

Fostering and Monitoring Learner Autonomy in a Self-Access Centre

OTA, Yuki

要旨

自律学習とSACの利用効果は言語学の分野でもしばしば話題となるトピックである。しかしながら、SACに関する参考文献は非常に少ない。これは、大学、および高等教育機関におけるSACの数が限られることが主な理由の一つだと考えられる。この論文では、日本の私立大学のSACにおいて、学習者が自律学習をどう理解しているか、また彼らが自律学習を行っているかについて観察したものである。自律学習を育み支援することは非常に重要なことである。SACを利用する目的意識のある学生が自律学習についてどう考えているか、またどのような目的のためにSACを利用しているかを調査した。その結果、自律学習とは自分に合った学習法を見つけることであると理解している学生が何人かいることがわかった。当大学では、自律学習者の数は月別に異なるものの、年間の平均利用者数は増えており、特に英語の資格試験受験の前に大きく増加している。さらに、SACは英語の自律学習をサポートするという学術面でのサポートだけでなく、多様な学生たちが集まり交流する場を提供することで学生生活においても重要な役割を果たしていることがわかった。

キーワード

セルフアクセスセンター、自律学習、英語教育

Abstract

Learner autonomy and the effective uses of self-access centres have been popular topics in the fields of linguistics. However, there is only a handful of literature available on the effectiveness of self-access centres, including self-access centres (SAC) in Japan. This is mainly because of the lack of SACs in Japanese higher educational institutions. In this research paper, a SAC in a private Japanese university was observed for two and a half school years to study learner's understanding of the concept of learner autonomy and whether these students were engaged in autonomous language learning. It is important to foster and monitor autonomous learners because they oftentimes have a clear goal on what they want to achieve. These willing and responsible students were surveyed on their perceptions of autonomous learning and for what purposes they have been using the SAC. The survey results showed that several students believed that learner autonomy is knowing how to search for an effective learning method. The university's SAC also experienced an exponential growth in the number of university students using the resources for different purposes by themselves. Although the number of students engaged in self-study, a form of self-directed study, varied by month, the numbers increased especially around fall and spring when nationwide English proficiency tests are given. In addition to the academic aspects of fostering and monitoring learner autonomy, the SAC played an important role in students' school life as it provided a space for social gatherings.

Keywords

Learner autonomy, Self-access centre, EFL, University setting

Introduction

Learner autonomy has been a hot topic in the field of linguistics for the past several years. Intensive and extensive research has been conducted throughout the world to dissect autonomy among first and second language learners (Brown, 2009: 571). Many of the studies have defined and focused on fostering autonomy within learners and teachers (Cotterall & Reinders, 2001; Martinez & McGrath, 2013; Reinders & Balçikanli, 2011). However, little has been reported about the uses of self-access centres specializing in English-language education – and needless to say, self-access centres for foreign languages in Japan (Fouser, 2003: 62; Gardner, 2001;

McMurry, Tanner, & Anderson, 2009). Many literatures available in online databases regarding self-access centres are observed in English-speaking countries where English is used as a second language (ESL) rather than a foreign language (EFL). Because English is a foreign language in Japan, the majority of the English language learners are at a disadvantage where the learners are confined to their English classrooms. Many university students are easily influenced and motivated by others, however they have tendencies of giving up. This applies not just for English language learning but for other things as well. Monitoring and having follow-ups on student goals are important but keeping their motivation

is challenging because only the student knows how serious he or she was in the first place. There is a need to mitigate such behaviours which could partly be achieved by developing traits of autonomy. This working paper aims to report the role of a self-access centre in a Japanese university EFL setting and aims to report on learners' understanding of autonomy. In this paper, the terms "learners" and "students", and "teachers" and "educators", are interchangeably used.

Before defining self-access centres, it is important to understand what autonomy really is. Holec (1981:3) described an autonomous person as someone who can "*take charge of one's learning*" (italicized in original). This definition has been the basis in the field of modern learner autonomy and has inspired other notable second language acquisition (SLA) researchers such as Little (1991), Cotterall & Reinders (2001), and Benson (2011). Holec's definition was made from a technical standpoint of learning. However, Little (1991), gave a psychological twist and defined learner autonomy as "essentially a matter of the learner's psychological relation to the processes and content of learning" (as quoted in Thanasoulas, 2000). Thanasoulas (2000) stated that autonomy is not achieved through teaching in classrooms but it is more of the willingness among learners to "control and oversee" their own learning. In a more recent definition, Ushioda (2011: 223) defined autonomy as a process among learners who are motivated and can conduct self-regulated learning. She added that autonomy and motivation are closely linked and interrelated. Other researchers such as Martinez and McGrath (2013) agree and that motivation is one of the many factors that drive students to take charge and be responsible for their own learning. Although there are a countless number of definitions available in the literature, the simplest and most useful definition is still Holec's.

It is important to understand and fully grasp the concept of learner autonomy because, by doing so, current and future educators can leverage this knowledge to foster autonomous studies among students. As Holec (1981: 3) pointed out, autonomy is encouraged when first determining the objectives, defining content and progression, selecting methods and techniques to be used, monitoring the procedures of acquisition, and evaluating what has been acquired. Encouraging learners to become autonomous in their studies outside their classroom will benefit both learners and teachers because learners will be more focused and motivated in reaching their target goal (Balçikanli, 2010:

90). Learner autonomy is the ideal form of learning regardless of what the learner is aiming to acquire. To foster autonomy, it is important to have appropriate resources readily available for use so that learners could freely choose and decide which resources they want to use for their learning (Balçikanli, 2010; McMurry, Tanner, & Anderson, 2009).

Such resources can be found in many places around educational facilities – such as the library, the classroom, and in the teacher's room or office (Fouser, 2003). Some educational institutions have a designated room that provides educational assistance to students for various school subjects. That is how self-access centres got their name – because most students take the initiative to regularly study in such an environment. Fouser (2003: 48) added that self-access centres are "one of the most recent approaches to integrating learner autonomy" in university settings. Self-access centres provide learning activities that lead to learner development such as: setting learning goals; identifying appropriate learning resources; selecting appropriate learning strategies; selecting important from unimportant; integrating materials; managing time; monitoring achievement and setting effective study habits (Towle & Cottrell, 1996: 357). These skills will be effective for learners in a studying environment and can also be used even outside school.

Although self-access centres can promote learner autonomy by providing necessary materials that are "designed to accommodate learners of different levels, styles, goals and interests" (Cotterall & Reinders, 2001: 2), self-access centres are not common in Japan. According to Japan Association of Self-Access Learning's (JASAL) registry of self-access centres in Japan, there are 22 centres that provide English-language assistance to students (JASAL Website, 2014). As of 2012, in a report published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) website, there were 783 universities in Japan. In other words, less than 3% of the universities (private, local, and national) have such a facility. There is a possibility, though, that some of these universities have not registered their self-access centres or similar facilities with JASAL since it is not required of institutions to do so. However, these figures reflect the situation of English-language education in Japan. There are several possible reasons why self-access centres are sparse. The most common reasons are that institutions cannot find and are therefore unable to hire English-language teachers willing to teach in a self-access centre as a language advisor,

lack of monetary funds resulting in lack of learning resources such as books and computers, and also a lack of available space. Dınçer, Yesilyurt, and Goksu (2010) also emphasized that the concept of autonomy is heavily rooted with the idea of “individualism and independence”, which are traits of Western societies and not so much of Eastern societies. Dınçer et al. (2010) added that such a concept will not be beneficial and useful to Eastern students, which may be why the idea of learner autonomy and self-access centres are not common in Japan.

For motivated students, having a self-access centre, or a similar environment, is very crucial because they have a goal that keeps them running, a drive to learn and to acquire the target language. These students, unlike other unmotivated students, manage their time to maximize the use of resources the institution offers – hence it is important to keep them motivated and to prevent the students from losing enthusiasm. To prevent learners’ demotivation or loss of motivation and also promote and encourage learners, it is important to examine learners’ understandings and awareness of autonomous learning. It is necessary, for learning advisors, to have a clearer understanding of student needs and goals to better aid and cater to the learners’ foreign language developmental educational needs. In addition, it is also important how a self-access centre fosters and monitors both autonomous and non-autonomous learners.

For this study, a self-access centre-in-the-making was observed for the duration of two and a half school years. Two research questions were posed for this study:

1. What are the learners’ understandings of learner autonomy?
2. How has the self-access centre influenced the learners?

Methods

Setting

This study observed a self-access centre-in-the-making established in a private women’s university in Japan. This facility is still “in-the-making” for two reasons; the first reason is that it is not registered under the JASAL registry and secondly, this particular facility aims to become a pure self-access centre. However, from here on, this facility will be referred as a SAC.

This institution has a four-year college as well as a two-year junior college. There are graduate schools as well. However, for this study, only the four-year college students and the junior college students were subjects of the study. In both colleges, many students are studying to become teachers

and, in the four year college, several hundred students aim to become dieticians. For all departments, English language is a requirement for graduation. However, there is an incentive for students who pass or score an English proficiency test such as STEP EIKEN. For these students, their English course credits are waived and therefore do not have to take a required English class. Many students are not aware of the incentive their university offers, but it is no hidden fact either. This information is provided in their student handbook, which is given to them at the beginning of their college career.

The SAC has two bilingual (Japanese and English languages) advisors and several English-language teachers, who often join students for lunch chatting time when the centre is busiest. Some teachers will voluntarily join the language advisors in helping and assisting students at other times, as well. The language advisors are always in the centre five to six days per week.

The SAC has six round tables which seat three to five people and three island tables that can easily be rearranged according to the students’ needs. In total, there are about 55 chairs with sufficient table space. The facility is also equipped with various Graded Reader books from beginner to intermediate levels, textbooks for various English proficiency tests, story books and novels, children’s picture books, six magnet whiteboards that are on the walls, and two movable whiteboards. The movable whiteboards can work as partitions when needed. There are copies of each textbook that are currently used by English-language teachers, which are mainly used by language advisors when assisting learners with specific questions from the textbooks. In addition, there are CD players with headphones, a television set with DVD players, laptops with Internet connections, a printer, and other office and classroom supplies (such as stationeries, an electric kettle, cups and instant coffees and teas). Although the SAC is a classroom, one of their aims is to provide a relaxing environment for learners to promote a healthy and a positive foreign language learning environment.

Participants

The participants of this study were students currently enrolled in the four-year university or the junior college. The majority of students were aged between 18 and 22, with some older students as well. The majority, if not all, of the participants were Japanese who grew up in the Japanese education system. The participants did not have to

be an English language major or did not have to be taking an English-language course to be using the facility. All participants' remained anonymous and only students who used the SAC were used for this study.

Procedures

For this study, university students who frequent the SAC were asked to participate in an anonymous survey. This anonymous survey aimed to obtain honest feedback from students. The survey was printed on a single-sided A5 sheet with questions written in English and also in Japanese for better comprehension. Learners were not asked to write their responses in English because the aim of the survey was to get as many honest opinions and insights from them and not to assess their English language competencies. The survey was given to learners who showed interest and willingness. Students were asked to fold the paper and to put it in a box that was placed near the door so that they could drop their survey at their own convenience. The surveys were available for interested students for six months (from December 2013 to May 2014).

The questionnaire contained the following questions:

- 1) What was the purpose of your visit today?
- 2) How often do you use the centre?
- 3) What are your views about learner autonomy?

The first question aimed to look at the learners' purpose for using the SAC resources. They were to choose their answer by circling any of the four options: assignment; test preparation; conversation practice; and/or lunch-time chat. There was another option, which allowed learners to write their own purpose. It must be noted that there is a difference between "conversation practice" and "lunch-time chat". Conversation practice involves learners to talk with teachers and language advisors at the SAC. Use of Japanese is discouraged as learners are encouraged to use the English language in conversation. Japanese is used on occasion, when meaning cannot be fully conveyed in English. In some cases, learners get an incentive in their final English course grade if they engage in several hours of conversation practice. Lunch-time chat generally involves free-conversation among larger groups of students while they have lunch. Although the teachers and learning advisors encourage learners to communicate using English, there are more students using Japanese than English.

The second question aimed to see student frequency of SAC usage per month. Learners were to circle one of the

following: first time; once a month; twice a month; and more than three times a month. Unlike the first two questions, the third question was an open-ended question. This question aimed to find out the learner's understanding of learner autonomy. As adults, learners should be "responsible for their own learning" (Holec, 1979). By asking question number 3, we as educators in the university can more fully grasp the level of student understanding in order to encourage and promote autonomy in learners.

In addition to the survey, the SAC advisors have been recording the number of learners and their purpose of using SAC every month. The anonymous learner count reports began in April 2012. Detailed reports, which include the visitors' purpose, began in May 2013. The purposes which were observed were self-study and test preparation. Learners were considered self-study students when they conducted their own learning without much assistance from a language advisor. When learners were studying individually or as a group for an English-proficiency test, their purpose will be noted as test preparation. The idea of self-study and test preparation overlapped in several ways as they required minimum assistance from teachers and language advisors. However, when learners explicitly studied for tests, they were considered as test-preparation rather than self-study students.

Results and Analyses

A total of 16 university students responded to the request to fill out the anonymous survey over the span of 6 months. The turnout rates were poor because many students did not show willingness to participate. The responses to the first question ("What was the purpose of your visit today?") showed that majority of the students answered "lunch chat" and "conversation practice" (as shown on Table 1).

Table 1: Results of Question 1 "What was your purpose of your visit today?"

Purposes	Number of respondents
Homework	8
Test Preparation	6
Conversation Practice	9
Lunch Time Chat	12
Other	2 ("UNO"; "to enjoy")

Because learners could circle more than one purpose, many learners circled both "lunch time chat" and "conversation practice". This could indicate that learners are aware of the importance of practicing communicative

language rather than studying grammar or vocabulary. Many students use the SAC to get their assignments completed and checked before turning them in to their respective teachers. Six out of 16 learners, at the time they filled out the survey, were preparing for some kind of English-proficiency test at the SAC. This shows that learners are showing willingness and motivation to study on their own, which could mean autonomy. It is also important to note that learners wrote “UNO” (the card game) and “to enjoy” in addition to the options provided, which shows that SAC is more than just a centre to study. It is also a centre to mingle with peers. In response to the second question in the survey, every learner gave the answer of “more than three times a month”. This suggests that learners might be comfortable with the SAC atmosphere.

The third question (“What are your views about learner autonomy?”) was an open-ended question. Three learners responded in English and nine in Japanese. Four out of 16 left the space blank or left an invalid response. Table 2 shows the responses obtained. The nine responses written in Japanese were translated into English. Note that the responses written in English were not corrected for their grammatical or spelling errors.

Table 2: Responses from the surveys to “What are your views about learner autonomy?”

Responses written in English	
“A heart which advance and study.”	
“It’s a good way to motivate and find out weaknesses by myself.”	
“I can do anything.”	
Responses written in Japanese	English translations
勉強を楽しむこと。	To enjoy studying.
習ったことを自分でちゃんと活かして学んでいけること。	To be able to learn and make use of what I learned.
楽しんでやること。	To enjoy.
目標をもってやること。	To have a goal.
能力を上げる	To increase my knowledge.
一人で学べるようになる	To be able to study alone.
わからないことを自分で見つけて、質問をして、吸収して学ぶこと。	Looking for something I don’t understand by myself, question it, and absorb it.
自分の意志で学習を始めること	To take initiative of my own learning.
自分でやりやすい方法で勉強すること	To look for a studying method that is suitable for me.

The majority of the responses shared a common theme of pursuing a suitable learning method. In any given school, students are taught how to study. The learning methods may vary by teacher and school subject, but by the time students enrol in higher education, students are expected to have some kind of preferred studying method. However, the

results show that some students are still figuring out how to study (this could possibly mean for any school subjects). Because there is no universal or correct way to study, and because educators cannot force a learning method on a student, educators must, with a great deal of patience, suggest various learning methods. This could, however, lead to a serious case of falling behind course curriculum. Hence, it is important that learners acquire their preferred and suitable method of studying prior to university.

Other students responded about improving their knowledge and setting a goal in their studies. By setting goals, learners could have some degree of motivation that is necessary for studying. Such responses are ideal traits in fostering learner autonomy.

To answer the second research question (“How has the SAC influenced the learners?”), reports of how many learners used the SAC resources and for what purpose were used. From the data gathered, trends in the number of SAC visitors, as well as the number of students undertaking test preparation; and self-study students, were assessed. These numbers might not directly reflect whether the SAC has positively influenced learners to study English. However, this information could indicate how learners are starting to make use of the facility and resources during their years at the university. Monthly data on the number of visitors using the SAC were recorded for 28 consecutive months (from April 2012 to July 2014). Graph 1 (in Appendix) shows that the number of learners have increased immensely over the course of two-and-a-half school years.

The first school year, 2012-2013, recorded low numbers of learners using the SAC. During the months of August and September, the SAC was closed because of advisors’ lack of availability and the lack of demand from the students. When the second semester commenced, there was an increase in number of students and this could be because of a cultural event (Halloween) that was hosted. Since October, more English-language teachers in the university started sending their students to the SAC as part of an assignment and or as part of their class grade. The numbers fell in February because most students finished their classes and their final exams. In March, there were “schooling” classes, which are intensive courses offered during long breaks to those long distance learners. In addition, some college students studied for tests or used the SAC to practice conversation.

In the following school year, the number of learners

increased dramatically (up to 906.5% in April). This is because SAC began advertising the facility to new students during their school orientation at the beginning of the school year. Many new first-year students visited the SAC not only to study English but also to meet new friends and mingle with their seniors, or senpais. In May, SAC experienced a 500.9% increase in the number of learners, which was mainly because of English language teachers assigning homework that required learners to work with a language advisor or teacher. However, during the final exam and summer break periods, the number of learners dropped – a similar trend was seen in the first year as well. Unlike the first year, the SAC was open a minimum three times a week during the summer to allow college and long-distance learners to freely study English. The number increased when the second semester began. The growth seen in the following months was very similar to the first year, the only difference being the number of learners.

In the third year, the number of learners that utilized the SAC was 744, many of which were first and second year students. Like the second school year, the SAC advertised to almost all the new learners during the orientation period. Unlike the previous year, though, many of the first year students actively came to the centre to study for their mandatory English placement test (TOEIC Bridge and CASEC). In June, the number drastically increased, mainly because of the students studying for English proficiency tests and those needing help with assignments. The greatest difference between the third year and the two previous years is that students seemed to have been more motivated and responsible for their learning. It must be noted that advertising the SAC must have been successful. SAC has provided learners with necessary English help outside their classrooms and must have been an influential part in their English-language education.

In addition, the SAC has been seeing an increase in the number of self-studying students. These are students who take the initiative to study on their own without much assistance from the language advisors and teachers. These students would study for their upcoming in-class test, work on their assignments, or study for a test. The data collection of students whose purpose was to study by their selves began in May 2013. Table 3 (in Appendix) shows the growth of the number of self-studying students over the months. It is important to note that in the months of April, June,

July, October, November, January, and February, there are English-proficiency tests held both in and out of the university. In April, first and second year college students are required to take a placement test, as mentioned previously, and for the other months, there are English-proficiency tests such as STEP EIKEN (英語技能検定) and Hoiku Eigo Kentei (保育英語検定) taking place. The number of students studying by themselves grew exponentially in just one year, which could signify that more students are becoming motivated and autonomous as language learners. In Table 4 (in Appendix), the number of students studying specifically for an English-proficiency test was extracted from the data in Table 3.

These figures represent learner autonomy. Although there is no data available to compare the monthly and yearly trends, the data collected for this study shows that the learners are beginning to take control of their own learning outside their English classes. In April of the school year 2014-15, 80.7% (N=197) of the students who engaged in self-study at the SAC were studying for some kind of English-proficiency test. A good percentage of students were studying for the CASEC and TOEIC Bridge tests. However, it is crucial to keep in mind that these students were not under any pressure or did not face any requirement to study for these tests. Among the list of English-proficiency tests, there is a relatively new test called the Hoiku Eigo Kentei (from here on, Hoiku Eiken). Hoiku Eiken attracted more students than any other English-proficiency test due to the practicability of the English for teachers. In addition, Hoiku Eiken textbooks are colourful. This test is suited for anyone interested in teaching (and also to those currently teaching) English to young children in kindergarten or in elementary school. Since October 2013, in six out of the ten months, the number of students studying for Hoiku Eiken exceeded that of students studying for EIKEN. This could infer that students are becoming more aware of what is needed to get a job after university graduation.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. There was a limitation in the number of collected questionnaire responses. The turnout rate of the questionnaires was poor. There are several possible reasons why this was the case. The main reason was that learners often feel sceptical and misunderstand when they are asked to do something unordinary (such as answering a questionnaire).

It perhaps would have been better if learners had been made to feel comfortable and understand that it was just a questionnaire for a study. The timing was also very difficult because questionnaires had to be given to learners when the learners were least emotional as it could possibly affect their responses. Another possibility, in terms of the quality of their responses, was that some might have taken this questionnaire less seriously than others.

In the total number of learner SAC usage during the two-and-a-half school year observation, the majority of the students were first, second, and third year students. Unfortunately, most fourth-year college students did not utilize SAC resources. There are three possible reasons why this is the case: 1) for most departments at this university, English is required in the student's first two years and becomes an elective course thereafter; 2) learners do not have sufficient time to study; and 3) many students did not know about the facility or thought it was an exclusive centre for top-tier students or English-literature majors.

Lastly, there was a limitation in the data of learners using the SAC to study by themselves – especially for English-proficiency tests. These figures reflect the number of students who actively used the SAC resources to study. However, there may have been a student population who studied at home or elsewhere – again, the study could not penetrate the wider student population.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of conducting this research was to evaluate, at one Japanese university, learners' understanding of learner autonomy and determine whether students are autonomously learning and studying. The research questions for this observational study were:

1. What are the learners' understandings of learner autonomy?
2. How has the SAC influenced learners?

To the first question, some students responded “to have fun” and “enjoy studying” and “to gain further knowledge”. However, the majority of the students were in pursuit of studying and learning methods'. It is unknown whether individual students had hoped to be told from a teacher-figure about how to study or whether learners were searching for a suitable way to study on their own. This answer likely varies according to students. The best way to find out would be through asking the students in an informal interview. It is expected of students to have a preferred studying method or two by the time they begin college, but because they do not, SAC langu-

age advisors and teachers in English classrooms should suggest ways of studying to encourage students to take time and study English outside the classroom. This would definitely be beneficial, as students would need to spend less time trying to manoeuvre through various learning and studying methods. It would be ideal if students were exposed to various studying and learning methods from an early age so that, during their days as students, they autonomously adopt and tailor methods of learning to better suit them.

The second research question aimed to understand how or even whether the SAC monitored and fostered learner autonomy within the SAC facility. Although the surveys had a poor turnout rate, students proved that they are not only responsible but are motivated to study on, and for, their own. Despite the students' demanding schedules, many still make time to study using SAC resources. Even in months where there were no English-proficiency tests taking place, more students had been seen preparing months in advance to pass or get good marks on their tests. Again, students were not required to take these tests. However, students had enough motivation to set aside time to study. To foster these students and keep them from losing motivation, language advisors and teachers must keep encouraging and supporting them.

Since the establishment of the SAC in 2012, it has provided resources and assistance to a number of students. The SAC created an environment where students can study in a stress-free space to optimize their English-language acquisition. The facility needs more improvement to better support the wider student body of the university. English is becoming a mandatory language skill now more than ever, partly due to the 2020 Olympics, which will be held in Tokyo. The Ministry of Education is encouraging and promoting English-language education at all educational levels. Despite this time of growing need, most learners are confined to their English classrooms and are unable to practice and use their English-skills outside. This restrictive situation applies to all educational levels (from elementary to university). To increase chances for learners to practice English outside their classrooms, students should be encouraged to utilize, and classroom teachers should incorporate, the SAC into their learning to lower the fear factor towards English-language. Learner autonomy cannot be forced. However, if educators could explicitly teach possible ways of learning to learn, then learners could start to take responsibility for their own learning. It is the SAC's duty to monitor and foster these

students.

Ideas for future research include two major points: finding students' objectives and how to attract more students into finding enjoyment in learning the English-language. Firstly, it is important to identify individual objectives for learning the English-language. It is also necessary to find the best ways and keep them motivated to reach their objectives. Secondly, it is important to encourage students who are not too keen on studying the English-language because English-language will be a necessary, if not a required, skill in their futures.

To conclude, the role of SAC is to assist learner needs upon studying the English-language. This paper reported on the current status of a SAC in a Japanese university and this study will continue to observe how the SAC changes and adapts over time according to student needs.

References

Balçıkhanlı, C. (2010) Learner autonomy in language learning: Student teachers' beliefs. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 35(1): 90-103.

Benson, P. (2011). What's new in autonomy? *The Language Teacher*, 35(4): 15-18.

Brown, J. (2009). Self-regulatory strategies and agency in self-instructed language learning: A situated view. *The Modern Language Journal*, 93(iv): 570-583.

Cotterall, S. & Reinders, H. (2001). Fortress or bridge? Learners' perceptions and practice in self access language learning. *Tesolanz*, 8: 23-38.

Dinçer, A., Yesilyurt, S., & Goksu, A. (2010, November). Practical tips on how to promote learner autonomy in foreign language classrooms. In *The 10th International Language, Literature and Stylistic Symposium*. Symposium conducted at the meeting of Dokuz Eylul University, Ankara, Turkey.

Fouser, R. J. (2003). Self-access centres (SAC) in university-level foreign language education: Theoretical and practical considerations. *MM NEWS*, (6): 44-69.

Gardner, D. (2001). Making self-access centres more effective. *English Language Teaching and Learning*. 161-174.

Holec, H. (1981). *Autonomy and foreign language learning*. Oxford: Pergamon. (First published, 1979, Strasbourg: Council of Europe.)

Japan Association of Self-Access Learning (2014). *Japan SAC registry* [excel spreadsheet]. Retrieved from <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0Ah4REUDWxJm8dGs0NmJvM2MwVTUzWFFVb052VWpGZUE#gid=0>

Martinez, M. R. & McGrath, D. (2013). How can schools develop self-directed learners? *Phi Delta Kappan*, 95(2): 23-27.

McMurry, B. L., Tanner, M. W., & Anderson, N. J. (2009). Self-access centres: Maximizing learners' access to centre resources. *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*, 12(4): 1-13.

Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology - Japan (2012). Statistical abstract 2012 edition 1.9 universities and junior colleges. Retrieved from: <http://www.mext.go.jp/english/statistics/1302965.htm>

Reinders, H. & Balçıkhanlı, C. (2011). Learning to foster autonomy: The role of teacher education materials. *SiSAL Journal*, 2(1): 15-25.

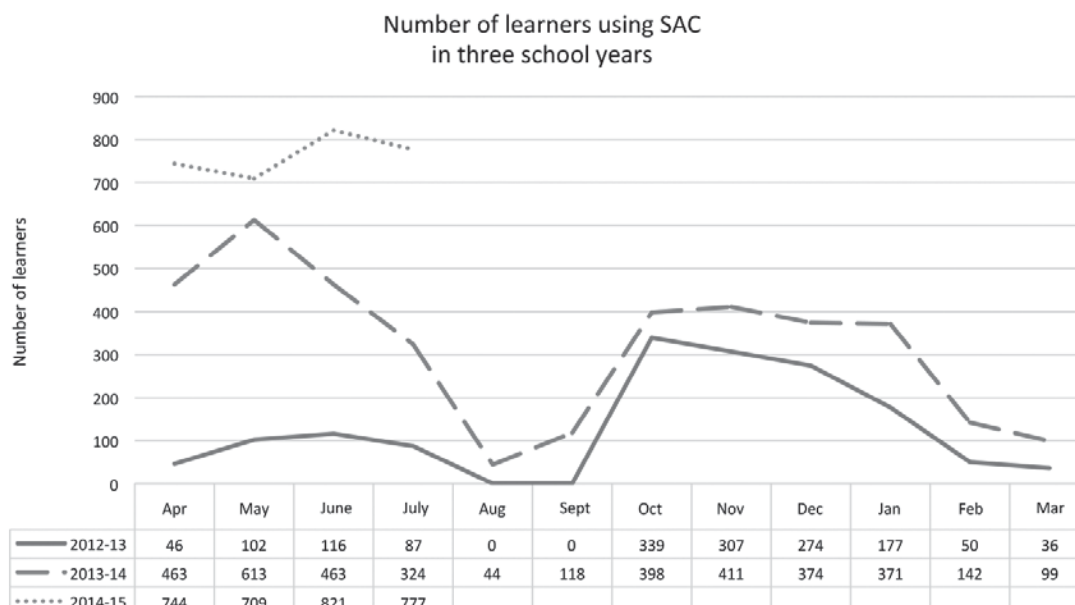
Thanasoulas, D. (2000). What is learner autonomy and how can it be fostered? *The Internet TESL Journal*, 5(11). Retrieved March 5, 2014, from: <http://itesl.org/Articles/Thanasoulas-Autonomy.html>

Towle, A. & Cottrell, D. (1996). Self directed learning. *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, 74: 357-359.

Ushioda, E. (2011). Why autonomy? Insights from motivation theory and research. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 5(2): 221-232.

Appendix

Graph 1: Number of learners using the SAC over a period of two-and-a-half school years.



Note. This graph shows the number of learners using SAC over a two and a half year span. The purpose of their visit varied from getting help with their assignments to studying for an English proficiency test outside their university. These numbers were obtained by counting the number of student walk-ins and having students jot down their purposes on a sign-up sheet next to the door.

Table 3: Number of students self-studying since May 2013

	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.
SY 2013-14		44	44	35	3	38	185	164	133	115	41	17
SY 2014-15	244	120	184	134								
Percent growth (%)	-	172.7	318.2	282.9								

Note. This table shows the number and the percentage growth of students whose purpose was to “self-study”; these students studied by themselves without the constant help of a language advisor or a teacher. These students oftentimes studied for a proficiency test (such as TOEIC, EIKEN, and Hoiku Eiken), worked on their class assignments, or studied English grammar using a textbook.

Table 4: Number of students studying for an English-proficiency test since October 2013

	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.
SY 2013-14							151	121	117	70	27	13
SY 2014-15	197	67	99	33								

Note. The yearly and monthly trends of students studying for an English proficiency test is not comparable. However, a greater percentage of the self-studying students were studying for an English proficiency test. In months where there were no English tests held outside the university and also in months where classes are finished or in break, students actively studied in the SAC to prepare for tests.