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Edited by Jo Mynard

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Editorial

Jo Mynard, Kanda University of International Studies, Japan

Welcome to issue 7(1) of SiSAL Journal, which is a general issue. It contains three full papers, a work in progress, two reviews edited by Hisako Yamashita, and three papers that form the fourth part of the language learning spaces column edited by Katherine Thornton.

Regular Papers

The first paper by Sahar Alzahrani and Julie Watson from the University of Southampton in the UK explores the link between strategy training and autonomous learning through a research project conducted with medical students in Saudi Arabia. The focus of the paper is on students' attitudes, awareness, and use of language learning strategies which were investigated using written reflections, interviews and focus group discussions. The researchers found positive results in the students who had received strategy training, particularly those who received online training.

The second paper by Neil Curry and Satoko Watkins based in Japan provides an outline of a peer mentoring programme at the authors' university. The paper outlines the context and rationale for the programme and introduces the approach to recruiting and training the mentors. The authors also give due consideration to kind of research that will take place in the coming years.

The third paper by James Simmonds based in Mexico is also concerned with learning that is facilitated by a peer relationship. The author describes a small research project that investigates the effectiveness of student-run workshops. The author draws on interview data investigating student experiences with the workshops and peer interactions. The findings indicate the value such workshops and peer interactions have on learning as they break down hierarchical relationships in traditional learning environments and boost confidence in learners.

Work in Progress

Kwan-yee Sarah Ng and Yang Gu based at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (Shenzhen), describe the trial operation of the Self-access Language Learning Centre and explore students' needs and preferences in self-access English language learning. The authors describe and evaluate the operation and then go on to discuss recommendations for how the SALL might develop in the future.

Reviews

There are two reviews in this issue which were edited by Hisako Yamashita, our reviews editor. The first is a book review by Marilyn Lewis who is based in New Zealand. Lewis reviews a book published by Palgrave McMillan in 2015: *Assessment and Autonomy in Language Learning Edited by Carol J. Everhard and Linda Murphy*. The review summarises each chapter and comments on the cohesive nature of the book despite the diversity of contributions.

The second review published in this issue of SiSAL Journal is of an event in Japan. Andrew Tweed reviews the JASAL (Japanese Association of Self-Access Learning) 10th Anniversary Conference which was held in Tokyo in December 2015. The review briefly summarises each of the 12 presentations at the event, exploring them within four themes: integrating self-access and curriculum; learning spaces; activities and events; and focus on individuals.

Language Learning Spaces: Self-Access in Action

The theme of the newest instalment of the *Language Learning Spaces: Self-Access in Action* column edited by Katherine Thornton is the development of learner autonomy through initiatives within learning spaces. In her introductory article, Katherine Thornton summarises the three contributions in this issue which come from Kerstin Dofs and Moira Hobbs based in New Zealand who discuss online courses; Tarik Uzun, Hatice Karaaslan and Mümin Şen who are based in Turkey and are in the process of developing a language advising programme; and Andrew Tweed who reports on an initiative to develop a language advising programme in Cambodia.

Acknowledgments

Notes on the Editor

Jo Mynard is the founding editor of SiSAL Journal. She is an associate professor and the Director of the Self-Access Learning Centre at Kanda University of International Studies in Japan. She has been involved in facilitating self-access language learning since 1996.

The Impact of Online Training on Saudi Medical Students' Attitudes, Awareness, and Use of Language Learning Strategies in Relation to their Developing Autonomy

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Abstract

In the context of ongoing debate about the relationship between strategy training and autonomous learning, this study set out in the belief that they are inextricably linked and sought to explore three important aspects of learner strategy development more deeply. An experiment was designed to investigate the effectiveness of learner training with three groups of Saudi students taking a course in English for Medical Purposes: control (no treatment), offline (treatment delivered on paper), and online (online treatment). The treatments used supplementary learning material focused on language learning strategies (LLS). The design and the delivery of the treatments was informed by Rubin, Chamot, Harris, and Anderson (2007), Cohen (1998), Murphy and Hurd (2011), and Murphy (2008a). This paper sought to answer three research questions related to the impact of learner training on students' attitudes, awareness, and use of LLS in relation to their autonomous abilities after exposure to the treatment. Qualitative data from students' reflective writings, interviews and focus group discussion was used to answer these questions. For the two treatment groups, the treatment impact was found to be positive in relation to the research questions and negative in the control. The online group outperformed the offline one in all the three investigated aspects.

Keywords: language learning strategies, learner autonomy, Saudi medical students, strategy awareness, learner training, strategy use, attitudes to strategies, English language

Background

Teachers have often and are still trying to make their students successful learners. One way to achieve this end can be through the provision of learner training to the students. The link between learner strategies and learner autonomy has not received agreement among the researchers in the field of learner strategies. Oxford (1999) was among those who believed that being a strategic student would lead to the achievement of successful learning and to the enhancement of learner autonomy. Similarly, Cohen (1998), White (2008), Everhard (2012), and Ranalli (2012) see a connection between learner autonomy and learning strategies.

However, other scholars perceive this connection between learner strategies and autonomous learning as a complex one. Benson (2011) is one of the opponents of the relationship between the provision of strategy training and the attainment of better language proficiency and better learning. McDonough (1999) was skeptical about the reliability and robustness of the studies that looked at the effectiveness of LLA training on having successful learners.

Some researchers believe that it is not necessary that autonomous students apply lots of learning strategies. Murphy (2008b) says that we should not assume teaching strategies to be effective in improving language learning outcomes and learner autonomy. She believes that this goal can be obtained only when the teachers use the learning material to keep the students engaged in reflections, collaborative learning, and self-assessment during class time. In other words. These researchers assert that it is not enough to describe good learners based on the number or frequency of strategies they are using because strategy use is not the same even among successful learners (Chamot & Rubin, 1994). Cohen and Weaver (2013) point out that not all students use the same set of strategies given to them, but they pick the ones that apply to them. Therefore, the focus should be on whether or not they understand LLS and on whether they adopt a collection of preferred strategies (Chamot & Rubin, 1994).

With relevance to the current study, according to Dörnyei (2005) and Murphy (2008a), the integration of strategy tasks with language learning tasks in the design of the strategy training material is one of the significant recent shifts in strategy training research. Cohen and Weaver (2013) recommend that the course developer integrate strategies into the material content and to consider contextualizing strategy training by inserting the language tasks explicitly and implicitly into strategy training.

Our interest in this topic was as a result of our belief in the importance of learning strategies for the enhancement of learning and of language proficiency. Little (2016) argues that greater awareness of learner strategies will result in students' enhanced learner autonomy. Strategy training is assumed to be helping students to become successful and accordingly more autonomous learners (Cohen, 1998). Rubin, Chamot, Harris, and Anderson (2007) illustrate that effective strategy training will result in greater ability to manage cognitive and affective strategies, higher motivation, better performance, and more skills in independent

learning. According to them, strategic learners can identify their weaknesses and strengths and are able to make plans for their language learning, monitor and evaluate the progress in their language learning.

This paper is part of PhD research which investigated the effectiveness of an intervention to enhance learners' language learner autonomy. It is focused on examining the level of students' awareness of language learning strategies as well as their use of strategies in their language learning, particularly the autonomous strand, after being exposed to strategy-based instruction. Students' attitude to language learner strategies is also investigated after being exposed to strategy training. This paper will address the following research questions:

1. What is the attitude of learners towards LLS after taking part in learner training?
2. What is the level of learners' awareness of LLS after taking part in learner training?
3. What is the level of their strategy use after taking part in learner training focused on LLS?

Methods

Background

The participants in this study were taken from a higher education population. This population comprises students in the Medical and Medical Sciences disciplines, studying in their preparatory year at a university in Saudi Arabia. These students take a condensed English course in the preparatory year before they specialize in their subject areas. In the preparatory year, they study General English in the first semester and English for Medical Purposes in the second semester. They take these courses of English in face-to-face classes using their assigned textbooks or using the CDs accompanying the textbooks.

In a pre-study questionnaire and interview, most of the students in this population felt that the language learning they receive in formal educational contexts is not sufficient and that they need more opportunities for learning and using English. Therefore, many of them have developed their own strategies for learning English generally and medical English in particular. They claimed that these strategies made them aware of the features of spoken discourse such as pronunciation variations as well as expressions and vocabulary specific to the

spoken language. The oral skills in English of some of those students are much better than their academic skills as observed by one of the researchers and noted by the students themselves. They lacked developed general strategies that could be helpful to their language learning. They also need to be trained in the use of language learning strategies in order to be better language learners and to gain greater language proficiency.

Participants

The participants selected for the intervention were three groups of students who have the same language proficiency level- intermediate level- according to the placement test administered by the university at the beginning of the semester.

The experiment design

It was decided to conduct the study with three groups of students. The rationale for this design was to investigate whether there is a causal relationship between technology use and language learner autonomy. This was the focus of the wider PhD research. An experimental design is deemed to be the best to detect the causality between students' use of technology and the development of their language learner autonomy (Thomas, 2013). Two of the groups received strategy training through two different teaching modes (online and offline) and the third group (control) received no learner training. As part of the experiment, the two treatment groups were provided with supplementary material for learning medical English. The supplementary material adopted the task-based learning approach in its design and focused on teaching language learning strategies (LLS). The provided treatment aimed to develop the awareness of the two treatment groups about LLS and to provide them with the opportunity to find helpful LLS in order to develop their language learner autonomy.

The offline group were given the material on printed papers and the tasks were done in face-to-face sessions whether inside or outside the classroom. There was no intention to use technology in the delivery of the material to the offline group. However, the online group were taught in a blended way with the material uploaded to a Learning Management System (LMS) and the students did the individual as well as the collaborative tasks online whilst sitting together in the same physical classroom. Some tasks were assigned for homework- in case the

students wanted to have more practice in language learning and language use. Those homework tasks were done online at distance amongst the online group when students were outside the classroom and they were submitted via the LMS; whereas the offline group had arranged for face-to-face meetings or synchronized virtual meetings to discuss the homework tasks and submitted them to the teacher (the first author) on paper next time they met. The control group were not exposed to the supplementary material that was given to the two treatment groups and it was supposed they would show negligible change in terms of their attitude to learner strategies, strategy awareness, or strategy use.

Design and teaching of the supplementary material

Strategy tasks were integrated with language learning tasks when the strategy training was designed for the two treatment groups only (Dörnyei, 2005; Murphy, 2008b; Cohen & Weaver, 2013). The design of material considered contextualizing the strategies in a relevant context (here, language learning) and linking them with problems directly related to the students' needs to ensure the effectiveness of strategy training (Rubin et al., 2007). The core of the supplementary material provided to students in this study centered on LLS embedded in a task-based format and presented explicitly (both in English and Arabic) in the introductions to the tasks. Because learners' use of strategies varies according to individuals, tasks, and goals, each task in the supplementary material introduced students to a strategy selected on the basis of its usefulness to the students' context (see the appendix for a sample task). This was included in the design of the material in order to encourage students to use more of the provided strategies with the aim of improving their language proficiency. Some of the strategies selected for the strategy training were repeated in the design of different types of tasks with the aim of training students to use the strategies in different contexts and to avoid potential confusion between a strategy and a task. We take the view that there is a relationship between strategy training and the promotion of learner performance and the enhancement of their autonomy-related abilities as Cohen (1998) stresses. Therefore, we adopted the explicit strategy instruction approach in the design and the delivery of the material.

At the beginning of the experiment, the teacher explained how the provided learner training could be helpful for the students' coursework, language

learning and lifelong learning skills in order to ensure that students' do not perceive the treatment as extra work and do not feel overloaded as recommended by Murphy (2008a). To encourage learners to respond to the provided material, strategy instruction was integrated with language instruction with the focus of attention on raising learners' awareness of strategies. While teaching the treatment material, the teacher clarified the individual strategies and gave time for students to read and understand the strategy presented first in each task in English and Arabic. It was ensured that students share the teacher's intention and that the strategies embedded in each task are explained while working through tasks as this was emphasized by Murayama (1996). The teacher highlighted the learning objectives along with the strategy to be taught in each task. Briefing students with the implied learning outcomes and strategies in each task they do is believed to be helpful to increase the effectiveness of leaner training and hence this was done in every task during the course as suggested by Murphy and Hurd (2011).

Data Collection

Qualitative tools, identified as informal by (Cohen & Weaver, 2013), were felt to be more useful for post intervention analysis in order to obtain a rich insight into language learning strategies. Therefore, three qualitative instruments were used after the intervention to address the research questions in this paper. Eight one-to-one interviews were carried out with students randomly selected from both of the treatment groups, students' reflective writing after each session about the strategies learned in the session, and a focus group discussion was conducted with six students from the three groups (online, offline, and control). The data taken from these three sources was used. The current paper focuses on finding answers to the three research questions, i.e. what are the students' attitudes to learner strategies, what was the level of students' awareness of the strategy, and the level of students' strategy use after the intervention? Evidence for the potential impact of the learner training, focused on learner strategies, was sought from the students' qualitative data and the results are discussed in the following section.

Results and Discussion

The results of this study come from qualitative data from students'
reflective writing, a focus group interview, and one-to-one interviews. Answers to
the three research questions – i.e. the impact of learner training on students'
attitude to learner strategies, level of students' awareness, and level of strategy
use in the context of their developing autonomy– were found in this qualitative
data.

Attitudes of the learners towards learner strategies after the intervention
(coded and brought together with QSR NVivo software) were revealed in the
responses of the students in the two treatment groups particularly from the data of
the interviews and the focus group discussion. Key indicator words were
identified such as 'helpful' (7 instances), 'practice to speak English' (5), 'useful'
(2), 'makes English easier' (2), 'important' (2), 'saves time' (2), 'effective' (2),
'will try to use these strategies' (2), and 'like them' (2). In addition, there were
single references to 'interesting', 'easy to apply', 'easy to understand', 'fun', and
'beneficial', 'no one at the bottom of the list', and 'we can change our thinking'.
In contrast, the results for the control group suggested a negative attitude to
learning and to the use of learner strategies with only two key indicators present:
"it depends on the body. Somebody doesn't like to follow something. I will learn
as I want" and "No, I don't have to follow these strategies". Interestingly, the
positive responses of the online group were also more varied than the positive
responses of the offline group (14 types of responses and 5 respectively).

Most and least autonomous students were identified in both treatment
groups based on the framework proposed in the PhD research for the
measurement of language learner autonomy (LLA). The framework was turned
into a measuring scale to measure the LLA of each of the students and then to
compare these levels across the three participating groups (Alzahrani,
forthcoming). Based on this ranking of autonomous students, it was found that
those students recognized as the most autonomous ones in the online group were
selective in their use of learner strategies, evidenced by, "I can use a variety of the
skills now and it really helped me" and they expressed enjoyment in taking part in
the provided leaner training; "it was fun to do". On the other hand, none of the
responses of the offline group, though none were negative, suggested that students
were selective in their strategy use or particularly enjoyed the learner training as

much as the online group, e.g., "it is important to know about strategies" and "I think we have to know but not from a book".

In addressing the research question about strategy awareness, data was drawn from the students' interviews and the focus group discussion. The amount of responses taken from the online group were found to be much greater (6) than those from the offline group (1). Members of the control group did not talk about strategy awareness which suggests no evident change in their strategy awareness. It makes sense that the control group made no change in their awareness about learner strategies as they were not exposed to the treatment. The responses of the online group which are related to improved student awareness about strategies came from students with different capabilities associated with learner autonomy, while only one of the most autonomous students in the offline group talked about it, e.g., "I did some of them in the past but I did not know they are strategies. Then when I knew, I felt proud of myself that I am using learning strategies".

Students' strategy use was also one of the aspects of strategy training that was investigated. The sources of students' responses in this theme were students' reflective writing, interviews, and focus group. More responses came from the online group as compared to the offline group. This theme did not appear in the data from the control group which would indicate that they are not aware of what the strategies are and that their strategy use might be minimal compared to that of the two treatment groups. When the quality of the responses between the online and the offline groups is compared, different levels of use are expressed by students with different levels of learner autonomy only in the online group.

- The most autonomous student (i.e. based on the measurement using the measuring scale created) talked about the strategies she uses in her language learning e.g., "my strategy for learning vocabulary, I should have a picture, a word, and I have to write it" and the ones she started to use after participating in the course, e.g., "I started using the strategy of keeping notebook for new words";
- The medium autonomous student talked about the strategies she uses but they are not very helpful strategies, e.g., "I use in my English learning just the old fashioned strategies" and about the potentiality of using many of the strategies they have learned from

the supplementary material, e.g., "I think I can use lots of these strategies";

- The least autonomous student in the online group talked only about her plans in terms of strategy use, e.g., "I am going to try to use these strategies which I like very much" and about how much of the strategies given in the treatment can be applied in her learning, e.g., "I think I can use 50% of the strategies we learned in this course".

However, this distinction between the individuals with different levels of learner autonomy and strategy use cannot be seen in the offline group as only two of the most autonomous students talked about their strategy use. One of them reported the percentage of change in her strategy use since she joined the higher education, e.g., "I was using like 50% of them before I enter the college and now I use 70%" and about how much use of the strategies in the learner training can be made, e.g., "I can use 80 or 90 % of what I have learned from these strategies". The other gave the percentage of her strategy use in learning English, e.g., "I use maybe 70% strategies in my learning of English" and what strategies she uses frequently, e.g., "a lot of medical terminology is difficult to understand and to memorize. So I connect what I know about prefixes to this new word to find out the meaning of the new words".

Conclusions and recommendations

This paper aimed to shed light on the relationship between learner training and the development of better learning and better language proficiency. This paper explored aspects more deeply and investigated the effectiveness of the provided learner training in terms of its impact on students' attitude to LLS, students' strategy awareness, and students' strategy use in relation to their level of language learner autonomy. Positive results were found in the students' attitudes, awareness of strategies, and strategy use among the two treatment groups as opposed to the control group, where they were absent in relation to awareness and use. Other results distinguished the online group from the offline group in these different aspects of learner strategies. We recommend that the impact of strategy

training is further researched in relation to the changes in students' language proficiency, as suggested by McDonough (1999), and to the changes in learner autonomy. We also recognize the need for students' perceived strategy use to be measured quantitatively in order to add to the validity of the study when the two types of data utilized inform one another.

Notes on the contributors

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Appendix

A Sample Task with the Embedded Language Strategy

Task 4: Application on the use of the dictionary

الاستراتيجية اللغة الأحادي القاموس استخدام استراتيجية نمارس سوف التمرين، هذا في :
الاسئلة بعض على الاجابة التمرين هذا في منك يطلب سوف. الانجليزية اللغة تعلم في
اللغ الأحادي القاموس استخدام طريق عن. ة

The strategy: Effective use of monolingual Medical dictionaries as an important classroom and personal resource.

Objectives of the task:

1. To develop the ability to use dictionaries to look up the meaning of words relevant to a particular context.

Think about the following points:

1) In small groups, look at the sentence provided below. It has the word 'take' two times. Look up the word 'take' in Oxford Wordpower Dictionary:

   '<u>Take</u> painkillers for as long as it <u>takes</u> to ease the pain.'

2) Which of the meanings offered in the dictionary for the word 'take' fits with the first 'take' in the sentence and which one fits with the second 'take'.

3) In the dictionary, the word 'Take' has a number of meanings. Provide a sentence for the following meanings of it.

   a. To use a form of transport; to go by a particular road.
   b. To put your hand round sth and hold it (and move it towards you).
   c. To swallow sth.

Considerations in Developing a Peer Mentoring Programme for a Self-Access Centre

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Abstract

The paper outlines a peer mentoring programme at tertiary level in Japan, where it is still an uncommon practice. It will explain the context and reasons for its introduction; namely, expanding the range of services of a busy self-access centre. It will then describe what services we wish the mentors to provide which are compatible with the aims of the centre, and what skills we believe the mentors should possess, and what they need to be trained in to successfully deliver the service. It will then describe the research opportunities which this programme should provide.

Keywords: peer mentoring, self-directed learning, learning advising, self-access centres

This paper will describe the background to the implementation of a peer mentoring programme at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) beginning with a description of the reasoning behind the decision to implement it and its intended outcomes. Each stage of the implementation process will be documented to help determine whether the stated outcomes have been achieved in the context in which we operate, which will be outlined later, but mainly to ask the question of whether students can be effective in engendering good self-directed learning habits in their peers as part of a formally-administered scheme. Firstly, we will describe the particular context in which we work at KUIS, specifically the role of the Self-Access Learning Centre (SALC), and how we aim to develop mentoring as an extension of the services we already offer to students in our roles as Learning Advisors (LAs).

Peer mentoring, for the purposes of the scheme being described here, is defined as a relationship between two individual students within a formal, monitored scheme. One student, the mentor, offers advice and support, with a view to the realisation of a specified goal of another student, called the mentee. It is now a very popular practice at many universities in the UK, for example (Collings, Swanson, & Watkins, 2015), although it appears that there are relatively few instances of its use in Japan. Before proceeding, we wish to make clear the distinction between peer mentoring and peer tutoring. We wish our mentors to act to support the goals of their mentees, offering advice which is in congruence with the principles of learner autonomy already practiced in the SALC, which will be explained below. Mentors

will not act as teachers, giving instruction, but rather as peers who have an understanding of the needs of mentees, and will act as a motivating force.

It is envisioned that the scheme will act as a pilot in order to test its viability. As such, there are several points we are concerned with:

1. Interest and uptake on the part of the student body, both in terms of wanting to mentor or be mentored
2. Content and structure of the mentor training programme
3. The degree to which the programme will deliver the required outcomes (for outcomes please see below)
4. The best way to administer and support the scheme.

The Context

Learning Advisors at KUIS operate from the SALC, a purpose-built space providing materials and an environment to facilitate language learning. As advisors, we aim to encourage the development of skills and knowledge for autonomous language learning amongst the student body, which is done in 3 ways:

1. Self-study 'modules' (voluntary course) for developing self-directing learning methods
2. Taught courses on self-directed learning methods
3. Independent consultation with learning advisors, through appointments or a drop-in helpdesk.

All of these ways involve personal interaction with learning advisors on an autonomous basis, which means that students are not required by their courses or teachers to use our services. We engage the students in a spoken or written dialogue to help them in such matters as setting goals for study, choosing suitable resources and learning strategies, building confidence and motivation, and basically anything related to self-directed learning. Our services are also mainly offered in English and the students are encouraged to use this language in the SALC; however, students may use Japanese if they wish. As a result, the service is used mainly by students who seek us out and engage with us. It may be possible that there are more students who would like advice on studying but may lack the confidence to engage with faculty members or to use English.

Mentoring at KUIS

The SALC is sometimes perceived as a place where more fluent learners congregate, which can be off-putting to some students, so extending our services to the wider university environment through peers may be fruitful. Peer mentors should be able to help spread knowledge of self-directed learning methods and help develop learner autonomy, as noted by Kao (2012). Additionally, Kao mentions that through the use of reflective dialogue to help other students, peer advisors also develop their own "sense of learner autonomy through the interaction" (Kao, 2012, p. 97). We hope that this type of self-reflection on learning practice will appeal to those of our students who wish to further develop their learning skills, or who are interested in a career in education.

The SALC has recognised the need for learners to consider affective factors in order to fully realise their potential for self-directed learning (Valdivia, McLoughlin, & Mynard, 2011). Therefore there is the additional desire to further develop the ideas put forward in Curry (2014), which are that as learning advising employs techniques used to encourage autonomy in learners, that are the same that cognitive behavioural therapists use for treating anxiety disorders, LAs are well-placed to help students who suffer from Foreign Language Anxiety, which is brought about by the fear of the potential negative outcomes of performing in a different language. Peer mentoring also utilises some of these same counselling techniques, and because concerns about what peers may be thinking about their abilities can be a major inhibiting factor for some learners to use language, it seems appropriate that a peer mentor may be an excellent choice to help a student overcome their FLA. The mentors in the training group will also be recruited on the basis of interest in wanting to help other students with this problem, and will be trained towards this end, the details and progress of which will be described in a later paper.

The Benefits and Concerns of Mentoring

The benefits provided by mentoring both to those being mentored and also to the mentors themselves have been described at length, and the aim here is to demonstrate how it is thought that students at KUIS will be helped by such a scheme. It will also describe some of the problems which can arise, and how we might hope to deal with them.

Several benefits of using peer mentors in academic settings have been noted. Firstly, mentored students indicate a superior academic performance, in addition to less anxiety displayed towards their studies (Rodger & Tremblay, 2003). Retention of students is also

aided (Jacobi, 1991), dropout rates are reduced, and the mentee is helped to feel more involved in university activities (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). It is also very important to note the benefits which accrue for the mentors themselves. Among these are the feeling of reward gained through supporting others, "reapplying concepts in their own lives" (Colvin & Ashman, 2010, p. 127), which is to reassess their own situations through reflecting on the ideas they are providing to their mentees, and, lastly, the development of friendships and contacts. All of the above are highly relevant to students at KUIS, and it is hoped that through reflecting on their experiences and study practices, the mentors will be able to further develop their own self-directed learning skills in tandem with their mentees, as stated above. Everhard (2015) also points to an increase in "self-confidence and self-esteem" (Everhard, 2015, p. 306).

There are risks, however, as Colvin and Ashman (2010) also note. The danger of mentors over committing themselves is present, and it must be confirmed that they are able to spend time on mentoring, together with their other obligations. As personal issues may be involved, both parties might leave themselves emotionally vulnerable if they are obliged to 'open up' and divulge their feelings. Efforts to take a full part in the relationship are also required of mentees in order to make the partnership viable; they must be reliable and responsive during conversations, and make the effort required to reach their stated goals. Finally, complaints are reported about some mentees being over-dependent (Christie, 2014); for example, in the case of peer tutoring, students may request that tutors complete homework tasks on their behalf (Mynard & Almarzouqi, 2006).

In a Japanese context, in which great emphasis is placed on the widely-found hierarchical relationship of *sempai / kohai*, where a senior student advises a junior student, there may be the potential of a mentee deferring to the ideas of a mentor simply because they are older or in a higher year. Christie (2014) also warns that the positioning of the mentor as the expert in the relationship results in hierarchy, as the mentor is instructing the mentee how "to 'fit in' to the university culture" (Christie, 2014, p. 960). Kao (2012) advises that in order to alleviate any problems caused by the redefinition of roles which are more traditionally hierarchical, it is necessary "to take into consideration the learner's socio-cultural as well as psychological factors" (Kao, 2012, p. 98). Thus, as well as selecting trainee mentors who are experienced in self-directed learning, we will be sure to emphasise, during the recruitment and training stages, the reciprocally supportive and beneficial nature of the mentor / mentee relationship. This will also have to be made clear to potential mentees when they apply to use the service. Like the learning advisors, student mentors will be attempting to help their

mentees consider and choose their available SDL options according to their own needs, and not directly telling students what they should be doing.

Needs Analysis

Before designing the programme we thought it advisable to gather ideas and opinions from the student body about how they viewed the idea of peer mentoring, and also what they might want to mentor or be mentored about. We also thought that a survey could help raise awareness about peer mentoring.

A questionnaire was produced using the SurveyMonkey platform and piloted in July 2014 with the 28 members of our class, using both English and Japanese. Feedback indicated that the questions were clear and easy to understand. Subsequently, the questionnaire was distributed in November. It was sent to a total of 1677 students who were registered as SALC users, and we received a total of 383 responses.

The responses were analysed and categorized according to the content of the answers given. As well as serving the purpose of raising awareness of mentoring among the students, and possibly reaching out to those who might be interested in becoming a mentor, we were particularly interested in what aspects of learning and university life the learners felt it was important to have help and advice with. A summary of the results regarding the areas in which students want to / can give support is shown in the appendix.

From the results, it is possible to see that many of the students questioned felt that advice about 'class registration', or which courses they should choose, was most important. However, we considered it to be impractical for mentors to advise on this area as it would be unlikely that they would have enough knowledge about all the classes and teachers available; it would be better for them to be able to suggest where and how information can be sought. Similarly, exams such as TOEFL and TOEIC were also a concern, but it was decided that for now it would be best if the Learning Advisors handle such queries in the SALC, as there is already a TOEFL exam tutoring system in place.

Hence for the purposes of our project, namely to extend the reach of the SALC and to lay the foundations for any future mentoring program, we thought it prudent to concentrate on areas in which we would best be able to train would-be mentors, and which also fall under the purview of the SALC. This would namely involve advising learners on self-directed study and assisting with language anxiety-related issues. According to the survey, these are obviously of importance to some students.

In addition to the questionnaire results, it was also thought necessary to consider the results of the recent SALC Curriculum Project needs analysis study. In this study, there were six areas that students stated that they needed knowledge of to succeed in their studies (Takahashi et al. 2013):

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

These areas encompass the majority of the queries learning advisors receive, and therefore mentors trained to advise on these topics would be invaluable.

Defining the Roles and Characteristics of Mentors

Colvin and Ashman (2010) list several roles which student mentors could be expected to play. Below are the roles which we think are most relevant to our context, considering the needs analysis above, and also the skills which we believe our mentors will need to use.

Table 1. Roles & Characteristics of Mentors

	Role	What is it?	Needed skills/knowledge
1	Connecting link	Help mentees with knowledge of campus resources	Resources & events on campus such as: • SALC • Student Affairs Office • Writing Centre • Practice Centre • Yellow sofas (free conversation area) & conversation club
2	Peer leader & trusted friend	Motivate & guide mentees	Advising skills Active listening skills
3	Learning coach	Teach academic & life skills	Time management Learning strategies *Mentor should help mentee with "how to study"

Below are characteristics which Terrion and Leonard (2007) regard as necessary for successful mentors, and which we will be looking for during the interview process when looking for suitable candidates:

- evidence of academic success
- flexible schedule
- previous experience in mentoring
- aspirations towards self-enhancement
- good communicative skills
- supportive
- can act independently
- trustworthy
- empathetic
- enthusiastic and interested in other students

We have added some other characteristics which we think are also appropriate for our context:

- desire to empower their mentees
- proven experience in self-directed learning (e.g. completion of SALC courses)
- punctuality.

All prospective candidates will be interviewed and references obtained from their teachers as to their personalities and academic performance.

Training Syllabus Content and Structure

The aim of the training course will be to help ensure that mentors will receive the knowledge and skills needed to effectively facilitate mentees' needs. For example, as stated by Newton and Ender (2010), there is a great difference between the advice given by friends in daily life and the approach taken to advice giving in a mentoring situation. The mentors will need awareness of and some practice in the use of what may be a new set of interpersonal communication skills to function effectively. The following are what we hope the mentors will be able to achieve following the training course:

1. Clearly define their roles as peer mentors and specify what they should and should not take responsibility for
2. Understand and give own definition of learner autonomy
3. Know what self-reflection and self-evaluation are, and practice regularly
4. Be able to employ some learning advising skills in dialogues
5. Be able to suggest various learning strategies and activities for different learning needs and goals
6. Be able to suggest various learning resources for different learning needs and goals
7. Be able to suggest campus resources that are connected with mentee's needs
8. Can show understanding of learners' anxiety, confidence, and motivation and offer some strategies to deal with such issues
9. Offer some strategies for time management
10. Understand their work contract

The course will last for ten weeks and consist of single 50-minute sessions, with the possibility of additional time if we feel that some items need to be covered in more detail. Ideally, the sessions will be longer in the future, but currently we are obliged to run it during students' lunch hours, and so time is limited.

At the time of writing, the contents of the training sessions will be the next task for us to work on, but we have made a rough syllabus to guide us:

Table 2. Training Syllabus

	Contents
1	Understanding roles (ethics/ difference between mentor and tutor/cultural sensibility/ learning styles/assumptions re: good learners & good ways to learn, need for regular reflection)
2	Learner autonomy (definitions & principles – what does it mean to be an autonomous learner?)
3	Self-reflection & self-assessment of strengths & weaknesses as a language learner
4	Advising skills Active listening skills Positive reinforcement techniques Questioning
5	Learning strategies for different skills
6	Learning resources for different skills

7	Campus resources
8	Anxiety, motivation, confidence
9	Time management
10	Work contract and ongoing training

Outcomes and Programme Assessment

In order to facilitate a smooth implementation of the scheme in the future, and to investigate to what extent the mentors are achieving the desired effect and that mentees are satisfied with the service, there are several questions we wish to answer as the scheme progresses. Each stage promises to present particular issues we will need to address and will require different methods of research.

In consideration of the above, we have selected the following as the outcomes which we hope to achieve:

1. Mentees should

- feel an improvement in confidence or motivation
- feel less anxious about speaking English in and out of class
- feel that they are able to set meaningful and attainable goals
- feel better able to plan and organize their studies
- have a greater knowledge of available strategies and resources.

To summarise, they should be able to utilise self-directed learning skills to some degree, and feel a progression with their language skills. Additionally, we hope that by using the mentoring service, they will become regular SALC users.

2. Mentors should

- feel an improvement in their own self-directed learning skills. They will have regular meetings with the project coordinators where they will reflect on their mentoring and any insights they have gained about how other learn, which we hope they will then be able to apply to their own learning. They will also be encouraged to share their experiences and knowledge with each other.
- feel able to achieve other personal goals relating to their mentoring (to be discussed with us). Many students are interested in careers in teaching and therefore want to expand their knowledge and experiences in education. Others are interested in

improving their communicative skills, for example confidence speaking with new people, active listening abilities, and widening their circle of friends.

3. The Programme administration should

    •   ensure the reservation service works smoothly

    •   verify if procedures for handling any issues / complaints are functioning

    •   evaluate whether the service is being promoted effectively.

In addition to the above, the following is an outline of the research we plan to undertake in order to determine if the outcomes have been realised:

Table 3. Research Focus

Project stage	Research topics	Data collection
1. Recruitment	1. In what ways can the position of peer mentor be advertised to students? How successful are they? 2. How can new mentors be recruited and selected?	Ongoing participant observation / field notes
2. Training	Critically examine training methods and contents: 1. What worked well and can be repeated? 2. What needs to be changed?	Ongoing participant observation / field notes, student feedback logs
3. Advertising service to student body	What method works best?	Ongoing participant observation / field notes
4. Administering service	What issues arise, and how can they be resolved?	Ongoing participant observation / field notes
5. Efficacy of mentoring	1. What can be observed about mentees' affective factors? 2. What can be observed about mentees' metacognitive understanding of their learning processes? 3. Do mentors experience better metacognitive understanding of their learning processes? Are there any other benefits they feel? 4. To what extent are mentors an effective way of reducing Foreign Language Anxiety for students? 5. What improvements could be made to the service (mentors & mentees) in: a. administration b. delivery	1. & 2. Feedback sheets / reports, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires 3. Written reflection, semi-structured interviews 4. Mentors' written reflection logs, semi-structured interviews with mentors & mentees 5. Ongoing participant observation / field notes, interviews with staff

The amount of detail and information that each stage of the project will produce will be quite large, and as a result it is necessary to keep the project on a small-scale while we determine its long-term potential. Accordingly we anticipate hiring a small (6-8) number of

mentors. It will also be necessary to institute an effective system for evaluating the outcomes at a later point.

Next Steps and Final Thoughts

To establish the project we have agreed upon the following timeline:

1. 2015 semester 1 (April to September): Plan content of training sessions and recruit trainee mentors. Arrange administration procedures.
2. 2015 semester 2 (September to mid-January): Conduct mentoring training, review content of session, decide on advertising strategy
3. 2016 semester 1: Publicise and begin mentoring service, conduct some reminder training for mentors. Begin collection and analysis of data on the programme's efficacy.

In subsequent papers, we hope to provide more detail on each of the different stages of the programme. We feel that a successful self-access centre should not only be seen as a space for learning but also as a community, creating a sense of ownership in the students. This means that ownership would not only extend over control of language and the learning process, but also could extend the notion of self-access learning beyond the SALC and the purview of the Learning Advisors (Everhard, 2012). Having students themselves engage in the advising process will be a great way to increase their involvement, in addition to increasing our resources by utilising their valuable skills and experiences.

Notes on the Contributors

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Appendix

Summary of student questionnaire

	What did they (other students at AU) help you with?	Is there anything about your university life now which you think another student could give you advice and support for?	If you are sophomore or above, in your freshman year, was there anything about your university life which you think another student could have given you advice and support for?	If yes (I would like to be a mentor), what would you like to offer advice about?
Registration / choosing classes	20	20	45	17
How to study / SDL	11	11	39	18
Class / homework support	18	18	10	8
Practice English / learning grammar, pronunciation etc.	15	15	13	2
Study Abroad	9	9	22	6
TOEFL	7	7	14	3
English conversation	8	8	8	3
TOEIC	2	2	12	0
Job hunting	1	1	16	0
Emotional support	5	5	4	5
Time management	1	1	8	7
Other languages	3	3	3	2
Clubs / circles	3	3	4	6
Using the SALC	2	2	4	0
Motivation	2	2	1	2
Confidence / yellow sofa (conversation area) help	0	0	1	2
Daily life / school life	1	1	3	8

Youth and the Disruption of Power: Student-run Conversation Workshops in a Mexican Self-access Centre

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Abstract

Within self-access learning there has been a gradual shift towards incorporating approaches to learning involving strong elements of peer interaction. In the USBI Xalapa self-access learning centre (SALC) that is part of the Universidad Veracruzana in Veracruz, Mexico, work placement students (WPS) have begun to run daily conversation workshops with students from the centre. By drawing on the works of Acuña González, Avila Pardo, & Holmes Lewendon (2015), Murray (2014), and Hughes, Krug, & Vye (2011) relating to peer-supported learning in self-access environments, a small research project was developed to understand the effectiveness of the student-run workshops. This involved conducting interviews with WPS and English students who attended the workshops. By comparing and contrasting the responses, a rich, heterogeneous set of data was uncovered which provides insight into peer-centred learning. The findings suggest the need incorporate peer-based learning to break down hierarchical relationships in which power divisions construct a traditionalist learning environment governed by fear of making errors. Also, the role of WPS needs to be reconsidered to allow them to take a more active role in the institution due to their positive relationships with learners. Beyond these aspects, it can be seen that a deeper understanding of the role of peer interaction in learning environments is essential in self-access centres.

Keywords: peer interaction, peer-centred learning, self-access centres, self-access learning, power, hierarchy

Background

The USBI Self-Access Learning Centre (SALC) of the Universidad Veracruzana in Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico, has existed for over sixteen years. It functions as a learning space where learners can study English autonomously, while being supervised by language advisers who have been trained to operate in SALC settings. Learners have a somewhat individualized relationship with the adviser, which often involves more personal contact as a result of one-on-one interactions.

The SALC provides the Universidad Veracruzana campuses throughout Xalapa with language learning opportunities for students to take general English courses aimed at levels pre-A1 and A1, respectively, of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2001), which are compulsory for all university students.

Each year about 1500 students are enrolled in the courses for which there are five full-time and three part-time English advisers. Students are required to complete courses which focus on the four major skill areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing. The central activities for advisers are advisory sessions, conversation workshops, exam revision, curriculum design, material creation, exam administration, and cultural events.

Writing about a different Universidad Veracruzana SALC in the city of Veracruz, Herrera Diaz (2010) discusses in detail the complexity of defining SALCs (within the context of the Universidad Veracruzana), as they are not strictly "autonomous". For example, the amount of control students actually have over their learning is considered to be minimal by some teachers. While the level of autonomy is questionable, the focus of this article, like the research, is on peer-interaction in conversation workshops within the centre rather than focusing on defining and explaining how the centre operates as a whole.

Through working with these students and by having conversations with other English advisers, it has become apparent that students struggle to grasp spoken English and have difficulty with communicative interactions. Their marks tend to be lower in these areas and some students cannot even perform basic social functions in English by the end of the semester. With this in mind, unpublished research involving observation was conducted into how such skills could be improved in the SALC. Studies relating to social dimensions of SALCs (Murray, 2014) and peer interaction in language learning (Hadwin & Oshige, 2011; Hughes, Krug, & Vye, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978) were influential in shifting focus towards social-based approaches to improving skills. While different options were being considered, little progress could be made as the centre was understaffed in the period August 2015 – January 2016. It was however in this period that an effective change occurred in which work placement students (WPS) from the Faculty of Languages at the Universidad Veracruzana were incorporated into the conversation workshop roster. Generally, these students are in their early 20s in their final year of study, and are required to cover a total of 480 hours of service without remuneration. They are monitored by advisers at the SALC, and are predominantly expected to help with the creation of materials that can be used in the centre. For the WPS involves, all were studying English as their major, with an approximate B1/B2 level of proficiency.

As will be discussed further in this paper, this change has unintentionally created a substantially more positive learning environment for learners at the centre and given WPS invaluable experience. The inclusion of WPS in conversation workshops has primarily impacted upon how learners *feel* when required to express themselves orally, by giving them greater confidence and reducing stress and pressure. Furthermore, traditional relations of power and knowledge in language learning have been disrupted and reconstructed in a positive way which weakens pre-existing power hierarchies. These pre-existing hierarchies relate to the way in which control and power are centralised in the figure of the "teacher" or adviser. Such a change has meant learners become more empowered within their learning experience through the construction of mutual bonds with WPS. Therefore, making such changes has been highly effective in improving the learning environment and learning experiences of learners at the centre. For greater clarity in the following sections, *learners* will refer to learners who are enrolled in English courses at the SALC.

Methodology and Literature

The central goal of this research was to find out how WPS and learners feel within student-run conversation workshops as opposed to those run by regular English advisers. The complementary goal was to understand *why* they felt this way. Therefore, in order to understand their experiences, individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted by the author during September, 2015, and all names of the interviewees have been changed for publication. Taking 5 to 10 minutes per participant, interviews with both WPS and learners from the centre were recorded. Each interview was conducted in Spanish due to the participants' low levels of English proficiency and to allow them to be more comfortable and more articulate. The interviews took place just after learners had finished a 30-minute WPS-run conversation workshop focusing on grammar and vocabulary they had studied. This was done to make sure the experience was fresh in their minds. In general, WPS spoke longer and gave richer information than regular learners. This was perhaps a result of their current involvement and commitment to education through their studies.

A qualitative methodology was chosen as it permits one "to understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge" which allows "the concepts of importance in the study to emerge as they had been constructed by participants" (Mertens, 1998, p. 11-

13). This is therefore pertinent as it facilitates the rich, varied accounts of the interviewees and reveals themes that are considered to be important by interviewees. Such an approach acknowledges the subjectivity of interviewees' responses and does not limit their responses to categories pre-defined by the researcher. In the interviews, all questions were open-ended thereby enabling interviewees to express themselves freely and expand their responses when necessary. As discussed by Eichelberger (1989), by using such a methodology researchers are "constructing the 'reality' on the basis of the interpretations of data with the help of the participants who provide the data in the study" (p. 9). Also, as can be noted in the following sections, ample space has been given to participant responses in a way which allows their experiences to collectively construct the findings.

When it came to organising the information, there were several themes that could be dissected from the abundant data. After transcribing the somewhat overwhelming data, it was not too difficult to organise as the questions were direct and the semi-formal format allowed for necessary clarification during the interview. As themes began to emerge from the data, relevant information from each interview was categorised as pertaining to Age, Knowledge, or Power. In places where information overlapped, an attempt was made to include this in the findings. Thus, rather than dividing findings in terms of WPS and learners, a much deeper understanding of issues can be demonstrated by interweaving concepts which transcended the type of participant, thereby allowing for a farther-reaching representation of interviewees' experiences.

In terms of how the interviews were conducted, all (five) of the WPS (three men/two women) were interviewed. Also, eight randomly-chosen learners (four men/four women) from both English I and II who had participated in both student-run and adviser-run conversation workshops were interviewed. An effort was made to achieve gender balance in the research as a way of acknowledging the role that gender plays as it "influences all aspects of our being, of our relationships and of the society and culture around us" (Järviluoma, Moisala, & Vilkko, 2003, p. 1). While this is a critical point in qualitative research, surprisingly there were no great discrepancies in the interviewees' experiences of the workshops based on gender. To consider such areas, it would be necessary to conduct in-depth discourse analysis of the interviews and dramatically change the focus of the research. Both WPS and learners answered four questions relating to their

experiences and opinions of the student-run workshops (see Appendix A). They were asked to compare the workshops with those run by permanent English advisers and comment on the advantages and disadvantages of both types of workshops. The intended purpose of this comparison was to provide the researcher with greater insight and understanding of the perceived effectiveness of the workshops.

In terms of related literature, a Vygotskian perspective of peer-learning was important which can be understood as process involving "more competent learners supporting weaker students and this helps their progression through the zone of proximal development i.e. the difference between a learner's performance unaided and that when assisted by an adult or more competent peer" (Mynard & Almarzouqi, 2006, pp. 13-14). While earlier studies have focused on the benefits of peer-learning in general (Beasley, 1997; Tudge & Winterhoff, 1993; Tudge, 1992) it has also been critical in recent studies looking at peer-mentoring in self-access language learning (Everhard, 2015a) and a case study from Southern Mexico in which a SALC was conceptualised as a 'community of practice' (Acuña et al., 2015). These studies (and this current one) incorporate underlying social dimensions of autonomy which are commonly overlooked in respect to SALCs (Murray, 2014). From such studies it is evident that there is a growing body of work relating to peer-learning in SALCs to which this study is indebted.

Findings

Both students and learners (see Appendix B for a summary of participants) expressed an overwhelming sense of satisfaction with the student-run workshops. Only one learner expressed strong negative views, two learners were neutral, while the other ten interviewees articulated both negative and positive aspects with general to strong appraisal towards the workshops. It can be noted that of the participants the vast majority fully supported continuing the implementation of the workshops, with some recommending more hours each week. In general the WPS were more enthusiastic about their experiences and pleased with the results than the learners who participated. The WPS were generally pleased with their involvement in the workshops and saw it beneficial to their future careers. Juan commented:

"I feel good. It's a good place to start outside of the classroom as a teacher…It has really changed my perspective on teaching…I was worried that I wouldn't enjoy it at all….I now know that I could definitely be a teacher at some point in my life."

Such perspectives were shared amongst other WPS but also with some feelings of nervousness. All mentioned this starting point and how it changed over time, for example David said: *"I′m not going to lie. At the beginning I got very nervous…now after a month and half a feel more confident."* Also, Arturo mentioned broader benefits as he stated: "*I now don't feel nervous in front of a group of people here. It helps me at school where I have to give presentations and now I'm not as scared as I was before."* Two students were also self-reflective about the process as can be seen in Juan's comment: *"it gives you a lot of security and makes you reflect upon your own language level."* Laura provided example as she stated that *"it has opened my eyes…(to think) that I'm an advanced English student…well, no"'* Overall, these main aspects demonstrate some general benefits reaped from their experiences.

In terms of the learners interviewed, five responded positively to workshops with WPS, two were indifferent, and one was negative. Positive comments all related to the proximity of age between themselves and the WPS – an area which will be dealt with in later sections. The negative experiences related to the perceived lack of English knowledge and the nervousness of the WPS during the workshops. This is exemplified by Isabel who stated that *"they (WPS) are sometimes unsure, they forget words, and at times they are very nervous."* Ironically, many learners who praised WPS workshops emphasised that they were very pleased with the WPS level of English, as noted by Diana who stated: *"There aren't any disadvantages. Both have very good knowledge and explain all problems. But you feel more comfortable with them."* It is evident therefore that a perception of nervousness was common, yet there was an overall sense of satisfaction with the workshops.

Age, Power and Knowledge

In considering *why* these results came about, focus was placed on the reoccurring themes of age, power, and knowledge that came out of the interviews. This focus takes into account the need to recognise the role of power relations and social politics within L2

learning environments (Auerbach, 1995; Oral, 2013; Pennycook, 2000). To date there has been little investigation into this area in SALCs. Thus, by shedding light on these sociolinguistic aspects, it is possible to consider the role age plays in developing interpersonal relationships in the learning environment; the (de)centralisation of power within workshops due to how the identity of the 'teacher' is constructed; and the dialectical relationship of power and knowledge which shapes the conversation workshop. Through this analysis, the benefits of peer-learning through student-run workshops become explicit along with important considerations for the future.

Age

The importance most interviewees placed on age provides an insight into the value they give to peer-interaction. While research has looked at age in terms of how it affects language acquisition (Birdsong, 1999), little is written about its social function in learning environments. For example, Oral (2013) uses a Foucauldian analysis to discuss power relations in a primary school classroom, yet does not mention the relationship between power and age. In the present research, when follow-up questions probed the topic of age, only the negative response and the two neutral responses stated it was unimportant, with Gregorio stating: *"I haven't really noticed any difference. Both teachers teach well – both the young teacher and the older teacher."* Instead the majority recognised the importance of age with the follow comments:

> *"You feel more confident because they are from my generation. So with an adult one feels more nervous because they impose with their age more than someone your age."* (Isabel)

> *"As one who is close to them in age, I feel more comfortable…you feel that they are not going to get angry at you…If you get something wrong there is not a problem which is the same as with other teachers but they can intimidate you a bit more."* (Miguel)

> *"The disadvantage that teachers have is that generally they are a bit older, so students tend to feel more timid or scared to ask questions…The advantage with us work placement students is that we try to create a more familiar environment for them that isn't so formal…occasionally we tell a few jokes."* (David)

These responses recognise the importance that age has upon learners' levels of confidence and their abilities to work well together. The positive impacts of peer-to-peer contact relate to the positive way in which feedback is received (Everhard, 2015b). One can note the learners' increased confidence which leads to more questions and a lack of fear when feedback comes from a peer. As students with such a low English competency, learners also note how they can become intimidated leading to nervousness. The comments demonstrate the effectiveness of workshops in allowing students to feel comfortable as they facilitate a unique relationship that is intrinsic to peer-learning. This relationship is further encapsulated in the following interviewee comment:

> "*They are nearly my age. They don't look as old. You know they are your teachers, but you don't see them as your teachers because they are nearly your age. It's like asking for help from a friend. You see them as friends. They are like friends. You ask them for help, they explain to you and well, everything is relaxed. But if you ask for help from a teacher you have to be more attentive…and behave more seriously because they are a teacher. I feel freer with a student because I say what I can and they correct me but I don't feel like I'm being corrected. You feel like they are helping you.*" (Gerardo)

Gerardo refers to a level of friendship which is contrasted to relationships in which one has to 'behave more seriously.' With the proximity of age facilitating the relationship, the regular role of an English adviser is transcended. Hughes et al. (2011) describe a space in Japan which is designed for voluntary interaction in English and which helps students "engage in target-language conversation and build friendships through the medium of English, and while an advisor is on hand to provide help if it is needed, the focus of students' attention is on each other, not on the advisor" (p. 284). In this example the adviser observes and is still present, yet with WPS at the SALC there is a genuine instructional interaction taking place in which a unique relationship exists. A happy medium between friend and teacher is constructed in a familiar, relaxed environment which is important in producing a stress-free space. This notion also comes out through the following thoughtful interviewee response:

> "*I feel good with them because there is a level of trust because I make errors and they make errors…This way both of us are learning. I practice and he or she also*

needs practice. If I were put with a regular teacher, there would only be benefits for me." (Isabel)

From this response a level of inter-peer care is evident, as is an understanding of the position of the "teacher." This pragmatic outlook suggests an affective relationship which is not common with regular student/teacher interaction. The WPS David further recognises this in the statement *"I try to be students' friend,"* which can be contrasted to traditional teacher/student relationships.

Power

The comments above from learners and students related to age can be seen as indicating how power relations are constructed by students, which in turn provides insight into how conversation workshops can be organised effectively. The focus on age merely reflects students' perception of power and its conflicting discourses which are brought into play by student-run workshops. These discourses are best exemplified by WPS as they reflect upon their personal experiences.

David implies how power relations are decentralised as a result of how the teacher is referred to. He states: *"I always say to the kids don't call me "professor," call me by my name."* From personal experience within Mexico, the construction of asymmetrical power relations is prevalent from the usage of the formal tense to explicitly refer to qualified teachers as "teacher," "professor" or "doctor." While there is some resistance to the hierarchy that is created by such language, in my personal experience this is by far the exception. Thus by refusing to reproduce such power relations a more egalitarian environment can be constructed within the learning space.

Similar issues of formality and superiority which are associated with teachers are effectively discussed by another interviewee:

"With a teacher things are more formal…they don't see us like teachers …I feel that they aren't as pressured and are more relaxed…The students do see you as a teacher but they don't treat you like somebody superior and that's why they ask more questions." (Laura)

According to Laura, greater formality is intrinsic to regular teacher/student dynamics. Such a critique is not new and various studies account for this relationship (Ellis,

1994; Lin, 2008; Oral, 2013). This was shown earlier when discussing the importance of age, yet it is necessary to understand how it intersects with power. The construction of what is "formal" is essentially decided through the social construction of learning spaces which is (un)intentionally done when a regular teacher enters the space and begins to interact with learners. The process takes place through the identification of the "superior" subject within the learning space. As described by Buzzelli and Johnson (2002), there exists "institutional power vested in the teacher to tell students what to do" (p. 56). When this institutional power is actively resisted by the superior subject (teacher) it is possible to construct more inclusive spaces.

While the desirability of such a process could be strongly argued, it was surprising to note that Veronica, a WPS, seemed content with its reproduction. She firstly stated that: *"we forget things; become nervous because we don't have practice…we may fail with the student-teacher dynamic."* She explained what student-teacher dynamic meant as she said in the workshops she would *"put into practice everything I've seen in class: the teacher must have a firm voice, not demonstrate nervousness, if there is a problem; resolve it… We are taught how a teacher should control their students."* From her comments it is evident that Veronica was not so interested in trying *"to be students' friend"* like David, but rather following the traditionalist teacher hierarchy taught in her degree. To some extent this is not surprising, as documented by Lin (2008); the rigid control expected of a teacher defines many teacher/student interactions in a classroom. This raises questions over content taught and demonstrates the complexity of students' perspectives. What WPS consider as the "correct" approach with learners may not produce the familiar, relaxed environment referred to above, but rather environments that are more traditional in nature, with a top-down hierarchical dynamic.

Knowledge

As discussed by Michel Foucault (1980), there exists a dialectical relationship between power and knowledge. Through the interviews in this research, knowledge that is manifested by WPS is perceived as deficient in comparison to that of a regular adviser. This was a common self-perception as demonstrated by David who stated that "*teachers…have the ability to resolve unexpected situations, or more knowledge and better understanding of*

the topic." This is complemented by Laura who confessed that *"I have limited knowledge and a teacher with more experience can solve any problem in comparison to me."* Such experiences were also noted by learners in relation to WPS like: *"They don't know how to respond to all potential problems'* (Miguel) or: *"They are sometimes unsure, they forget words, and at times they are very nervous."* (Isabel)

It is evident from these comments that some of the learners perceive themselves to be lacking in knowledge, which is to be expected. This lack of knowledge perhaps produces the aforementioned nervousness experienced by WPS. However, not all learners responded this way, as three interviewees responded that WPS were (practically) the same as regular advisers in terms of knowledge. This can perhaps de attributed to the process in peer-learning described by Hargreaves (2010) in which peers "construct or co-construct knowledge" (p. 107). Through the co-construction of knowledge, learners are more amenable to teacher errors as they are more involved in the learning process. Also, the importance of age and its perceived intricate relationship with knowledge leaves open the possibility of a *perceived* lack of knowledge because of WPS young appearance. Overall, while knowledge is seen to be lacking, undoubtedly social constructions of the teacher and student play an important role in this process. Additional research is required to explore this area further.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Essentially, from the relationship between age, power and knowledge, it certainly appears that student-run workshops have an overwhelmingly positive impact. The advantage of being a similar age is a key aspect in peer-learning which has clear benefits. This is intrinsically-linked with the decentralisation of power which WPS manifest in their interactions with learners. The perceived lack of knowledge is not necessarily a negative point, as it can be argued that it is exactly for this reason that students feel more comfortable. The breaking down of socially-constructed power/knowledge hierarchies is crucial in this process. As discussed earlier by the learner Isabel, the fact that both WPS and learners make errors actually provides an element of commonality in their experiences which strengthens their mutual relationship.

This study demonstrates the pedagogical benefits in breaking down power hierarchies. It is implicit from most WPS and learner experiences that maintaining hierarchical relations does not produce a more effective learning environment. We can see that the inclusion of WPS is a great example of how such relations of power can be decentralised. Breaking down these hierarchies has created a more comfortable environment in which peer-learning allows students to freely express themselves without feeling intimidated or obligated.

I would strongly recommend the expansion of the role of WPS in SALCs whether it be in the form of incorporating WPS and more advanced students into SALCs as described by Acuña González et al. (2015); or exploring skill areas than speaking, as demonstrated by Everhard (2015a). However, with greater WPS involvement there would need to be a greater level of care and support from English advisers. What is highly evident throughout this study is the lack of understanding of the nuanced differences between an English adviser in a SALC and a classroom-based English teacher. This suggests a current lack of understanding from the WPS who are the responsibility of the centre.

Beyond this research project, it would be useful to further explore peer support in SALCs. Sociolinguistic issues such as the social construction of the English teacher/adviser's identity and the impact of age on SALC environments would also be pertinent areas of study. In general, more research in the area would contribute to processes of democratisation within SALCs and leave the door open for greater peer-learning opportunities.

Notes on the Contributor

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Appendix A
Interview Questions

Learner Interview Questions
1. How do you feel in conversation workshops?
2. How have you felt with the work placement students?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of working with work placement students in comparison to working with regular advisers?
4. Is there anything else you would like to add about the teachers, work placement students, or conversation workshops?

Work placement student Questions
1. How do you feel as a teacher in conversation workshops?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of working with work placement students in comparison to working with regular advisers?
3. What do you feel this experience has given you?
4. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience or conversation workshops?

Appendix B
Names and Gender of WPS and Learners Interviewed

Work Placement Students	Gender
Juan	male
David	male
Laura	female
Veronica	female
Roberto	male

Learners	Gender
Andrea	female
Diana	female
Gerardo	male
Isabel	female
Gregorio	male
Jacobo	male
Miguel	male
Tania	female

Balancing Competing Needs among Stakeholders: Lessons from the Self-access Language Learning Centre (SALL) of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (Shenzhen)

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Abstract

The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Shenzhen), referred to as 'University' or 'CUHK(SZ)' hereafter, is a newly established private university located in the Longgong District of Shenzhen, which is a special economic zone in the southern part of China. Its first batch of about 300 undergraduate freshmen, all majoring in Business Administration, commenced studies in September 2014. The Self-access Language Learning Centre ('SALL' or 'the Centre' hereafter), as a unit under the School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS[1]), was put into trial operation from 6th March to 4th June 2015 to explore students' needs and preferences in self-access English language learning. The purpose of this progress summary is to delineate and analyze the trial operation. It is divided into two major sections. The first section is a brief description of the 3-month trial operation and evaluation whereas the second section details recommendations for the future development of the SALL and other self-access centres also needing to address conflicting needs among stakeholders.

Keywords: self-access centre; Chinese university; needs assessment; individual consultations; workshops

Background

The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Shenzhen), referred to as 'University' or 'CUHK(SZ)' hereafter, is a newly established private university located in the Longgong District of Shenzhen, which is a special economic zone in the southern part of China. Its first batch of about 300 undergraduate freshmen, all majoring in Business Administration, commenced studies in September 2014. The Self-access Language Learning Centre ('SALL' or 'the Centre' hereafter), as a unit under the School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS), was put into trial operation from 6th March to 4th June 2015 to explore

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[1] The acronym of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences was officially changed from SHSS to HSS on October 30, 2015

students' needs and preferences in self-access English language learning. The trial operation was conducted by an Acting Director who concurrently served as the lecturer. By that time, she had had ten years of experience in teaching and researching in tertiary education and had been involved in the maintenance of two university self-access centres (SAC) in Hong Kong.

The purpose of this progress paper is to delineate and analyze the trial operation, focusing on insights gained from balancing the University's and learners' competing needs. It is divided into two major sections. The first section is a brief description of the 3-month trial operation and evaluation whereas the second section details recommendations for the future development of the SALL and other SACs.

Trial Operation of the SALL

The SALL adopted a two-pronged approach, responding actively to students' genuine concerns while incorporating requests from lecturers on the formal English curriculum and the University management. When the Acting Director was first invited to establish a SAC, she met with the Dean of the SHSS, who delivered the University's expectations for the centre and summarized her and the English lecturers' observations of students' weaknesses in English, which comprised almost all academic English skills, ranging from listening to lectures to academic reading, writing and presentation skills. Resolute on making the SALL truly student-focused and an attractive learning space while respecting the University's expectations, the Acting Director gauged student needs through multiple means including random interviews with participants after almost every SALL activity and with students in the canteen during lunchtime, student evaluations, and an online questionnaire. This section describes the Centre's initial objectives, rationale and reception of its activities.

Activities: Objectives, types, rationale and enrollment

Based on initial, informal interviews with students who clearly believed their greatest weakness and need was to have continually enhanced competence to converse with people from different cultures using communicative English, instead of only focusing on academic English as indicated by the SHSS, the Acting Director proposed a primary

mission which was "to develop students' intercultural and communicative competence for a globalized environment" (as seen on the SALL's webpage) with an aim for long-term skill development. To this end, the SALL upheld two principles when designing activities:

1. The activities should encourage students to set specific and achievable goals, and then develop a plan in which they follow, monitor, evaluate and fine-tune in a cyclical process;

2. The activities should be interactive and communicative in nature, but at the same time as individualised as possible.

The first principle is aimed at helping CUHK(SZ) students to hone lifelong-oriented, "proactive" autonomous learning skills, where "learners are able to take charge of their own learning, determine their objectives, select methods and techniques and evaluate what has been acquired" (Littlewood, 1999, p. 75). Given the students' wish to develop oral English competence especially for daily communication, the activities would be designed in such a way that there was plenty of time for both teacher-student and student-student interaction. The approach was indirect in that the activities were comparatively open-ended, an apporach that enables students to experiment and manage conversations through negotiation of meaning (Ellis, 2003; Morrison, 2008). This stood in stark contrast with the highly academic-oriented and structured learning style that students were used to. The two principles were ostensibly an effort to prioritize students' self-perceived needs over University's academic-driven emphasis. The decision was made based on the data collected in the Acting Director's regular informal interviews with students after almost every SALL activity and the random ones conducted in canteens to boost the generalizability of data by taking into account views of students who appeared less keen on SALL. It was consistently found that:

1. Many students suggested there was a lack of an English speaking atmosphere outside of lecture halls. According to some students, despite their effort to speak in English in their daily life, the English speaking atmosphere was so weak that their motivation and practice could hardly be sustained. Even though there were English clubs, a number of them had been inactive or even dissolved after the first semester, which limited students' exposure to the language.

2.   Students showed deep concerns about their ability to interact in English, with many showing doubts whether their pronunciation was accurate. They mentioned that while pronunciation was assessed in presentations and seminars in their English classes, they did not know which particular sounds or areas they should focus on in their independent learning.

3.   Many students reported having to translate Chinese into English rather than conceiving ideas directly in English. They were anxious to know how to activate their vocabulary or recall words that could aptly deliver their thoughts.

In connection with the above principles and concerns, the Centre devised two types of activities, namely workshops and individual consultations, as detailed in Table 1. The former type is aimed at generating interaction, while the latter catering to individualised needs, an equally important characteristic of self-access learning (Morrison, 2008).

Table 1. General Details of Workshops and Individual Consultations

	Workshop	**Individual Consultation**
Time of each session	1 hour in March, but extended to 1.5 hours in April upon students' requests	30 minutes
Maximum number of students allowed	6 in early March, but raised to 8 in mid-March upon students' requests	1
Topics	• Common mistakes in pronunciation • Filling in the gap between listening and speaking • Discussion on money • Idioms of the body • Useful everyday expressions • Common misunderstandings across Chinese and Western cultures • Speech analysis	Mutually agreed upon by the lecturer and the student

The activities the SALL offered almost exclusively focused on listening and speaking, specifically pronunciation and social English, for two reasons. First, it was to materialize the University's intention to nurture an English-speaking environment to students. Second, it was to address the English lecturers' observation that the students are strong at memorizing passive vocabulary but weak at speaking, especially in informal settings. This impression of the students was later confirmed by the Acting Director's observations both in and out of the SALL activities. Apart from self-enrollment, eleven students whose pronunciation was considered to be substandard by their respective English lecturers in the formal curriculum were referred to the SALL for extra tuition, in sessions known as "referral lessons". The design and delivery of these lessons did not strictly follow the second design principle but instead assumed a more direct approach aimed at raising students' ability in particular aspects of oral English competence through isolated, focused practices that Hughes (2002) states are very useful. However, independent learning skills to self-identify and improve on pronunciation mistakes were weaved into the referral lessons; therefore, the referral lessons could be taken as an attempt to incorporate the views of the two most important stakeholders, i.e., the University and the students.

Table 2, below, shows the enrollment statistics of the trial period. The enrollment rates in different activities were more than satisfactory, with one in ten students attending at least one individual consultation or workshop within only three months. It is worth-noting, however, that only one out of the eleven referred students responded and attended all of the ten referral lessons despite their lecturers' strong and repeated recommendations.

Table 2. Enrollment Statistics in the Trial Operation

	Number	Percentage of the Whole Student Population (Total: 303)
Participants in all activities	106	35.0%
Participants in workshops	63	20.8%
Participants in individual consultations	43	14.2%
Students having attended at least one workshop	40	13.2%

Students having attended at least one individual consultation	34	11.2%
Students having attended referral lessons	1	9.1% (total: 11)

Reception of SALL's activities among students

The SALL's activities were all well-received as concluded from three sources, namely participant feedback forms (n=97), informal interviews with students, and a survey about the future development of the SALL (n=39). As seen in Table 3 below, all participants felt satisfied with the SALL's activities.

Table 3. Participants' Responses from the Feedback Form to the Statement: "Overall, I am satisfied with the workshop (or individual consultation)"

	1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5	6 Strongly Agree	Mean
Workshops (total number of feedback forms: 62)	0%	0%	0%	1.6%	19.4%	**79%**	5.77
Individual consultations (total number of feedback forms: 35)	0%	0%	0%	0%	14.3%	**85.7%**	5.86
Referral class (total number of feedback forms: 1)	0%	0%	0%	**100%**	0%	0%	4.0

As shown in Table 4, many students wished to have more workshops, to have time to practice in each workshop, and to have more resources for self-study. Variety appears to be another major concern in terms of both content and difficulty level. Similar to the findings for the workshops, some students expressed wishes for more and longer individual consultations. It was also suggested that the Centre gauge students' progress over time.

Table 4. Types and Frequencies of Suggestions for Improvement from the Feedback Form

	Comments by Category	**Frequency of Comments**
Workshops	Increasing the frequency of workshops	13
	Increasing the time of each workshop	8
	Providing more resources for further independent learning	5
	Providing a greater variety of workshops	4
	Offering workshops at different levels	4
Individual Consultations	Increasing the frequency of consultations	4
	Increasing the time of each consultation	3
	Building a study plan with follow up later	2

Suggestions for Development

Overall, the enrollment and student feedback both revealed that many students were keen to have more structured, sustainable and informal English exposure outside the formal curriculum. Considering students' self-perceived needs, as well as the fact that students mostly had been passive learners in high school because of public examinations, the SALL needs to position itself to be a supporting but independent unit that rigorously promotes active use of English primarily and initially through activities geared towards improving students' speaking and listening. While the formal aspects of English cannot be ignored considering the University's educational philosophy and its mission to develop bilingual competency in students, room needs to be created to allow for growth of learner autonomy in terms of both the ideology and self-regulation strategies.

To promote students' ownership of the Centre, their use of English, and learner autonomy (as in Heigham, 2011, Malcolm, 2011, and Navarro, 2014), apart from giving workshops and consultations, the Centre could recruit a volunteer team comprising students who are keen to help out with daily administration and maintenance of the SALL's

resources. The benefit is mutual; students will have more exposure to English as they will be required to interact in English at the SALL while providing the SALL with a greater human resource. Another suggestion is to invite guest speakers to talk on an array of topics about English learning, world Englishes and cultures, as an answer to diversifying the types of workshops available.

Conclusion

This progress report records the preliminary conceptions of a self-access language learning centre for CUHK(SZ). The highly positive student responses confirm that the SALL is steered in the right direction. Questions remain to be answered, however, as to how students' self-perceived needs should be balanced with the University's and society's expectations of university students' language abilities. After all, while the informal curriculum that the SALL has implemented is aimed at perpetuating students' motivation and abilities in English learning, it has to consider the public's expectation of the first international university in Shenzhen. Should the SALL, given its less structured and informal nature, take a peripheral role in the English curriculum or a more integral, if not central one? Should the SALL be promoted as a centre that provides supplementary classes to weak students referred by their English classes, or should it adhere strictly to learner autonomy, serving only those who are motivated enough to make the extra effort to enroll in SALL activities? These questions are not only relevant to the SALL of the CUHK(SZ) or any newly founded SACs, but also to, perhaps even more complexly so, well-established ones.

The data of this pilot study corroborate Gardner and Miller's (2011) findings that one of the important roles of an SAC manager is to negotiate and balance the conflicting concerns of different stakeholders during the establishment and maintenance of the centre. Two possible solutions can be concluded from this piloting study. First, it is possible to address various parties' concerns in a staged manner; for example, the Acting Director chose to be student-focused, designing activities based mostly on students' preferences in an attempt to boost registration and build the SALL's reputation on campus. She was highly aware, meanwhile, that the next stage would see the introduction of more academic-driven workshops that would comply more with the academic curriculum of the University.

Another possible approach would require the SALL manager's passion and expertise to weave independent learning components into activities which might otherwise be rather didactic, such as phonetic drills, for example. In this regard, the Acting Director consciously built in a self-directed learning plan for the referral class in the hope to enhance the one enrolled student's self-monitoring ability.

It was very fortunate that the management of CUHK(SZ) was highly accommodating and trusting of the Acting Director, giving her ample room to investigate the best way to orchestrate different stakeholders' needs and to gauge learners' needs, both of which are determiners of success of an SAC (Gardner & Miller, 2011; Morrison, 2008). The task is not easy, however, on the part of the centre manager, who must answer needs of stakeholders who differ in interests, cultures, ages, academic backgrounds, which gives rise to various perceptions of the functions of an SAC. To enhance recognition of SACs among not only students but also schools and society at large, research is needed to ascertain effective ways to assimilate the needs of stakeholders. More also needs to be known about the degrees and nature of influence of a university's management style on an SAC.

Notes on the contributors

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Book review: Assessment and Autonomy in Language Learning Edited by Carol J. Everhard and Linda Murphy

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At first glance the two key words, *assessment* and *autonomy* in the title seemed to contradict each other. Isn't assessment typically associated with formal learning systems and autonomy with out-of-class learning? Therefore it wasn't a surprise to see that Benson, in his foreword, says as much when he refers to assessment as "the elephant in the room" (p. viii) in discussions about learner autonomy. The six chapters in this edited book bring the elephant out into the open. The contributors, all of them academics as well as researchers, are or have been based in Australia, Bahrain, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Japan and the UAE. Most chapters start with the writers' interpretations of the word 'autonomy' in particular, and as befits the term's meaning, these ideas are varied. The book ends with a final list which combines references from all of the chapters, which makes sense, given that there was some overlap in sources from chapter to chapter.

In their Introduction, the two editors, Everhard and Murphy, suggest reasons why assessment and autonomy are not usually considered together before justifying the connection. As one example of this link they refer to self-assessment checklists in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The link continues in Everhard's literature review in the first chapter named "The assessment-autonomy relationship". A helpful table summarized the preferred terminology of autonomy experts" (p. 13) starting thirty years ago with the terms "teacher directed" and "student directed" and continuing to a 2003 reference which refers to "total dependence" versus "autonomy". Another table bringing together references that link autonomy with assessment shows that an interest in that connection actually dates back even earlier to the late seventies.

In Chapter 2 Murase reports from a Tokyo university on her doctoral study which takes a slightly different line from some of the chapters in that she is assessing autonomy amongst learners. She mentions first some problems, loosely grouped as technical and conceptual, that can arise in developing a measurement instrument. In looking for solutions to these problems she

describes four dimensions of autonomy: technical, psychological, political-philosophical and socio-cultural. The model was tried out on an impressive 1517 students and recommends this model, or "quantitative measurement instrument" (p. 54), as a tool which could be used for such assessment. Even readers who stop short of adopting the complete model could be interested in her 113 item checklist with which students can self-report.

A different model is offered in Chapter 3 by Tassinari from a university in Berlin, where the interest was in assessing "for autonomy" (p. 64). Like the previous writer, she starts by referring to the challenges involved in assessing the autonomy of language learners, and wondering whether language acquisition "can or should be assessed, tested and/or certificated at institutional level" (p. 68). Her chapter, too, is based on PhD studies. In presenting her model, she believes that self-assessment of their autonomy is useful for students' reflection "and even to regulate the learning process itself" (p. 88).

In Chapter 4 Cooker reports from the University of Nottingham on Assessment as Learner Autonomy which she sees as referring to "the development of the individual as much as it is about the development of the language of the learner" (p. 89). Her research process is labelled Q methodology, namely principles and techniques that lead the researcher to discover "opinions, perceptions and beliefs" (pp. 94-95). Cooker chooses easily-understood labels to categorise learners' responses in self-reports from the U.K. and Hong Kong in seven ways. Those categories include a "love of language learning", "oozing confidence" and "competitively driven" (pp. 97-98). Cooker's resulting model of autonomy is therefore perhaps easier for the reader to grasp than Murase's detailed but uncategorised list. Another helpful feature of the chapter is an Appendix including a page for each of six participants where they summarise their learning strategies and record suggestions from their friends on how to improve their learning.

Chapter 5 by Everhard is more specific, focusing only on oral skills but considering both peer- and self-assessment in a Greek university. A table comparing research studies from 1996 to 2010 sets the scene for this fresh investigation. Following the literature review, the author opens with an interesting reflection on collecting data from students in compulsory and in non-compulsory courses. As readers who are teachers would agree, being made to attend a class need not lead to engagement of the mind. Data is presented both statistically and anecdotally, the latter including (not surprisingly) contradictory comments made by students in a questionnaire after the study. While some referred to the possibility of cheating, others mentioned the need for

teachers to trust students. There were also comments about the impossibility of being objective in self- and peer-assessment.

One distinctive feature of Murphy's Chapter 6 from the U.K.'s Open University is that its context is language learning at a distance under a "closely controlled, mass-assessment system" (p. 144). The study assesses students' use of autonomy. Volunteers were sent materials which included reflection and self-assessment sheets amongst other resources. One happy outcome was students' reports that the time taken to complete these sheets was rewarded by the fact that their actual learning became easier.

In the eight-page Epilogue, Cotterall and Malcolm revisit the six chapters. Their comments are grouped first under two questions. "Can autonomy be assessed?" and "Why do it?" Suggestions follow to encourage readers to apply the reported findings. They conclude with their belief that what really matters in doing studies of this kind is "who is seeking to measure autonomy and how they intend to use the results" (p.173).

One impression of the book is its cohesion. Presumably the editors put out a call for contributions or perhaps they shoulder-tapped likely writers. Whichever the process was, the book has a strong sense of unity between chapters along with its diversity of settings. There is a difference between a cohesive, edited volume such as this and the special edition of a journal where all the articles may be on the same topic and yet the reader needs to make the connection between them.

In conclusion, in our field, as in others, a research topic is never finished. The reports published here open the door to future investigators to replicate or be inspired by the detailed lists of qualities presented.

Publication Information

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Report on the JASAL 10th Anniversary Conference, 2015

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Abstract

The JASAL (Japanese Association of Self-Access Learning) 10th Anniversary Conference was held on December 12th, 2015 at Kanda Institute of Foreign Languages (KIFL) in Tokyo. JASAL was established in 2005 by Garold Murray and Lucy Cooker to promote self-access learning in Japan. 2015 marked the first year that the event was held as a stand-alone conference; from 2006-2014 the JASAL Forum took place at the JALT (Japanese Association for Language Teaching) annual national conferences. More than 50 participants attended the 2015 JASAL conference, which began with a guided tour of KIFL's self-access facilities. The conference featured 12 presentations on a variety of topics related to self-access learning. In this conference summary, the presentations are grouped into four sections: integrating self-access and curriculum; learning spaces; activities and events; and focus on individuals. At the end of the article, the author considers future directions for the JASAL Conference.

Keywords: self-access, learner autonomy, curriculum, learning spaces, advising

JASAL (Japanese Association of Self-Access Learning) marked its 10th Anniversary with a first ever stand-alone conference. This conference stood out from past JASAL forums in that it did not coincide with the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) national conference, lasted an entire day, and had more presentations than previous events. Held at Kanda Institute of Foreign Languages (KIFL) in Tokyo, the conference began with a guided tour of VISTA (Village of Innovative Study and Training Access), KIFL's self-access center (SAC). After some discussion time, the morning concluded with two 20-minute presentations. The afternoon started with four fast-paced, 10-minute *pecha-kucha* presentations, in which the presenters' slides change at a rather quick, predetermined rate. To conclude the conference, six 20-minute presentations were given. Although not officially part of the conference, some participants stayed at KIFL for an annual JASAL report which was delivered by its President Katherine Thornton, Vice President Dirk MacKenzie, and Membership Chair Hisako Yamashita.

As this conference was about self-access and autonomous learning, all of the presentations, in various ways, were concerned with helping learners to take control of their own learning (Benson, 2011). However, the presenters approached self-access learning from a variety of perspectives. The first part of this summary includes presentations about integrating self-

access into an institution's curriculum. As SACs exist within larger learning institutions, it is important to consider how they provide connections with classroom learning (Cotterall & Reinders, 2001; Reinders, 2012). In the second section I report on presenters who focused on learning spaces, including the establishment of new SACs. The examples presented would fall under Gardner and Miller's (1999) distinction of *controlled* learning environments, in that materials are provided in an organized manner. The theme of the third group of presentations is activities and events. As the social aspect of learner autonomy has become increasingly emphasized (Murray, 2014), these presentations dealt with ways of bringing students together. Finally, the last section focuses on individuals. These presentations zoom in to describe how certain learners have become more autonomous.

Integrating Self-Access and Curriculum

Language learning foundations

Herman Bartelen of Kanda Institute of Foreign Languages in Tokyo presented about *Language Learning Foundations* (LLF), a course on self-directed learning for first-year students. LLF focuses on principles of self-directed learning, including goal setting, time-management, reflection, motivation and learning strategies. Course materials for LLF included print and digital materials. All students and teachers received iPads for the course and these included apps such as *Quizlet*, dictionaries and graded readers. The written and digital materials also included pages to help students to self-direct their learning. One page entitled the PAR cycle explains the process of Plan, Act and Reflect. Related to reflection, another page shows how learners utilize the Wheel of Language Learning (Kato & Sugawara, 2008, as cited in in Yamashita & Kato, 2012) to evaluate their past English learning experiences. Other pages in the materials give students help with scheduling their learning and with employing specific learning strategies related to language skills.

Bartelen concluded by discussing some of the positive and challenging features of the LLF course. The main advantage was that it exposed learners to a range of effective practices related to self-directed learning. In addition, the course ensured that all students were introduced to KIFL's self-access materials and facilities. Regarding challenges, for some teachers and students there was still some resistance toward LLF, and concepts about learning how to learn remain abstract to some. Another issue was that it was difficult to find good activities based on

learning how to learn. Despite these challenges, Bartelen believes that LLF provides additional support to learners who engage in learning outside of the classroom.

Integrating self-access into two courses via a stamp rally and extensive reading program

Dirk MacKenzie and Brian Nuspliger of Konan Women's University in Kobe reported how self-access learning components were integrated into the curriculum of first and second year English courses in the department of English Language and Culture. Each semester, 20% of students' grades in the Production and Fluency course come from completing activities connected with the university's SAC, e-space. For two semesters, students did extensive reading and completed quizzes. During the other two semesters, students had to get stamps for completing various self-access activities, such as attending advising sessions, visiting the English cafe, and participating in e-space activities and events.

MacKenzie and Nuspliger presented data on students' attitudes and their usage of e-space and its resources. In general, students had a positive attitude toward the SAC, with most agreeing that the stamp system was helpful for learning about e-space, that advising was helpful, and that going to the English Cafe was good for their English. While students indicated that that extensive reading was good for their English, the majority expressed that they would not continue doing it in the future. The presenters also reported that less than a third of available advising sessions were booked by students. On the plus side, student numbers at the English Cafe have generally increased over the past five years.

Establishing a self-access center and supported, self-directed language program

Kirby Record, Makiko Hori, and Ryosuke Saito of Yamanashi Gakuin University discussed the connections between the Language Acquisition Center (LAC) and the International College of Liberal Arts (ICLA), both of which were launched in 2015. While the LAC, a self-access center, provides autonomous learning support for drop-in users, students in the ICLA are also required to use it as part of their required coursework. For these students, 10 periods of traditional classroom learning is supplemented with four periods in the LAC. The work ICLA students do in the LAC is coordinated with other English courses, and it also includes advising sessions.

Record, Hori and Saito concluded by reporting on the positive effects of LAC use for ICLA students. One benefit is that students are better able to manage their own learning, including time management and decisions about which skills to focus on. Students also demonstrated greater awareness of learning strategies and selecting materials. Finally, as the LAC holds events such as workshops and lectures, the center is becoming more of a community in bringing teachers and diverse groups of learners together in one common space.

Adapting speaking and writing sessions to suit the context of a newly established Self Access Centre

Chris Fitzgerald and Rachelle Meilleur presented about their work in Kyoto University of Foreign Studies' SAC. The SAC, which is known as NINJA (Navigating an Independent Non-stop Journey to Autonomy), was opened in 2014. In addition to providing opportunities for language exchange with foreign students, NINJA provides an advising service and support for improving writing and speaking skills. The presenters mentioned a number of challenges related to the speaking and writing sessions, including scheduling issues and providing appealing topics for students in the speaking sessions.

NINJA has introduced a trial system for two classes which introduces new students to the idea of independent learning. After receiving an orientation to NINJA, students are asked to write a language learning history, create a student profile and schedule, and make a learning plan. Once they begin putting their plan into practice, students reflect on their work and receive feedback from a NINJA teacher. While some students have found this process of self-directed learning to be time-consuming or boring, most of them found it useful, with some commenting that they study more when they enjoy what they are doing.

Learning Spaces

English World: an English space for elementary school students

Clair Taylor of Gifu Shotoku Gakuen University discussed an English language space that was set up in an elementary school for students to speak English outside of their classrooms. Having experienced success in implementing a speaking lounge at a university, Taylor wished to provide a speaking space for younger students. Taylor discussed a number of its characteristics which both English spaces shared. These include affording students the opportunity to use

English freely, having a sense of community, promoting autonomy and incidental learning, and having a human-centered design with support staff. After much planning and discussions with stakeholders, *English World* was launched, with an accompanying website and social media such as Facebook and LINE sites.

The English World space is outdoors and it provides students with ample room to play and work in groups. Despite being a rather large area, the school provided a single picnic table as the English Space furniture, which makes it challenging to organize certain activities and games. As English World is intended to be an English only zone, one of its aims is to introduce language required to carry out different activities, games and songs. The English only rule and other policies, such as the avoidance of swearing, are made known to the students. At the moment, Taylor is engaged in training volunteers and carrying out action research on English World.

The seven year itch? Reflections on establishing and maintaining a self-access program

Keiko Omura reported on the Language Lounge (LL) at Toyo Gakuen University in Tokyo which was set up about seven ago. Omura explained that the LL is a space where students can relax and learn languages, and receive support in becoming more active and independent learners. Teachers work as facilitators in the LL and various cultural events are held to motivate the students.

According to LL records, which are based on a stamp card system, usage of the LL is down from 2011. This has triggered the LL to investigate why students come to the lounge and what skills they wish to work on there. The top three reasons students come to the LL are to talk to teachers and interns, to get to know other students, and to relax with friends. The overwhelming majority of students say that what they most want is to practice speaking in the LL. Omura proposed a number of ways to increase the usage of the LL. These include clarifying the purpose of the lounge, teaching methods of self-study, organizing a peer support system, and holding workshops on life skills. The LL hopes to develop and attract more independent learners.

The Autonomous Language Rooms in Akita University

Yo Hamada discussed the Autonomous Language Rooms (ALL Rooms) at Akita University. The ALL Rooms has been open for five years and is run by 10 students and three teachers. A self-access center, the ALL Rooms contains materials which help students with the

four macro skills, grammar, vocabulary and TOEIC and TOEFL preparation. The ALL Rooms also provides advising services for students to help them with independent learning, including selecting appropriate materials.

A number of activities and events are offered by the ALL Rooms. These include a conversation circle, a potluck lunch, and a Halloween party. Also, there is a multi-day English camp which is held in February. In 2015, students from ALL Rooms went to high schools to make connections between the university and young students.

Conceptualizing LLC: Identifying needs and problems

Yaoko Matsuoka presented about the Language Learning Center (LLC) at the Yokohama office of Kokugakuin University. The LLC's aims include promoting learner autonomy, providing a suitable environment for communication and offering non-credited courses. Among the activities and services at the LLC are advising, conversation practice and e-learning. Matsuoka identified some problems affecting self-directed learning, such as students' limited amount of time and the inconvenient location of the center itself. She also said that some students may lack intrinsic motivation to study or have little awareness about how to learn on their own. Matsuoka believes that advisors can offer support to learners by motivating them and making them more aware of the language learning process.

Activities and Events

Pathways to cultural awareness: Linking Self Access and the Curriculum

Kayoko Horai of Sojo University in Kumamoto explained how activities are used to make connections between students' required course work and self-access learning. Although Sojo University has a SAC, some felt the students had few opportunities to gain cultural knowledge. To address this need, a project was launched to encourage students and teachers to interact with one another to increase cultural understanding. The project had students engage in various activities, including gathering information from foreign teachers, making posters, and planning events. In addition, students created activities for the classroom. Horai reported that these activities have resulted in better connections between students, teachers, and advisors, as well as between the curriculum and the self-access center.

Magical Workshop for better self-study: are there any "magical" ways for self-study?

The Self Instruction (SI) room was opened as a SAC in 1988 at Chubu University, in Aichi prefecture. The presenters, Seiko Oguri and Tetsuo Kato, explained that, whereas the SI room has a wide variety of language materials, learners require support so that they understand how to study more effectively on their own. In response to this need, the Magical Workshops were begun in 2011. The title word 'magical' apparently reflects that these workshops can transform participants into effective, self-directive learners. Over the past four and a half years, 42 workshops have been conducted with 345 learners participating.

Oguri and Kato emphasized that the Magical Workshops are different from regular classes. Unlike classroom instruction, there are no grades or traditional teaching, and participants can expect more activities, talking, encouragement and laughter. A range of workshops have been offered, but the most frequently offered ones are related to vocabulary, reading, grammar and oral skills. According to the students who have joined the workshops, the Magical Workshops make them want to study more, improve self-study methods and help them to better use the materials in the SI room. Oguri and Kato said that these workshops encourage and support learners, and provide them with a variety of ways to navigate the SI learning materials. In this way, the Magical Workshops help the learners to continue learning on their own.

Focus on Individuals
Advising in language learning: What can conversation analysis tell us?

Mathew Porter of Fukuoka Jo Gakuin Nursing College and Yukari Rutson-Griffiths of Hiroshima Bunkyo Women's University presented their study of an advising session between an experienced advisor, Ruston-Griffiths, and a learner. The learner was a non-English major at a university who would need to use English in the future as an elementary school teacher. The 70-minute session was video-recorded, transcribed and analyzed. Porter and Rutson-Griffiths referred to Kelly's (1996) micro and macro skills for advising, and in this analysis, they focused on the three micro skills of interpreting, reflecting feelings, and empathizing. Their study examined the discourse moves of the learner and the advisor through use of conversation analysis (CA).

Porter and Rutson-Griffiths' analysis showed how the experienced advisor moved the dialog toward the goal. This was done through cyclical maneuvers in which the advisor requested information about the learner, sought confirmation of understanding and then offered

advice. Porter and Rutson-Griffiths emphasized the importance of maintaining a shared understanding, which involves interpretation and repair. They believe that CA is a useful tool for showing how advisors can move advising sessions toward the mutually shared goal of advice.

One learner, many stories: before and after self-access language learning

Umida Ashurova of Nanzan University in Nagoya told the story of a remarkable learner, Risa Hayashi, whom she got to know at Sugiyama Women's University over a period of four years. Risa very much epitomized the autonomous learner from the time she was a junior high school student through to the present, three years after having graduated from university. Even before she entered university, Risa had a strong desire to learn English and she took control of her own learning. For example, she communicated with her assistant language teacher (ALT), joined an English club, and listened to English radio programs.

At university, Risa took advantage of the available resources, but she also fought to improve things in ways which better reflected the perspective of the students. For instance, she successfully negotiated changes to regular English quizzes which she thought were poorly designed. Risa also challenged the services offered by the SAC, arguing that they needed to be "of the students, by the students, for the students." Risa and other students began to make changes in the SAC: peer advisors started new projects, volunteers organized lunch time events, and they also maintained the program website. Perhaps most impressive was that Risa led a group of students to hold a conference on self-access learning. Risa is now working but she continues to carry out self-directed learning.

Conclusion

The JASAL 10th Anniversary Conference provided many opportunities for participants to share ideas. While the presentations represented more structured ways of exchanging ideas, the SAC tour and break times allowed for more casual discussions related to self-access. Considering that this was the first time that JASAL held a full day conference, the JASAL committee must be congratulated on a fantastic job of organizing the event.

Since its inception in 2005, JASAL has continued to grow as an organization and there is no doubt that it has contributed toward the increased awareness and development of self-access learning in Japan. Looking ahead, JASAL may consider how future conferences and events can

further influence and promote self-access learning in Japan. JASAL could encourage more school administrators to participate and welcome individuals to share ideas in Japanese.

I am sure that JASAL will continue to inspire those who participate, regardless of their context or number of years working in self-access. Let's hope that JASAL's next 10 years can be as successful as its first 10! Those interested in learning more about JASAL can do so at their website: https://jasalorg.wordpress.com/

Notes on the contributor

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Learning Space-Based Initiatives for Developing Learner Autonomy: Design and Implementation

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Recently, traditionally resource-heavy self-access centres have increasingly been reinvented as social learning spaces (Allhouse, 2014; Murray & Fujishima, 2013), usually with a greater emphasis on peer interaction and communication in the target language.

By elevating the communication aspect of a language learning space, however, there is a danger that the important task of developing metacognitive skills gets sidelined in favour of simply developing language proficiency through peer or teacher-student interaction. Language learning spaces that set themselves up as conversation lounges are missing a big opportunity to do so much more than just develop language proficiency in users. Learner autonomy should be a central mission of any language learning space. Indeed, a language learning space can be an ideal milieu for supporting learners to become autonomous. Unlike in the classroom, users of self-access and other non-classroom learning spaces already have a sense of being in control of their learning choices, even if they are not entirely sure how to exercise that control. It is therefore vital that support is offered to guide and support learners, and this support can take many formats. The best forms of support do not simply attempt to help learners make single learning decisions such as which materials to choose or service to use, but to support their long-term development as autonomous language learners.

The papers in this instalment of the Language Learning Spaces column each describe the process of designing and implementing an initiative to develop users' self-directed learning skills as part of the services offered within the learning space. One is a blended format, consisting of online course offered to learners with support from learning advisors, while two describe face-to-face advisory services set up to address specific populations of students at the institution.

Kerstin Dofs and Moira Hobbs, long-term collaborators based on different islands of New Zealand, report on their efforts to develop a Moodle course, run through their respective self-access centres, that can be accessed by language learners enrolled at their institutions. As more and more institutions are considering ways to make content available to learners online, their project offers important insights into

this process. They describe the challenges involved in offering such voluntary online courses, particularly in terms of student engagement and peer interaction, and highlight concerns about appropriate technology and the need to ensure equity of access.

Tarik Uzun, Hatice Karaaslan and Mümin Şen from Yıldırım Beyazıt University School of Foreign Languages, in Ankara, Turkey describe their own experiences of establishing a Learning Advisory Program (LAP) to address the complex needs of "repeat students": those who, after a year of study, fail to meet the English language requirement to enter undergraduate degree courses. Through administering strategy questionnaires, they identified that students had both affective and cognitive needs in relation to their language learning, and developed an approach that involved both face-to-face advising sessions and bespoke materials such as pamphlets for strategy instruction and learning plans. While the LAP is still in its initial phases, the authors' reflections reveal the need for dedicated advisor training and student record systems to keep track of individual students.

Andrew Tweed describes a similar initiative implemented at a private language school in Cambodia. In this case the target of the intervention is a group of students preparing for overseas study, who have limited time to achieve certain scores on English proficiency tests. He charts the transformation of Cambodian teachers from having a largely administrative role in the self-access centre to becoming language learning advisors, and the development of learning materials such as learning plans to support advising sessions. Using data from a survey designed to discover advisors' initial experiences of the advising services, he highlights the generally positive attitude of these new advisors but also shows evidence of the oft-cited difficult transition from teacher to advisor (Kelly, 1996; Morrison & Navarro, 2012; Mozzon-McPherson, 2006). The need for further training is again identified as an area for improvement, suggesting that becoming a competent and effective learning advisor is indeed a lengthy and complex process.

The initiatives described in this instalment, both online and face-to-face, offer several models of how support for developing autonomous learning skills can be provided through language learning spaces. The common issues faced in terms of advisor training, record keeping and materials development may offer lessons for those looking to start or adapt similar initiatives in their own contexts.

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Autonomous Language Learning in Self-Access Spaces: Moodle in Action.

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Abstract

Over the past few decades language educators have experienced an enormous growth in the use of digital technology, both for themselves and for their students. Along with the internationalisation and stronger business focus of education that most of us have been experiencing, many institutions around the world are now undergoing a push towards new methods of teaching and learning, which involve less face-to-face contact and more online instruction and learning. This paper takes the reader through reflections on the development of an online resource for students, of which one of the aims was to foster learner autonomy. Knowledge has been gleaned from the authors' experiences of enhancing their expertise in the use of Moodle. The rationale behind the development, as well as the background to the final choice of resources and online tools for the autonomous learning components and learner engagement are explored. The writers also reflect on the effectiveness of the site and suggest improvements for future development of autonomous language learning (ALL) Moodle sites.

Keywords: autonomy, Moodle, language learning, e-learning

Background

In recent years there has been widespread re-thinking about teaching and learning pedagogies, places and purposes, which has had significant impact on the range of teaching and learning methodologies and learning environments that are now available to most practitioners and learners. Alongside these new learning models there has been a decrease in physical space for learning, and conversely, an increase in the 'anytime, anywhere' virtual and digital delivery of learning. Combined with this is the requirement for many teachers and advisors to upskill their knowledge and facility with e-learning tools.

Many of us in teaching or advising roles are having to contend with changing pedagogies and use of space (Lamb, 2014; Murray, Fujishima, & Uzuka, 2014; Narum, 2013). Along with this of course is the rise of e-technology and e-learning through the development of e-tools. While this has the obvious benefit of making education potentially more accessible and cheaper to a wider range of people around the globe,

from a wide range of ethnicities and socio-economic groups, there are still inequalities and limiting factors such as access to technology, devices, and internet capability.

Educators in our institutions, two large polytechnics in New Zealand, are being encouraged to embed training for autonomous language learning (ALL) within courses, to enable students to become life-long learners in today's and tomorrow's world where they may assume multiple occupations and roles within their working life span. For them to flourish, they will need to have the ability to re-assess their own skills levels, set their own goals for any retraining they may consider necessary, and then be able to put these into practice, i.e., access suitable and convenient courses and use appropriate strategies to study efficiently and effectively.

While mobile technology offers the possibility of fast and ready access to many resources, it is also very important and useful because it can offer increased affordances for those who need and/or want to learn autonomously.

This paper will now discuss some considerations when creating interactive, engaging 'anytime, anywhere' ALL opportunities using Moodle and show how these concepts can be woven into practice, through examples from the authors' own experiences.

The Moodle Site

The authors' institutions both provide purpose-built language learning spaces (self-access centres) with especially adapted and easily accessible resources for all levels of English, organised into skills and topics areas. Students have access to learning advisors, strategy advice, and other resources to guide their study. The purpose of this pilot project was to extend the support provided by the centre by developing and establishing online support for ALL. The student cohort in the study was both domestic and international students of English as an additional language (EAL) from intermediate level and above.

Moodle is the platform available to and supported by the authors' institutions, which is why it was chosen for the project. The aim of setting it up was to offer interactive, engaging activities to enable and support ALL, with the learning outcomes of developing study skills, expanding self-awareness, improving English, and learning skills for ALL. Another reason for creating this digital resource to encourage autonomy was to

follow our institutions' philosophy of delivering more content online so it is available to students 24/7 from a wide array of learning spaces.

The site was initially open to about 250 students and is now available to all enrolled English language students (approximately 400) to use for self-access studies, either in the SAC or elsewhere with internet access, for example, from home. This was offered as a non-assessed and voluntary component of their English language course. At the institutions, students have access to learning facilitators and their teachers, which can be especially useful for speaking and pronunciation practice. This gives them the opportunity to make use of a blended learning format, which lends itself to both undisturbed independent self-study and guided learning, and skills practice with teachers or facilitators in a self-access centre.

This paper will now describe three key activities of the ninety-seven activities within the twelve units on the ALL Moodle site (see Appendices A-C). These represent what we believe to be three important aspects of becoming autonomous: preparation, performance, and self-assessment. The first (Activity 1) aims to ensure that students are prepared by having a good grounding of metacognitive awareness at the beginning of their learning journey, the second (Activity 2) is an example of performance through learning collaboratively, while the third (Activity 3) illustrates encouragement of self-evaluation. By completing these activities learners are expected to be able to:

- identify and utilise learning strategies that accommodate their learning styles for improving their language skills,
- demonstrate an understanding of, and the benefits of, peer teaching, teamwork and collaboration,
- demonstrate a high level of personal autonomy and accountability in the acquisition and application of language knowledge and skills, as well as showing an understanding of how to self-evaluate their own learning progress.

The first activity was informed by a previous study (Dofs & Hornby, 2007) which showed that language learners tend to limit themselves to using only what they are familiar with. Therefore, the first activity described in this paper is an online awareness-raising activity for students to understand more about language learning techniques and styles: Visual, Aural, Reading/writing, and Kinaesthetic, (VARK), (Fleming, 2011), and the associated strategies.

Students complete a questionnaire and are referred to suggested strategies according to their profile. This gives them ideas of useful individual strategies for improving their language knowledge based on their prevalent style. In a follow-up task learners reflected and related what they learnt to their needs and goals. They did this by completing a self-evaluation document, provided on the Moodle site, and by linking the suggested strategies to their learning plans. This aims to enable a deeper understanding of the suggested strategies, to make their learning methods more self-evident, and to encourage future monitoring of their progress.

The second activity involves students learning something in order to teach it to their peers. According to Biggs and Tang (2007), people usually learn 95% of what they teach another person; therefore, this activity is a useful technique to enhance learning at a deeper level. Autonomous learning is about being in control of one's learning situation, e.g., where, what, and how you learn, and who you choose to learn with. This activity is an example of giving students experience of using a new strategy that they can then use themselves later as autonomous learners. The activity described here is from the listening section of the Moodle site; however, elsewhere in the site it covers areas such as: grammar items, vocabulary, and techniques for learning any of the other language skill categories (reading, speaking, and writing). The web tool, DebateGraph (Baldwin & Price, 2012), which is a form of discussion forum, was used. The DebateGraph has many useful functions that learners can utilise to share experiences and thereby extend their understanding of the concept and also discover the usefulness of such a peer teaching activity, i.e., students were directed to this website and asked to share ideas about strategies they used for learning listening skills by answering the question provided and adding comments to the mindmap. This helps reinforce metacognitive development through learning by teaching.

In the third activity, students are referred back to their original evaluation and planning sheets to reflect on their new levels of accomplishments, needs and goals, to decide what to work on next. Students re-evaluate themselves and their current language levels after each activity, and compare themselves with their original evaluations. This can help them make informed decisions about the next step in their learning journey. After re-evaluating and reflecting, students can discuss future courses of action with their peers and advisor, using the 'chat' or 'question and answer' function in Moodle. The advisor can also assist and offer advice, either synchronously or asynchronously.

Reflections

Once the activities in the whole Moodle site were finalised, it was used by students for one term in order to see how it worked in practice. At the end of the term it was time to reflect on key features, shortcomings, and future improvements. Twenty of the teachers also had the opportunity to give feedback and comments at a professional development session, and nine main topics arose: (1) non-completion, (2) ALL development, (3) required language level, (4) participation and engagement, (5) peer-to-peer teaching, (6) appropriate technology, (7) techniques for learning, (8) equity of access, and (9) future evaluation.

(1) Non-completion. As all the Moodle site activities are non-assessed and voluntary, some students may choose not to complete all the components. The modules are unassessed, as students are encouraged to understand and practise self-evaluation, which is a core part of autonomous learning (Cooker, 2015; Tassinari, 2015). If desired, student completion can be tracked through the background statistics within Moodle, using the learning analytics tool. Information about students' participation rates, attempts and completed activities are given but no information about students' factual up-take and knowledge gains. To find out more about student gains, staff can actively monitor and interact with students in the self-access centre, and through learning advisor and/or class teacher appointments. Even though this is a self-directed learner resource, incentives may need to be incorporated to ensure a wide and in-depth up-take, e.g., learners could receive a document showing the completed components, or it could be a credit-bearing part of their qualification, whether that be a language course or a content-based course.

(2) ALL development. Although it is widely regarded as being difficult to detect and assess enhancement in ALL behaviour (Everhard, 2015), there were some indications that some of the students were becoming more autonomous while learning a language, as teachers mentioned that they seemed to have more self-efficacy and confidence in applying their new-found skills while finding resources. Observations by Kerstin in the self-access centre confirmed this, showing that they could use new strategies, choose appropriate styles and modes of learning, as well as make use of new language knowledge, and record it in their goal-setting forms, planning sheets, and self-evaluation logs.

(3) Required language level. The Moodle site was used by English language students at an intermediate level and above, and to make it more accessible for lower

level language users, it is currently being adapted with level-appropriate information and instructions. However, to make it more readily available to a wider audience, activities like the VARK can be combined with face-to-face sessions at lower levels.

(4) Participation and engagement. When reflecting on the activities in the modules, the authors considered that some of them were rather 'flat' and one dimensional, so these are being re-developed to be more interactive, to encourage deeper learning, e.g., using Adobe Acrobat Pro to make interactive forms. This is in line with the Equivalency of Interaction Theory (Anderson, 2003), which implies that deep and meaningful learning will take place as long as students are interacting and engaging thoroughly with either another student, the teacher, or the content. In rethinking the tasks, the best interaction pattern had to be determined according to, and aligned with, the stated outcomes for each of the tasks. For example, to reach the outcome of learning at a deeper level, a task that involves sharing ideas in the Moodle forum is suggested. The interactive nature of this helps students engage with each other while at the same time participating in a communicative learning activity using the L2.

(5) Peer-to-peer teaching. Anecdotally, some students do not want to, or simply have no time for, assisting others with their learning unless they experience gains for themselves in return. This led to our thinking about students' willingness to participate in student-student interactions, as in the peer teaching activity described above, and then a consideration of whether the activities would meet the learning outcomes for the students. For example, grammar knowledge lends itself better to a peer-to-peer interaction than learning a technique for the language skills areas. Because peer teaching of a grammar item consolidates and provides extra practice of that grammar point, tutoring others directly influences the targeted knowledge for both the peer and the peer teacher, and can be a good ALL strategy. In contrast, peer teaching of learning techniques relates more to providing teaching practice for the peers, albeit in the target language. Of course, when using this ALL strategy, there is also L2 speaking or writing practice involved, as students use spoken or written language for the instructions, even if this is only indirectly related to the targeted knowledge or acquisition of autonomy.

(6) Appropriate technology. Suitable technology for the different components needs to be chosen and aligned to certain activities and learning outcomes (Teaching at UNSW, 2015).). Grammar and vocabulary, the areas most suitable for peer teaching, can be taught through collaborative practice so that students negotiate their understanding of the grammar concepts and sets of vocabulary to be included in the particular units.

Students can use wikis and/or blogs, but, according to Hughes, Toohey, and Hatherley (1992), moderated discussions can also be appropriate. The students need to have a clear understanding of the protocols and processes for interaction, and perhaps a rubric for participation in discussions, to guide and encourage high interaction levels, would be beneficial.

(7) Techniques for learning. A blended learning format may be better than a fully online mode, especially for teaching and learning techniques associated with enhancing skills in the areas of listening, reading, writing and speaking. This is because such techniques can be taught through face-to-face awareness-building activities in which these can be modelled in the language self-access centre or in the classroom.

(8) Equity of access. There were some students who did not have readily available devices, especially amongst the refugee population, so to alleviate the barrier of limited access, computers and other technological resources needed to be provided for these students. This is now being fulfilled through short and long term loans of laptops and tablets, from the language department, or through on-site usage in the self-access centre and computer labs.

(9) Future evaluation. Further evaluation of the Moodle site could involve using a list of criteria, a rubric, especially made for such a resource. An example of a suitable rubric is the Rubrics for Evaluating Open Education Resource Objects (Achieve, 2011) in which the section "Quality of Technological Interactivity" is especially applicable. Other appropriate rubrics like the "Consumer Guide" to seven strategies for online course evaluations developed by Berk (2013) and a rubric to evaluate open educational resources (OER), Temoa by Aguilar (2011), could also potentially be useful tools for evaluations.

This project, to provide extended self-access support for autonomous language learning by developing and establishing an online Moodle site, was a worthwhile experience. We can now make informed decisions about future developments of such assistance, and the students can benefit from the guided 'anytime, anywhere' language learning support offered. The Moodle site is constantly being up-dated and is now being integrated into the induction process for all EAL learners.

Notes on the contributors

Kerstin Dofs and Moira Hobbs are both EAL teachers who have moved into learner advising, and have been managing self-access language learning centres in their respective tertiary institutions in New Zealand for many years. They have been collaboratively researching, presenting, publishing and helping organise conferences in the field of autonomy for the last 7 years. Both their institutions are in the process of major transformative change.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Moodle Page for Activity 1

The icons in the picture below link learners to audio files, interactive questionnaires, an online quiz (all developed by the author), and a website questionnaire (VARK).

Moodle Page for Activity 2

This shows relevant links to peer teaching through the website DebateGraph.

Below is an explanation of how peer teaching is being employed.
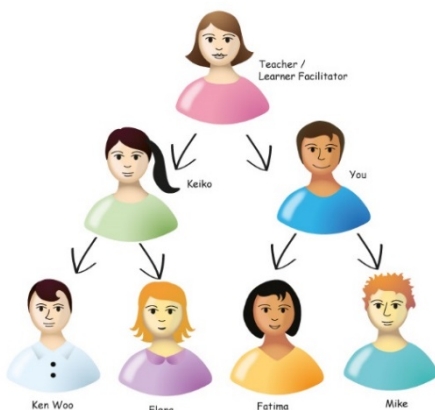
Fan–teaching

Fan-teaching can be used to give opportunities to students to learn at a deeper level while they teach something to somebody.

It works as follows:
The Learning facilitator (or the teacher) show two students how to, for example, use a piece of equipment, how to do an exercise, or a technique for skills improvement. Then these two students teach this to two other students and so on until all students have learnt it. It "fans out" from the starting point. It is a good example of "teaching as the highest form of learning" which is quoted on the front page.

Moodle Page for the Activity 3

Students can undertake on-going self-evaluation and reflection using the links in these pictures. Students re-evaluate themselves and their current language levels after each activity, to compare themselves with their original evaluations on their planning sheets. This can help them decide the next step in their learning journey.

On the Road to Developing a Learning Advisory Program (LAP)

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Abstract

Learning Advisory Program (LAP) was launched at Yıldırım Beyazıt University School of Foreign Languages in the 2015-2016 academic year. The LAP, under the guidance of the instructors and advisors at the Independent Learning Centre (ILC), was planned to be used initially with students of a specific profile, composed of low-achieving, unmotivated students – the so-called 'repeat' students. In our case, 'repeat' students pose a challenge in that teachers have difficulty identifying their individual needs, and catering for them. To address this, we enrolled these students in a partially online blended learning program. Students were also informed about the possibility of getting individual support from ILC advisors. In order to facilitate the advising sessions, new materials and tools have been devised or adapted. A few months' experience in advising has given us a better understanding of our students and raised our motivation to turn the LAP into a more functional system.

Keywords: Independent Learning Centres (ILC), learner autonomy, advisory programs, 'repeat' students

The Context

Yıldırım Beyazıt University was founded as a state university in 2011 in Ankara, Turkey. Most students commence their higher education at the School of Foreign Languages and spend one year in the English preparatory program. The school has more than 1000 students, on average, every year and around 90 instructors are currently employed.

The Independent Learning Centre (ILC) located in the School of Foreign Languages is a popular place for students. The ILC was initially designed as two labs with 40 computers and a library in the middle of the two labs. Students can use reading, grammar, vocabulary and listening worksheets from Starter to Upper-Intermediate level as well as supplementary materials aimed at proficiency exam practice. A variety of extracurricular activities such as Speaking Club, Tea Talk, Culture Days, Movie Club and Workshops are also offered to ILC users. In terms of staffing, ILC is operated by a coordinator and a full-time staff member who are both English Instructors. Every semester, around 10 more instructors are appointed to the ILC to work on materials and activity development. We as Tarik Uzun, ILC Coordinator and a Learning Advisor, Hatice Karaaslan, Online Program Coordinator and Mümin Şen, Director of the School of Foreign Languages are members of the core team for developing the Learning Advisory Program (LAP) described in this paper.

The ILC is a constantly-developing, active learning environment with around a hundred visitors every week. However, two studies conducted at the ILC (Nasöz, 2015; Uzun, 2014) clearly indicated that even the majority of the regular users of the centre were not autonomous in language learning and needed further guidance or training. We anticipated that the overall picture with respect to independent learning behaviour could have been even worse within the wider school population, particularly among the repeat students that are in their second year at the English preparatory program.

In the regular English preparatory program, students are enrolled in different levels based on their initial language scores and they follow the syllabi appropriate for their levels. At the end of each academic year, the proficiency exam is administered and if students cannot attain the required pass score, they are required to study at the English preparatory program again. The number of these 'repeat' students reaches around 250 at the end of the year.

In their second year, these students are offered a blended learning program providing them with online resources to practice the receptive skills and 8-hour tutorials each week on the productive skills. The rationale for this format and content is two-fold: to provide some flexibility in their schedules for their individual needs and to ensure detailed feedback on their performance, which can be enhanced in a collective learning environment.

However, even with alternative programs, these students still pose a challenge in that teachers and coordinators have difficulty in identifying and catering for their individual needs ranging from personal, familial issues to general difficulties in language learning. Without an individual-specific attention that would scaffold their learning process with a consideration of how each can develop his route to linguistic and academic success, they keep failing across most levels, end up suffering for more than a year, and eventually drop out.

Defined as "the process and practice of helping students to direct their own paths to become more effective and autonomous language learners" (Carson & Mynard, 2012, p. 4), advising in language learning was considered a reasonable option to assist our students in their autonomy-building process. This perspective was also confirmed by a survey administered by the ILC in which students of the School of Foreign Languages were given the definition of an advisor and asked whether they would be interested in the provision for such a service. More than two thirds replied 'Yes' to this item. Once the need for advising was recognized, we decided to develop the materials and tools of the Learning Advisory Program (LAP).

Designing the Learning Advisory Program (LAP)

The ILC, whose staff has explored ways of creating a more resourceful centre which would incorporate broader engagement with language and stimulate the intellectual, communicative, and affective response of students, seemed to be the ideal place to develop the envisaged customized LAP, driven by the first-hand observations and insights derived from the iterative nature of the 'repeat' groups' program.

We planned to develop the LAP and use it initially with this particular group of low-achieving, unmotivated learners – the so-called 'repeat' students. Our work on the LAP started in June 2015, and, as part of it, we administered two questionnaires to collect information on students' views of their language learning skills and strategies, with a final open-ended question asking for their opinions and suggestions. We ran the study with 34 students who attended the six-week summer course for the students who had not succeeded in passing the proficiency exam called Assessment in General English (AGE) in June despite an eight-month English preparatory program. In total, students with this profile constituted around one fifth of the learners we planned to cater for with the LAP in the following academic year.

For our research, we used the Turkish version of the Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) (Cesur & Fer, 2007), developed by Oxford (1990), for assessing the frequency of use of language learning strategies (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). On SILL, participants are asked to indicate their response ranging from 1 (never or almost never true of me) to 5 (always or almost always true of me) to a strategy description such as "I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English." (See Appendix 1 for sample items). In addition, we developed the Inventory of Language Learning Skills (ILLS) to measure students' views regarding their use of language learning skills, based on the objectives of our school's English curriculum. It is again a 5-point Likert-type scale referring to the same descriptors and requires participants to respond to a skill description such as, "I can understand short, simple texts of around 400-450 words, containing familiar vocabulary." See Appendix 2 for sample items.

This study, which also functioned as a needs analysis, revealed significant information as to the nature of advising that our students needed and shaped our efforts in the development of various materials and tools. Our findings also confirmed the current trend in related research. The students reported to be in need of two types of advising: one concerning language learning and competence, and the other about the affective dimension (Kato & Mynard, 2015).

With an ultimate goal of supporting students to become autonomous language learners who have the capacity to take charge of their own learning (Benson, 2011), we have decided to establish reflective dialogue in our advising sessions in order to get our students to think about and reflect on their own language learning experiences. Kato and Mynard (2015) point out that an advisor is supposed to activate learners' reflective processes in language learning with the help of one-to-one dialogue. According to the researchers, during these dialogues, learners, initially unaware of their learning processes, gradually consider their needs and interests in language learning and the reasons for their struggle under the guidance of their reflections and mediation of ideas with advisors. Thus, we decided to follow this framework as it seemed to offer alternative ways to deal with the problems of 'repeat' students in our case.

Two full-time ILC staff members who are also English Instructors, Tarık Uzun and Stephanie L. Howard have undertaken the role of advisors at the ILC. Their weekly schedules are announced and students visit them in person to attend an advising session. They have had no formal training but have read widely about advising, which could be considered as informal training. With years of language teaching experience in their field, they are now switching their roles from teacher to advisor.

Initiatives in Action

Advising sessions are held at the ILC in English or Turkish depending on student choice. Students are expected to make an appointment with an advisor and attend the session on the specified date. They are free to request instant assistance as well if there is an advisor available at that time. Some common themes for the sessions are how to cope with the proficiency exam, develop skills and strategies, improve study skills and avoid failure due to high levels of anxiety.

Each session lasts around 20 minutes depending on students' needs and expectations. Advising service is voluntary yet instructors sometimes direct their students to the advisors to get individual assistance.

Our LAP sessions involve all or some of the following steps:

1. Filling in the SILL and ILLS inventories or the related Language Learning Strategy Pamphlets (see below)

2. An individual advising session held by an ILC advisor upon request

3. Directing students to relevant resources or strategies depending on their responses to the inventories, items in the pamphlets or their oral reflections.

In order to address students' skills and strategy development and facilitate LAP sessions, we made various adjustments to the content of the materials in the ILC and developed new ones or adapted existing documents to fit our context.

1) Pamphlets: With a specific title for each, 15 pamphlets are now in use at the ILC. Some of the pamphlets provide learners with ideas to improve their language skills and strategies (e.g. Speaking, How to Learn Vocabulary) or present online or mobile applications (e.g. Dictionary, News Resources). The idea of offering the ILC users such pamphlets was inspired from the SALC at Kanda University of International Studies, Japan. Learning Strategy Pamphlets have also been made available at the ILC and the model presented by Thornton (2011) has been adapted in the making of these.

2) Learning Plans: Our observations in advising sessions as well as the oral feedback from students reveal that they need guidance about how to organize their learning. Learning plans assist advising sessions in this regard as the process of preparing one is carried out in a reflective dialogue between the advisor and a student. We have two different learning plans in use. One of them is general purpose while the other is titled 'Proficiency Learning Plan' (See Appendix 3).

3) Proficiency Guidebook: This has been designed as a booklet and given free to the students. Each section of the exam is introduced to the students with suggestions and tips.

Initial Reflections on Advising

ILC staff members involved in advising, Stephanie and Tarık share their first impressions of advising:

Stephanie

'Repeat' students who visited us in advising sessions seemed to lack basic language learning strategies and had a low level of competence in terms of language skills. For example, they did not even know where to start, thus, many of them asked for assistance in devising a learning plan. Advising has a real potential for the ILC but something must be done to help students gain necessary skills to take control of their learning from the very beginning.

Tarık

What I especially try to do in my sessions is to create a good rapport with students to help them express their problems more comfortably. I observe that many of the students have a high anxiety level, which could be related to their

failure. Failing over and over again seems to have affected them negatively
and they have set a barrier between themselves and learning English. Yet, I
have the pleasure to listen to them and guide them to possible solutions.

These reflections based on their advising experiences provide further support for the necessity of a well-developed advising program at the ILC structured around a learner training curriculum. Its content and format require careful planning with a consideration of the current research in similar institutions with similar concerns.

Advice and Suggestions

The LAP is still in its early days. In the last few months, we have put our energy mainly into developing the tools of the LAP as well as working on advising in practice.

The feedback received from the two ILC advisors and the online program coordinator who is in close contact with 'repeat' students reveal that advisors need to be trained to serve the students more effectively. Undoubtedly, experience in advising and diving deeper into the advising research can also be expected to aid their development. In addition, classroom-based advising could also be a practical solution in dealing with students' immediate problems. Students with more serious issues could see their advisors at the ILC. And without a doubt, more advisors are needed to establish a well-grounded advising service at the ILC.

The current form of the LAP poses some challenges. Firstly, it is hard to keep track of students and guide them according to the progress they make as some of these students do not attend further sessions. It is also hard to establish good rapport with a student in only one session. Launching a specialised curriculum on autonomous learning, compulsory or optional, could be a valuable effort in the long run in securing the continuity of advising and bringing a more systematic approach to the process. We expect such a curriculum to better address our students' needs as well.

Conclusion

Overall, the LAP, in its current form seems to be promising in that it can help us approach the 'repeat' students in a more systematic and professional way. However, we, and institutions facing similar cases, need to understand that dealing with the problem requires long-term efforts, time and energy to succeed.

Our future research may include pre- and post- studies into LAP-design. Such an intervention may cover training in language-learning strategies and skills spread over a long period of time presented in a more explicit and overt manner, and offer students a mechanism to evaluate their own progress.

Finally, our plans for the future are to serve a larger and a more diverse population, consisting of students with differing levels of language proficiency, as our participants, until now, were limited in number and quite homogenous in terms of language proficiency. Despite the challenges involved, the efforts we have made so far are quite promising and we feel motivated to keep going.

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Appendix 1

Sample items from Strategy Inventory of Language Learning

Cognitive Strategy 12. I practice the sounds of English.
Compensation Strategy 26. I make up new words if I don't know the right ones in English.
Metacognitive Strategy 30. I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.
Affective Strategy 43. I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.
Social Strategy 49. I ask questions in English.

Appendix 2

Sample items from Inventory of Language Learning Skills

Listening Skill (B+ Level) 19. I can follow a lecture or talk within my own field if the subject matter is familiar and the presentation is clearly structured.
Reading Skill (B Level) 19. I can recognize author's main ideas and important supporting details .
Speaking Skill (A+ Level) 25. I can describe plans, future arrangements and alternatives.
Writing Skill (B Level) 20. I can express my thoughts on abstract or cultural as well as everyday topics (such as music or films).

Appendix 3

Proficiency Learning Plan

YBU Proficiency Learning Plan

1. PLEASE TAKE ONE OF THESE LEARNING PLANS 2. FILL OUT **PAGE 1** 3. TAKE NOTES ON **PAGE 2** 4. ASK FOR AN APPOINTMENT TO SEE A LEARNING ADVISOR

Student Name: _____   Date: _____

Advisor Name: _____

Background Information:

On what date did you begin English prep classes at YBU? _____

What level did you start at? _____

What level are you at now? _____

What is your department? _____

Previous Proficiency Information:

Have you taken the proficiency test before? _____ yes _____ no

    If yes, what date did you last take the test? _____

    If yes, what scores did you get:

                Reading: _____ out of 40 possible points

                Writing: _____ out of 25 possible points

                Listening: _____ out of 20 possible points

                Speaking: _____ out of 15 possible points

Problems and Difficulties:

Please explain in detail what problems and difficulties do you think you had/will have for each section of the Proficiency test:

Reading:---

Writing:---

Listening:---

Speaking:---

Advisor's Notes: --

Recommended Resources: (List below)

Recommended Strategies: --

Recommended Schedule

(List tasks below)

1 _____   by/every _____

2 _____   by/every _____

3 _____   by/every _____

4 _____   by/every _____

5 _____   by/every _____

Student's Notes: ---

Date of the next meeting with your advisor: _____

A SCANNED & PRINTED COPY OF THIS LEARNING PLAN IS TO BE SAVED IN STUDENT'S FILE AT THE ILC.

study, the focus here will be on the PDT students because they are the SAC's target users.

Because the PDT students were provisionally accepted into their Australian and New Zealand universities, it is especially important that they reach their required IELTS scores. These high-stakes tests can determine whether or not a student is able to take advantage of an overseas scholarship. It is therefore in the students' interest to use every means possible to reach their language learning goals. Since research has shown that out-of-class learning can complement students' in-class studies (Pearson, 2004), the PDT students are encouraged to make use of the SAC.

While the SAC had been operating since 2011, an internal evaluation in late 2014 found that the center was not reaching its full potential. In particular, the evaluation revealed that the center was being used more as a place for individual study and completing class assignments, and less for the kind of self-directed, autonomous language learning it was intended to promote. Recognizing that the center could be better utilized, the school decided to investigate ways of developing its self-access program.

Impetus for the Change

In order to determine how the center could be improved, the author consulted the literature on self-access language learning. Much of this research suggested that simply providing students with language learning resources does not necessarily promote language learning (Reinders & Lázaro, 2007). In fact, students often do not have the skills necessary to effectively make use of self-access resources (Gardner & Miller,

language study, due to space and resource limitations, the use of the SAC is restricted to students in the PDT program and to other students at an intermediate level or higher.

I worked at this branch of the language school as a teacher trainer and course designer from September 2014 to the end of February 2015. While I had no prior experience working in self-access language learning, at that time I was taking a doctoral course in learner autonomy. I became interested in resource-based approaches toward self-directed learning and learner autonomy and so began investigating the SAC. On the positive side, I noted that the SAC was well organized, providing a variety of materials that would appeal to different types of students (see Table 1). However, as I examined the SAC and talked to SAC teachers, I noticed that there were differences between what the literature advocated and the realities of the SAC.

Table 1. List of SAC Resources and Facilities

One SAC teacher on duty, Monday to Friday 9am to 6pm, and Saturday 9am to 1:30pm
30 computers each with around 12 CALL programs installed
Worksheets used with podcasts and IELTS tasks
Hundreds of laminated newspaper articles organized under various topics
Generic reading and vocabulary worksheets to complement study of newspaper articles
Magazines and newspapers
Limited yet varied selection of books, including graded readers and non-fiction titles
Two small speaking rooms separated by glass doors
"Comfy sofas" space for quiet chatting and watching English TV and DVDs
Study desk for individuals
Tables for individual or group study

Benson (2011) states that structure and support are important in promoting effective resource-based language learning. In this SAC, however, very little support was being provided. While the SAC teachers were in the SAC in case questions arose, they mostly used their time to complete various administrative tasks, and there was no system of scheduling

meetings between SAC teachers and students. In recent years, it has become increasingly common for researchers to emphasize the social dimensions in promoting self-directed approaches to language learning (see, e.g., Benson, 2011; Murray, 2014; Oxford, 2011). However, from my observations, the users of the SAC tended to work mostly in isolation.

Considering the gap between what I saw in the SAC and what I was reading in literature, I thought that one effective way to provide more support for the students and add a social dimension to the SAC was to utilize the SAC teachers as language learning advisors (LLAs). The SAC teachers were Cambodian, held bachelor's degrees in TEFL, and worked as English teachers at the language school. I believed that the SAC teachers offered great potential as a source of support, and that an advising service would make the SAC into a more interactive learning space. The school administrators agreed with me that, as successful language learners themselves, the Cambodian SAC teachers could offer more effective support to the students by working as LLAs.

Implementing a Language Learning Advising Service

After the school agreed that the SAC teachers would work as advisors, I worked with the administrators on a number of initiatives. One key challenge was in helping these teachers to understand what an advisor is and how it is different from a language teacher. According to Carson and Mynard (2012), "advising in language learning involves the process and practice of helping students to direct their own paths so as to become more effective and more autonomous language learners" (p. 4). Thus, both the practices and goals of advising are different from that of language teaching. In order to emphasize their new roles, the SAC teachers' titles were changed to *Language Learning Advisors (LLAs)*.

Training sessions related to advising in language learning were also provided. I conducted two 90-minute workshops to support the LLAs in late 2014. These workshops were attended by the LLAs, as well as other Cambodian English teachers who would presumably work as LLAs at other branch schools in the future. The first workshop was a general introduction to learner autonomy. It addressed the what, why and how of learner autonomy, and also gave special attention to various research-based approaches to promoting learner autonomy, including self-access.

The second workshop focused on ways of improving the school's SAC. There were three core sections in this session: explaining the role of advisors; introducing learning plan documents; and role playing as advisors and students with the learning plans. Prior to the workshops, I had developed learning plans to help with goal setting, selecting materials, scheduling study time, and recording and evaluating one's work. These were based on models I had seen in the literature (Thornton, 2010) and at a Japanese university's self-access center.

I believed that these learning plans were a key component in the advising process. Mynard (2012) classifies learning plans as cognitive tools. As such, they can facilitate dialogue in advising sessions (Yamashita & Kato, 2012). By using learning plans, advisors can help also learners to develop their metacognitive awareness. This includes "information that learners acquire about learning" and "general skills through which learners manage, direct, regulate [and] guide their own learning" (Wenden, 1998, p. 195). With higher metacognitive awareness, students become better able to self-direct their own learning.

While my workshops did not explore advising in great depth, one of my doctoral professors, who was visiting Cambodia in early 2015, delivered a 90-minute training session for the school. It was attended by SAC teachers as well as foreign EFL teachers and a few administrators. This workshop was helpful in a couple of important ways. First, the speaker explained how advising is different from teaching, including the aims, practices, strategies, discourse and locations. As Esch (1997) notes, while knowledge of "teaching and learning theories and methodologies are fundamental pre-requisites of a good language adviser . . . they are not enough" (as cited in Mozzon-McPherson, 2003, p. 192). In addition, the presenter focused on one crucial area of advising, which is counseling skills. Kelly (1996) explains that LLAs draw upon the discourses of counseling, utilizing a host of macro and micro skills. The counseling skills covered in this workshop were repeating, mirroring, restating, summarizing and giving positive feedback. In addition to being introduced to these skills, workshop participants practiced using them in role plays.

The advising service was implemented in the second, 10-week academic term of 2015 and more than 100 advising sessions were held during that time. The school decided that meetings between students and advisors could be arranged in three ways: students could approach LLAs in the SAC; LLAs could approach students in the SAC; students could be referred to an advisor, e.g., by a teacher.

I believe that the advising service is a key element in transforming the SAC into a more supportive space for autonomous learning. As this is a new service, however, it is important to ascertain how effective these recent changes have been. The next section will report on an initial effort to evaluate the LLA service.

<div align="center">**Evaluation of the Advising Service**</div>

In August of 2015 I returned to my former school in Cambodia to conduct four days of teacher training workshops. As eight LLAs were in attendance at the training, I thought the most efficient way to elicit feedback from them was through a questionnaire. While future evaluations could include observations of advising sessions and data collected from students, there was no time to collect such data during this visit.

I did not have any set research questions in mind when I designed the questionnaire (see Appendix). Instead, I wanted to get a general since of what was going well for the trainers and what they found challenging. In addition to bio-data questions, a variety of closed and open-ended questions were included on the questionnaire. It was hoped that the results from the questionnaire would indicate ways to provide further support for the LLAs.

Eight LLAs (four men and four women, aged 24 to 30) completed the questionnaires. As all of the respondents have a high level of English proficiency, the questionnaire was written in English. The results from the survey are discussed below.

Positive responses about advising

Part B of the questionnaire includes closed questions on the LLAs' opinions about the advising system. Overall, the results indicated that the advisors are positive about their role as LLAs. They mostly enjoy working as LLAs, and they expressed a positive view of the advising service, indicating that it is useful for students and promotes learner autonomy. Also, in response to the open-ended questions in Part D, all of the LLAs had positive things to report about their experiences as LLAs. Some commented on the progress they see students making and others reflected on their own development as more effective communicators.

Criticism of the administrative side of the advising service

One general criticism of the advising service was in relation to its administration. For various reasons, the LLAs said that they do not always feel ready to advise students. For

example, some advisors felt it was tiring to advise students right after teaching a class. Others found the scheduling of advising appointments to be problematic. For example, one LLA said there were times when many students arrived for advising at the same time, and another one complained that advisors were not always informed in advance of advising appointments.

Advising high level students

Another issue mentioned by the LLAs was the difficulty of advising high level students. The LLAs teach few high level or academic English courses and they reported having trouble recommending materials or strategies for students enrolled in these kinds of courses. Two of the advisors mentioned difficulties in helping students with questions related to the IELTS examination. For instance, one LLA explained:

> When it comes to giving advice regarding IELTS writing . . . I myself also find it challenging.

Similarly, another LLA commented:

> I think some trainings are needed to give LLA techniques in how to give advice to students, especially high level and IELTS students.

The LLAs apparently feel an obligation to provide learners with content specific advice for certain courses, such as IELTS, but this is more of a tutor-based interpretation of the advisor's role. As Kelly (1996) defines it, language advising is "a form of therapeutic dialogue that enables an individual to manage a problem" (p. 94). Effective advising is not simply about providing students with listening techniques and recommended resources, rather, "an advisor should be a good listener and mediator of meanings by mirroring what the learner says" (Mozzon-McPherson, 2000, p. 122). As Kelly explains, "by helping learners to become reflective and self-aware we are empowering them to make conscious choices and hence to take greater responsibility for their learning" (p. 111). Unlike teachers, "one of the qualities of a good adviser is not to impose or prescribe the best recipe, but ask and trigger replies and solutions, which function best on the learner's own terms, however innovative or traditional

they may be" (Mozzon-McPherson, 2003, p. 184). It is important that this distinction between tutor and advisor be clear.

Confidence with advising skills

The items in Part C of the questionnaire were adapted from Aoki's (2012) can-do statements for advisors (see Appendix). They were designed to examine the LLA's perceived levels of confidence for various skills related to advising. Generally, the advisors indicated that they were confident in the 12 skills areas of advising included on the questionnaire.

While these results reflect the advisors' perceptions, it is doubtful that their advising skills are highly developed, which is understandable. As Morrison and Navarro (2012) explain, "The movement from teaching to advising is a shift requiring reorientation of professional *practice* and *identity* [emphasis original]" (p. 351). Moreover, just as most novice teachers may be unable to effectively evaluate their own teaching abilities, the same can be said for novice advisors. As discussed above, it is likely that the LLAs see themselves more as tutors—a kind of teacher transported to the self-access center—than as advisors. They may be unaware of the importance of advising skills and fall back on their more familiar role as teachers. There are a number of ways in which the roles of teachers and advisors differ. As Gardner and Miller (1999) explain,

> the work of language counsellors is complex and goes beyond the type of teacher-student dialogues commonly found even in CLT situations. Counselling requires teachers to make significant shifts in their attitudes and perceptions of the teacher-student relationship, and requires training and guidance. (p. 182)

Being inexperienced, these LLAs may not fully understand the unique skills required for advising.

Use of the learning plans

LLAs had mixed views on the effectiveness of the learning plans that had been developed to facilitate dialogue and to help the students self-direct their own learning. Five out of eight LLAs had positive comments on using them. Overall, though, there were more

criticisms, with six advisors including negative comments. Five LLAs said the learning plans were confusing or that the students did not know how to complete them. One advisor explained:

> I don't find the learning plans very useful. I think they are time-consuming and confuse students. I myself also find it confusing. I think it's better if LLAs spend more time to talk with the students to find the real problem they are having.

Due to their design, or perhaps to a lack of training in their use, the learning plans do not seem to make the work of the LLAs easier, or to facilitate self-directed learning for students.

Future Initiatives

The LLAs require more training to better develop their knowledge and skills for advising. Although they indicated being confident in advising skills, their comments on the questionnaire suggest that they may be taking on the role of a tutor more than that of an advisor. Workshops that more clearly define the roles and objectives of advisors are necessary. The LLAs would also benefit from reflective professional development practices. A study by Morrison and Navarro (2012) showed that discussing reflections on advising sessions, "when done with an experienced colleague, led to a clearer understanding of the practice of advising for the [LLAs] involved" (p. 358). While there are no highly experienced advisors at their schools, the LLAs could still benefit from peer discussion of advising practices. Not only would this raise their awareness of their appropriate use of advising skills, it would help them to understand the very kinds of reflection that advisors wish their learners to experience (Kato, 2012).

While I had thought that the learning plans would be helpful for the students and advisors, this has not necessarily been the case. While some LLAs said they were helpful, others reported that they caused confusion. The learning plans and their use therefore need to be re-examined. It needs to be determined why the LLAs and students did not find them helpful and the school should consider revising them. The LLAs could alter the learning plans in a way that makes better sense to them.

Finally, some of the LLAs expressed frustration with the administration of the advising system. The management needs to address scheduling issues so that the LLAs can be more prepared and confident. The school must ensure that advisors are notified in advance of appointments so that they can effectively prepare for advising. Scheduling conflicts need to be avoided so that LLAs do not feel rushed. Better scheduling will allow them to be more relaxed and to focus on the students that they are advising.

The evaluation conducted in this report is a preliminary one and its scope is limited. In the future, additional data need to be collected and analyzed to corroborate these initial findings. Observations of LLA sessions would be useful to better understand the LLAs' advising skills. In addition, interview and questionnaire data from students should be gathered to gain a broader perspective on the effectiveness of the advising service.

The advising service is still new and it is not surprising that there are some issues which need to be addressed. On the positive side, the LLAs generally have a favorable view of the advising system and have already experienced satisfaction in helping students to self-direct their own learning. If the school administration can continue to listen to the advisors and support them with training and better scheduling systems, the LLAs can make a more positive impact on the students who visit the SAC.

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Appendix

Questionnaire for Language Learning Advisors

The Language Learning Advising system at the Self-access Center is new and we want to get feedback from you. In general, we would like to know how things are going and if you have suggestions for how we can make it better. Please give *honest* answers to the questions. The data from these questions will be used for a small research project. Your name or personal details will not be included in any research reports.

A. Background information. Please write your answers on the lines.

   1. Name: _____

   2. Date of birth: _____

   3. Gender: _____

   4. At which campus have you worked as a LLA? _____

   5. How long have you worked as an English language teacher? _____

   6. How long have you worked at this school? _____

   7. How long have you worked as a LLA? _____

   8. About how many LLA sessions have you done? _____

B. Opinions about LLA service. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements. For each one, please *circle* the number which best represents your opinion.

     1 = Strongly disagree
     2 = Disagree
     3 = Somewhat agree
     4 = Agree
     5 = Strongly agree

9. I think the LLA service at ACE is useful for students.	1 2 3 4 5
10. I think the students understand the purpose of LLAs.	1 2 3 4 5
11. I think the LLA service promotes learner autonomy.	1 2 3 4 5
12. I enjoy working a LLA.	1 2 3 4 5
13. As a LLA, I have helped some students to become better learners.	1 2 3 4 5
14. I feel qualified to be a LLA.	1 2 3 4 5
15. It is difficult being a LLA.	1 2 3 4 5
16. The LLA system is a waste of time.	1 2 3 4 5
17. Working as a LLA sometimes makes me feel uncomfortable.	1 2 3 4 5
18. I would like to have more support to become a more effective LLA.	1 2 3 4 5

C. Think about the following *can-do* statements. For each statement, circle the number that best represents your *confidence* in doing each one as a language learning advisor.

1 = I don't feel confident at all.
2 = I don't feel very confident.
3 = I feel a little confident.
4 = I feel confident.
5 = I feel very confident.

19. I can make learners feel comfortable.   1 2 3 4 5

20. I can empathize with the problems of my learners.   1 2 3 4 5

21. I can give positive comments to the learners.   1 2 3 4 5

22. I can control the conversation when necessary or appropriate.   1 2 3 4 5

23. I can let learners control the conversation when necessary or appropriate. 1 2 3 4 5

24. I can help learners make decisions about their English learning goals.   1 2 3 4 5

25. I can help learners choose appropriate materials for their learning goals.   1 2 3 4 5

26. I can introduce ways of learning to the learners.   1 2 3 4 5

27. I can ask questions which help learners talk about their language learning. 1 2 3 4 5

28. I can wait to give learners enough time to express themselves.   1 2 3 4 5

29. I can interpret learners' facial expressions and gestures.   1 2 3 4 5

30. I can adjust my level of speaking to learners' proficiency levels.   1 2 3 4 5

D. Open-ended questions. Please write your answers to the following questions.

31. Could you describe any positive experiences working as a LLA?

_____

_____

32. Could you describe any negative experiences working as a LLA?

_____

_____

Please continue section D on the next page . . .

D. Open-ended questions. Continued.

33. What difficulties, if any, have you experienced working as LLA?

_____
_____
_____

34. What difficulties have you experienced transitioning from working as a teacher to working as a LLA?

_____
_____
_____

35. In what ways, if any, have you felt uncomfortable working as a LLA?

_____
_____
_____

36. What has been your experience with the learning plans? For example, do you use them? Do you find them helpful? Do students understand how to complete them?

_____
_____
_____

37. How do you think we can make the LLA service better for the language learning advisors?

_____
_____
_____

38. How do you think we can make LLA service better for students?

_____
_____
_____

39. Do you have any suggestions for future training or support for LLAs?

_____
_____
_____

40. Do you have any suggestions for ways to better organize and administer the LLA service?

_____
_____
_____

41. What percentage of the time do you use Khmer during the advising sessions? What do you think about using Khmer during advising sessions?

_____
_____
_____
_____

E. Other comments.

42. Please feel free to write any other comments related to the SAC or LLA service on the lines below.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

LLAs: **Are you willing to be interviewed? If so, please check the boxes you are available. The interviews may be done in groups or individually. They will be about 15 minutes long**.

Tuesday lunch time ☐ Tuesday at 3pm ☐
Wednesday lunch time ☐ Wednesday 3pm ☐

Thank you very much!

Reference

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