Analyzing Self-Access Anxiety Through the Eyes of Students

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Author Biographies

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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

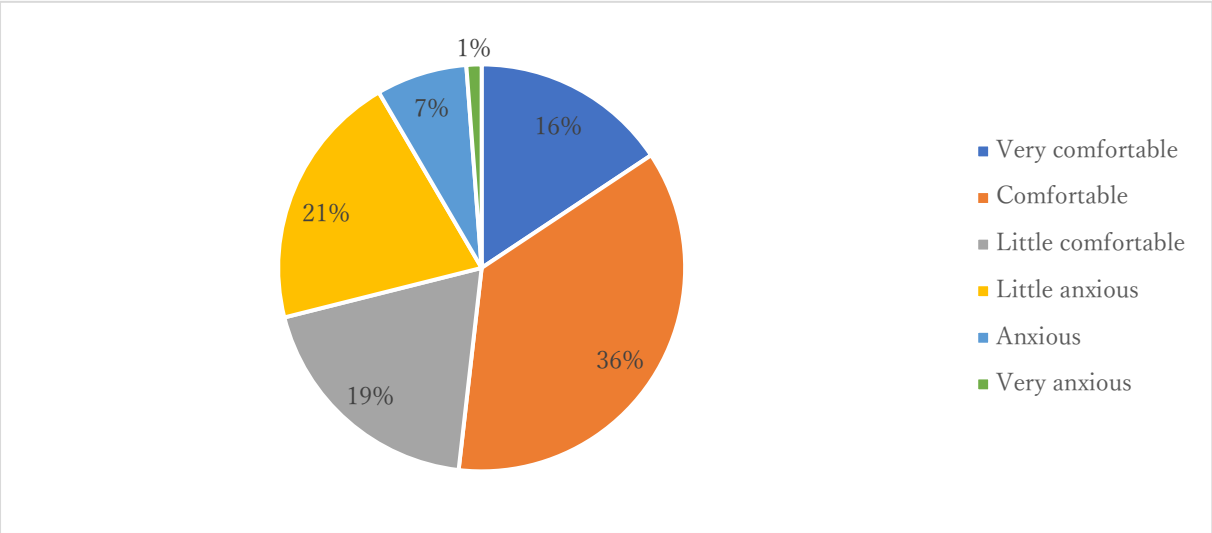
In this section, we will examine and discuss the questionnaire responses and interview data, and will describe implications from these results.

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?

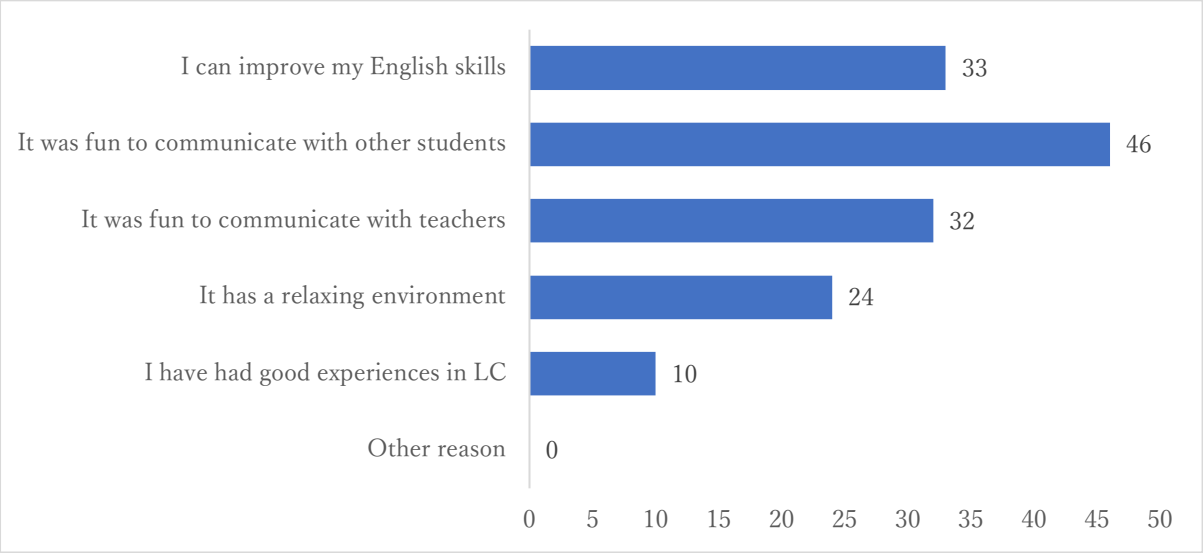
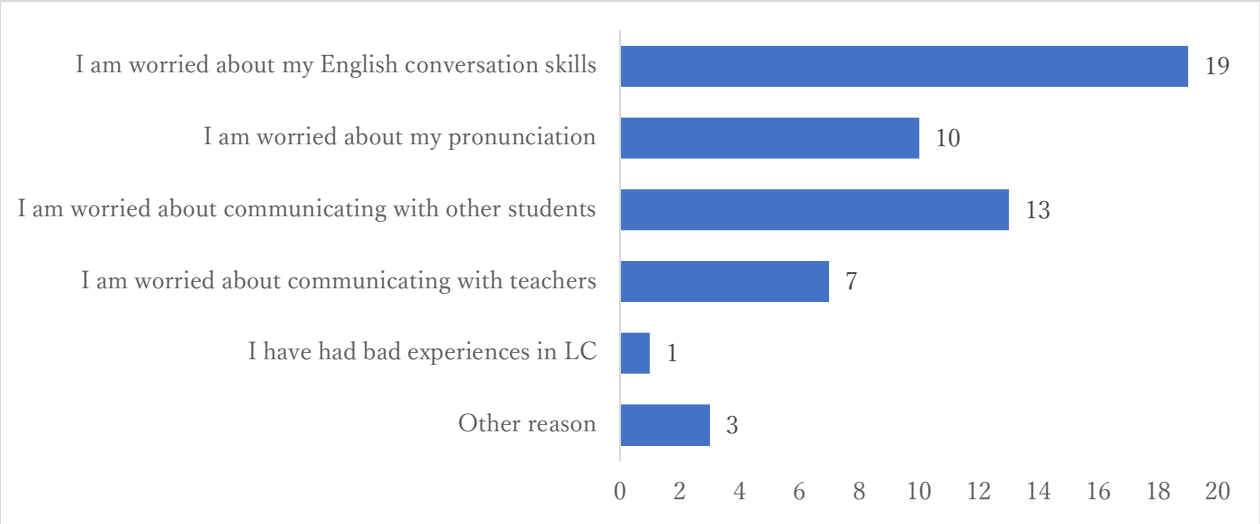


Figure 4

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))