

PanSIG 2025 Conference Report

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Author Biography

Christopher Ho was raised in Hong Kong and is now a fourth-year undergraduate student at Gifu Shotoku Gakuen University in Gifu, Japan. He is a student volunteer staff member at Lounge MELT, the social language learning space at his university. He is currently researching voice acting and intonation and plans to be a language teacher after graduation.

This short report is a review of and my reflections on the JALT PanSIG 2025 conference held from May 16th to 18th, 2025, at Kanda University of International Studies in Chiba, with the theme of *Agency and Autonomy in Language Education*. I participated in the SALC Showcase as a student volunteer staff member representing Lounge MELT (an acronym of “Maximum English Learning Together”), a self-access learning center located at Gifu Shotoku Gakuen University. As a future language teacher, I was delighted to be given the opportunity through the support of the JASAL bursary to attend different sessions throughout the conference to further broaden my knowledge of teaching and learning.

SALC Showcase

At the SALC Showcase, there were multiple exhibits of SALCs from other educational institutions, with posters and photos of events held lining the walls, while representatives explained the operations of their SALC. By attending the showcase, it helped expand my views and provided inspiration to further develop my SALC, the two main institutes I interacted with being English House from Chiba University and English Café at Otemon (E-CO) from Otemon Gakuin University.

English House at Chiba University holds activities such as Lunch Chats on a regular basis with rotating topics depending on the month, many social events focusing on different cultures around the world, and conversations with student advisors, as well as study groups for serious learners. I was intrigued by the sheer variety of services and events offered to the students, which give them so many opportunities to access different pathways of foreign language learning that can apply to different needs. Whether by multicultural events, peer consultation, or just through casual conversations, there is a way for each student to enjoy accessing the SALC.

The most striking aspect of E-CO at Otemon Gakuin University is the use of cooperative video games as an asset for self-access learning. I thought it must be an effective addition to a SALC, as having such a method would be a way not only to attract students through interest but also to increase the amount of second language usage and interpersonal contact, bond-developing by practicing natural and contextual communication along with plentiful amounts of problem-solving activities within the said video games.

Inspiring Sessions

Of the many presentations and workshops I attended over the three days, two in particular inspired me. As a volunteer with native Cantonese and near-native English-

speaking ability, I often teach or tutor students learning Chinese and English in Lounge MELT, and these sessions gave me ideas on how I can change my ways of teaching to effectively support autonomy in student language learning.

One of the Friday workshops, entitled *Becoming Aware of Cognitive Differences: Based on Korthagen's Reflection Theory* and led by Eriko Yamabe of Waseda University, focused on exploring how our cognitive processes function, using the Korthagen Reflection Model (Korthagen et al., 2001), and highlighted the role of both rational and subconscious elements in teaching. Participants engaged in group activities where we shared recent teaching experiences and reflected on our actions, thoughts, feelings, and intentions from multiple perspectives. We talked in small groups, and I shared the difficulties I faced as an international “outsider”, which led to some useful and uplifting comments from my group members. The exercise made me realise that it is of paramount importance not only to reflect on our own actions as educators but also to assume the role of the learner to assess if our methods of teaching are sufficient or if someone is struggling and requires further support.

On Saturday, Nicholas Marx from Kanazawa Seiryu University gave a compelling presentation titled *Lived Emotional Experiences—What Can They Tell Us About Our Students and Our Teaching?* on how emotional experiences influence students in second language acquisition. He explained that *perezhivanie*—a concept from Vygotsky’s (1994) theory—is rarely explicitly stated and yet is deeply ingrained in second language learning, showing the importance of emotional experiences such as engagement in classes, positive evaluation, and other intrapersonal factors. The session resonated with me as I have run into multiple negative emotional barriers during my learning of additional languages, mainly fear of peer expectations and negative evaluation, which used to shape my motivation, confidence, and willingness to participate.

Through the two sessions, I have learned that in order to support effective language learning, it’s extremely important for teachers to have an understanding not only of what they want to teach, but also of how their students feel and what teaching methods would be productive for them both academically and emotionally.

Reflections on My Practices in My Current SALC Role

An idea I have for my SALC, inspired by Otomon Gakuin University’s E-CO, is purchasing a Nintendo Switch console with the language set to English. By having a game console, Lounge MELT can offer cooperative and competitive video games as tools for language learning. As an avid gamer myself, I believe that offering the option of carefully

selected wholesome video games, such as *Super Smash Bros Ultimate*, *Overcooked!2* and *Pico Park*, Lounge MELT can create authentic opportunities for students to speak and listen to English in real time, encourage spontaneous conversation, and help build confidence in using English in a relaxed, enjoyable setting. It would also make the space more appealing to a wider range of learners, including those who might feel shy about traditional language learning activities such as holding presentations and parties. In comparison to other consoles on the gaming market, the Nintendo Switch sports a much more affordable price along with a more family-friendly library of games, both cooperative and competitive. Overall, I believe that the console would support Lounge MELT's goal of fostering autonomous, interest-driven, and communicative language use, while being at an affordable price, and would contribute to being a livelier, engaging environment for all. I am currently planning a gaming event in Lounge MELT with one of the learning advisors, putting what I learned at PanSIG 2025 into practice. I hope to play a role in adding a new dimension to our social language learning space.

At the PanSIG 2025 conference, by attending I had the opportunity to explore the operations of different self-access learning centers by attending showcases from different educational institutions, as well as multiple sessions introducing me to new ideas to language learning such as the importance of reflection and positive emotional experiences to overcome barriers of language learning. I look forward to using what I learned from this conference to expand my own way of running a SALC and to effectively assist in self-access learning as a whole.

References

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