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This is a short report where I reflect on my experience of attending the *JASAL 2018 x SUTLF 5* conference. I joined the conference as a presenter and also a recipient of the student grant provided by the conference organizers. At the end of the paper, I will discuss a potential issue based on my experience which I personally consider important to explore.

The Japan Association for Self-Access Learning (JASAL) held its annual conference of 2018 with Sojo University Teaching & Learning Forum (SUTLF) as the *JASAL 2018 x SUTLF 5 conference* on December 15, 2018 at Sojo University in Kumamoto prefecture, Japan. This conference was also the flagship event of the Nankyu Chapter of the Japan Association for Language Teachers (JALT). More than 110 people not only from Japan but also from abroad who are involved in the field of self-access learning participated in the conference. The venue was the brand-new Sojo International Learning Center (SILC) which was re-built in 2018. While many universities and language schools have been seeking to improve their Self-Access Centers (SACs) and help students' language learning, the conference was beneficial for sharing and discussing ideas and issues. As a graduate of an international university who has been involved in language learning as a student and also as a beginner researcher, it was a great opportunity to learn about a variety of successes and attempts made in other institutions.

There were several presentations that particularly interested me. The presentation by Lucius Von Joo, Robert Werner and Teruya Oikawa from Ryutsu Keizai University entitled "Connecting students and teachers through a student ambassador exchange program" was interesting in that a university which does not specialize in language studies attempted to get students motivated and involved in language learning through student ambassador exchange program. Also, Oikawa who led the program provided a student perspective enjoyed interacting with international students. He also autonomously helped other Japanese students' English learning because he strongly felt the necessity of improving their English ability so that they could communicate better, and moreover, the program could be sustained.

Another stimulating presentation was "Making peer-support a part of the SAC experience" presented by Abidemi Bancole from Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU). While various types of peer learning have been developed, her presentation focused

on learning support provided by international undergraduate students called peer advisors. It was absorbing for me to compare it to the research that I conducted on peer tutoring at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) where only Japanese students were involved (Shirakawa, 2018).

Given the above, it seemed that many universities have been trying to incorporate international students within their language learning programs. In order to describe the value of international students, it may be worth bringing in the term "relatedness" here which is from self-determination theory (SDT) framework (Ryan & Deci, 2010). Relatedness is one of the basic human psychological needs and refers to a sense of belonging that a person has within a context (Ryan & Deci, 2010). Generally, and also in my experience, many domestic students proclaim an aspiration towards and interest in international students. Therefore, creating an opportunity to communicate with international students in Japanese universities might drive students' motivation towards language learning in that they may seek for better communication as Oikawa experienced.

I gave a presentation entitled "Challenges and successes of study group and the role of the self-access learning center" which focused on a student-led learning community called Study Group. The presentation mainly focused on needs of the learning community active in the Self-Access Learning Center (SALC) at KUIS. As a conclusion, I suggested for SAC staff to behave as Kuroko, a Japanese stage-hand, i.e., it may sometimes be important for SAC staff to wait for students' autonomous actions because students are the main characters.

Upon attending several presentations, it was not hard to understand that every SAC has made a great amount of effort to create a better learning space. However, it was not clear whether there is a well-established connection or cooperation between those SACs and other parts of their institutions if they exist. In the case of my university, KUIS, there are several facilities designed to help students' language learning; the SALC, the Academic Success Center (ASC), and the English Language Institute (ELI) which runs the Academic Support Area (ASA) in the SALC. The ASC provides English learning support such as the peer tutor program and Q-desk where students can get advice about English learning from Japanese teachers of English on duty. There is no doubt that each facility has provided a highly supportive environment and attempted to improve its services. Therefore, it may be possible to maximize the learning support within KUIS if they cooperate with each other. Simultaneously, however, it is necessary to ponder the role of each facility. For example, there is a lounge used as a space for international students in the ASC, but there could be value to this lounge being situated in the SALC because domestic students may benefit from

it especially for English communication practice. However, on the other hand, it might not be a good idea to move the lounge to the SALC because the lounge in the ASC is also arranged for international students to study Japanese, and concurrently, studying Japanese in the SALC should be limited in order to maximize the use of English. Therefore, this distinction may need to be maintained. Since the theme of the conference was "Making Connections", this potential issue arose in my mind during the conference. It could thus be suggested in general that considering connections might be a clue to improve not only SACs but also the whole school.

Notes on contributor

Tomoya Shirakawa is a graduate of Kanda University of International Studies, Department of English. His research interests include motivation and autonomy. He is going to study on the MA TESOL program at the University of Warwick from September 2019.

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