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Creating an “English Reality” Environment: Effectiveness of the Language Garden to Supplement the English Curriculum

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要旨

本研究の目的は、文教大学国際学部が2008年に設立した外国語学習支援室、Language Garden (LG) について、背景理論、LGの概観、利用者の学習状況調査結果を中心に論じ、英語教育カリキュラムと連携する効果的な自律学習方法を考察することである。言語習得の過程において、対象とする言語を実際に使用する機会 (English Reality) の有無が学習成果を大きく左右するため、LGはコミュニケーション手段として英語を使う環境を学習者に提供することを主たる目的として、設立された。同時にLGは授業を補うだけではなく、海外研修や海外ボランティア活動等、学部カリキュラム上のプログラムを補い、統合することに寄与している。LGには習熟度や興味に応じた多様なジャンルの学習教材 (書籍、DVD、雑誌、漫画、新聞、ラジオ講座テキスト) に加え、会話を発展させ語彙力を鍛えるゲーム等も設置されている。大型TVスクリーンには常時英語ニュースが流れ、学生の間も英語でのコミュニケーションが原則である。2名の助手が英語教員とともにLGの運営に関わり、日常的に学生への学習支援や教材の管理を行っている。また学生たちの協力も得て、クリスマスやハロウィーンなどのイベントも定期的に行うなどの雰囲気作りにも配慮している。しかしながら頻繁に利用している学生数は、ほとんど利用しない学生の数より大幅に少ないことが調査結果から判明した。この背景の原因と学生のニーズを分析しつつ、今後専門カリキュラムとも密接に連動し学習効果を上げていくために、LGでの自律学習の単位認定、英語学習ポートフォリオや学習カウンセリングを導入することを提案する。

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past few decades, a paradigm shift from ‘language teaching’ to ‘language learning’ has occurred and ‘learner autonomy’ has also become a focal point of recent discussions. The concept of the self-access center (SAC) has been developed as a result of this paradigm change. According to Gardner and Miller (1999), there are three elements that are essential in running a successful self-access center. First, a center needs to be effectively organized and supported. Second, both teachers and language advisors need to facilitate the educational use of the resources available and promote independent learning. Third, the center must provide the necessary infrastructure to enable self-learning. Morrison (2007) maintains that a self-access center must incorporate facilities, and high-quality learning materials, which are sufficient, varied, relevant, structured, and accessible within a clearly defined learning space.

The Faculty of International Studies at Bunkyo University established a new self-access center, named

the Language Garden (LG)¹ in April 2008 based on the following educational philosophy: (1) English should be learned for the purpose of self expression and communication, not as an accumulation of academic knowledge, and (2) by using English for real communication, students will improve their English skills. We believe that in creating this kind of environment within the SAC, it is actualizing an “English Reality”². A location that provides an English Reality is indispensable for English learners in Japan, who have limited opportunities for communicating in English except in situational contexts such as classroom settings.

In this paper, we will examine and assess the current state of affairs of the intended English Reality of the LG in relation to our English curriculum: both the regular classes, study-abroad programs, and overseas volunteer activities. The results of a survey that was conducted at the end of 2009 Fall Semester will also be discussed, in terms of the difficulties such as the unexpected number of the LG non-users, and finally, future endeavors will be considered in reference to some related studies on self-access centers.

2. GENERAL FRAMEWORK OF THE LG

The LG is located in the central part of the main faculty building where it is easily accessible. The LG is approximately 25 square meters in size with two windowed doors where the view inside is discernable to passers-by. In addition to language learning resources, DVD players and monitors, the room is furnished with comfortable couches, a white-board³, both fixed and non-fixed study desks and chairs (Appendix 1).

The LG has a wide variety of learning resources⁴: DVDs (500+), graded readers (1000+)⁵, comic books (30+), paperbacks, magazines, foreign language textbooks (English, Korean, Chinese, Spanish, French, German), board games etc. (Appendix 2).

Students and faculty members are able to use the room at any time during its opening hours (weekdays 9:00-16:50). Everyone is free to chat, play games, and relax, as long as English is used as a means of communication⁶. Social events such as Christmas parties, and informal presentations where students and teachers share their experiences of studying or volunteering abroad.

The LG has two language assistants who help students use the LG effectively as they play the role of language advisors. In addition to the language assistants, English teachers⁷ are scheduled on during lunchtimes to facilitate students’ interactions.

1 Creating a special language space to practice English would give our students additional hours of English learning that would develop better English skills through talking with their peers. This would give them the chance to develop a sense of ownership of English. The name “The Language Garden” was suggested by one of the Bunkyo students.

2 “English Reality” is the concept that has been advocated by Prof. Bamford since the 1990s.

3 Sample daily conversation topics and quizzes are written on the white board.

4 Many of them were donated by Professor Bamford who retired in March 2009. He founded the original self-access center in his office at Bunkyo University Shonan Campus in the 1980s.

5 The Language Garden remains consistent to the basic principles of free voluntary reading (FVR) advanced by Stephen Krashen in *The Power of Reading*. Although Krashen was concerned more with the effect free reading would have on native speakers, he commented that free reading in a second or foreign language is one of the best things a language learner can do to bridge the gap from beginning level to advanced levels of second language proficiency (Krashen,1993).

6 Students can code-mix with their first language (L1) if they wish.

7 A native speaker teacher of English is scheduled as a facilitator every lunchtime.

3. THE ENGLISH CURRICULUM AND THE LG

At the Faculty of International Studies, the first year students are required to take eight mandatory 90 minute English classes: four in the spring semester, and four in the fall semester. Each semester, two of these classes are English for International Communication (EIC). The language learning objective of the EIC classes is to enhance students' general communicative English skills. Students are also required to take two Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) classes. Both EIC and CALL classes cover the four English basic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. As part of the CALL curriculum, students are assigned to work on self-study English e-learning material from the "ALC Net-academy Super Standard Course" which primarily aims to improve students' listening and reading skills. They can access this e-learning material from any location.

Additionally, students are required to gain a minimum of ten credits in elective classes. Although students can choose foreign language classes other than English, such as Chinese, German, French, Spanish, and Korean, they fulfill their credits for the most part with English classes. Besides some more advanced EIC and CALL language skill classes, six English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes are also offered. Each class is recognized as one credit, therefore students have to complete at least eighteen foreign language classes in total before their graduation. Selected seminar students also have lunchtime assignments where they facilitate the English Reality in the LG.

3.1 The LG's Role for the English Curriculum

Through various kinds of language activities in classes and learning materials from e-learning, a significant amount of language input is provided for students. Regarding language output, many students have few opportunities to improve their communication skills on a daily basis because of classroom time constraints and the number of students per class. In order to supplement the opportunities for students to use English, the LG plays a crucial role. Some students are eager to talk about their own interests in English, however, topics discussed in class are usually selected by teachers. In the LG, students can choose any topic that they wish to discuss such as campus-life, part-time jobs, or TV programs that they watched the night before.

3.2 The LG's Role in the English Teacher Training Program

The English teacher training program for prospective teachers of junior and senior high schools was introduced as part of the curriculum in 2008. There are approximately thirty students per year enrolled in the program. For the purpose of reviewing standard junior and senior high school English grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, the students are encouraged to make use of the textbooks and the accompanying CDs of the NHK radio English programs that are available for loan in the LG.

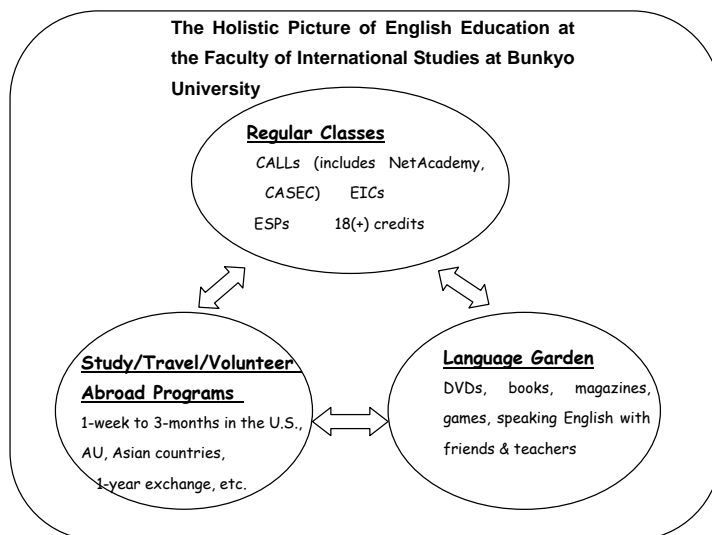
For the English language teaching methodology classes that are part of the program, micro teaching practices are conducted regularly. The LG acts as a resource bank where students can find teaching and learning materials which can be used in these teaching practices. According to the 'New Course of Study for

Senior High Schools,’⁸ which will be implemented in 2013, all Japanese teachers of English are supposed to use English as the medium of instruction in their classes, therefore the LG can play an important role in improving both the students’ English language ability as well as supplementing the course as a resource.

3.3 The LG’s Role for Study/Volunteer-abroad Programs

The Faculty of International Studies, Bunkyo University focuses on experiential learning throughout the curriculum. As many as a quarter of the second year students participate in the three month study abroad program either in the U.S. or Australia. The study abroad students do cross-cultural studies as well as attend English classes at the language centers that are affiliated with our partner universities⁹. In addition to this program, a number of students join one or two week programs supported by Bunkyo University to pursue specific studies such as hospitality management in Hawaii, development studies in Bangladesh, international cooperation volunteer activities in Kosovo/Bosnia, and international relations at the United Nations in New York. Many students also travel abroad independently either to better their language skills, or to participate in volunteer activities. For these students the LG is an ideal place to share their experiences in English. They are invited to make presentations on their experiences in the LG.

The English education curriculum is illustrated in the following chart.



Integration of the Classes, the Language Garden and Study/ Volunteer/ Travel abroad Programs at the Faculty of International Studies, Bunkyo University

8 Released by Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology (MEXT) in 2009.

9 Monash University in Australia and Oregon State University in the USA (2001-present)

4. EVALUATION: A SURVEY OF THE CURRENT LG

Despite some success, some problems such as the limited number of regular users, and the deliberate intention of some students who avoid the LG (non-users) have been observed. In order to increase the number of users, as well as to improve the quality of the LG, the following survey was conducted at the end of the 2009 Fall Semester to investigate the inclinations of the LG's users and non-users and the affective variables that influence these inclinations. The expected respondents were 270 first-year and second-year students enrolled in the 2009 academic year. A total of 210 students' responses were collected and the data was subsequently analyzed for this study. Appendix 3 contains the original Japanese questionnaire which was used, and Appendix 4 contains the demographic data of the respondents which includes their study abroad experiences and CASEC achievement scores.

The questions¹⁰ asked in the survey are as follows:

1. How often did you visit the LG in the 2009 fall semester?
2. Which LG activities are you usually involved in?
3. When did you mostly use the LG?
4. What kind of materials did you use in the LG?
5. What kind of atmosphere did you feel in the LG?
6. What motivated you to visit the LG for the first time?
7. To those who have never visited the LG: Why have you never visited the LG?
8. Are you willing to travel abroad in the future?
9. Are you willing to study abroad in the future?
10. Would you like to have friends who you can communicate with in English?
11. Would you like to use English in your future career?

Background data¹¹ includes:

1. Have you studied abroad in English speaking countries for more than three months? If yes, where and how long?
2. CASEC (computer-adapted English proficiency test) score

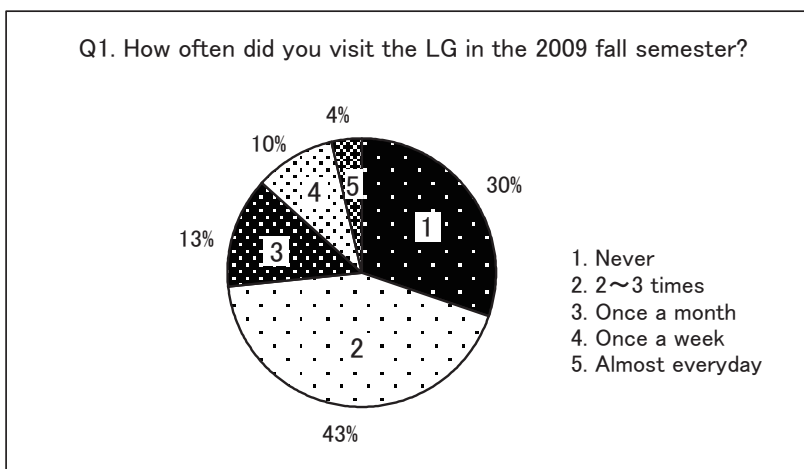
4.1 Results

As is shown in the survey results, Figure 1~ Figure 7 demonstrate the perceived realities of LG users and non-users. Figure 8 ~ Figure 11 point out the motivational factors which seem to be highly correlated with frequent users. The concept of International Posture (Yashima, 2002) and Willingness to Communicate (MacIntyre et al. 1998) can be seen as significant factors that influence and maintain students' motivation who 'use' the LG.

10 Refer to Appendix 3

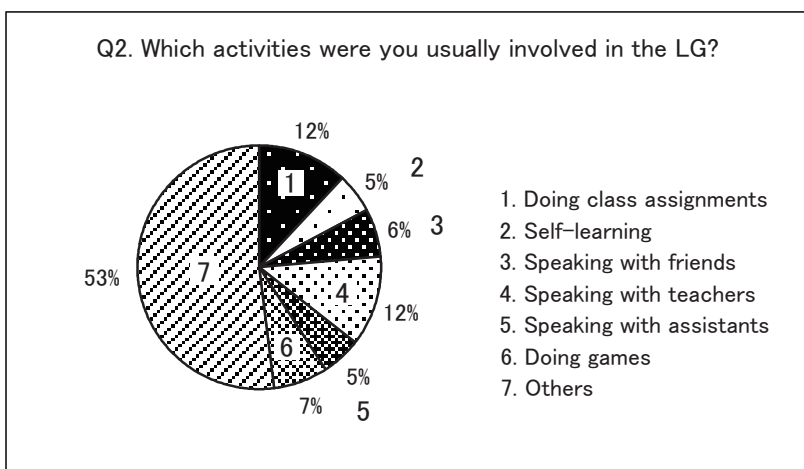
11 Refer to Appendix 4

Figure 1



The frequency of students’ use and non-use of the LG is indicated by Figure 1. Only 14 % of students use the LG on a weekly basis, whereas overwhelming 30 % of students have never entered the LG.

Figure 2



In Figure 2, various utilization of LG activities is evidenced. Answer #7 suggests that independent activities such as watching DVDs has the highest popularity.

Figure 3

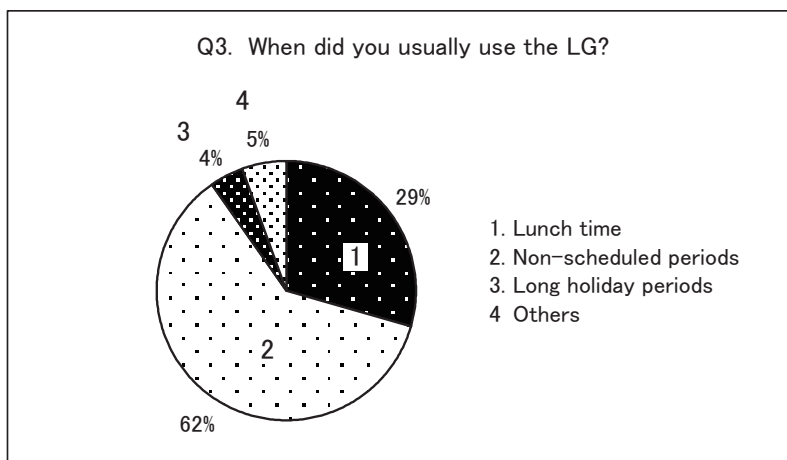
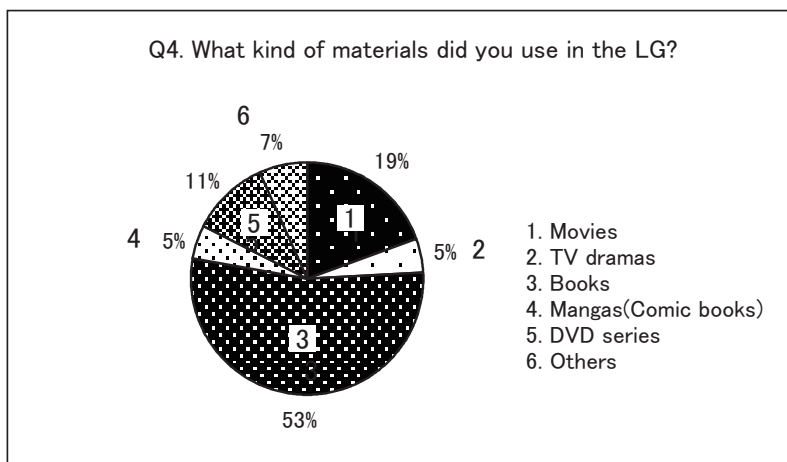


Figure 3 may imply that the physical space of the LG provides students with a comfortable, relaxing ‘zone’ as peak use time is in the students’ free periods between class periods.

Figure 4



The result of Figure 4 may appear to contradict the result of Figure 2 as we see that books are the preferred resource rather than DVDs in the LG. However, this may be because books can be borrowed from the LG unlike DVDs¹², also many teachers set book reviews as homework assignments.

¹² DVDs are not permitted to lend to students outside of the LG.

Figure 5

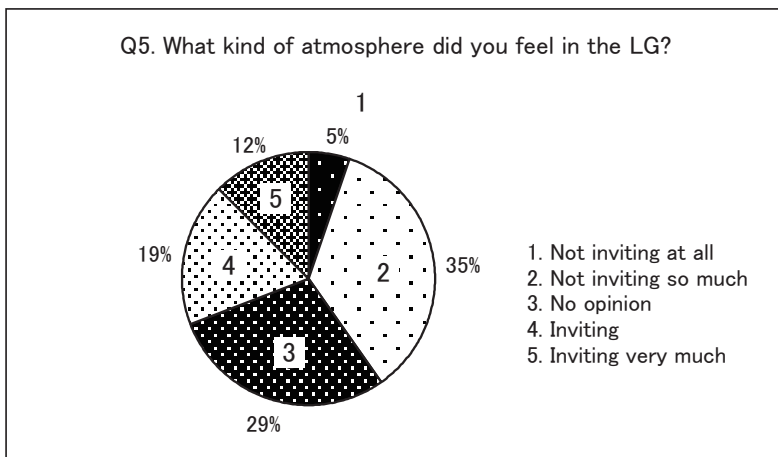


Figure 5 implies that students are looking for non-threatening environment. The results show that only 31% of the respondents found the LG ‘inviting’ which can be seen a synonym for ‘non-threatening.’

Figure 6

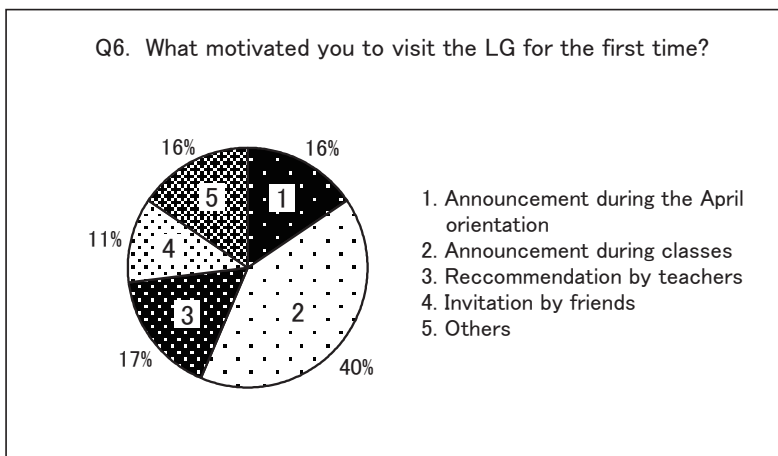


Figure 6 suggests that students are generally passive in regard to acquiring information and need to be encouraged to participate by others rather than exploring both learning and non-learning opportunities independently. Seemingly, teachers are the most influential factor in students’ use of the LG.

Figure 7

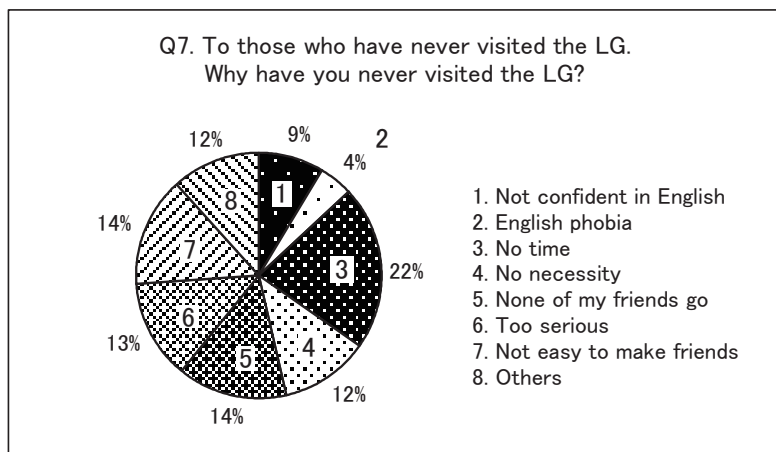


Figure 7 demonstrates a considerably high representation of language anxiety traits and resistance to an English Reality environment among the LG's non-users.

Figure 8

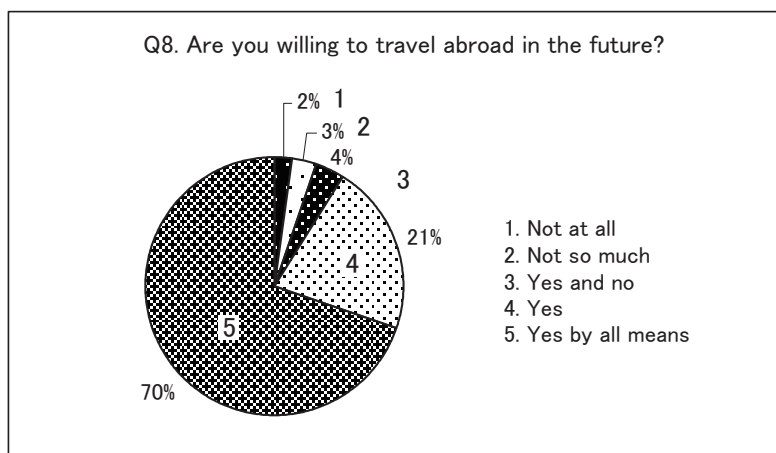


Figure 9

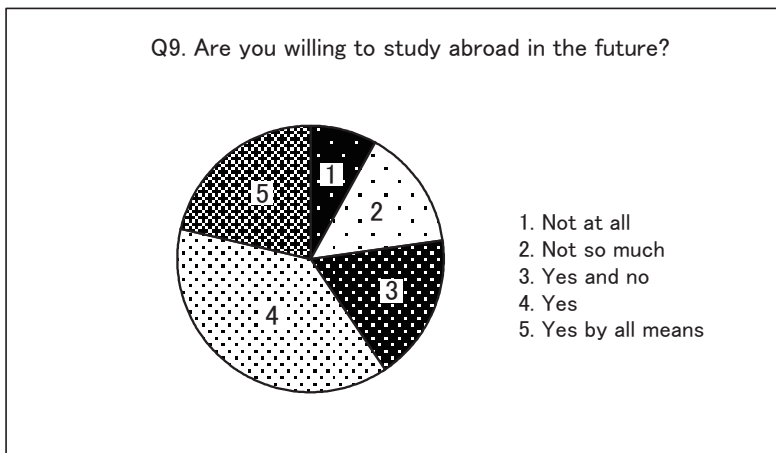


Figure 8 and 9 illustrate that the students’ attitude is highly positive in terms of international posture, which is considered a significant motivational factor for foreign language learning.

Figure 10

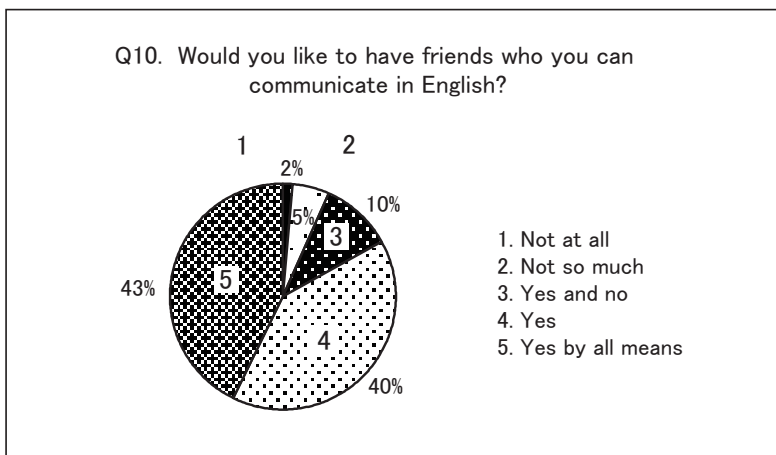


Figure 11

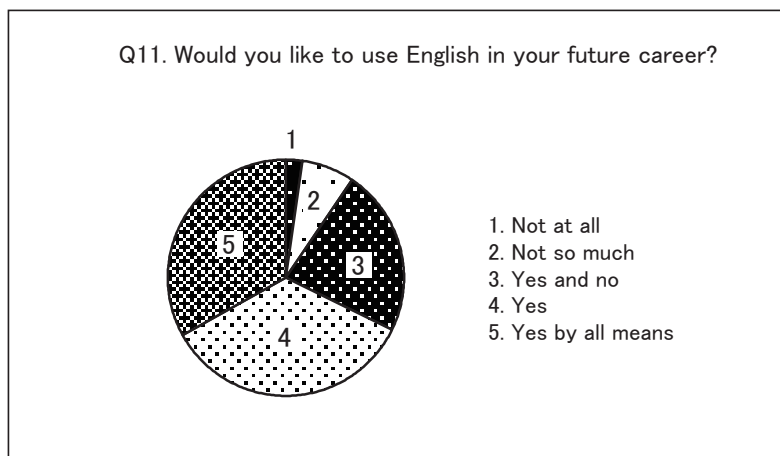


Figure 10 and 11 suggest that the students have high tendency of “Willingness to Communicate” which is another significant motivational factor for their learning. The above figures indicate that the LG is not as friendly a space as the authors had expected. Actually, limited number of students are observed to study in the LG regularly. As for correlations between question items, except for weak correlation between question #8 and #11, no significant relation was found. Detailed results are shown in Appendix 5.

5. DISCUSSION

Nunan (1998) suggests that if teachers and researchers view second language acquisition, and its use, as being akin to “growing a garden” it can greatly enrich their understanding of the processes and products of language learning (p.102). Appropriately, Bunkyo’s self-access center nomenclature is the ‘Language Garden’.

The LG is a location where teachers can tend to the cultivation of students’ self-sufficient L2 growth and development in a ‘permaculture garden’-like environment. As the survey results demonstrate, for some individual learners this has indeed been the case (Questions #1-6). However, the teachers who prepared and care for the garden may have unwittingly hindered some students’ L2 ‘fertilization’ possibilities, and other students’ subsequent L2 ‘harvests’, by implementing it ourselves in the first place, resulting in the attachment of a ‘creepy’ garden stigma to the LG by some students (Stein, 2008).

These students, that may not be reaping the learning benefits of the LG, are those who can be identified as the non-users (Question #7). Some students seem to actively avoid entering the LG, including those learners who are extrinsically motivated to use it to complete homework assignments (Questions # 2, 4, 6), and could accordingly be identified as resistant users. Additionally, the homework users of the LG somewhat displace the ‘self’ in the SAC acronym.

We have endeavored to set up the LG as an efficient system that would be a good fit for the end-users: a location that offers students self-directed and semi-guided access to a variety of resources and texts, and also a space where the learning possibilities can be “harvested from simply what goes on ‘within and between’ the people in the room” (Meddings & Thornbury, 2003, p. 2). However, it is all upon the condition that it is through the medium of the target language, English.

Considering the implications mentioned above, as well as the number of non-users and resistant users, (Questions # 1, 5, 7) we could look to a recent analogy of student resistance to institutionally provided learner spaces dubbed the “Creepy Treehouse Effect” (Stein, 2008). This analogy refers to adults building an accomplished treehouse that children will inevitably avoid despite the calls of encouragement to ‘Come in and play—it’s fun!’ Stein (2008) has defined it as:

Any institutionally-created, operated, or controlled environment in which participants are lured in either by mimicking pre-existing open or naturally formed environments, or by force, through a system of punishments or rewards [...] any system or environment that repulses a target user due to its closeness to or representation of an oppressive or overbearing institution.

Despite all the best efforts, the LG does seem to symbolize a creepy treehouse (or in this case, ‘creepy garden’) to some students who in turn resist, or avoid utilizing it (Questions # 5, 7). As Krutsch elucidates, “Kids ...can see a [creepy treehouse] a mile away and generally do a good job in avoiding them” (Stein, 2008).

Adversely, for some students who do regularly use the LG, (Question #1) it represents ‘their’ space, a location in which they feel they “belong” to a community at university. On some levels, for these users, the LG functions as a circle, a club, a hang-out space, and therefore a site “where their social identities are constructed” (Roberts, 1998, p.113). In considering the LG’s users and non-users in the immediate social context of a Japanese university, they both need to be conceptualized not only as language learners, but also as “social beings struggling to manage often conflicting goals” (Roberts, 1998, p.109). Norton (2002) has also pointed out that “identity and language learning are inextricably intertwined” and when learners speak “they are [...] reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world” (p.2). If we acknowledge the LG users as social beings, we need to contemplate the resistance that characterizes some of the LG (non) users as being bound up in: their individual social identity, their investment in the target language, and how other affective factors such as motivation (Dornyei & Schmidt, 2001), willingness to communicate, (MacIntyre et al., 1998), language anxiety, (MacIntyre, 1995), and international posture (Yashima, 2002).

Norton (2002) attests that “to invest in a language is to invest in an identity” (p.1). To further examine how the results of Questions #8, #9, and #10, 11, reflect the users and non-users of the LG social identities, as well as their investment in English, it would also be beneficial to re-situate the LG as the students’ own ‘garden’ to contend with any ‘creepiness’ that may cause some students’ non-use of the LG.

6. CONCLUSION : FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Although our LG meets the basic criteria of what a self-access center should be, there are some areas to improve upon. As Reinders (2007) points out, the LG has some challenges commonly observed in many self-access centers:

- Learners are unprepared for self-directed study.
- There is little monitoring of student learning.
- Little objective assessment is done.

As van Lier (1996) attests, teachers can only motivate and give guidance to students, and we also need to take differences in learning styles into considerations. So-called “communicative learners” may like talking with friends in the LG; however, “analytical learners” and “authority-oriented learners” may find the LG not as an attractive option. Also, students need to become aware of their learning styles and take responsibility for their own learning. In this sense, introducing portfolio and counseling to the function of the LG will be one of the next steps. Having the students realize what their goals are using a portfolio should be quite effective. Bridging formal instruction and personal study at the LG with the help of counselors or advisors may also be equally important.

Implementation of credit-based, self-directed learning program exemplified by Victori (2007) would be another factor to consider. By doing so, all the students will access the LG, finding something useful for them. Use of electronic environment to monitor and encourage each student would be another area to work on. Getting counseling via the Internet can be less threatening for some type of learners. Collaboration with academic courses such as area studies and environmental studies offered on campus would also be another worthwhile task. Providing content-area DVDs and books recommended by specialist teachers along with their introductory talks in English will motivate students to visit the LG.

In addition, approaches to make the LG a more student-friendly space should be explored. For instance, as we observed at British Hills¹³ in January 2010, craft workshops may inspire students linguistically and artistically. Likewise, we may be able to hold informal mini lectures or workshops in a variety of topics by students and faculty members. Moreover, encouraging the students to form an LG volunteer group that organizes events and manages workshops may give users autonomy and help get rid of “creepiness” from the LG. Then, the LG will serve not merely as an institutionalized complementary environment, but an “English Reality” with sustainable vitality, which will contribute to our whole educational curriculum the most significantly.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to extend our deepest appreciation to: Firstly, Professor J. Bamford who is the founder/initiator of the Language Garden in Shonan Campus, Bunkyo University. Secondly, the LG assistants Ms.

13 British Hills is located in a forest, 1,000 meters above sea level in Hatori Natural Park, Fukushima. British Hills was originally established in 1994 by Sano Educational Foundation to provide students the opportunity and space for international training.

A. Takanashi and Ms. T. Machimura, who have been our dedicated, diligent, and determined co-workers in the LG. Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to the Faculty of International Studies, Bunkyo University who provided the generous research grant for this study in the academic year of 2009. This paper could not have been completed without these individual invaluable supporters.

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Appendix 1:



Appendix 2:



Appendix 3: The Questionnaire Sheet

国際学部のみなさんへ

以下の Language Garden (通称 LG) 使用に関するアンケートにご協力をお願い致します。結果は統計的に処理され、言語教育環境の研究のために使用されます。どうぞよろしくお願い致します。国際学部語学教育委員会 2010 年 1 月

1. 「この秋学期」に、LG をどのくらい利用しましたか。

1. 0回 2. 2～3回 3. 月1回程度 4. 週1回程度 5. ほとんど毎日

1 度でも行ったことのある人は、以下の質問に続けて答えてください。

0 回の人は、7 以下の質問に答えてください。

2. LG で主にどのようなことを行いましたか。ひとつ選んでください。

1. 宿題をする 2. 自習する 3. 友達と話す 4. 先生と話す 5. 助手と話す
6. ゲームをする 7. その他 ()

3. LG を主にいつ使用しましたか。ひとつ選んでください。

1. お昼休み 2. 授業のない時間 3. 長期の休み期間 4. その他 ()

4. LG で主にどのような教材を使用しましたか。ひとつ選んでください。

1. 映画 2. テレビドラマ 3. 本 4. マンガ 5. DVD シリーズもの
6. その他 ()

5. LG の雰囲気は、あなたはどのように感じていますか。

1. とても入りにくい 2. どちらかと言えば入りにくい 3. どちらとも言えない
4. どちらかと言えば入りやすい 5. とても入りやすい

6. LG に初めて行ったきっかけは、次のうちどれでしたか。

1. 新学期オリエンテーションでの案内 2. 授業での案内 3. 先生からすすめられて
4. 友人から誘われて 5. その他 ()

7. 全く行かなかったひとだけ、その理由を以下から選んでください。

1. 英語に自信がない 2. 英語が嫌い 3. 時間がない 4. 必要を感じない
5. 友達がいかない 6. 堅苦しい印象 7. 仲間に入りにくい 8. その他 ()

8. 今後、海外旅行に行きたいですか。

1. 全く思わない 2. あまり思わない 3. どちらとも言えない 4. そう思う
5. 非常に強く思う

9. 将来、長期留学がしたいですか。

1. 全く思わない 2. あまり思わない 3. どちらとも言えない 4. そう思う
5. 非常に強く思う

10. 英語を使ってコミュニケーションできる友人が欲しいですか。

1. 全く思わない 2. あまり思わない 3. どちらとも言えない 4. そう思う
5. 非常に強く思う

11. 将来、英語を使って仕事がしたいですか。

1. 全く思わない 2. あまり思わない 3. どちらとも言えない 4. そう思う
5. 非常に強く思う

* 以下の該当するところを○で囲んでください。

学科 国際理解学科 国際観光学科
 3年生以上：国際コミュニケーション学科 国際関係学科
学年 1年 2年 3年 4年
性別 男性 女性

英語圏（英国、米国、豪州）などに3ヶ月以上滞在経験がありますか？

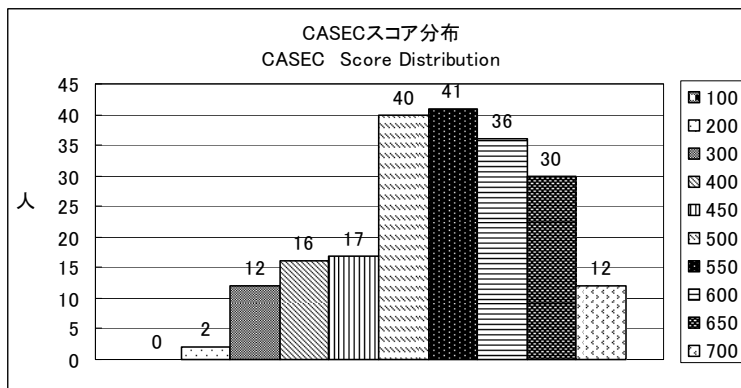
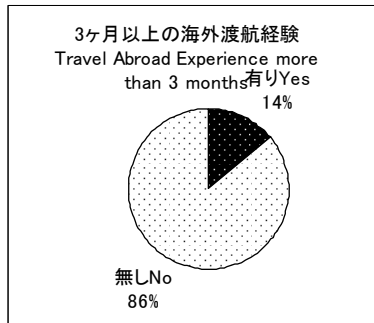
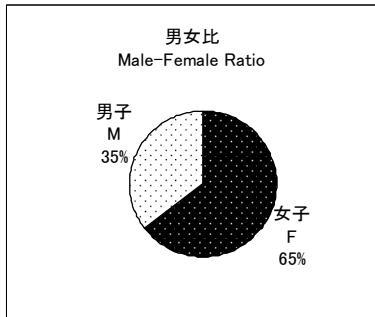
はい いいえ
はいの人へ：どこにどれくらい滞在しましたか？ ()

CASEC の今までの最高得点に近い数字を選んでください。

100 200 300 400 450 500 550 600 650 700 750 800

ご協力をありがとうございました。

Appendix 4 Demographic Data



Appendix 5

	1. Frequency	F. CASEC	5. Atmosphere	8.Travel Abroad	9. Study Abroad	10. Friends	11.Future Career
1. Frequency		0.166183926	0.250702769	0.174809034	0.162529672	0.248932358	0.137126147
F. CASEC			0.190201444	0.253807487	0.175956516	0.274133852	0.162563584
5. Atmosphere				0.170600957	0.078797806	0.222732706	0.090204692
8. Travel Abroad					0.498704156	0.610717427	0.432744525
9. Study Abroad						0.569179967	0.597613695
10. Friends							0.529261657
11. Future Career							