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Contents

Promoting Engagement in Self-Access Language Learning Through Social Connection

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Thank you for taking the time to download the latest issue of JASAL Journal, now in its fifth year of publication. This issue covers a variety of topics of interest to self-access researchers and practitioners, and three reports from recent JASAL events, our 2023 national conference, the latest JASAL Forum held at the 2023 Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) international conference, and a report from the December 2023 online student conference. One thread tying together the various papers in this issue is the theme of social connection between self-access users and its importance in reducing anxiety and promoting engagement in self-access activities. While it has long been recognized that self-access centers (SACs) function as social learning spaces (Kushida, 2020; Murray & Fujishima, 2016), the papers in this issue provide further evidence of how these social connections can be made, and the importance of their role in reducing anxiety and promoting engagement in self-access activities.

The first paper in this issue is a collaborative study between a student, **Koshun Suzuki**, and faculty member **Daniel Hooper**, into self-access anxiety at the SAC at Hakuoh University. Through a mixed-methods study involving an online survey and follow-up interviews with two student self-access center users, Suzuki and Hooper aimed to understand the students' emotional reactions to using the Learning Commons at their institution. Their study revealed the primary role of social relatedness on students' level of comfort in the space, with not only teachers but student staff playing a vital role in easing anxiety. Their findings highlight the benefit to well-being that students can gain by taking on active prosocial roles, and the knock-on effect this can have on the accessibility of self-access spaces for users.

Eric Hauser, Phillip E. Bennett, and **Daniel O. Jackson** investigate a similar topic from a different perspective, namely using conversation analysis to investigate how student staff accomplish joint attention and do sociability at the SAC service counter (Tomasello, 2003). Their detailed analysis into student interactions reveals how the service counter provides affordances for joint attention which can lead to doing sociability, and the implications this can have for student staff training.

While the first two research papers in the issue focus on the possibilities for creating social relatedness and sociability in a self-access environment, **Gerardine McCrohan, Gareth Edward Perkins and David Guillaume Billa** investigate non-attendance at a self-access center, and draw similar conclusions about the importance of social connection for sustained self-access use. The results of an online questionnaire show that social anxiety was a major factor in preventing students from engaging in self-access services and activities, along with time constraints and low linguistic competence. One source of this anxiety was not having meaningful relationships with regular SAC users, and concerns about the ability to communicate in English, especially with international students.

In the fourth research paper in this collection, **Hiro Mitsuo Hayashi** and **Bartosz Wolanski** use a survey to investigate the impact of involving student teaching assistants in a university-wide study abroad fair, and the benefits this has had for the assistants themselves and the students they engaged with through the presentations they led. Through developing presentations about their home countries, study abroad experiences and language learning experiences, teaching assistants were able to develop their autonomy and confidence in public speaking, while the students who attended the sessions reported being stimulated to take a deeper interest in foreign cultures, through the sessions they attended and the connections they made.

Tokyo International University has established a new SAC on its new Ikebukuro Campus. **George Hays** and **Kevin Mueller** report some preliminary findings from their investigation into this new facility, with particular interest into the motivations for use and the impact of a language policy change. In the new Learning Commons, the English-only rule has been relaxed and students are free to use Japanese. An online survey investigated how SAC use had changed among first year students who had moved from the Kawagoe Campus in the spring semester to the Ikebukuro Campus in the fall. They found that overall attendance exceeded the basic requirement for participation, but small differences were found in Japanese and

international student usage patterns. Japanese students were more likely to report increased attendance in the new facility, whereas average attendance by international students remained static or decreased. The possible reasons for these trends, including the role of language policy, will be investigated through user interviews.

In our final discussion of practice paper, **Joe Terantino** examines the use of AI, an increasingly hot topic in the field of language learning, and illustrates some practical considerations for SAC practitioners who may be considering the integration of an AI element into their center. Terantino also outlines concrete ways in which AI could be operationalized including supporting conversation practice, providing multilingual support, and gamifying language learning.

In the final section of this issue, you can get a sense of recent JASAL activities through the reports of three of our recent events. **Isobel Hook** gives an account of attending the JASAL National Conference at Gifu Shotoku Gakuen University in October 2023. Following that, the presenters and organisers of the JASAL Forum at JALT2023 in November last year, **Agnes Maria Francis, Yaya Yao** and **Katherine Thornton** share their experiences from the first in-person JASAL Forum in several years. Finally, **Shiira Imada**, a recently graduated student from the University of Miyazaki reflects on his participation in the online JASAL student conference, held in December 2023. Collectively, we hope these reports give a sense of how JASAL is able to provide opportunities for those passionate about self-access to get together, share experiences, and contribute to our field.

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Analyzing Self-Access Anxiety Through the Eyes of Students

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Daniel Hooper is an associate professor in the Department of English Communication at Tokyo Kasei University. He has been teaching in Japan for 18 years in a variety of contexts including primary/secondary schools, English conversation schools, and universities. His research interests include teacher and learner identity, reflective practice, self-access learning communities, and communities of practice.

Abstract

In more and more Japanese universities, self-access centers are being established to facilitate students' language learning outside of the classroom. Alongside the steady proliferation of self-access within Japan, a recent wave of research has been focusing on issues of accessibility and inclusion in self-access learning in order to ensure self-access facilities best serve the needs of the greatest possible number of students. In line with this movement, this collaborative study, conducted by a student staff member and faculty member, focuses on students' feelings of safety or anxiety while using the Language Commons (the LC), a self-access center at Hakuoh University. To understand students' emotional reactions to using the LC deeply, this study utilized a mixed-methods approach including an online survey and follow-up qualitative interviews with two students. The results showed that there are multifaceted and dynamic factors that contribute to anxiety when students use the LC. Through analysis of each data source, it was found that social relatedness had a major influence on students' degree of comfort. Especially, the existence of not only teachers, but also student staff, had a substantial role in decreasing student anxiety when interacting with others in the LC. This study suggests the importance of dialogue between both self-access users and staff in order to understand key sources of student anxiety. Furthermore, this study highlights how students taking on active prosocial roles and helping each other can increase their well-being and can contribute to the creation of more accessible spaces for all users.

日本の大学では、教室外での語学学習を促進するため、セルフアクセスセンターの設置が広まっている。同時に、多くの学生のニーズに応えるため、セルフ・アクセス学習におけるアクセシビリティとインクルージョンの問題に焦点を当てた研究が盛んに行われている。この動きに連動して、学生と教員による、白鴎大学のセルフアクセスセンターであるランゲージ・コモンズ（LC）を利用する際の学生の安心感や不安感に焦点を当てた研究を、オンライン調査と 2 名の学生へのフォローアップインタビューを含む混合研究法を用いて実施した。その結果、学生が LC を利用する際の不安には、多面的かつ動的な要因があることがわかった。各データの分析を通じて、社会的関係性が学生の感じる快適さの度合いに影響を与えていることが明らかになった。特に、学生スタッフの存在は、他者と関わる際の不安を軽減する上で大きな役割を担っていた。本研究は、学生の不安の主な要因を理解するために、利用者とスタッフの両者が対話することの重要性を示唆している。更に、学生が向社会的な役割を担い、互いに助け合うことで、より利用しやすい空間づくりに寄与できることを浮き彫りにしている。

Keywords: self-access accessibility, learner affect, language anxiety, student research, basic psychological needs

Learners are currently afforded a wealth of opportunities to engage in effective language learning both inside and outside of the classroom. Self-access learning centers (SALCs) represent one key setting within a broad "language learning environment" (Benson, 2017, p. 136) in which learners may attain high levels of linguistic proficiency even without classroom instruction. Perhaps partially due to growing recognition of this educational reality, there has been a steady increase in the number of self-access centers in Japanese universities, with Japan becoming a hotbed for self-access research in recent years (Mynard, 2016). However, despite the abundance of affordances that SALCs offer in terms of both linguistic development and social support, there are still many students who experience anxiety or feelings of resistance towards engaging in self-access language learning. In managing a SALC, we need to examine and seek to understand what factors contribute to students' negative affect in regard to self-access so that we may create more comfortable learning environments. This study focuses on the Language Commons (hereafter the LC), one SALC established in Hakuoh University in the Kanto region of central Japan. We utilize a mixed-methods approach to investigate students' feelings of safety or anxiety in using the LC and, based on student data, discuss actionable steps we can take to transform the SALC into a more accessible environment from users' perspectives.

Self-Access Learning and Learner Autonomy

Gardner and Miller (1997) defined self-access learning as "learning in which students take more responsibility for their learning than in teacher-directed settings" (p. xvii). An early definition of self-access by Sheerin (1991), states that it is "a way of describing materials that are designed and organized in such a way that students can select and work on tasks on their own" (p. 143). Indeed, congruent with this definition, SALCs often provide many resources such as audio, video, and computer workstations (Benson, 2011). However, due to the widespread availability of mobile internet access and the vast amount of free online language learning materials at learners' fingertips, the idea that learners need to physically come to a self-access center to get books or DVDs seems increasingly antiquated (Reinders, 2012; Thornton, 2021). Consequently, SALC environments and functions have shifted in scope since Sheerin's (1991) original definition and are now providing opportunities and support for social learning. Mynard (2016) affirms the new social role that SALCs have evolved into, claiming that they have become "social hubs where students naturally come for social, emotional, and learning support" (p. 336). Reflecting this, modern SALCs commonly also feature areas for group work, a help desk, and even advising services with learners able to use these spaces and gain social support any time they wish (Benson, 2011). In more recent

theoretical work into the role of self-access, a number of studies conducted at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) (Asta & Mynard, 2018; Shelton-Strong, 2020; Watkins, 2022; Yarwood et al., 2019) have drawn upon a self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017) (SDT) framework. These studies have discussed how SALC facilities represent an educational setting that facilitates the satisfaction of learners' basic psychological needs (BPNs) of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (see Figure 1) – fundamental prerequisites for intrinsic motivation and human thriving.

Figure 1

The Three BPNs (Watkins and Hooper, 2023, p. 41)

This SDT-informed research has contributed to the evolution of recent perspectives on the role of self-access, with Mynard (2019) claiming "[a] self-access center should be viewed as an 'autonomy supportive' place where learners can feel connected to people and have a sense of belongingness (i.e. relatedness), autonomy, and competence" (p. 16).

The shift from SALC as materials repository to SALC as social hub reflects a recent theoretical emphasis on the potentially vital role of social connection in the development of learner autonomy. This stands in contrast to a common misconception of learner autonomy being analogous to "learning in isolation" or "independent learning" (Hooper, 2021, p. 211). Based on this misinterpretation, some educators or learners may believe that autonomous learning means that learners have to engage in independent study, and not receive help from

other people such as friends or teachers. On the contrary, learner autonomy is now understood as being stimulated by social interaction, social dialogue, and interdependent agency (Mynard, 2016). Mynard's claim regarding the importance of social connection in fostering autonomy has been supported in various existing studies. A longitudinal ethnographic study by Murray et al. (2014) examined social interaction and agency in autonomous language learning within a university SALC. Based on written language learning histories, interviews, participant observation, and TOEIC score monitoring, their findings revealed the SALC to be an affordance-rich environment where learners could exercise their agency in a safe space, engage in collaborative problem-solving, and interact within their *zone of proximal development*–the zone between what a learner can do without help and what they can achieve with guidance and support (Vygotsky, 1978). The researchers asserted that the SALC facilitated autonomy through both individual and social elements, and emphasized the importance of recognizing the impact of the individual/social interplay within autonomous language learning.

Another illustrative study, albeit outside of a self-access setting, was conducted by Yashima (2014) who utilized SDT to examine the motivational and attitudinal states of Japanese high school English learners in the context of a two-and-a-half-year Model United Nations project (McIntosh, 2001). This mixed-methods study involved questionnaires assessing intrinsic motivation and the satisfaction of BPNs, followed by qualitative interviews with seven participants. Yashima discovered a strong correlation between relatedness to others and autonomy, emphasizing learners' reliance on trusted individuals for support. Based on her data, Yashima coined the term "autonomous dependency" (p. 60), highlighting the positive impact of learners' agentic decision to depend on others while pursuing personal language learning goals. Yashima's study provides yet more evidence challenging the notion of autonomy as isolated independence, emphasizing the role of social interaction and interdependence in autonomy development. As has been established in existing research, social connections between self-access users strengthen their capacity for autonomous learning and can thus be viewed as a crucial aspect of contemporary SALC management.

Anxiety and Safety in Self-Access Learning

As a SALC is a space in which students can learn autonomously, there are likely to be various motivations and purposes for students to go there depending on their language learning histories and present/future needs. Furthermore, based on their past or present circumstances and future goals, each individual student is likely to experience different

complex and dynamically-changing feelings such as tension, anxiety, or comfort when entering a self-access space. To explore this issue, utilizing both survey and interview data, Kushida (2018) investigated the motivation of students who attended a conversation center within the SALC at KUIS. In this investigation, 38.4% of students responded that they felt anxiety about using the conversation center. Kushida identified four salient themes in terms of factors that caused anxiety in users of conversation-oriented facilities within the SALC.

1. Having no confidence in own oral English proficiency.
2. Regardless of English skills, feeling uncomfortable about meeting and communicating with people they do not know.
3. Experiencing low confidence when coming to talk to the (on-duty) teacher alone. Conversely, coming with friends helped them feel more secure.
4. The viability of each conversation topic being dependent on students' existing knowledge and ideas. Depending on the topic, students may feel anxious because they have no ideas or opinions to express.

As illustrated above, there are many factors influencing why students may experience anxiety in a SALC including their own perceived competencies, social relationships, and the like. Therefore, the relatively high occurrence of student anxiety from Kushida's results reveals that even established and well-funded self-access centers like the one at KUIS still need to continue to focus on providing effective support for SALC users' anxiety management.

In another frequently cited study, Gillies (2010) interviewed a range of participants in Hiroshima Bunkyo University's English Communication Center to examine factors influencing whether students use the self-access center or not. From the interview data, Gillies determined two main factors impacting students' hesitation to use the self-access center.

1. While students used the SALC, they felt that the space was "not in Japan" because there were "native-speakers"[1] and students there that they could speak English with. For the students lacking confidence in their communicative abilities in spite of having sufficient English skills, they felt anxious about this environment.
2. Communities in SALCs are often already determined or formed, so students who do not often use the center may feel discomfort due to unfamiliarity and a lack of belongingness. Several students did not have existing relationships with other teachers and SALC users, so it was hard for them to make the first step in joining interactions. Gillies's study reinforced how social factors have a considerable

influence on students' motivation for self-access use and highlighted how attempting to join an already-formed community could lead to anxiety.

Congruent with Gillies's study, Yamamoto and Imamura (2020) discussed similar issues surrounding belongingness in relation to "learner-led learning communities" (p. 362). In their study, they conducted interviews with participants of two self-access social learning groups - the English Lounge and Study Buddies - in the SALC at KUIS. Through their interviews, they identified that some participants hesitated to use these services because they felt unable to join the pre-formed communities there. Thus, from the above studies, we can see that although social factors and interaction can promote learner autonomy, some self-access users' perceptions of pre-formed communities being inaccessible can increase their anxiety.

Interventions to Manage Student Anxiety in SALCs

In the preceding section, we examined what factors may contribute to anxiety among self-access center users. Therefore, one could argue that one priority within any self-access center needs to be implementing concrete interventions in order to facilitate self-access use despite users' anxiety.

Mynard et al. (2020) considered how SALCs could be made more accessible in order to better support students. They suggested several interventions based on identity, communities of practice, and user beliefs:

1. Sharing findings with students and faculty about self-access users' emotions and how they manage them.
2. Sharing case studies with students to enhance consciousness of commonly-experienced feelings and different identities when they use a SALC.
3. Creating opportunities for student ownership within SALC communities of practice and for users to participate on varying levels of engagement (central/active/peripheral). Giving students room for agency and support in creating their own communities.
4. Creating opportunities to raise users' awareness of their self-beliefs. By realizing what their own self-beliefs are, as well as which beliefs may be misaligned or debilitative, students can more effectively work towards their ideal future visions.

This research implies that understanding and learning to accommodate students' various emotional reactions is necessary to effectively manage SALCs. Furthermore, in line with Mynard et al. (2020), another way to enhance students' ownership within SALCs is encouraging them not simply being the *subjects*, but being the *producers* of research. This

type of collaborative student-SALC practitioner research has already resulted in a number of publications (Chen & Mynard, 2018; Ota & Yamamoto, 2018; Takada, 2018) that offer valuable emic insights into the lived experiences of SALC users and the ways in which they engage with SALC-based learning affordances and constraints. A recognition of students not as mere consumers, but as active contributors to SALC environments is further legitimized and supported through initiatives such as the Japan Association for Self-Access Learning Student Conference (https://jasalorg.com/7th-jasal-student-conference-online/). As Suzuki, a SALC student staff member, both initiated this research and acted as a co-researcher throughout the entirety of the present study, we also hope to contribute to what we see as a positive movement within SALCs enhancing student ownership by increasing the depth of faculty/student research collaboration.

Methodology

Key Concepts and Research Question

In order to better clarify the focus of the present study, it is important to spell out our understanding of the central concept of anxiety. Although three anxiety types have been identified in the existing literature–trait, situation-specific, and state–(Spielberger, 1983) in this study we concentrate specifically on situation-specific anxiety (consistently recurring over time, but limited to certain situations). This determination was based on the fact that we are focusing on a very specific educational environment, i.e., a SALC, distinct from familiar classroom learning that may cause learners to feel alienated or displaced (Murray & Fujishima, 2016) and that situation-specific anxiety is widely recognized as the anxiety type corresponding most closely to foreign language anxiety (FLA) (Luo, 2013). FLA has been identified as an area of concern for numerous SALC users, and generally tends to manifest itself in two distinct forms: 1) *communication apprehension* - anxiety over the ability to effectively express oneself in the target language (Horwitz, 2000) and 2) *fear of negative evaluation by others* such as peers or teachers (Curry, 2014). Of course, the notion of completely removing anxiety from a given educational setting is unrealistic and may even be undesirable due to the potentially-facilitative effects of anxiety in certain situations or for learners with certain motivational orientations (Horwitz, 2010; Papi & Teimouri, 2014). However, based on examples within SALC-based studies of learners being deterred from SALC use altogether due to anxiety, we feel that examining causes of anxiety and ways in which it may be managed (Curry, 2014; MacDonald & Thompson, 2019) is a worthy research focus. Furthermore, environments that afford *psychological safety* where students can "tak[e]

initiative, interact, and speak out their ideas without being embarrassed, humiliated, and punished" (Tu, 2021, p. 2) have been found to be closely linked to enhanced innovation, cooperation, and engagement (Newman et al., 2017). Therefore, in this study, we investigate how SALC-related situation-specific anxiety may be intensified or mitigated among LC users at Hakuoh University. As such, we intend to address the following research question:

"What factors contribute to LC users' feelings of safety or anxiety in the LC?"

Data Collection

To understand students' anxiety when using SALCs more closely, this study featured a mixed-methods design. First, a questionnaire for LC participants was designed. Questions were written in Japanese and were all multiple choice. The quantitative survey featured seven descriptive and opinion categorical questions (Appendix A). Questions focused both on participant demographics (school year, academic major, frequency of LC attendance, motivation for LC attendance) and impressions of the LC (degree of and reasons for anxiety or comfort). These questions were checked by peers that were representative of the target respondent demographic (Japanese university students) to mitigate any ambiguous or confusingly-worded items. This survey was carried out from May 29 to June 2, 2023 and distributed via Google Forms to a large number of LC users, thanks to the cooperation of LC administrative and student staff. Respondents answered during lunchtime chat in the LC or during their regular English classes. In total, 83 responses were collected. No identifying information (name, student number) was required when completing the Google Form apart from those who volunteered to participate in the interview phase of the study. Furthermore, all students were informed that responding to the questionnaire was completely voluntary and that the data in the Google Form would be deleted on completion of the study.

Subsequently, 27 participants from the respondents of the questionnaire agreed to participate in follow-up qualitative semi-structured interviews. In order to analyze various aspects of positive and negative self-access experience, two students were selected via criterion sampling as they responded that using the LC was generally comfortable or uncomfortable for them respectively. Limiting the number of interview participants to two was a practical decision influenced by the fact that Suzuki was a student at the time of the study who was also engaged in examinations for his teaching license. Furthermore, Hooper was only an adjunct faculty member who visited the campus once a week, and we therefore determined that this number of interviews would be manageable in terms of both data collection and analysis. The interviews took place on July 13 and 14, 2023.

One student (Student A) was a first-year student who primarily answered that the LC

was a comfortable space, whereas the other student (Student B) was a third-year student who responded that the LC participation was predominantly an anxiety-inducing experience. All interviews were conducted in Japanese by Suzuki and consisted of nine open-ended questions (Appendix B) focusing on various topics including experiences of anxiety or comfort in the LC and interactions with students or teachers. Participants provided informed consent for their data to be used in this study and they were assured that their confidentiality would be protected. The interviews were audio recorded for transcription later. In terms of the interview process, small talk was initially used to help the interviewee relax, and the purpose and content of the interview were explained. Each interview lasted approximately twenty minutes, and each participant received a five-hundred-yen library card as a token of gratitude for their participation. The fact that Suzuki was a member of the LC student staff at the time of the interviews must be taken into account when examining our results and discussion as this likely impacted all the data we received and in particular the interview data. All interview excerpts included in this article were translated from their original Japanese into English by the research team.

Data Analysis

For the questionnaire results, the data were summarized in graphs, and discussed with two university/LC faculty members as a means of investigator triangulation (Rothbauer, 2008) to enhance the credibility of our findings. The interviews were transcribed and the data subsequently analyzed via inductive reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All thematic codes were discussed and agreed upon by both researchers and then organized into categories. In total, the research team identified eight salient categories (see Table 1).

Table 1

Categories Identified from the Interview Data

Category	Example
Positive experience	"I was able to talk in English about things that I would not normally be able to talk about with my teachers, so I feel that it was a great experience in terms of studying English and in terms of human relations." (Student A)
Negative experience	"I felt uneasy because everyone draws attention to the fact that I am an English education major." (Student B)
Language proficiency	"I'm very worried about whether I can speak good English when I come to the LC, and whether I can understand what the other person is saying and respond accordingly." (Student B)

Social factors	"I don't feel too anxious about talking to people I meet for the first time, so I didn't feel negative about it, but as I mentioned earlier, I felt that the LC was good because it allowed me to expand my network with various people." (Student A)
"Native"/ foreign teachers or students	"Since the other person was a native speaker, I was worried about whether my English would be understood, whether the English I was speaking that I thought was right was being conveyed incorrectly." (Student B)
Japanese staff/peers	"In relation to students, I had a lot of classmates, so I talked with people I knew. In Japanese, we always talk together, but I enjoyed being able to communicate in different ways like when we speak in English." (Student B)
Facilities/environment	"I also feel comfortable with the fact that the facilities are substantial. For example, there are yogibos [beanbags] where you can relax and talk with each other, there is pronunciation software where you can improve your pronunciation, and on Wednesdays you have the opportunity to talk with teachers, so if you want, you can improve your level even more." (Student A)
Atmosphere	"My first impression was that the LC was a valuable opportunity to learn English in a relaxed way." (Student A)

The research team subsequently analyzed relationships between these categories through collaborative dialogue and interpreted the data taking into account existing literature. Finally, broad themes were devised based on each researcher revisiting both the original data and our identified categories individually, and later reconvening to discuss any patterns that we determined to be consistent with the two participants' experiences of anxiety or comfort within the LC. These co-constructed themes will form the skeleton for the following section:

1. Social factors impacting anxiety or comfort
2. Role of student staff

Findings and Discussion

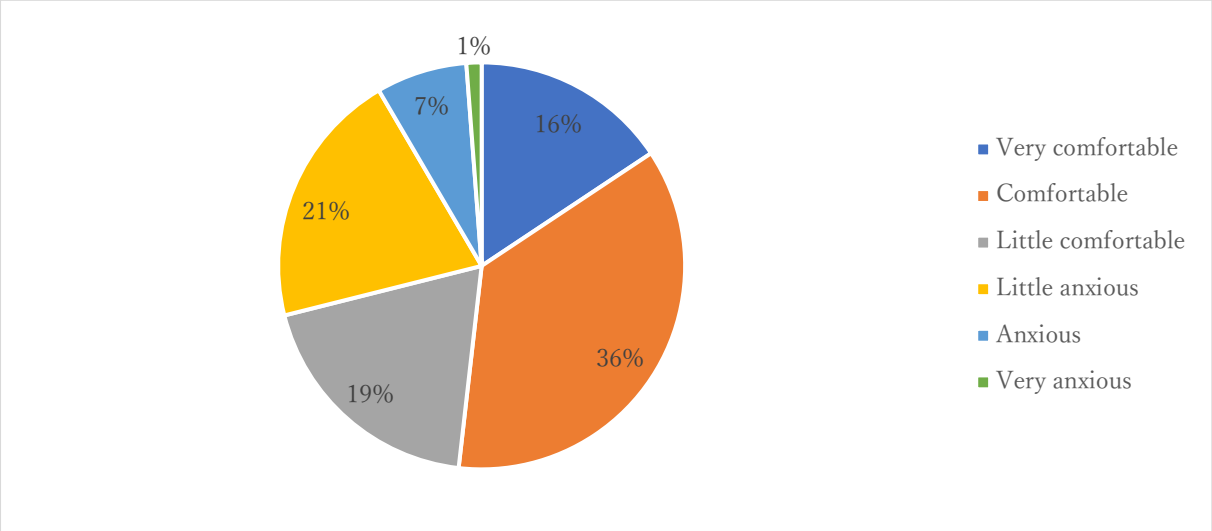
In this section, we will examine and discuss the questionnaire responses and interview data, and will describe implications from these results.

Social Factors Impacting Anxiety or Comfort

The questionnaire responses indicated that many students believed that the LC was a comfortable space (see Figure 2). Over 70% of students stated that they felt a little to very comfortable in the LC, whereas the remaining approximately 30% of respondents answered that attending the LC made them feel from little to very anxious.

Figure 2

To What Extent Do You Feel Comfortable or Anxious in the LC?



According to the data, almost 30% of students expressed some level of anxiety, with a further 19% only feeling "a little comfortable," which leads us to think that they perhaps require extra support. In terms of why participation in the LC made students feel comfortable or uncomfortable, our results illustrate that there are various factors that impact students' psychological safety (see Figures 3 and 4).

Figure 3

Why Do You Think the LC Feels Comfortable?

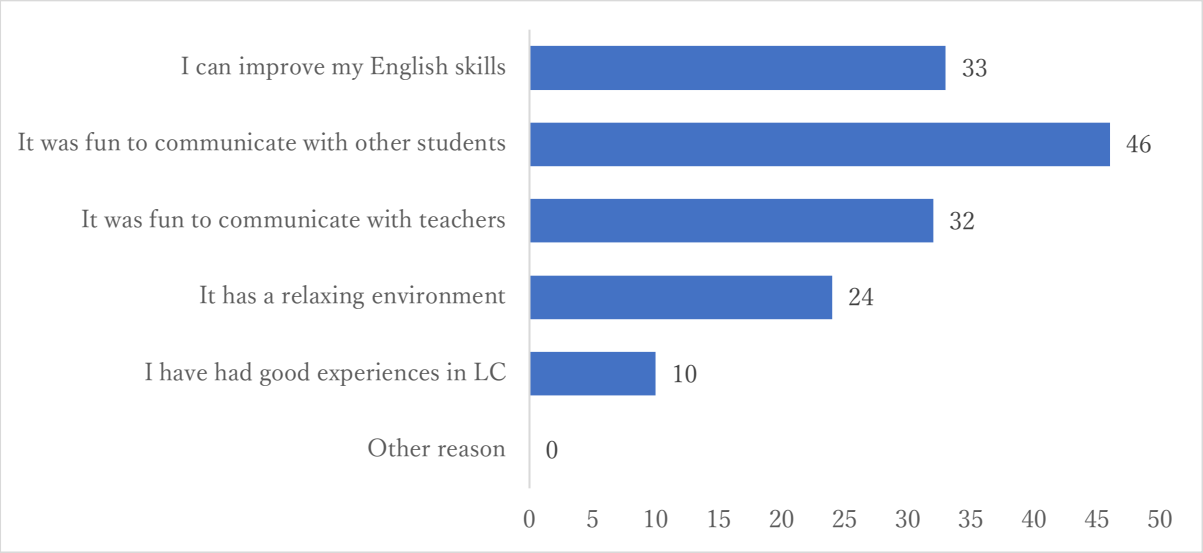
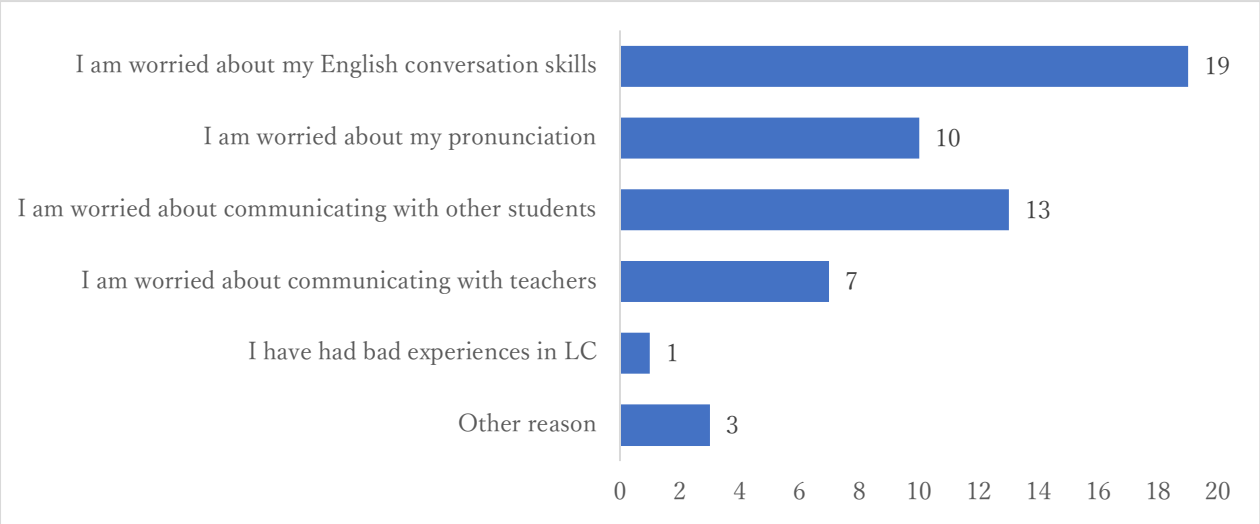


Figure 4

Why Do You Think the LC Makes You Feel Anxious?



In particular, self-efficacy beliefs, social factors such as communicating with other students or teachers, and the presence of a relaxing environment seem to have a considerable influence on whether students feel safe or insecure within the self-access space.

The survey data reveal that the majority of respondents recognize the value of the LC as a place to develop their English proficiency (33 responses) and appear keen to communicate with both peers (46 responses) and teachers (32 responses). Conversely, Figure 3 highlights that a key cause of FLA among respondents was a lack of confidence in their conversation skills (19 responses) and pronunciation (11 responses). This, along with anxiety about communicating with other students (13 responses), may have been a manifestation of communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation by others, or both. These survey results represented a starting point for understanding factors underpinning anxiety in the LC, but it was apparent that examining student experience more deeply through our qualitative data would be necessary to grasp the positive and negative affect that LC users might be experiencing in the space. Indeed, from the two interviews, we found that various kinds of social factors strongly influenced students' sense of emotional wellbeing and motivation. Student A told us about his experiences and feelings when interacting with "native speaker" teachers.

> At the LC, we have native-speaking teachers several times a week, and by talking with them, I am able to learn about their culture and their values. I believe that these experiences will expand my own sense of values and perspective on the world. (Student A)

Regarding his interaction with "native speaker" teachers, Student A stated that he enjoyed conversations with them and that this was the main purpose behind him coming to the LC each time. For him, participating in the LC, in this instance, seemed to be linked to his desire to experience the "foreign country" feeling (Gillies, 2010, p. 199) of a self-access center.

Another area of social interaction that featured in the interview data was the role of friends. Student B explained the importance to him of communicating with friends as a way of helping him feel comfortable when using English in the LC.

> At that time, when I don't understand a question or when I wonder, "Is this correct?" As I say something, I can confirm it with my friends. This means that I feel reassured when my friends are there.
> (Student B)

As can be seen from the above statement, Student B felt that communicating with friends mitigated communication apprehension in the LC. This perspective highlights the potential value that English interaction scaffolded by peers can have in creating a positive learning cycle. Students can experience higher psychological safety and feelings of competence when receiving peer support which then leads to increased participation in the conversation practice sessions. This increased participation then likely leads to them developing their communicative ability over time. Conversely, Student B described his feelings of anxiety when talking with students from other communities.

> There is pressure from being an English education major… Because I have a certain level of English ability and have decided to come to the LC, if I can't speak English well or clearly understand someone else's English, I lose confidence and feel embarrassed.
> (Student B)

Student B's comments reveal the pressure and anxiety he felt from communicating with students he does not know. Furthermore, this general social pressure was exacerbated due to his status as an English education major. His *reflexive identity* (Benson et al., 2013)–his view of himself–as a student majoring in English caused him to worry about the

perspectives of other students because he perceived that they would assume that his English fluency or pronunciation would be much better than theirs. These data suggest that individual students' backgrounds and the fear of negative evaluation by others can strongly affect self-access users' feelings. In the LC, various student communities can mix, meet teachers and other students, enjoy interacting with each other, learn about English and cultures together, and the like. However, when talking with other students in English, some students may also feel pressure and lose confidence due to what they imagine other students are thinking of them. This finding is similar to the phenomenon discussed by Mynard (2020) where *senpai* (senior) students felt pressure and even shame from speaking English in front of their *kōhai* (juniors) because they believed that their English was expected to be a higher level.

The Role of Student Staff

In the previous section, we looked at the influence of a variety of social factors on participation and anxiety in the LC. Related to these findings, *relatedness* (Ryan & Deci, 2017) appeared to be an important factor tied to students' feelings of comfort or discomfort while participating in LC activities. One key way in which users' relatedness was satisfied within the LC was through assistance provided by student staff.

> When I first came to the LC, because I previously had few opportunities to speak English, I felt anxious. But at that time, when there was something I didn't understand, the staff jumped in and helped me. I remember them really helping me. (Student A)

Student A's experience implies that the student staff have an important role in managing a SALC and helping new attendees feel welcome. Compared to the classroom, where students generally focus on teachers as the primary source of knowledge and support, student staff members are closer to self-access users' zones of proximal development (ZPDs) (Vygotsky, 1978) because their English level and learning experiences are more similar. In addition, student staff can act as "near-peer role models" (Murphey, 1998) to other students. Murphey & Arao (2001) have shown that students can identify with near-peer role models, feel increased motivation, and develop more positive learning beliefs as a result. Finally, through assisting new self-access users, student staff are afforded tangible opportunities to contribute to a SALC and feel increased ownership of that space.

From our interviews, SALC student staff were also found to help with not just linguistic, but also social support as they assisted students anxious about talking with new

people. Student B related an uncomfortable experience when he came to the LC alone.

> When I came alone and there were some other people from other majors, I felt like I was left out of the group because I was trying to engage them in conversation, but they were just talking between themselves. It was like it was me versus a group of several people… I did not know what kind of people they were, so I was worried that they would not give me a proper answer when I asked for help.
> (Student B)

Although creating and joining student communities can enhance learner-led learning (Yamamoto & Imamura, 2020), some students are likely to feel anxious when first talking with other students they do not know. Student staff can help SALC users to negotiate this awkwardness, acting as proactive intermediaries who socialize newcomers and chip away at social barriers inherent in preformed communities. Although not strictly student staff, an additional example of peer leadership and scaffolding in action can be seen in Lyon (2020) as she shows how Kokon, a social learning space user, would actively engage and involve students feeling intimidated about joining their group. Furthermore, supporting each student can create opportunities for *prosociality*–helping others–and these prosocial acts can help to satisfy the BPNs of both regular participants and student staff (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). By helping each student through this social *scaffolding* (Bruner, 1983), students can experience lower anxiety, and scaffolding can expand students' ZPDs (Kato & Yamashita, 2021). Creating an environment in which students can ask for help from others leads to a situation where students feel a SALC is a psychologically safe place for them to learn.

Conclusion

This student staff/faculty collaborative study sought to explore the reasons behind SALC users' feelings of anxiety or safety. Based on both questionnaire and interview data, we identified that, in line with existing studies (Gillies, 2010; Kushida, 2018; Yamamoto & Imamura, 2020), social factors have a potentially pivotal impact on how learners perceive the degree of psychological safety in a SALC. Situation-specific anxiety within the LC also manifested itself in terms of *communication apprehension* and *fear of negative evaluation by others*, as both survey and interview data indicated that low self-efficacy and social comparison with peers appeared to be salient issues. Conversely, when SALC users' need for relatedness was satisfied through support from friends or guidance by teachers or student

staff, they felt more secure and experienced less communication apprehension. In particular, the presence of SALC student staff appears to be one promising means of keeping students' situation-specific anxiety at manageable levels and scaffolding learners' social engagement. Student staff can also represent relatable role models for new SALC users who can soften those sometimes-excruciating first steps into a community. We also hope that this study, as an example of student-faculty collaboration, can contribute to the growing body of student-led SALC research in our field (Chen & Mynard, 2018; Ota & Yamamoto, 2018; Takada, 2018). The focus of this study (student anxiety) was raised by a student staff member (Suzuki), who, with the assistance of faculty (Hooper), was able to gain deeper insight into the recurring problems experienced within a local SALC community of practice (Wenger, 1998) and work towards enacting positive change in that space. We hope that our findings can contribute in some way to the development of SALCs as BPN-satisfying "social hubs" (Mynard, 2016, p. 336) and also stimulate more collaborative research between students and faculty, thus making SALC evolution a truly co-constructed and jointly-owned process.

Notes

1. The term "native speaker" is displayed in quote marks in this article duetoits socially-constructed and contestable nature (Moussu & Llurda, 2008).

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Appendix A

LC survey

ランゲージコモンズの利用者が安心または不安に感じる要因についてのアンケート（What factors contribute to self-access center users' feelings of safety or anxiety?）

本アンケートにご協力いただきありがとうございます。

白鴎大学教育学部英語教育専攻4年の鈴木宏駿です。

私は現在、卒業研究において、セルフアクセスセンター（Self-access Center：本学のランゲージコモンズのことを示します）の利用者がどの程度、快適または不安に感じるかについて、研究を行っています。

この研究のデータ集計のために、本学のランゲージコモンズ（以下、LCと称します）利用者を対象にアンケート調査を実施させていただきます。ご協力お願いいたします。

ご不明な点などがあれば、以下の連絡先まで、お問い合わせください。よろしくお願いします。

* Indicates required question

1. (1) あなたの学年を教えてください。 *
Please tell us your school year.

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ 1年生 (1st year)
- ◯ 2年生 (2nd year)
- ◯ 3年生 (3rd year)
- ◯ 4年生 (4th year)

2. (2) あなたの学部・専攻を教えてください。 *
Please tell us your faculty/major.

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ 英語教育専攻 (English Education)
- ◯ 児童教育専攻 (Child Education)
- ◯ スポーツ健康専攻 (Sports and Health)
- ◯ 心理学専攻 (Psychology)
- ◯ 経営学部 (Business)
- ◯ 法学部 (Law)

3. (3) ランゲージコモンズを一度でも利用したことがありますか？ *
（利用経験がない場合は調査をお断りさせていただくことがあります。）
Have you ever used the Language Commons before? (If you have never used the Language Commons, we cannot accept your responses and ask that you do not complete the questionnaire.)

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ はい (Yes)

ランゲージコモンズ（以下：LC）の利用頻度、利用目的について (Frequency and purpose of Language Commons (hereafter LC) use)

4. (4) 平均的にどのくらいの頻度でLCを利用していますか？ *
On average, how often do you come to the LC?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ 週3回程度、またはそれ以上 (Three times a week or more)
- ◯ 週2回程度 (Twice a week)
- ◯ 週1回程度 (Once a week)
- ◯ 1カ月に1回, もしくは2回程度 (Once or twice a month)
- ◯ 2か月に1回程度、またはそれ以下 (Once every two months or less)

5. (5) LCを利用する主な目的を教えてください。【複数選択可】 *
What is your purpose for coming to the LC? (Check all boxes that apply)

Check all that apply.

- ☐ 自身の英語力を向上させるため (To improve my English ability)
- ☐ 他の学生と交流するため (To interact with other students)
- ☐ 先生方と交流するため (To interact with teachers)
- ☐ 発音ステーション（PC）を利用するため (To use the pronunciation stations (PCs))
- ☐ 授業の課題のため (Because of homework assignments from class)
- ☐ その他 (Other)

6. ※その他を選択した方のみ、ご回答ください。
出来る限り、その他の理由を記入してください。
If you selected "Other", please state your purpose for attending the LC here.

LCを利用する際、どの程度、快適または不安に感じるかについて (Your degree of anxiety or comfort when attending the LC)

7. (6) LC をどの程度、快適または不安に感じますか? *
あなたの気持ちに最も近い番号を選んでください。
（次のセクションはこの質問の選択肢によって内容が異なります。）
To what extent do you feel comfortable or anxious in the LC? Please choose the number that most closely reflects your feelings. (The next section will depend on your response to this question.)

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ ① かなり快適 (Very comfortable) *Skip to question 8*
- ◯ ② 快適 (Comfortable) *Skip to question 8*
- ◯ ③ 少し快適 (A little comfortable) *Skip to question 8*
- ◯ ④ 少し不安 (A little anxious) *Skip to question 10*
- ◯ ⑤ 不安 (Anxious) *Skip to question 10*
- ◯ ⑥ かなり不安 (Very anxious) *Skip to question 10*

LCを快適に感じる理由について (Feeling comfortable in the LC)

【上記の設問で①～③を選択した方のみ、ご回答ください。】
(If you responded 1-3 to the previous question, please answer this section)

8. (7) LCを快適に感じるのはなぜですか。【複数選択可】 *
Why do you think the LC feels comfortable?
(Check all boxes that apply)

Check all that apply.

- ☐ 自身の英語力を高めることができるから (I can improve my English skills)
- ☐ 他学生とのコミュニケーションが楽しかったから (It was fun to communicate with other students)
- ☐ 先生方とのコミュニケーションが楽しかったから (It was fun to communicate with teachers)
- ☐ リラックスできる環境だから (It has a relaxing environment)
- ☐ LC内での良い経験があったから (I have had good experiences in the LC)
- ☐ その他 (Other)

9. ※その他を選択した方のみ、ご回答ください。
出来る限り、その他の理由を記入してください。
If you selected "Other", please state your reason for feeling comfortable in the LC here.

Skip to question 12

LCを不安に感じる理由について (Feeling anxious in the LC)

【上記の設問（6）で④～⑥を選択した方のみ、ご回答ください。】
(If you responded 4-6 to the previous question, please answer this section)

10. (7) LCを不安に感じるのはなぜですか。【複数選択可】 *
Why do you think the LC makes you feel anxious?
(Check all boxes that apply)

Check all that apply.

- ☐ 自身の英語力（コミュニケーション能力等）に不安があったから (I am worried about my English conversation skills)
- ☐ 英語の発音に不安があったから (I am worried about my pronunciation)
- ☐ 他学生とのコミュニケーションが不安だったから (I am worried about communicating with other students)
- ☐ 先生方とのコミュニケーションが不安だったから (I am worrried about communicating with teachers)
- ☐ LC内であまり良い経験がなかったから (I have had bad experiences in the LC)
- ☐ その他 (Other)

11. ※その他を選択した方のみ、ご回答ください。
出来る限り、その他の理由を記入してください。
If you selected "Other", please state your reason for feeling anxious in the LC here.

Appendix B

Interview questions

l. LC にくる主な目的は何ですか。(What is your main purpose for attending the LC?)

2. LC に初めて参加した時、どれくらい不安に感じましたか。(How anxious did you feel when you first attended the LC?)

3. はじめて LC に来た時、LC の雰囲気をどのように感じましたか。(How did you feel about the LC's atmosphere when you first attended?)

4. LC を不安に感じるのはなぜですか。(What makes you feel anxious in the LC?)

5. LC を快適に感じるのはなぜですか。(What makes you feel comfortable in the LC?)

6. LC に参加する中で、自身の気持ちや不安に何か変化はありましたか。(Did your feelings or anxiety change at all while participating in the LC?)

7. 他の学部、学年の学生と交流することは楽しいですか。何か不安はありますか。(Is it fun for you to interact with students from different departments or grades? Do you feel any anxiety?)

8. 先生方と交流することは楽しいですか。何か不安はありますか。(Is it fun for you to interact with teachers? Do you feel any anxiety?)

9. LC での忘れられない経験や思い出はありますか。（よい経験 or よくない経験）(What are your most memorable experiences and memories from the LC? (Positive or negative experiences))

Sociability and Joint Attention at the SALC Service Counter

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Abstract

Drawing on several hours of videorecorded data at the service counter of a Self-Access Learning Center (SALC), this paper looks at how the accomplishment of joint attention can provide a framework for doing sociability. After defining what is meant by *doing sociability*, the concept and importance of joint attention, including the importance of physical space for specific ways that it affords jointly attending to something, is discussed. The research setting, data collection, and data transcription are then described. Through the use of conversation analysis and transcripts designed to show both talk and embodied conduct, two examples are presented and analyzed of interaction at the service counter in which the participants' accomplishment of joint attention to an object provides a framework for doing sociability. The paper ends with a discussion of 1) how the physical space of the service counter affords joint attention in specific ways; 2) how norms of language use at the service counter afford doing sociability, including doing sociability within a framework of joint attention; and 3) implications of this research for self-access learning centers.

概要

本稿では、自律学習施設（SALC）のサービス・カウンターで録画された数時間のデータを基に、共同注意（joint attention）を達成することが、「社交性をする」（doing sociability）という行為のための枠組みをどのようにもたらすかを明らかにする。「社交性をする」ことの意味を定義した後、共同注意の概念と重要性について、特定の仕方で対象に共同で注意を向けることを可能にする物理的空間の重要性を含めて議論する。次に、研究対象、データ、データの文字化について説明する。会話分析と、発語と身体動作の双方を示すように設計されたトランスクリプトの使用を通じて、サービス・カウンターにおいて対象に対する参加者の共同注意の達成が「社交性をする」ための枠組みをもたらす例を二つ提示し分析を行う。最後に、１）サービス・カウンターの物理的空間が特定の仕方での共同注意の達成をどのように可能にするか、２）共同注意の枠組み内で「社交性をする」ことを含め、サービス・カウンターでの言語使用の規範が「社交性をする」ことをどのように可能にするのか、３）この研究の自律学習施設に与える影響を議論する。

Keywords: affordance, conversation analysis, joint attention, second language interaction, sociability

In this paper, we consider how the accomplishment of *joint attention* to an object in interaction between student staff (SALCers) and student users at a Japanese university Self-Access Learning Center (SALC) service counter can provide a framework for *doing sociability*. At the SALC service counter, SALCers and student users are expected to use English with one another. Often, the interaction that occurs between SALCers and student users is limited to relatively simple service transactions.[1] Occasionally, though, participants in interaction at this service counter do more than engage in a service transaction, that is, they engage in more casual or friendly conversation, while also maintaining their use of English. Such friendly conversation may occur within a context of joint attention to some object. That is, there seems to sometimes be a connection between such joint attention and friendly conversation, or what we are calling doing sociability. By *doing sociability*,[2] we mean interacting in a friendly manner with (a) presumably relatively unacquainted other(s), with this friendly interaction not being directly oriented to any agreed-upon goal. The interaction can be understood as interaction for the sake of being friendly or sociable, or as interaction for the sake of interaction. In the context of the SALC service counter, this also means that it is not directly related to the provision or reception of SALC-related services, though, as will be shown below, it may be intertwined with a service transaction which is directly related to these services.

A concept that is basic for the analysis presented below is *joint attention*, referring to an ability that emerges in early childhood and provides a foundation for human development (Tomasello, 2003, 2019) and for human interaction more generally (Kidwell & Zimmerman, 2007). Based on the assumption that language learning is not merely a matter of innate abilities, Tomasello (2003) observed that, from around nine months of age, children begin to interact *triadically*. That is, they become capable of "social interaction mediated by an object in which both participants constantly monitor each other's attention both to the object and to themselves" (pp. 21-22). In joint attentional frames, which are embedded in communicative situations that make an adult's intended meaning clear, children come to understand linguistic resources for referring to objects and events. Tomasello proposed that such intention-reading skills, alongside pattern-finding skills (e.g., statistical learning ability), are the only requirements for constructing a language.

In Tomasello's account, joint attention involves not only shared attention to an object, which, for example, can be observed when two people gaze at the same object in a non-coordinated way, but also attention to the other's attention to the object, which can be said to also involve a grasp or awareness of the other's intentions. Furthermore, joint attention is a complex skill in at least two ways. First, the focus of joint attention can be objects, events, or mental states, although the extent to which attention is perceivable and intentions can be gauged in each case varies. Secondly, this type of attention is *recursive*. That is, one can attend to another's attention to one's own attention. In later writing, Tomasello (2019) expanded the case for joint attention by explaining how its early emergence provides a foundation for communication, learning, and cooperation, and ultimately leads to the development of rationality and morality. This view is supported by Kidwell and Zimmerman's (2007) conversation analytic research on a quite different demographic to the current study: children, between 12 and 30 months old, who were interacting with other children and adults at a daycare facility. This research illustrated how children not only show objects to others, but also how

they find sequential locations within ongoing interaction to attract another's attention and how they treat another's response to being shown an object as adequate or not. Even prior to the emergence of language, these children thus engage in practices that organize their own and others' attention.

Scholars such as Gallagher (2011) have pointed out that adults frequently use embodied interaction to understand intentions and accomplish real-world tasks. According to this ecological perspective, one does not need direct access to another's mental state to grasp another's intentions and to engage in joint action, as long as affordances (Gibson, 1986) provided by the context make norms for interaction transparent. To illustrate, Gallagher referred to Merleau-Ponty's (1983) discussion of how football players understand each other's intentions and actions according to the layout of the field. Therefore, joint attention can be accounted for in terms of context, perception, and movement—without direct reference to individual cognition. As Kidwell and Zimmerman (2007) put it, intentionality "can be located in the visible practices of participants" (p. 594). Finally, these visible practices are always found within concrete physical space, which is included within this ecological perspective as providing affordances for joint attention. Drawing on this ecological perspective, in the analysis below we look at 1) how the physical space of the SALC service counter, including objects within this space, affords the accomplishment of joint attention and 2) how this can provide a framework for doing sociability.

Although we are looking at how joint attention provides a framework for doing sociability, we are not claiming that joint attention always involves doing sociability or that doing sociability only occurs within a framework of joint attention. Nor are we claiming any kind of causal connection between joint attention and doing sociability (or the other way around). Rather, we are merely trying to show how the accomplishment of joint attention and doing sociability may sometimes be connected and how this connection may be relevant for the design of self-access learning centers, the training of center staff, and the provision of center services.

In the next section, we introduce the SALC service counter, describe the data and data collection, and explain the multimodal conversation analytic transcript system. We then analyze two examples of the accomplishment of joint attention between a staff member and a student user and doing sociability. In the first, the joint attention is extremely brief. In the second, there are actually two cases of joint attention, the second of which is more sustained. In the final section, we summarize what we have found about how joint attention can provide a framework for doing sociability; discuss how the SALC service counter, aside from the provision of SALC-related services, affords (Gibson, 1986) opportunities for doing sociability among students; and consider implications and suggestions for center design, staff training, and service provision.

Setting, Data, and Transcription

The SALC service counter is located on the first floor of the Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) SALC next to one of the two entrances of the building. It functions as the nexus between students and the use of most of the SALC resources and services such as lending books, providing information about SALC events, reserving study rooms, etc. It is staffed by 30 student workers called SALCers with support by the SALC administrative staff made up of assistant managers (AMs). When the data were collected, there was an English-only language policy according to which

students, SALCers, and AMs were encouraged and expected to use English for service transactions, various administrative duties, and small talk that occurred within the vicinity of the service counter.

This study was approved by the relevant ethics committees at KUIS, where two of the authors are employed, and the University of Electro-Communications, where one of the authors is employed. The data consist of video recordings from the SALC Counter, made across three mornings, totaling approximately nine hours. To establish informed consent, service counter staff signed a bilingual consent statement. Service counter users were informed of the recording through bilingual posters visible at the location, which also contained information about opt-out procedures.

In our examples, talk is transcribed based on the standard conversation analytic transcription system developed by Jefferson (2004), a system designed to show possibly meaningful details of how talk is produced, such as elongation, breathiness, pauses, quiet talk, and so on. (See Appendix A for transcription conventions used in our examples.) In the speaker column, on the left, `SAL` indicates a SALCer and `USE` indicates a student user. Embodied conduct (e.g., gaze, gesture, physical movement) which is relevant for the analysis is transcribed using a system loosely based on Mondada (2018). Such conduct is transcribed in gray beneath the transcription of co-occurring talk or silence. The start of embodied conduct in relation to talk is shown with a vertical gray bar (|) in the talk and at the start of the description of the conduct. The producer of the embodied conduct is shown through the use of the first letter, in lower case, of the label used for that participant (i.e., "`s`" or "`u`"), followed by a hyphen and an abbreviation for the relevant primary part of the body (e.g., "`rh`" for "right hand"). (See Appendix B for the list of abbreviations used in the transcripts.) One way of focusing on embodied conduct is to use links to videos and/or gifs. However, we do not do this in order to protect participants' anonymity. Instead, annotated frames (i.e., stills extracted from video-recordings) are used to focus on embodied conduct. The temporal relation between talk and a frame is shown by a sharp symbol and number, in gray (e.g., `#1`), placed within the transcribed talk or silence. To protect anonymity of participants, all frames have been modified using the find edges filter in Photoshop. All frames appear at the end of the transcript. In order to save space and improve readability, the transcripts have been simplified by the removal of details of embodied conduct that are irrelevant for the analysis.

Accomplishing Joint Attention, Doing Sociability: Two Examples

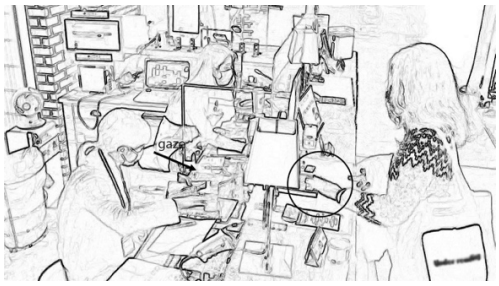
In each of our examples, we attempt to show, first, how joint attention is established and, second, how the established joint attention provides a framework for doing sociability. One thing to note is that, while brief joint attention to an object, such as when an object is exchanged between participants, may be fairly common, doing sociability is not so common in the data. Often, interaction at the service counter remains at the level of a service transaction. Also, we have not calculated the proportion of episodes of interaction at the service counter which include doing sociability, as this might give a false impression of claiming generalizability and as such quantitative description is beyond the scope of this paper. Finally, these examples were chosen as they are particularly clear cases. More and possibly longer examples have not been included due to space limitations.

In excerpt 1, a student user comes to the counter to return two borrowed books. During the exchange, the student user and the SALCer establish fleeting joint attention on the second book. (The first part of the transcript has been omitted to save space.)

Excerpt 1 (partial, simplified)

```
13 USE  an::dʰ (0.9) ((SAL takes book))
14 SAL  °IELTS test.°
15   (0.5) ((SAL turns over book))
16 USE  |°lemme check.°
   u-bh |book from bag, flip through book
   s-rh |to barcode reader

17   (0.9)
18 USE  |↑this one. |↑yes:.
   s-rh |barcode reader to book
   u-bh             |book to counter

19   (0.5)
20 SAL  |oh. #1
   s-gz |glance to book
   s-hd |slight nod
   u-lh |open cover

21 USE  |°this one?° (.) |#2°yes.°
   u-lh |close cover     |tap book, retract

22        |(0.9)#3|(0.2) ((USE moves back))
   s-gz   |to book
   s-bh   |to book|take book

23 SAL  |oh |you are studying for |IE|LTS.#4
   u-gz |to SAL
   u-lh     |to hair, groom
   s-bh                          |book slightly up-down
   s-gz                          |to USE
   s-hd                             |nod

24 USE  |yeah |I[ELTS.
25 SAL          [|oghʰ.#5 |↑great. |heh heh .hh
   u-lh |down                       |to object, pick up
   u-bd |forward
   u-gz       |to book              |left
   s-bh       |turn book over
   s-gz          |to book           |to book
   s-hd          |nod     |two nods
   s-rh                   |to barcode reader
   s-rh                            |barcode reader to book
```

#1



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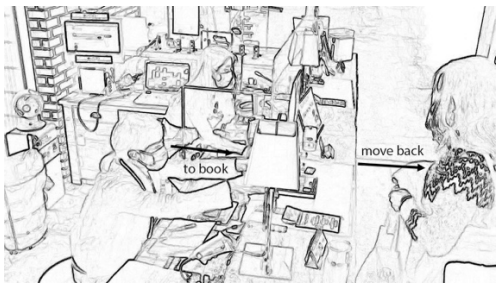

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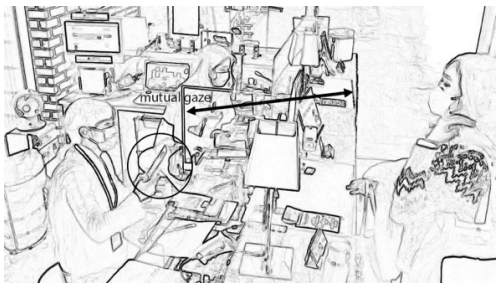

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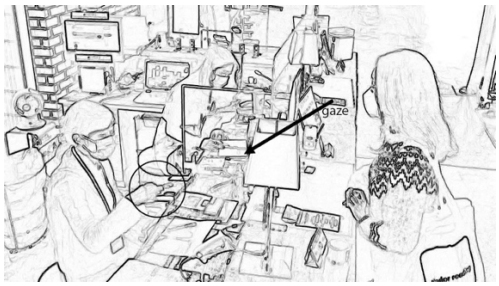


#5

Prior to the start of this excerpt, the student user has come to the counter to return two study books for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). She has returned one of these books, which the SALCer takes from the counter in line 13, while indicating that there is something else by saying “and.” As the SALCer takes the first book and starts to scan it, the student user takes the second book from her bag and flips through it (line 16), after which she confirms that this is the book to return and places it on the counter (line 18). This attracts the SALCer’s attention, as she glances at the book, nods slightly, and says “oh” (line 20). As shown in frame #1, there is a fleeting moment of shared but uncoordinated attention to this second book at this point, as the SALCer has briefly glanced at it and indicated through talk and nodding that she recognizes the existence of this second book-to-be-returned, while the student user has opened the cover, apparently to check that the CD is inside. However, there is no indication that either participant is attending to the other’s attention to the book, so it seems difficult to say that this is a moment, however fleeting, of joint attention, although, following Gallagher’s (2011) approach, this might also be regarded as a minimal degree of joint attention based on the embodied affordances of the situation. In line 21, the brief moment of uncoordinated attention to the book has come to an end and the two are attending to different things. The SALCer continues working with the first book (frame #2), while the student user once again confirms something to herself about

the book. She then displays relinquishment of possession of the book by tapping it (frame #2) and then withdrawing her hand. This divergence in attention continues during the silence in line 22, as the student user, on the one hand, disengages by moving back, while the SALCer, on the other, shifts her gaze to the second book and takes it from the counter (frame #3). Up to this point, then, while the student user and SALCer cooperate in accomplishing the return of the study materials, and while they may briefly attend simultaneously to the same object, they have not established (a high degree of) joint attention.

This changes in line 23, as the SALCer says "oh you are studying for IELTS," at the end of which she shifts her gaze to the student user and moves the book, which she is holding in both hands, up and down slightly (frame #4). The start of this utterance attracts the student user's gaze to the SALCer, which she maintains until line 24, and she and the SALCer establish mutual gaze toward the end of this line (frame #4). In line 24, the student user shifts her gaze to the book itself as she answers the question. She then tracks the movement of the book as the SALCer moves it into position to scan while also responding to the student user's answer (frame #5). Here, then, the SALCer and the student user not only established shared attention to the book, but may at least possibly have established joint attention, as they can through their mutual gaze attend to what the other is attending to.

If we accept that they have established a moment of joint attention to the book, this joint attention can be understood as providing a framework which lends (some degree of) intelligibility to the SALCer's statement in line 23. That is, the book as a possible object-of-joint-attention provides the basis of the SALCer's inference about the activities of the student user. This is not to say that if joint attention had not been established, the SALCer's statement would necessarily have been unintelligible, but simply that the establishment of joint attention facilitates its intelligibility. The SALCer's statement in line 23 is disjunctive, in that up to this point, the focus of the interaction has been the task of returning and accepting the return of the borrowed materials. Two things that have been noted about such disjunctive utterances are that, first, they may involve hitches and restarts characteristic of self-initiated self-repair, particularly if there is a lack of mutual gaze (Goodwin, 1980) and, second, they are often responded to with other-initiation of repair (Drew, 1997; Robinson & Kevoe-Feldman, 2010). Here, though, there is none of this—and the two participants unproblematically establish mutual gaze—and the interaction from line 23 to line 25 runs off without any sort of trouble. In addition, the SALCer's utterance can also be understood as doing sociability, as it moves away from the service transaction and proffers a topic for more casual conversation, transforming the interaction from being between a service-provider and service-user to being between two student peers talking about preparing for and taking a widely-recognized English proficiency test. And, as it turns out, non-service-related conversation about this topic continues for a few more turns while the SALCer continues scanning the materials (not shown in transcript). The establishment of joint attention to the book can thus be understood as not only supporting the intelligibility of what the SALCer says but also as providing a framework for a move from only providing/receiving a service to also doing sociability.

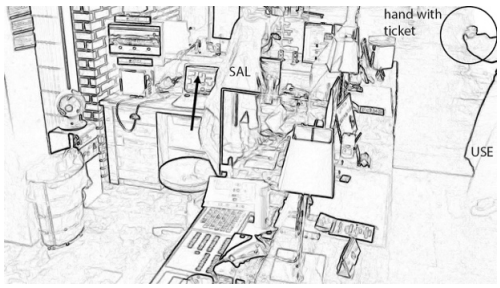
In excerpt 2, a student user comes to the counter to claim a prize from an *omikuji*[3] fortune box set up in the SALC. During their interaction, the SALCer and the

student user jointly attend to the *omikuji* ticket and then to the bag of snacks that the SALCer retrieves.

Excerpt 2 (simplified)

```
01 SAL  |hi::.#1((USE enters, ticket in right hand))
   s-bd |stand
   u-bd |walking to counter--->

02 USE  ¥hi::.¥ |hih hn|
   u-bd ---------------->|
   u-rh          |turn ticket
   u-gz                 |to ticket

03 SAL  ↑oh |#2you got the |(feh[laht).#3
04 USE                          [ye:s    |(fehlaht).[4]
   s-gz     |to ticket
   s-bd                                  |turn right, step
   u-gz                    |glance to SAL, back to ticket

05 SAL  °wh(↑o:↓ka::y)_wh° ((starts walking))#4
06   (3.0) ((SAL walks out of camera shot))
07   (7.2) ((sounds of bag being handled; USE gz to SAL))
08 SAL  |°whoka:ywh°
   s-bd |re-enter camera shot
   s-bh |trying to open bag

09        (1.0)|#5(0.4)
   s-bd        |stop walking
   s-bh        |pull sides of bag

10 USE  huh heh heh .h
11   (1.0)
12 SAL  |oh.
   s-bd |step forward

13 USE  |can you open |it?#6ih |HHUH [huh hn .h
14 SAL                              [hn hn|
   s-bh |pull sides of bag---------------->|bag down
   s-gz               |to USE  |down

15   (1.0)|(1.0)|#7(0.8)|(0.3)
   s-bh   |bag up, pull sides
   s-bh          |pull sides
   s-gz   |up, right    |to bag

16 USE  ih [heh heh
17 SAL     [o  h  :  :_
18        |(0.7)|(0.2)
```

```
   s-bh   |pull sides
   s-bh          |open bag

19 SAL  |ah.#8=
   s-gz |glance to USE
   u-gz |to SAL

20 USE  =ah. [heh heh ha ha|
21 SAL       [yes.
   u-gz                    |to bag

22         |(1.3)#9
   s-bh    |finish opening bag

23 SAL  |please take |o:ne.#10=
   s-rh |off bag, to bottom of bag
   s-lh |bag up      |bag toward USE
   s-gz              |to USE
   u-lh              |up

24 USE  =hee: |↑thank you:::_
   u-lh       |to bag

25   (0.4)
26 SAL  thank you:::.
27 USE  ih heh hn hn
```



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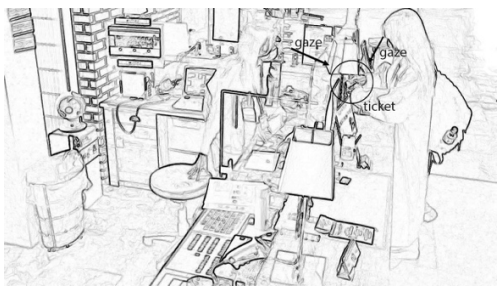

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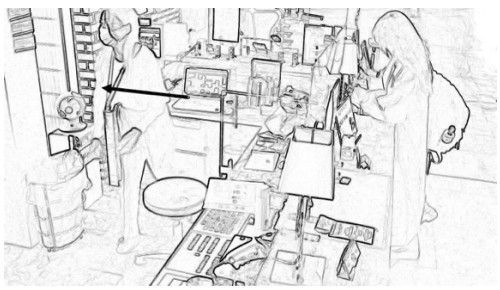

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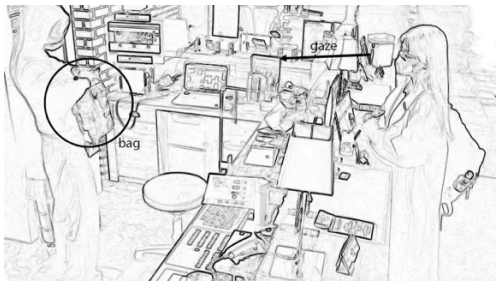

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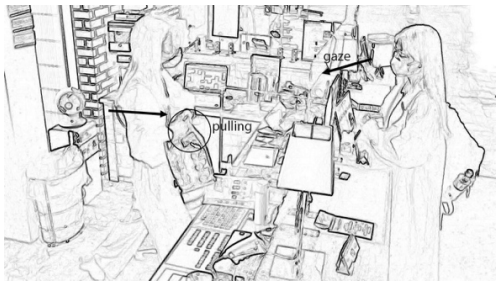

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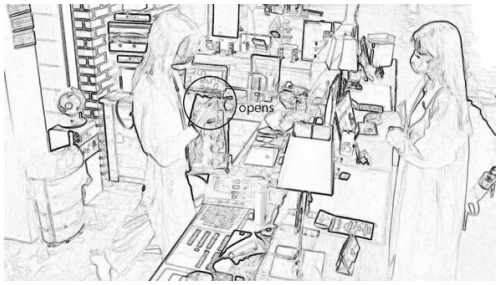

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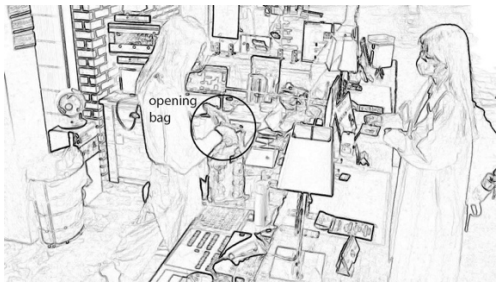

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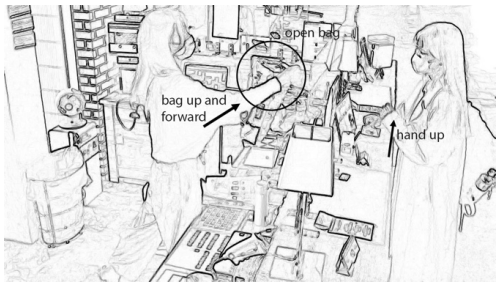

#10

Prior to this excerpt, two people, one of whom is most likely the student user, can be heard talking off-camera about the student user taking her ticket to the counter to claim her prize. In lines 01 and 02, the student user enters the camera shot, holding the ticket high in her right hand (frame #1), and approaches the counter, moving the ticket to the counter space (frame #2). At the same time, the SALCer stands (frame #1) and produces a greeting in line 01, to which the student user responds in line 02. It is likely that the SALCer has heard the talk about the student user taking her ticket to the counter, but even if she has not, the way that she holds the ticket high as she approaches and then places it on the counter makes it visible as connected to the student user's reason for approaching the counter and relevant as something for the SALCer to attend to (cf. Heinemann & Fox, 2019). In addition, through the SALCer standing and the student user approaching, a space on the countertop becomes available for both of them to visually attend to anything that is placed in that space. From the end of line 02 and into the first part of line 03, the SALCer and the student user do indeed bring their gaze to the ticket that has been brought into this space (frames #2 and #3). The student user is not just incidentally placing the ticket there, which the SALCer then happens to notice. Rather, she places it there as an object for the SALCer to visually attend to and her intention in placing the ticket there is visible to the SALCer. The two of them can thus be understood as having established a moment of joint attention, as they not only attend

to the ticket but can be understood as attending to the other's attention to the ticket. It is within the framework of joint attention and on the basis of information made available by the ticket that the SALCer articulates the student user's reason for coming to the counter (line 03), which the latter then confirms (line 04). Finally, the moment of joint attention is closed as the SALCer turns and walks out of the camera shot (lines 04-06, frame #4).

The second moment of joint attention starts to develop as the SALCer reenters the camera shot (line 08) carrying an unopened bag of snacks which she is trying to open. She stops walking in line 09 and tries again to open the bag (frame #5). Her inability to do this elicits laughter from the student user (line 10), who has been watching her attempts to open the bag. It is clear that both participants are attending to the unopened bag, the SALCer through her attempts to open it and the student user through her gaze and laughter. Also, it is clear from the SALCer's sequence of actions (i.e., articulating the reason for the student user coming to the counter, then walking away, then returning with the bag while attempting to open it) that both the bag itself and the opening of the bag are relevant for the project of giving/receiving the prize. And the SALCer is holding the bag in such a way as to make it available for the student user's attention and as to make visible what she is currently doing.

In lines 12 to 14, the SALCer steps closer to the counter, attempts to open the bag again, and shifts her gaze to the student user. She also reacts to her inability to open the bag by saying "oh" (line 12), to which the student user responds with a question clearly connected to the failed attempts to open the bag (line 13), while also maintaining her gaze on the bag (frame #6). This all results in shared laughter (lines 13 and 14). Rather than respond to the question, the SALCer makes visible her increased efforts to open the bag as she shifts her gaze away while again pulling on the sides of the bag (line 15, frame #7). This elicits more laughter from the student user (line 16) and another "oh" from the SALCer (line 17). Finally, the bag opens (line 18, frame #8), to which both participants respond with "ah" (lines 19 and 20), the student user with more laughter (line 20), and the SALCer with "yes" (line 21). These responses are hearable as involving a shared slightly celebratory stance (cf. Sormani, 2011) toward the SALCer's success at finally being able to open the bag. Finally, the SALCer finishes opening the bag (line 22, frame #9), moves the bag toward the student user in a manner that allows the latter to reach in and take a snack (frame #10), and offers one snack with the words "please take one" (line 23). The student user responds with "*hee*" and "thank you" as she takes a snack (line 24), the SALCer produces her own "thank you" (line 26), and the student user laughs (line 27) before leaving with her snack (not shown).

From the time that the SALCer retrieves the unopened bag (line 07) to the end of this transcript, it is clear from several things—gaze, laughter, response tokens, bodily orientations, actions of trying to open the bag and of offering and taking—that both participants are attending to the bag and attending to each other's attention. There is thus a relatively extended period of joint attention. There are, then, two separate moments of joint attention in this excerpt, related to different objects. The first moment provides a framework which supports the intelligibility of the SALCer's articulation of the student user's reason for coming to the counter (line 03). However, based on how we defined doing sociability above, as this talk is directly related to the provision of a service, the handing over of a prize, it does not constitute doing sociability, and it is immediately followed by the SALCer going to retrieve the prize. The second moment of

joint attention provides a framework which supports the intelligibility of the student user's question (line 13) and laughter and the other talk from both participants, including the celebratory stance (lines 19 to 21). For example, the "it" in the question is clearly interpretable as referring to the unopened bag. While this question is at least indirectly related to receiving her prize, it is not *directly* related as it does not contribute to the goal of providing/receiving the service. Rather, along with the shared laughter, it is indexical of the shared humorous stance being taken toward the SALCer's efforts. It is their adoption of these shared stances of humor and celebration, the intelligibility of which is supported by the framework provided by their joint attention, that we argue involves doing sociability.

Conclusion

This research has illustrated how participants' accomplishment of joint attention to objects in a SALC (e.g., a book or bag) provides a framework for doing sociability. There are certainly ways of doing sociability that do not require joint attention to an object and joint attention does not necessarily involve doing sociability, as in the joint attention to the ticket in excerpt 2. As mentioned above, we are not claiming any sort of causal connection between the establishment of joint attention and doing sociability. However, joint attention to an object can provide a framework within which participants, even unacquainted participants, can do sociability.

Theory and practice, namely ecological approaches and the center's language policy, support the view that the SALC service counter lends itself to joint attention and sociability. First, as discussed in the introduction, physical space in specific ways affords joint attention. This can be seen at the SALC service counter, where the counter surface not only affords such things as relinquishing and taking possession of materials being returned (as in excerpt 1), but also affords joint attention to an object placed on the counter, such as the ticket in excerpt 2. Also, even with the partitions placed on the counter, which at the time of recording were there to prevent the spread of COVID, the counter affords joint attention by the SALCer and the student user to objects currently in the SALCer's possession. One way that the SALC service counter is relevant, then, is in how as a physical space it affords joint attention by participants on opposite sides of the counter.

Second, the norms of language use at the service counter—the expectation that English will be used, as well as, in contrast to a library setting, the permissibility of talking in a non-hushed voice—and the purpose of the counter to provide student users with SALC-relevant services can be seen as affording doing sociability. The service counter brings together presumably relatively unacquainted students as SALCers and student users. It provides a space where they are encouraged and expected to use English and where being sociable through talk is not constrained by a rule to be extra quiet. While the physical space of the counter, then, affords certain ways of jointly attending to objects, normative features of the counter space afford doing sociability, including doing sociability within the framework of joint attention.

As a third point, practical implications can be drawn from this study's observations. Sociability could lead to extended discussions in which SALCers recommend additional materials, encourage users to join advising sessions, or engage in "micro-advising" (Shibata, 2012). Therefore, it would be helpful to raise SALCers' and users' awareness of the sophisticated pragmatic abilities involved in doing sociability.

This could be achieved by signage containing scaffolding language to navigate various counter interactions, focusing on small talk as a valuable tool for prosocial behavior. Furthermore, it is possible to raise awareness of the concept of joint attention and its benefits for communication via roleplaying counter interactions in SALCer training sessions. Such lessons could focus on appropriate phrases and interactional routines, as well as going beyond the basics to include topics and phrases that foster sociability.

To end on a serendipitous note, after our research started and before this article was completed, we learned that the SALC at KUIS had revised its mission statement in anticipation of a new, post-pandemic era. The current mission statement states that one purpose of the SALC is "to facilitate prosocial … language learning …" (Mynard et al., 2022, p. 33). (See Appendix C for the full text of the mission statement.) The mission statement also defines "prosocial behavior" as "something you choose to do to benefit or help others" (Mynard et al., 2022, p. 33). What we have called doing sociability (or what may be more typically called something like being sociable or being friendly), while it clearly does not encompass all of prosocial behavior, can be understood as a small but important part of it. Moreover, doing sociability at the service counter, regardless of whether a SALCer or a student user takes a greater role in initiating it, contributes to a friendly atmosphere at the counter. It becomes more than just a place where people are supposed to use English and where SALC services can be accessed, as it becomes a place where people can also connect socially and develop their identities as competent L2 users of English.

Notes

1. Service transactions often involve highly formulaic language and are often limited to the achievement of a particular goal. However, in referring to "relatively simple service transactions," we are not claiming that they run off automatically or are unworthy of research in their own right. For recent conversation analytic research on service transactions, see Fox et al. (2023).
2. There is certainly a great deal of theoretical work and research dealing with sociability or related concepts. See, for example, Tomasello (2019) on prosociality. Our use of the word *sociability* is based primarily on a lay understanding of this word and how it applies within the context of the service counter. By referring to *doing sociability*—a type of locution common in conversation analysis—we are treating sociability as a process that participants engage in, rather than, for example, a personality trait.
3. *Omikuji* is a kind of fortune written on a piece of paper. It is commonly found at Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples and is strongly associated with the first visit to a shrine or temple at the start of the year. As can be seen in this example, this practice can be copied outside religious institutions.
4. As indicated by the use of parentheses, "fehlaht" represents the main transcriber's (i.e., the first author's) hearing of what the student user says, though the main transcriber has no idea what this is supposed to mean. An alternative hearing, suggested by the third author, is "I saw that." Either way, the discrepancy between what the different authors hear does not impact the analysis. Also, there is no indication from the participants that what is said at the ends of lines 03 and 04 is unclear to them.

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Appendix A

Transcription Conventions

Transcription of talk is based on the transcription system developed by Jefferson (2004) standardly used within conversation analysis. Only symbols actually used in the transcripts above are included here.

.	period: falling final intonation
?	question mark: rising final intonation
_	underscore: flat intonation
:	colon: elongation, more colons for longer elongation
[	left bracket: start of overlapping talk
(word)	parentheses: uncertain transcription
((remark))	double parentheses: transcriber's comment
°word°	degree signs: talk between produced quietly
^{wh}word^{wh}	superscript *wh*s: talk between produced in whisper voice
¥word¥	yen signs: talk between produced in smile voice
word	underscore under (part of) word: stress
word^{h}	superscript *h*: aspiration
.h	period followed by *h*: inbreath, more *h*s for longer inbreath
=	equal signs: latching (i.e., no beat of silence between turns)
↑	up arrow: pitch shift up
↓	down arrow: pitch shift down
tango	word in italics: Japanese word (not part of standard transcription conventions)
(.)	period inside parentheses: micropause (i.e., less than two tenths of second)
(0.5)	number inside parentheses: silence measured to nearest tenth of second

Appendix B

Abbreviations Used for Transcription of Embodied Conduct

bd	body
bh	both hands
gz	gaze
hd	head
lh	left hand
rh	right hand

Appendix C

Text of the New Mission Statement (Mynard et al., 2022)

The relevant full text of the mission statement reads:

The SALC community aims to facilitate *prosocial and lifelong autonomous language learning within a diverse and multilingual learning environment. We aim to provide supportive and inclusive spaces, resources and facilities for developing ownership of the learning process. We believe effective language learning is achieved through ongoing reflection and takes variables such as previous experiences, interests, personality, motivations, needs and goals into account and promotes confidence and competence when studying and using an additional language.

*Prosocial behavior is something you choose to do to benefit or help others (Mynard et al., 2022, p. 33).

Investigating a Negative: Student Non-Use of a Self-Access Centre

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Abstract

Over the past 20 to 25 years, Self-Access Centres (SACs) have become increasingly common at universities world-wide and a considerable body of research has been developed into a variety of SAC related topics including how motivation and autonomous learning in a SAC affect second language acquisition (SLA), how the physical design impacts students preceptions of the SAC, and the role staff and teachers have in developing student participation in a SAC. However, despite researchers, teachers, and learners themselves acknowledging the benefits of SAC participation, many students are still reluctant to simply visit or participate in SAC classes and events. Through the use of an open-ended questionnaire, this study aimed to discover the factors that deter students from utilising a SAC. We found that several factors were involved, but social anxiety, low linguistic competence, and time constraints due to a busy social life were the most dominant themes. Of these, social anxiety seemed to be the most prominent, but the correlation between social anxiety and foreign language anxiety is unclear. Other less-important factors, but perhaps more easily modified include, lack of knowledge of and interest in current classes and events, as well as the physical layout and atmosphere of the SAC.

過去 20〜25 年の間に、セルフ・アクセス・センター（SAC）は世界中の大学でますます一般的になり、SAC に関連するさまざまなテーマについてかなりの研究が展開されてきた。SAC は日本では一般的で、大学もかなりの資源を費やしているが、多くの学生は利用しない。本研究では、公開質問紙調査を用いて、学生が SAC への参加を躊躇する要因を明らかにすることを目的とした。その結果、社会的不安、言語能力、活発な社会的活動の要素が最も支配的なテーマであった。その他の、あまり重要ではないが改善が容易な要因として、現在実施されているクラスやイベントについての知識や興味の欠如、SAC の物理的なレイアウトや雰囲気などが挙げられる。

Keywords: SAC attendance, social anxiety, linguistic competence, autonomy

Japan has a long history of English language education, yet a common complaint is the poor communicative abilities of many (maybe most) Japanese people when using English (Reesor, 2003; Iwamoto, 2016). This is widely recognized and has led to the plethora of English conversation schools (*eikaiwa*) from the late 1980s onwards and an increase in the number of hours allocated to English language instruction within the formal educational system. However, despite there being a general understanding of the importance of English language proficiency in Japan by the government, educators, and the general public, and significant time and resources allocated to English language education, the fact that Japanese test-takers continue to perform poorly on various measures of English proficiency raises serious concerns. In the 113 countries included in the most recent Education First (EF) English Proficiency Index Report (EF EPI, 2023), Japan was described as having low proficiency and ranked number 87 alongside countries such as Mexico and Afghanistan.

While there is a recognition of the need to improve the ability of Japanese students to communicate in English, within the formal educational system, especially in upper-secondary school, the primary focus is still on preparation for university tests. Thus, English-spoken communicative competence, which is usually not part of these examinations, loses relevance for students and some teachers. Even if the Japanese educational system placed a stronger emphasis on communication skills, this might not be sufficient. Nunan (1989) asserts that language learners might not be able to fully improve their English language proficiency in a classroom context, while Jackson and Kaplan (1999) propose that students studying linguistically distant languages should receive a minimum of 2,200 hours instruction.

During their formal education from elementary to upper-secondary school, approximately 1,050 hours are allocated to studying English (Hosoki, 2011), significantly less than the 2,200 hours suggested by Jackson and Kaplan (1999). However, it should be noted that this does not include non-formal instruction received through classes at language schools and cram schools, and for some students, this may constitute a significant number of hours of English language instruction.

This places the onus on the learners themselves and on universities to make up for this deficit, which is not always logistically possible. At Kagawa University, students are required to acquire six language credits in their first and second years as part of their general education receiving in total around 90 hours of foreign language (for most students, English) instruction over two years. Even with a university education, most students still receive far less than the 2,200 hours mentioned above, placing greater importance on increasing the usage of self-access centres (SACs) to close this gap.

Most SACs are designed to serve as a bridge between the classroom and the real world, providing extra practice and exposure to the target language in a non-formal environment where students can grow their sense of community and learn through social and experiential means (Murray & Fujishima, 2013, 2016). With SACs becoming commonplace at universities throughout Japan and with a large financial and personnel investment put into them, it is becoming increasingly important to not only investigate what may motivate students to attend a SAC on a persistent basis (Hughes et al., 2012; McCrohan & Perkins, 2023) but also to look into possible barriers to SAC use.

Firstly, it is important to understand why students choose to get a tertiary education, whether they attend lectures and classes, and also how this may affect SAC utilization. Numerous studies have been conducted on the motivations behind students' desire to attain a university education. The results have shown that these motivations can range from a sincere desire to learn, to more practical ones, such as improving their future job prospects or fulfilling family expectations. While some studies have revealed evidence in favour of the desire for knowledge (Massingham & Herrington, 2006) and there are certainly students who continue to attend university because they find learning to be truly enjoyable and believe lectures provide a valuable educational function (Dolnicar, 2004), there is evidence that a growing number of students are not motivated by the desire to learn and acquire a good education (e.g. Rodgers, 2001; Kirby & McElroy, 2003; Ditcher & Hunter, 2004). Instead, they are concentrated on achieving their ultimate objective, which is to find a good job. This would suggest that participation at a SAC may also be subject to these factors, particularly if students can, or cannot, see a use or a practical purpose in making use of the SAC. Research by Lang et al. (2008) into attendance at university lectures has shown that the factors that both positively and negatively influence their attendance can be broadly divided into two categories: unavoidable and avoidable/personal factors and this framework may also apply to student reluctance to visit a SAC. Illness is the component most commonly mentioned in the literature among those that may be considered unavoidable (Cader et al., 2003; Massingham & Herrington, 2006). Other unavoidable factors include family responsibilities and access to public transport (Morgan, 2001), although lack of access to public transport is rarely a concern in Japan, especially in urban areas. In contrast, personal factors are defined as those that are fundamentally inherent to a particular student. The main avoidable/personal factors governing lecture attendance are subject interest, peer influence, motivation, social life, and in a foreign language context, linguistic competence. Firstly, a student's level of interest in the subject matter being taught has a major impact on attendance. Dolnicar (2004) asserts that

if lectures are engaging and deemed valuable for the future, students will be more likely to attend. Similarly, Morgan (2001) discovered that engaging lectures positively impacted attendance, while, unsurprisingly, Cader et al. (2003) found that boring lectures had the opposite effect. A student's peers and social life can have a big impact on their attendance, both positive and negative. According to Morgan's (2001) findings, a significant proportion of business students chose whether or not to attend lectures depending on the actions of their classmates. Moreover, this study also noted that a busy social life might have a major detrimental impact on students' presence. Similarly, Hubbard (2007) found that some students attended primarily for social reasons, but also for some academic reasons; mainly to find out about impending assignments and tests or to seek guidance on what the lecturer thought was important.

As motivations for students to attend university and lectures vary, it becomes important to cast a net wide enough to encompass the general attributes needed to attract the largest number of students to a SAC. Regarding those who view their university education as a pragmatic step towards gainful employment, the SAC must also provide concrete benefits that factor into their plan. These students are not likely to be motivated to attend for social or intrinsic reasons; rather, the SAC should aid them in their studies. Mayeda et al. (2008) discussed the SAC at Nagoya Women's University where they have devised a highly structured advising system wherein students can prepare for TOEIC/TOEFL exams while following their own personally devised study plans. This system offers clear benefits to students (particularly first-year students) as they must achieve a certain grade in their TOEIC exams to pass their English classes. In the SAC at Kanda University of International Studies, Barrs (2010) concluded that having a language policy, an orientation program, and an effective layout and design were three key factors that could motivate and encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning in a SAC. He found that these factors played a significant role in creating a supportive and engaging learning environment that fostered student participation and utilization of self-access resources. What is more, Mynard & Shelton-Strong (2022) advocated for reimagining SACs as autonomy-supportive environments that cater to the basic psychological needs of language learners. They emphasised the importance of providing purposefully initiated activities and an environment facilitating autonomous motivation and increased well-being outside the traditional classroom setting. They suggested that encouraging learners to take initiatives that contribute to learning is crucial in student participation and the development of SACs. Finally, research by Bibby et al. (2016) found two additional issues related to linguistic competence and non-

participation at a self-access lounge: lack of confidence as English speakers and the belief that attendees need to have high existing levels of communicative ability before they can participate in activities at the SAC. Similar beliefs were also found amongst students and teachers at Kagawa University (McCrohan et al., 2023; McCrohan & Perkins, 2023).

Study Background, Participants, Setting, and Design

Study Background

The SAC at Kagawa University, established in 2014, is located in a highly-visible, centrally positioned location on the main campus, and through its use of colour and an open-plan design, is intended to be a welcoming space for all students. The facility itself is divided into several distinct areas that can be adapted to meet the needs of ongoing activities. During freshmen orientation, all students are introduced to the concept of the SAC, and during language classes, teachers are encouraged to provide information about ongoing events and classes. Moreover, students receive regular updates regarding special events at the SAC, thus students should be well aware of its location, function, and the activities run by the SAC. Since its establishment, the SAC at this university has adopted a semi-guided learning strategy with the aims of aiding international and exchange students in integrating into the university environment, bridging the transition from structured classroom language instruction to autonomous learning, fostering the enhancement of both language proficiency and self-directed learning abilities, and offering language learning assistance to all students.

However, educators and personnel at the SAC have noticed that despite providing a diverse range of classes and activities, most students seldom or never participate in SAC events. Regretfully, through personal communications with other SACs, this appears to be a prevalent issue within self-access in Japan rather than one limited to a particular university. Table 1 shows SAC usage figures for Kagawa University from 2019 to 2023. However, as it is important to distinguish between visits and visitors the numbers in this table refer to visits. In fact, we have found that a small group of students spend a considerable part of their day, attending multiple classes and events, and in our previous studies (McCrohan et al., 2023; McCrohan & Perkins, 2023) we found that over three years (2019-2022), 82 students were frequent attendees and came to the SAC on average 28 times per semester.

Table 1

Study Background – Number of SAC Visits During the Academic Years 2019–2023

Academic Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total number of Visits	4740	1330	1087	2800	5063

Table 1 covers pre- and post- Covid-19 pandemic usage figures. During the academic years 2020 to 2022, the SAC could not operate under normal conditions due to pandemic restrictions, and it was only during the 2022–2023 academic year that the SAC returned to its pre-pandemic operating hours. The number of users is steadily increasing and we have again reached pre-pandemic levels.

Participants and Setting

In total, 5,629 undergraduate and 792 graduate students attend Kagawa University (https://www.kagawa-u.ac.jp/en/about/quick-facts/) but students from three faculties (once past their first year) are mostly at the satellite campuses and thus have difficulties making use of the SAC during their second to fourth years. For this reason, the authors collected data mainly from first-year students taking General Education classes, and from one class of second- to fourth-year students who are based at the main campus and should have unlimited access to the SAC. In total, we asked 93 students using the university Moodle system, an open-ended question regarding their participation in the SAC (Table 2).

Table 2

Number of Participants and Average TOEIC L & R Score per Class

	Number of Students	Grade (s)	Faculty (ies)	Average TOEIC L&R Score	Range
Academic English	20	1	Medicine Law Education	705	690–920
Cross-culture understanding	24	2-4	Education Economics	590	480–850

Communicative English II T	24	1	Engineering	463	320–570
Communicative English II JE	25	1	Economics Law	547	380–715

Study Design

Our research questions aimed to discover: 1. The percentage of students from these classes that used/did not use the SAC. 2. The factors that they believed influenced their usage/non-usage.

The information regarding this study and the questions given to the students were as follows (the original was in Japanese):

> "We are conducting a survey on student usage of the Global Café and would appreciate your cooperation. Please answer in as much detail as possible. Please write in Japanese. Your answers will be deleted after this survey has been completed. Thank you for your cooperation.
>
> **1.** If you participated in the Global Café this semester, please explain your motivation for participating and what you gained from your participation.
>
> **2.** If you did not participate in the Global Café, please explain why. Please give as much detail as possible."

Students were given approximately 15 minutes at the end of their regular class to respond to the survey. Upon receiving all responses, we first noted the number of students who were currently using the SAC and how many were not. We discovered that usage rates for these four classes were low. From the two Communicative English (CE II) classes, six students were currently attending the SAC, from Academic English there was only one attendee, and from the Cross-culture Communication class, there were four attendees. Therefore, only around 10% of students in these classes were actively involved with the SAC.

We next translated all responses into English. To try to reduce bias, we adopted an inductive approach (Baralt, 2011) to coding the responses received. Therefore, codes and themes are derived directly from the data, not from pre-conceived theories or hypotheses. Each researcher meticulously examined responses from his/her class, highlighting phrases and sentences that indicated a student's reason(s) for their involvement at the SAC or not. Subsequently, we organized the data into clusters distinguished by assigning specific codes,

enabling us to obtain a concise summary of recurring key points and shared meanings across the data. In total 25 cluster codes were found (Table 3) and ultimately, we merged multiple codes to form nine cohesive themes (Table 4).

Table 3

Cluster Codes Identified From Student Responses

	Cluster Codes		Cluster Codes
1	previous bad experience with international students	14	too shy
2	concern about talking to/not understand international students	15	lack of courage to enter
3	scheduling conflicts or classes at a different campus	16	unable to locate the SAC
4	difficulty entering (unspecified)	17	general fear of English
5	difficulty entering (specified)	18	lack of motivation to attend
6	lack of knowledge regarding content and/or purpose of the SAC	19	need to pay/costs
7	lack of interest in SAC classes and events	20	trouble communicating (not necessarily with international students)
8	low English speaking and listening competence	21	prefer to connect with students from own faculty
9	lack of time (unspecified)	22	noise issues/design issues
10	lack of time (specified)	23	unwelcoming atmosphere
11	SAC was closed in first &/or second year - no habit of attending	24	no need for English in the future
12	feelings of fear (unspecified) or fear of embarrassment	25	already has a social circle including international students.

13 Will be alone, no friends attend SAC

Table 4

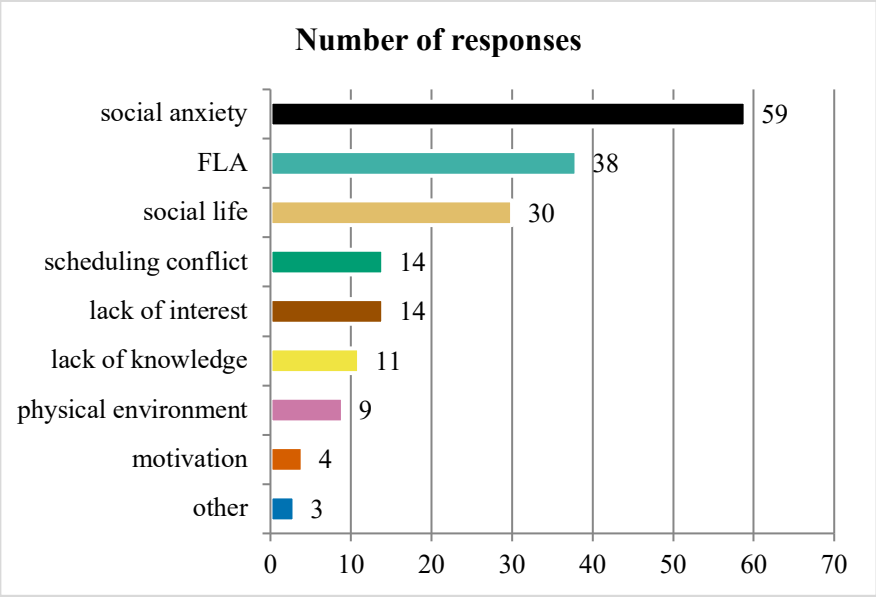
Themes Found From Student Responses

	Theme		Theme
1	foreign language anxiety (FLA)/linguistic competence	5	lack of knowledge of SAC function
2	social anxiety (shyness)	6	scheduling conflicts/off-campus
3	social life	7	physical environment
4	lack of interest in SAC classes/events	8	lack of motivation
9	Other		

Once we had settled on these themes, we then counted the number of citations for each theme as per class, per grade, and finally as a whole (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Distribution of Themes Found for all Students (n = 94)



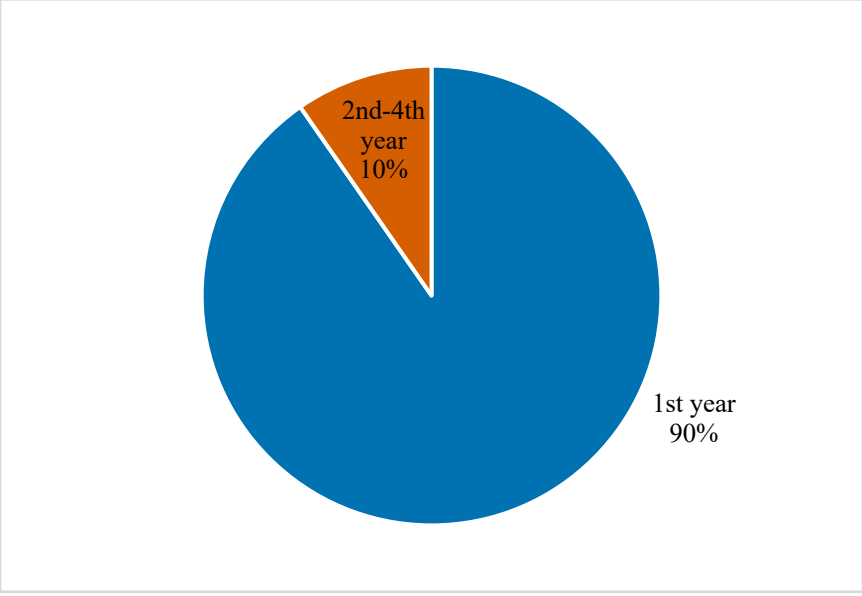
Results and Discussion

Mentioned by 59 students, it quickly became apparent that social anxiety was the main factor for nonparticipation. Social anxiety can be defined as a feeling of unease that "occurs when people become concerned about how they are being perceived and evaluated by others" (Iizuka, 2010, p.3). Examples of social anxiety include shyness, stage fright, being embarrassed socially, and communication apprehension.

Within the general theme of social anxiety, we included cluster codes such as "too shy", "lack of courage to enter" and "no friends attend the SAC". Of particular note was that social anxiety was more often mentioned by the first-year students than the second to fourth-year students in the cross-culture communication class. (Figure 2). In total, 56 of 69 (81%) first-year students mentioned factors such as "shyness" or "no friend" as reasons for their reluctance to attend SAC classes and events compared with 6/24 (25%) second to fourth-year students in the cross-culture communications class (Figure 2)

Figure 2

Social Anxiety Citations by Grade – First Grade vs Second to Fourth (n = 62)



This may suggest that as students became more comfortable in the university environment, in particular, mixing with students from different faculties and grades, they suffered less social anxiety when attending mixed events such as those run by the SAC.

Following this, foreign language anxiety (FLA)/linguistic competence is cited by 38 students. Considering that FLA/linguistic competence in this scenario is self-assessed, it

could reasonably be considered as closely related to social anxiety, as fear of embarrassment or miscommunication due to a perceived lack of communicative skills in English fits comfortably under this umbrella. However, even students from the classes that achieved higher scores in the TOEIC L&R test expressed reservations about their abilities to communicate with other students, especially with international students. In Academic English, 12 of 20 students were worried about their speaking abilities, and eight from this class had had a negative experience communicating with international students. Figure 3 shows the number of students from the two first-year CE II classes, Academic English and Cross-Culture Communication, who believed that they would have communication difficulties in the SAC.

Since we only collected data from a questionnaire and did not interview students or ask them to complete a more focused follow-up questionnaire, it is difficult to determine the relationship, if any, between their social anxiety, second language (L2) anxiety/competence, and SAC non-attendance. There is some conceptual ambiguity regarding the link between social anxiety and L2 anxiety, and different studies have produced contradictory findings. Some researchers have suggested that L2 anxiety might be classified as a kind of social anxiety because L2 learning typically entails social contact, for example, conversing with people, notably teachers, and classmates in a target language (e.g. Iizuka, 2010). However, some empirical research (e.g. MacIntyre & Gardner,1989; MacIntyre, 1999) has shown that L2 anxiety can be distinguished from other kinds of general anxiety, including those that are dependent on social interactions. These contradictory sets of results serve as a good example of how the concept of L2 anxiety is difficult to analyze and understand.

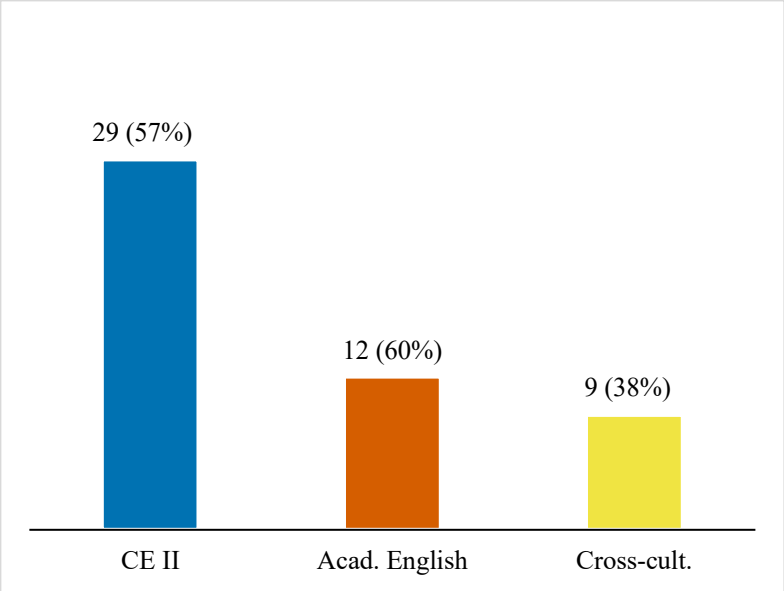
Moreover, language anxiety itself can be separated into three subcategories: trait anxiety, situation-specific anxiety, and state anxiety. Trait anxiety is described as a more permanent predisposition to anxiety, while situation-specific anxiety manifests only as the result of a specific situation or event—for example, taking a test or public speaking. On the other hand, state anxiety is a transient fear felt at a certain point in time (Hodapp, et al., 1995). It differs from situation-specific anxiety in that it is not characterised by a predetermined archetype, but rather depends on an individual's assessment of a sudden encounter as a threat.

In a Japanese setting, Masutani (2021) discussed how Japanese learners of English were moderately to highly anxious about speaking English both in and out of class. For numerous students, the setting of a SAC is foreign and frequently entirely distinct from the

more regulated L2 classroom setting. Therefore, could this environment trigger situation-specific anxiety which was what the students were expressing in certain responses such as "difficult to enter" or "it takes courage to enter"? Additionally, many students expressed concern about communicating with international students, and perhaps this could be an incidence of state anxiety. The studies above suggest that students may feel general social anxiety in addition to L2 anxiety in a SAC setting and our study seems to indicate that this may be the case. The relationship between these different kinds of anxiety and SAC attendance (or non-attendance) could be enlightening, and of use to SAC teachers and staff, but is outside the scope of this current study.

Figure 3

Numbers of Students Who Believe They Would Have Communication Difficulties per Class (n =50)



Though less mentioned than the previous themes, a busy social life also plays a large role in preventing students from using the SAC, with 30 students responding that this was a reason for non-usage. Within this theme, many students explained that they were especially busy with part-time jobs or already had an active social life and did not feel the need to make new friends.

Lack of interest in SAC classes and events, and lack of knowledge of the function of the SAC are particularly important themes as both are issues we should be able to address. Despite being given comprehensive information regarding the role of the SAC at Kagawa University at orientation, and frequent messages (on the university messaging system)

regarding upcoming events, a considerable number of students (11) do not seem to understand the purpose of the SAC, how it operates, or in one case, where it is located. This would suggest that traditional advertising is not effective and similar feedback was found in previous studies (Hughes et al., 2012; McCrohan &Perkins, 2023). In those studies, it was found that word-of-mouth was the most effective method of enticing students to attend SAC classes and events and from the 2024 academic year, we plan for some frequent attendees of the SAC to visit first-year classes to talk about the activities run by the SAC and how it has (positively) impacted their university experience.

"Lack of interest in SAC classes and events", mentioned by 14 students, is an area that certainly deserves further research. Some students, especially second to fourth-year students from the Cross-culture Communication class said that the classes and events were too serious and did not sound as if they would be enjoyable to attend. In fact, four students from this class had attended the SAC frequently during their first and/or second year but had stopped attending particularly due to the nature of the SAC classes and events, but also due to increasing academic demands. Most of the students in this class are Education majors who in addition to writing a final thesis in their fourth year, must also participate in teacher-training classes and activities during their third and fourth years, and study for the teacher's licensing examination. We believe that it would be worthwhile for the SAC staff to frequently conduct questionnaires asking students what type of activities they wish to have in the SAC.

Quite a few students mentioned scheduling conflicts or difficulty attending due to most of their classes being held at a satellite campus. First-year medical students are on the main campus only two days per week, and thus find it difficult to attend classes and events even if they find them interesting. Some of these students (six) suggested that the SAC needs to run more activities during the evenings or on weekends.

Interestingly, nine students referred to the physical environment of the SAC as a factor deterring them from entering. The physical design of a SAC is an under-researched area (Edlin, 2016). Positive emotional reaction, low-stress and safe surroundings, social interaction, accessibility, comfort, and adaptability are the main themes of the six principles he suggests when designing the internal space of a SAC. Unfortunately, not all these factors were considered when our SAC was designed. Moreover, a significant problem that Tweed and Yamaguchi (2017) discovered regarding the physical design of the SAC at their university was that certain students did not understand how some learning spaces were intended to be used, especially when the intended use of the space was not explicit. We believe that this may also be an issue at our SAC. In this study, the most common issue

related to the physical environment of our SAC was noise. Because our SAC is open plan (albeit divided into several sections using the SAC furniture and room dividers) it is difficult to have a designated quiet area. Some students use the SAC as a place to study, play games, read, or chat with friends, but some of them have indicated that they find it difficult to concentrate or even hear their friends when the SAC is very crowded. A few students (three) mentioned that the musical instruments, a guitar, and piano, have added to this noise problem. The SAC staff and teachers are aware of this and have just purchased headphones for the piano and are going to limit the times when students can play these instruments.

Another issue with the physical environment is the large windows on all sides of the SAC. For students in the SAC this can lead to a fish-bowl atmosphere and in response to feedback from students, there are now many posters advertising SAC events and classes along one wall, and the blinds are kept either partially or fully closed on the others. However, as two students mentioned in this questionnaire, this makes it impossible for students walking past to see what activities are ongoing, and how busy (or empty) the SAC is. Due to these comments, we are now working on a way to find a balance, giving students privacy within the SAC, while allowing students outside to observe what is happening within.

Finally, within the theme of *other* we had only three responses: one student mentioned that he already had plenty of friends including international friends, another student said that he only wanted to make friends from within his faculty so did not see any need to attend the SAC, and finally one said that he was unable to locate the SAC (although we do not fully understand how this is possible).

Conclusion

Through the data and analysis presented in this research, we have gained a better understanding of student behaviour and motivation with regard to SAC usage. This study makes it clear that simply having facilities accessible is insufficient.

It goes without saying that extensive publicity is needed to inform students about the purpose of the SAC and its array of resources, but from the student feedback in this study, as in a previous study (McCrohan & Perkins, 2023), traditional advertising and information provided at orientation does not seem to be sufficient. It may be more efficient to encourage word-of-mouth advertising of SAC classes and events by using students already involved in the SAC. What is more, a previous study (McCrohan & Caldwell, 2021) found that students look up to these active SAC students and they become language role models for more junior

and less linguistically competent students. By providing these active students with accurate information regarding SAC activities, and giving them access to first-year General Education language classes a couple of times a semester, we may be better able to disseminate SAC information and therefore, encourage higher usage rates.

Furthermore, creating a welcoming environment that allows students to feel both at ease and focused is crucial. Social anxiety seems to be one of the main deterrents with regard to student attendance. When setting up a SAC, there are many elements, some quite subtle and easily-missed, that go into establishing the ideal environment. Again, involving students in the design of the actual SAC, the placement of furniture, decorations, etc. might help with this. Additionally, using students as SAC staff, especially during freshmen orientation, and during the first few weeks of each semester, might enable students to find the courage to enter.

Scheduling conflicts and the multiple satellite campuses at Kagawa University are additional obstacles for many students when accessing the SAC. It is possible that in order to meet the needs of these students in both their academic and social lives, SAC staff and teachers will need to modify how lessons and events are delivered and what language-learning resources are available. More hybrid, evening, and weekend classes and/or events might help with this.

Further work needs to be done to discover what and how to motivate student attendance and enjoyment of the learning environment at the SAC. There will always be a certain margin of student non-usage in any SAC but the important issue for any university is to develop a better understanding of the motivating factors that determine usage and non-usage, and then adapt to meet these needs.

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Developing Educational Activities that Encourage Autonomy for Teaching Assistants and Students

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Abstract

Learning facilities around the world have returned to in-person services in response to a decrease in the number of people contracting the coronavirus and the development of more effective strategies to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. Against this backdrop, examining the re-introduction of educationally stimulating face-to-face activities into self-learning centers schedules in the post-pandemic era is a fruitful exercise. The Self Access Learning Center (SALC) at Kyushu University, located in Fukuoka Japan, has hosted regular events to promote study abroad programs as part of the university's annual study abroad fair. During the 2019 fair, the SALC held a series of talks in which international teaching assistants (TAs) spoke about their home countries, experiences of studying abroad, and approaches to language learning. This article will examine how these presentations were developed, halted due to COVID-19 pandemic, and later re-introduced. This will help provide context to better understand their impact in cultivating a sense of autonomy among the students and TAs. Two small scale online surveys were conducted after in-person talks were re-introduced at the 2023 Study Abroad Fair in SALC: one aimed at participants and one at presenters. Further interviews were also conducted with the 2023 presenters. The questions in the surveys and interviews were designed to gauge the effects of the event on the autonomy, skills, and personal relationships of the respondents. The results gathered highlighted the benefits of creating opportunities for teaching staff to share their experiences with learners and how interactive sessions can prove beneficial to both parties.

Keywords: educational activities, autonomy, study abroad fair, cultural exchange

ティーチング・アシスタントと学生の自主性を促す教育活動を展開

コロナウイルス感染者数の減少と、新型コロナウイルス感染症のパンデミックに対処する戦略の策定により、世界中の学習施設が対面サービスを再導入している。このような背景において、教育的に刺激的な対面活動の再導入を検討することは有益であると考えられる。福岡にある九州大学セルフ・アクセス・ラーニング・センター（SALC）は、毎年恒例の大学留学フェアの一環として、海外留学プログラムを促進するイベントを定期的に開催してきた。2019 年のフェア期間中、SALC は留学生ティーチング・アシスタント（TA）が母国、自身の留学経験、語学学習へのアプローチなどについて語る一連のプレゼンテーションを開催した。本論文では、これらのプレゼンテーションがどのように開発され、新型コロナウイルス感染症のパンデミックにより中止され、その後再び導入されたかを検証する。これは、学生と TA の自主性を育む上での影響をよりよく理解するための背景を提供するのに役立つ。SALC の 2023 年留学フェアで対面トークが再導入された後、2 つの小規模なオンライン調査が実施された。1 つは参加者を対象としたもの、もう 1 つは発表者を対象としたものである。 2023 年の発表者へのさらなるインタビューも実施された。アンケートとインタビューの質問は、回答者の自主性、スキル、人間関係に対するイベントの影響を評価するように設計されている。この結果は、教員が自分の経験を学習者と共有する機会を設けることの利点と、双方向のセッションがいかに双方にとって有益であるかを浮き彫りにした。

Learning facilities around the world have started to return to offering in-person services in response to a decrease in the number of people contracting the coronavirus and the development of more effective strategies to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. Against this backdrop, looking at the re-introduction of educationally stimulating activities back into self-learning centers' schedules in the post-pandemic era is a fruitful exercise. Seeking out reflections on the manner in which events, developed before the pandemic, have been received since returning to face-to-face learning can offer insight into the value of maintaining these activities moving forward.

Initiatives that promote study abroad programs held at Kyushu University, located in Fukuoka, provide a setting to review the type of events highlighted above. Various facilities throughout Kyushu University participate in a coordinated effort to hold events during a set period of the academic calendar that give the student body an opportunity to learn more about overseas academic opportunities. The best example of this multi-pronged effort to promote the benefits of learning in a new environment is the university's annual study abroad fair. When this cross-departmental project has taken place, the SALC has usually contributed, as the goals of the facility align with many of the general aims of studying abroad. For example, both stress the importance of students cultivating a desire to study languages and the benefits that result from assuming autonomy in learning. From the center's perspective, these kinds of shared goals have made participating in this university-wide study abroad initiative worthwhile. The center has supported numerous students who have gone on to study abroad after participating in the fair and made use of the SALC in their efforts to develop language skills in preparation for joining exchange programs. In many cases, the managerial staff have witnessed students increase their independent, out-of-class language studies upon learning that they have an opportunity to study abroad. Involvement in the fair also ensures that the SALC is working in-sync with other facilities within the university and can also help raise awareness about the services that the SALC offers.

The SALC's involvement in the study abroad fair provides an opportunity to review some of the educational activities that have been established by the managerial staff in conjunction with the faculty and university's wider work. This report focuses on a series of presentations that the SALC organized over the period of a few days a week in 2019 during the last in-person study abroad fair that the facility participated in before the outbreak of the

coronavirus. In these talks, international members of staff were given the opportunity to talk about their home countries, their experiences of studying overseas, and language learning in Japan. The series of talks was designed to be mutually beneficial for students and teaching staff. Many of the talks focused on non-English speaking countries, as the TAs who presented were from countries all over the world. However, all of them took place in English in order to provide language learners with an opportunity to practice their listening skills. This was of paramount importance given that the SALC's main goal is to provide support for English language learners (more details about the core and supplementary services of the SALC at Kyushu University are outlined below). They also promoted independent learning amongst students as the TAs could discuss how taking initiative in their studies positively impacted their ability to move abroad. The wide range of countries discussed by the TAs highlighted how new educational opportunities have emerged as globalization has accelerated. The talks also underlined the idea that study can take place outside the constraints of a classroom. The talks also provided the SALC staff with the chance to develop professional skills, such as presenting and lesson planning.

This article will examine how the SALC management developed, implemented, and later reintroduced this educational program. Studies that examine approaches to cultivating autonomous students and employees will help underpin this section of the paper. The paper will initially focus on the presentations that were held in 2019, the first year that the program was introduced. Focus will then shift on to two small scale online surveys conducted in 2023, which was the first time that in-person presentations were held following the lifting of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions at the university: One aimed at participants and one at presenters. Details will also be provided about follow up interviews that were held with the 2023 presenters. The conclusion will discuss whether or not similar events may prove beneficial for university-based academic facilities in the future.

SALC at Kyushu University

The SALC at Kyushu University operates within KIKAN Education (the Faculty of Arts and Science). Since opening in 2014, the center has aimed to support autonomous language learning for both students and staff. The center primarily provides assistance to English language learners. However, the center also offers visitors the chance to practice other languages. At

different times throughout the center's operation, the managerial staff have helped run events that support learners of Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Spanish, and Russian. Nonetheless, daily English conversation sessions are the core service on offer to learners. They usually function as open discussions, which users can join at any time without having to make an appointment. These sessions are supplemented by one-to-one support for students looking to take English language tests, such as TOEFL iBT, IELTS, TOEIC, and GRE). Learners are normally encouraged to make a reservation to utilize this service. In addition, the SALC runs a range of activities, such as game nights and open lectures that promote exchange while also establishing platforms for individuals to sharpen their language skills. The center is also home to a small library and stocks a range of interactive games that encourage students to engage in the language learning process.

The center employs a team of TAs that help support these activities. The majority of TAs are international graduate students at Kyushu University. However, the center has also employed Japanese students and undergraduates. The size of the team fluctuates in number but there are usually between 8 to 15 TAs employed at any one time. The center employs two administrators, a role that involves looking after the day-to-day running of the facility. A member of the Faculty of Arts and Science teaching staff serves as an advisor to the SALC. This individual supports the administrators and assumes a degree of academic responsibility of the SALC alongside the director of the center, who oversees the running of the facility. The authors of this paper have worked in various roles associated with the SALC at Kyushu University. At the time of writing this paper, one of the authors held the position of advisor and the other was no longer attached to the SALC.

Literature Review

The educational activities described in this paper were implanted with a desire to cultivate a sense of autonomy among students and staff. In keeping with Mynard's (2022) model, which links autonomy with increasing intrinsic motivation, the SALC looked to provide a setting where students could pursue their interests and freely express themselves in a safe, interactive environment. By inviting TAs to engage with the students through sharing their experiences of language learning and living abroad, the series of events would hopefully help the students feel at ease when expressing themselves. The talks would also provide a platform for the students to

get to know the center's teaching staff, which could facilitate future interactions between both sides. The aims of these events tie in neatly with Wang and Han's (2020) suggestion that interaction, efforts to introduce culture, and positive social networks help enhance an individual's ability to learn in an autonomous manner. They also stress that that both teachers and students, along with the educational authority, are involved in the process of cultivating an ability to display autonomy.

The importance placed on relationship building within the talks held by Kyushu University's SALC draws from Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory, which indicates that people are naturally drawn to positive educational experiences and the desire to cultivate close, caring relationships (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2020). The type of reciprocal bonds highlighted in this framework dovetails with an interactive learning process that Little and Brammerts (1996) explore in more detail. Within this discussion, they stress that developing learner autonomy is a collaborative process. This also links in with Murphey and Jacobs' (2000) notion that autonomy involves "an understanding of how and when collaboration may be beneficial and the right to choose it" (p. 6).

Furthermore, the managerial staff who helped implement and run these talks hoped that students would draw inspiration from TAs in order to become the type of autonomous learner that Holec (1981) describes as being "capable of taking charge" of their own learning. This approach involves "determining the objectives; defining the contents and progressions; selecting methods and techniques to be used," and "evaluating what has been acquired" (Holec, 1981, p. 3). The managerial staff also felt that these concepts were not limited to students and that the SALC could benefit as a facility by giving TAs an opportunity to develop similar skills through delivering their own independent sessions. This paper's attempt to examine the methods for encouraging autonomy amongst TAs, as well as students, draws on themes explored in Tassinari's (2018) study into the structures and processes that help make a SALC a facility that fosters autonomy for both learners and workers environment. Tassinari highlights that it is the duty of managerial staff to foster a sense of autonomy within their staff, especially when the team is composed of student assistants. Tassinari's notion that this can be achieved by providing teaching staff with the platform to make decisions and take initiative is of particular relevance to this study.

As the paper also explores the development of the talks from the perspective of the SALC managerial staff, the authors have also looked into wider views of autonomy in the workplace. Within in this context, Gagné & Bhave's (2011) discussion on the importance of autonomy in job design and staff management provides a useful resource. These resources provide the authors with the framework to examine a core question that underpins this study: how autonomy can be encouraged within an educational facility.

Methodology

In order to gain a better understanding of how the SALC study abroad talks were received and the value of holding them again, the authors sought a manageable way to gain feedback from both participants and presenters. Gaining meaningful feedback would not only highlight whether or not changes should be made to the contents of the talk moving forward but crucially also provide insight into the means for encouraging autonomy for TAs and students. The 2023 Study Abroad Fair presented a valuable opportunity to collect this kind of information. This marked the first time that in-person presentations were fully re-introduced at the SALC during the study abroad fair following the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors asked both groups to respond to questions in a survey (one aimed at participants and the other at presenters). The questions were designed to gauge how well the events were received through the lens of autonomy, skill development, and personal relationships. The studies highlighted in the literature review have helped the authors identify these three areas as pertinent to this study. Respondents marked the degree to which they agreed with a total of 14 different statements (eight aimed at participants and six at presenters). Participants were instructed to indicate their stance on a sliding scale from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). The questions were intended to gain insight into attitudes towards the events in terms of key topics, such as language learning opportunities, autonomy, and interpersonal relationships. The participant and presenter surveys also gave students as well as TAs and presenters an opportunity to add any remaining comments or impressions about the event in a final open-ended question.

A full list of the questions that were distributed online can be found in Appendices A and B, along with supplementary notes that were added at the bottom of the survey. The questions were distributed using Google Forms and the participants received an access link immediately after a given talk. A total of 11 participants and seven presenters responded to their respective

surveys. Respondents were not asked to provide their personal details when submitting their surveys. This approach was employed as the authors felt that a certain level of anonymity would increase the likelihood that people engage with the project. The authors then collected the results, looked at the mean score for each question and used this as a general indicator for how respondents viewed each statement. Thus, the analysis and insights discussed in the participant and presenter survey results are drawn from these averages.

Upon examining the feedback, the authors decided that follow up interviews with the presenters would be a useful way of gathering more in-depth views on the events and checking if their opinions had changed with the benefit of hindsight. Even though the surveys were submitted anonymously, it was possible to check if respondents to the presenter survey were available to provide added feedback. A total of seven presenter surveys were filled in after the series of talks, which meant that all participants responded. Furthermore, the SALC managerial staff had contact information for the TAs as they were employed by the facility. This meant that it would be possible to simply ask for extra feedback from all seven presenters. This was done through email and two of the presenters provided additional feedback. However, seeking similar responses from the participants who answered the initial survey proved logistically challenging. The participants did not need to register to attend the event and survey respondents were not asked to provide contact information. These two factors meant that there was no means for the authors to later contact the participants who responded to the survey.

Gaining feedback from the students and presenters involved in the talks not only helps to understand how they were received, but also allows both sides to reflect on the activities. Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985) also argue that reflection is "an important human activity in which people recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it." They further stress that it is this process in conjunction "with experience that is important in learning" (p. 19). Although the questions in the surveys were designed not to be taxing on respondents, asking students to look back at the events that they have participated in at the SALC, can hopefully cultivate a desire to reflect in a more critical manner. This ability is valuable as it can be seen a facet of autonomy along with "decision-making, and independent action" (Little, 1991, p. 4).

Developing the Project: Benefits for Teaching Assistants

The SALC participated in a university study abroad fair that ran across a couple of weeks at the beginning of the 2018 academic calendar. As a part of this initiative, the SALC held a series of talks where the management and international TAs gave talks about their home countries. The SALC managerial staff felt that the talks that took place in 2018 were successful in promoting possible study abroad destinations to students but wanted to encourage a greater level of engagement in the sessions. In 2019, the SALC participated in the same study abroad fair; however, it decided to further develop the talks by asking presenters to also share their own experience of studying abroad and how they approached the challenges that they faced in new academic environments. This decision ties in with Tassinari's (2018) suggestion that a diverse team of student assistants can draw on their own set of interests and skills to contribute to the development of an SALC. Tassinari adds that their experience of being students and staff members within the university means that they can provide divergent perspectives into the learning environment. In order to inject a range of viewpoints into this series of talks, the managerial staff involved international TAs who worked in the SALC. A total of six TAs were pinpointed as possible candidates to deliver talks based about their experiences (see Table 1). It was important that the presenters came from diverse backgrounds and would be able to share interesting tips for studying in a new environment. The managerial staff wanted each TA to take charge of one session, which would last approximately 30 minutes to one hour. The talks would take place during the university-wide study abroad initiative, which ran in April 2019. Each speaker would be allocated a time slot to speak over a period of three days.

Table 1

Overview of Presentation Schedule – 2019

Date/Time	Content
Monday 22nd April - 5th period	Talk One: Presentation about Peru[1] Talk Two: Presentation about Iraq

[1] Each presenter spoke about their personal experiences in Japan and provided advice about studying abroad.

Tuesday 23rd April - Lunchtime	Talk Three: Presentation about Malaysia
Tuesday 23rd April - 5th period	Talk Four: Presentation about China
Wednesday 24th April - Lunchtime	Talk Five: Presentation about Mongolia
Wednesday 24th April - 5th period	Talk Six: Presentation about Brazil

The managerial staff wanted the series of presentations to provide an opportunity for TAs to develop their skills. Prior to the event, the TAs who were involved were reminded that they could communicate with the managerial staff if they had any questions about the talks. However, staff wanted to cultivate a sense of independence among the TAs and establish a platform for personal growth. The presenters were told about the aims of the project and the basic structure of the talks. The managerial staff asked for the TAs to talk about their hometown, as well as their experiences of language learning and studying abroad; however, they were given the freedom to develop their sessions in whatever they felt would best appeal to students. Managerial staff thought that providing the TAs with this kind of independent task could encourage an autonomous work environment that facilitates motivation and cultivates a desire for staff to engage in their work and strive for high performance (Gagné & Bhave, 2011). The presenters were encouraged to reach out to the managerial staff to ask for assistance if they wanted help in developing their talks.

The rationale was that providing the staff with an opportunity to speak about topics that they have experienced first-hand in a structure that best suited their personality would create a more enjoyable work experience. Having experienced working in the SALC as TAs, the managerial staff felt that creating a supportive, fun work setting would prove beneficial for staff. While in this instance, it would also encourage the presenters to engage in their tasks at their own volition. This approach links to the aspect of SDT that argues that staff function at an optimal level when they are autonomously motivated to an appropriate level (Slemp, Lee, & Mossman, 2021). It also ties in Ryan and Deci's SDT framework, which suggests people's psychological development is contingent on an environment that encourages engagement within as a means of experiencing autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2020).

The managerial staff believed that the event would have highly practical and tangible benefits for the TAs. Presenters who actively engaged in their tasks could develop transferable skills, such as speaking in front of a group, preparing a talk with a specific audience in mind, delivering an academically engaging session, selecting appropriate levels of language, and facilitating discussion.

Structure of the Presentations: Benefits for Students

The staff determined that the talks would work well if divided into three sections. The first would focus on the speaker's hometown. This would provide students with a chance to find out more about places where they might want to study or work. Staff wanted to have some TAs represent countries or regions that Kyushu University students could choose as a destination to study abroad as academic connections with institutions in those locations had already been established. It was also decided that it would be good to have TAs presenting from places where not so many Kyushu University students go to study as this would encourage participants to broaden their horizons and open their minds to new possibilities for the future. This part of the presentations could also enhance the participants' cultural awareness, which is an indispensable factor in the process of learning English as a foreign language (Wang & Han, 2020).

The next section would see the speakers talk about their own personal experiences of language learning and studying abroad. This would provide listeners with ideas for how to approach their own studies, cultivate a desire to pursue a second or third language, and hopefully inspire them to seek different challenges in their academic careers. If the presentations could help serve as motivation, they might influence students' attitudes towards learning. Wang and Han (2020) argue that motivated study facilitates autonomous learning. They view the two concepts as feeding into each other, suggesting that learner autonomy also leads to motivation. Specifically, they highlight that encouraging students to exert agency and take responsibility for their learning can help promote motivation.

Staff also thought that hearing the experiences of international residents in Japan would help build mutual understanding. One of the key tasks for TAs in the SALC at Kyushu University is to lead engaging, educationally stimulating English language discussions for students who want to practice their language skills. The staff concluded that giving participants the opportunity to discover more about the TAs during the presentations could prove conducive

to a more relaxed atmosphere for the core services. The SALC managerial staff agreed with the viewpoint that autonomous learners can maintain a sense of independence while still promoting group work (Jacobs & Kimura, 2013). If participants made the decision to use the SALC at a later date at their own volition, these talks could help lay the groundwork for more open, engaging discussion sessions between the TAs and students in the future. This, in turn, would lead to the creation of a positive group dynamic, which would encourage the students to become more frequent users. These first two sections of the talks would also provide students with the chance to practice their listening skills.

The SALC managerial staff decided that the final section of the presentations would be a relaxed question and answer session. This would serve as a platform for exchange, allowing the TAs and students to develop a rapport. Staff believed that the question and answers would help newcomers to the center feel more at ease in the premises after witnessing that the space can be used for open discussion, helping to promote the facility and the kind of interactions that take place within the facility. There was a desire to avoid a traditional teacher-centered learning environment and ensure that the setting encouraged an engaged, motivated attitude towards language learning (Wang & Han, 2020).

Students who were already using the SALC could take advantage of this section to find out more about TAs they may have met before when utilizing the facility's core services. This section would also encourage students to speak and practice formulating questions. The SALC managerial staff wanted to ensure that each part of the talk would have practical and educational significance for those in attendance. Thus, participants could experience various benefits through joining the talks. The decision was also made to ask TAs to prepare a PowerPoint presentation to accompany their talks. It was felt that imagery would help provide a visual component to the talks, while any text featured would give students context for the points covered and be useful for participants who struggle with listening.

Promotional Activities

The SALC managerial staff created posters to advertise the presentations. One design was used to promote all six speakers. Details about the speaker's hometowns and the topics that would be covered in the presentations were featured, alongside information about the date, time,

and venue. The posters were put inside the SALC premises and all around the main university campus. Information about the events and the posters were also put up on the SALC's website.[2]

The university produced a list of all the activities taking place during the study abroad fair, which was also posted around the main campus and online. Information about the SALC events were included in the list of these activities. The faculty members who support the SALC also promoted the talks to their students. Furthermore, the SALC managerial staff and TAs encouraged regular visitors to the center to attend.

Interested participants would not be asked to register for both conceptual and practical purposes. The SALC managerial staff felt that removing registration requirements for participants would help create a relaxed atmosphere that would be conducive to autonomous learning, while also reducing the amount of information that needed to be conveyed in promotional materials.

Initial Reactions, Hiatus, and Re-introduction

Each presentation welcomed approximately 10 students. Unfortunately, an exact breakdown of who joined each session is not available; however, this figure was a combination of regular SALC users who attended multiple sessions and less frequent visitors who just participated in a single talk that resonated with their interests. This proved to be an optimal number of participants as core language support activities were also taking place parallel to the talks. As the size of the center is somewhat limited, welcoming more participants could have proved detrimental to one or both of these activities. In addition, the number of participants for each presentation allowed for small to mid-size discussions to ensue during the question and answer section.

The presentations proved valuable to the TAs, as they were given the opportunity to assume greater responsibilities and a sense of autonomy in their duties. They were asked to take on extra work, as the presentations required preparation; however, the personal nature of topics discussed meant that the workload was not excessive and did not interfere with their studies or

[2] In the time since this event was held, the SALC has expanded its online presence. The center now operates an X page (formerly Twitter), Instagram account, and Moodle site in addition to the platforms mentioned.

core TA responsibilities. Consequently, these kinds of events can prove an effective, efficient way of utilizing the experience and knowledge of TAs.

One of the key aims was to develop educationally stimulating small scale events that would be inclusive and encouraging in nature. As the presentations took place in English, participants were able to practice their listening during the presentations, as well as their speaking in the question-and-answer section. Students also got to learn about new cultures, think about possible study abroad destinations, cultivated relationships with TAs, picked up practical tips for language learning, and heard how other students dealt with the process of acclimatizing to different environments.

However, the SALC could not build on these initial successes in years that followed, as the COVID-19 pandemic meant a reduced number of students traveling abroad for academic purposes. This in turn resulted in the study abroad fair not taking place during the subsequent three-year period. However, as opportunities to study abroad start to increase for students engaged in higher education all around the world, 2023 proved a logical time to re-introduce the series of TA-led presentations as the need for programs that facilitate study abroad prospects became increasingly necessary. The SALC staff arranged for a series of seven talks to take place during Kyushu University's study abroad fair. The concept, aim, promotion, and implementation of the talks followed the same pattern as the pre-pandemic events. One of the main differences between the two sets of talks was that the 2023 saw all TAs lead their presentations on the same day (as highlighted in Table 2).

Table 2

Overview of Presentation Schedule - 2023

Date/Time	Content
Tuesday 25th April 2023 - Lunchtime	Talk One: Presentation about Indonesia[3] Talk Two: Presentation about Tunisia Talk Three: Presentation about Mexico

[3] As with the previous set of talks in 2019, each presenter spoke about their personal experiences in Japan and provided advice about studying abroad.

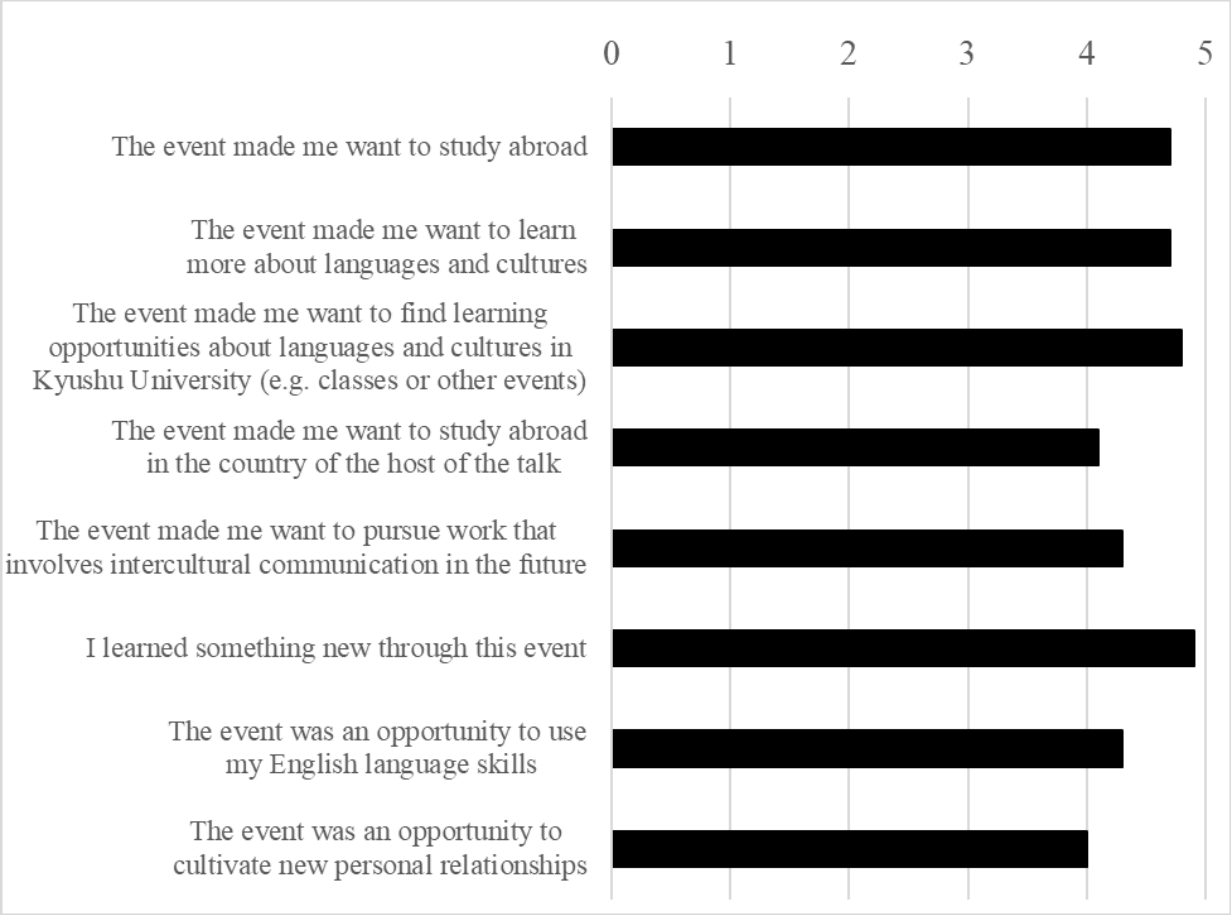
Tuesday 25th April 2023 - 5th period	Talk Four: Presentation about Indonesia
	Talk Five: Presentation about Turkey
	Talk Six: Presentation about Croatia
	Talk Seven: Presentation about Egypt

The 2023 Study Abroad Fair would also provide a valuable chance to conduct a survey examining the degree to which reintroducing these events was a worthwhile exercise. The following sections provide details about the answers that were gathered from the survey, as well as the key points that were gleaned from this intervention.

Participant Survey Results

As outlined in the methodology, the authors calculated a mean average for each respective statement and posited that the closer to five a comment scored, the more it resonated with participants. Overall, the averages indicate that the respondents agreed with all the statements in the survey, with no average dropping below four out of five (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Participant Survey: Average Score for Each Statement



The statements "The event made me want to study abroad" and "The event made me want to learn more about languages and cultures" both generated an average response of 4.7 out 5. Participants also responded positively to "The event made me want to find learning opportunities about languages and cultures in Kyushu University (e.g. classes or other events)," with the statement scoring an average of 4.8 out 5. These responses highlight that the event stimulated the participants' desire to learn more about other languages and culture, as well as an interest in studying abroad. Wang and Han (2020) discuss how a lack of knowledge about another culture can have a negative impact on learning a language. They stress the need to enhance student's awareness of cultures as a lack of cultural knowledge in this area can impede the motivation to learn. The scores for these statements indicate that talks of this nature can act as a casual, undemanding entry point which motivates students to continue exploring language learning and study abroad options at their own volition.

"The event made me want to study abroad in the country of the host of the talk" averaged

4.1 amongst respondents. The slightly lower score here can be explained by the variety of countries focused on during the presentations, some of which are less common destinations for students at Kyushu University. There is a limited amount of formal learning opportunities, such as exchange programs, linking some of the locations discussed in the talks and Kyushu University. Thus, the scores indicate the participants left the events feeling highly motivated to study abroad in a general sense; however, it seems that the home countries of the presenters were not always an optimal match.

Similarly, not all participants expressed a strong desire to pursue a career that involves international communication, which is a more serious commitment than a fixed-term educational study abroad program. "The event made me want to pursue work that involves intercultural communication in the future" averaged 4.3 amongst respondents. Although the nature of the event likely attracted students who already had some interest in the kind of work outlined in the statement, it is likely that others had different and potentially more casual motivations for joining.

Those in attendance reported learning through participation. "I learned something new through this event" averaged 4.9 in the survey. However, there was slightly lower agreement reported for statements that related to improved language proficiency and relationship building. "The event was an opportunity to use my English language skills" averaged 4.3, while "The event was an opportunity to cultivate new personal relationships" scored slightly at 4.0. These scores suggest that these events could benefit from incorporating more interactive elements. Activities such as pair chats, themed discussions, or quizzes could help engage the audience more than a traditional question and answer session.

Finally, in the free comment section, one participant expressed appreciation for getting a chance to listen to a speaker who had studied in the United States, as this was also a destination they were hoping to visit in the future. Another stated that they would like to visit the SALC again. This latter participant's response highlights that these sorts of events can serve as a valuable first encounter with self-access for some students and encourage repeat visits.

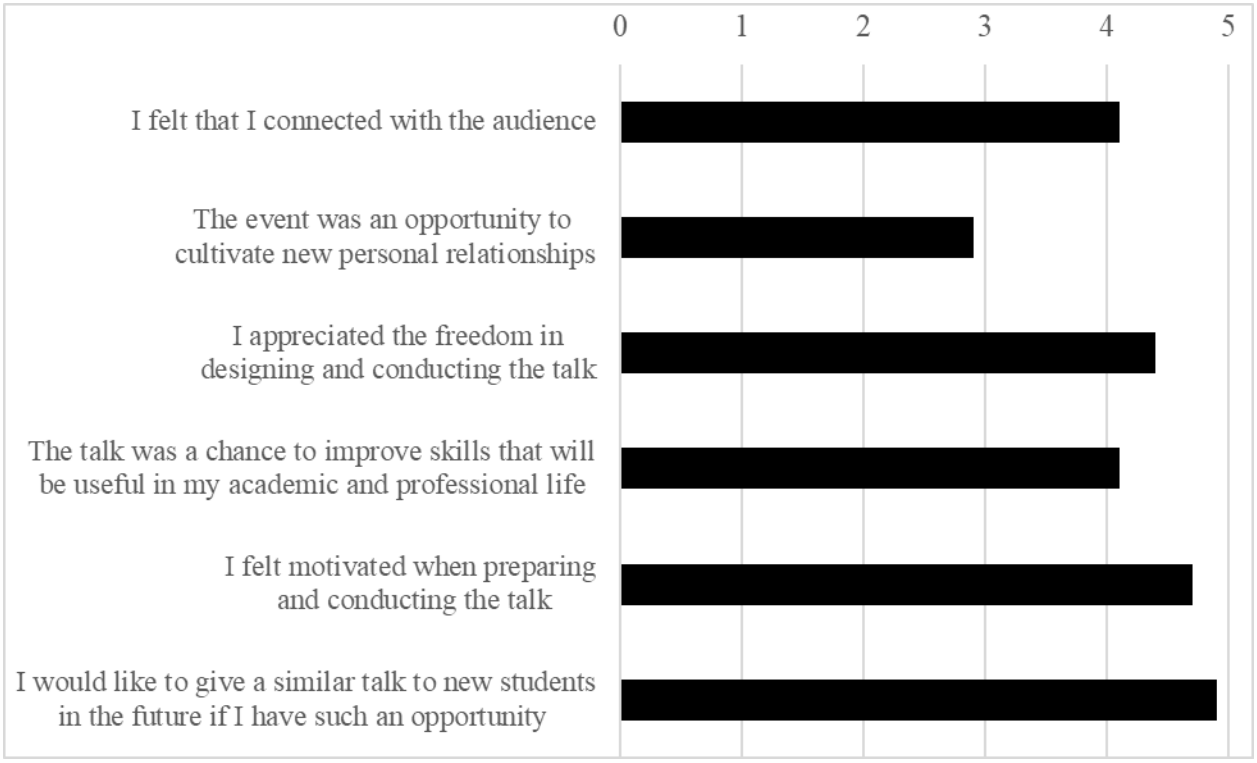
Presenter Survey Results

As with the participant survey, the authors have taken a mean average for each statement

in the survey. Compared to the participant survey, the presenter's average scores suggest more variety in their responses, with one statement scoring under three out of five. However, the respondents did agree with most of the comments, with the remaining comments all averaging over four out of five (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Presenter Survey: Average Score for Each Statement



Most presenters felt that they were able to reach their audience in an effective manner, with the statement "I felt that I connected with the audience" averaging 4.1 out 5. However, one presenter did voice a practical concern regarding the venue and this comment highlights a wider issue with organizing events within a SALC that operates drop-in language practice throughout the day. The presenter in question wrote the following in the comment section of survey:

> "*The talk was conducted during regular language table sessions so voices clash and that sometimes disrupt the atmosphere of the talk. I imagine if our talks were scheduled*

somewhere else we might have more participants and can create a different feel than what we did with these ones."

This comment highlights the trade-off between creating an environment conducive to focus on one hand and encouraging spontaneous participation on the other. A separate isolated space would minimize outside interference, but holding the event in the shared space within the SALC made it visible to visitors (not planning to participate in the talks) and even passersby outside of the building. Kyushu University does not hold statistics that provide insight into the number of students who spontaneously joined these talks having simply walked past the SALC. However, discussions between the SALC managerial staff and students suggest that this was a pathway to entry for some participants. The SALC managerial staff strive to create activities that are more accessible to everyone on campus but the kind of disruption the respondent spoke about in the above quotation is an occasional side effect that cannot be ignored. Gardner and Miller (1999) discuss how noise caused by speaking within a SALC should be accepted given the need to accommodate different forms of study that are driven in accordance to the learner's approach. They also highlight that explaining the need for this kind of noise to both students and staff can help mitigate against issues arising in this area. Taking necessary precautions to manage sound level expectations prior to the hosting of events that supplement an SALCs core services can help avoid the types of challenges outlined by this presenter.

"The event was an opportunity to cultivate new personal relationships" scored 2.9 out of 5, which was the lowest level of agreement out of any of the statements in either survey. This is perhaps to be expected from an event that is only organized only once a year. However, one speaker felt that the tight schedule of the presentation did not allow enough time to meaningfully interact with the audience. Setting aside more time for the question-and-answer session, providing the audience with some prompts for the discussion, or exploring interactive activities (as discussed earlier) could better facilitate interpersonal relationships. This could have given participants the chance to speak about their goals, which could have been particularly fruitful given that learners can gain a understanding of their own sense of purpose when encouraged to open up about their dreams and personal motivations (Mynard & Shelton-Strong, 2022). During the preparation of the talks, the managerial staff could more actively encourage presenters to ask the audience their own questions. It is important that educators who wish to promote greater

learner autonomy start by reflecting on their own practices and expectations (Little, 1991). Promoting this approach among the presenters prior to the talks would be worth considering when holding similar activities in the future. A short briefing with TAs could prove a simple yet highly effective way to ensure that the question-and-answer session does not become a one-directional exchange. It could also provide the TAs with an opportunity to develop lesson planning skills and encourage the SALC managerial staff to interact with the presenters about their topics before the events take place.

This neatly ties in with the next statement in the survey and the level of autonomy that is attributed to TAs (and or support staff) based in SALCs. All the speakers felt that they were given free rein in creating their presentation as is evident in the 4.4 average score that was attributed to the "I appreciated the freedom in designing and conducting the talk" statement. All but one of the presenters seemed to see that as a positive. However, there was one speaker who evidently felt differently:

> "*While I did appreciate the freedom in designing the talk, it was difficult for me to decide on the contents. I could get an idea of the type of attendant by the prompt "Japanese students with an interest in studying abroad" but I didn't really know what they expected or what they were interested in when preparing the talk. Nonetheless, I enjoyed the experience and learning to engage different types of audience is a useful skill to have*."

Although this respondent is focusing on some of the challenges that TAs experienced during this series of talks, it can be valuable to compare their experience to the issues that might arise for language learners in SALCs, as this can provide a useful point of reference when developing activities. While pursuing one's goals independently and proactively brings benefits such as increased learning motivation (Dickinson, 1995), some students might feel confused or even lost without enough structure, especially if they expect the faculty and staff to provide it (Ho & Crookall, 1995). Future speakers could benefit from being provided with a more detailed profile of the potential audience and what it may seek to hear in the talk.

"The talk was a chance to improve skills that will be useful in my academic and professional life" scored 4.1 out 5. This implies that the speakers generally felt that the talks were an opportunity to develop or cultivate useful skills, which meant that the events were not

only beneficial to the students who attended, but also of the hosts of the talks.

Finally, the speakers reported a strong sense of motivation and willingness to repeat their role in upcoming Study Abroad Fairs. "I felt motivated when preparing and conducting the talk" averaged 4.7 amongst respondents and "I would like to give a similar talk to new students in the future if I have such an opportunity" was slightly higher at 4.9. Any issues that were reported by respondents did not discourage them from future participation, meaning suggests they were perceived either as tolerable or as fixable.

Presenter Survey Follow-up

Out of the seven presenters who responded to the original survey, two agreed to elaborate on their answers and provide new ones in a follow-up questionnaire. Some points raised in the responses reiterated some of the views expressed in the first set of surveys, while others offered fresh insight into the presenters' experiences.

The first respondent provided more detail on the benefit of connecting with the participants who joined:

> *"I feel that what I gained the most from this presentation was experience in how to connect, as a presenter, with a Japanese audience. My feeling is that some strategies like asking questions directly to the audience or asking them to raise hands were met with some resistance".*

The above statement suggests that the presenter received some insight into the cultural considerations needed when attempting to engage Japanese students. This respondent also was in favor of imposing more structure on the topics of the presentations, which would make the preparations easier and let potential participants know what to expect. The authors concur with Tassinari's (2018) assumption that TAs are more likely to encourage autonomy amongst learners when they experience this approach to education firsthand. Although there could be a danger that too much predefined structure might compromise the intended aim of fostering the autonomy of the presenters, it may be worthwhile providing future presenters with optional suggestions or ideas that can serve as a source of inspiration. Adopting this type of approach seems advisable given that similar feedback was provided by a presenter during the initial survey that was

circulated after the talks were held. The respondent who gave this feedback also noticed some of the participants returned to SALC to join a conversation event that they organized. On an anecdotal level, this suggests an SALCs involvement in a study abroad fair can serve as a point of entry for new students.

The second respondent also felt a deepened understanding of the particular kind of audience that attended:

> *"As a scholar, I am used to giving talks and presentations as such I had already acquired the necessary skills and knowledge by the time I gave the talk last year. That being said, it was useful to learn how well undergraduates-especially first and second years- can follow my talk and how responsive they are to ideas introduced in the talk."*

The comment shows that even if a presenter is already an experienced public speaker, giving a talk to young Japanese students specifically can be helpful in learning how to tailor a future talk to their needs. The practical benefits afforded to TAs who deliver talks to students inside a SALC was not as explicitly expressed in the initial presenter survey. The second respondent also highlighted that the content of the talks could be more stimulating, suggesting the need to go beyond a simple "introduction of my home country" style presentation and dive deeper to discuss problems of "access, issues of language and identity, funding, etc., that everyone who studies abroad would have navigated." This individual also suggested using the theme of "What I would tell my younger self" as a prompt for future presenters, which could act as a balanced compromise between imposing structure and allowing free reign in designing content.

Conclusion

This paper highlights how SALCs can make efforts to encourage autonomy for both TAs and students. The feedback provided in this study highlights that Kyushu University's SALC could consider making changes to these events in the future, such as providing the TAs with more specific guidelines during the planning phase and exploring the possibility of incorporating interactive aspects into the sessions. However, keeping the desire to foster autonomy among TAs and students as a constant focus from the development through to the implantation of an

activity is a valuable approach for SALCs to employ, as it ensures that all parties are considered by management.

The survey carried out as part of this paper serves as a useful starting point for analyzing the effectiveness of the activities developed, implemented, and reintroduced by Kyushu University's SALC as part of the Study Abroad Fair. Further analysis is required into the topic, given that there was a small sample size garnered in this survey. The follow up interviews provided another challenge in this study. As the authors did not initially plan to conduct these email-based follow up interviews, efforts were not made to capture respondents contact details. Although asking for this type of information may have impacted the ability of conducting an anonymous survey, there could have been an attempt to ask for details that could facilitate further correspondence in a sensitive, non-obtrusive manner. A key learning in this area is to integrate a back-up plan for generating further feedback as a means of mitigating against any possible limitations in responses received.

Nonetheless, the efforts discussed in this report highlight how developing activities in self-access language centers that benefit both the teaching staff and students can be worthwhile. Furthermore, making the effort to ensure that these initiatives encourage motivation on both sides can help encourage autonomy for staff and language learners. The series of talks that were reintroduced into Kyushu University's SALC during the 2023 study abroad fair were well received. This suggests that there is a continued appetite for TAs to engage with students, as well as a desire for SALC users to learn languages and study abroad. In the future, it is likely that Kyushu University will continue to host study abroad fairs and the SALC may well explore the possibility of organizing similar events. It is also of significance that the structure employed pre-pandemic could feasibly operate in an online capacity as this might help open up the sessions to an increased number of participants.

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Appendix A

Participant Survey

1. The event made me want to study abroad.
2. The event made me want to study abroad in the country of the host of the talk.
3. The event made me feel it is valuable to learn about languages and cultures.
4. The event made me want to find learning opportunities about languages and cultures in Kyushu University.
5. The event made me want to pursue a career that involves intercultural communication.
6. I learned something new through this event.
7. The event was an opportunity to practice my language skills.
8. The event was an opportunity to cultivate new personal relationships.

Note to all respondents: The results of this survey will not be made public in a way that would allow identifying the participants as individuals.

Appendix B

Presenter Survey

1. I felt like I connected to the audience.
2. The event was an opportunity to cultivate new personal relationships.
3. I appreciated the freedom in how to design and conduct the talk.
4. The talk was a chance to improve skills that will be useful in my academic and professional life.
5. I felt motivated when preparing and conducting the talk.
6. I would like to give a similar talk to new students in the future if I have such an opportunity.

Note to all respondents: The results of this survey will not be made public in a way that would allow identifying the participants as individuals.

Note to Presenters: Any response you provide will not affect your status as a SALC and

Kyushu University Teaching Assistant.

Exploring Student Perceptions of the New Learning Commons at the Ikebukuro Campus of Tokyo International University

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In the ever-evolving landscape of higher education, institutions are constantly striving to create dynamic and inclusive learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of their student body. Tokyo International University (TIU) recently opened a new facility, the Learning Commons, at its Ikebukuro campus. This space serves as a hub for linguistic exploration, cultural exchange, and collaborative learning, aiming to enhance the overall academic experience for students.

To gauge the impact of this facility, the authors of this paper are currently conducting a survey targeting students who actively participate in the Learning Commons' programs and activities. This study seeks to explore and compare the experiences of students at two distinct SACs – one established on the Kawagoe campus and a newly formed counterpart on the Ikebukuro campus. The study focuses on understanding how the transition and differences between the two SACs impact student engagement and satisfaction. Participants in the study were students who had utilized the English Plaza (EP) on Kawagoe campus during the spring semester and subsequently experienced the newly opened Learning Commons (LC) on the Ikebukuro campus in the fall semester of the same year. The objective is to identify factors contributing to the students' experience at each location and evaluate how the establishment phase of a SAC influences student perceptions and interactions. This analysis is particularly relevant as most students who used the EP have since transitioned to the Ikebukuro campus, offering a unique perspective on continuity and change in student life facilitated by campus activity centers. Another question the researchers are exploring is whether the change in language policy in the LC, allowing students to speak both English and Japanese, will attract new students to visit and participate in activities compared to the EP.

The aim of this research project is to understand student perspectives and how their perceptions play a role in in university administrators' assessment of the effectiveness of the LC. This paper will detail the preliminary findings from survey responses from students who have participated in the LC, shedding light on strengths, areas for improvement, and overall impact. The researchers attempt to illustrate how language policy affects students' participation and perception of the space (Thornton, 2018). The authors hope to contribute valuable insights that can inform future enhancements and ensure the continued success of TIU's commitment to global education and cross-cultural understanding.

Context

TIU was established in 1965 and its main campus is located in Saitama, Japan. There are approximately 7,000 students representing over 100 countries. In the fall of 2023, a new campus opened in Ikebukuro, Tokyo. This campus caters to the international student population and English language and International Relations majors.

The original SAC at TIU is called the English Plaza (EP) on the Kawagoe Campus in Saitama, created in 2013. It is located in a reappropriated student lounge in a main classroom building on campus. Activities included the English Lounge, a conversation practice area, and Academic Advising, which is a homework and tutoring space. The faculty of the Global Teaching Institute (GTI) provides English conversation and academic support. There is also a section of the space dedicated to English language books for students to use freely, and a small cafe space for students to order drinks free of charge. The newly established SAC on the Ikebukuro campus, the Learning Commons, provides similar facilities to those on the Kawagoe campus, including dedicated spaces for English conversation, academic advising, individual study rooms, and a spacious cafe area. While the facilities are nearly identical, there has been a change in the language policy. Instead of being exclusively English-speaking, the facility now accommodates both English and Japanese languages.

Day-to-day operations are managed by paid student interns, consisting of both Japanese and international students, who undergo training and are supervised by faculty advisors. The space is administered by GTI managers and university administration.

In keeping with mission statements common to other SACs (Chen & Mynard, 2018), the EP was designed to be a hub of English language development and international understanding. The aim is to provide a space where students meet to refine their language skills, connect with international students, and gain the support of experienced tutors and advisors in pursuit of academic and personal excellence. The space proved to be popular with students; anecdotal feedback from repeat visitors to the EP noted how they enjoyed the atmosphere, surroundings and furniture. The genesis for the creation of the EP came from TIU administrators who recognized the importance of creating new and dynamic spaces to attract students. There was also the recognition that a SAC could become a hub for intercultural exchange, as TIU was actively recruiting students from abroad during this time to enroll in the university's English-mediated Instruction (EMI) program, English Track (E-Track). Mynard (2019) noted that this

rationale among university administrators has become more common in consideration of the declining birthrate in Japan.

Previous Research

The establishment of SACs within higher education institutions, particularly in the Japanese context, has been a subject of scholarly investigation for many years. Previous studies (Thornton & Noguchi, 2016; Hooper, 2020) have provided valuable insights into students' perceptions of such learning centers, shedding light on various aspects ranging from student needs assessment to the growing recognition of the importance of social learning. Chen and Mynard (2018) explored students' perceptions of the SAC space through the lens of students' experiences, emphasizing the positive correlation between engagement in language centers and the impact of the physical environment on users' experiences.

This research, conducted in various cultural contexts, offers insights relevant to the bilingual and culturally diverse environment of the SAC on the Ikebukuro campus. For instance, a study conducted at a university in the Netherlands (Beckers et al., 2016) delved into the role of learning spaces and their impact on meeting students' expectations. The findings indicated that well-designed learning spaces, like those found in language centers around the world, contribute to students' sense of control over their learning journey and promote collaborative learning among students, faculty, and staff.

Considering the context of the Ikebukuro campus, with its diverse student population encompassing both Japanese and international students, it is crucial to understand how SACs contribute to students' perceptions of the university environment, language proficiency, autonomy, and intercultural competence. The collective findings of these studies emphasize the multifaceted benefits of such centers, providing a valuable foundation for the current study on the LC at Ikebukuro campus.

Synthesizing these studies, it is evident that SACs and their language policies in Japan play a vital role in shaping students' perceptions of the university environment. As we navigate the specific context of Ikebukuro campus, with its bilingual and culturally inclusive SAC, we aim to build upon and extend these insights to contribute to the broader understanding of the impact of similar learning environments on students, particularly focusing on the experiences and perspectives of both Japanese and international students.

Ongoing Data Collection of Student Perceptions

The ongoing study focuses on exploring the experiences and perceptions of 88 participants: 75 Japanese students and 13 international students. The international students are enrolled in the E-Track Program at TIU, studying fields such as international relations, business and economics, or digital business innovation. They originate from various countries, with more than 100 nations being represented at the university. While these students do not take regular classes with Japanese students, they regularly use the LC to practice Japanese and meet fellow students. At present, the participation of international students in the survey is limited. While some international students who frequently visit or work in the LC as interns were participants in the survey, the researchers are actively seeking more feedback from this group. Among the Japanese respondents, 68 individuals were first-year students. The primary method employed for data collection has been a survey distributed to first-year seminar classes and made accessible online through a QR code in the LC. The data was collected towards the end of the 2023 academic year, following the opening of the new campus in the fall of 2023. After the campus had been operational for three months, it was determined that sufficient time had elapsed to begin gathering data on student perceptions of the new facilities.

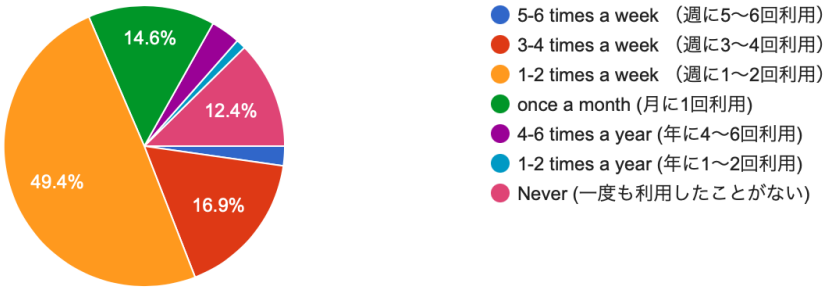
The survey aims to capture insights into various aspects of the participants' experiences within the learning environment, particularly focusing on their interactions and engagement in activities within the LC. This facility serves as a central hub for academic and social activities, making it an ideal setting for studying student engagement and experiences.

While all students across different academic years were invited to participate, the study primarily targets first-year students. This focus is driven by the fact that some activities in the LC, English Lounge (conversation practice) and Academic Advising (tutoring support), are mandatory and connected to course grades for first and second-year Japanese students who major in English. However, international students must visit Academic Advising for only first-year academic literacy courses. Therefore, this cohort represents a significant portion of the target population and provides valuable insights into students' initial experiences transitioning into higher education. By including both Japanese and international students, the study aims to capture a diverse range of perspectives and experiences, considering potential cultural differences in engagement and utilization of the LC.

The survey items focused on students' frequency of visits, motivation for attending, and their awareness of policies and rules. This report focuses on the first two of these matters. In total, there were 10 questions. Questions were provided in both English and Japanese and participants could write their open-ended responses in either language. Figure 1 notes the frequency of users in the fall semester of 2023. This was the first semester of the newly-opened campus in Ikebukuro.

Figure 1

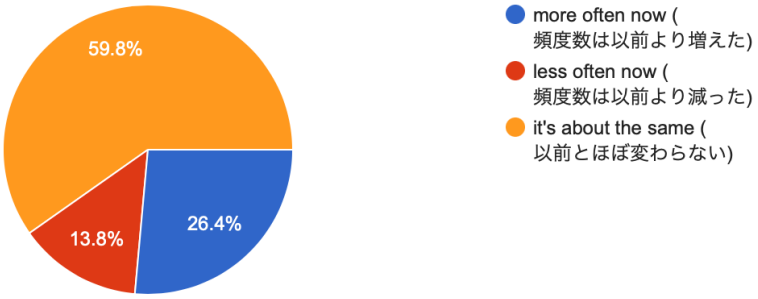
How Often Do You Visit the Learning Commons (Not Including Intern Working Hours or Class Time)?



While analyzing the data from Figure 1 and comparing it with visits to the EP on the other campus in the spring semester (see Figure 2), we observed that nearly 60% of the students indicated no change in their visit frequency from the EP to the LC. Meanwhile, 26% reported visiting the LC more frequently. Notably, among the international students surveyed, the majority noted that their visit frequency to the LC either remained the same or decreased. To better understand this trend, the researchers aim to increase the number of international student participants in the survey and conduct interviews to explore their reasons for visiting the LC less often. Conversely, Japanese students were more likely to report increased visit frequency to the LC. The degree to which the changed language policy plays a role in these usage patterns requires further investigation.

Figure 2

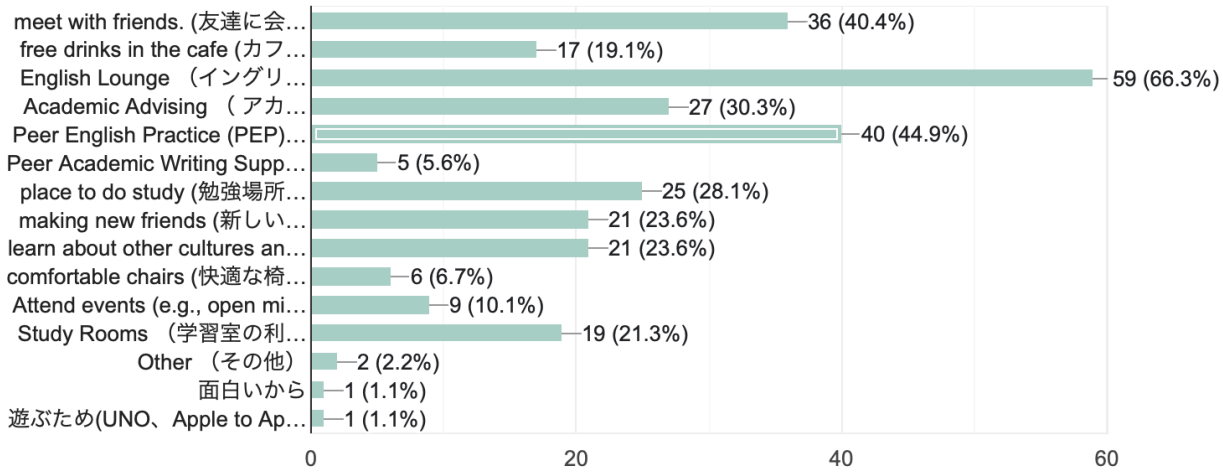
Has the Frequency of Your Visits Changed From Last Semester in the English Plaza?



To better understand motivation for visiting the LC, activities provided in the LC were added as multiple-choice items in English and Japanese (see Figure 3). This question asked participants to select several items related to the activities in the LC and EP in order to better understand their motivations for participating. Responses to this question show that the majority of users are fulfilling a requirement to participate in the English Lounge for class credit. The second highest recorded reason for using the LC is Peer English Practice which is similar to the English Lounge conversations, but led by student staff. Students can also receive class credit for attending these sessions.

Figure 3

What Is Your Motivation for Visiting the Learning Commons (Ikebukuro) or English Plaza (Kawagoe)? Select All That Apply.



At TIU, all first- and second-year English majors are required to visit the English Lounge at least once a week. In the survey, students provided their year and major so from this data it is

assumed that at least some of the EL attendance is for class credit. A closer look at the data also shows that students are exceeding requirements. While students are visiting the EL at least partially for credit, the data do not imply it is the only reason.

Although the survey data supports previously assumed ideas about usage, the next phase of the study will provide a comprehensive exploration of student experiences through interviews within the LC, shedding light on factors such as visiting for class credit. The implications from these interviews will help the researchers understand the individual motivations of students and may shed light on factors that can enhance the overall learning experience of all students, not merely first-year students. They may also aid in the continuing effort to provide tools that support learner autonomy. As Mynard and Stevenson (2017) have pointed out, measuring whether or not a SAC promotes autonomous learning is a challenge, nevertheless, it is important for university leaders to observe evidence of learning and underscore areas for improvement.

Going Forward

The authors are actively collecting additional survey data, particularly from international students, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their perceptions of both facilities. To further this inquiry, preparations are underway to conduct semi-structured interviews with students who have expressed willingness on the surveys to discuss their experiences in the EP in Kawagoe and the LC in Ikebukuro. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allow the researchers to focus on predefined areas of interest while also enabling participants to offer new insights (Hooper, 2020). The aim of these interviews is to delve into specific survey responses and explore participants' motivations for using these spaces across different semesters.

The overarching goal of this research is to enhance our understanding of the functions and benefits of the SACs, along with their complexities and potential challenges. By the end of the 2024 academic year, the authors plan to present a comprehensive review of the findings to university administrators. This report will include summarized results and actionable recommendations. Ultimately, it is hoped that this research will provide institutional stakeholders with the in-depth knowledge required for informed decision-making concerning funding, staffing, and future initiatives related to the SACs.

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Leveraging AI to Enhance Self-Access Language Learning Centers

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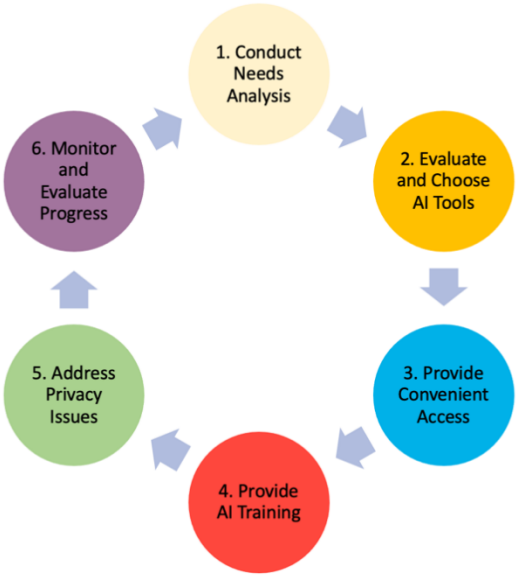
Self-access language learning centers (SALLCs) play a crucial role in higher education institutions, offering students a flexible and supportive environment to improve their language proficiency (Koyalan, 2009). Whereas the traditional purpose of SALLCs was to provide physical access to materials and resources (Gardner & Miller, 1999) such as books and films, the constant evolution of technology-based tools continues to transform the landscape of digital learning resources that now provide access to materials and platforms designed to afford learners more interactive practice of their language skills outside of a formal language classroom (Mynard & Shelton-Strong, 2022). The recent accelerated use of AI, in particular, has revolutionized the way students learn and acquire new knowledge and skills (Aithal & Aithal, 2023), and simultaneously challenged educators at colleges and universities worldwide to reconsider how we should leverage AI to support students' self-directed learning (Li et al., 2024). Because SALLCs play a crucial role in providing students with opportunities to develop language skills at their own pace, this article explores the ways in which AI technologies can enhance these language learning experiences in self-access centers. This article is not intended to be an all-inclusive discussion of the potential benefits and applications of integrating AI into SALLCs; rather, it should serve as a starting point in the broader discussion that is needed to continue moving SALLCs forward in light of recent advances in AI.

Practical Steps to Integrate AI into SALLCs

Integrating AI into SALLCs at colleges and universities can serve to enhance the overall language learning experience for students (Har & Ma, 2023). Yet, we need to note several practical steps that should be taken to successfully implement AI. Figure 1 illustrates these steps and their cyclical nature intended to encourage repeating the integration process as needed.

Figure 1

Overview of Steps for AI Integration



First, it would be beneficial for all stakeholders involved to begin with a thorough needs analysis to identify the specific language learning needs of the students, expectations of faculty, and the needs and capacity of the SALLC and its staff to support the implementation of AI. Second, after conducting a needs analysis, those involved should evaluate and choose the appropriate AI tools that align well with the needs previously identified, whether they be specific AI applications, chatbots, virtual tutors, or other forms of AI. This might also include a discussion of potential costs. Third, SALLCs need to ensure that students have convenient access to AI tools within and outside of the center. This may include dedicated workstations or comfortable areas to utilize their own devices. Fourth, SALLCs should provide adequate training to familiarize students and staff with the AI tools available to them and ongoing support to address any difficulties that arise during the learning process. This phase of implementation should also consist of collaboration with the language instructors to guide students to maximize benefits to their language learning. Fifth, and perhaps in conjunction with the training mentioned previously, students and SALLC staff need to be aware of how data is used and how to protect student privacy when engaging with AI. Last, successful implementation of AI depends greatly on constant evaluation and monitoring of students' progress. AI grants SALLCs the capacity to track and monitor students' progress, which can be utilized to identify patterns, strengths, and weaknesses. Similarly, constant evaluation of such AI integration, based on feedback from

students, instructors, and SALLC staff, allows stakeholders to continuously make improvements to the overall process, especially when repeating cycles of the integration process.

Potential Applications of AI in SALLCs

The potential applications of AI in SALLCs worldwide are countless, limited only to one's imagination or potential for innovation. For example, there are some documented cases of SALLCs using AI robots that serve as personal learning assistants to students (Har & Ma, 2023) and others implementing self-assessments for language learners via Quizizz AI (Anggoro & Pratiwi, 2023). Building on these examples, the remainder of this article focuses on four key considerations for integrating AI that draw on its pedagogical affordances to offer conversational language practice, multilingual tutoring, gamification and tracking of learner progress, and multimodal learning experiences.

Conversational Language Practice

One of the primary advantages of incorporating AI tools, such as chatbots like ChatGPT, ZenoChat, Mondly, or others into SALLCs is the opportunity for students to engage in realistic conversational practice. ChatGPT, in particular, has the ability to generate human-like text responses (Susnjak, 2022), which affords students opportunities for realistic and interactive conversations. Students can engage in dialogues with AI tools to practice and reinforce their language skills in a dynamic and personalized manner. AI models possess the ability to understand context, provide relevant responses, and adapt to user input, which facilitate meaningful interactions. This conversational practice may contribute to improved fluency (Hwang et al., 2023), as students gain confidence in applying language skills in real-world scenarios. AI, especially chatbots, can simulate authentic conversational experiences by generating contextually relevant dialogues (Chen et al., 2023). Students can engage in interactive conversations with the AI, practicing their language skills in a supportive and non-judgmental environment. This has the potential to foster increased confidence in using the language and improve fluency through regular practice.

Furthermore, AI excels in tailoring responses to individual users based on their specific needs and proficiency levels (Firat, 2023). By analyzing the individual learner's input AI can assess the proficiency level of learners through these conversations, enabling the system to generate tailored content and feedback based on their specific needs. This personalized approach

ensures that students receive targeted support to foster more effective learning outcomes. Simulations powered by AI can also immerse language learners in real-world contexts, allowing them to apply their skills in practical scenarios. For example, ChatGPT can simulate conversations in a variety of settings, such as travel, business meetings, or social gatherings. This not only reinforces language skills but also familiarizes students with cultural nuances and context-specific language use. AI-driven speech recognition technology can also be integrated with various AI tools to provide feedback on pronunciation and spoken language skills. Real-time assessment and feedback allow learners to refine their pronunciation, intonation, and overall oral communication (Sun, 2023). This addresses a common challenge in self-access language learning, where learners may lack opportunities for meaningful spoken language practice.

Multilingual Tutoring

Beyond serving as a conversational partner, AI technologies like ChatGPT can provide multilingual support, catering to the diverse linguistic needs of students in SALLCs. AI can offer language learning resources and intelligent virtual tutoring in a wide variety of languages (Huang et al., 2023), ensuring inclusivity and accessibility for a broad range of students. For example, ChatGPT is a multilingual chatbot that supports more than 80 languages (Botpress, 2023). Within SALLCs, these multilingual virtual tutors can provide instant feedback (Weng & Chiu, 2023) on grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary usage, mimicking real-time interactions with a human tutor in a variety of languages.

Furthermore, AI-powered language learning systems, including ChatGPT, provide the advantage of 24/7 access to multilingual tutors and immediate feedback. Students can engage in language learning activities at any time, promoting flexibility in their schedules. While managed or guided by SALLCs, this type of accessibility caters to diverse student populations, including international students (Wang et al., 2023) and those with different time zones or non-traditional learning preferences, ensuring that language learning is not confined to specific hours or the physical space of the SALLC. This utilization of AI for tutoring purposes may also alleviate SALLC concerns related to costs, lack of staffing, or lack of personnel from a specific target language.

Gamification and Tracking Learner Progress

To make language learning engaging and enjoyable, SALLCs can leverage AI to incorporate gamification elements. ChatGPT can create interactive language games, quizzes, and

challenges, which have recently been linked to increasing students' motivation and active participation in the learning process (Bekou et al., 2024). In addition, traditional assessment methods often fall short in providing real-time feedback and tracking progress. AI, integrated with SALLCs, can offer adaptive assessments that dynamically adjust difficulty levels based on individual performance (Jeon, 2023). Moreover, AI-based multilingual tutors can generate comprehensive progress reports, allowing both students and educators to monitor language development over time (Huang et al., 2023). The implementation of AI in SALLCs allows for the generation of valuable data on user interactions, preferences, and learning outcomes. Analyzing this data could provide insights into individual and collective learning patterns, enabling educators to make informed decisions about instructional design and content delivery. Continuous improvement based on data-driven insights ensures that the language learning experience remains dynamic and adaptive to evolving student needs.

Multimodal Learning Experiences

AI technologies have the capacity to extend beyond text-based interactions, offering an array of multimodal learning experiences. Integrating visual and auditory elements into language learning can significantly enhance comprehension and retention (Teng, 2023). AI, coupled with other multimodal AI tools such as Synthesia AI, a tool utilized to generate videos with avatars and voiceovers, can support the creation of multimedia content such as interactive videos, virtual reality scenarios, and image-based exercises, providing a holistic language learning experience. Similarly, many AI applications support text and voice-based interactions, which allow users to receive targeted feedback on pronunciation, intonation, and fluency (Hwang et al., 2023).

Mitigating Risks of Using AI in SALLCs

AI can be a useful tool for language learning; however, it does come with several limitations and concerns that need to be addressed by SALLC staff and language educators. For example, if language students are instructed to practice with an AI tool such as ChatGPT, they may receive interaction that is inappropriate for their needs. In comparison with human instructors, AI tools often display limited adaptability based on learners' needs or proficiency level (Huang et al., 2023). Similarly, such tools may have difficulty with complex language structures (Roumeliotis & Tselikas, 2023) and often generate content that is inaccurate or irrelevant, because they fail to understand the context of a conversation or interaction (Huang et al., 2023). Thus, it is important to train language students and educators how to utilize AI-based

tools effectively and to monitor student progress over time. Part of this training should include scaffolding language learners and educators with strategies to mitigate such challenges, including how to design effective prompts to successfully drive the focus of their interactions and how to verify the accuracy of linguistic information. In addition, because AI systems are based on large data training sets, there is a risk for perpetuating biases or cultural insensitivity (Kamalov et al., 2023), especially if the tools are not prompted effectively and constantly monitored. Last, AI tools may collect and store learner data, raising concerns about privacy and data security (Wang et al., 2023). SALLC staff will need to develop and implement robust measures to protect learner privacy, such as minimizing the sharing of learner data or completely anonymizing learner participation.

Conclusion

The integration of AI into SALLCs holds immense potential for transforming the landscape of language education at colleges and universities globally. From personalized learning paths to intelligent tutoring systems and gamified interactive learning, these advancements can revolutionize how students engage with language learning. By providing personalized, interactive, and multimodal learning experiences, these technologies address the limitations of traditional approaches, making language acquisition more engaging and effective. Lastly, while the integration of AI in SALLCs has the potential to effect numerous benefits for language learners, it is essential to address potential challenges and ethical considerations. Ensuring students' data privacy, preventing biases in AI-generated content, and promoting digital literacy are crucial aspects that educators and SALLC staff must prioritize.

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JASAL2023 National Conference Review

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On 22nd October 2023, The Japan Association for Self-Access Learning (JASAL) held its Annual National Conference at Gifu Shotoku Gakuen University, in Gifu City. The conference welcomed teachers and other professionals involved in the field of self-access learning and learner autonomy in Japan allowing opportunities for professional development and networking, as well as an in-depth exploration of Gifu Shotoku Gakuen University's Self-Access Center "MELT", and the associated "English World" run at the neighbouring university-affiliated elementary school. The 2023 theme was Student Agency and Leadership in Self-Access Learning Communities which was explored through Daniel Hooper's plenary presentation, Fixing Issues under the Radar: Student Agency and Leadership in Self-Access Learning Communities.

This is my second year attending JASAL's annual conference. In 2022, I began working in an established Self-Access Learning Center (SALC) with an experienced manager and team. Attending JASAL in 2022 allowed me to see beyond the SALC I was working in and develop a deeper understanding of the field. JASAL has given me insight into alternate programs and SALC offerings. In 2023, I moved to another university in order to rebuild a SALC which had been out of use for several years. I suddenly needed to build my own programs and offerings, with very few examples from which to draw. The SALC tours and presentations in JASAL have given me a wealth of examples and ideas along with a deeper understanding of various perspectives, many of which have become foundational in my reinvented SALC. This conference review will outline some of the practical applications I have taken inspiration from, such as the SALC tours listed below. This is followed by a discussion of the plenary presentation which explores theories which underlie such SALCs. Finally, it will present some commonalities between presentations, many of which have also become sources of inspiration in my own practice.

SALC Tours

Prior to the conference on October 21st, participants able to attend were taken on a tour of "English World" by its founder and director of MELT, Clair Taylor. English World, the social learning space at Gifu Shotoku Gakuen University Affiliated Elementary School, is run in conjunction with and by members of the MELT volunteer team. It allows elementary school students to access an English-language-based play environment freely. The elementary students are able to interact with English in a non-classroom environment through games, play, dance, and role-play, supported by

undergraduate students in the Faculty of Foreign Languages. Speaking to the undergraduate students, it was easy to see how modelling an environment of language exploration developed their sense of agency and authority, allowing them to participate in a burgeoning language-learning community. At the same time, English World allows the elementary school students to supplement and reinforce the language skills practised in their classrooms in a low-stress environment while interacting with role models. This dynamic between undergraduate and elementary students highlights the important position of role models, and also seemed to remind the undergraduate students of the importance of play in their language learning progress.

Mid-way through the conference, attendees were also able to tour Gifu Shotoku Gakuen University's SALC, MELT (an abbreviation of Maximum English Learning Together) Lounge and Annex, and talk with student staff. The staff here described an interest in pushing their language skills and self-accountability as some of the motivations behind them becoming staff members. They were keen to talk about the services provided and how they had benefited from them. The spaces featured a range of resources from direct study advice to self-access materials, and collaborative community-building activities. Student staff showed a genuine interest in using English language knowledge and skills to effectively communicate with the conference attendees, a testament to the self-motivation endorsed by the SALC.

The willingness to practice English-language communication skills with not only their peers and seniors (such as teachers and coordinators), but also students earlier in their learning journey is a key trait I have sought out in student staff for my SALC. These tours reinforced the idea that all learners can gain something valuable from other learners, regardless of their position within the community.

Plenary Presentation

The conference began in earnest on the 22nd with the plenary presentation, Fixing Issues under the Radar: Student Agency and Leadership in Self-Access Learning Communities by Daniel Hooper, associate professor in the Department of English Communication at Tokyo Kasei University, which explored topics of student leadership support in self-access. Hooper began by describing the gap between the test-focused study of *eigo* and the communication-focused practice of *eikaiwa* (Hiramoto, 2013). Hooper noted that students may have a sense of insecurity or instability when accessing a self-access environment, described by Zittoun (2006) as "rupture". Although a range

of students may access the space, higher-level students are the ones who receive the most benefits and are more likely to develop a sustained relationship with a SALC. He posited that one response to this unequal engagement is a student-led space which balances autonomy and support.

Hooper described an ideal student-led space as being a non-canonical knowledge domain. Unlike a top-down guideline-driven canonical structure, a non-canonical organisation allows a grassroots and flexible approach, where student leaders pull from their life experiences both in and outside of SALCs. This creates a liminal space where students can disregard social norms and challenge existing structures to better fit their needs. In an interest-based student learning community, teachers sit on the sidelines while students flex their leadership skills and autonomy. This also allows a breakdown of fluency-based hierarchies; students with skills or knowledge of language learning and practice are as, or more, vital than fluent language speakers. Through such a collaborative target-language practice, students with all levels of language proficiency can have their basic psychological needs (BPNs) satisfied through a cycle of autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Watkins, 2021, p. 202; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Hooper argued against the framing of these student-led spaces as communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), as this framework is often posed in a vacuum and may not address power imbalances in areas such as race, gender, and in-group/out-group membership. Instead, he presented the goal as being one of prosociality wherein students intentionally help or benefit others as part of satisfying their own BPNs.

To break down autonomous learning barriers in a student-led space and get reticent students to maintain their engagement, Hooper encouraged the provision of three types of resources:

- **social resources:** Social resources, wherein students use fellow students as resources for language practice and answers, can be managed through a flattening of hierarchy and the encouragement of leadership opportunities. These opportunities are scaffolded into an “affiliate leadership” with student members offering official or unofficial leadership opportunities to other members. Senior students also actively encourage newcomers and seek out their feedback, creating an environment where both senior and new students see the space responding to their needs.

- **cognitive resources:** In order to lighten the cognitive load on students with more *eigo* than *eikaiwa* exposure, students can engage in practices which leverage their theoretical language study. This allows students who may not have fluency to not only participate but also provide benefit to others.
- **symbolic resources:** Explicit resource availability and language-learning guidance can be practised in programs such as advising (Kato & Mynard, 2015). While not only promoting community leadership, such structured approaches allow students to practice and develop their prosociality in a formalised dynamic, allowing time and focus on transitioning into the new environment. As with the social resource of student feedback and response, students can become researchers into how the space should progress, how they and others learn, and the theory of autonomous learning for the betterment of themselves and others.

Through his presentation, Hooper described ways in which a SALC can not only support allocated student leaders such as student staff, student advisors, or target-language native speakers but can also create an environment where prosocial students recognise and desire leadership in themselves and their fellow students.

Presentations

Following the plenary speaker, JASAL conducted its annual general meeting and then took a short break to prepare for the conference presentations. These consisted of 30 research and practice presentations delivered in a hybrid format, and five poster presentations. The following presentations were relevant to my burgeoning SALC, and offered perspectives on how to make English-based activities approachable for students of all English as a foreign language fluency levels, language production opportunities that arise from features of SALCs, and the role managers and coordinators play. I also chose presentations which focussed on student leadership and students with multiple language competencies, as these are elements I wish to foster in my context.

In Project-Based Learning and Autonomous Learning: A Great Fit, Malcolm described a collaboration between language and engineering teachers to deliver a project-based learning (PBL) course. The class goal was to work in a team on an English-medium engineering project, and then present the project in English to industry professionals. While the program required a high level of buy-in from other faculties,

the PBL approach allowed for learning through discovery, meaning-making, creativity, and applying integrated knowledge. Students were able to rely on each other's unique skills and approach the project in an autonomous manner in order to achieve a collective goal. While teachers were on hand for support, they were not prescriptive in their advice, and the most successful teams were those who recognised the need for self-motivation and English as a method, not just a goal.

Hays and Mueller, and Hauser, Bennett and Jackson explored roles of elements within a SALC, and how these spaces facilitate goal-orientated speaking opportunities. In Hays and Mueller's Cultivating Connections: The Oregon Café in a SALC, they presented on a cafe within a SALC which empowers learners to develop skills within a common-goal community. Its location within the SALC and in the center of campus helps to bridge the gap between the classroom and the real world, facilitates communication between junior students, senior students, and teachers of all departments and languages, and fosters intercultural understanding. In The Service Counter as a Space for Friendly Conversations, Hauser, Bennett and Jackson conducted a conversation analysis on the English exchanges between student staff and visitors at a SALC service counter. They observed the staff's attempts at casual conversation, small talk, and comments about their work. It was noted that both staff and visitors contributed to this low-stakes environment, signified by the physical space of the service counter. Staff and visitors all displayed a willingness to engage other students in English dialogues and persisted with the communication efforts even when meaning was lost or confused. As with Hooper's and Malcolm's presentations, Hays and Mueller, and Hauser, Bennett and Jackson all described environments where teachers are available to students but are hands-off, allowing students to overcome language barriers between themselves. All presenters discussed developing a student-led environment where students felt empowered to explore, correct, question, and lead their fellow language learners.

The topic of student prosociality and knowledge-sharing was explored in Abe and Sei's Learning Backgrounds of Multilingual Student Staff at a SALC. Their research investigated the motivations and backgrounds of graduate student staff who support multilingual learning in a SALC. Through interviews, staff reflected on their experiences and attitudes towards autonomous learning, which in turn helped them to make suggestions to other students and encourage them to reflect on their own language learning journey. Despite the identifiable differences between the student staff and the

SALC visitors, the latter didn't seem to be intimidated by the former's multiple proficiencies, instead finding them a source of interest and inspiration. Open dialogues with the SALC visitors encouraged graduate staff to discuss how they acquired the language, helped the visitors reflect on their language-learning progress, and developed relationships with near-peer role models.

As a direct example of Student staff as reflective researchers, Hooper, a professor and manager of the SALC in question, and Suzuki presented the student-initiated research project Analyzing Self-Access Anxiety Through the Eyes of Students. Suzuki, a student of Hooper's and a participant at the SALC, described students' attitudes regarding participation in said SALC and how he developed a deeper understanding of student language anxiety. This anxiety is experienced in several areas such as linguistic factors, social factors, perceived levels of peer support, and conversation topic and familiarity. Student perspectives on the development of the SALC allow for a bottom-up sense of ownership, and the social relatedness of activities in the SALC is interrelated with users' well-being when using the space. However, the sense of belongingness in the SALC was presented as a balancing act between feeling at home and pushing oneself or being pushed to perform beyond a familiar level. To address the question of what to do about this anxiety, Suzuki identified methods starting with addressing and naming the anxiety directly. This provides the student with a level of agency and allows them to examine their learner beliefs. While the scaffolding of linguistic factors is important, so too is scaffolding social factors. Suzuki introduced concept of journeyfolk, seen in apprenticeship communities where three main relationship dynamics emerge: "apprentices, young masters with apprentices, and masters... But there are other inflection points as well, where journeyfolk, not yet masters, are relative old-timers with respect to newcomers" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 56). These journeyfolk share the experiences of apprentices but are not yet beyond relatability. Peers and near-peers in SALCs can model social interactions both as leaders within an interaction as well as learners still developing their skills. This fluidity outside of a strict dynamic relieves the pressure of perceived expectations and reduces social isolation for those experiencing language anxiety.

Reflections

When starting a SALC, I initially focussed on what was lacking. I could not entice students with the built-up resources available in my previous location or the facilities and infrastructure of larger, more famous institutes. But through the

presentations, one message was clear: social connections are the lifeblood of SALCs. While there are many motivating factors which may encourage a student to enter a SALC for the first time, it is the social connections formed there which will keep them participating long-term and these positive relationships cannot form in an environment where a student does not feel supported or guided. While I always recognised the importance of peer support, I had focussed on the one receiving the support, and not the one providing. My biggest take-away from JASAL2023 was that encouraging students to be guided and supported by their fellow students not only helps that student, but also has a hugely positive impact on the student providing the help. This was a major factor in helping me understand the dynamics between new students, experienced or more confident students, and student staff.

Students need guidance in not only what to do or say in these spaces but also how to participate in the community and help it grow. Students undoubtedly benefit from resources and facilities, but I have found that it is the people found in the SALC which keep them motivated; an unmotivated learner will not use the materials and facilities, no matter how abundant or new they are. A student-led space requires a large amount of agency, not just from student staff but from all visitors to the space and, as described in many of the presentations, a hands-off approach by the teacher or manager allows students to flex their leadership skills and practice seeking out resources to fulfil their needs. This does not mean that teachers are obsolete in student-led SALCs, but that a students-helping-students cycle allows students to recognise their own abilities and develop an autonomous learning identity. This in turn may lead to students being better able to use a teacher as an expert resource rather than feeling a sense of dependence or default to authority. When given the opportunity and shown how, supported students show a remarkable interest in pushing themselves beyond their comfort zone and challenging their language skills. Although my guiding principle for my SALC from the beginning has been to build a community, it was a difficult line to walk. With a deeper understanding of prosociality and student collaboration, and examples of how they can play out in various ways in a SALC, I feel better able to navigate the role of a manager promoting student autonomy. An environment in which students are both satisfying their basic psychological needs through receiving and providing support fosters not only leadership within the SALC, but also encourages agency in other areas of learning and self-development as well as resilience towards hardships and setbacks.

The JASAL conference is undoubtedly an excellent opportunity for presenting on research conducted, sharing practices, and networking with industry peers. However, it may also be an opportunity for teachers and other professionals to develop their own sense of agency and leadership within a community. I began my SALC journey as a member of an established SALC community, but rebuilding such a space in a new context without experienced co-managers could have been an isolating and daunting experience for someone with little experience. By participating in a community such as JASAL, I have been able to learn from others and reach for future possibilities. Presentations and tours offer a scaffold to follow when developing a SALC, observations of student staff and visitors demonstrate how flexing an individual's skills can greatly benefit an overall outcome, and support can be received if you also have interest in supporting others and are open to learning from those around you. These practices are ones modelled in the JASAL community and ones I aim to pass on within my SALC. If the post-conference networking dinner is any way to judge the conference and direction of JASAL, then this was a conference in which to learn, grow and celebrate community.

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Supporting Growth through Self-Access Learning: Report on the JASAL Forum at JALT2023

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Forum events at the international Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) conference have been an important part of the Japan Association for Self-Access Learning's (JASAL) annual calendar since the organisation started in 2005. They serve two main purposes: to give JASAL members the chance to meet and discuss issues related to self-access learning, and also to introduce new people to our association.

On November 25th, 2023, the Japan Association for Self-Access Learning (JASAL) held its first face-to-face forum at JALT for several years. A Call for Papers went out to the membership in early 2023, and through this process, two presentations were selected for participation in the forum, entitled Supporting Growth through Self-Access Learning, in keeping with the overall conference theme of Growth Mindset. In this report, Yaya Yao and Agnes Maria Francis summarise their presentations and discuss their experience participating in the forum and the ideas that emerged from it.

Yaya Yao: Translanguaging Arts-Based Approaches for Linguistic Justice

In this presentation, I shared understandings drawn from a study conducted through a university self-access language learning center in urban Japan. The study involved the implementation of two workshops in February 2023 applying translanguaging performance poetry to center bilingual/multilingual identities and experiences. I then engaged in follow-up dialogues with one participant, Mohan (a pseudonym), over the next several months, to reflect on his creative process in the workshops, his poem, and his subsequent linguistic development.

Translanguaging

Translanguaging (García, 2009) as a concept and applied theory has received considerable attention over the past two decades. It is built around an understanding of how bilinguals (henceforth used interchangeably with multilinguals) use language; that is, how we draw on all our linguistic resources to make meaning. We do so in a way that is unbounded by state-imposed boundaries on languages, versus dialects, versus language varieties. As such, we must regard personal linguistic resources as one entity rather than divided into discrete languages. This is reflected in the idea of a holistic language repertoire. The translanguaging (and plurilingual) perspective argues that (language) learning is most supported when bilinguals are encouraged to draw on our holistic repertoires freely, mirroring and centering uniquely

dynamic cognitive processes. In the context of English language education (ELE), challenging normative monolingualism and celebrating bilingual ways of knowing and being.

Arts-Based Approaches

Arts-based approaches to ELE that incorporate translanguaging are a burgeoning area of research. Given the multimodal, open-ended nature of arts-based methods, they are an intuitive fit with translanguaging. This is especially so with the genre of poetry, and especially of performance poetry, given its multimodal focus on linguistic experimentation, wordplay, and in-the-moment interaction. But translanguaging arts-based approaches have received little attention in Japanese secondary and tertiary contexts. Given how self-access learning, or SAL, is concerned with attuning to learner perspectives to foster autonomy (Mynard & Shelton-Strong, 2022), and with the related impetus to decolonize ELT, translanguaging arts-based approaches can support these goals.

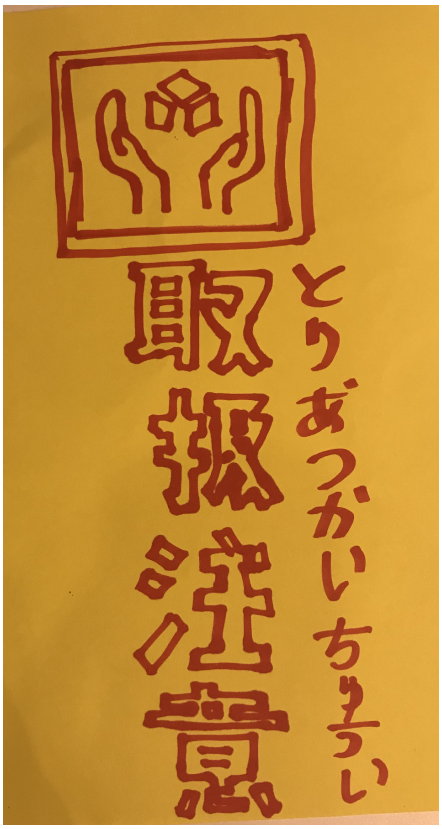
Results & Discussion

This study explored the participatory dialogue between Mohan and me as we interpreted his creative process, poem, and linguistic development over the eight months following the initial workshops.

At the start of the study, Mohan was at the end of his first year of a master's program at a Japanese university. An international student from India, he was adjusting to a new culture and language. His poem reflected his relationships to Hindi, his mother tongue and formative language of instruction; English, the other language in which he had been educated; and Japanese, a recently adopted language. The Hindi and Japanese lines of his poem seem to plead to the reader for understanding. The English lines exhibit a more declamatory and direct tone. Mohan's performance of the poem reflected a sense of vulnerability that was underlined by the final Japanese-language line, translated as "Handle with care." He also included a visual element to his multimodal performance of the poem, pulling out a hand-drawn symbol (with accompanying kanji) typically affixed to fragile mail (Figure 1).

Figure 1

The Visual Element of Mohan's Poem



In three subsequent dialogues undertaken between March and October 2023, Mohan and I explored the underlying meanings of his poem, his feelings and thoughts in the workshop process, and the changes in his language repertoire since the workshops. Reflections connected milestones in his personal life to shifts in his linguistic expression and identity. In his words, "this Japanese guy" was experiencing exciting transformations. These discoveries were clarified through a dialogue in which his initial poem served as an anchor for reflection, crystallizing his mindset at the time of creation.

Conclusion

Challenging linguistic injustice involves the direct critique of the systems of power that marginalize multilingual ways of languaging. It also means recognizing and celebrating the diverse ways that multilinguals relate to their holistic repertoires. The creative and dialogic process following the initial poetry creation and performance surfaced depth of knowledge that Mohan developed through family, community, and social lives (and typically marginalized in his current schooling context); in other words, celebrating his funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992).

Suffice to say, reflecting on Mohan's creative process through dialogue fostered both participant and researcher learning in unexpected and powerful ways. Through this and other approaches, translanguaging arts-based methods can facilitate non-hierarchical interactions that can move learners and educators towards deeper mutual understanding, autonomy, and linguistic justice.

Agnes Maria Francis: Navigating New Advising Sessions, Growing as an Advisor

In this presentation, I reflected on my personal experiences as a learning advisor at three different institutions. As each institution implemented distinct advising approaches, I realized the importance of support for new advisors. Hence, through this presentation, I aimed to explore various types of advising that I had experienced, examine different training approaches, and propose support that could be provided for advisors.

First Experience: Advising To Check Students' Learning Progress

My first experience as an advisor began all the way back in Indonesia at a language school for adults, which incorporated some self-access components. At this language school, students were required to see the advisors every two or three months to check their learning progress and to address any challenges students faced; advising sessions had a clear goal and were quite structured. Dialogues were used to assist students in reflecting on their progress, although advisors maintained significant control during the advising sessions. During this time, my view of learner autonomy was rather limited.

Delving into advising could be intimidating. However, I found that the structured advisor training was helpful and practical. The new advisors observed the experienced ones, followed by a reflection session. Then, for the new advisors' first advising sessions, they would be observed and receive feedback. There were regular observations and feedback sessions every year to maintain advising quality.

Second Experience: Advising To Assist Students with Their Learning

My second experience with advising began when I started working at a self-access center (SAC) in Japan. In contrast with my previous experience, this advising was on a voluntary basis. Most students seeking advising had specific goals in mind, such as enhancing their listening skills for an upcoming TOEIC test, thus the advising sessions were tailored accordingly. By this

time, I had a better grasp of learner autonomy as I had done some research on the topic. I was able to involve students in the decision-making and encourage them to voice their opinions.

The initial advisor training provided allowed me to grow as an advisor. I learned how to communicate and build rapport with students from my advising experience in Indonesia, but I learned the theory of advising and intentional reflective dialogues (Kato & Mynard, 2016) during this initial training from the SAC coordinators. Besides the training, advisors were encouraged to write reflections and engage in evaluation sessions. Finally, student surveys completed after advising also helped me understand students' feelings.

Current Experience: Advising To Help Students Formulate Goals and Take Actions

My current role as an advisor in e-space, the SAC at Konan Women's University, was rather different from my two previous experiences. First-year students were required to attend advising sessions as part of their grades. Due to its compulsory nature, many students did not fully understand the purpose of advising, and advisors had to lead the sessions. In the spring semester, advising topics were rather limited to students' language goals and learning plans because students were from the English department. As students arrived with personal goals, advising was tailored to accommodate each student individually. In the fall semester, reflections on students' learning experiences started to happen, and more diverse topics emerged in the advising.

Suggestions for Advisors and SAC Coordinators

Drawing from my previous experiences, I would like to suggest some ideas for both advisors and SAC coordinators to consider:

1. Utilize advising tools such as student profiles, goal-setting worksheets, learning plans, and journals. Advising tools help students visualize the reflection process (Mynard, 2012). Advisors can adapt the tools to suit their advising styles and become more familiar with them.

2. Communicate the purpose of advising with students clearly and explain how the advising will go. Advisors should briefly explain the rationale behind whether students should answer questions or share stories during advising. This will help tremendously with how students feel about advising and how they will make decisions regarding their learning.

3. Professional development through communities of practice, research, training, and reflection. Although there was no official training for my current role, the informal discussions among advisors gave me a better idea of what the advising would be like.

4. Lastly, it is important to recognize that students are the focus of advising (Kato & Mynard, 2016). Advisors often fear that students will not return, so we pack a lot of information in one advising session. It is important to understand that too much advice can overwhelm students. Advisors can always invite students to come back after a few weeks.

Discussion

These two presentations were then followed by a short discussion with other participants. The group split in two, with each presenter joining one discussion group to reflect collectively on the ideas raised in their presentation.

In the conversation inspired by Yaya's presentation, we discussed how translanguaging, even in everyday interactions, can foster learner autonomy. As a pedagogical practice, it signals to learners that their holistic repertoires–their whole selves–are welcome. This stance is especially important in the self-access space. When educators translanguage, it can build trust as we strive to express our authentic selves, to be transparent about our positionality, and to model the embracing of our own plurilingual repertoires. Of course, this is not a simple proposition, as there is generally institutional pressure to maximize time in the target language. We might be forced to choose between exclusive target language use versus modeling plurilingual ways of communicating, arguably an equally important pedagogical goal. We also discussed the ways in which native-speakerist inequities shape the ways in which educators might feel able to apply translanguaging in their practice. While, for example, a teacher assumed to be a Western native English speaker might be lauded for their plurilingual capacities and their commitment to this leading-edge paradigm, teachers perceived as Japanese or non-Western might find themselves questioned as to why they might "need to use Japanese" with learners. The topic of translanguaging in self-access is certainly one in need of greater exploration.

In Agnes's group, we shared our experiences and challenges as learning advisors. Initially, we discussed students misunderstanding the purpose of advising. For instance, they often bring personal problems to advising sessions, not realizing that advisors are not

psychologists equipped to address such issues. We reached a consensus on the importance of clearly explaining the role of advising to students beforehand to prevent disappointment. Additionally, we addressed the issue of student passivity during sessions, where they expect advisors to provide all the answers. One strategy we explored was sending advising tools to students prior to the sessions. This approach aims to outline the topics that will be discussed in the session, allowing students to prepare their thoughts and fostering a sense of ownership over their learning. Furthermore, we explored the potential of translanguaging during advising sessions to support students' reflective practices and establish rapport. This exchange was particularly enlightening, as it provided a rare opportunity for advisors from various SALCs to exchange ideas and perspectives.

Conclusion

There are few opportunities for JASAL members to meet and discuss self-access related issues in person, so this forum was an excellent opportunity to bring people together, and the presenters provided an excellent starting point for our discussions. We look forward to hosting more forums and similar get-togethers at future events across Japan.

Acknowledgments

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Review of the 7th JASAL Student Conference, December 9th 2023

Running Head: JASAL Student Conference Review 2023

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Author Biography

Shiira Imada is a graduate student majoring in computer science at University of Miyazaki in Miyazaki. There is no self-access center in his university, but he organized a student team which focuses on improving English speaking skills. His interests are students' motivation for learning a foreign language, organizational management of language learning groups, and the effects of self-access center on university students.

This report is a review and my reflection of the 7th Japan Association for Self-Access Learning (JASAL) Student Conference. The online conference was held on Saturday, December 9, 2023. 28 students from eight universities attended it, and 10 presentations were given. We met on Zoom from 1pm to 5pm. There were teachers, advisors, and members of JASAL staffs in addition to the students.

My Motivations for Joining the Student Conference

I organized a new student team to learn English in May 2023, and we worked on weekly activities. After starting the group, we faced some problems such as management and contents of activities, so I set two goals in the student conference. The first goal was to learn about situations of SALC in other universities. Especially, I was interested in what kind of activities other SALCs do and how to make active SALC members. Another goal was to give a presentation about our activities, problems, and possible solution to let participants know our situation.

Overview of Conference Sessions

In the conference, we had an opening session, two presentation sessions, two group chats, a group discussion, action planning, and a closing session in accordance with the timetable below.

13:00 – 13:20	Opening Session
13:20 – 14:10	1st Presentation Session
14:10 – 14:30	1st Group Chat
14:30 – 15:30	2nd Presentation Session
15:30 – 15:50	2nd Group Chat

15:50 – 16:20	Group Share & Discussion
16:20 – 16:30	Quick Presentation
16:30 – 16:45	Action Planning
16:45 – 17:00	Closing Session

In the opening session, we talked about the reasons and our goals for attending the conference. Each participant had two minutes to talk including self-introduction. After the opening session, we had the first presentation session. The presenters had ten minutes to give a presentation. The second session with presentations took place after the first group chat session. The two group chat sessions were about the presentation sessions. We were divided into groups of four to five students, and we discussed which presentation(s) was(were) interesting in each session. In the chat sessions, students had two to three minutes to talk, and after that, we could ask questions to our group members. The members of group were rearranged every session. Therefore, we could meet and talk with students from a different university at least once. In the group discussion, we shared about what kind of problems, and we discussed about some possible solutions. In the closing session, we had a photo shooting part and a reflection part. We shared what we have learned on that day using chat box of Zoom.

Pre-Conference Activity

There were two self-study activities that we had to do before the conference. At first, we clarified the purpose and goals of attending the conference by using an assigned worksheet. In the worksheet, there were three questions.

1. Why did you decide to participate in this Student Conference?
2. What is (are) your goal(s) for attending this conference?
3. What is one thing that you would like to promise yourself?

We talked about these questions with other students in the opening session. Other than this work, there was another pre-conference worksheet to think about questions to ask students from other universities. The worksheet had a space to write questions, answers from other participants, and our school name. In addition to a pre-conference worksheet, there was one more kind of worksheet which we used during the presentation sessions. We could take notes and write our thought about the presentation. All worksheets helped me a lot during the conference and when I did a reflection after the conference.

Opening Session

We had a group chat with 4 or 5 students in a group. It took 20 minutes, and we introduced ourselves and talked about some of the topics given in the pre-conference worksheet. All of our group members were to give a presentation at the conference, so they mentioned about doing their best in the presentation session. After talking about designated topics, we had time to ask each other some more questions. We were from different areas of Japan, so we enjoyed having conversations about the current temperature in our living area.

Presentation Session One

In the first presentation session, six presentations were given by students from three different universities. The brief summary of each presentation is written below.

1. APU's Sanctuary for Language Learning

This presentation was about SALC (Self-Access Learning Center) in Ritsumeikan APU (Asia Pacific University) in Oita. It offers materials for language proficiency exams, a lounge for interactive learning, operational listening booths, and so on. The distinctive activity is one-on-one sessions facilitated by skilled advisors. Moreover, they hold monthly language

exchange events.

2. NINJA Innovation

NINJA is a center in Kyoto University of Foreign Studies where, students, administrators and teachers work together. The students talked about how they overcame the staff-centric situation by advertising. There are counter staff, chat staff, and tutor staff in the center. They offer different learning opportunities on campus, such as speaking practice and individual consultation about learning language.

3. Welcome to the SALC

The SALC in Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) has a two-storey building on campus. The first floor is a multilingual area, and the second floor is an English only area. In the presentation, the presenter had a picture slide tour about the building and SALC activities.

4. What I learned about making an inclusive and supportive community through events

Yuka Mukumoto from KUIS gave a presentation in which she shared her personal story. “Inclusive” and “supportive” are key phrases in her team, but she felt how difficult it was to be supportive. She shared how her team made efforts to overcome the difficulty throughout Tanabata (summer star festival) and Wafuku (Japanese traditional dress) events.

5. SALC is the best place for learning Language at KUIS

The SALC at KUIS offers Language Practice Partners (LPPs) and Learning Advisor services. LPPs help students exchange language and cultures with international students. Learning Advisors provide personalized guidance and effective tips to improve users’ language skills.

6. Journaling Community in the SALC

There is journaling community in the SALC at KUIS. Presenters explained what the

journaling is and its effect on our mind, and they gave some topic examples from their community.

Group Chat One

We talked about the first session with presentations in the group chat. We had 20 minutes for chatting. Our group members were interested in the presentation about NINJA and SALC in APU. Fortunately, there were APU students and NINJA members in our group, so we were able to ask them some questions. The contents of questions were particularly about their facilities, events, and members of staff.

While chatting, I realized a big difference of number of international students between my university and other universities. However, I thought inviting international students to team would be good motivation for members. Compared with NINJA or SALC at APU, our team is very small, so I asked these teams for their advice on how to gather members. Both of them answered that advertising by using Instagram account was effective.

Presentation Session Two

In the second presentation session, four presentations were given by students from three different universities including me. A brief summary of each presentation is below.

1. A Step Ahead from Being a Student: Mini Translation Project with Our Teachers

At the Graduate School of Humanities, English and Linguistics Major of Kinjo Gakuin University students work on several autonomous translation projects. In 2023, presenters worked on the translation of Declaration Form of AI Translation Tools. In the presentation, they shared about the discussions they had, the skills they have gained, and the difficulties they have faced in the translation project.

2. Situation of Self-Access English Studying Group Made up of only Students

This presentation was given by me. I organized a self-access English learning team in May 2023. I reported about the situation with our team activities, difficulties we had faced, and how we have overcome these difficulties. We have a weekly activity, but the contents are limited. Therefore, I was concerned about the declining motivation among my team. We used to have activities online, so I held a face-to-face event with international students. I realized that the events will be good opportunity to let people know about our team and keep students motivated. In addition to that, I shared our future prospects at the end of my presentation.

3. SALC and Me: A Story of Change

Rina Ito from KUIS gave a presentation about her personal experience of learning English by using SALC at her university. Especially, she focused on some benefits that she had gained from speaking practice with learning advisors. She also talked about her beliefs and mindset related to language learning.

4. Partiu! Portuguese Learning Community

This presentation was about learning community for studying and practicing Portuguese in the SALC at KUIS. Presenters mentioned the reasons why they created the community in the beginning. After that, they talked about what makes their learning community special and motivating. Furthermore, they shared their activities they do and the games that they do and play in the community, and finally, they introduced about the challenges they had and how they have overcome them.

Group Chat Two

We had another chat time about the second round of presentations. Happily, I was asked a lot of questions from other group members. They asked about the origin of our team, management, and first event that we held in December 2023. Not only asking questions to me but also group members gave me some advice to make team grow. For example, they suggested

inviting international students and holding events regularly.

In my opinion, in the second session presentation by Rina Ito was interesting. She shared her experience as an English learner. I had a similar experience when I was a beginner in learning English, so her presentation reminded me my own original intention.

Group Share & Discussion

We discussed about problems and issues in SALCs. We were separated into breakout rooms and talked with students from other universities. Every student had their own problems about their own team, but we found two common problems. They were related to managing centers and gathering new members. We considered some solutions to these issues, but we couldn't come up with one perfect idea to solve them. For instance, using Instagram to announce about recruiting was possible solution, but Instagram posts will only reach followers. On the other hand, we discovered a new problem. It was about the difficulty of keeping our motivation for studies.

As a result, we found these three issues in the group discussion.

1. How to manage a team
2. How to recruit new members
3. How to keep learning motivation

After the group discussion, we went back to the main room, and we had time to share the results of our group discussion. Other groups also mentioned about recruiting and motivation, so I thought these two issues happen to many SALCs. I would like to reconsider these problems with my own team sometime in the future.

Action Planning

Next, we made an action plan to solve one of the issues at our team during the session

on action planning. As a first step, we clarified what issues would we like to solve. After that, we considered about a concrete action. Finally, we made a timeline to proceed with this plan.

In my case, the issue I would like to solve is the management problem that might happen after I graduate. I was planning to organize a management team with the current team. I also thought about the kind of roles that are necessary, and I made a possible timeline.

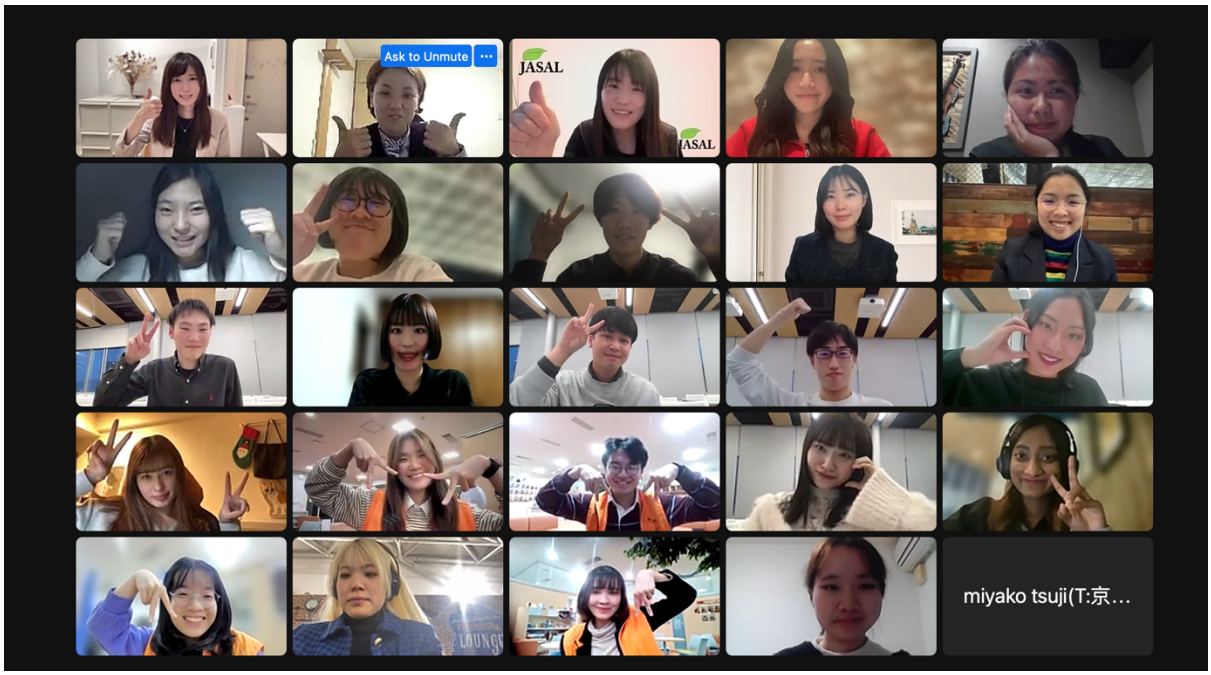
This activity was very meaningful for participants to sincerely face the issues within their own teams. There were some group discussion or chat activities during the conference, but in this activity, we could think about the situation in our own teams and centers deeply by ourselves.

Closing Session

In the closing session, organizers greeted to participants once again, and we took some group photos (Figure 1). We also did a final reflection by ourselves and shared our thoughts in the chatbox. The conference seemed to have given precious opportunities to all participants.

Figure 1.

A Group Photo of some Conference Participants



Suggestions

I had a wonderful time at this conference, but I have two suggestions for improving the future student conferences.

The first suggestion is to set aside time for joining the Zoom meeting. The conference was supposed to start at 1pm, but we took time and waited for every participant to join the meeting. As a result of the waiting time, we were a little behind the schedule. If we allocated time before the start time, I think we would have started right on schedule. 5 to 10 minutes is enough as a waiting time.

The second suggestion is to let the presenters to know about the remaining time during their presentations. I could my presentation around 10 minutes when I practiced, but I finished earlier than I had expected in the conference. I think I was too nervous and talked too fast. I couldn't afford to check the time while I was giving a presentation.

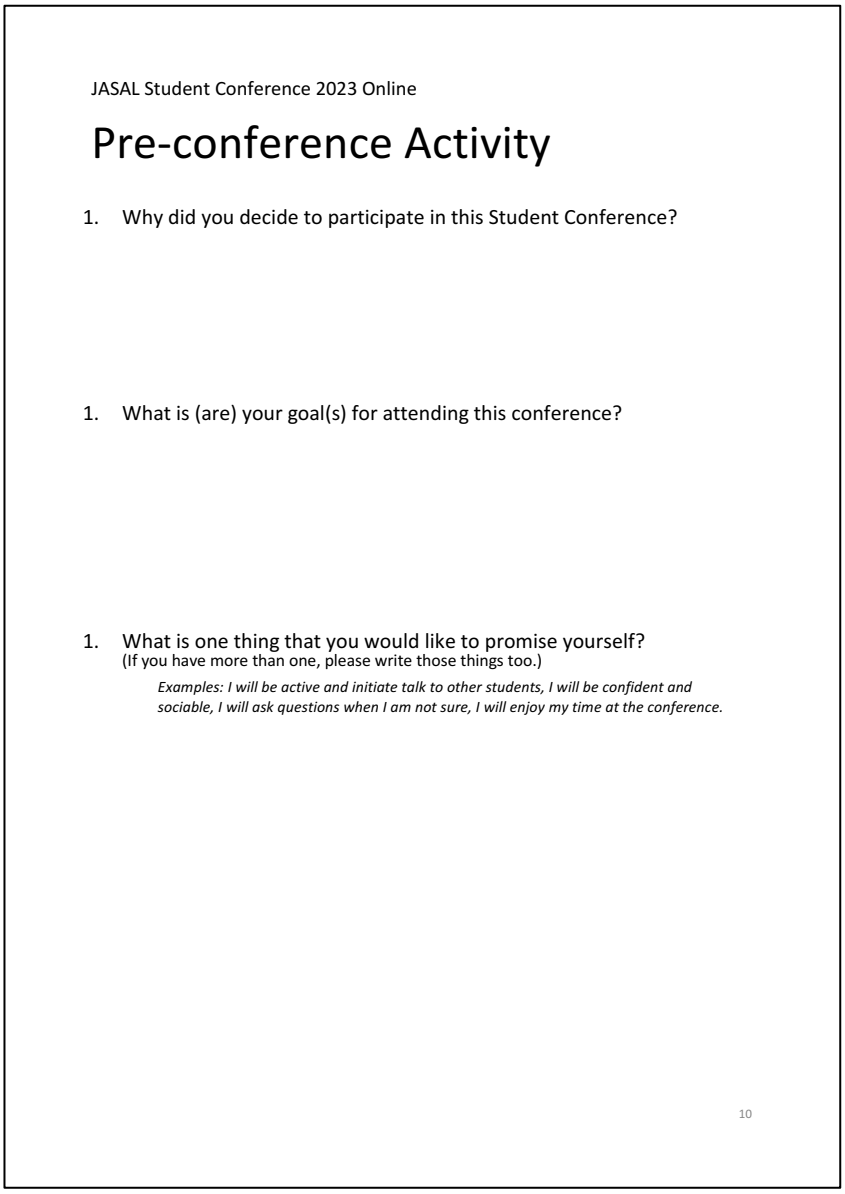
In my opinion, the effective ways to announce the remaining time are ringing bells and using the reaction function. Each way has its own advantages and disadvantages. If someone rings the bell 5 minutes and 1 minutes before the end, presenters will be able to understand

the remaining time easily. On the other hand, the sound of bell may bother the presenter. In case of using Zoom reactions, it will not annoy the presentation, but the presenters may possibly miss seeing these reactions. Although it's ideal to manage the time by presenters themselves, setting the options like I mentioned above will make the presenters more comfortable about the time.

Conclusion

I was very satisfied with the 7th JASAL Student Conference. It was my first time to give a presentation in an academic conference. I was a bit nervous before the conference, but I enjoyed this experience a lot. I learned a lot of things from other university SALC members about how to make my own team better. I will graduate in March 2024, so I will hand over my duties and what I have learned from this conference to the next leader of our community.

Appendix: Student Conference Workbook



JASAL Student Conference 2023 Online

Pre-conference Activity

1. Why did you decide to participate in this Student Conference?

1. What is (are) your goal(s) for attending this conference?

1. What is one thing that you would like to promise yourself?
   (If you have more than one, please write those things too.)

   Examples: I will be active and initiate talk to other students, I will be confident and sociable, I will ask questions when I am not sure, I will enjoy my time at the conference.

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JASAL Student Conference 2023 Online

Questions I'd like to Ask

List questions you would like to ask to other students from other universities.
Ask your questions when you meet them and write a memo of their answers.

My questions	Answers from other participants	School name
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

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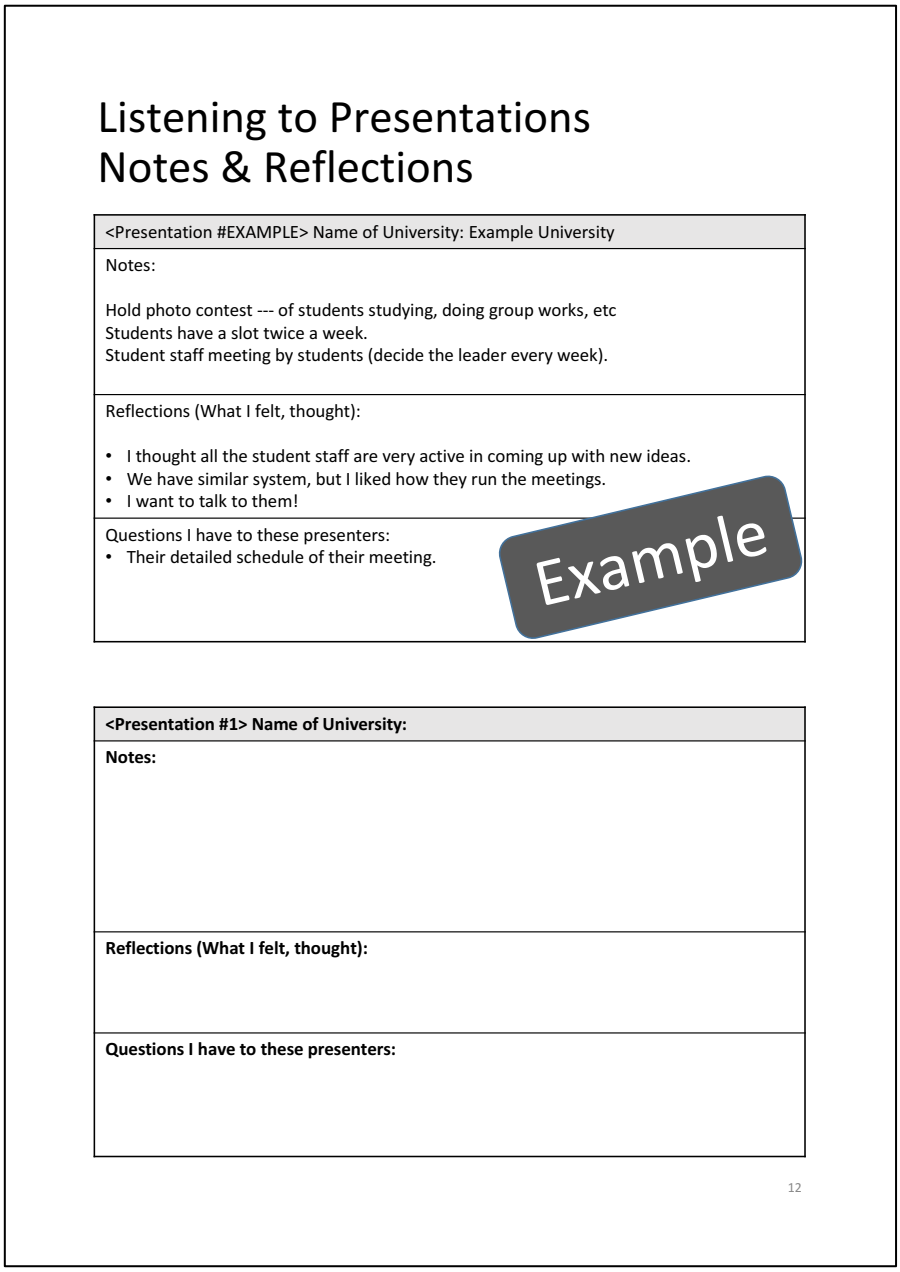

Listening to Presentations Notes & Reflections

<Presentation #EXAMPLE> Name of University: Example University
Notes: Hold photo contest --- of students studying, doing group works, etc Students have a slot twice a week. Student staff meeting by students (decide the leader every week).
Reflections (What I felt, thought): • I thought all the student staff are very active in coming up with new ideas. • We have similar system, but I liked how they run the meetings. • I want to talk to them!
Questions I have to these presenters: • Their detailed schedule of their meeting.

<Presentation #1> Name of University:
Notes:
Reflections (What I felt, thought):
Questions I have to these presenters:

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