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“The SALC is mine!”: Supporting the Development of Learner Agency and Reconfiguration of Language Learning Environments Beyond the Classroom

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Abstract

This study explores the process of how a learner recognises the value of a Self-Access Learning Center (SALC) and takes charge of her own learning through self-reflection of her language learning environments beyond the classroom as well as her ideal future self-image as a motivational factor. A university student who majors in English drew a mind map as a tool to reflect on her learning activities beyond the classroom before and after engaging in various reflective activities. Employing a qualitative narrative case study approach, multiple data sources, which included two mind maps, written descriptions of them, and a follow-up semi-structured interview, were analysed from an ecological perspective. The findings show that the learner’s self-reflection on her learning environments beyond the classroom, as well as her stronger image of ideal future-self, guided her to step forward to take action to engage with the SALC to create a meaningful space to achieve her goals. The learner’s self-reflection on her engagement with the environments, strategic advice from her friends, and a clearer image of her ideal future self are seen as key factors for the development of her learner agency. The benefits of teachers including self-reflection during class time on learning beyond the classroom as an aid to develop learner agency are also outlined.

Keywords: language learning ecology, self-reflection, ideal L2 self, learner agency

With increased learning resources available for the learner beyond the classroom, learners have more choices to select from to tailor individual language learning environments (Reinders, 2014). The value of out-of-class language learning has been paid more attention due to the positive outcomes from informal learning settings (Sockett, 2014; Toffoli, 2020). Online applications installed in individual smartphones, YouTube videos, and social networking services (SNS) are just a few examples that are commonly used by learners for their everyday learning, with those informal learning resources ever-evolving. In turn, the learner’s capacity to make decisions at the content level is required more than ever in this highly digitalised, complex, and changing world (Illés, 2012).

A self-access learning centre is one of the learner’s choices. The Self-Access Learning Center (SALC) at a Japanese university where this study was set is defined as “a place where students can individualise their language learning and develop autonomous

learning skills” (Kanda University of International Studies, 2020). The SALC provides various support services to facilitate the learner, such as opportunities to have one-on-one conversations with English speaking staff, advising consultations to assist their learning processes and progress, and learning resources, communities, and spaces for independent learning. All the support services and facilities are promoted at the orientation when students enter the university, and the students are expected to make use of them so that their learning is more efficient and well supported. This enables them to achieve their individual learning goals and become more independent and self-directed learners. A growing body of research has contributed insights into the dynamics of learner engagements in the social language learning spaces (e.g., Murray & Fujishima, 2016). However, less is known about the extent to which learners actually select the SALC as one of their learning settings in their highly resourceful environments for language learning and to what extent they may derive benefit from the SALC. A recent ethnographic longitudinal study on the learners’ use of the English Lounge as a social language learning space examined the voices of both regular users and non-users (Mynard, 2020). Findings showed that non-users appeared to have psychological constraints such as their beliefs and anxiety about their language proficiency levels as well as identity issues. These findings suggest that further discussion or better preparation and support for non-users is needed for them to be more comfortable in joining the learning activities in the SALC (Mynard et al., 2020b). It is worth following up on the authors’ suggestions on some practical pedagogical interventions to help non-users to recognise the connection between the learning spaces and their needs, and construct their language learning environments beyond the classroom, which includes active engagement with the SALC.

Employing an ecological framework, this study explores how an undergraduate university student majoring in English (a non-user of the SALC) incorporates the SALC, together with many other language learning settings, in her language learning environments. Also, the changes in her perceptions and learning activities outside of the classroom as outcomes of self-reflection on her language learning environments beyond the classroom as well as motivation for learning English are examined. Although the present study only includes one participant, the outcomes can give insights into how learners with similar goals within a similar context might recognise and benefit from the same affordances. Therefore, how class teachers other than SALC staff can guide and support the learners to engage with and maximise their learning opportunities at the SALC are also outlined. In this paper, the author uses the term ‘SALC(s)’ to refer to the Self-Access Learning Center; however, ‘SAC’

(Self-Access Center) is also used in some of the direct quotations as some scholars use SAC as an abbreviation.

Literature Review

A Language Learning Environment and Ecologies of Language Learning

A learning ecology is defined as “the accessed set of contexts, comprised of configurations of activities, material resources and relationships, found in co-located physical or virtual spaces that provide opportunities for learning” (Barron, 2004, p. 6). Barron explained that “[e]ach context is comprised of a unique configuration of activities, material resources, relationships, and the interactions that emerge from them” (Barron, 2006, p. 195). For Lai (2015), a learning ecology is a collection of communities, both formal and informal, physical and virtual, organised by individual learners through their interests and constantly evolving to form individual learning experiences. In other words, learning takes place across settings simultaneously, and individual learning ecologies emerge with all elements around them. In addition, learners themselves create or pursue activities in their environments. This paper adopts these notions of ecology and refers to it as ‘an environment’ involving complex and dynamic configurations of interrelations between various components to generate learning experiences.

White et al. (2016) highlighted the importance of understanding the complex nature of context: “the learner, the context and the interface established between each learner and their individual contexts, based on the actions they take and the interplay between themselves and their contexts” (p. 5). Learner-context interface theory (White, 2009; White et al., 2016) aims to elucidate and accentuate the interplay of individual language learners as agents, the target language, and the contexts. From an ecological perspective, a meaningful learning experience using the target language in a social context is considered a key element in constructing and contributing to the development of the interplay (White et al., 2016). With the emergence of research on the informal and private learner life-worlds, the relationship between such diverse language learning environments and language learning experiences has emerged as an important aspect for enquiry.

Self-access learning environments are also considered to be a dynamic social learning space with an emergence of various elements associated with language learning and learners’ self-development (Murray, 2018; Mynard et al., 2020a). The concept of language learning ecologies allows not only SALC staff but also other members in the institution to contemplate how a SALC can contribute to the construction of individual learners learning ecologies in

the institution and beyond and enable the learner to take charge of their learning environments through generating effective learning experiences.

Self-Access Learning Centers Within a Language Learning Environment

Benson (2017, 2021) proposed spatial perspectives as a new way of looking at language learning contexts and emphasised the importance of considering *where* learning takes place and emerges, and the importance of the configuration of individual learning environments. For Benson (2017), from an environmental view, “a SAC is not a ‘learning environment’ in and of itself. It is, instead, one of many ‘settings’ for language learning that potentially make up the language learning environments of its users” (Benson, 2017, p. 142). Indeed, if in-class learning is considered to be one of many settings for the learner, a SAC is also one of the components of their learning environments. The conceptualisation and value of a SAC, in what ways a “SAC might be situated in the complex worlds of students’ lives and learning” (p. 143) would also vary among individual learners. There seems to be a need to have a better understanding of the ways that the learner selects a SALC for one of their learning settings to contribute to their overall learning experiences and how they can maximise potential learning at the SALC. This study reflects Benson’s conceptualisation of the spatial view and attempts to examine how a SALC is situated in one’s learning environments with a holistic view. The use of a visual method such as mind maps as a tool for a learner to visually represent their learning environments and experiences will be suited for the purpose (Benson, 2021; Kashiwa, 2019). This study also explores the reconfiguration of all the settings in a learner’s environments through their learning experiences at the SALC as a consequence of increased awareness of her physical learning spaces as well as ideal L2 future self images.

The Role of Ideal L2 Self

The ideal L2 self refers to “the representation of the attributes that one would ideally like to possess (i.e., representation of hopes, aspirations, or wishes)” (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 13). As a key component in the L2 Motivational Self System, the notion of the ideal L2 self has been highlighted and regarded as one of the powerful motivational factors to initiate and sustain language learning (Dörnyei, 2009).

Drawing on Dörnyei’s framework of the L2 Motivational Self System, Gillies (2010) explored the role of motivation for the active engagement with the SALC environment at a Japanese private university. Gillies developed his previous survey into a qualitative investigation with interviews and found that the strength and vividness of the learner’s ideal L2 self (i.e., to be a competent English speaker interacting with teachers and foreign

exchange students, atmosphere of the environment as if they were in a foreign country), not their proficiency levels, played a vital role in how learners participated in social learning activities in the SALC. This was seen in the regular SALC users, whereas infrequent users tended to avoid the SALC due to their anxiety because of their lack of confidence in their oral communication skills. Mynard et al. (2020b) reported various individual difference factors such as learner beliefs and identity which were seen in both regular users and non-users of a social learning space. One of the salient differences which seemed to influence their choice of participation in the English Lounge was their future self images. The regular users perceived the space as “a place that allowed them to become a version of their ideal selves” (Mynard, 2020b, pp. 148-149) and their future self images became more specific over time. Both studies above suggest the prominent relationship between learner agency and the development of the ideal L2 self, and learner identity, which were involved in the co-construction of the dynamics of a social learning space.

By linking identity theory and possible future selves, Ushioda (2011) argues that in order to enable the learner to visualise their future possible self images, it is necessary for them to engage their current L2 experiences and selves through interactions with others so that they can perceive their ideal self image as continuous with their current selves. Ushioda (2011) then affirms teachers’ roles as “how we engage our students’ social identities in their L2 interactions within and beyond the classroom now would seem to have important consequences for how they visualize themselves as users of the L2 in the future” (p. 203). The current study was inspired by Ushioda’s notion and considers whether the learners have a clearer image of their ideal L2 selves through reflection on their current learning beyond the classroom, they might perceive the connection between their learning needs to be closer to their future selves as competent users of English and the potential benefits from using the SALC. In other words, learner agency to initiate their actions to join the SALC can be developed by both self-reflection and visualisation of their ideal L2 self.

The Development of Learner Agency

Learner agency is defined as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112). Learners are therefore regarded as “social agents collaborating with other people and using the tools and resources available to them in their surrounding environment” (Kalaja et al., 2011). Duff (2012) elaborates on the notion of agency from a sociocultural perspective as follows:

People’s ability to make choices, take control, self-regulate, and thereby pursue their goals as individuals leading, potentially, to personal or social transformation (p. 414).

Mercer (2011) argues from a complexity view that a learner's sense of agency involves "their belief systems, and the control parameters of motivation, affect, metacognitive/self-regulatory skills, as well as actual abilities and the affordances, actual and perceived, in specific settings" (p. 435). In a similar vein, Larsen-Freeman et al. (2021) assert that "Learner agency refers to the feeling of ownership and sense of control that learners have over their learning" (p. 6). For them, agentic learners are those who possess 'a growth mindset'. They further explained that "they believe that they are in control of their learning, and they have the ability to learn and improve. Agentic learners take initiative, seizing and even creating opportunities to learn. They are also resilient; they have the ability to adapt and persevere in order to overcome setbacks" (Larsen-Freeman et al., 2021, p. 6). Emphasis is placed on learners' active involvement in and control over learning, and the ability to shape (and re-shape) their own language learning environments for their development.

Palfreyman's (2014) account of the pedagogy for learner autonomy suggests that by developing learner awareness of language learning outside of the classroom environment (which is more likely rich in resources, but where the learner has limited awareness of its possibilities for learning) and by guiding learners to reflect upon "how well they do (tasks), in what circumstances, with whom and why", "learners come to reframe experiences in their life outside the classroom as opportunities to practice and learn" (p. 187). Pachler et al. (2010) also pointed out the importance of "the notion of agency, namely the creation by the user/learner together with other relevant parties, such as teachers and peers, of situations conducive to the use of mobile technologies as frames for meaning making" (p. 65) as a key point in the argument for the affordances of mobile technology in language learning environments.

In a Japanese university context, Murray et al. (2014) investigated the use of a social learning space, the English Café, and demonstrated how Japanese university students utilised the English Café by gathering and sharing information; then, through the interactions among the users, the space was transformed into a meaningful place for them. The importance of exercising agency through social learning activities was discussed, however, the participants were the regular users of the English Café, who were assumed to have known the potential of learning outcomes and already initiated their learning activities at the social place. It is assumed that there are many others who do not use or recognise the value of the facilities provided in their surrounding environments. Considering that stepping into a social learning space itself is a choice of the learner and awareness of their learning needs is necessary to

engage with learning activities at a SALC, the first step into the SALC could be regarded as the first agentic action of the learner.

Based on the aforementioned literature, the current study addresses the following research questions:

1. How does a student configure and perceive the SALC within her learning environment beyond the classroom?
2. In what ways does a learner develop her awareness of her language learning environments?
3. What pedagogical support can teachers provide to promote the SALC as one of their learning settings in their environment?

Methodology

This study employed a case study involving narrative analysis of multiple qualitative data sources to investigate the depth of the process of a learner's reconfiguration of the learning environments through the learning experience both in-class and outside of the classroom. Case study research concentrates on "optimizing understanding of the case rather than to generalize beyond it" (Stake, 2008, p. 120). It is commonly used for qualitative research as a strategy for investigating "a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and contexts may not be clearly evident" (Yin, 2014, p. 2).

Hood (2009) described a case in qualitative research as "a bounded system comprised of an individual, institution or entity and the site and context in which social action takes place, the boundaries of which may not be clear and are determined by the scope of the researcher's interests" (p. 69). Although the boundaries may not be easily drawn, such research is considered as a "contextual study, unfolding over time and in real settings" (van Lier, 2005, p. 205).

Research Setting and Participant

The current research was set at a private university in Japan. A participant, Lisa (pseudonym), was a third-year undergraduate university student majoring in English and taking a teacher training course. She was one of the students taking the author's Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) course entitled 'Language learning beyond the classroom' for the duration of one semester. The objectives of the course were to self-reflect on their own learning beyond the classroom and to construct a better learning environment. Therefore, many of the class activities, while understanding concepts associated with

language learning, aimed to guide the learners to increase their awareness of their own learning both in and outside of the classroom and gain a holistic view to be able to configure language learning environments. Thus, the results of the present investigation can reflect the learning outcomes of the course. In terms of reflexivity, it should be noted that the potential influence on the participant due to the fact that the researcher was the teacher of the participant in this particular course was taken into account. However, to ensure rigour in the research design, the class activities and artefacts for the course which were later used as research data were focused on the course objectives throughout the process rather than encouraging changes in the participant's actions for research purposes.

Multiple Data Sources

Data was collected from multiple sources which ensured triangulation of the data: a language learning history essay, mind maps, and short descriptions of the learner's reflection of the mind maps as class activities. The assignments and related class tasks were designed for the learners to reflect on their own learning from the past to the current in order to better understand their learning environments beyond the classroom. Some concepts of language learning, such as L2 learning motivation (Ushioda, 2011) and language learning strategies (Griffiths & Oxford, 2014), were introduced as analytical tools for reflection in the course.

A visual tool 'The Strategy Tree for Language Learners' was used as an instructional tool for advising and teaching in a SALC in a Japanese university for the learners to reflect on their own language learning strategies (Abe et al., 2014). Drawing the Strategy Tree allowed the learners to view their learning in a holistic way. It guided them to raise their awareness of their learning strategies and plan their future learning in the hope of making it more effective. The current study employed the mind map drawing as a tool for self-reflection on language learning environments beyond the classroom, and also as a tool for discussion at the stimulated recall interview. The students drew a mind map on 'My language learning environments beyond the classroom' twice - at the beginning of the semester to write down all the activities they did for learning English, and also towards the end of the course (around a three-month gap) so that they could compare the differences between the two. Bagnoli (2009) suggests that "the inclusion of non-linguistic dimensions in research" (p. 547) can be used as a way of accessing and representing daily experiences at different levels. This is because everyday events and experiences cannot always be easily expressed in words since they are "made of a multiplicity of dimensions, which include the visual and the sensory" (p. 547). Given that the "visual is also spatial" (Emmison, 2011, p. 238), the analysis of visual

data in this study allowed for reflections on and discussions about the relevance of items which constitute the language learning environment (Kashiwa, in press).

A follow-up semi-structured stimulated recall face-to-face interview (Gass & Mackey, 2000) was conducted with the participant Lisa after the semester using the two mind maps and her descriptions of them, which were written in English. The interview was conducted in Japanese, the first language of both the participant and author, and lasted approximately one hour. Using the mind maps, the author asked for clarification on Lisa's descriptions of the mind maps in order to avoid any misinterpretation. Also, interview questions were designed to elucidate further details on the process of change in her learning environments. In addition, the author asked her to elaborate on her overall reflection of her learning outcomes on the course. The interview transcript was translated into English by the author. After conducting a careful coding of all the data sources, extracts presented later in the findings were selected to demonstrate the key elements of the development of her agency by keeping as much of her original words as possible.

It should be noted that the nature of the course was to encourage the students to broaden their perceptions of language learning beyond the classroom through self-reflection, and possibly develop their agency to act upon their perceived affordances within their learning environments. However, it is also the fact that learners' conceptions and beliefs about learning are not easily influenced or changed (Kashiwa, in press). The participant for this paper had been selected from the author's observation of the course as an instructor. She was a person who demonstrated ways that a learner could be guided to exercise agency and maximise the spatial dimension of her language learning environment (Benson et al., 2018) and gained benefits from using the SALC. The transformation from 'a non-user' to 'an active user' of the SALC was the most significant among the students in the course.

Data Analysis: Narrative Inquiry

Webster and Mertova (2007) describe narrative inquiry as "human stories of experience [that] provide researchers with a rich framework through which they can investigate the ways humans experience the world depicted through their stories" (p. 1). It is "a way of doing research that focuses on the stories we tell about our lives. These stories are about our *experiences* of life – the meaning we make of the events we live or imagine in our future lives" (Barkhuizen, 2015, pp. 169, emphasis in original). Narrative approaches have been widely used in the field of language learning and teaching as a powerful tool for understanding the depth of individual teachers and learners' lived experience in relation to their (re)construction or negotiation of their identities (Barkhuizen, 2016, 2013; Barkhuizen

et al., 2014; Benson et al., 2013; Coffey, 2010; Pavlenko, 2007). Narrative inquiry also allows researchers to explore how learners' beliefs have been affected by their past learning experiences and how they would most likely reflect their current learning activities. Their stories contain emotions, constraints, expectations and future visions. They can therefore provide us with a better understanding of how learners make sense of their lived experience and how they reconstruct or negotiate their identity as a learner in the particular contexts in which they are now situated (Barkhuizen, 2015; Liu & Xu, 2011).

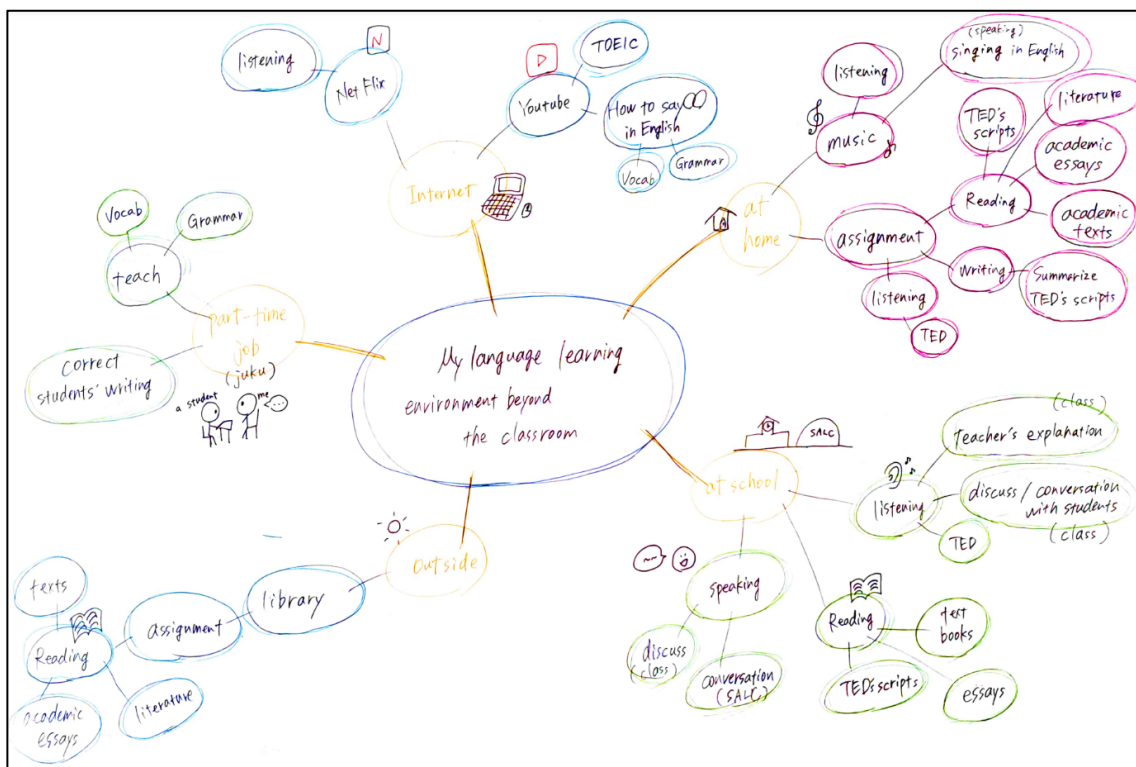
Narrative analysis was conducted to explore the depth of Lisa's learning experiences. Writing a narrative of an individual learner by combining multiple non-narrative data sources into a cohesive, structured story was used in this study for further analysis (Benson, 2013). As such, writing Lisa's narrative allowed the author to conduct an in-depth investigation of the development of her agency and reconfiguration of her learning environments through changes in attitudes during the time of data collection.

The next section provides a narrative of Lisa with her two mind maps, which were used as tools for self-reflection of her learning environments beyond the classroom, in order to present the process of her agency development as well as change in her learning practice with engagement with the SALC. Her background information is briefly stated first, followed by a detailed explanation of her learning activities as well as the role of the SALC at the beginning of the semester described on the first mind map. Then, the major factors which fostered her agency are illustrated with the visual image of her new learning environment, presenting the expanded roles of the SALC in her environment.

Findings: Lisa's Story of Becoming an Active User of the SALC

Lisa decided to take this CLIL course named "Language learning beyond the classroom" because a more senior student recommended her to take it as one of the elective subjects. She works part-time at a private-tutoring school because becoming a secondary school teacher is her dream.

Figure 1
Lisa's Mind Map (1)



At the beginning of the semester, Lisa described her learning activities by dividing the mind map categories into five (Figure 1). At school, she said that she practised listening, reading and speaking skills. She “listened to teachers’ explanations and students’ talks” and also watched TED Talks videos as class activities. Reading academic textbooks, articles, and TED Talks’ scripts were good for practising reading. Opportunities to discuss something in class was good speaking practice. Although she wrote in the mind map that “*at school – speaking-conversation (SALC)*”, as if she had had conversations with English teachers at the SALC. However, it showed that she just said “hi” when she met staff at the SALC, she did not attend any sessions facilitated by the SALC staff. She expressed in the interview that she “knew that what services that they have, such as ‘yellow sofa’ (where you can join casual chats with English speaking staff and other students any time) but [she] was scared to use them, so [she has] never used it before”. She thought she had to write as many ideas as she could on the map; that’s why she wrote it even though she was not actually a user of the SALC.

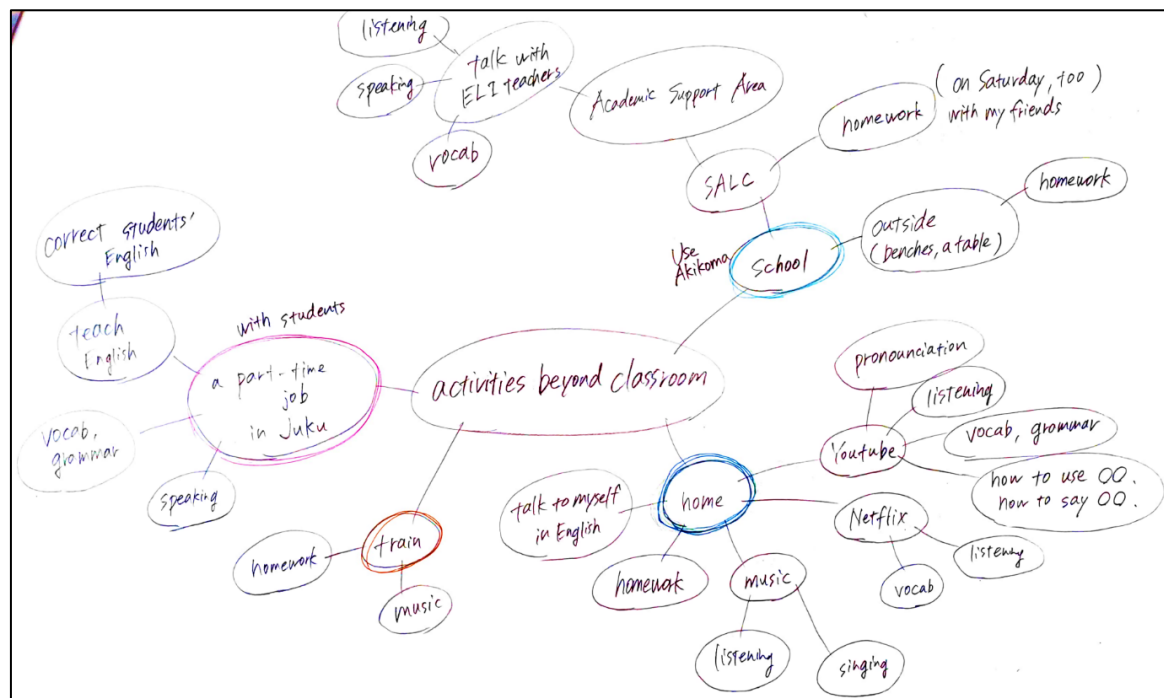
At home, listening to music (also singing along) and doing assignments were the two main things she did. She evaluated her activities and claimed that summarising TED Talks’ scripts was good writing practice. The category of “*On the internet*” described how she

utilised YouTube and Netflix as resources for learning English. YouTube videos were resources not only for entertainment but also for learning English. She learns vocabulary and grammar by watching YouTube videos. For example, tips of TOEIC examination, grammar tutoring videos such as explaining the difference between “can and may” or “–ing vs. to do”, and some useful expressions for conversation by native English speaking YouTubers. She thought that she “could learn how native speakers use English words naturally”. She watched Netflix, usually with Japanese subtitles but sometimes with English subtitles, and “tried to listen to as many English words as she could”, in particular, she paid attention to informal language use in the movies. However, her “main reasons of watching Netflix has always been simply enjoying watching movies”.

Since Lisa wanted to be a secondary school English teacher in the future, she worked at a private-tutoring school as a part-time English teacher so that it would be good training for her. She has taught mainly junior high school and high school students vocabulary and grammar. She considered that teaching was another good learning opportunity as she should comprehend grammar rules clearly in order to teach her students. Apart from these above activities, she liked to go to the library alone to do her reading. She reflected on her learning activities and her environments beyond the classroom with her first mind map and realised that she “read a lot”, mainly for classes she was taking. She also thought that “reading is very important to get vocabulary” as she found that she could remember words she came across frequently while reading, such as “cognitive”, thanks to her extensive amount of reading. She evaluated herself that she was not good at listening, and that was why she intentionally practised listening skills through watching TED Talks. YouTube was a great resource with a lot of information where she could clarify her questions on grammar and learn more natural expressions used in conversation. She commented that she did not have enough speaking practice. It was only in class she actually spoke English. She did not use the SALC, and it was not part of her learning environment. As a result, her out-of-class learning was mostly done alone, either at the library or at home. Also, she reflected that she did not enjoy learning at that time; she just kept doing her assignments without any motivation or clear images of her goals to be achieved.

Figure 2

Lisa's Mind Map (2)



The second mind map (Figure 2) was drawn about three months later, almost at the end of the semester. Lisa described her learning activities and environments beyond the classroom in detail again. She thought that she was able to draw the mind map with a better understanding of her own learning the second time and it was a refined version of her learning environments. After drawing it, she compared the two mind maps and self-assessed the changes.

The biggest change she found was that she started using the Academic Support Area (ASA hereafter) within the SALC, which is one of the facilities, for practising speaking. Her actions and attitudes towards the use of the ASA did not change just because of the reflection and evaluation of her learning activities when she drew the first mind map. Rather, she considered that her opinion changed after learning about one of the concepts regarding learning motivation and discussed the importance of having the “ideal L2 self” as a motivational factor for sustaining her motivation. She noted that her ideal L2 self image was like that of a senior student who was fluent in English, and she wanted to be like him. Since her senior student frequently used the ASA facilities, in particular, the sessions talking with English language teachers, she thought that that was the way he maintained his good speaking skills. Then, she decided to do the same so that she could be fluent in English like

him. She made a reservation for the speaking session for the first time after she knew that a senior student did it very often.

Another key factor that she took action on was that her classmates also emphasised to her the value of the ASA. One of her classmates, who was also a frequent user of the ASA, suggested some strategies to her as a beginner. That was to try some conversation sessions with different staff and find one whom she enjoyed talking with, also whom she can share the same topics of interest so that the conversation will be livelier. She followed his strategic use of the conversation sessions. She met a teacher with whom she could share the same interests (e.g., TV series, cartoons, music, etc.). Now, Lisa made it her weekly routine to visit the ASA to practice speaking with this particular staff member. At the time she wrote the reflective notes on the mind map, she did not really feel that her speaking skills had developed as “it is not easy to see the development of speaking skills”, however, she was determined to “continue to talk with the teacher to develop her skills”.

Another change she found was that “there were a lot of available resources and places she did not use” after doing the class activities of reflecting on learning environments for increasing awareness of their surrounding environments. Since she saw some students using benches and tables outdoors for self-studying, she thought, “it must be comfortable to study outside!” Then, one day, she sat there and did her homework. She found that “she could feel refreshed” and realised that changing a place to study works as a way to experience positive feelings for studying.

She found both of the new ways of learning effective to achieve her goal, which was “to develop speaking skills”, and valuable to continue as a routine. She concluded her self-reflection by saying, “Even if I feel lazy to go to ASA, I will go there at least once a week. There are numerous ways, strategies, and resources to learn English. So I try many ways and want to find a great one that suits me” (the original English texts written in her mind map descriptions).

The SALC was not part of her learning environment until she took this course in her third year in university. However, once she started using it and practised speaking with English speaking staff regularly, she felt that “the SALC is mine, I own it” (*watashi no mono* –original is Japanese in the interview). Furthermore, her learning experiences at the SALC, not only the speaking sessions with the staff but also spending time with her friends studying together at the self-study areas, worked effectively. She felt “motivated just to see her friends also working on the same tasks that she was working on” and then could spend her self-study time more productively. In addition, these positive learning experiences gave her positive

feelings towards learning English. Her recognition of the SALC has changed from “just knowing the existence and services that they provide” to a place in which she maximises her learning and takes ownership of her learning. Furthermore, she associated such learning experiences with active engagement with the SALC with the positive feeling of “fun” and to be an active student at this university. She emphasised that “if [she] didn’t take the course, she would not reflect on her own learning and thought about her ideal-self” and “it was the best timing to be able to change her attitudes because she had been bored with everyday learning just completing assignments”.

Lisa concluded that although the university staff often introduced and promoted the excellent supportive facilities of the SALC, she did not think that it was a place for her. What made her take action was the emergence of many incidents; her senior student, whom she admires, her classmates who were active users of the SALC, and her explicit self-reflection of her learning in the class.

Discussion

The outcomes of this study support the idea that language learning takes place in an individual learner’s language learning environments which consist of various settings beyond the classroom (Benson, 2017). The configuration of those settings are varied in the individual learners, which depend on their selections of activities and resources according to their needs and perceptions of their learning environments in mind. The reconfiguration for quality environments for language learning can result from the learner’s recognition of usefulness for them to achieve their personal goals of language learning, and also the development of learner agency to take actions to engage with the environments (Palfreyman, 2014). Three key influential factors which supported Lisa’s development of her agency appeared to be 1) her future self-image to become like her senior student as a motivational factor, 2) peer interactions which Lisa gained suggestions on strategies to utilise the ASA, and positive learning experiences with teachers and peers at the learning space, and 3) self-reflection of her own learning and surrounding environments.

Ideal L2 Self Images

Lisa first perceived the SALC as a location without any specific language learning value, although she was aware of its existence as a language learning center. However, the usefulness of it was not certain until she knew that her senior student, whose English fluency she admired, utilised the SALC. As reported in research on non-users’ avoidance of the SALC (Gillies, 2010; Mynard et al., 2020b), Lisa also previously had anxiety about talking to

English speaking staff as well as uncertainty of the learning outcomes from the participation in a speaking session at the ASA. Her non-engagement with the SALC also made her perceive the SALC as not necessary. Her motives for challenging herself to join the ASA session were ignited at the time when she visualised her ideal future self-image. This study supports Gillies' (2010) that ideal L2 self-images are motivational factors for the usage of the self-regulated learning. Through the learning experiences in the conversation sessions, Lisa appeared to reduce the discrepancy between her current self and her image of her future possible self (Ushioda, 2011).

The Role of Peers

As Murray et al. (2014) discussed, Lisa also exercised her agency by engaging in the activities at the SALC. Through the interactions with others, the SALC became a meaningful place for learning. Classmates' recommendations related to strategical usage of the facility also made Lisa's affordances of the SALC more realistic and linked to her goals. Her learning experience of using the conversation sessions and her continuous use of it helped her make it her own through the satisfaction of her own actions. Her strategic use of conversation sessions was also highlighted as she could have a clear picture of how to use it. As such, her construction of a meaningful interface at the ASA was achieved through social interactions with peers (White et al., 2016) – casual chat with her classmates on the specific strategy of advice. She was trying to have sessions with various teachers and find one with whom she felt more comfortable communicating with so she could enjoy the conversation and a more sustainable activity.

Furthermore, sharing the learning space in the SALC with her peers created a positive pressure of working together in the space. Specifically, it was the way she made this space personally meaningful using the target language. In other words, the emergence of elements involved in constructing Lisa's language learning such as the recognition of the SALC as a potential learning space and her agentic actions to make meanings of learning through learning experiences in a social space, and peer interactions both in and out-of-class developed her ecology of language learning (Barron, 2006; Murray, 2018; White et al., 2016).

Pedagogical Support

Lisa's understanding of the importance of having an image of her ideal future self and self-reflection on her own learning through class activities guided her to recognise the value of the SALC and encouraged her to take action. As such, as Lai (2015) argued, the connection between in-class and out-of-class learning activities for traversing an individual's

overall language learning has been created within Lisa. This study showed a positive impact of the learner's reflective practice on language learning beyond the classroom by integrating it with class activities. Learners themselves should have an ecological perspective by reflecting on what they are doing beyond the classroom and sharing it with others, and then reconfigure their surrounding language learning environments (Kalaja et al., 2011). As Ushioda (2011) suggested, the current study demonstrated a way that teachers can help raise learners' awareness of their current learning experiences, selves, affordances, and resources in the immediate environment to be able to visualise their future possible selves. The learner's better understanding about the role of motivation for language learning, in particular, the power of ideal L2 self to connect the now and future would also be a tool for self-evaluation and reflection for planning future learning strategies (Abe et al., 2014).

Conclusion

The study presented the process of how a learner, Lisa, who did not make use of the SALC started to utilise the SALC and made it her own. She made it an essential part of her learning through the development of self-regulated agency. The key for the development of learner agency which guided the non-user to become a regular user and can derive benefits from the SALC were seen. The study highlighted the importance of having a stronger image of ideal L2 future self and the learner's reflective practice on learning environments beyond the classroom. The peer interactions such as sharing specific strategies for using the SALC for improving speaking skills also helped her to take agentic action. Such actual learning experiences generated meanings of the SALC as part of a learner's language learning environments. In other words, the learner's awareness of the use of learning spaces and strategic use of resources available in her environment, and peer interactions guided the promotion of her agency to use the SALC effectively.

The limitation of the study may be that the outcomes of the study are not generalisable. However, the current study did provide insights into the process and key factors of the development of learner agency. Future research could be done, perhaps, with a multiple case study approach to have a better understanding of individual differences on shaping participants' personal learning environments, and how they perceive their affordances and engage in everyday learning activities beyond the classroom. In addition, teachers' roles to better support the learner to use their agency with a spatial view would be worth exploring.

Since the author was the instructor of the course, the change of perception as an outcome of her learning in the course was guided and encouraged so that the learner could be a better learner. However, such changes were not taken for granted, and not all the class students achieved a tangible change by the end of the course. In other words, not all learners will develop such a connection to the SALC as Lisa did. Nevertheless, the class activities requiring students to reflect on their learning, as well as develop an ideal future self image for planning their learning and having clear motivation for learning, can help learners create a link between in-class and out-of-class learning, now and future.

In terms of methodological consideration, mind maps showed the spatial dimension of Lisa's personal learning environments beyond the classroom. Seen from her visual representation of her language learning environments, the SALC was one of many settings available for her to construct individual learning environments. This study also suggests that class teachers can contribute to helping learners develop their agency through more creative tasks related to their learning environments beyond the classroom as a reflective activity. By doing so, they can be active agents making decisions related to selecting learning resources relevant to them and making use of learning spaces which can support them becoming autonomous learners.

Since the current study reported only one learner who had not used the SALC before, further studies are needed to pay more attention to the constraints of not being able to utilise the SALC by listening to more voices of other non-users. In turn, we can explore effective and practical pedagogical intervention to assist learners to be more aware of the configuration of their learning environments and prepare them to exercise their agency.

Notes on the Contributor

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