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As explained in the first installment of this report (Thornton, 2013), the learning advisor (LA) team at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) has engaged in redesigning a curriculum for the Self-Access Learning Centre (SALC) by following a framework adapted from the Nation and Macalister (2010) model. This framework, which is based on an investigation of student needs, aims to establish criteria in the shape of clear principles and goals. Following the Environment Analysis stage, detailed in the previous installment of this column (Thornton, 2013), this paper describes the needs analysis stage which was undertaken in 2012.

Long (2005) emphasizes the importance of triangulating needs analysis data, and discusses a number of sources that may be consulted to establish a comprehensive picture of needs. In the KUIS context, the LA team identified four major stakeholders in the SALC curriculum as sources of information for needs analysis: LAs, students, teachers and the university senior management team. In order to conduct a thorough needs analysis to guide curriculum evaluation and design, the LA team decided to investigate each stakeholder group's perceptions of students' self-directed learning (SDL) needs. This second installment showcases each research project, and demonstrates how the data from the four projects were collated in order to discover freshman student SDL needs, resulting in a document of Learning Outcomes for the future curriculum.

Learning Advisors' Perceptions of Student SDL Needs

As LAs are the stakeholders most familiar with both the field of learner autonomy and SDL, as well as KUIS students' experiences of SDL, it seemed logical to approach the needs analysis by first examining LAs' own perceptions of their students' needs.

In order to establish a coherent understanding of student needs among the LA team, each LA brainstormed what they considered to be student needs, supporting their points with reference to the literature or specific personal experiences gained while working as a LA, to avoid unsubstantiated intuitions. The individual responses of each LA were then collated by two members of the LA team and categorised under three headings: socio-affective needs, cognitive needs, and metacognitive needs. On further discussion with the full LA team, an additional category, self-management needs, was added to reflect organisational and practical needs that did not relate directly to language learning (such as being able to meet deadlines, and being familiar with the different learning environments available) but were nevertheless considered important for successful SDL.

LAs were then asked to indicate where they felt the SALC curriculum's priorities should lie by completing a survey in which they labelled each need as high, mid or low priority, or something that should not be covered in the freshman curriculum. The LA Survey responses were then shared with all LAs and a consensus was reached over the level of priority given to each need. This resulted in a detailed preliminary taxonomy of LA perceptions of student SDL needs (hereafter LA Taxonomy).

Students' Perceptions of Their Own SDL Needs/Wants

This section highlights one of the needs analysis sub-projects to find out about freshman students' subjective needs. By asking students to give their subjective views about their SDL needs, the working group assigned to this portion of the research realised that these subjective needs could be considered more accurately as "wants", so this term is used throughout this section.

In the hope of learning about freshman students' experiences, it was decided that sophomore students who had completed one year at the university would be targeted with a student survey. The following research question was used to guide the design and analysis process:

What support do current sophomore students perceive they needed (from the SALC) to succeed in their freshman year?

An open-ended written prompt in Japanese with follow-up interviews was used to generate data from which the item pool for the Student Survey could be constructed (Dörnyei, 2010). The data from the prompt and the interviews were collated and categorised into six groups, using a grounded research approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Each group has several subcategories with a total of 23 items in all. The six categories which emerged are:

- Time management (e.g. scheduling, prioritizing)
- Managing learning resources - human & physical (e.g. knowing how to access support from advisors/teachers, making contact with speakers of English, knowing how to access SALC facilities effectively)
- Learning activities (knowing a variety of strategies, incorporating English into daily life)
- Learning environment (choosing the right environment for the right task)
- Attitude (e.g. motivation, endurance, effort)
- Goal Setting (e.g. prioritizing needs, breaking goals into achievable tasks)

Following the process of generating the item pool, the 23 items were used to create a closed-ended Student Survey. The text below was the instruction given in the survey (translated here from Japanese):

Think back on your freshman year. Think about whether you would have liked the opportunity to learn about the following things in your first year, and choose the most suitable response.

The following four response options were used in the survey (Figure 1). While these response options did yield some relevant data, one limitation of this format is that students whose opinions may not have exactly matched these options did not have an opportunity to express their views.

<i>Yes, I couldn't do this, so I would have liked the opportunity to learn about it.</i>	<i>Yes, I was able to do this to a certain extent, but I would have liked the opportunity to learn more about it.</i>	<i>No, I was able to do this to a certain extent, so I don't think it's necessary to learn about it.</i>	<i>No, I could already do this, so I don't think it's necessary to learn about it.</i>
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Figure 1. Four Questionnaire Response Options

In addition to the aforementioned closed-ended questions, an open-ended question was also added at the end to elicit any “wants” not included in the 23 items.

In order to elicit responses from students covering as many variables as possible, such as students’ majors and English ability levels, the Student Survey was administered to 11 sophomore classes in all departments including both English and non-English language majors. In total 234 students responded, of which 207 gave their consent for data to be used. Seventy responses to the open-ended option were also collected, in both English and Japanese.

Analysis of the data indicates that all 23 items were “wanted” by more than half of the students. The data suggest that students have more wants in utilising human resources such as advisors, teachers and international students, and also in using the physical resources and services available. Categories such as goal-setting and time management (which the SALC curriculum currently focused on more strongly) appeared to be less desired. This may indicate that students need more awareness-raising of the importance of these aspects of SDL.

Teachers’ Perceptions of Students’ SDL Needs

This part of the needs analysis aimed to elicit the voices of teachers who have taught freshman English classes. Because teachers may have a role in developing students’ SDL skills, the working group assigned to this portion of the research needed to clarify what teachers wanted from the SALC, in addition to teachers’ perceptions of students’ needs. Researchers used an exploratory design research method (Ivankova & Creswell, 2009) to investigate the following two questions:

- 1) What do teachers believe freshman students need in order to be effective independent learners?
- 2) In what areas of independent learning should the SALC support the students?

First, an open-ended prompt and follow-up interviews were administered to ten participants. The qualitative data collected was then coded into 20 student traits and 18 student actions which teachers considered important for their students to possess. These traits and actions were then used to generate closed-response survey items. This Teacher Survey was sent to the 35 teachers who taught freshman English classes and 19 responded. Related to the first research question, the teachers strongly perceived the following traits and actions to be the qualities of

effective independent learners. The number in brackets shows the average rating of each item, with 6.00 being the highest rating possible. Only items with a rating of 4.70 and above are listed:

Traits

- Proactive (4.93)
- Curious (4.88)
- Determined (4.81)
- Hard-working (4.81)
- Confident (4.75)

Actions

- Make the most of university facilities and learning materials (5.13)
- Not afraid of being perceived to be silly or making mistakes (4.80)
- Organize their time (4.76)

With regard to the second research question, the teachers selected the following traits and actions as the SALC's responsibility to help students with. The numbers in brackets show the percentage of teachers who selected the item. Only items with a 60% and above response-rate are listed:

Traits

- Reflective (81.25%)
- Self-led to use English (81.25%)
- Independent in making choices (68.75%)

Actions

- Make the most of university facilities and learning materials (100%)
- Organize their time (71.43%)

The results suggest that while the teachers perceive that the traits and actions listed above are the main qualities that may lead to students being self-directed, they do not expect the SALC to be responsible for helping students with all those traits and actions. This may suggest there are SDL elements that can be covered in the classroom by teachers. It could also indicate that there are SDL elements that only students can be held responsible for. Future research could further investigate which stakeholder(s) could best address the SDL needs identified above.

Senior Management Perspectives on Students' SDL Needs

This section of the needs analysis investigates the perspectives that senior management have of students' SDL needs and views on how to address them. The research involved interviewing four participants, all of whom are senior academics at the university and hold leadership positions. This step in the research took an interpretative, qualitative approach drawing upon the principles of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). An identical initial prompt was sent to each participant prior to the meeting so that they could think about the questions in advance, and the researcher conducted a semi-structured individual interview with each participant. The initial prompt was:

What do you think our students' SDL needs are in the freshman year? i.e. what do you think the ELI / SALC should be preparing students to be able to do in order to be effective learners? (we are not looking at language learning / proficiency for this study).

The interviews were transcribed, coded manually according to emergent themes, and the initial interpretations were shared with the interviewees separately for further comments and /or elucidation. The four coded documents were then combined, which involved some re-coding (in line with grounded theory techniques).

The results naturally contributed to one of two emergent focus areas. *Focus Area 1* related to what participants thought were the key skills that freshman students should have an awareness of in order to be effective learners. These skills were coded within one (or sometimes more) of the following eight categories:

- Affective factors, e.g. knowing how to regulate motivation and language anxiety
- Behaviour-related, e.g. knowing the importance of being an active learner and taking responsibility
- Cognitive skills, e.g. developing practical strategies for language learning
- Focus on future, e.g. having a long-term goal
- Metacognitive skills, e.g. understanding the learning process
- Resources, e.g. knowing what materials and facilities are available in the SALC and how to use them

- Self-management, e.g. knowing how to manage study time effectively
- Social factors, e.g. understanding how communicating with other people is crucial for developing language proficiency

Focus Area 2 related to participants' views on what action needed to be taken by either the SALC or by the university in order for freshman students to be effective learners. The responses were coded into the following categories:

- Incorporate elements into the classroom, e.g. build learner training into the freshman curriculum
- SALC / Classroom overlap, e.g. make links between in-class and outside-class learning
- What should the university do? i.e. these were areas beyond the scope of the ELI and SALC and need to be addressed at an institutional level
- Explicit competencies, e.g. establishing learning outcomes related to learner training that students can work towards
- Learning advisors, e.g. something that falls within the learning advisors' areas of responsibility and/or expertise
- Peers, e.g. ways in which peers could be involved in the process

Collating Different Perspectives on Students' SDL Needs

The previous steps in the needs analysis resulted in four different sets of findings from each of the stakeholders examined. The final step of the needs analysis was to collate the findings from each of the four groups, in order to produce a final document detailing students' SDL needs.

As the LAs are the domain experts who can confidently be considered knowledgeable on the subject, with detailed knowledge of the field and their experience working directly with students, it was decided that comparing each set of findings to the LA Taxonomy would be the most effective way to make sense of the data.

Each research working group compared their findings with the LA Taxonomy, stating for each "need" whether it was also present in their data set (and if possible to what extent), and also to list "needs" identified by their stakeholder group that had not featured in the LA Taxonomy. These needs were then added to the original list of needs used in the taxonomy, resulting in a

final document of 65 items, grouped into four categories: Socio-Affective Needs, Cognitive Needs, Metacognitive Needs and Self-Management Needs.

Using the data from all four sources, the final step of the process was to identify the most important SDL needs. These higher priority items were collated into a document and rephrased as a list of Learning Outcomes, which the LA team believes all freshman students need to achieve (see Appendix). The items which were not included in the Learning Outcomes are still acknowledged as being important but were considered not relevant to all students and therefore not included in the document. The process of finalising this document is still in progress.

Conclusion

This installment of the column has described the investigation of multiple data sources to explore different perspectives of freshman students' SDL needs. The findings have enabled the team to understand different perspectives. The results indicate that the stakeholder groups, namely LAs, students, teachers, and senior management, have similar perceptions about what kinds of SDL skills students need in order to become successful self-directed learners. The Needs Statement created in the process described above was utilized in order to establish a working Learning Outcomes document (see Appendix).

Curriculum evaluation and development is a laborious process. Nevertheless, as Brown (1995) states, the formation of learning outcomes (or program goals) is essential to a curriculum particularly because learning outcomes provide curriculum developers with a way to assess both student performance *and* the course itself. The findings from the analysis of the stakeholder groups' perceptions have given the LA team the confidence to move forward in creating the new self-directed learning course. The next installment in this series will discuss the subsequent steps in this curriculum development project following the modified Nation and Macalister (2010) model described in the previous installment:

- Establishing principles
- Evaluating the existing curriculum

Notes on the contributors

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Retrieved from: <http://sisaljournal.org/archives/june13/thornton/>

Appendix

Learning Outcomes for All SALC Courses and Modules

1. How to use the SALC

- Freshman students should know what a self-access centre is and how it can help them
- Freshman students should know how to get a SALC card and how to participate in SALC events
- Students should know the purpose of the advising service
- Freshman students should know how to access services and facilities
- Students should know how to access online resources for self-directed learning

2. Setting and reviewing goals

- Freshman students should be able to identify their language strengths and weaknesses
- Freshman students should know how to set a relevant and realistic goal considering their wants, interests, and needs
- Students should draw upon previous knowledge and experiences in order to individualise their plan

3. Selecting, using and evaluating resources

- Students should be able to locate resources that will help them to address their goals
- Students should try at least two new resources and reflect on their suitability for their goals

4. Identifying, using and evaluating strategies

- Students should try at least two new strategies and reflect on their effectiveness and suitability for their goals
- Students should know how to get information about learning additional strategies when they need them

5. Making, implementing and evaluating a learning plan

- Students should demonstrate that they understand the difference between S, U and R (Study, Use and Review) activities
- Students should be able to make a basic learning plan which forms a practical guide for a period of self-directed study

6. Evaluation of linguistic gains

- Students should demonstrate that they understand the meaning of “evaluation” of learning progress (embedded into outcomes above)
- Students should demonstrate how they can evaluate linguistic gains
- Students should be able to evaluate whether or not there have been linguistic gains