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Announcements

- **Upcoming Special Issues**

  Second call for papers. Special Issue on *Self-Access and Young Learners*. December, 2015 (Volume 6, Issue 4) edited by Annamaria Pinter, Robert J. Werner and Jo Mynard. DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS: August 10th, 2015.

  Pre-call for papers. Special Issue on *Virtual and Other Learning Spaces*. June, 2016 (Volume 7, Issue 2) edited by Curtis Edlin and Jo Mynard. DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS: January 15th, 2016.

Editorial

Jo Mynard, Kanda University of International Studies, Japan

Welcome to issue 6(2) of SiSAL Journal, which is a general issue. It contains three research articles followed by three 'stories', related to language learning spaces, which form the first installment of the new column edited by Katherine Thornton.

Research Papers

The first paper by Junko Noguchi from Kanda University of International Studies in Japan, is a preliminary study examining the attitudes of students working in a self-access centre with regards to communicating in English with their peers. The research indicates that the SALC working environment appears to enhance the learners' willingness to communicate due to the sense of community that they feel.

The second paper by Ward Peeters from the University of Antwerp in Belgium looks at outside-class peer collaboration using *Facebook*. The research indicates that socio-communicative aspects of the *Facebook* group motivated the participants to collaborate outside the classroom.

The third research paper by Jing Wu investigates the utilisation of computer technology for vocabulary strategies in order to enhance self-directed vocabulary learning. The research indicates that the CALL mode was more effective than the paper-based version when comparing an analysis of students' performances.

Language Learning Spaces: Self-Access in Action

Sometime last year, Katherine Thornton wrote to me with an idea for a new series. Whereas the previous two columns she has edited have centred around one institution's story or ongoing development, the new series (that starts in this issue) centres around a common self-access theme and explores this through stories from several institutions. The first theme is "Creating a Learning Space", which Katherine summarises in her introduction to the project and the instalment. The three contributions in this issue come from Marina Chavez and Adelia Peña from the National Autonomous University of Mexico, Kate Allert from the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts, and Luke Carson, from Hiroshima City University. I

have enjoyed seeing this project come together and have already learned a lot from the first three papers in the series.

Upcoming Issues

The next issue of SiSAL Journal (September, 2015) is again a general issue. The December 2015 issue will be a special issue on self-access and young learners edited by Annamaria Pinter, Robert J. Werner and myself. We welcome submissions from colleagues around the world in this relatively unexplored aspect of self-access learning. Further information can be found at http://sisaljournal.org/for-authors/call-younglearners/ and the deadline for submission is August 10th, 2015.

The March 2016 (issue 7-1) will be a general issue, and the June 2016 (issue 7-2) will be a special issue on Virtual Learning Spaces. More information about the special issue will follow. A summary of the upcoming issues is shown below. If you are interested in guest-editing a future general or special issue, please get in touch.

Date	Issue	Theme	Deadline
September, 2015	6(3)	General Issue	June 30th, 2015
December, 2015	6(4)	Special Issue on Self-Access and Young Learners	August 10th 2015
March, 2016	7(1)	General Issue	November 30th, 2015
June, 2016	7(2)	Special Issue on Virtual Learning Spaces	January 15th, 2016
September, 2017	7(3)	General Issue	June 30th, 2016

All that remains for me to say now is 'thank you' to the authors for choosing to publish their work in SiSAL Journal and to the reviewers and editorial team members who have helped to put this issue together.

"I am a SALCer": Influences of Identity on Fear of Making Mistakes in English Interactions

Junko Noguchi, Kanda University of International Studies, Japan

Abstract

This preliminary study attempts to examine the potential factors that enable EFL learners working in an English-only self-access learning center (SALC) to overcome their fear of making mistakes when they communicate in English with their peers. Through the interviews with those student workers called "SALCers," it was revealed that the degree of their Willingness to Communicate (WTC) (McCroskey & Baer, 1985) was quite high when they interact with other SALCers in the SALC. On the other hand, their WTC is low when they are instructed to communicate in English in their English classrooms. The findings seem to indicate that some of the distinctive characteristics of the SALC work environment free the learners from the fear of making mistakes in English. Moreover, an analysis of interviews conducted with the SALC student staff indicated they had strong identities as SALCers and a shared sense of community, which also seemed to enhance their WTC. In this paper, the prominent characteristics of both the SALC and the SALCers themselves which seem to enhance their willingness to communicate by reducing the anxiety of making mistakes will be delineated with examples.

Keywords: Willingness to Communicate, Community of Practice, Japanese learners of English

This research project took place at a language-focused university in a self-access English learning space called the SALC (Self-Access Learning Center). The center hires student staff as helpers, who are referred to as SALCers. Working at the center as a learning advisor, I believe that everyone who works in the SALC shares the same sense of mission to create an optimal English learning space for students at the university. Even though we did not directly work together, I had many opportunities to observe the SALCers confidently communicating with each other in English. This study was conducted to find out the features of the SALCers' identity that seem to help them create an English learning community where they can interact with each other in English without being afraid of making mistakes. Since the research was undertaken based on the assumptions of a constructivist paradigm

(Hatch, 2002), I regarded the research process as a place for myself and the informants to co-construct how we interpret their interactions.

Literature Review

Sociocultural theory in language learning

Sociocultural theory in language learning assumes that learning takes place through participation in social settings (Lantolf & Johnson, 2007). This view puts emphasis on the importance of learning about interpersonal interactions and social context. Hence, it is essential for L2 learners to conduct their language learning in a social setting where they can engage in L2 performance while assisting each other through meaningful and cooperative interactions (Cheon, 2008).

Community of practice

One of the ways these sociocultural concepts could be realized is through the idea of "communities of practice" (COP) proposed by Wenger (1998). The sociocultural view of language learning and its emphasis on the importance of social context fits nicely in the framework of the COP, which is defined as "groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger, 1998, p. 1).

Moreover, through the practice in COP described above, language learners construct their identity in relation to individual community members and the community itself (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In the COP, identity is constructed through three "*modes of belonging,*" which are "*engagement,* "*imagination,*" and "*alignment*" (Wenger, 1991, p. 173).

WTC in an EFL context in Japan

The intricate relationships among different socio-cultural dimensions, personal affective aspects of the learning process and the identity construction of a learner is conceptualized as a framework called *Willingness To Communicate (WTC)*, which was first introduced by McCroskey and Baer (1985) and described as "the probability of engaging in communication when free to choose to do so" (p. 546). It has been shaped into a visual representation by MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998) (See Figure 1).

FIGURE 1
Heuristic Model of Variables Influencing WTC
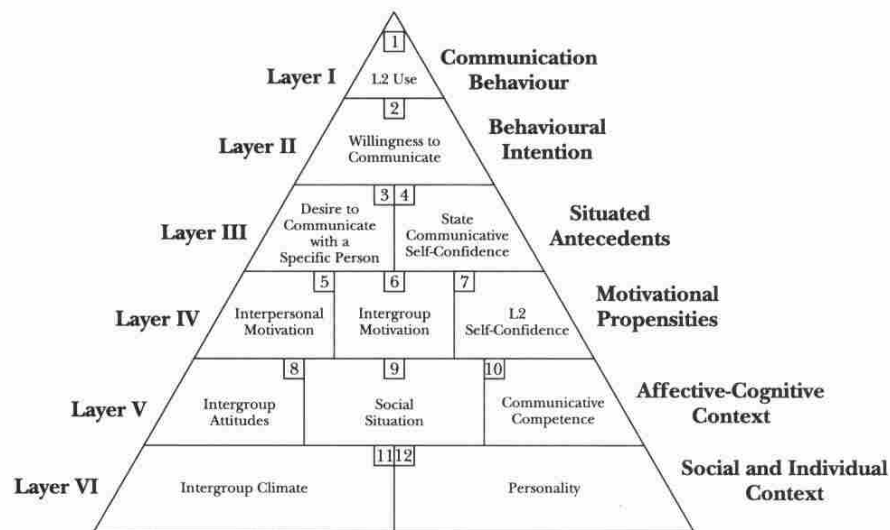
Figure 1. Heuristic Model of Variables Influencing WTC (MacIntyre et al.,1998, p. 547).

In Osterman's (2014) case studies on experiences of Japanese university students' willingness to speak English in class, one finding was that students did not like to use English with other students and that their WTC was lower with other Japanese students than with native speakers. Through interviews with students, he found one reason for this seemed to be related to collectivism and peer pressure, characteristics that are often said to be apparent in Japanese learners of English, while another theme is fear of feeling embarrassed by not being understood or making mistakes. Some of the Osterman's students' concerns included the following:

■ No one tries to initiate the conversation

■ No one wants to put pressure on other students who may not want to try by talking to them in English

■ They do not want to be the only one who speaks in English and stand out

■ They do not want to feel embarrassed when they did not make themselves understood.

■ They simply do not know what to say or how to pronounce some words

These two characteristics of collectivist attitudes and fear of shame in Japanese EFL learners will seem familiar to their teachers as being the major obstacles to encouraging students to communicate with each other in English in class.

WTC of the SALCers in the SALC

Looking at the definition of COP again, "groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger, 1998, p. 1), we can see that the SALC has the basic elements of a community of practice: a group of people (the SALCers) share a concern or passion for something they do (language learning and serving other students who come to the SALC) and they learn how to do these things better as they interact regularly (they help each other learn English and senior students train junior students how to do their jobs better when they work together every week).

As shown in the study by Osterman (2014), it is often the case that Japanese EFL learners are afraid of not being able to express themselves clearly and correctly and therefore of not being understood. This fear was also the most often cited source of anxiety in English classes in a study by Williams and Andrade (2008). Anxiety, which is often viewed as the opposite of confidence, is considered to be one of the biggest hindrances to WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

On the other hand, from my casual observations on a daily basis when I see the SALCers work at the counter, they look very relaxed and confident, actively interacting with each other or their customers in English even though they make mistakes or misunderstand each other. In other words, they do not seem to have any fear of being unable to express themselves or make themselves understood clearly, which seems to counter the typical representation of Japanese EFL learners described by the literature. Therefore, I was intrigued to find out why this was the case and investigate what characteristics, if any, the SALC and the SALCers themselves help with their willingness to communicate actively in English. My research question was as follows:

- What are the characteristics of the SALC and the SALCers that seem to enhance the SALCers' willingness to communicate in English?

The broad scope of this research question was intentionally constructed to allow for complex issues related to identity and willingness to communicate to emerge. In order to answer the research question above, an interview research study was conducted.

Context

The self-access learning center in which the study was conducted has a strict English-only rule, which applies to everyone who enters the space. Student helpers (SALCers) are hired as paid employees to assist with administrative tasks at the center. Their job is mostly equivalent to that of library desk staff. They have been selected from many applicants based on how motivated they are to contribute to the center and how comfortable they seem to be working in an English-only environment (regardless of their actual English proficiency level). Therefore, all SALCers are assumed to have positive attitudes toward interaction with people in English. There are also some non-Japanese SALCers, who are exchange students mainly from Korea or China, whose native languages are Korean and Chinese respectively, and who study both Japanese and English at the school.

This context is quite unique and different from a classroom environment in that students are required to use English relatively more authentically to function competently in their workplace. They are paid for working there, and there are real consequences if they fail to meet the expectations from their supervisors (i.e. losing their job). In classroom settings, students are forced to communicate in English with their classmates through practice activities. However, working at the SALC does not require the SALCers to communicate with their co-workers unless there is a real need to work together in order to get some job done. Therefore, whether they socialize with their colleagues or not is their choice. Additionally, there is a well-established training system in place, as well as organized social events for the new SALCers to help them build their sense of community and bond with other SALCers.

Participants

Two SALCers, K and S, agreed to participate in this interview study. K is a female sophomore student who has worked in the SALC for about a year and a half. S was K's trainer and mentor at the SALC. These participants were chosen because they were the only ones to respond to my blanket e-mail to the SALCers asking for participant volunteers, and both showed sufficient interest in the research, as well as a sense of responsibility, by promptly and adequately replying to all of my follow-up e-mails. It should be acknowledged that as these participants represent a sample of convenience, they may not be representative of all SALCers. However, it turned out that K and S provided intriguing insights about the factors that influence their

language identity. Their views had many commonalities, but at the same time their differences in years and the amount of experience working in the SALC gave me different perspectives.

It was also fortunate that K and S had a very close relationship, which I found out when I was interviewing K. K told me that she decided to start working in the SALC when she saw S working in the SALC and felt that she wanted to be like her. Also, it so happened that S got assigned to K as her trainer. Therefore, they worked closely together, and K often consulted with S regarding not only work-related matters, but also with her personal problems. They had a relationship within the SALC and outside the SALC in both English and Japanese, which gave me richer data about how they regard the SALC and the SALCers.

Methods

Data collection methodologies

In this study, data was collected using a pre-interview survey and interviews. The purpose of the pre-interview survey was to help me understand the baseline of the participants' (i.e. K and S) perceptions, so that in the interviews with them I could ask more in depth questions. It was also designed to elicit some demographic information about the participants so that I would know enough about them from the beginning, and I would not need to spend much time in the interview asking basic questions about the informants, such as their major or study abroad experiences.

The interviews were formal "semi-structured interviews" (Hatch, 2002) with some guiding questions prepared in advance in order to gather information on how the participants view the SALC and the SALCers, and how they perceive the differences between their attitudes toward speaking English in a classroom setting and those in the SALC. Those interviews were conducted in their native language, Japanese, so that the participants could feel free to express themselves without any language barriers. They were video-taped, as well as audio-taped, using a voice recorder as a backup.

Data analysis methods

In this section, I will explain which analytical tools I used in order to analyze the data. I used "interpretive analysis" (Hatch, 2002) in order to analyze the excerpts from the interviews and the video clips of the observation. I transcribed the parts of

the interviews that I thought were relevant and useful to answer my research questions after watching the interview and observation videos several times. More specifically, I transcribed the parts where the interviewee talked about the differences between how they interact with others in English in class or in the SALC, the possible reasons for their differences in behavior based on their location, as well as the general characteristics of the SALC and SALCers. Once the transcription stage was done, I followed Hatch's (2002) guidelines on how to conduct interpretive analysis. I reviewed the impressions that I had recorded in a notebook throughout the research process and modified them as I read the transcripts. I looked for salient interpretations and placed codes where those interpretations were supported in the transcripts. I put all the codes together on a separate sheet of paper and sorted them into codes for the SALC and the SALCers, as well as for attitudes toward English communication within the SALC and with Japanese classmates in class.

Preliminary findings

The analysis explained in the previous section revealed some interesting emerging themes. I went over the recordings to discover the perceived characteristics of the SALC as a workplace either explicitly mentioned or implicitly suggested through SALCer utterances. I looked for themes, grouped all the excerpts that came under the themes, re-organized and renamed them.

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), the experiences in different communities of practice we belong to are an important factor in our construction of identity. In this case, the characteristics of the community of practice (the SALC) and the community members themselves (the other SALCers) should definitely influence the identity of the participants as SALCers. Judging from the fact that both of the participants described how they are willing to speak in English in the SALC, but they are not in class or other contexts, it would seem that they distinguish their identities as SALCers as different from their identities outside the SALC. As shown in Table 1, their contrastive attitudes to the SALC and to class or other contexts imply that they have formed a clear identity as a SALCer.

Table 1. Contrast of the Behaviors in the SALC and in Class or Other Contexts

In the SALC	In class or other context
■ Speak a lot in English ■ Fun to speak in English ■ Have more self-confidence ■ Have more willingness to communicate with others in English ■ <u>No fear of making mistakes, not knowing what to say or long silences</u>	■ Passive to speak in English ■ Embarrassed to speak in English with her classmates, boyfriend, and her mother ■ <u>Fear of making mistakes or not knowing what to say</u>

It would seem that this identity as a SALCer is the source of their enhanced WTC. Therefore, based on the theoretical understanding of identity construction as a negotiation process in relation to the community and other community members, analyzing their perception of the characteristics of the SALC (i.e. the community) and the SALCers (i.e. the other community members) can give us insights into what elements in their COP help them shape the identity that motivates them to break out of the shell of fear and initiate interactions with others in English.

Characteristics of the SALC that help the SALCers enhance their WTC

Two characteristics of the SALC which help the SALCers enhance their WTC emerged from the data: "the English-only policy" and "Equality."

English-only. The first characteristics of the SALC that helps the SALCers feel more comfortable speaking in English seems to be its English-only policy. While "English-only" sounds slightly imposing, shy Japanese EFL learners seem to need a little bit of a push.

During the interview, prompted by the interviewer's question about the differences she feels when speaking in English in the SALC or in English classes, S mentioned that she feels shy in speaking English with her classmates because she usually communicates with them in Japanese outside class. However, in the following excerpts, she also explained how she feels less embarrassed since everyone is speaking in English all the time:

本当に日本語話す人いないし、電話とる時も英語だし、とりあえず全部英語だから、恥ずかしさがないから。なんか、クラスだと、間違え

ちゃうのがやだから。なんか、面倒くさいから、日本語で言うけど、SALCは、そういうことはなく。

(*No one speaks in Japanese in the SALC. They even answer the phone in English and just about everything is conducted in English, so I don't feel shy about using English. Somehow, in English classes, I don't want to make mistakes, and it is also cumbersome to speak in English, so I often use Japanese, but I don't feel that way in the SALC.*)

Her comments indicate that she can overcome her shyness when she is in the SALC since she knows that everyone speaks in English there. There is no risk of being embarrassed by being the only person who tries to speak in English, which Osterman (2014) found prevented students from talking in English in class.

In order to emphasize the thoroughness of the English policy in the SALC, S also shared her experience signing a confidentiality agreement that new SALCers need to sign before they start working in the SALC. She was taken aback to find that even the confidentiality document was in English, which made her realize that everything really had to be done in English.

The fact that the SALCers do not speak in English outside the SALC proves that it is not only the people they are with, but the space where they are expected to speak in English, that is crucial for them to feel willing to engage in English communication. This assumption is supported by K's comment stating that it is usually the case that the SALCers do not talk to each other in English outside the SALC, even though they want to speak and practice their English, unless there is a rule or necessity that they do so.

Based on these observations, the SALC having an English-only policy and providing a space where it is guaranteed that everyone speaks in English seems to be one of the factors that helps SALCers feel more comfortable and willing to communicate in English with other Japanese learners of English.

Everyone is equal. The second characteristic that enhances the SALCers' WTC is "Everyone is Equal." Both S and K mentioned that they can be friendlier and treat everyone equally regardless of their ages when they speak in English, since they are not required to be aware of the hierarchical relationships as they need to do in Japanese. K listed an example of calling someone older than her by their first name

without adding "san" at the end, which she must do in Japanese. Being free from constantly paying attention to hierarchical relationships or being aware of proper language and attitudes to interact with each other, the SALC may be empowering students to communicate more regardless of who they communicate with.

Characteristics of the SALCers that help them enhance their WTC

In addition to the characteristics of the SALC as a community of practice that helps SALCers enhance their WTC, there seem to be some characteristics of the SALCers as community members that help them feel more encouraged to communicate with each other in English. Those characteristics are namely: 1) Willingness to actively communicate and get to know each other, 2) Actively helping each other, and 3) Friendship and sense of community.

Willing to actively communicate and get to know each other. The first of the characteristics of the SALCers is "willingness to communicate and get to know each other". When asked how she would depict the characteristics of the SALCers in general, K mentioned that the SALCers are actively seeking opportunities to have conversation with and help other people in English. She also said that she herself has more confidence in actively seeking out other people to communicate with in English when working in the SALC, even though she is usually not the kind of person who does. She attributed the differences to the fact that she enjoys and takes pride in working in the SALC while using English. This seems to demonstrate lucidly how her identity as a SALCer who is required to be an active communicator empowers her and enables her to overcome her shyness.

Actively help each other. Another key characteristic of the SALCers that emerged is that they help each other when they do not know how to express themselves in English. After mentioning how she does not want to make mistakes in English in classes, S also said that she does not feel that way in the SALC since other SALCers will help her to find phrases to express what she wants to say. She depicted how their close relationship enables themselves to help each other:

> S: なんか、みんなでくずして言ったりして、「あ、それってなんとかって単語で意味あるよね」みたいなのゆったりする仲なんで、それは全然違います。

> *S: I think it's because we have a relationship where we help each other by, for example, trying to figure out what someone wanted to say while suggesting possible words the person can use to express what he or she wanted to say, saying something like "Right, you can say that with something like this….")*

The "relationship" mentioned here, based on both improving their English and becoming better SALCers, might be the driving force behind their actively helping each other with their English. Based on the excerpts from the interviews provided above, it is apparent that the SALCers are proactively supporting one another.

Friendship and sense of community. The last theme that I will introduce as one of the characteristics of the SALCers is that they are not only willing to communicate with other people, but also be their friends. There was no indication of cliques depending on SALCer interests or dispositions. K and S both stated that all the SALCers get along and are close to each other. This could imply that the SALCers are consciously making efforts to create this network of friendship to build a good community of practice.

The relationship among SALCers appears to be different from other close relationships. For example, S stated that she feels awkward speaking in English with her mother or her friends who are Japanese and capable of communicating in English. It seems that just knowing each other well is not enough to make her feel comfortable speaking in English. Rather, the English-only environment of the SALC, coupled with the mutual agreement of the SALCers to be peer learners, seems to enable her to communicate in English more easily.

Discussion

The main characteristics of the SALC and the SALCers that seem to enhance the SALCers' willingness to communicate with their Japanese peers in English and contribute to their reduced anxiety of making mistakes were characteristics of the SALC including: 1) the English-only policy, 2) Equality, and traits of the SALCers, including A) Willingness to actively communicate and get to know each other, B) Actively helping each other, and C) Friendship and sense of community. These findings align with sociocultural theory in that social context and interpersonal interaction plays a crucial role in SALCers' willingness to speak in English with each other. The SALCers construct their identity through interactions with community

members who share the joint enterprise of both learning English and fulfilling the demands of the job. Furthermore, the SALCers perceive the SALC as a place where everyone communicates only in English and everyone is treated equally and in a friendly manner. The sense of belonging to this community and the identity as a SALCer help them to reduce their anxiety of making mistakes, which in turn increases the level of WTC.

Limitations of the study

This preliminary description of SALCer identity is based on the constructivist approach, which means a large portion of the data consists of my own subjective interpretations, co-formed through the interactions with the participants. In addition, it would be difficult at other institutions to replicate the conditions under which these SALCers work. The SALC where this study was conducted is one of the best-funded facilities of the university, and the SALCers are paid to speak English and therefore have an extrinsic motivational factor that most students do not. Additionally, they are encouraged to bond with other SALCers through a training system, as well as organized social events for the new SALCers, which surely help to build their sense of community. This makes generalizing the findings of this study to other contexts, such as a classroom setting, nearly impossible.

Furthermore, this was an exploratory study based on interviews with only two participants, who were chosen primarily due to their willingness to participate in the study. There is no guarantee that they were typical "SALCers". Hence, the conclusions reached by this paper can only be described as tentative. However, the current data does seem to indicate that an interaction between certain characteristics of the SALC and the SALCers themselves positively influence SALCers' WTC in English. Further investigation of these characteristics may serve as a basis for better understanding of the factors affecting Japanese EFL learners' willingness to communicate in other settings.

Conclusion

This study has shown how the identity as a SALCer and the SALC itself as a workspace seems to foster a sense of community among SALCers, which enhances their willingness to communicate. It is especially noteworthy in that the participants of this study seem to have overcome one of the most challenging issues that many

Japanese EFL learners face: fear of embarrassing themselves by being unable to express themselves or use English accurately. It is hoped that further research will provide more substantial information to either confirm these interpretations or offer alternate views that explain these preliminary findings.

Notes on the contributor

Junko Noguchi taught at a public high school in Chiba, Japan after getting her MA in TESOL from Soka University of America, USA, and is currently working as a learning advisor at Kanda University of International Studies. She is also a PhD student at Temple University, Japan. Her research interests include articulatory phonology, self-directed learning and metacognition.

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Tapping into the Educational Potential of Facebook: Encouraging Out-of-Class Peer Collaboration in Foreign Language Learning

Ward Peeters, University of Antwerp, Belgium

Abstract

Due to their social framework and often informal character, social network sites such as *Facebook* are believed to promote out-of-class learning by encouraging learners to participate in online peer collaboration. Yet, the evidence remains inconclusive when it comes to the effectiveness and students' appreciation of collaborating via social network sites, which indicates the need for further research. The first part of the present paper discusses the 'out-of-class' use of a closed *Facebook* group by analysing the online communication behaviour of 119 first-year foreign language English majors at the University of Antwerp (Belgium) participating in a writing course. The assessed data (more than 4,000 *Facebook* posts and a post-questionnaire) suggest that the socio-communicative context of a *Facebook* group motivates students to learn collaboratively beyond the physical classroom walls. The remaining part of this paper investigates which conclusions can be drawn from this for increasing the effectiveness of independent self-access modules and study programmes blending self-access and classroom learning. Here, results hint at the fact that students attach particular importance to social network sites as support networks for sharing positive and critical learning experiences and language learning tips.

Keywords: Facebook, EFL writing, collaborative learning, self-access learning

Opportunities for interpersonal contact are often suboptimal in large, heterogeneous foreign language learning groups, where focus lies on content and language integrated learning with limited contact time. In order to optimise the social learning context, teachers and mentors often look for solutions outside of the classroom. The social, informal character of *Facebook* seems to offer new possibilities as it is intended to encourage interpersonal communication, not only in the personal lives of students but also in various learning environments (Liaw & English, 2013; McBride, 2009; Zourou, 2012). However, studies are inconclusive about the pedagogical potential of social network sites (SNSs) for self-regulated learning and self-access contexts. To shed light on this issue, this paper presents the results of a case study conducted in a first-year academic writing class in English as a foreign language; a course blending classroom learning and self-access modules. In this project (the Antwerp *Facebook* Project or AFP), the social network site was introduced to enhance collaborative learning through peer-to-peer communication outside of the classroom, without the presence

of a tutor online. In order to determine how effective the forum was as an educational tool, the study investigates how the learners experienced the project's face validity and how they established peer collaboration over time.

Facebook in the Foreign Language Learning Classroom

The social framework of *Facebook* appears to be the keystone for thinking about the network site as a support tool for foreign language learning as it may encourage students to take part in peer-to-peer communication and peer collaboration. Over the past ten years, the use of SNSs in foreign language learning classrooms has increasingly caught the attention of researchers and practitioners in the field. Zourou (2012) suggests that *Facebook* encourages peer-to-peer communication due to its community building capacity. Liaw and English (2013) support this argument by pointing out that the social environment of *Facebook* fosters socialisation, and establishes and strengthens social ties between different end-users. As the SNS encourages interpersonal interaction, it motivates learners to form communities in which they can explore language in use (Liu et al., 2013). Engaging in peer-to-peer communication is considered beneficial for students' learning as it encourages them to develop, among others, higher level reasoning strategies, critical thinking and self-reflection (Leidner & Jarvenpaa, 1995), which are essential features of successful self-access and blended learning environments (Murray, 2014; Zimmerman, 2008).

In the present project, the learners were encouraged to perform self-regulated learning, which refers to "the self-directive processes and self-beliefs that enable learners to transform their mental abilities, such as verbal aptitude, into an academic performance skill, such as writing" (Zimmerman, 2008, p. 166). In other words, self-regulated learning requires learners to gain and develop knowledge and skills by setting their own goals and showing initiative in their own learning process. By enhancing community building, the social framework of *Facebook* therefore seems to be highly applicable to support learners in developing self-regulated learning strategies through peer collaboration.

The social framework of Facebook

Facebook is a highly accessible online tool and part of students' everyday life (McBride, 2009). The language production on social platforms is considered to be genuine or, more specifically, language use that resembles real-life communication (Sykes, Oskoz, & Thorne, 2008). Using SNSs as communication tools in language learning contexts can facilitate the contact with the foreign language outside of the actual classroom (Lantz-

Andersson, Vigmo, & Bowen, 2013). By implementing *Facebook* into the learning process, additional to in-class instruction or online learning material, the actual learning environment is further extended online. Doing so, the learners are able to experience a language to a fuller extent and are motivated to take part in the productive process of foreign language learning by communicating with their peers (Blattner & Fiori, 2009). However, in an educational context, online peer-to-peer communication also has to be pedagogically relevant (Olvera-Lobo & Gutiérrez-Artacho, 2012). In order to serve learning goals and objectives, the SNS has to be informed by educational incentives, i.e. learning tasks (Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010).

Language learning objectives or learning tasks have to encourage students to engage in 'meaningful interaction' (Liaw & English, 2013), supporting their learning as a collaborative process. Collaborative learning is exemplified by students working together towards the same (learning) goal (Akdemir & Koszalka, 2008). In the present study, the learning objectives are set by the tutor and are supplemented by a collaborative learning environment on *Facebook* in which students have the freedom to select and manage their own self-regulated learning activities (Murray, 2014). The learning tasks are to stimulate the participants to engage in peer-to-peer communication in the 'deeply social' environment of *Facebook* (Gasiorek, Giles, Holtgraves, & Robbins, 2012), guiding their interaction by means of assignments and instructions.

The Antwerp *Facebook* Project (AFP)

Methodology and instruments

A group of 119 first-year English majors ‒all native speakers of Dutch‒ participated in this study as an out-of-class part of an academic writing programme. The course adopted a blended learning approach with 12 contact hours, self-access modules and elements of continuous assessment. In an effort to improve the overall academic writing quality and give opportunities to practise writing, students had to individually hand in three 300-word essays. As part of these genuine assignments students were instructed to discuss online particular language and writing issues. They were requested to include their posts in the final version of their writing assignment, as well as provide the tutor with the most helpful response of their fellow students. In class, students were introduced to a writing scale to monitor their progress and they were encouraged to engage in peer correction. The texts were individually corrected by a tutor and graded as part of the final assessment. In-class feedback was given and students were required to rewrite the assignment and upload it again on the university's learning platform.

The students were introduced to the AFP forum and were requested to use it for collaborative writing for the duration of the course. Students who did not have access to *Facebook* (*n* = 2) teamed up with peers who had. They consulted the peer group through the *Facebook* profiles of their team mates and regularly logged on to participate in the discussions. All students were informed that the tutor would not be available online. This study is interested in student-student interaction and their self-regulated collaboration on SNSs. By excluding the tutor, students would feel less inhibited to communicate with their peers, which is to lead to a more extensive and genuine foreign language output (cf. Lloyd, 2012). Introducing the assignments and instructions −guiding students in their online collaboration while minimising the anxiety to collaborate− provided the initial learning goals. Students had full control over their own collaboration strategies and were able to autonomously appropriate the online learning space while working together on the set learning tasks.

Data and approach

This study is interested in the applicability of SNSs in self-access and blended learning environments, and analyses the students' online language production as well as their self-reported data on learning gain when collaborating with their peers (cf. Kabilan et al., 2010). The following research questions were formulated:

1. How do students appraise the use of *Facebook* for peer-to-peer collaboration?
2. Do students feel they gained knowledge and skills regarding their learning process by collaborating with their peers on *Facebook*?

The study investigates which conclusions can be drawn from this for integrating SNSs in the learning process and increasing the effectiveness of independent self-access modules and study programmes blending self-access and classroom learning.

Two types of data were collected: 4,278 online posts, produced by the participants on the forum over a time span of four months, and responses to two pen-and-paper questionnaires. The project had four phases, co-occurring with the three monthly writing assignments: three assignment phases (ASS1, ASS2, ASS3) and one post-assignment phase (POST-ASS). The POST-ASS phase was the time when the forum was still online and used by the students, but in which no set learning task was present. The language data of the individual posts underwent topic analysis through topic identification and topic segmentation.

Topic identification looks for words or clusters of words which indicate a given subject in a string of sentences and consequently identifies the communicative purpose of that sequence. Topic segmentation groups sequences together which share the same subject. The topic analysis also attended to the fact that different sequences could be generated by different individuals (cf. Li & Yamanishi, 2003). The analysis of the language data is to enable this study to make informed decisions on the communication strategies and the effectiveness of student collaboration on SNSs in the context of self-access and blended learning.

The questionnaires consisted of closed-format questions and closed-end questions using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicates a low (self-reported) score on a given statement, and 5 indicates a high (self-reported) score. Respondents could provide additional comments to every question in a comment section. The study used two questionnaires: a pre-questionnaire provided insights into students' computer literacy and their opinion about the use of *Facebook* in language learning, and a post-questionnaire examined the students' opinions about peer collaboration on *Facebook*, and was completed after the last writing assignment had been handed in. Answers to the post-questionnaire also provided more insights into students' perceived gain in writing skills, knowledge and evaluation of their individual participation.

Analysis

Identifying educational vs. social topics

Topic analysis was conducted on the 4,278 contributions the students had generated during the four phases of the project. All contributions were analysed and identified as either *social* or *educational*, depending on the topic of the conversations. Educationally relevant communication addressed course content or contributions on the content, formulation, or structure of the writing assignments. The social contributions consisted of course-related postings, e.g. posts on course objectives and assignment deadlines; but also non-course-related posts about general pastime and upcoming events.
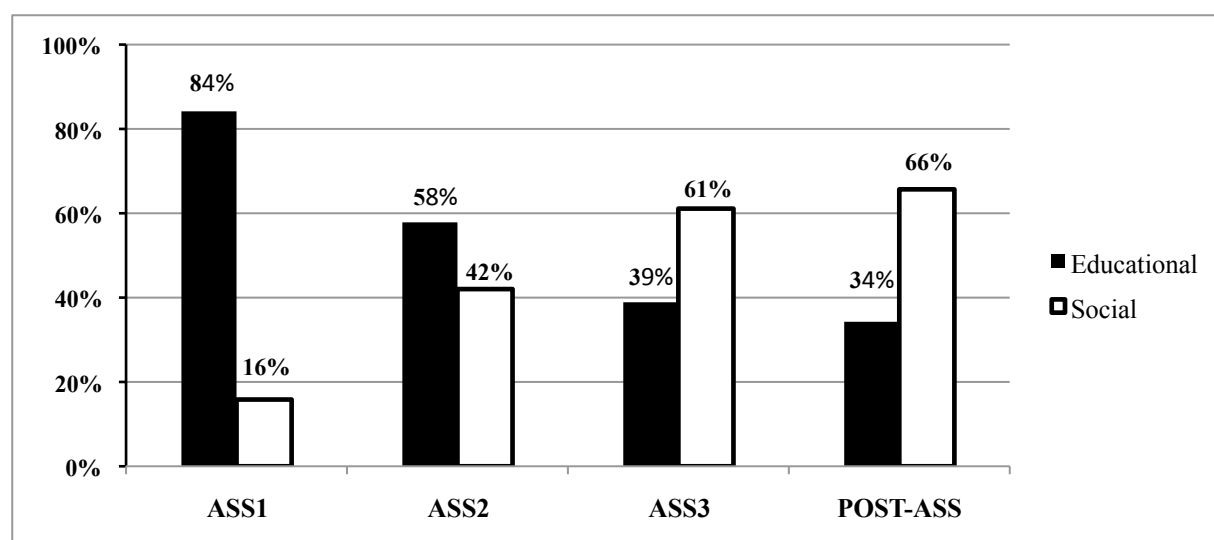
Figure 1. Percentage of Contributions with an Educational or Social Communication Purpose

When comparing the four phases of the project, two distinctive tendencies can be observed, as illustrated in Figure 1. During the first two months of the project (ASS1-ASS2) the educational contributions outnumbered the social. In ASS1, 84% of the posts are considered to be educational, while 16% are considered to be social. During the second phase (ASS2), this was 58% vs. 42% respectively. From the third month onwards (ASS3-POST-ASS), the social contributions outnumbered the educational. In ASS3, the social contributions (61%) surpassed the educational ones (39%), and in the POST-ASS phase the number of social contributions even rose to two thirds of the total number of individual posts (66%), while the educational dropped to one third (34%). This crossover exemplifies the presence of both an educational and social communication purpose on the forum and shows a shift in the students' use of the AFP forum over time: from a mainly educational to a mainly social communication environment.

The crossover towards the end of the third phase of the project was due to the finalisation of the three writing assignments. As the writing assignments were completed, the set learning objective disappeared. Students who had finished their essays switched to more informal communication, socialising with their fellow students and exchanging information and tips about the upcoming examination period. Both communication purposes nevertheless appear to be an indissoluble part of the online forum, as the forum was used for educational peer-to-peer discussions, but also as a *social safety net*. This social safety net was conceptualised over time by the fact that students started to discuss more and more questions about life at university, and exchanged information about their own experiences. They

assisted each other with administrative issues and exchanged their opinions on the goals and objectives of the university's curriculum.

Identifying peer collaboration

Since peer-to-peer communication had both an educational and social purpose, the study further investigated the nature of the conversations in order to examine how the crossover from an educational to a social communication environment is represented in the peer collaboration. In prototypical educational peer-to-peer communication on the forum, students posted questions about the content and argumentation used in their writing assignments, as in the example below:

> P1: Papers nowadays are made to attract people's attention because there are more competitors on the market, like internet and television. This might change their reliability. Reactions? Agree or disagree?

Students also asked for advice regarding the formulation, grammar and spelling of their assignments, using their peers as a sounding board. In other words, they made use of their peers' knowledge and expertise, posing goal-directed questions:

> P2: Can someone who is really good at English check the grammar and choice of words in this sentence? [...].

The responses to the questions were, overall, coherent and well-structured. The quality of the initial questions also appeared to influence the quality of the replies (cf. McBride, 2009), as replies prototypically contained the same jargon and provided argumentation to support the given opinion or answer.

While educational postings mainly received extensive replies (represented in *mean utterance length*: 16 words/post), the social posts, as well as the replies to them, were shorter (represented in *mean utterance length*: 12 words/post). Social posts also received a higher number of replies (M = 11 for the social vs. M = 4 for the educational). The educational conversations typified goal-directed discussions as part of self-regulated learning while the social contributions appeared to have an additional function in the learning process, e.g. to encourage fellow learners:

> P3: To those who have submitted their essay: YOU GO GLEN COCO! To those still working on their essay: YOU CAN DO IT!

In the POST-ASS phase, the social aspect gained momentum and students made their posts more entertaining. They also shared how they were dealing with the upcoming examination period and how they experienced the *Facebook* forum:

> P4: One positive thing about this exam: I feel like we are bonding!

In sum, the educational posts mainly focused on collaboratively and successfully completing the writing assignments, which exemplifies common goal-directed behaviour. Students also exchanged additional course information and tips, and posted questions about the curriculum, which shows how students added learning goals to the peer collaboration. The social posts mainly focused on encouraging fellow students and sharing funny remarks, and exemplify the community-building capacity of the social network site.

Students appear to enjoy this kind of interaction with their fellow learners, which attributes to their sense of satisfaction in online learning programmes (cf. Swan, 2002; Gunawardena, 1995) and is an essential part of effective online learning (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997). The interaction on *Facebook* exemplifies students' social presence as they demonstrate their own personal engagement, as well as acknowledge the presence and effort of others (Kehrwald, 2010; Rourke et al., 2001).

Student evaluation of Facebook's educational potential

The observed conversations have both an educational and social function. In order to know how students perceived the forum, its learning tasks and the peer collaboration, the study further examined the reported data from the questionnaires. These data show, in contrast with the rising number of social conversations over time, that a vast majority of the learners (85%) considered the communication purpose of the forum to be *educational*. Moreover, 82% of the students regarded the *social* purpose of the forum subordinate to the *educational* purpose. The students therefore appear to attribute a high degree of educational value to the AFP forum and regard it as a valid tool in their learning process.

As part of the post-questionnaire, students evaluated various statements about their perceived gain in academic writing through their participation on the *Facebook* forum, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' Self-Assessment on Peer Collaboration (Post-Questionnaire)

Statement	*M* (SD)
Discussions on the forum have given me more insights into academic writing	3.21 (0.96)
Discussions helped me to improve my writing assignments (content)	3.49 (0.98)
Discussions helped me to improve my writing assignments (formulation)	3.18 (1.10)

On a five-point Likert scale students indicated that they had gained insights (M = 3.21), knowledge (M = 3.49), and skills (M = 3.18) by actively participating on the *Facebook* forum. The standard deviation (SD) of about 1.00 is rather large, which indicates that the respondents hover around the mean and do not appear to have outspoken opinions towards the far negative or positive side of the five-point scale. The findings drawn from these responses therefore do not represent the definite conceptions and opinions of the community of learners, rather than generalised believes and attitudes towards the given statements.

Table 2. Students' Self-Assessment on Confidence Gain (Post-Questionnaire)

Statement	*M* (SD)
Confidence gain in discussing language topics	3.08 (1.04)
Confidence gain in academic writing	2.89 (1.03)

Students reported that they had gained confidence in discussing language topics due to their active participation on the forum (M= 3.08), as illustrated in Table 2. These findings attest earlier research by Promnitz-Hayashi (2011) on a small scale sample of Japanese students which proposed that the use of *Facebook* may have a positive impact on students' sense of comfort, confidence and motivation while collaborating with their peers on *Facebook*. However, the students in the present project also expressed that the discussions on the *Facebook* forum did not result in confidence gain regarding academic writing (M = 2.89). In the comment section students indicated that the instruction in class had given them confidence in academic writing as it introduced them to the essential building blocks of a proper academic text. They regarded the *Facebook* forum as a support tool in the language learning process, but not as a learning environment per se.

The role of the learner and the tutor in peer collaboration through Facebook

As the *Facebook* forum is perceived as an educational online environment, it is important to consider the students' assessment of their own participation on the forum, as well as the role of the tutor and the educational institution.

Table 3. Students' Self-Assessment on Peer-to-Peer Communication (Post-Questionnaire)

Statement	*M* (SD)
Comfort about discussing assignments with peers	3.38 (1.13)
Comfort about writing assignments after discussing it with peers	3.39 (0.90)
Positive attitude towards providing extra support for peers	3.05 (1.13)
I liked being part of the *Facebook* forum	3.46 (1.10)

The students reported that they felt comfortable discussing the writing assignments with their peers (M = 3.38), as illustrated in Table 3. They also felt comfortable writing their assignments after discussing them on the forum (M = 3.39). Students expressed the willingness to provide additional support for their peers (M = 3.05). Additional support is exemplified by sharing summaries, replying to additional questions and reviewing supplementary assignments. By doing so, students added various learning objectives to the *Facebook* forum and actively engaged in the discussions. In the context of self-access learning, this means that *Facebook* may provide a suitable environment for participants to exchange information, pose supplementary questions about their personal learning process and, additionally, be motivated to take part in peer collaboration. Moreover, students liked being part of the *Facebook* forum (M = 3.46) as they regarded it as a fun and safe environment to take part in peer-to-peer communication.

Table 4. Students' Self-Assessment on the Role of Tutor/Institution (Post-Questionnaire)

Statement	*M* (SD)
Positive attitude towards the presence of tutor/lecturer in the *Facebook* group	2.66 (1.01)
Positive attitude towards the educational institution supporting collaboration on *Facebook*	3.13 (1.10)

Students preferred not to have a tutor join the *Facebook* forum (M = 2.66), as illustrated in Table 4. Half of them (50%) additionally commented that the presence of a tutor would have influenced their participation in a negative way. As they were able to self-regulate

the collaboration on the forum, the inclusion of a tutor could have affected their active engagement and intrinsic motivation. The students' attitudes confirm that the *Facebook* forum is to be regarded as an online environment of self-regulated learning, which is a "process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behavior, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features in the environment" (Pintrich, 2000, p. 453). Despite the students having a negative attitude towards the inclusion of a tutor on the *Facebook* forum, they had a positive attitude towards educational institutions supporting recourses on *Facebook* to stimulate peer-to-peer communication (M = 3.13). The students seem to prefer institutions to make tools for collaborative learning available to them, but also want to have the opportunity to self-regulate the peer-to-peer communication.

Implications for Self-Access Learning

This study highlights *Facebook*'s potential as a collaborative support tool in (1) independent self-access modules and (2) study programmes which blend self-access and classroom learning. Self-access learning through self-access centres benefits from immerging learners in a 'social environment', as it may encourage and motivate them to take part in the learning process (Gillies, 2010). A collaborative space on *Facebook* might therefore form an incentive for learners to engage in the different modules of self-access learning; even more when taking into account that one of the main raisons for learners to avoid self-access centres is the unwillingness to study by oneself (Chan, Spratt & Humphreys, 2002; Gillies, 2010). As learners in the present project experienced little anxiety talking to their peers and perceived the forum as being primarily educational, the apparent contradiction of combining low-threshold socialisation and learning tasks seems to have been overcome. Even though measuring the effectiveness of self-access modules is regarded to be complicated and understudied (Gardner & Miller, 2010), the learners in the present project reported that they gained insights in academic writing and writing skills through their self-regulated collaboration. Furthermore, the data provide indications that the collaborative nature of a *Facebook* forum in self-access learning may attribute a high degree of educational credibility to this online environment, since it is experienced by the learners as a fun and worthwhile component of their learning programme. Self-access centres therefore may consider integrating group forums on social network sites in their modules, where students are to

manage the conversation and collaboration strategies in order to fully engage in the learning process.

As the integrated learning tasks and instructions attributed a high degree of educational value to the collaborative forum, *Facebook* is highly applicable as a support tool in study programmes which blend self-access modules and classroom learning, i.e. a "social network enhanced blended learning environment" (Mynard, 2011, p. 302). The learners in the AFP study indicated that the contact sessions introduced them to the essential building blocks of academic writing, which made them more confident in their writing practice. The collaborative forum on *Facebook* was regarded as an additional support tool, but not as a learning environment as such. It gave them the opportunity to gain more insights in their own productive process of language learning and into successfully completing learning tasks through peer collaboration. Therefore, it can be argued that a peer-to-peer discussion forum on *Facebook* might be most effectively integrated into a study programme which blends self-access and classroom learning, where online collaboration may enhance the knowledge, skills and confidence acquired in class.

The design of the SNS environment (i.e. making the online environment a closed environment and excluding the tutor from the discussion group), as well as the learning tasks, whether integrated in self-access modules or blended learning contexts, have to fit the specific learning goals of the set curriculum as well as the needs of the learner group. Only then can the multi-faceted role of self-access centres and educational institutions alike tie both the educational as the social, leisure-related factors together to provide an optimal language learning environment (Gillies, 2010).

Conclusion

This study has shown how *Facebook* can function as a support tool in foreign language learning, encouraging learners to successfully complete learning tasks while interacting on a collaborative learning platform. As an integrated part of the learning programme, the *Facebook* forum, complemented with learning objectives and tailored instructions, provided students with an out-of-class discussion environment for self-regulated learning activities. The learners indicated that they gained insights, knowledge and skills regarding academic writing, and that the peer discussions online made them feel comfortable in completing their learning tasks. This feeling of comfort can be attributed to the social framework of the *Facebook* environment, lowering the threshold for peer-to-peer

communication and socialisation. The learners experienced the forum as a playful and constructive component of the learning process and attached particular importance to it as a support network for sharing positive and critical learning experiences and language learning tips.

In this study, self-regulated collaboration exceeded the initial instructions and pushed the boundaries of the learning tasks. Learners engaged with the content and argumentation of the assignments and discussed their learning experiences. Such a collaborative space therefore holds considerable potential as a support tool in self-access learning and blended learning environments, providing an accessible discussion environment with a high degree of educational value for the learner community. Therefore, integrating *Facebook* as a support network may provide the learners with the social environment needed for effective self-access learning and may be the stepping stone towards a more communicative and participatory language learning process.

Notes on the Contributor

Ward Peeters is a PhD researcher at the University of Antwerp, Belgium, studying social network impact in educational contexts.

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Effects of CALL on Self-directed FL Vocabulary Learning

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Abstract

This paper focuses on whether computer technologies could help to create a better learning environment for FL vocabulary learners in China, activating their utilization of various vocabulary learning strategies and thereby enhancing self-directed vocabulary learning (SDVL). A vocabulary learning system called *Learning Vocabulary In Domain* was developed especially for this research purpose. In the judgmental analysis, students' satisfaction levels to the vocabulary learning conditions under the computer-based mode and paper-based mode were statistically compared and discussed. As a result, the CALL mode was more favorable to the students during their self-directed learning. The superiority of CALL was further reinforced by the empirical analysis of comparing the students' vocabulary performances under the two learning modes.

Keywords: computer-assisted language learning; vocabulary learning strategies; self-directed vocabulary learning

Vocabulary knowledge is one of the most important factors in achievement for FL learners. The degree of vocabulary acquisition affects the accuracy and efficiency of language communication directly, including language comprehension and production. With the gradual recognition of the importance of vocabulary in language communication, a research interest in vocabulary learning and teaching has grown since the 1980s. "Vocabulary acquisition research has established itself as a central research focus for language acquisition researchers" (Henriksen, 1999, p. 303). Research has shown that vocabulary knowledge is a key indicator of overall language ability and that vocabulary learning is relevant to the development of all language learning skills. For instance, vocabulary learning is strongly correlated with reading comprehension (Nagy, 2005; Nassaji, 2003; Nation, 2001, 2006; Qian, 2002) and quality writing (Laufer & Nation, 1995; Lee, 2003; Lee & Muncie, 2006; Muncie, 2002). However, despite its great importance, vocabulary always presents one of the

greatest challenges for FL learners. Although being eager to learn as many words as they can and take in a large amount of knowledge of these words in depth, FL learners have the most trouble in vocabulary learning and express a strong desire for good learning abilities.

Regarding FL teaching within higher education in China, teachers' explanations of vocabulary in class is usually confined to a limited time or a particular context. As a result, a large amount of remaining work on vocabulary learning is left to students' out-of-class time. According to a study on Chinese college students' self-directed vocabulary learning (SDVL) (Wu, 2011), 68% of the students declared that the time they spent on vocabulary learning out of class was more than double that spent in class. Consequently, it is important that students develop autonomy so that they might effectively take charge of their own vocabulary learning outside of class. However, research (e.g., Liu & Zhang, 2005; Wang, 2002; Wu & Wu, 2008; Xu, Peng, & Wu, 2004) indicates that Chinese college students depend too much on their teachers, are used to being passive recipients, and lack autonomy. The majority of them engage mostly in rote memorization with word lists and mechanical drills during their SDVL. With only mechanical repetitions and drills, the depth of processing and elaboration of words are obviously restricted at different stages of vocabulary learning. Therefore, long-term word retention is hard to achieve, to say nothing of good word transfer. This way of learning vocabulary in self-direction is most likely to result in a decrease of both learning interest and efficiency.

Therefore, in order to address the problem described above, this paper will focus on the improvement of self-directed vocabulary learning through CALL so that students can learn vocabulary independently as well as successfully. With the rapid development of computer technology, CALL has been widely applied in both FL teaching and learning. It has also shown great potential in the field of vocabulary learning in terms of three computer roles, i.e. tutor, tool and medium. Its unique features such as providing numerous authentic resources conveyed with texts, images, audios and videos, immediate feedback, on-hands learning tools and authentic online interactions are considered favorable to both learning efficiency and learner autonomy.

Therefore, the application of CALL is expected to facilitate the compilation of various vocabulary learning tasks to promote students' utilization of various vocabulary learning strategies through the advancement of learning conditions and ultimately enhance self-directed vocabulary learning.

Literature Review

CALL is tightly connected to other disciplines, such as cognitive psychology, artificial intelligence, course design, human-computer interaction and SLA. CALL may be defined as "the search for and study of applications of the computer in language learning and teaching" (Levy, 1997, p. 1). The academic literature has recognized the field of CALL for about five decades. It has undergone a series of phases that have been directly determined by both the level of advancement of technology and the type of methodology prevalent. From recent literature, it is found that computer technology has been gradually integrated into language education with its applications in various aspects. Many studies (e.g., Kern, 2006; Levy, 1997; Warschauer & Kern, 2000; Wu & Wu, 2008, 2009) report that the integration of CALL into L2 learning and teaching is both preferred and effective. In fact, CALL has also been applied widely in facilitating vocabulary learning with richer linguistic or non-linguistic support from diversified perspectives.

(1) The tutor role of the computer

"In the tutor role, computers can provide instruction, feedback, and testing in grammar, vocabulary, writing, pronunciation, and other dimensions of language and culture learning" (Kern, 2006, p. 191). The findings in research by Tozcu and Coady (2004) demonstrate that explicit instructions for high-frequency words in English on the computer result in a significant increase in vocabulary knowledge. Furthermore, Coll (2002) writes that hypermedia-based instruction may achieve an effective learning environment for building vocabulary. Christensen, Merill and Yanchar (2007) agree that students perform well with computer-based drill and practice programs in both breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge. Zapata and Sagarra (2007) find that

the students completing their homework with an online workbook outperform those

working with a printed one after six and eight months of exposure to the learning

environment. In addition, Merrill et al. (1996) argue that computer-based drill and

practice programs can tailor the practice to the needs of individual learners and

increase retention by providing short-spaced reviews. Moreover, CALL can provide

the immediate and individualized feedback to promote learners' motivation to make

more efforts on recalling or reproducing newly learnt words. As a result, with a high

motivation, learners may increase their studying time for language learning, and

vocabulary acquisition is enhanced. Ellis (1995) concludes, "Computers can structure

training, practice, and testing to optimize the rate of vocabulary acquisition" (p. 123).

Nowadays, some researchers have attempted to create CALL programs on

vocabulary learning, emphasizing the role of a computer as a tutor. For instance, the

program *CAVACO* (Groot, 2000) simulates three stages of acquiring a new word in

the mental lexicon, namely noticing, storage and consolidation. In addition, the

research project of Basanta (2004) reports the pedagogical process of the design and

development of an online vocabulary modular course *ADELEX* for assessing and

developing lexical competence. Chan and Liou (2005) investigate the influence of

using five web-based practice units in the format of textual explanation, semantic grid

analysis, a bilingual concordancer called *TOTALrecall* and interactive exercises. The

results show that learners make a significant collocation improvement after this online

practice.

(2) The role of the computer as a tool

The role of the computer as a tool has revealed its significant prominence in

vocabulary learning. "In the tool role, computers provide ready access to written,

audio, and visual materials relevant to the language and culture being studied" (Kern,

2006, p. 191). Certain conditions have been identified in the CALL environment that

make lexical learning easier: when a word is presented in the context of a sentence

with cues indicating synonyms and definitions (Kolich, 1991); when a word is

presented in the form of text-related images instead of video and text or text only

(Chun & Plass, 1996); and when electronic dictionaries as on-line reference tools help

students access target vocabulary (Wang, 2012). Besides, a large number of CALL studies (Abraham, 2008; De Ridder, 2002; Lenders, 2008) have discovered that recall is enhanced and retention is superior when word meanings are provided with electronic glosses. The glosses can be made much more informative and attractive than traditional word entries.

Moreover, an important tool for vocabulary learning is the concordancer, which is "a sophisticated computer retrieval program with a large amount of information in the form of computer language corpus accessible to encourage data-based inductive learning" (Chan & Liou, 2005, p. 233). Horst, Cobb and Nicolae (2005) argue that concordancing can provide learners with rich semantic, syntactic and collocational information about a new word presented in different contexts. Learners first guess the meaning of a concordanced word, then make a hypothesis about its meaning and finally confirm the guess by checking an online dictionary. Bloch (2009) discusses the use of a web-based concordancing program to help students choose reporting verbs properly. Online activities with a concordancer can offer richer input and encourage deeper processing.

In addition, many software tools can facilitate vocabulary learning. *WordNet* is an online lexical reference system whose design is based on psycholinguistic theories of human lexical organization and memory (Beckwith, Fellbaum, Gross, & Miller, 1990). As a lexical learning environment for French as a second or foreign language, the *ALEXIA* system (Chanier & Selva, 1998) describes a network module, plotting the graphs of lexical semantic relations automatically. A computer program called *TextLadder* (Ghadirian, 2002) can select, screen and arrange texts to solve the problem of how to bring FL learners with limited vocabulary knowledge to the point where they can comprehend authentic texts in a target field adequately. Huang and Liou's *Textgrader* (2007), an online extensive reading program, draws on Ghadirian's ideas for creating supportive conditions for vocabulary acquisition but makes some improvements.

(3) The medium role

The medium role of the computer has not been discussed extensively in relation to vocabulary learning, but some emerging helpful media may make it more interactive. "In the medium role, technology provides sites for interpersonal communication, multimedia publication, distance learning, community participation, and identity formation" (Kern, 2006, p. 192). The technology underlying a multimedia environment allows new forms of interaction, emphasizing the learning process rather than the mere provision of correct answers. With the appearance of the Internet, computer-mediated communication (CMC) has become one of the most prominent ways for interaction to occur among learners, even at a distance. Research (e.g., Bueno-Alastuey, 2011; Crystal, 2001; Herring, 2001; Kitade, 2008; Payne & Whitney, 2002; Yanguas, 2012) has been conducted which focuses on various forms and functions of CMC. As Kern (2006) summarizes:

> It is clear that CMC is not a single, uniform genre of language use, but rather a constellation of genres related partly to the particular medium (e.g., instant messaging, e-mail, chat groups, blogs, MOOs) and partly to the particular social and cultural contexts of a given act of communication. (p. 193)

It is expected that all the media can be used for vocabulary learning. Then, learners can negotiate meanings and solve problems in word learning with their teachers, peers and even native speakers collaboratively.

Although the applications of CALL in vocabulary learning have emerged in various aspects, there are still a few noticeable problems. First, vocabulary learning is often seen as a sub-component of a CALL program, particularly a commercialized product. Such a program is often criticized for its lack of a solid pedagogical basis and its unhelpfulness to learners' individual needs. "Given their general lack of research basis as well as the comparatively small amount of time and space devoted, the quality of the vocabulary learning resulting from the utilization of these programs is often disappointing" (Ma & Kelly, 2006, p. 19). Moreover, most studies only emphasize the effect of CALL on one particular aspect of vocabulary learning. In

other words, few studies make a holistic and comprehensive application of CALL in its overall aspect. Third, most current projects focus solely on drill and practice, which isolate words being learnt and do not provide adequate contexts. Then, cognitive processes cannot be involved sufficiently. By viewing numerous vocabulary learning websites, we find that only a few of them offer multiple contextualized examples of target words, such as the *Compleat Lexical Tutor* (Cobb, 2004), the *Virtual Language Centre* (Greaves, n.d.) and Gerry's *Vocabulary Database* (Luton, 2000). With the problems discussed above, learners cannot be highly motivated and effectively guided to achieve success in vocabulary learning through CALL. Therefore, based on the unique features of CALL in supporting learner autonomy (Blin, 1999; Gu, 2001; Littlemore, 2001; Wu & Wu, 2008, 2009), what is urgently needed is to fully explore the potential of CALL in its overall aspect to a self-directed vocabulary learning environment.

The Study

An empirical study was conducted in order to discover whether the application of computer technology could significantly enhance college students' use of vocabulary learning strategies and improve their self-directed vocabulary learning in comparison with the paper-based environment. Two kinds of learning environments were created for the purpose of the study. In the first environment, students used a vocabulary learning system including diversified and meaningful learning tasks. In the second environment, students were given a printed material displaying almost the same vocabulary tasks which they could complete as they normally did. The research objective was expected to be achieved by comparing students' actual use of vocabulary learning strategies and their performances in the two learning environments.

Materials

A vocabulary learning system called *Learning Vocabulary In Domain* (Figures 1

& 2) was developed to help students discover and construct new word knowledge in an authentic environment based upon their existing mental lexicon, while working either individually or in collaboration with others, in order to achieve successful self-directed vocabulary learning. The target words in the system were categorized into three units, belonging to the domains of "Dwelling", "Happy-Sad" and "Walk" respectively (Trump, Trechter, & Holisky, 1992). Diversified and meaningful computer-based learning tasks (Table 1) based on those words were arranged systematically according to newly-designed vocabulary learning processes (Wu, 2012), which are expected to stimulate various processing-involved and interactive vocabulary learning strategies for the improvement of self-directed vocabulary learning. Regarding the printed material, it offered almost the same tasks along the same vocabulary learning processes.

Figure 1. Main Page Screen

Figure 2. Main Task Screen

Table 1. Diversified and Meaningful Computer-based Learning Tasks

Vocabulary Learning Processes	Vocabulary Learning Tasks
Word Concentration	advanced organizer
Word Construction	pronunciation, part of speech, contextual guessing, semantic grids, use a concordance, imagine a pictorial representation of word meaning, group discussion

Word Confirmation	word formation, video, dictionary use, ask teachers or peers for word knowledge
Word Connection	group words, word chunks, semantic mappings, keyword method, connect a new word to personal experience
Word Consolidation	read as much as possible, make up grammatical sentences, dictation, flash cards, word scales, loci method, word test
Word Composition	use new words in authentic speech or writing

Participants

The participants in this study were 61 freshman students from a science and engineering university in China. They were all non-English majors selected randomly from about 4,000 freshmen. The distribution of their English scores in the placement test which was held immediately after their college entrance is shown in Figure 3. As can be seen from the histogram, although it is skewed to the left (skewness value=-0.424<1), the skewness was not very strong. Therefore, the participants selected generally represent all students in that grade and on a larger scale those at similar science and engineering universities in China. For the purpose of achieving the research objective, the participants were divided into two groups and then assigned randomly to use the self-directed vocabulary learning system and the printed material respectively.
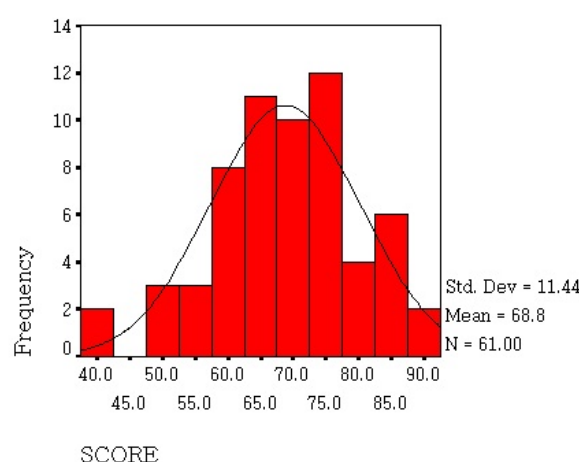

Figure 3. Participants' English Scores in the Examination Immediately After College Entrance

In order to ensure the validity of the research, the English scores of the two groups in the examination immediately after college entrance were compared by an Independent samples t-test. The results in Table 2 reveal that the mean score was 69.61 (SD = 12.32) for the computer-based group and 67.90 (SD = 10.59) for the paper-based group. These group means were tested using an Independent samples t-test, and this difference was found to be non-significant, $t(59) = -.581$, $p = .563$. It implies that the two groups demonstrate a similar language proficiency level before the start of the experiment. In addition, students' performances in the pre-test that checked their initial knowledge of the target words in the intended materials were also compared between the two groups by using the Independent samples t-test. It turned out that, as shown in Table 3, the mean score was 19.19 (SD = 6.41) for the computer-based group and 19.17 (SD = 7.55) for the paper-based group. Using the Independent samples t-test, there was no detectable difference, $t(59) = -.015$, $p = .988$. Meanwhile, the students in both groups were found to be unfamiliar with the target words. The comparisons above indicate that the two groups were qualified to participate in the experiment.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Two Groups' English Scores in the Placement Test

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Computer-based	31	69.61	12.32
Paper-based	30	67.90	10.59

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of the Two Groups' Performances in the Pre-test

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Computer-based	31	19.19	6.41
Paper-based	30	19.17	7.55

Instruments

As suggested by Chapelle (1999, 2001), a comprehensive CALL evaluation should include both judgmental and empirical analyses. The former focuses on the characteristics of the software and tasks in terms of criteria drawn from SLA research, while the latter stresses data collection to display the details of CALL use and learning outcomes. With respect to this study, the judgmental analysis was conducted mainly via a questionnaire survey to discover students' actual use of the designated materials. The empirical analysis was undertaken through comparisons of students' performances to unfold the effects of CALL on self-directed vocabulary learning.

Judgmental analysis. A questionnaire (see Appendix) was the instrument chosen for the judgmental analysis. The questionnaire is composed of two parts. The first part is concerned with personal information, covering gender, the English score on the College Entrance Examination and experience with electronic language learning tools. The second part is aimed at finding out the effect of the material on students' actual use of different vocabulary learning strategies in their self-directed vocabulary learning. For the convenience of later statistical analyses, a 7-point Likert scale was adopted to show the effect of using the material from "not effective at all" to "extremely effective". Interviews and observations were also employed as instruments in the judgmental analysis. They were expected to provide more detailed information about students' actual use of the designated materials.

Empirical analysis. Three vocabulary tests, namely the pre-, post- and delayed tests were designated as instruments to compare students' performance. The participants were not informed in advance of the post-test immediately after the treatment and the delayed test two and a half months later. Therefore, the two tests were designed to be almost the same as the pre-test, with some changes only in the sequence of question items. The test mainly checks the participants' vocabulary knowledge in three essential aspects, i.e. word form, meaning and usage. It is composed of five parts: 1) Dictation; 2) Choose the correct spoken forms of target words and write out their L1 translations; 3) Find out the synonyms of target words; 4)

Fill the gaps of contextual sentences with target words; and 5) Make up grammatical sentences with target words.

Importantly, for the purpose of ensuring the validity and reliability of both the questionnaire and the test, both of them were discussed with two professors who are engaged in the study areas of CALL and language testing respectively to make sure that the questionnaire or test items are accurate, necessary and consistent. Also, six college students took the questionnaire survey and the test prior to the participants. They were then revised accordingly, such as selecting more appropriate words for item descriptions, adding items neglected while being crucial for the research purpose and removing items repeated or irrelevant to the research purpose.

Data collection and analytical methods

The questionnaire survey was conducted at the end of the experiment, and the questionnaire was sent to 61 participants by the researcher as a tutor in the Learner Autonomy Center (LAC). All participants gave valid responses. Then, the raw data collected from the questionnaire survey were analyzed using SPSS. Cronbach's alpha was employed to test the level of internal consistency reliability within the post-questionnaire survey. As a result, an acceptable coefficient was obtained ($\alpha=0.825$). Comparisons were made between the two groups according to the data collected from the questionnaire survey to determine whether the system with the application of computer technology could help students better enhance their strategy use and thus improve their self-directed vocabulary learning. Specially, a comparison of students' satisfaction levels with the effects of the designated materials on their overall utilization of vocabulary learning strategies was drawn between the two groups to identify whether students were significantly more satisfied with the system than the printed material. As for the interview, six students were randomly selected from the system group. Three students were invited in each half-hour interview. Thus, two interviews were conducted at intervals throughout the relatively late period of the experiment. The questions asked in the interviews along a checklist were based on the items of the questionnaire survey above for the purpose of examining the details of

students' views on strategy use in different learning environments. In addition, the researcher observed the participants studying in the LAC. The observation focused on how participants carried out their self-directed vocabulary learning with the help of the designated materials. A notebook was mostly used by the researcher to take down students' behavior patterns during their study. In other words, a great emphasis was placed on the behaviors that occurred frequently and distinctively among students.

The three vocabulary tests were carried out with the two participating groups before, immediately after, and two and a half months after the treatment. Each test lasted about 45 minutes. Sixty-one valid test papers were collected afterwards for each test. The papers were scored according to the scoring criteria. Then, all the raw data collected from the tests were analyzed using SPSS. Cronbach's alpha was employed to check the level of internal consistency reliability within the post-test this time. The result indicated an acceptable coefficient ($\alpha=0.754$). Comparisons were made between the two groups based on their performances in the three tests to discover whether the application of computer technology could significantly enhance college students' self-directed vocabulary learning. To put it in detail, firstly, the gain scores from the pre-test to the post-test were compared between the two groups by an Independent samples t-test to see whether the gain scores of the group engaging in the system were significantly higher than those of the group studying on the printed material after the treatment. Secondly, the gain scores from the pre-test to the delayed test were compared in the same way to find out whether the students using the system still achieved significantly higher gain scores two and a half months later.

Procedures

The experiment lasted eight weeks in its entirety, including one training week, five learning weeks and two assessment weeks. In the training week, a tutor explained the use of the designated materials to the two groups. During the five learning weeks, the two groups were required to study their materials twice a week, one hour each time in the LAC for Language Studies. During the assessment weeks, the questionnaire survey and some vocabulary tests were conducted.

Results and discussion

Questionnaire Survey. The results of the comparison between the satisfaction levels of the two groups are listed in Table 4. The mean score (5.20) for the group studying on the system was larger than that (4.87) for the group engaging in the printed material. However, this could not justify that the difference was significantly large. Then, these group means were tested using an Independent samples t-test, and the difference was found to be significant, t (59) = 2.023, $p < .05$. It means that there was a detectable difference between the satisfaction levels of the two groups immediately after the treatment. That is, the application of computer technology as the only factor differentiating between the system and the printed material had a significant effect in increasing students' satisfaction levels.

In the first interview, students argued for the relatively positive effect of the system on their utilization of various strategies. For instance, one student said, "I favor this system as it can provide immediate feedback with useful phonetic rules or tips to help me understand word pronunciation, which is important for pronunciation accuracy." Another student added, "The interactive tasks of guessing word meaning from either textual or prolific contexts leave me a deep impression of target words and their distinctive features." Furthermore, the remaining student emphasized, "The task of semantic mappings encourages me to grasp more words in a particular domain besides its synonyms and antonyms. I also find that the learning tool *WordNet* is very useful to help me discover these associated words." Then, in the second interview, the students reinforced the preference for the system as a student mentioned, "I enjoy the latest authentic articles indicating target words from popular online newspapers in the task of reading. They look more attractive than those in the conventional textbooks." Two other students followed with excitement, "It is quite convenient to dictate myself just with a mouse click on a button and look up a new word and its family members via electronic monolingual or bilingual dictionaries," and "The computer-mediated task of word test is more favorable than that in the printed material because the feedback with language hints or keys can be offered in real time." By observation, the

electronic notebook provided in the system looked quite favorable to students for their frequent use because they could note down any relevant information about target words immediately, whenever they scanned the material. Additionally, the tasks of asking teachers or peers for new word knowledge and using new words in authentic interactions at the electronic forum could effectively elicit students' word discovery and production along with less anxiety.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of the Two Groups' Satisfaction Levels with the Effects of the Designated Materials on Overall Strategy Use

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Computer-based	31	5.20	0.65
Paper-based	30	4.87	0.63

Performance Comparison. The results of the comparison of the gain scores from the pre-test to the post-test between the two groups are displayed in Table 4. The mean score (84.71) for the group using the system was larger than that (79.57) for the group taking the printed material immediately after the treatment. However, the Independent samples t-test value for the difference between the two groups was non-significant, t (59) =2.000, p = .050. It reveals that no detectable difference could be found between the gain scores in the two groups immediately after the treatment.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of the Two Groups' Gain Scores from the Pre-test to the Post-test

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Computer-based	31	84.71	10.00
Paper-based	30	79.57	10.08

According to the results of the comparison of the students' gain scores from the pre-test to the delayed test between the two groups in Table 5, the mean score (77.32) for the group utilizing the system was larger than that (70.97) for the group adopting the printed material two and a half months after the treatment. Then, these group means were tested using an Independent samples t-test, and the difference was found to be significant, t (59) = 2.480, $p < .05$. Therefore, it could be said that despite the insignificance shown immediately after the treatment, there was a detectable difference between the gain scores in the two groups two and a half months after the treatment. We could state that the system was significantly more effective in helping students to maintain long-term retention of target word knowledge than the printed material. The result further implies that the effect of computer technology as the only difference between the two materials was enlarged two and a half months later.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics of the Two Groups' Gain Scores from the Pre-test to the Delayed Test

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Computer-based	31	77.32	10.02
Paper-based	30	70.97	10.00

As mentioned in the literature review, vocabulary learning is usually regarded as a sub-component of a CALL program, and most research studies only investigate the effect of CALL on one particular aspect of vocabulary learning. Thus, few studies make an overall application of computer technology to vocabulary learning. In this study, a system was developed to apply CALL to self-directed vocabulary learning from a comprehensive perspective, and the effect of CALL revealed in the empirical study above ultimately turned out to be significant. As a result, the satisfactory outcomes not only conform to those from the individual applications of computer with

its different roles (i.e. tutor, tool and medium) in vocabulary learning, but also show the full potential of CALL on self-directed vocabulary learning.

Limitations

Despite the satisfactory outcomes of computer-assisted self-directed vocabulary learning in this study, some further research needs to be conducted in the future in order to explore more significant achievements in this area. First, a longitudinal study with a longer treatment period could be undertaken if the research conditions allow. This could lead to more interactions with the computer-mediated learning tasks, which may further contribute to their self-directed learning of target words. Moreover, a larger number of target words and more participants involved in the longitudinal study could enable researchers to collect a broader range of data to probe more into details of computer-assisted self-directed vocabulary learning, such as how many word exposures are sufficient for long-term retention of a new word and which aspect of word knowledge, form, meaning or usage, is most improved in such an environment. In addition, it is expected in future research that more advanced computer technologies can be incorporated into the development of the system. Thus, the tasks with a more attractive interface can be designed for strategies such as semantic mappings and word scales, and more interactive tasks can be provided for the strategies like flash cards and the loci method. More importantly, the adaptive nature of CALL may help achieve the individualized learning for students, allowing them to control their learning environment and select the strategies best suited for their learning styles.

Conclusion

Nowadays, most college students in China lack learner autonomy and usually learn words by rote memorization and mechanical practice, which is most likely to result in inefficient self-directed vocabulary learning. With its rapid development and wide applications in language teaching and learning, computer technology is expected to improve self-directed vocabulary learning so that students could acquire words

more successfully. Therefore, in the present research, a self-directed vocabulary learning system called *Learning Vocabulary In Domain* was developed. In this system, computer technology facilitates the composition of various learning tasks that activate different vocabulary learning strategies.

In the empirical study, it was discovered that the system was superior to the printed material delivering almost the same tasks in helping students enhance their strategy use according to the questionnaire survey. In addition, although there was no detectable difference between the gain scores immediately after the treatment, students using the system retained significantly more knowledge of the target words two and a half months later based on the performance comparison with those studying the printed material. In other words, the application of computer technology as the only difference between the two materials helped students enhance their strategy use, and more importantly, retain the knowledge of the target words for a longer time. Therefore, the efficacy of the developed self-directed vocabulary learning system was justified through the validation of the effectiveness of computer applications.

On the whole, in terms of all the aspects above, this study has surely illuminated the direction of future research on both vocabulary learning and FL learning, and future research is expected to make more breakthroughs in the area.

Notes on the contributor

Jing Wu is an associate professor in the College of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Fudan University in China. Her research interests include computer-assisted language learning (CALL), EFL learning and teaching, vocabulary acquisition and self-directed learning.

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Appendix

Questionnaire Survey on Self-directed English Vocabulary Learning

I. Personal information
* Sex: ☐ Male ☐ Female
* Department: _____
* English score in College Entrance Examination: _____
* Have you ever used any electronic tools (including electronic dictionaries and
  software) to learn vocabulary?
  ☐ Yes (please specify) _____   ☐ No

II. Effect of the current self-directed vocabulary learning material
Question 1: In the current self-directed vocabulary learning, do you use the following
vocabulary learning strategies?
   ☐ a. No (No need to answer the second question)   ☐ b. Yes (Please go ahead)
Question 2: Does the current self-directed vocabulary learning material help you
utilize the following strategies effectively?
Not effective at all ←☐1—☐2—☐3—☐4—☐5—☐6—☐7→ extremely effective

1. Recall words that belong to the same domain as a new word before learning it.
2. Learn pronunciation of a new word.
3. Learn word formation and etymology of a new word.
4. Group words that sound alike or that are formed in similar ways to a new word.
5. Read as much as possible.
6. Dictation.
7. Learn part of speech of a new word.
8. Look up dictionaries to find out meanings and family members of a new word.
9. Learn word chunks of a new word, including collocational patterns and idioms.
10. Make up grammatical sentences by using a new word.
11. Make flash cards.
12. Guess meaning of a new word from textual contexts.
13. Imagine pictures or even watch videos related to a new word.
14. Use semantic mappings to associate a new word with its related words, such as
synonyms, antonyms and hyponyms.
15. Make use of the loci method.
16. Use semantic grids to guess meaning of a new word.
17. Ask teachers or peers for new word knowledge such as L1 translation, paraphrase,
synonyms or sentences the word occurs in.
18. Make use of the keyword method.
19. Make use of word scales.
20. Guess meaning of a new word from prolific contexts.
21. Connect a new word with personal experiences.

22. Use word test.
23. Discover meaning of a new word through group activities.
24. Use a new word in speech or writing.
25. Take notes about a new word.

Language Learning Spaces: Self-Access in Action: Part 1: Introduction

Sharing Stories of Practice in Self-Access Facility Design and Management

Katherine Thornton, Otemon Gakuin University, Osaka, Japan

Welcome to the new column in SiSAL Journal. So far, this regular column has followed two different institutions as they reconceptualised aspects of their self-access services, in the case of Kanda University of International Studies (Japan), the self-directed learning modules offered through their SALC, and, in the case of the University of Bradford (UK), the reinvention of the self-access facilities as a social learning space.

The upcoming column is a much bigger project. It will run for seven volumes of SiSAL Journal. Each issue will address a different aspect of self-access management, through reflective case studies from professionals who work in language learning spaces.

Part 1: Creating a Learning Space

This first instalment examines the process of creating and setting up a language learning space, and gives three different perspectives on this process.

Firstly, Marina Chavez and Adelia Peña from the National Autonomous University of Mexico reflect on the process of establishing the mediateca, the name by which self-access centres are known in Mexico, at the Foreign Language Teaching Center there, in 1996, and the ways it has changed and adapted to its students and institution in the last 20 years. Their account emphasises learner autonomy as the primary theoretical concept which has driven the decision process in both the original set up and consequent evolution of the mediateca.

Secondly, Kate Allert from the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts gives a personal account of setting up the Language Learning Center (LLC) there in 2012. Working in Hong Kong, Kate had the opportunity to visit many of the centres already well-established there, and talk to many experienced SALL-practitioners. While this perspective has been invaluable, Kate also emphasises the primary

importance of local and institutional context in the process of establishing the LLC. While this may seem obvious, less experienced teachers, advisors and administrators, when faced with the daunting task of starting a new language learning space, may feel overwhelmed and be tempted to draw too much on the experiences of others working in essentially different contexts.

In the third and final piece, Luke Carson, from Hiroshima City University, drawing on his experiences from being involved in three different SACs, reflects on the importance of employing full-time staff in language learning spaces that should be more than just resource centres. While acknowledging the good work done by peer mentors, student staff and part-time teachers, Luke argues that only professionally trained teachers, advisors and administrators who are given the time to devote to working directly with students and keep up-to-date with the field of SALL and SAC management can truly maximise learning opportunities for students. In closing, he offers some practical suggestions for those wanting to convince their institution's management that it is worth the investment.

I hope that the experiences and reflections detailed in these three articles will offer valuable insights into the process of establishing a language learning space, and the varied contexts in which these spaces are established. For future themes in this collection, please refer to the table below.

Katherine Thornton

Editor

Language Learning Spaces: Self-Access in Action

Publication date	Focus
June 2015 (Volume 6, issue 2)	Creating a Learning Space
September 2015 (Volume 6, issue 3)	Promoting Learner Involvement through Peer-Learning Initiatives
December 2015 (Volume 6, issue 4)	Facilitating Learner Involvement through Student Staff Training Programmes
March 2016 (Volume 7, issue 1)	Developing SAC-based Programmes to Support the Development of Learner Autonomy

June 2016 (Volume 7, issue 2):	Developing Autonomy through Integrating SAC Learning with Curriculum
September 2016 (Volume 7, issue 3):	Attracting Users
December 2016 (Volume 7, issue 4):	Evaluating Self-Access

June 2016
(Volume 7,issue 2):

The Development of CELE-UNAM Mediateca (1996-2015)

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Abstract

This paper describes the creation and evolution of the self-access centre (mediateca) at the Foreign Language Teaching Center at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, since its establishment in 1996, and its present profile as a learning space in the context of the university language center. It addresses the organization of the self-access system and describes the services it provides to foster learner autonomy, as well as the problems encountered in the process. It mentions some future directions.

Keywords: self-access center, autonomy, advisor training, learner training

Background to Self-Access Centers in Mexico

During the 1990s self-access centers for language learning were established in public state universities and in the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) with the intention of providing a learning modality that would help students take responsibility for their language learning (Holec, 1979) and self-direct their learning (Dickinson, 1992). The setting up of these centres was performed in two ways.

On the one hand, the Board of Education (SEP), the public state universities and the British Council, as a consultant, developed a national program, and after an intense process of establishment, which lasted a decade, the self-access model was incorporated as part of the provision of language education (Contijoch Escontria, 1998) across the country. Currently, there are over 250 SAC's with this origin. On the other hand, in the same period but independent of the SEP-British Council program, the Foreign Language Teaching Center (CELE-UNAM) developed its own center and called it mediateca.

The Origin of the Mediateca at CELE-UNAM

The mediateca at CELE-UNAM was the result of a research process conducted in 1995 by professors in the Applied Linguistics Department, who studied the theoretical

principles and practical aspects of self-directed learning (Holec, 1979). They held seminars and gathered expert advice, in addition to attending academic events (Groult, 2006). The group wrote a project proposal including what was needed to set up the center: learning materials, equipment, furniture, signage, layout, language advisors and technical staff; as well as the general guidelines for the introduction to the system and basic usage policies.

Immediately after the mediateca was set up, a two-month-pilot was conducted with 180 volunteer participants from language courses. The main purpose was to introduce the self-access system and topics related to learner training and self-direction. The instruction was organized in ten-hour-workshops and the students were expected to learn about cognitive and metacognitive strategies and to have a general idea of how to plan their study. The feedback from the students suggested that the workshops were useful and in 1996 the academic group decided to open the mediateca to the entire university community for learning English and French (Cámara et al., 2006).

Marina Chávez first joined the project in 1996 as a material developer. Then she was the academic coordinator of the mediateca from 1998 to 2012, and at present is a language advisor. Adelia Peña also joined the mediateca as a material developer and has been a language advisor since 1996.

Physical Establishment

In order to build the mediateca physical adjustments were made to an already existing site. The aim was to set up an inviting space where people would want to spend time, and the arrangement of the areas – study, audio, video, multimedia, language advising, the front desk and the coordination office – would reflect openness and flexibility. Soft colors and their combinations in walls, signage and furniture were used.

Good quality furniture for heavy use and with modular features to facilitate the redesign of the areas when needed was purchased. After two decades, these decisions have proved to be adequate because replacements have been minimal. The original dimensions of the space remain the same, but changes in the physical layout have been necessary to fulfill new needs related to the inclusion of other languages and the increased flow of users. Over the years, the equipment has been replaced to suit new digital formats.

Operational Design

During the first decade, an academic group made up of four advisers, two technicians, and the academic coordinator defined how to operate the self-access system. The process was complex because it had to take into account many necessary aspects of building a new conceptual structure: the institutional context, the beliefs of CELE's community and their attitudes towards a new space; the profile and knowledge of those involved in the project; the students' motivations and needs and the availability of instructional materials, among others.

The mediateca was conceived as an integral system of academic and operating elements (Rowland, 1999) which, when combined, provides an environment that facilitates autonomous learning. Three lines of action were defined:

a. The academic or conceptual base, integrating all the services and resources as a unit, for advising, learner training, and for providing learning materials.

b. The operating base, which organizes the resources and services, and defines the policies and procedures to run the center.

c. The infrastructure base, including the physical and human resources.

A systemic process of planning and development allowed the academic base, fostering learner autonomy, to become the principle that guided most decisions about the other bases (Aragón, Chávez, & San Juan, 2001), since the services and resources coexist and are combined into a space by means of physical resources. The following three elements were designed:

Pedagogical structures, like learning to learn workshops, the language advising methodology, the adaptation of a course text for each language, and the design of various types of worksheets (language, learning to learn, descriptions of materials); the criteria for materials selection, adaptation and design.

Patterns of activities, like the guided tour of the mediateca, introduction talks, organization of the language advisory timetable, and group activities (conversation circles and tandem sessions); material classifying and cataloging systems, and technical processing. Materials borrowing was not considered because they were available for the autonomous learner to use within the system as described.

Physical objects, like materials catalogs, equipment user guides, database information architecture, the arrangement of chairs, tables, shelving and signage, among others.

We also designed parameters for internal and external communication in order to maintain a stable profile – for example, the idea of the mediateca as an autonomous learning center – which helped it to adapt to changes, keeping its identity without preventing its constant evolution. Eventually, this prevented the mediateca from being confused with a library or a simple resource center.

To put this operational design into action, the whole academic group always presented, analyzed and discussed all work proposals. After changes and improvements were made, the proposals were piloted and revised until we had the best versions of resources, materials, worksheets, etc. Although agreement was not always easy to reach, we kept in mind the definitions made for the self-access system we were offering. On many occasions, we had the direct participation of learners who provided feedback on the decisions made and evaluated the efficiency and effectiveness of the center. Initially, they used an automated activity log and later a suggestion box, but we also carried out surveys.

Over the years, most of the conceptual structures, patterns of activities and physical objects were consolidated and became part of the model we reproduced when establishing new centers at UNAM.

The Mediateca at CELE-UNAM

The mediateca offers support for German, French, English, Chinese, Italian, Japanese and Portuguese language learners. Users are 18 to 26-year-old-students, who study in various undergraduate programs. They spend at least seven hours in their disciplinary studies and 1-2 hours learning a foreign language at the mediateca every day. Previous research has revealed that they choose self-access for any of the following reasons: lack of time and conditions to enroll in a course; they need extra help with a language course; preparation of language certification for graduation or for scholarship eligibility; and interest in learning autonomously (Bufi & Chávez, 1999). The annual population ranges between 800-1000 active learners. Registration is open throughout the year and is renewed every six months for a fee of four dollars.

Since its establishment the mediateca has offered a flexible system that incorporates an academic support structure (Gremmo, 1998) consisting of personalized language advising, learner training and a variety of materials and learning resources, as well as physical resources in order to support university students who, according to their interests, needs, purposes and personal possibilities, undertake a self-directed language learning process at their own pace. Therefore, attendance has always been voluntary and there is free access to all the services and resources. There is room for 65 students at a time in the 180 m^2 space. In accordance with the principle of complete independence, there is no explicit link between the mediateca and CELE's language courses, but we agree with Gardner & Miller (1999) that both modalities can be complementary. The mediateca is an alternative learning space[1] to language courses.

Human resources

The language advisors are full and part-time language teachers, with special training. They give advice, select, adapt and develop materials, and provide learner training[2]. The technicians are graduates in related areas: literature, language teaching, communication, computing, and education, who support the work of the advisors, help users, and take care of the proper functioning of resources and services. The coordinator is a language professor trained as an advisor, who directs the work of the group and trains the technicians. This training consists of informing them about self-directed learning, as well as the self-access system.

Pedagogical practices

The aim of learner training is for learners take responsibility for their own learning and develop a level of autonomy (Nunan, 1997; Dickinson, 1987), so that they can learn a foreign language efficiently and effectively. It is integrated in workshops and worksheets, as well as in the advising sessions.

Advising offers the three types of support proposed by Gremmo (1998), psychological, conceptual and methodological. During the interview in Spanish the learner

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[1] The mediateca is open Monday to Friday from 8:30 am to 7:30 pm.
[2] It has been found that is appropriate for each advisor to collaborate at least 10 hours per week so that he or she shows involvement in the project.

and the advisor hold, as much as possible, an equitable dialog to exchange ideas towards the establishment of a work plan to tackle the learner's needs, interests, and goals. Tracking progress and self-assessment are also addressed during the sessions[3].

The instructional materials are selected taking into account the learners' needs, viability for self-access, design and potential to foster autonomy, and content. Although collections are constantly updated, in recent years they have not been able to grow due to new university policies for the acquisition and protection of library collections. In addition, changing from analog to digital formats is slow.

Advisor training

We believe the conceptual and practical training of language advisors is very important. Therefore, the project that has been a cornerstone of the evolution of the mediateca is advisor training, which we have provided through courses in different universities and through an online diploma course that was first issued in 2004[4]. This project has involved continuous updating of the academic team and the revision of the mediateca experience.

Challenges

During the early years, the project was challenged by a number of parties. For example, the university authorities questioned the cost-benefit relationship of the mediateca: how many students, in what time frame, learned a foreign language, or achieved a certification. Furthermore, the students believed that the mediateca was an advanced technology center; they often expected the advisors to give them private lessons. Most CELE teachers possibly felt the threat of being displaced by this type of space that offered technology, a variety of learning materials and a pedagogical approach that they did not fully understand.

In response to questioning, we made strong efforts to convey the idea that the mediateca was a space that supported the language learning process, not an evaluation nor a

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[3] A learner file is kept for further reference.
[4] http://cad.cele.unam.mx/formasesores. This ten-month diploma course is entirely online. It offers six modules; three are theoretical and three practical. Until 2015, 464 teachers from 52 higher education institutions have enrolled and 283 of them have received a diploma.

certification department, and we emphasized that it could complement classroom learning rather than threaten it. We stressed that it was a modality suitable for language learners who possessed or were willing to develop the characteristics of an ideal language learner (Cotterall, 1999; Rubin, 1975), with the intention to invite students to try out the system. We continually communicated this through brochures and posters distributed on campus and visited classrooms to invite students and teachers to use the mediateca, and to raise awareness of the benefits that this space could deliver to language learning.

It took approximately eight years to build the appropriate image of the mediateca. We believe that at present, although there are still teachers and students who do not believe in self-direction, the mediateca has a clear presence within the institutional context of CELE. We have found out from learners' comments that now some classroom teachers encourage them to use the center to do remedial work, or to get extra practice, but also, that many students decide to use it because it suits their expectations and serves to achieve their language learning goals.

Final Reflections and Future Directions

The mediateca project has always been important to CELE because from the beginning it represented an innovation in language learning. This alternative modality became an institutional model that has been fully or partially reproduced at UNAM and in fifty seven other schools and universities in Mexico.

The academic group has continuously kept a proactive attitude towards our own development as advisors and professionals. Since advisor training became a stepping-stone in the consolidation of the academic structure in the mediateca, all the advisors gained comparable instruction and background knowledge about learner autonomy and self-directed learning. In this way, it was possible to reach agreement on what kind of autonomy we wanted to foster. At the same time, we have explored related areas like educational technology and online education, which has led to the development of several projects that have enriched our practice (See the Appendix).

In operating the mediateca it was useful to define clearly the profiles and the roles of each of the members (advisors, technicians and coordinator) in order to avoid confusion,

especially to the users. Apart from that, involving all the members of the project was important in the decision making.

Although our practice has been fruitful, it is necessary to keep finding ways to improve. For instance, we believe that the systematization of a learner training methodology is perhaps the best contribution made in almost twenty years of operation because it is the result of a permanent assessment of activities and materials implemented. However, at present this methodology requires further updating in order to meet the demands of young students who hold a greater mastery of a foreign language and are more aware of their ways of learning, in addition to using technology for learning.

We have worked hard to consolidate the correct functioning of all the elements of the self-access system and have made a permanent effort to communicate its existence and its benefits, but we feel we should now find more creative ways to link the mediateca practice to the classroom in order to attain a better understanding of the modality.

In terms of space design, when the mediateca was built we did not consider the need for an area to hold group activities, and that has been a permanent lack that causes inconvenience. Eventually, a new design might be needed as more languages are incorporated into the center causing an increase in the number of users.

During the first decade of the present century, when the Internet started to take a significant presence in the education field, we lacked vision and did not take into account a strong incorporation of virtual learning environments and resources. We feel that now we have to double efforts in order to maximize the mediateca project.

To conclude, in the setting up and development of a center we believe the following advice will be helpful. First, the involvement of all the members in the decision-making process and extensive communication to the rest of the community. Second, a proactive attitude towards the project, encouraging the academic growth of all members. Third, the design of a model where the academic principles permeate the rest of the organization. Finally, in the current digital era, the focus should be on how we are going to foster learner autonomy considering the new forms of communication and new ways of learning that are taking place.

Notes on the contributors

Marina Chávez Sánchez was the chief editor of *LEAA Lenguas en Aprendizaje Autodirigido*, an electronic journal. She led the establishment of 14 mediatecas in UNAM high schools in 2010. She received an MA in Educational Technology through the Latin American Educational Communication Institute (ILCE) and an MA in Virtual Learning Environments through Virtual Educa and the University of Panama. Her research interests are self-access, ICT, and language learner advising.

María de la Paz Adelia Peña Clavel is responsible for an Advisor Training Online Diploma Course at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. She is in charge of a Teletandem (etandem) project at the mediateca. She received her MA in Educational Technology through the Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education (ITESM) in México. Her research interests are Teletandem, language learning strategies and autonomy.

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Appendix

Related Projects Developed by the Mediateca

Period	Name
1997-1999	Colección Aprendizaje autodirigido Vol. 1 and Vol. 2 [Self-directed works collection. Vol. 1 and Vol. 2] [Collected works on self-directed learning]
1998-2000	Directorio descriptivo de los CAA en México. [Self-access centers in México descriptive directory]
1998-2004	Diplomado Formación de Asesores de CAA [Online Diploma Course for SAC language advisors] http://cad.cele.unam.mx/formasesores
2001-2002	Establecimiento del Centro de Apoyo a la Docencia, CAD. http://ditel.cele.unam.mx/ [Establishment of the Language Teacher Support Center]
2003-2006	Sitio web de apoyo para los aprendientes Consultamediateca [Consultamediateca. Mediateca Web-site] http://cad.cele.unam.mx/consultamediateca.
2003-2006	LEAA Lenguas en Aprendizaje Autodirigido. Revista electrónica de la mediateca del CELE-UNAM [LEAA Self-directed language learning. CELE-UNAM Mediateca electronic journal] http://cad.cele.unam.mx/leaa
2008-2010	Establecimiento de 14 mediatecas del bachillerato de la UNAM [Establishment of 14 mediatecas in UNAM high schools] http://cadtest.cele.unam.mx:8081/medi/
2008	Proyecto de Teletandem [Teletandem Project] http://cad.cele.unam.mx/leaa/cnt/ano04/num01/0401a03.pdf

2011	Proyecto Rutas de aprendizaje.
	[Pathways Project]
	Pathwayshttp://cad.cele.unam.mx/leaa/cnt/ano04/num01/0401a04.pdf
2011	Proyecto Facebook
	[Facebook Project]
	http://cad.cele.unam.mx/leaa/cnt/ano05/num01/0501a06.pdf
2010-2012	Proyecto Aprendizaje autónomo de lenguas: italiano, inglés y español con el Centro Lingüístico de la Universidad de Padua, Italia
	[Autonomous Language Learning Project: Italian, English and Spanish in collaboration with the Linguistics Center at Padova University, Italy]

Considering Context: The Importance of Specific Institutional and Learner Contexts When Researching the Set Up of a Self-Access Centre

Kate Allert, The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, Hong Kong

Abstract

This article describes how a language learning centre was researched and set up at a performing arts academy in Hong Kong. The Language Learning Centre (LLC) at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts opened in December 2012, after five months of research and planning. During the research phase, specific aspects of the institutional culture and of the learners themselves were identified and compared with examples found in relevant literature and with other self-access centres in the region.

During the planning phase, much was unknown about the purposes that the LLC would serve, since new programmes were being introduced throughout the Academy and the incoming cohort was the product of a new secondary school syllabus. While necessary decisions were made at the outset to establish the space, others, particularly those relating to pedagogy and the provision of advising and learner training, were taken in stages, as information became available.

Keywords: language learning centre, Hong Kong, performing arts academy

The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts (APA) is a unique institution in many ways. It offers the world's only bachelor degree in Chinese Opera, as well as diplomas, bachelor's and master's degrees in Dance (ballet, contemporary and Chinese folk), Music (Western and Chinese), Drama, Film & Television and Technical & Entertainment Arts (sound, lighting, set & costume design and construction, and stage & events management). With fewer than a thousand students, mostly local but with significant numbers of mainland Chinese and some from other South-East Asian countries, the Academy receives funding from a different branch of government to other tertiary institutions in the region and has a separate governing council.

These differences in structure, funding and disciplines are reflected in the nature of APA students who, while varying widely in terms of academic sophistication and ability, must demonstrate high levels of competence and experience in their chosen discipline to be admitted. This expertise, and the

confidence it imparts, impacts student-teacher relationships; the most respected and effective teachers at the Academy being those who manifestly respect their students and position themselves as learning facilitators, rather than authority figures.

Context

The Language Learning Centre (LLC) at the APA opened in December 2012, two years after it was proposed to the governing council by the Head of the Department of Languages. His vision was for a self-access centre that would support and extend the department's work, offering students virtual and physical self-study resources, together with advisors to help develop and oversee study plans and train independent learning skills, while working with individuals and small groups towards specific learning outcomes. The role of an academy encompasses both academic and vocational training so preparing learners for their industry after graduation is as important as supporting their studies.

My role as LLC Coordinator commenced at the beginning of July 2012, prior to which I had been a part-time teacher at the Academy for several years. I was familiar with APA students; how they work, what kind of teaching approach they respond to and what they often need. This knowledge was invaluable when it came to the design of the learning space and the structuring of the services the centre would provide. However the start of the academic year in September would bring significant changes, as we welcomed the first graduates of the new Secondary Syllabus (NSS), with only six, rather than the previous seven, years of high school education. Consequently, along with the other Hong Kong tertiary institutions, the Academy was rolling out a new four-year degree and revised diploma programmes. The entirety of services required by the LLC could not be predicted while the centre was being established, although a key motivator was to provide language learning opportunities to motivated students who were to study only half the mandatory language courses of their old-system counterparts.

The Academy has three official languages for learning and teaching: Cantonese, English and Mandarin. Students could require LLC support for writing and presenting in Chinese or English and for listening and reading in English, depending on major-study requirements. Additionally, the Department offers popular courses in other languages: Korean, Japanese, Italian, German, Spanish and French.

The LLC would offer support in all nine languages to learners from all the Academy's schools.

Researching the Learning Space

When I took up the role, the location of the LLC hadn't been decided and most stakeholders were away for the summer, including the Head of Languages. There were no known deadlines to work towards and many practical decisions had to be delayed. This allowed for a valuable period of research, during which I read about independent language learning, advising and self-access centres and discovered the *Studies in Self-Access Journal* to be a terrific resource. Key texts that I found useful included those of Gardner and Miller (1999; 2010). Mynard (2011) and Mozzon-McPherson (2011), among others.

I also visited a number of self-access centres in other tertiary institutions and talked with centre managers and administrative staff. I am lucky to be based in Hong Kong, which can, according to Little in his endorsement for Gardner and Miller's recent book about managing self access "fairly claim to be the SALL capital of the world" (2014, p. i). There were many centres to visit, although I was dismayed to be told that some institutions had downsized or closed the physical SAC and that others had reduced or stopped advising services for reasons of cost reduction and competing demands for space. I developed a questionnaire, based on both my reading and my knowledge of the Hong Kong context (See Appendix A), to cover the key points I wanted to find out from the SAC Coordinators at these centres.

Applying what was learned from research

The overriding message to come out of the reading and site visits was that, in terms of setting up a new self-access centre, context is king. Institutions larger than ours rely on fresh graduates from overseas, on scholarships or short contracts, to undertake most advising work and to entice learners with the prospect of working with young foreigners. SACs in institutions with student accommodation, far from the city centre, have busy social and cultural programmes, while those closer to town do not. Every institution I visited incorporates self-access study into credit-bearing courses. I discovered that, where students dislike mandatory language courses, that prejudice extends to non-mandatory SAC activities. Where there are language or language teaching majors, much higher visitor numbers can be anticipated.

The Learning Space in Action

At the end of the summer 2012, it was decided that the LLC would be located, for several years at least, off-campus in an office building ten minutes' walk away, across three main roads. The space allocated was 25% smaller than expected, at 75m2. I was, unsurprisingly, disappointed by these decisions. However, with what was already known about APA learner needs, together with what had been learned through site visits, my colleagues in the Estates Department and I made best possible use of the space. With a concrete floor and only vinyl and leather furniture, the LLC is food- and drink-friendly, which partially offsets the disadvantages of location and packed student timetables.

From a design point of view, I had seen from the visits how successful it was to use different types of furniture, flooring and lighting to create separate areas for different activities. We now have several distinctive areas in a fairly small space. First of all, the sense of spaciousness is maximised by the treatment of floor and ceiling. There is no false ceiling but exposed pipes and rough, painted concrete, while the floor is polished concrete throughout, which wears extremely well and still looks fresh, three years on. Three round student worktables, an L-shaped bench along two walls for five student computers and a large set of enclosed bookshelves for physical resources inhabit around half the area. In the space in front of a large window are beanbags, a leather sofa and matching armchair and magazine racks. Along the back wall is an advisors' workstation, together with long, open shelves for teacher resources and LLC files. In front of those are the Coordinator and Administrative Assistant's desks, facing into the main space. See the included floor plan (Appendix B) for the exact design of the centre. The lighting is in three sections and often switched off in one area to create a more restful working environment. Floor and table lamps been added to further differentiate sections of the centre.

Figure 1. Inside the LLC

Several centre managers had stated that learners prefer advising to take place in the main space, rather than a separate room. They note that seeing advising in action encourages other learners to use the service. It was recommended to have administrative staff, advisors and centre managers in full view of the learners. In larger institutions where managers have separate offices, they spend part of the day in the centre, available to engage with staff and learners alike. My experience indicates that learners can engage in self-study while others work with advisors nearby and that learners and advisors both enjoy being able to interact with centre staff informally. However, I have also found that not having a quiet space to retreat to makes it hard to think and write when the centre is busy.

The APA is too small for the kind of overseas graduate advisor scheme popular in several other Hong Kong institutions; advisors are part-time teachers, together with whom I continue to develop the most effective advising techniques and learner training for APA students. These are teachers who regularly top polls in formal student feedback questionnaires, capable of developing the kind of rapport necessary for effective learner-advisor relationships (Lee, 2015).

Social and cultural events in the LLC were originally planned but student timetables are prohibitively packed for now, especially when production practice,

rehearsals and performances are added in. Regular LLC visitors, when asked if they would support such events, express enthusiasm, but say they have no time.

Range of Activities

Once the academic year began, we had the first of many surprises. A significant proportion of the new intake did not meet admission requirements in either Chinese or English language and this has continued to be the case. The LLC was soon running credit-bearing courses for these Conditional Admission learners, in addition to devising study plans and running exam preparation workshops. This, fortunately, keeps us busy, as the location in combination with student schedules, mean the centre doesn't receive the traffic that was hoped for. In a recent survey, 80% of students who don't currently use the LLC said that they would do so, were the centre to be on campus.

The LLC also works with faculty to identify areas where language support could benefit major studies and provides workshops or short courses to address these needs. The only mandatory visit most learners make to the LLC is during their first semester, when attendance for one lesson is given on the basis of the visit and successful completion of a Treasure Hunt, a thinly disguised introduction to the physical and virtual resources, with some fun activities thrown in. These visits are scheduled over several weeks, to manage numbers.

The LLC also runs credit-bearing Guided Independent Learning (GIL) courses in English and Chinese. Conditional Admission students are currently the main, but not exclusive, participants. Learners, singly or in small groups, meet with advisors for only half the contact hours or less of a regular course and are encouraged to take increasing responsibility for their own learning, to set goals and select suitable resources to achieve them. The scheme is still developing but shows promise according to advisors, who use the attached guidelines (See Appendix C) with learners to monitor progress, as well as give grades, and to learners themselves, who give predominantly positive feedback about progress. Learner training is to become a significant part of the first-year APA curriculum, the need for it having been identified since the introduction of the NSS, and the success of the LLC GILs may result in courses of a similar structure being developed in other subject areas.

Advice and Suggestions

Detailed knowledge of the learning context and specific learner characteristics is essential so that principles governing the centre, its resources and services can be aligned. Adjustments can and should be made once operations have started but it is worth taking the time, if you have it, to get as much as possible right from the outset. This includes considering what kind of physical self-study environment will appeal to your learners.

If you are new to the institution, I recommend spending time with language teachers and talking to major subject teachers too, if these are different. They have a working knowledge of the students that may be more useful for your purposes than senior management's institutional viewpoint. Observing a variety of classes gives a sense of the learners and their preferences. Noting where students currently congregate for self-study and to discuss their studies is helpful too, to give an idea of the physical environments they find conducive to learning. This kind of data gathering will reveal more than student surveys if, as is the case for the APA, the learners have little experience of independent study.

People involved in self-access language learning, be they centre managers, administrators or advisors, are both knowledgeable and passionate about what they do. Talk to as many people as possible, perhaps with a questionnaire as a starting point. If you can't visit in person, ask questions by email, and request a live tour using technology such as FaceTime or an informal recorded version, with a staff member filming the centre, while offering a narration and perhaps interviewing other key personnel. Compare their context with your own and decide which practices and recommendations are indispensible, what you can adapt and what is not helpful.

Despite student and advisor training to foster independent learning, the majority of LLC visitors want to spend as much time as they can with advisors, who don't like refusing them. This tendency amongst learners, possibly Chinese learners specifically, was flagged during my visit to the Hong Kong Institute of Education by SAC manager, Helen Lavender, who expands on the issue in a case study (2014, pp. 143-155), where she talks about the range of learner and advisor attitudes to independent learning that can coexist in one institution and the difficulties inherent in the learner-advisor relationship. Many of our students, who demonstrate independent learning skills in their own field, revert to dependency when it comes to language learning. To address this, advisors have utilised the can-do statements from the

Common European Framework of Reference, together with the University of Helsinki's self-assessment tool, Kaleidoscope (Karlsson & Kjisik, 2007). They report that learners respond well to undertaking projects, similar to those described for young learners by Thomsen (2011), where learners choose their own topic. Major study-related topics are selected, researched, written about and presented, incorporating elements of critical analysis and personal response. Components of both process and product are negotiated between the learner and the advisor, with independent language study positioned as a means to an end, necessary for task fulfilment.

Building mandatory self-study, SAC-based components into credit bearing courses has both advantages and disadvantages. Managers at several of the centres I visited stated that compulsory visits were as much about balancing SAC costs with visitor numbers as promoting independent learning. Some teachers I spoke to who run courses incorporating independent study components were quite dismissive of potential learner benefits. However, it may be possible to be creative and cost-conscious in this area, if your academic board is amenable to arrangements such as the Academy's GILs.

Lastly, I strongly recommend staying open to new opportunities that may integrate the SAC into your learners' lives and to be proactive in seeking ways to support major study or postgraduate plans, both with faculty and the student body. Your centre may, as a result, expand its operations beyond what was originally envisaged, but play a much more vital and integrated role in the institution as a result.

Notes on the contributor

Kate Allert is Coordinator of the Language Learning Centre at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. Prior to taking up the position in 2012, she had been a language instructor and corporate trainer in Hong Kong for fifteen years. Her research interests include learner autonomy and learner-advisor relationships.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Questionnaire for SAC Managers/Coordinators

Questionnaire for Coordinators of other SACs

Administration
1. What is the total number of students in your institution?
2. How many students can study in the centre at one time?
3. How do you track student usage?
4. What are the opening hours of the centre?
5. Are students given an induction to the centre and its resources before they can use it?
6. Is use of your centre sometimes mandatory or always by choice?
7. When was the centre established? Has it undergone expansion or metamorphosis since its inception?
8. Do you ever open or run activities outside of term-time?

Location and physical set up
1. How close is the centre to the different departments and to what extent do you think distance makes a difference to usage?
2. What size is the centre? How many computers does it have? What other hardware does it have?
3. How would you describe the approach that has been taken to creating the environment of the centre?
4. Do you think the environment and ambience is important to the students when they are choosing whether or not to use the centre?

Resources
1. What languages does your centre support?
2. What cataloguing system do you use for your resources?
3. What are the key resources for students to use? Printed materials/CDs & DVDs/software/online materials? Which are most popular?
4. Can students check material out of the centre? If so, for how long?
5. How much of your material is generic and how much generated by your institution?

6. Any specific recommendations for materials or resources that have proved their worth with students?
7. How was your own material generated and over what timeframe?
8. Are there any initiatives you have introduced recently or are planning to that we haven't talked about already?

Staffing
1. What forms of professional development has your full- or part-time staff undertaken?
2. Is there further professional development or training planned for staff in the future?
3. How do you recruit and utilize student helpers?

Students

1. How do you prepare or encourage students to be **independent** learners and users of the Centre?
2. Do you use study guides or learning pathways with them? All users?
3. How do you evaluate progress?
4. What degree of resistance to SALL do you experience from your students and/or teachers? And what measures have you taken to overcome this?
5. What kind of students tend to use the centre most? Major subject? M/F? Year of study?

Study related issues
1. Is any aspect of centre usage credit bearing? How do you determine and track that?
2. What degree of buy-in do you receive from teachers of other major subjects? Do they encourage students to use the centre?
3. If you have users who are not majoring in Language, do they seek advice to support any language course(s) they are taking only, or are there aspects of major subjects that require language support too? For example, a key text that is only available in English.
4. How about preparation for tests such as TOEFL & IELTS? How does the centre support this and how popular is this kind of preparation among students?
5. Do students also prepare for tests in Mandarin and third languages through your centre?

Advising
1. Do you undertake adviser training before your advisers start work at the centre?
2. Is there a particular pedagogy or philosophy you follow in terms of advising?
3. How many advisers do you use? Are any full-time?
4. Are advisers always available on a drop-in basis, or do students have to make an appointment?
5. What do advisers do if they are on duty in the centre but without students to work with?

Events/Activities
1. Are there additional activities you organize?
2. What informal or social activities have you organized and what degree of success did they meet with?
3. Do you run workshops in the centre – and on which subjects?
4. Do you ever organize co-curricular events or workshops for or with other departments?

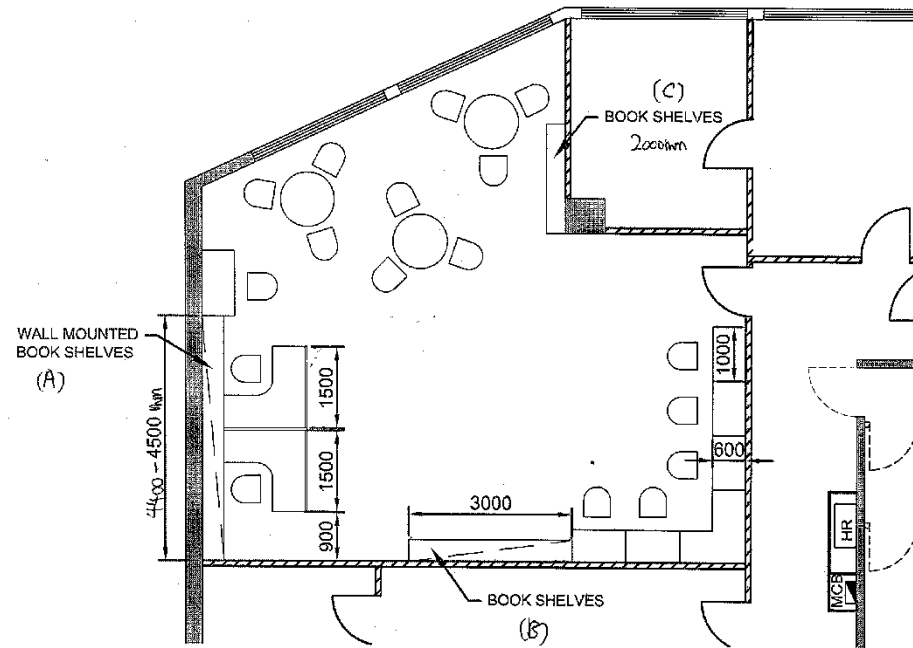**Research**
1. Do you undertake research in the centre?
2. If so, what have been your most significant research findings to date?
3. What are you currently researching?

Is there anything else you think is important that we haven't already covered?

Appendix B

Floorplan of the LLC (showing student tables where sofas and beanbags are now)

Appendix C

Guided Independent Learning Grading Guidelines

GIL DESCRIPTORS

These descriptors are intended to guide teachers towards giving overall holistic grades on the performance of GIL students, and plus or minus refinements of these.

Grade	Descriptors
Straight A student	• Is motivated and a pleasure to work with • Is actively involved in identifying needs and setting learning goals • Is beginning to evaluate what sort of activities work for them personally and make learning suggestions based on this • Makes an attempt to source and try learning material independently • Has a good work ethic and might do more work than is set • Completes work well or if tests are devised performs well on these. • Makes the most of consultation time • Makes notable progress
Straight B student	• Is motivated • Needs teacher guidance with needs and goals • Works positively towards meetings goals • Is engaged during consultation time • Puts the hours in • Is dependent on the teacher for sourcing and setting work • Completes work set to the best of their ability and if tests are devised, takes them seriously and has a good go at them • Makes progress
Straight C student	• Is passive, but not resistant • Needs must be identified for them, goals set and progress monitored closely • Does not source learning material independently • Completes most of the work set, but is not generally hardworking • Is acceptably focused during consultation time. • If tests are set, performs averagely or erratically, but could have done better with greater application. • May find consultations difficult, but is not disengaged. • Makes patchy progress.
Straight D student	• Does just enough to scrape by on attendance and effort • Is hard to teach, generally, because of motivational issues • May have palpable focus and engagement problems during consultations • Does not complete work well or if tests are set performs poorly • Has retention issues or does not make obvious progress • May leave the teacher with the feeling that the course has wasted everybody's time.

Human Resources as a Primary Consideration for Learning Space Creation

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Abstract

This paper discusses language learning space creation within third level institutions in Japan – specifically self-access language centres (SALCs). Human resources are particularly important considering that language learning is, both a difficult task that can be facilitated through expert support, and a necessarily communicative, interactive endeavour.

It suggests that the first issue designers of new learning spaces may wish to consider is educational staffing, and gaining institutional approval for the necessary funding from the outset if possible. As the history of SALCs clearly shows, adequate and appropriate staffing remains key in order for optimal and broad learning gains to occur.

One of the earliest evaluative studies of SALCs was conducted by Gardner and Miller (1997) in Hong Kong. The finding of most salience to this discussion is that "the SAC manager's post should be full-time as should some of the tutor's posts" (Gardner & Miller, 1997, p. 118). As a non-traditional learning environment where student and 'teacher' roles are repositioned, a SALC does not function within the same parameters as, for example, a language classroom. SALCs tend to employ learning advising rather than teaching. "While both the disciplines of advising in language learning and language teaching attempt to improve students' language competence and learning ability, and would generally state both as desired learning outcomes, the weighting given to each goal is different" (Carson, 2012, p. 247). Those involved in setting up and running a SALC need to bear in mind different factors, and have a different knowledge base and skills set. Or, at least, they must have the time to develop this new knowledge and skills set, which can be problematic if this role is merely an addition to a wider job role.

Author background

I have worked in different capacities with seven different SALCs, in Japan and elsewhere. I was a full-time learning advisor for seven years, and a full-time SALC coordinator for five years. I have had coordination responsibilities for SALCs as a small part of wider academic roles, and worked in an external consultancy capacity. I have varied experience of what a SALC can be, and how staffing situations in universities arise and impact the services than can be offered.

Although not exhaustive, and definitely a personal list, reflecting on my working experience, staff working full-time in a SALC (coordinators, learning advisors and administrative staff) can do the following:

1. Become expert language learning advisors
2. Develop positive relationships with a large student population of individual learners and sustain these relationships to allow learning to prosper
3. Through understanding individual preference, bring enjoyment and creativity to learning
4. Create materials and learning pathways specifically for independent learning
5. Create materials and learning opportunities for the myriad of specific language learning related issues students may have
6. Stay current with relevant educational developments
7. Complement wider university teaching and learning endeavours
8. Motivate and assist learners for whom traditional learners pathways are not so effective
9. Infuse learners with an interest in learning and a sense of their own agency
10. Develop the SALC as a hub of internationalisation within the university

While staff attached to SALCs on a part-time basis can indeed do some of the above, they cannot do all.

The Need for Academic Staffing: Case Studies

As the name suggests, students can use SALCs independently. In the case of Japanese university learners coming from directive learning experiences, this requires a new learning schema, and one that necessitates support as they begin to negotiate this beneficial but unfamiliar learning environment. Most students are not yet expert language learners. Technology programmes (e.g. Kidd & von Boehm, 2012), administrative

support and peer systems do help. Yet, in these cases, the technology has to be designed and maintained, and the administrative and peer support staff have to be trained (preferably in an ongoing manner). Most importantly, none of these can provide the individualized expertise that a dedicated learning advisor can.

In order to understand how SALCs can be staffed (or indeed not staffed), three examples are given below of SALCs in Japan with different staffing situations, where I have had different levels of working involvement (the descriptions represent the situations at the time of my involvement and may have since changed).

University 1

Table 1. SALC Situation in University 1

Type of University	Private foreign languages university
Undergraduate Majors	Languages, International Communication
Student Enrollment	Approximately 3500
Learning Centre	Large self-access language learning centre
Centre description	Open plan, various types of learning spaces. High volume of learning materials available for use in the centre, and borrowable.
Full time manager	Yes
Full time academic staff	Yes: 10 learning advisors (plus language lecturers involved part-time in lieu of a teaching reduction)
Full time administrative staff	Yes: 5 (plus part time staff)
Student staff	Yes: approximately 25

Why so well staffed? Although it is problematic to quantify the benefits of self-access learning (Morrison, 2005), and therefore difficult to make a financial case for its provision, this particular university was able to obtain external funding at the outset, as at the time of its inception it was an innovative project. At the same time, although quantifying its role as a revenue driver for the university was not possible, the university was also happy to fund the centre, as it understood it as a 'loss leader' (something that while not directly creating profit, drives wider profit to the provider). The centre became a major part of open campus tours for high school students, improving student enrollment. Being highly staffed, it developed excellent services. The centre became a central, supported and valued element of the university.

I was initially employed here as a full-time learning advisor, and later took on a managerial role. As a result of the large full-time staff, this centre provided a huge range of services – orientations to the SALC for all students in the university, semester-long independent learning modules all students could take with their own personal learning advisor (tailored to their stage of learning development or language need), drop-in advisory services all day, a reservation advising system, events, and a huge range of both purchased and in-house created language learning materials. The full-time staff were able to provide excellent services because the dedicated role allowed them time to do so, and time for ongoing training and development specific to this role.

University 2

Table 2. SALC Situation In University 2

Type of University	Private liberal arts university with dual language programmes (Japanese and English)
Undergraduate majors	Asia Pacific Studies, International Management
Student Enrolment	Approximately 6000
Learning Centre	Medium-sized self-access language learning centre
Centre description	Open plan, some provision of learning materials
Full time manager?	No. A group of people has involvement in the running of the centre – 2 language professors, and 3 members of the universities administration office.
Full time academic staff?	No: one advisor available for learning consultations during limited hours
Full time administrative staff?	No
Student staff?	Yes. Approximately 20 student peer language learning advisors

Why this staffing arrangement? When this SALC was created, the management team did not include any members with specialist knowledge of independent learning or SALC management. The university administration office controlled funding for the SALC, and the employment of full-time staff was not considered. Student staff were employed as this was common across the university (through a teaching assistant system).

My involvement with this centre was short (providing cover for a professor who was on a leave of absence). After gaining consensus from colleagues involved, I attempted to make a case for full-time staff, even for one full-time advisor. I prepared a report outlining the needs of the students in the context, and how these needs are being

effectively addressed in other SALCs that have full-time employees. This report was then sent to the main financial decision-maker, but unfortunately, the request was not approved. In fact, no reply was received.

Reflecting on this, my approach was somewhat naïve and shortsighted in its orientation. In this instance I did not have the social capital necessary to effect such a change, nor enough knowledge of the wider planning and activities of the university. At the time, the university was developing other aspects to promote active learning and the development of 'global human resources' (MEXT, 2012). Taking a longer, more contextually situated view – placing the SALC within these activities – may have proven successful.

University 3

Table 3. SALC Situation In University 3

Type of University	Public liberal arts university
Undergraduate Majors	International Studies, Information Sciences, Art
Student Enrolment	Approximately 2000
Learning Centre	Small self-access language learning centre
Centre description	Private computer booths (the university delivered much of its language education through a CALL programme). Some other language materials available for use in the centre when requested.
Full time manager	No. A professor from the linguistics and communication section of the university becomes the centre director on a rotating basis.
Full time academic staff	No
Full time administrative staff	Yes (though their roles include other obligations)
Student staff?	No

Why no educational staff? In this university, the centre functioned with only an administrative staff member whose role was limited to lending materials for use in the centre, and managing the computing facilities. There had been no discussion of staffing the centre with learning advisors. The centre was created to provide a space for students to work on required language practice delivered through a CALL programme, and the chance to use extra language learning materials. As such, at the time of its creation, wider learning goals may not have been considered. With frequent changes of directorship, a clear plan did not develop.

Having a distant working association with this centre, when asked for some input – for example, suggestions for language materials to purchase – I found it difficult to answer with confidence. My main priorities were elsewhere and my knowledge of how students were using the centre was minimal. This made suggesting materials most appropriate to the specific context problematic – what language difficulties were these students having, what materials were they interested in using, what materials might encourage other students to use the centre? When I asked these questions, the information was not available. While I could use my past experience to inform my suggestions, doing so without context-specific knowledge or adequate time devoted to the process was not ideal.

Three different staffing arrangements are described above. Each centre provides valuable services to students, but the depth and breadth of services offered differ greatly – a direct result of the number of educational staff available, their understanding of self-access language learning, and whether or not this role is their main priority.

The Japanese university context: Academic Roles and Finance

Although it is globally common for faculty to be involved in various university activities, the degree and importance of this in the Japanese context is important to clarify. Tenured faculty members are expected to be teachers, researchers and 'administrators', unlike in many other international situations, where academics tend to move into one of these directions more singularly.

In his ethnography of a Japanese university faculty, Poole (2010) shows the perception of 'good professor' to be based on devotion to the place of work, exhibited through engagement in activities that have high 'visibility', such as university committee and 'extra duty' work. This creates a situation where faculty members expect and are expected to take on 'extra duties'. Therefore, were a faculty member to suggest creating a new learning space, one could reasonably expect that the direction of this new space would fall under their remit, on top of their existing duties.

Faculty who become involved in SALCs on top of their base duties (or on a part-time basis with a reduction of other duties), can and do create excellent learning programmes and systems. Many universities have vibrant conversation lounges and student driven initiatives. Many organize peer-to-peer learning and peer tutoring programmes (as in the case of University 2) that have many benefits for students, though come with limitations (Boud, Cohen, & Sampson, 2014), and require coordination. If a centre is deemed 'functioning' under such a framework (as in the example of University 2 above), making the case for full-time staff is more complex. Making a strong case for this staffing at the outset, as part of a 'SALC package', may prove easier than asking for it later, when a SALC is already up and running under the 'extra duty' system.

Alongside the roles of academics, it is of value to know the financial workings of an institution. As learning centre creation requires funding, it is important to understand

- Budget categories (human resources, technology) and timeframes (e.g. an institution may function on a 6 year budget cycle)
- who the decision-makers are
- what the priorities of the decision-makers are

Take the case of University 3 given above. In this university, the number of faculty was being reduced. If my goal was to staff the centre with learning support, I would need to take a longer view – using the timeframe of the current budget cycle to garner university support, gain access to the most relevant decision-makers, and consider other options (i.e. if new tenured faculty appointments for the centre will not become possible, what about full-time term limited appointments?).

Conclusion

Although this paper makes the case for the full-time academic staffing of SALCs, that does not mean that such a space cannot be created without it. There are learning spaces developed and managed by very dedicated teachers with pre-existing full workloads that afford some excellent learning opportunities for students that would be unavailable otherwise. It is of course also possible (though perhaps more difficult, as the

case of University 2 above shows) to begin such a centre without full-time staffing and seek the staffing at a later stage.

As exemplified in this paper, SALCs without full-time staffing arrangements provide fewer learning opportunities. This can leave the dedicated 'part-timers' facing an uphill battle in terms of their own learning curves, other work demands, and attempts to increase the staffing complement after a centre is up and running.

Following the four steps below from the outset may increase the likelihood of support for full time academic staff in a SALC:

1. Clarify what services a fully staffed centre could provide, and why these roles are necessary (perhaps through a comparison of a well-staffed centre and a non-staffed centre)

2. Find out who the academic members involved in the financial decision-making and educational planning of your university are, and which of these members are most likely to support your plan. Convince them of point one!

3. Understand the budget cycles and limitations of your institution, and find out about university wide initiatives.

4. Consider all the benefits a SALC can provide (beyond improved language competency), and which of these will appeal to the decision-makers. For example, in Japan, universities have been tasked with but are struggling to develop *kokusaika* (internationalization) (Breaden, 2013), *kosei* (individuality), *ikiru chikara* ('zest for living') and *sozosei* (creativity) (MEXT, 2013) – all of which a supported SALC may be positioned to facilitate.

Notes on the contributor

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