources, advising services, and language practice opportunities, to online environments. According to Dr. Mynard, student-led learning communities and one-to-one advising that offers support and reflection are particularly effective in online environments. What might this shift mean for twenty-first century learner support, particularly regarding learning outside the classroom and the role of classroom teachers?

The Evolution of Language Learning Centers Proved Invaluable During the Online Pivot

Beginning with a historical overview of self-access language learning (SALL) and self-access learning centers (SALC) in the 1960s, Dr. Mynard traced the development and transformation of these spaces' practices and offerings from the solitary study of books, worksheets, and strategy guides to social community centers in the 2000s and the addition of events, experts, listening, writing, conversation lounges, professional advising, and peer support observation in the 2010s. Turning to the more recent social mobile movement and student access

to online learning sources and, finally, to the current concept of well-being centers designed to meet the basic psychological needs of students and help their learning thrive, Dr. Mynard set the background for how each of these stages of development played a role in the online pivot of 2020 (Mynard, forthcoming).

The basic psychological requirements for student agency and self-determination cited by Ryan and Deci (2017) include choices—such as using the target or mother language in the space—interest, autonomy, competence, relatedness, and leadership (often in the form of student-led events and study groups based on shared interests). One of the major focuses of the Kanda SALC is advising to promote student autonomy by devising a learner path that suits their personalized learning trajectory (Kato & Mynard, 2015).

The Online Pivot of Kanda's Self-Access Learning Center

The evolution of learning beyond the classroom, with its focus on basic psychological needs and wellness, was put to the test in 2020 with the shift to online learning. Every step of the language lab evolution process—from the 1960's individual computer-assisted language lab to the 2010's emphasis on social media and online resources to the present-day focus on emotional well-being—was the focus of the second part of the talk.

One of the major changes was the role of the website. It transformed into a hub where students could book advising appointments and find online resources. The challenge of moving the advising model—the dialogue, tools, and environments model—to Zoom was met with skepticism (Mynard, 2020), but this skepticism was overcome quite quickly, in a week or two, with the adoption and affordance of the medium by advisors who could convey empathy and a sense of listening through the video chat and by making use of the whiteboard and the chat features. One notable difference was advisors tended to be more directive than usual because the students were at home without other people and resources. The advisors also tended to suggest ideas more often (Davis et al., 2020). Although Zoom does not afford natural eye contact, some major affordances of the medium include collaborating on a Google Doc recording sessions with transcripts, and zero travel time. Even with some tech issues, such as audio failures, students reported being comfortable, took time to explore websites, and improved the quality of their reflection compared to dropping into an onsite SALC between classes. More research on self-access and the coronavirus pandemic is published in a *SiSAL* (*Studies in Self-Access Learning*) special issue.

Dr. Florencia Henshaw & Dr. Errol O'Neill—"Is There a Place for Online Translators in Language Courses?"

As language classes pivoted online, a much-discussed topic was the use of online translation. Dr. Florencia Henshaw, a Spanish professor at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and Dr. Errol O'Neill, a French professor at the University of Memphis, presented a panel with arguments for both sides. In Dr. Florencia Henshaw's case, teaching novice and intermediate students a specific proficiency benchmark to fulfill a requirement, using online translation (OT) did not help students acquire a language or develop their communicative ability in the target language. While recognizing the efficiency of OT, particularly noting that Google Translate (GT) does a good job with Spanish translations, her skepticism regarding online translation is in part due to O'Neill's findings that students who use OT were unable to produce the target language *on their own* (O'Neill, 2019). Her goal is for students "to develop a communication system that [they] can use to communicate on their own." The use of OT is the equivalent of "asking a friend to translate for you," thus falling into the category of unauthorized assistance. Furthermore, she compares online language tools, such as Grammarly, to a car's navigation system, but online translators to a self-driving car. If you use a self-driving car, have you learned how to drive?

Instead of banning OT in her classes, Dr. Henshaw redistributes assignment weights to lower the incentive to use OT and gives incentives to students who produce assignments and content at their proficiency level. In her syllabus, she reiterates that students who rely on OT are doing themselves a disservice if their goal is to acquire communicative ability in the target language.

Beginning with the history of Babel Fish, Dr. Errol O'Neill briefly explained how online translators work and notes that algorithms are improving. One positive is that users can fiddle with the online translation to see different outcomes. His research shows that the majority of students are already using OT, even more so in online classes. With training, students can reflect on what is being translated and make decisions based on that. He has developed his own workshop to have students reflect on OT (O'Neill, 2019). In his classes, after the workshop, students preferred their own translations and usage of OT dropped. Language instructors can help students by practicing good habits (bin Damash, 2020) when using online tools. After the

discussion, the attendees were polled, and the majority of attendees were now in the OT as "food for thought" category.

Dr. Elizabeth Enkin & Mr. Eric Kirschling—"The Language Lab in a Remote Age: Building and Utilizing a Hybrid "Smart Language Lab"

An ongoing project before COVID-19, The Language Lab at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln created virtual meeting spaces with a virtual browser-based 3D collaboration platform called Mozilla Hubs and embedded them with Amazon Sumerian virtual reality applications. Dr. Elizabeth Enkin and Mr. Eric Kirschling introduced this Smart Lab, which is a replica of the physical lab and now, as students return to campus, a hybrid lab.

The Smart Lab consists of three rooms: two virtual meeting rooms and one workroom. It provides students with novel experiential-based learning opportunities. The virtual meeting rooms are connected to the "Amazon Ecosystem," and high-quality browser-based applications create an immersive environment that can be entered via a virtual reality headset, PC, or mobile device. AWS (Amazon Web Services) Polly greets students in the target language when they enter the lobby. AWS Polly is a text-to-speech (TTS) application that turns text into life-like speech. AWS Polly runs on an XML-based markup language called SSML (speech, synthesis, markup language) that can be set up for different languages, voices, accents, gestures, etc. In Dr. Enkin's demonstration, AWS Polly took a reservation for the room in Spanish.

Behind the first door is "Hubs School," which has three classrooms and five breakout rooms. These can be reserved by students. Dr. Enkin notes, one positive of holding classes here is that research suggests that students in social VR settings have lower stress levels when working in the target language. The second door opens the "Morning Dew Coffee Shop," which is a virtual lounge built with MozillaHubs. Students can have class, meet at conversation tables, or conduct self-assessments or autonomous activities. Students can enter the lounge on a PC or mobile device when on or off-campus. Behind the third door is the virtual lab, which is built with Amazon's Sumerian software to allow quick access to machine learning, chatbots, code execution, and more. An ongoing project is Sentence Sleuth, a grammatical judgment test in which the user inputs a sentence in the target language and gets judged. The "Maze Task," built with AWS Dynamo DB (database), measures the reaction time for word constructions. It is designed to train Spanish learners on difficult grammar structures. This game is also available as

a mobile app on the Apple Store or Google Play. Mr. Eric Kirschling demonstrated playing in a VR headset using hand controls to click on correct word sets or body movements to dodge incorrect word sets.

Other applications being developed with AWS are "Smart Cat Convos" an AI-based service for building conversations, which will be mirrored in the physical space with a robotic cat, and task-based simulations, such as ordering in a restaurant or asking for directions. In addition, the virtual lab area mirrors an on campus makerspace. In the virtual workshop, students can collaborate to create an object that can be printed on a 3D printer in the physical world or used as-is virtually.

Conclusion

As the pandemic continues to cause school closures worldwide, the lessons learned and reflected on at this year's IALLT conference provide insight into how technology might change the landscape of language learning forever. Dr. Jo Mynard reported that students felt less stress during online advising sessions, the very type of interaction required to meet the physiological needs of students to create wellbeing in 2020 SALCs (Mynard, forthcoming). Thus, an idea originally met with skepticism turned into a silver lining during the online pivot. Dr. Florencia Henshaw and Dr. Errol O'Neill presented the pros and cons of using online translators in language classes, yet agreed that a majority of students use them and they are likely to continue to improve. Finally, Dr. Elizabeth Enkin and Mr. Eric Kirschling demonstrated what hybrid language labs look like using browser-based immersive technology, target language-speaking virtual assistants, and conversation-building robotic cats. We might ask, if schools had never shut down, would we have ever thought that it was possible to accomplish all of this in a mere 18 months? *Resilience, Transformation, and Beyond* was an appropriate title for this year's conference, which highlighted challenges, technological affordances, and reconsiderations of pedagogies in language learning.

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Review of a Panel Discussion on Self-Access Learning Centers in Japan at the 2021 IALLT Conference

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The presentations in the panel discussion at the International Association for Language Learning Technology Virtual Conference (Bennett et al., 2021) serve as an excellent introduction to the goals and foundational operating principles of self-access learning centers (SALC) in Japan. Moderated by Betsy Lavolette of Kyoto Sangyo University, the panel consisted of Hisako Yamashita of Kobe Shoin Women's University, Phillip Bennett of Kanda University of International Studies, and Katherine Thornton of Otemon Gakuin University. The format of the session was consecutive presentations from the three speakers listed above, followed by a short question and answer session at the end. Taken as a whole, this session was an excellent way to both understand what self-access learning centers are, as well as how to begin developing a new SALC.

The issue all three panelists address is that learning English in Japan is, for many students, disconnected from their day-to-day lives, as well as perceived as a very difficult and isolated task. A solution that all three panelists, who each manage at least one SALC, have implemented is for their staff to actively and thoughtfully connect with their constituents. These staff members may be student peers, SALC staff who host consultation and (synchronous or asynchronous, written) advising sessions, or some hybrid of the two.

To begin, Yamashita defined the core mission of SALCs in broad terms, and then explained the theoretical models that drive their design by using examples from her SALC. Next, Bennett explained how a SALC may teach students Intentional Reflective Writing Techniques in order to meet the goals explained by Yamashita; Bennett then thoroughly and clearly explained an example of written reflective activities. Finally, Thornton reported on the effects that different SALC layouts have on student engagement and retention by comparing two different SALCs at her institution. This review focuses on the significant points touched on by each presenter.

Hisako Yamashita

Yamashita defines the gap that SALCs set out to close as, quoting some of her students, "Studying English makes them feel, 'Allergic' to English," and that English is seen as a language that only, "special people can succeed in…!" She points out that these perceptions are rooted in what amounts to a lack of ownership of their English studies, as well as "a sense of detachment from the language learning process" that leads to, "little improvement." SALCs set out to address

these perceptions by increasing learner autonomy through providing positive environments, as well as teaching constituents the ability to think reflectively about their language learning processes. The three pillars that Yamashita defines as common across all SALCs in Japan are: facilities and learning resources; educational support; and community. These are covered in the subsections below.

Facilities and Learning Resources

Yamashita explains that facilities generally have multiple spaces within them. Each space is designed for specific activities that range from solitary activities, such as media consumption or production, through to spaces for group activities such as board games, watching media, or participating in a learning resource activity.

Learning resources, in the context of SALCs, are often student-led events, which all students are encouraged to attend or host. These events may be talks or presentations, as well as participating in target language conversation groups; study skills workshops; or other event formats such as cultural experiences or hands-on workshops. These resources are all hosted by SALC staff and/or student peers.

Educational Support

Yamashita explains that a central purpose of SALCs is to offer advice on how to learn a language. In varying degrees all SALC staff understand how language learning works. At Kobe Shoin Women's University they also offer self-reflective "Learner Autonomy Modules," which are a combination of written reflection and guided conversation designed to deepen a student's understanding of their own language learning process. According to the presentation, the goals of these advising sessions include teaching the student how to think critically about their goals and learning strategies. These interventions aim to help the student gain confidence in their language learning abilities, take ownership of their learning, and increase their motivation. It is important to note that these interventions happen repeatedly over a span of months.

Community

While it is not explicitly explained, the inference can be made that attending events throughout the semester combined with positive outcomes after visiting a SALC would create relationships both between students and between students and SALC staff.

Phillip Bennett

Bennett first explains that the principles behind advising are based on Kato and Mynard's 2016 work, "Intentional Reflective Dialogue." He goes on to say that advising encompasses two things: first, "a conscious discourse with a student in order to engage, support, and prompt their development as a language learner," and second, the strategies advisors are trained to share with their students. Bennett notes that these strategies and techniques are all closely related to those of counseling and coaching. Another important point he makes is that the advising does not have to be in the target language, or even a student's first language. The advising should be done in the manner that most easily facilitates communication between the advisor and the student.

During the rest of Bennett's presentation, he explains Kanda University's "Effective Learning Modules" (ELM). ELMs are self-directed, fifteen-week courses "aimed at developing the various skills needed to be an autonomous language learner." Students receive one credit for participating in the ELM. There are six units across the 15 weeks. During the first five weeks, students learn about effective ways to study and learn. Then, in week six, they create a "SURE (Study-Use-Review-Evaluate) Learning Plan" based on what they have learned and submit it to a SALC advisor for feedback. The next nine weeks are spent documenting their application of the plan and reflecting on their language learning. During this documentation and reflection period, students receive written feedback from their advisors. Bennett closes by doing a thorough and excellent job of showing and discussing actual examples of advisor feedback.

Katherine Thornton

Thornton focuses on ways that Otemon Gakuin University SALCs have built learner autonomy practices into their physical spaces and programming. Reiterating points made by both previous speakers, she explains how community, personalization (autonomy), and reflection can be designed into SALC spaces. Thornton shares four foundational influences that scaffold her SALCs as "Autonomy-Supportive Social Environments." They are: communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991); Relatedness (one of three basic psychological needs in self-determination theory) (Deci & Ryan, 1994); social learning spaces for language learning (Murray & Fujishima, 2016; Mynard et al., 2020); Social Dimensions of Autonomy in Language Learning (Murray, 2014).

One of the most important aspects of Thornton's SALC is the "front desk" counter area that everyone who enters must pass by. She frames the purpose of the front desk not as a passive

"help desk" area, but as an active, "way to greet students into the center, and a way to acknowledge the presence of everyone in the space." Thornton notes that, "initiating some kind of dialogue with the learner as they come in—find out why they're there, what they want to do, or if they're a regular, just saying hello… is really important." She also explains that the counter allows her staff to focus on, "micro-advising" (Shibata, 2012) where student staff ask reflective and organizing questions of SALC constituents. This is different from the second SALC space that Thornton oversees, which does not have a front desk. She observes of the second space, "Students come in and make a bee line for a space they want to use, and it's very difficult to initiate that initial interaction."

Finally, to paraphrase Thornton, many SALCs utilize consciously designed spaces for different purposes. This is done because entering a large and unfamiliar space that does not communicate how it might be used can stifle learners' engagement. Thus, having curated, signposted spaces engages students with the things they can do in each of the spaces within a SALC. She notes that in many centers curated, signposted areas are disappearing. While this disappearance may be okay for confident students, new or timid students usually struggle and may not return because they did not understand how to use the space.

At the end of the panel discussion, Thornton also explained what she thinks SALCs will look like in the future. Thornton said that, going forward, online sessions will always be an option, but that physical spaces really create a sense of belonging and community far more meaningfully and enduringly than online "spaces" have thus far been able to do, even during the 2020–2021 academic year.

Key Takeaway

All three presenters and the questions asked during the question and answer session reinforced the importance of two factors for increasing student autonomy and engagement with language learning: first, face-to-face interaction, ideally in person, but possibly online; and second, exposing SALC constituents to active reflective thinking processes. SALCs in Japan, as these presentations clearly show, are an excellent way to increase student autonomy in language learning.

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The *Language Center Handbook 2021*, published by the International Association for Language Learning Technology (IALLT), is the newest volume in a series that addresses issues related to both language center management and design. IALLT may already be familiar to some JASAL members as JASAL became an "official partner organization" of IALLT in 2020, a connection forged through the efforts of Elizabeth Lavolette (Kyoto Sangyo University), one of the editors of this collection along with Angelika Kraemer (Cornell University). Contrasting with earlier volumes that featured authors predominantly based in the United States, this book is part of a recent initiative by IALLT to become truly "international," including authors based in Hong Kong, Japan, Germany, Mexico, and Canada.

One important point, addressed in the introduction, is how "language education spaces" are conceived of differently in the United States in comparison to other international contexts. Such spaces in the United States are often referred to as "language centers" (or "language labs", a term and conceptualization now largely falling out of favor). Those spaces outside of the United States are often organized as self-access centers (SACs) or self-access learning centers (SALCs). While both types of spaces "aim to support language learners", "place a high value on social learning" and "provide materials and technology to learners in physical and virtual spaces," (p. ix) they differ, as the editors note, in that language centers (LCs) generally provide professional development and support for faculty, and SALCs are created with the goal of promoting self-directed learning. In an attempt to bridge the gap that existed until quite recently between these different contexts, the chapters of this book, "cover[ing] big-picture issues for language spaces" (p. vi) were selected with the aim of "facilitat[ing] [an] international conversation" (p. ix) among those involved with language education spaces worldwide.

This book is divided into three sections, the first of which explores "The Origins and Fundamentals of Language Spaces." Chapter 1 is an in-depth history of language laboratories and centers, spanning a century, that includes the voices of LC administrators. There is a general progression from "language labs" designed to provide technology that supports audio-lingual style language learning, to spaces that serve almost as libraries that lend a variety of language learning material, to "language centers" that place more emphasis on communication skills and interaction. One

challenge facing many LCs today, the authors note, is the pressure to adjust to rapidly changing, increasingly accessible technology.

Chapter 2 describes the history of the JASAL organization and how self-access learning took hold in Japan. This includes a discussion of where SALCs tend to be developed, often at private universities, and how they vary in focus, usually either on promoting autonomy, providing language use opportunities, or encouraging international interaction. The chapter concludes with the authors' proposals for next steps for the organization based on a survey of JASAL members and their needs.

Chapter 3 provides a guide for LC staff on supporting faculty in the development of online language learning courses. Two case studies are presented: one on a course for teachers on "Fundamentals of Online Language Teaching" that itself was online, offering practical experience for those enrolled. The other study was on the "Less Commonly Taught and Indigenous Languages Partnership" in which universities collaborated to offer online courses for underrepresented languages, thereby increasing access for students.

Chapter 4 details the evolution of the University of Chicago Language Center into a "hub" (p. 98) that supports the development of language teaching skills for faculty and graduate students from different departments and increases the visibility of language study opportunities on campus. The author offers advice on ways for LC administrators working with different levels of institutional support to meet the needs of language educators.

Chapter 5 presents data from four IALLT surveys collected over six years on language center trends. This chapter illustrates the contexts in which LCs are embedded, often large research universities, and the profile of the "typical" LC director and their background: people with master's or doctoral degrees in foreign language literature. Trends emerging from the data include an increased effort by LC administrators to provide social and event space, and challenges such as a decline in language enrollment, budget cuts, and the struggle to maintain relevance with technology becoming more accessible without LC support.

The second section on "Designing and Redesigning Language Spaces" begins with Chapter 6, which illustrates the three-phase redesign of a SALC in a post-secondary institution in Hong Kong. Emphasizing the importance of involving

"stakeholders" (in this case, center users, teachers, and center staff), the authors discuss interviews with student users and staff and consultations with other SALCs as part of the first phase. In the second phase changes to the SALC were made, including the addition of a "noisy zone" (p. 153) with movable furniture, increased speaking and writing support, and workshops that encourage independent learning. The third phase was the evaluation of the redesigned SALC by stakeholders. This chapter provides a framework that other institutions with similar budgets and space restrictions can use.

Chapter 7 details the development of the Julien Couture Resource Center (JCRC) within the Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute at the University of Ottawa. The JCRC, both a learning space and a center for resources on second language teaching, exists to support the implementation of the university's mission, supported by the government of Canada, to promote bilingualism and cultural exchange between anglophone and francophone teachers and students. This chapter explains how the JCRC adapted to support faculty and students in developing and maintaining their own bilingualism in line with university requirements. It also addresses the efforts made to close the gap between different language groups on campus and to collaborate with community partners.

Chapter 8 examines the language center at Sojo University (Kumamoto, Japan) as a "complex dynamic system" (p. 199). It is argued that the Sojo International Learning Center or "SILC" was able to "maintain dynamic stability" (p. 199) despite being directly affected by the 2016 Kumamoto Earthquakes that made their physical space unusable, forcing teachers and resources to be decentralized and resettled separately across campus while a new center was being built. Using technological tools such as Moodle and Microsoft Teams to maintain communication among teachers and students helped the SILC to survive and continue to innovate even after their new space was completed.

Chapter 9 explores the model of "co-design" (p. 217), an approach to improving language centers in which the process is emphasized over the final result. Two case studies in which the model was applied are provided: one from a university in Germany and one from the United States. The co-design process includes defining the mission of a space, involving stakeholders and assessing their needs, creating "prototypes" (p. 218) with which to experiment with changes, evaluating what was done, and repeating these

steps. The authors stress that change should emerge through collaboration and not through a top-down approach and that all changes be incremental and flexible rather than static.

Chapter 10 is the first in the third and final section: "Technology for Language Spaces." This chapter shares the history of the University of Washington's Language Learning Center and describes how they produce and manage digital media. The authors provide a detailed breakdown of how they make media accessible for learners and the technical process of archiving, digitizing, and converting both audio and video content.

In Chapter 11 the authors report how two universities collaborated to create "teletandem" partnerships (p. 269) for students involved in four different programs at their institutions. Teletandem, which is an online, mutually beneficial language and cultural exchange, was used to connect English and Spanish learners and speakers. This chapter explains how the programs were developed, beginning with identifying learner goals and planning, matching student partners and negotiating their schedules, preparing necessary equipment, providing orientation sessions, and creating tasks for student partners to complete. The authors include an analysis of the results based on feedback from the students who took part in the program. They also identify possible challenges and provide practical advice for other language centers that may consider starting a telecollaboration program.

Chapter 12 discusses the use of "immersive technologies" (p. 299) such as augmented and virtual reality (VR) at the University of Virginia's Language Commons and what their potential roles can be in other LCs. VR was used to give students cultural experiences through activities, such as a virtual tour of a faculty member's hometown. Noting that there were challenges involving the need to keep up with rapidly changing technology and some issues with accessibility and ease of use, the authors argued that VR shows the potential to enrich student interaction in the target language based on the media experienced.

Chapter 13 considers how VR technology can be integrated into language learning courses with LC support. The authors describe how students used VR to improve their vocabulary and grammar skills in interactive, virtual "chat spaces" and build vocabulary skills with a learning game developed by the LC. One group of students also used VR to "visit" the Hermitage Museum to select art pieces to speak

about, later creating their own virtual art pieces to share. The hope is to enhance motivation and technology skills of both students and faculty by involving them in facilitating VR use.

The IALLT Handbook provides valuable insight into language learning spaces, predominantly in the U.S., and their histories. Those involved in self-access learning, even if educated in the U.S., may not be familiar with the current reality of LCs, many of which are pivoting towards facilitating more social language learning and striving to incorporate advancing technology. Much has changed since the "language lab" era. The chapters in this volume well illustrate how the featured spaces are situated within larger contexts, working towards institutional and even national initiatives for language learning. The contexts that many of these chapters describe may feel starkly different from those that *JASAL Journal* readers are used to; for example, large, well-funded public institutions versus smaller, private ones with spaces on a smaller scale. While there is pressure to maintain relevance in a changing world for many U.S.-based LCs, for SALCs in Japan there may be pressure to gain relevance and acceptance in the first place. Perhaps with these differences in mind, the authors make an effort to offer approaches on topics like center redesign that can be adapted in other institutions. Anyone looking to know more about innovations outside of the self-access world would be well served by reading this volume.

Those who are looking for a general guide to language centers may find that, despite the "handbook" label, it does not serve as one. Instead, it is more of a snapshot of the current state of language learning spaces, with some chapters that felt a bit too dense or technical to be accessible for those without a background working in LCs. The context and history of most spaces was provided, which, while relevant, due to the similarities among the LCs featured, approached redundancy. I felt that some areas, perhaps due to my own experience in a SALC versus an LC, were underexplored. A sentiment that emerged from this volume was the idea that a reliance on technology could be risky as it becomes increasingly accessible without support from LCs, potentially making it harder to justify their existence. It was suggested in some chapters that in addition to keeping up with new technology, spaces should work to incorporate more social language learning and interaction. The authors did not go into detail on plans for shifting in this way—a gap I am curious to see filled. The importance of

including stakeholders was stressed in nearly every chapter, but I felt, with some exceptions, that stakeholder voices (other than those of directors) were lacking. More LC user insight would be a valuable addition to future volumes.

This book serves as an exciting start to the conversation between those involved in language learning spaces in the United States and in self-access learning in Japan. Instead of viewing the differences between the U.S. context and Japan context as something to bridge, we can use them as a source of inspiration. How can we support and involve faculty and advisors or teachers within self-access learning spaces? Would incorporating more technology strengthen our positions on campus or help us reach more students? In turn, for LCs, how might adding services like language learning advising or other elements that support independent learning further justify their presence on campus and help their learners? I look forward to more mutually beneficial dialogue that will emerge from the new IALLT and JASAL relationship and future collaborative works like the *Language Center Handbook.*