

Helping Self-Access Learning Centres Thrive Through Strategic Partnerships, Community Engagement, and International Awareness-Raising

Activities: Report on JASAL Forum 2025 at JALT2025

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Author Biographies

Daniel Hooper is an associate professor in the Faculty of Global Management at Chuo University. He has been teaching in Japan for 20 years in various contexts, including secondary schools, English conversation schools, and universities. He is passionate about fostering learner autonomy both inside the classroom and through self-access learning.

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Suwako Uehara is an associate professor at the University of Electro-Communications, teaching English for academic purposes and English for specific purposes to STEM students.

She leads the university's International Education Working Group and oversees the SALC. Her research interests include CALL and the use of AI in language education.

Katherine Thornton is a professor at Otemon Gakuin University, Osaka, Japan where she is section chair of modern languages at the Institute for General Education. She is the director of E-CO (English Café at Otemon), the university's self-access center, and current president of the Japan Association of Self-Access Learning (JASAL). Her research focuses on multilingualism in self-access environments, and telecollaboration in language learning.

Abstract

The JASAL Forum at JALT2025 explored two topics relevant for any self-access space: how to revitalise an underutilised self-access learning centre (SALC), and the ways in which a SALC space can support international exchange across the wider community. This report summarises the presentations given during the forum and the ensuing discussion. The team from Tokyo Kasei University detailed the strategic partnerships built through consultation and the process of conducting a needs analysis of student and faculty perspectives, while Suwako Uehara reported on how the International Week at the University of Electro-Communications, coordinated by the SALC in collaboration with faculty and other university departments, enhanced the visibility of global activities both within and beyond the university.

JALT2025 で開催された JASAL フォーラムでは、あらゆるセルフアクセス（自律学習）スペースに関連する二つのテーマ、すなわち「利用率の低いセルフアクセス学習センター（SALC）の活性化」および「SALC という空間がいかにして地域社会全体における国際交流を支援できるか」について議論が行われた。本報告は、同フォーラムで行われた発表およびその後のディスカッションの概要をまとめたものである。東京家政大学の発表者らは、学内のヒアリングを通じて構築された戦略的パートナーシップや、学生および教員を対象としたニーズ分析のプロセスについて報告した。一方、上原寿和子氏は、電気通信大学の SALC が教員や他部局と連携して企画・運営した「インターナショナル・ウィーク」を取り上げ、この取り組みが学内外におけるグローバル活動の可視性をどのように高めたかについて報告した。

Keywords: self-access language learning, needs analysis, learning community, international exchange

The self-access language learning (SALL) communities that thrive in self-access environments are increasingly important parts of a university's ecosystem, and the Japan Association for Self-Access Learning is proud to support the SALL practitioners who foster and help sustain these learning communities. One way in which we can do this is through an annual forum held at the JALT International Conference, where all delegates, whether or not they are members of JASAL, can join our event and engage in discussion with other practitioners. In 2025, this forum was held on Saturday, 1st November in Tokyo, and welcomed conference participants from all over Japan. This year's forum focused on initiatives from two self-access centres aiming to increase their reach and appeal to more members of their university communities. Strategic partnerships with stakeholders from across the institution and the wider community can be crucial to the success of a self-access learning centre (SALC). In the first presentation, Daniel Hooper and Sam Reid from Tokyo Kasei University detailed the reinvigoration of an underused SALC by focusing on building these relationships, while Suwako Uehara from the University of Electro-Communications reported on an International Week project, which connected students, faculty and administration, and the wider public through a series of coordinated international activities.

Daniel Hooper and Sam Reid: Revitalising the REAL Room: Creating a Learning Community

We (Dan and Sam) were delighted to participate in the JASAL Forum at JALT International as it was a valuable opportunity to not only share our current project but also draw upon the communal knowledge and experience of the supportive JASAL community. Our contribution to the forum centred on a needs analysis that our team implemented in order to establish a mission statement and plan of action for the REAL Room, a fledgling self-access centre at Tokyo Kasei University (Hooper & Namiki, 2025). The REAL room had been operational for a few years prior but had fallen into stagnation and eventual disuse in recent times. Moreover, as a team, we felt that the previous operational model of the REAL Room did not adequately integrate student input and was simply a venue where students could come and speak to assigned members of the foreign teaching staff during lunchtimes or free periods. In contrast to this passive model, where students would essentially just “consume” SALC services, we hoped to reconceptualize the space by including students and other local stakeholders in a more collaborative and empowering way. Based on a cursory review of existing literature, it became clear to us that developing a coherent mission statement was key to effectively focusing our future development of the REAL Room, as

well as acting as a point of orientation in regard to ongoing assessment and action research (Mynard, 2016; Werner & Von Joo, 2018). Furthermore, we found that numerous SALC practitioners and researchers (Datwani-Choy, 2016; Von Joo et al., 2020) advocated for the integration of multiple stakeholder voices (students, faculty, staff, administration) in the effective running of a SALC. In order to tie all of these guiding threads together, we set about creating and distributing needs assessment surveys to both students and faculty that would inform the construction of the REAL Room's guiding mission statement. As such, we hoped that the future direction of our SALC would be, at its core, driven by a wider community of active contributors rather than merely passive attendees.

Congruent with the broader shift from SALCs as materials repositories to SALCs as social hubs and sites for reflective dialogue (Thornton, 2021), our survey responses showed that both students and faculty members hoped that the REAL Room could become a social and communal space. Both surveys (student and faculty) cited the need for a place for users to make friends, receive guidance from teachers or senior students, and develop their interactional competence in English. Faculty also highlighted the potential value of the REAL Room as a PR tool for the department by foregrounding students' achievements and active educational engagement. Based on these survey responses and discussion within our team, we developed the following mission statement for the REAL Room:

The mission of the REAL Room is to provide an environment where our students have out-of-class opportunities to develop their communicative English ability while also deepening social connections with peers or teachers. We aim for the REAL Room to be an empowering space offering students support and opportunities for leadership while also acting as a means of sharing our students' visions and achievements with the wider world.

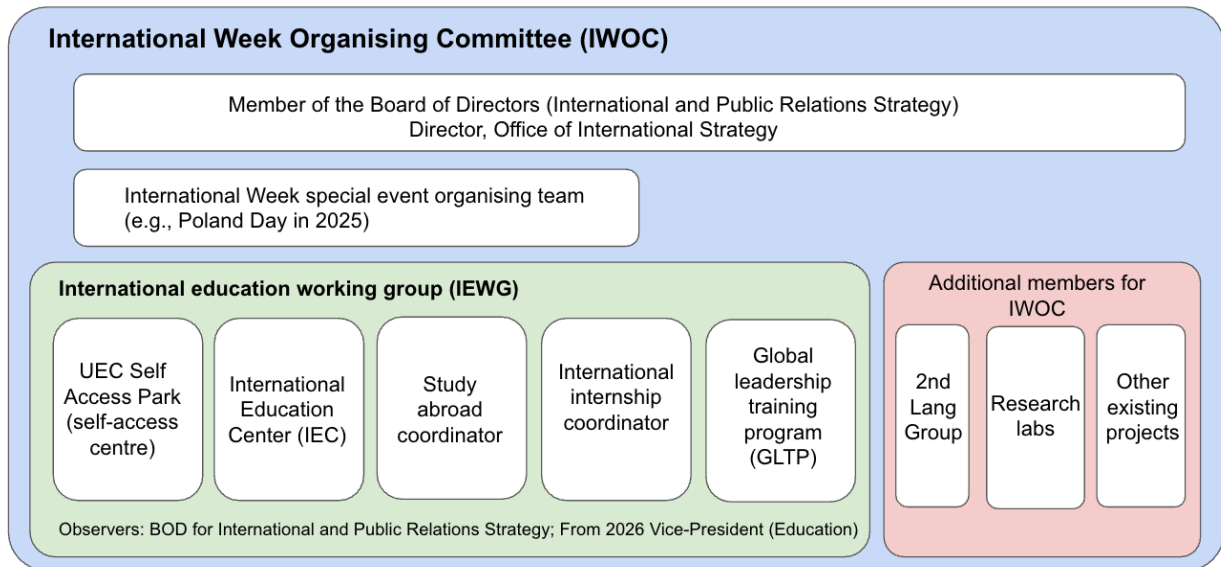
Within the JASAL Forum, we gained some extremely valuable insights from the attendees. Many attendees were very experienced SALC managers and administrators, and it gave us a rare chance to share some of the concerns, anxieties, and questions that we had been holding on to with peers from our wider self-access community. We were also able to increase our confidence relating to our next steps by drawing upon this experiential knowledge and gaining a better sense of what might be successful or problematic before we actually tried it out ourselves. To us, this represented yet another time when touching base with the JASAL community helped us to access an ever-developing treasure trove of accumulated knowledge while also feeling less alone in our endeavours.

Suwako Uehara: Connecting Across Campus: The International Week Initiative

Since 2024, I (Suwako) have had the pleasure of sharing different aspects of UEC's SALC (UECSAP: The University of Electro-Communications Self Access Park) to the JASAL community. In the JASAL Forum at JALT2025, I introduced how the SALC has become part of a university-wide collaboration through a new annual project, UEC International Week. As chair of the International Education Working Group (IEWG), I shared how this initiative was designed and implemented to bring international activities across campus together and make internationalisation a more visible part of campus life. The IEWG at the University of Electro-Communications (UEC) was established in 2020 to promote internationalisation by increasing student participation in international activities and raising awareness of UEC's global initiatives among those on campus (students, faculty, and staff) and the wider public, more specifically, to current and prospective students, academic and research institutions, companies, organisations, and local community members. Since its establishment, IEWG has coordinated initiatives including study abroad presentations, information sessions, promotional videos, a centralised information website, and global outreach publications (The University of Electro-Communications, n.d.-a; Uehara, 2026).

Global awareness initiatives have been promoted by the United Nations (United Nations, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). One example of these kinds of initiatives is an International Week, which has been hosted by many universities across Japan (e.g., Chuo University, 2022; Sophia University, n.d.; Saga University, 2024). Such events can foster global awareness, intercultural communication, and international engagement (United Nations, n.d.-a; White, 2021). In 2024, drawing inspiration from such events, IEWG appointed an International Week organizing committee (IWOC), composed of key UEC representatives. The main goal was to launch UEC International Week (The University of Electro-Communications, n.d.-c), a weeklong event that brings together international programmes and activities organised across the university. IWOC's responsibilities were planning, coordinating, and overseeing International Week and, in particular, promoting its visibility both within and beyond the university. See Figure 1 for the organisational structure.

Figure 1
Organisational Structure



The event style allowed organisers to maintain flexibility while amplifying their collective impact. By showcasing UEC’s global activities under a single banner, the event increased visibility, attracted broader participation, and contributed to making internationalisation a routine part of student life. See Figure 2 for the project timeline.

Figure 2
Project Timeline



Note. Int’l WG = International Education Working Group, JALT = Japan Association of Language Teachers, Std. = student, univ. = university.

Phase 1 involved defining the initiative’s goals, scope, and team. Phase 2 focused on strategy development, including programme planning, website creation, and registration procedures. During Phase 3, the IWOC implemented and refined plans while promoting the initiative to over 500 students and faculty through programme calls related to international activities, lab introductions, and student-led activities. A pre-set sample program of events from the IEWG was also shared, such as Poland Day, International Day, lab tours, and study abroad information booths. Newly registered programmes were then integrated into the event website to maximise collective impact.

During Phase 4, International Week featured 17 registered programmes and attracted over 1,300 attendances. Attendance figures represent event participation rather than unique individuals and therefore include multiple attendances by the same participant. See Figure 3 for related photos and images.

Figure 3
Selected Photos from International Week





In Phase 5, International Week was evaluated through participant feedback, and the findings were presented at EdYouFest2025 (Uehara, 2025), and this JASAL Forum at JALT2025, further increasing the visibility of the event and its outcomes.

Survey responses from 288 participants indicated positive perceptions of International Week (overall M = 4.35). Participants reported enjoyment, learning, and increased interest in UEC’s international and exchange programs, while exposure to different languages received comparatively lower ratings. See Table 1 for a summary of the results.

Table 1
Summary of Likert-Scale Results of Q1–Q4 on a Scale of 1 to 6 (in %)

Prompt	Likert-Scale Responses									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	Low 1–3	High 4–6	Avg. Score	
Q1 The event programme was interesting and enjoyable	0.3	3.5	13.2	25.7	27.8	29.5	17.0	83.0	4.66	
Q2 I was able to use or hear different languages	4.2	9.4	21.9	28.1	18.1	18.3	35.5	64.5	4.02	
Q3 I learnt something new about international cultures or topics	1.4	6.6	20.0	24.0	24.0	24.0	28.0	72.0	4.34	
Q4 The event increased my interest in international programmes and exchange at UEC	1.0	5.3	20.8	25.3	23.6	24.0	27.1	72.9	4.37	
Average Likert-Scale Score from Q1–Q4									4.35	

The qualitative responses suggest that International Week supported the IWOC's mission by increasing intercultural awareness, motivation, and interest in international opportunities. Across events such as Poland Day, International Day, and other programmes, participants highlighted the value of intercultural interaction, perspective-taking, and exposure to different languages and cultures. One student noted that "even small cultural gestures, like sharing food or language, can build meaningful connections," while another remarked that studying abroad "no longer feels like a distant goal; it seems like a realistic and exciting opportunity."

Many participants described international activities as more accessible after hearing peers' experiences and interacting with international students. Others reported increased motivation to learn languages after observing fellow UEC students communicate fluently in multiple languages. Experiential activities, such as dancing with Polish students and engaging in multilingual environments, further enhanced students' sense of immersion, with one participant commenting that it "felt like I was in another country even though I was still in Japan." Overall, the responses suggest that International Week not only raised awareness of global opportunities but also increased students' sense of relevance, accessibility, and motivation to engage in international activities.

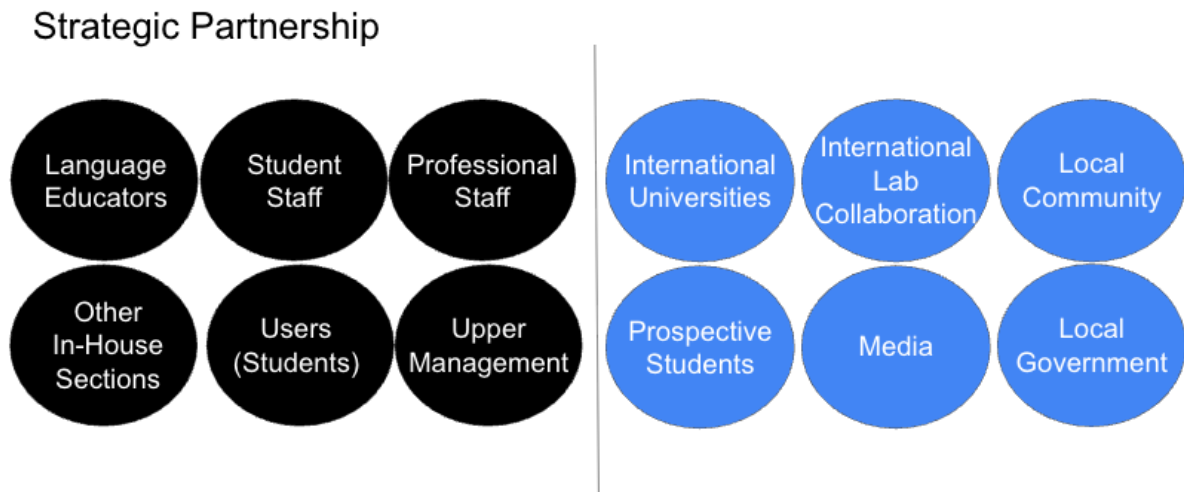
There was internal collaboration and raised awareness of the international opportunities at UEC across departments, university internal organizations, and student bodies. UEC was able to engage in international collaboration with Poznan University in Poland, resulting in the signing of official agreements with UEC. Reflecting on the activities during International Week, and in addition, receiving media coverage with J:COM TV (The University of Electro-Communications, 2025, n.d.-b), a letter of appreciation from a resident from Chofu city, and external recognition from a city council member (Aoyama, 2025) (see Figure 4), highlighted the importance and necessity of the strategic partnerships which were built across the wider community for the success (Figure 5) of the event.

Figure 4

Media Coverage, External Recognition, and Letter of Appreciation



Figure 5
Strategic Partnership



In conclusion, the findings suggest that International Week can serve as an effective mechanism for fostering international awareness and engagement at UEC. Future events should build on this momentum by expanding participation, strengthening stakeholder partnerships, and creating additional opportunities for meaningful intercultural interaction.

Conclusion

The presentations were followed by a lively discussion in which the presenters were able to engage directly with the audience on various issues raised in their presentations. Further discussion also focused on best practices for establishing a new facility. Those attendees hoping to start or revive facilities had the chance to share their experiences and ask questions in a supportive environment. Among other points, the presenters and other attendees with experience working in SALCs highlighted the importance of building strategic partnerships with as many parties as possible during the consultation period, both at the beginning of the process, such as that which Daniel and Sam from Tokyo Kasei University had reported on, and on an ongoing basis, as Suwako at UEC had emphasised in her presentation. JASAL Forums are an ideal opportunity for these kinds of discussions, so we were happy to once again provide this chance and welcome some new members into our growing community.

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