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Introduction

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Cover image by Jo Mynard: Ca' Bernardo - Biblioteca Area Linguistica (BALI) - Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia.

Introduction

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Welcome to this special issue of *SiSAL* journal, dedicated to exploring the current landscape of self-access and self-directed language learning in Europe. In this collection of articles, we look at various aspects of language learner support across the continent, highlighting innovative practices and emerging trends. The idea for the special issue was prompted by a one-year sabbatical based in Italy from April 2023 to March 2024 for two of the editors who are usually based in Japan (David McLoughlin, Jo Mynard). We were researching language learning beyond the classroom and systems for supporting language learners, and we were hoping to learn about current research and practice by editing this issue. We were fortunate to meet Elena Borsetto, a well-connected, multilingual and expert language specialist early in our time in Italy and we decided that the three of us would make a good team to compile this special issue.

The origins of self-access language learning can be traced back to Europe, specifically CRAPEL (*Centre de Recherches et d'Applications Pédagogiques en Langues* / Centre for Research and Applications in Language Teaching) at the University of Lorraine in Nancy, France (Holec, 2000). Despite many decades of publications related to self-access learning from Europe-based scholars, particularly from 1980 to 2000, in recent years—with some notable exceptions—few papers appear to be coming from European settings. Looking at issues of *SiSAL Journal* over the past five years (2019 to 2023 inclusive), out of 145 author locations, only 21 (14%) are based in Europe. Volume 12(3) (September, 2021) was a special issue containing 10 papers from a conference held in Turkey, so if we discount these papers, we are left with 11 Europe-based authors in five years, just 7.5% of the total authors. This special issue is an attempt to address this obvious gap in the literature.

The issue contains five papers in the main section, three case studies, one review (in both Italian and English), and a contribution to our regular ethnography column with a European

focus. Settings range from university language centers to secondary schools, outdoor schools, self-directed learning, and even a cruise ship. The papers take us to Austria, Denmark, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, and Italy. We hope you enjoy reading these papers as much as we have.

Main Section

The first paper by **Graham Burton, Elena Borsetto, Alessandra Giglio, and Leonhard Voltmer** reviews the first three years of the Centre for Academic Writing (CAW) at the trilingual Free University of Bozen-Bolzano. Established in 2021, the CAW was created to assist students with their writing and facilitate research in academic writing within a multilingual setting. The article outlines the CAW services, focusing particularly on the Helpdesk, which offers one-on-one support. The paper discusses the challenges faced, solutions implemented, and the evolution of the Centre's services. It emphasizes the importance of providing tailored self-access resources to meet diverse student needs and suggests future directions for enhancing student engagement and support.

The second paper by **Balázs Fajt** from Budapest Business School, University of Applied Sciences, Hungary examines secondary school students' motivation in Hungary to learn German as a Foreign Language (GFL). The author focuses on students' participation in extramural activities such as social media and German media consumption. Using Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System as a framework, the study surveys 546 students to determine how often they engage in these activities and their effect on GFL motivation. The results show that although these activities are generally infrequent, digital and interactive ones significantly boost motivation. The study also highlights gender differences in activity engagement and suggests incorporating extramural activities into GFL teaching to enhance student motivation and learning.

Elina Maslo, an independent researcher working in Tvis in Denmark presents a unique insight into the open Danish school system, showing the potential for language and learning in outdoor-school activities through an ecological perspective, emphasizing the interdependence of language use and meaningful engagement. The study, based on a pilot project at a Danish school, investigates how the outdoor-school environment offers unique 'affordances' (Gibson, 1979) for language learning by allowing children to interact with their surroundings in diverse, sensory-rich ways. Through observations, interviews with teachers and students, and multimedia

documentation, the author captured how outdoor exploration activities provided diverse language use and learning opportunities in a natural, hands-on setting.

In the fourth paper, **Marcella Menegale** and **Lucia Spricigo**, both from Ca' Foscari University of Venice, examine the efficacy of a confidence-building diary (CBD) as a reflective tool for younger language learners aged 13-14 in an Italian lower-secondary school setting. Results of a study replicating research by Shelton-Strong and Mynard (2021) indicated positive effects on student awareness of their learning processes and emotional responses, demonstrating the potential of such interventions to enhance metacognitive skills and foster positive attitudes towards language learning from an early stage. However, before fully integrating the CBD into the Italian school curriculum at lower educational levels, the study recommends further investigation to refine and broaden these findings across a variety of educational contexts.

With the aim of fostering students' autonomous language learning, **Martina Šindelářová Skupeňová** and **Radim Herout**, lecturers at the Masaryk University Language Center in the Czech Republic, discuss two formats of language advising. The study compares advising sessions that are part of an elective English (L2) course and those that are optional in a mandatory L3 German for Future Teachers (GFT) course. A survey conducted in both courses and two case studies revealed differences in students' prior experience with self-directed learning, self-regulation skills, and expectations of what an advisor should help them do. A difference emerged between the two groups in terms of self-assessment criteria and choices of learning strategies and approaches. The results of the case studies show that advising sessions help students select appropriate learning materials and methods. Despite the differences in course settings, both formats effectively meet students' specific needs and expectations and encourage autonomous learning.

Case studies

There are three case studies in this issue. The first is by **Lesley Adams** (University of Padova, Italy) and **Erik Gasparini** (University of Pisa, Italy) and is a description of the learning process of one exceptional learner preparing for an exam. The case study documents Erik's journey from scoring a 5.5 on initial IELTS mock tests to achieving a Band 8, surpassing his goals. Multiple data sources were employed, such as detailed interviews and written accounts, to analyze the strategies that Erik employed, highlighting the significance of disciplined self-study,

reflective learning, and the importance of mock tests. Findings from the investigation were helpful for the teacher restructuring an exam preparation course. This article provides valuable insights into the impact of motivation, goal-setting, and autonomous study on language learning and certification achievement.

The second article in this section uses a multiple-case study by **Lawrie Moore**, CELTA tutor in Vienna. This study explores how and why three Austrian secondary school pupils use *Study with Me* outside the classroom to support their English-language development. *Study with Me* real-time streaming sessions, in which content creators self-record while studying silently, provide students with opportunities for parasocial (Jhuang et al., 2022) and peer-to-peer interaction. Through semi-structured interviews and member checking, the study examines how students use these sessions to minimize distractions, foster a sense of community, and enhance self-regulation skills. Findings suggest that while *Study with Me* is beneficial for subjects requiring concentration and internalization, its usefulness for English-language learning is limited, highlighting the need for further research in different learning contexts.

In the third paper in the case study section, **Jo Mynard** from Kanda University of International Studies in Japan investigates self-access language learning (SALL) support at four European institutions—three in Italy and one in Germany. The study examines how learner support is conceptualized, operationalized, and evaluated through observations, document analyses, interviews, and site visits. The findings highlight several emergent themes and reveal that SALL support varies widely in terms of institutional vision, resources, and evaluation methods. The conclusions suggest that while there is a strong foundation for SALL in Europe, there is room for improvement in consistency and accessibility across institutions.

Reviews

The review in this issue is available in Italian and English. The authors, **Marco Lera** (La Bricola, Venice, Italy), **David McLoughlin** (Meiji University, Tokyo, Japan), and **Jo Mynard** (Kanda University of International Studies, Chiba, Japan) provide some insights into six resources for self-directed learners of Italian. Before describing some engaging ways to pursue Italian as a foreign language, the authors make a case that learners should first determine their goals before selecting a resource.

Ethnographies of Self-Access

In the fourth instalment of his autoethnography, **Leoncio P. Olobia** from Leyte Normal University, Tacloban City, Philippines, shares his autoethnography of a time spent working as a pianist aboard an international cruise ship traveling in Europe. He explores the dynamics of interactions as international crewmembers speak English as a working language with each other and with international guests also using English as a language of communication rather than a native tongue.

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Notes on the Editors

Elena Borsetto received her Ph.D. in Educational Linguistics from Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy, with a study focusing on the vehicular use of English in higher education. She is currently conducting post-doctoral research at the University of Verona on a project related to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). She works as a teacher trainer in professional development courses for academic staff, as a language tutor for the Center for Academic Writing (CAW) at the Free University of Bozen/Bolzano, and as an English lecturer.

David McLoughlin is an associate professor in the School of Global Japanese Studies at Meiji University in Tokyo, Japan. He has an M.Phil. in Applied Linguistics from Trinity College, University of Dublin, Ireland, and an Ed.D. in TEFL from the University of Exeter, UK. He researches learner motivation, including the role of interest in sustaining long-term motivation, and the motivational effects of causal attributions.

Jo Mynard is a professor in the Faculty of Global Liberal Arts, Director of the Self-Access Learning Center, and Director of the Research Institute for Learner Autonomy Education at Kanda University of International Studies in Chiba, Japan. She has an M.Phil. in Applied

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