Maximizing Language Learning Opportunities through CALL

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Introduction

The majority of university language students in Japan follow a similar schedule: they attend classes, listen to teachers go over salient aspects of language learning, and work with their peers to achieve specific goals. After school, students (hopefully) complete their assignments and then go about their daily lives, possibly working part-time or taking part in club or sports activities. However, while language instructors often stress the importance of studying outside of class, many learners in Japan do not invest a significant amount of time in self-directed language learning. Several factors may impact this decision: a lack of free time and/or motivation, as well as few opportunities to develop the second language (L2) in a meaningful way outside of class. For these reasons, self-access language learning centers (SALLCs) play an essential role in supporting students' language development by hosting special events, connecting students with language partners, and providing language learning resources. Yet, even if students are highly motivated, their busy schedules may prevent them from visiting a SALLC. Moreover, students may lack the confidence to participate in events, particularly if they are expected to speak in front of others in a foreign language. Therefore, the best approach to SALLCs is to incorporate both physical and online spaces through computer assisted language learning (CALL) in order to support the needs, interests, and abilities of all students.

Incorporating CALL with SALLCs

As Rubesch and Barrs (2014) notes, online spaces can "liberate self-access learning from its physical confines by vastly opening up the volume, velocity and variety of resources available to the learner" (p. 43). In other words, CALL allows students to access language learning resources anytime and anywhere; thus, breaking down the physical and temporal barriers that may impede a student from

leveraging the benefits of a SALLC. Furthermore, as Kissau, McCullough, and Pyke (2010) have found, computer-mediated learning can work to decrease L2 anxiety and increase self-perceived competence. As a result, students may feel more comfortable communicating in the target language in an online setting than in a face-to-face environment.

Given its prevalence among students and its potential to support self-access learning, SALLCs ought to utilize the features of Facebook. Peeters (2015) found that Facebook supported self-directed collaboration and increased the knowledge, skills, and confidence of the learners in academic writing. One way to incorporate Facebook to encourage self-access learning is through online instructional conversations (OICs). OICs are similar to conventional instructional conversations, which are "discussion-based lessons geared toward creating opportunities for stu dents' conceptual and linguistic development" (Goldenberg, 1991, p. 1). The only difference is that the OICs would take place in an online space rather than a physical one. In this activity, a teacher could start a discussion on a particular topic on a SALLC Facebook page while facilitating further dialogue in the comment section. By engaging in OICs, learners of all abilities could interact and learn from one another without the anxiety of speaking in front of others in a foreign language.

Although CALL can enhance self-access learning, it is critical not to overlook learner training (Reinders & Lewis, 2005). Considering this, SALLCs can serve as the place where students go to receive training on various CALL programs such as digital flashcard systems, which have been shown to be more effective at enhancing students' L2 vocabulary compared with traditional paper-based materials (Azabdaftari & Mozaheb, 2012; Başoğlu & Akdemir, 2010; Kiliçkaya & Krajka, 2010). In the context of SALLCs, research by Wu (2015, 2017) has demonstrated that the digital flashcard program, Quizlet, can have positive effects on self-directed vocabulary learning. However, learners may not be able to effectively leverage all of its features without the proper guidance. Thus, instructors or even experienced students could lead out in training sessions at SALLCs on how to use the program to maximize vocabulary development.

Conclusion

SALLCs have the power to transform language learning by giving students real opportunities to apply the skills they have learned in the classroom. However,

time constraints and oral speaking anxiety may inhibit some learners from taking full advantage of all the resources that SALLCs have to offer. Therefore, while technology will never replace the need for physical spaces where students can meet, learn, and converse with each other, CALL can afford learners with nearly limitless opportunities for self-access language learning.

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Abstract

In their paper outlining the challenges faced by foreign language instructors and learners in Japan, Nishino and Watanabe (2008) note that "Japanese students-like many other foreign language learners - have few opportunities to engage in face-to-face communication in English outside the classroom···" (pp. 134-135). Because of this, many institutions at the college level have turned to self-access language learning centers (SALLCs) as a way to promote second language (L2) interaction and the meaningful use of the target language outside of the confines of the classroom. However, simply having a SALLC does not guarantee that students will take advantage of all the features it has to offer. Learners may not have the time to visit a SALLC before or after class. Moreover, language anxiety may prevent students from attending SALLC sessions where speaking in the L2 is required. Given these potential issues, incorporating computer assisted language learning (CALL) may encourage students to utilize SALLC resources. Thus, the aim of this paper is to outline *why* and *how* universities can use CALL to better help students achieve their language goals through SALLCs.