The NUCB Self-Access Center and its Role

in the Foreign Language Program

BRUCE MONK and KEN OZAWA

This article, the third in a series, updates information on the development and growth of the Nagoya University of Commerce and Business (NUCB) Self-Access Center (SAC). In it we look at the current layout of the center, the range of materials and hardware that is now available, and the links that have been made with the various courses run by the Faculty of Foreign Languages. In the SAC we have also been concerned with monitoring student attitudes and motivation. We therefore give some of the results of a series of attitude questionnaires administered to students over the past three years. Through these, students expressed a definite need for help in planning their independent study. Details are also given of the seminars/workshops that were introduced as a direct result of these findings.

The evolution of the NUCB SAC should be of interest to anyone concerned with self-access learning and in particular to those who are working with Japanese students both within Japan and when they study abroad.

Growth of Interest in Self-Access Centers

The growth of interest in self-access learning and learner autonomy has been evident for a number of years as is witnessed by the publication of a number of influential studies on the subject (Gardner & Miller, 1999; Scharle & Szabo, 2000; Sheerin, 1989). Japan has similarly been caught up in this process. It seems that in the fierce competition that is now current among Japanese universities to attract sufficient numbers of students from the decreasing number of available high-school graduates, no university can be left behind in the development of a Self-Access Center. The June 2004 issue of *The Language Teacher* underscored this fact. It was entirely devoted to the subject of self-access (Cooker & Torpey, 2004; Cutting, 2004; Ford, 2004; Jones, 2004; Milbourn, 2004). As with the seminal studies on self-access the articles emphasize the importance of the integration of self-study into any language program, while repeating again that the major strengths of self-access are that it accommodates various student levels and individualizes study as far as is possible by giving students choice and the chance to work at their own speed (Decker, 2004).

The NUCB SAC

We have looked at the development of our own SAC in two previous articles. In our first article (Monk & Ozawa, 2002) we traced the initial development of the NUCB SAC and looked at the resources that were available in 2002 in terms of hardware and materials, and at how those materials were linked to the curriculum. The NUCB SAC had already been in existence for four years by that stage. At that time we pointed out that self-access language learning is not a cheap

option precisely because hardware, staffing and materials, while not replacing the teaching process or teachers' salaries, are, in fact, additional costs. Since 2002 NUCB has continued to invest quite heavily in its SAC, both in terms of equipment and working-hours. The SAC has consequently gone from strength to strength.

In our second article (Mimura, Monk, & Ozawa, 2003) we looked at the results of a series of questionnaires that had been administered in the SAC with the aim of giving us a clearer profile of our student population and their attitudes, and ultimately of improving the overall quality of the language program.

Location/Layout

The NUCB SAC is located in one of the four wings of the Information Center (Library). As we said (Monk & Ozawa, 2002), although there had been misgivings about the decision to house the SAC in the library rather than in the Language Center where formal language instruction takes place, the choice of location has in fact been a fortunate one. The SAC has been able to draw on the resources and personnel of the Library while at the same time establishing a very definite identity of its own.

As can be seen in Diagram 1 we have tried to use all the space available to us and have arranged it into areas for specific activities. There are areas for listening, recording, watching videos and private study, etc. There are also a number of classrooms where seminars and workshops can be held. At the same time we have tried to rationalize use so that activities will not interfere with each other and noise is kept to a minimum. This is achieved by the use of partitioning in certain key areas and the use of headsets in the TV lounge and in the audio and video booths.

Diagram 1: Layout of NUCB's Self-Access Center
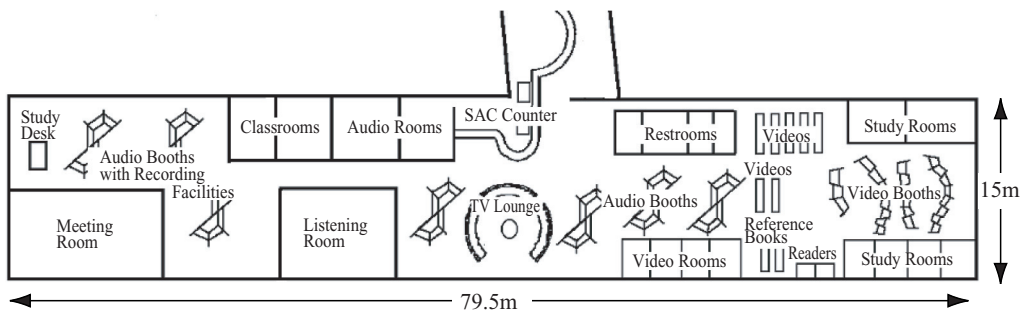
Hardware

In terms of hardware the NUCB SAC now has:

1. 42 booths (work stations) with both cassette players and CD players
    12 of these booths also have Mini Disc facilities.
    18 of the booths are called "Speaking Booths" (Audio Booths with Recording Facilities) and are equipped with headsets and microphones.
2. 24 TV booths
    5 of the booths have DVD players.
3. A TV lounge showing CNN and BBC World Service Television.
4. 4 TV rooms

Students are also encouraged to bring their laptop computers, which are provided by the university, to complete assignments in the various booths. There is a wireless network within the SAC so that students can have constant access to the Internet. Moreover, on the floor above the SAC there is also a computer room with 56 Macintosh computers and 12 Windows compatible computers. Although not in fact part of the SAC, the computer room also gives students continuous access to the Internet. Students can also watch DVDs there.

Materials

Over the past three years we have added considerably to the materials that are available to students. The NUCB SAC now has a wide range of resources including copies of all the textbooks and audio-cassettes used on courses in the language programs of the university. This is added to every year as courses are revised or new courses are introduced. There are also worksheets and answer sheets accompanying many of the courses. As the number of courses that have SAC-related activities has increased so too has the material available.

There are over 2,000 graded readers from various publishers; 1,200 of these are audio books with audio-cassettes. In addition, as all students in the Department of English Communication are required to take the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), there are a large number of books and audio-cassettes providing for this test and various other English examinations such as TOEFL and Eiken (an English proficiency test for Japanese speakers). A good range of grammar and phonetics exercise worksheets accompanied by audio-cassettes, and books and audio- and video-cassettes to teach English for Specific Purposes (ESP), such as general business, tourism and computer language, are also available.

Moreover, we are currently in the process of increasing our stock of DVDs. They have become a popular and powerful educational tool as students can choose the language of the subtitles and the sound.

The current inventory of materials is therefore:

1. Copies of all the textbooks taught on courses in the Language Center of the University.
2. Worksheets and answer sheets accompanying many of the courses taught in the Language Center.
3. Multiple copies of all the audio-cassettes of courses taught in the Language Center.
4. Multiple copies of Mini Discs of the courses taught in the Language Center.
5. Over 2,000 Graded Readers published by Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, Longman Publishers and Penguin Publishers. About 1,200 of these are audio books with audio-cassettes.
6. Over 100 books to prepare for various English examinations such as TOEIC, TOEFL, and Eiken (a proficiency test for Japanese speakers).
7. 50 Chinese readers (some with audio-cassettes).
8. 80 Korean readers (some with audio-cassettes).
9. Books and cassettes to teach Thai, Indonesian, and Vietnamese.
10. Books and cassettes to teach French, German, Italian and Spanish.
11. Over 100 videos in English, 30 of these with English and Japanese scripts.
12. 10 Japanese videos with English subtitles.
13. Grammar and phonetics exercises on worksheets accompanied by audio-cassettes.
14. Books and audio- and video-cassettes to teach English for Specific Purposes (ESP), e.g. general business, tourism and computer language.
15. 67 DVDs.

Personnel

Despite an exponential increase in the number of students using the facility, there has been no increase in personnel assigned to the SAC over the past six years. At present we still have one

full-time bilingual (Japanese and English) Japanese member of staff who is the SAC Coordinator. The Coordinator's role has been continuously developing. It now comprises various functions including liaison with members of the Foreign Language Faculty with regard to the planning and development of SAC use, the planning and supervision of the expansion of the facilities, and liaison with students in the planning of their study programs.

The SAC Coordinator also liaises with the library administration and staff. This is particularly important in the ordering of certain materials which come through the general library budget and are catalogued accordingly. This is an important part of the integration process within the library as all the SAC materials that students wish to use for study at home must be checked out through the library circulation desk. This has two definite advantages. The first is that we can accurately monitor the use of graded readers in our reading programs. Secondly, the materials are protected by the library's security systems. The SAC Coordinator's role has developed into new areas in the past two years, namely advising students in their use of materials and initiating a number of seminars to help students develop their study skills. These aspects of his work will be discussed more fully later in this article.

We also have a part-time Japanese member of staff who deals with much of the SAC administration including the registering of students and the keeping of data files on all aspects of SAC activity (Monk & Ozawa, 2002). This has been particularly important work over the past year as a new policy on SAC attendance was introduced at the beginning of April 2004. The new policy requires precise records of student attendance. This will also be described more fully later.

Integration into the Program

In 2002 SAC work had already been integrated into much of the course work in the Faculty (Monk & Ozawa, 2002). This has continued to be the case. An even larger number of courses in all languages taught in the university now have SAC components. Material design and production continue to reflect this fact.

A major function of the SAC has always been to aid the students' preparation for the mid-semester and end-of-semester examinations. Some materials for these examinations are available to students only through the SAC. The integration of the SAC into the curriculum affects all years in the Faculty of Foreign Languages although there has been a particular concentration of activities in the first and second years in an attempt to establish good study habits during the students' initial stages at the university.

Courses in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd years that have very clear links with the SAC are listed below. SAC activities are set on a weekly basis in each of these courses:

1st year
    English Conversation I & II
    English Listening I & II
    English Reading I & II
    Chinese Listening Skills I & II
    Reading in Chinese Culture I & II
    Korean Additional Work

2nd year
    English Listening III & IV
    English Reading III & IV
    Business English I & II
    Chinese Reading Skills III & IV

  Korean Additional Work

3rd year
  English Communication V &VI
  English Listening and Reading V &VI
  Business English III & IV
  Language and Culture & Values in Communication
  Practice for Chinese External Test V &VI
  Korean Additional Work

  A description of SAC activities in courses in the first-year English program will show the important role that the Self-Access Center plays in the language program as a whole. It will also illustrate the integration that has been fostered between courses as regards both classroom activity and SAC use.

  There are currently seven courses that students take in the first year:

1. English Conversation I & II
2. English Listening I & II
3. English Reading I & II
4. English Writing I & II
5. English Communication I & II
6. English Computer Applications I & II
7. English for TOEIC I & II

1. English Conversation I & II

  The textbooks for the course are *New Interchange 1 Student's Book* (2003a) and *New Interchange 1 Workbook* (Richards, 2003b). Like many contemporary textbooks *New Interchange 1* is now sold with a CD included. The CD contains some but not all of the listening exercises in the book. The remaining exercises can be found on the class cassettes, which are available to students in the SAC. The mid-semester and end-of-semester examinations are based on all the listening exercises found in the book. Students are encouraged, therefore, to listen to the class cassettes as part of their SAC work.

2. English Listening I & II

  The textbook for this course is *New Interchange Video Activity Book 1* (Richards, 2000). The course video, audio-cassette and oral drills are available in the SAC. Students can record the oral drills in the SAC using identical recording facilities to those used in the normal language learning classroom. Additional worksheets from this course are also available for students to use in the SAC or to take home to practice and revise.

  The listening course also includes standard language laboratory grammar drills focusing particularly on the use of English tenses. These drills and additional grammar drills are available to students in the Self-Access Center.

  A final component was added to the first-year listening course at the beginning of this academic year in the form of the iPod shuffle, which was issued to all first-year students when they entered the university. To encourage students to practice their listening skills, sound files of Voice of America texts have been placed on the university server. These files can be downloaded on to the students' iPod shuffles. The sound files and the texts of the sound files are tested in the listening mid-semester and end-of-semester examinations.

3. English Reading I & II

The first and second-year reading courses have become mainstays of Self-Access Center use. The first-year reading course also has a central role in the integration of the first-year reading, writing and communication courses.

First-year reading classes typically consist of two components—exercises from the textbook *Reading Power, Third Edition* (Mikulecky & Jeffries, 2005) and worksheets based on extensive reading of assigned graded readers (set texts), multiple copies of which are found in the SAC. In the first semester, students are required to read and prepare worksheets on two assigned readers at stage 1 (400 headwords), and one assigned reader at stage 2 (700 headwords).

In the second semester, they read one assigned reader at stage 1 and two assigned readers at stage 2. The set texts were originally selected because of their popularity among the student body. At the present time all first-year students are required to read the following set texts in the first semester:

Stage 1   *Love or Money?* (Akinyemi, 2000)
              The Elephant Man (Vicary, 2000)
Stage 2   *New Yorkers Short Stories* (Henry, 2000)

In the second semester all first-year students read:

Stage 1   *The Phantom of the Opera* (Bassett, 2000)
Stage 2   *Sherlock Holmes Short Stories* (Doyle, 2000)
              The Death of Karen Silkwood (Hannam, 2000)

Students must listen to and read these set texts in the SAC, and complete the worksheets. They must then take the worksheets to class to take part in various speaking activities.

Several times during the semester students are asked to select any graded reader from the SAC. They are then required to complete a book report form. This will be used for further speaking activities in the reading class.

A further component of the reading course is the "Reading Box." The box is always available to students at the SAC counter. In it there are a number of texts from the first-year conversation textbook *New Interchange 1*, speed-reading texts and TOEIC-type texts. A selection of the texts are used as part of each mid-semester and end-of-semester reading examination. Additional texts are placed in the "Reading Box" after every examination. Thus students need to re-read the texts that they have read before and also the additional ones in order to prepare for the next examination.

The final component of the reading course has been added this year. As in the first-year listening course, it relates to the iPod shuffle issued to all first-year students. The texts of the sound files found on the university server are kept in the "iPod Box" in the SAC. Students are encouraged to read the texts as a selection of these are tested in the reading mid-semester and end-of-semester examinations.

4. English Writing I & II

Students are given practice in preparing their initial book reports during the writing class. The first book report of the year is on the set text *Love or Money?* It is worked on and discussed by all students in a writing class. Similarly, students write their first book report on a graded reader of their own choice during the writing classes.

5. English Communication I & II

Collaboration with English Reading I & II and English Writing I & II has become a basic part of the English Communication course in the first year. The oral testing at the end of each semester has a component on the oral book report. The oral book report is prepared during English Writing and English Reading based on the graded readers in the SAC.

Conversation groups are also a component of the Communication course. Many of these take place in the SAC.

6. English Computer Applications I & II

Many of the skills practiced in this course are transferable to SAC work. These include familiarization with the Internet and introduction to the Blackboard Learning System, which is used extensively in the university. As has been mentioned, the SAC has a wireless network. All students are provided with a laptop computer when they first enter the university and students can use their laptop computers within the SAC to complete their writing assignments.

7. English for TOEIC I & II

Productive collaboration has also been established between TOEIC I & II and English Reading I & II in the form of the "Reading Box" which contains examples of TOEIC-type texts.

The SAC also has all the recorded material for the first-year TOEIC course on CDs, MDs and audio-cassettes. A great number of TOEIC practice books are also available.

Further examples of the integration of SAC work and coursework can now be found throughout the curriculum. In the second-year English program, for instance, students continue the work on listening and reading started in the first year by completing similar types of listening worksheets and book reports on graded readers. The audio-cassettes of the ESP courses on business English in the second, third and fourth years are also available to students through the SAC.

The amount of material available to students of Chinese and Korean has also greatly increased. SAC worksheets for both listening and reading are now set on a weekly basis.

As courses have developed and the curriculum has become more established the role of the SAC in the total program has greatly increased.

New SAC Policy

Institutional commitment to the success of the NUCB Self-Access Center has always played a central role. Because of its financial investment, the university has always wanted to see results in terms of the number of SAC users and rising external examination results. It was clear from the initial stages of SAC development that our students are not naturally predisposed to self-access without some form of necessity or prerequisite being imposed on them (Monk & Ozawa, 2002). As a group, they respond most positively to teacher intervention in the form of set tasks relating to specific courses. Of course this is also backed up by the institutional influence in that those learners who spend more time on the prescribed tasks are more likely to gain the credits awarded by the institution.

In 2002 we were continuously concerned with maintaining the attendance figures in the SAC at certain levels. Student attendance figures were regularly given to Faculty members at Faculty meetings and teachers were encouraged to increase the number of tasks that were based in the SAC in order to keep the attendance figures high. We published tables and charts reflecting the dynamics

of what was happening in the SAC with regard to attendance and the activities undertaken by students. The figures gave details of the total number of hours that students spent in the SAC, the daily distribution and comparison of SAC users, the average number of attendances per month, and the distribution by activity. We found that the policy of relating attendance to work for specific courses proved effective in certain areas. It was also clear that certain year groups attended more regularly than others. For instance, first-year students majoring in English recorded the highest number of SAC attendances on a monthly basis for April, May and June 2002. Every first-year English major attended on average 5.9 times per month in April, May and June 2002. There was, however, a falling away of attendance in the second, third and fourth years (Monk & Ozawa, 2002).

On April 1, 2004 at the beginning of the academic year 2004/2005 a new SAC policy was introduced which, at the same time as removing students' freedom of action to a certain degree, also removed the heavy responsibility from the SAC and Faculty administration of continuously trying to keep the attendance figures at high levels. All students were assigned a timetabled SAC period by the Student Affairs Department. Attendance is now treated as it is in any course in the university. Students are required to attend their SAC period a minimum of 9 times during the first semester of 13 weeks and a minimum of 10 times out of 14 weeks in the second semester. Students sign in and out on an attendance sheet which is kept at the SAC counter. They are also required to register attendance on a computer which is similarly kept at the SAC counter. If they do not attend the SAC the required number of times, they lose the right to take the final examinations in certain specific courses for that semester. This policy has been successfully in force since April 1, 2004.

Surveys April 2004

Gardner and Miller (1999) write that all systems designed to promote learning need to be evaluated periodically but especially when they are new. With this in mind, a great deal of the recent discussion on the NUCB Self-Access Center has focused on assessing the quality of the activities that go on there rather than simply looking at the total number of hours that students spend there. To make more sound judgment on what is actually happening in the language learning process of NUCB students both in the classroom and in self-access we have undertaken a more systematic study into various aspects of our students' language learning (Mimura et al., 2003). We have begun to obtain a more precise profile of our student population and their attitudes.

Here we would like to examine the results of detailed questionnaires administered to 161 first-year students and 173 second-year students in April 2004. As we were concerned with gathering information rather than testing the students on their English ability, the questionnaires were administered in Japanese. The results of the responses to questions A, B and C in the questionnaire are given below.

In response to question A (Charts 1 and 2) in the questionnaire students were free to make as many choices as they wished from *A* to *G*. It can be seen in both charts that *B. I am motivated but don't know how to study* is by far the most common choice. Although the percentage has fallen to a certain degree in the second-year group (Chart 2), still over half the students questioned chose *B*.

The next most common response is *D. I am too conscious about others' scores and ability*. This is particularly noticeable in the responses of first-year students (Chart 1).

Twenty percent of the second-year group in 2004 (Chart 2) have also chosen *C. I know how to improve but I am not motivated.* This is a larger percentage than is the case in the first-year group.

Classes are too difficult was chosen by 19% of the first-year group and 17% of the second-year group, with 17% of the second-year group also choosing *I don't have time to study*.

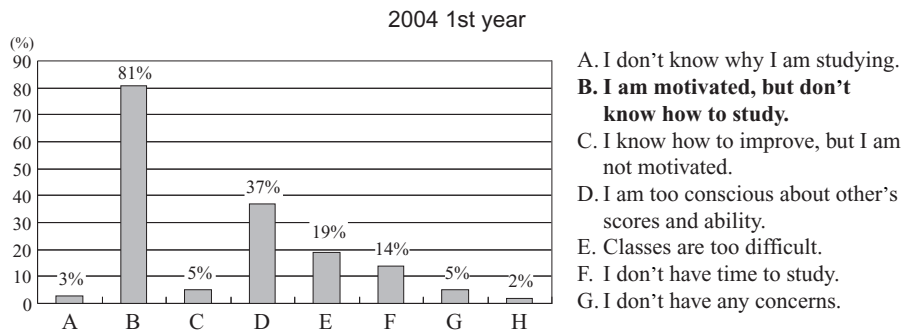**Chart 1: Concerns Relating to Language Study**
(Question A in the Questionnaire)

2004 1st year

A. I don't know why I am studying.
B. I am motivated, but don't know how to study.
C. I know how to improve, but I am not motivated.
D. I am too conscious about other's scores and ability.
E. Classes are too difficult.
F. I don't have time to study.
G. I don't have any concerns.

Chart 2: Concerns Relating to Language Study
(Question A in the Questionnaire)

2004 2nd year

A. I don't know why I am studying.
B. I am motivated, but don't know how to study.
C. I know how to improve, but I am not motivated.
D. I am too conscious about other's scores and ability.
E. Classes are too difficult.
F. I don't have time to study.
G. I don't have any concerns.
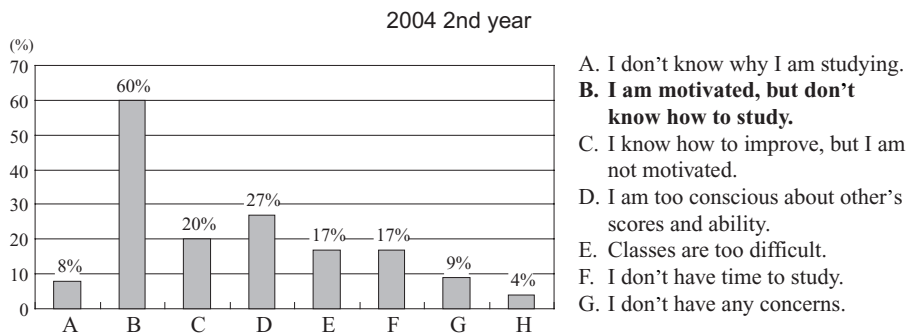
This may reflect the fact that many Japanese students have part-time jobs while at university or put a priority on their clubs which in Japan play a large role in student life.

Charts 3 and 4 give student responses to question B in the questionnaire: Which of the following are important to improve language skills? Students could make two choices out of six options. Both charts show that the most popular choices are *Study abroad* and *Consistent learning*.

The first-year students have put *Consistent learning* slightly ahead of *Study abroad* while the second-year students have put *Study abroad* ahead of *Consistent learning*.

The strong showing of *Study abroad* may reflect the emphasis that the university itself places on its very successful international programs. These have had a definite impact on the success of the language program as a whole over the past few years. The international influence may again be reflected in the third choice that was made by both groups: *Have friends from foreign countries*. This was a particularly popular choice among first-year students. Interestingly, the idea of *Learning from good teachers* was not seen as so important by either group and especially by the second-year group in 2004 who showed a greater preference for *Be strict with oneself*.

Chart 3: Which of the Following are Important to Improve Language Skills?
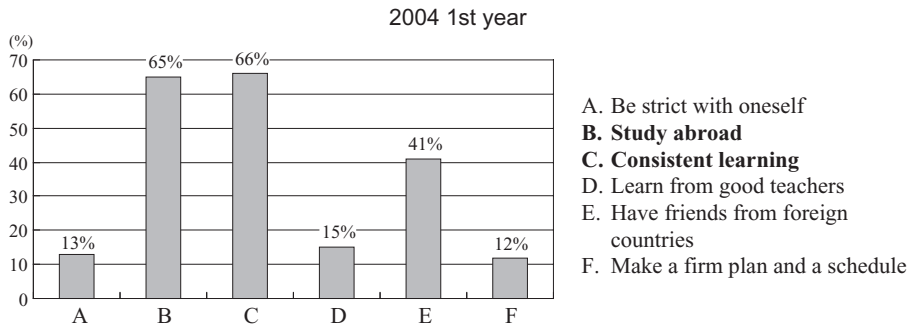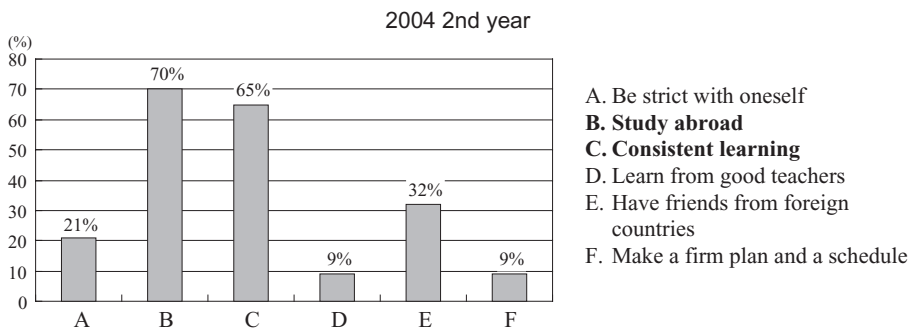(Question B in the Questionnaire)

2004 1st year

(%)

A. Be strict with oneself
B. Study abroad
C. Consistent learning
D. Learn from good teachers
E. Have friends from foreign
   countries
F. Make a firm plan and a schedule

Bar chart values: A 13%, B 65%, C 66%, D 15%, E 41%, F 12%

Chart 4: Which of the Following are Important to Improve Language Skills?
(Question B in the Questionnaire)

2004 2nd year

(%)

A. Be strict with oneself
B. Study abroad
C. Consistent learning
D. Learn from good teachers
E. Have friends from foreign
   countries
F. Make a firm plan and a schedule

Bar chart values: A 21%, B 70%, C 65%, D 9%, E 32%, F 9%

The students were then asked if they had a specific target or study plan in mind for the next TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) examination (Question C1). 84% of the first-year students and 68% of the second-year students responded that they did not have a specific target or plan. Although the percentage answering "No" in the second-year group is lower than the first-year group, it is still more than two thirds of the total of respondents.

The students who had answered "No" to the question Do you have a specific target or study plan for the next TOEIC? were then asked why they had no target in mind or study plan (Charts 5 and 6). They could choose as many options as they liked. The majority in both groups chose *I don't know how to make a plan*. This is especially true in the case of the first-year group. Both groups clearly recognized that the examination is important to them as very few students chose option *D. TOEIC is not important to me*. More second-year students than first-year students also chose *A. I cannot carry out a plan* and *C. I have no time to prepare for the exam*.

Chart 5: Why Don't You Have a Specific TOEIC Study Plan and Points Target?
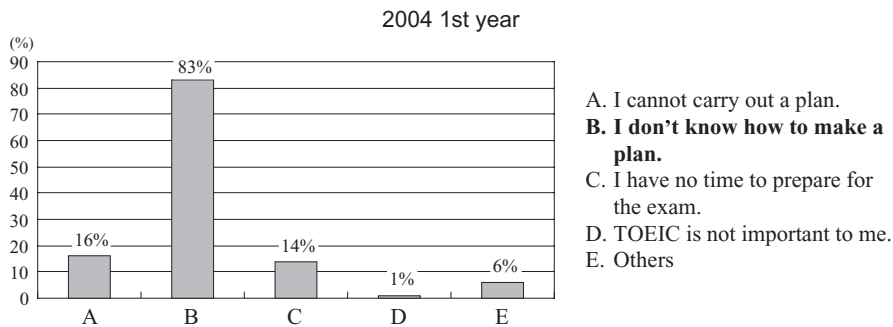(Question C2 in the Questionnaire)

2004 1st year

(%)

A. I cannot carry out a plan.
**B. I don't know how to make a
    plan.**
C. I have no time to prepare for
    the exam.
D. TOEIC is not important to me.
E. Others

Chart 6: Why Don't You Have a Specific TOEIC Study Plan and Points Target?
(Question C2 in the Questionnaire)

2004 2nd year

(%)

A. I cannot carry out a plan.
**B. I don't know how to make a
    plan.**
C. I have no time to prepare for
    the exam.
D. TOEIC is not important to me.
E. Others
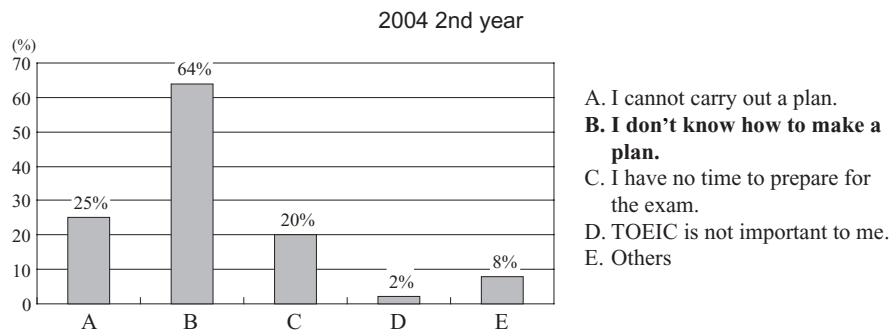
The Coordinator's Role/SAC Seminars

The Self-Access Center coordinator has a very important role within a SAC. This has become increasingly apparent to us over the past two years. Firstly, it is obviously important that there should be definite and clear advice and counseling on the location of materials and use of equipment. Gardner and Miller (1999) state that being able to direct learners to appropriate areas in the SAC and/or demonstrate how equipment works may not be considered by some to be 'real' counseling work, however they go on to emphasize that the notion of 'trust' and 'approachability' are central to the work of a good counselor. If learners trust the person from whom they ask practical advice, they may return at a later stage to discuss other aspects of their learning. Consequently, an important role of a SAC coordinator/counselor is to help learners find materials and use the equipment in a SAC.

O'Dell (1992) writes that on first arriving at a self-access center relatively few students actually have ready-made skills to help them make productive use of it. Teachers, although having a key role in the process, may also face problems in the practical use of the center. O'Dell discusses ways in which this role is made easier for the teacher, and therefore for the student, through the

development of counseling sessions and materials. This sort of practical measure is being adopted at NUCB through a carefully planned series of SAC orientation sessions for both students and academic staff at the beginning of the academic year and on-going communication with students and academic staff throughout the year.

Secondly, as a self-access center matures with the development of more materials and the addition of further hardware, students are potentially given a greater degree of freedom to choose and use materials on their own. Again O'Dell (1992) states, however, that the better resourced a self-access center becomes, the more of a problem this can be. Students require more advice and help to negotiate this surfeit of resources. This has been the case to a certain degree at NUCB. Even though students may declare that they are motivated, and understand that they need to study on a regular basis, many of them do not really know how to actually go about it. In our last article we posed two questions that still face the NUCB language program as a whole.

1. How to make students more autonomous in their language learning?

2. How to develop learning strategies in our students that will help them to work more effectively? (Mimura et al., 2003)

As has already been stated, our students are not in general "self-starters." They require more than just advice and counseling on the use of materials and equipment. Tasks need to be set for students. At the same time, an attempt must be made to make the students develop learning strategies and become more independent in their language learning. This has been a fundamental conclusion that we have drawn from the results of the SAC questionnaires. NUCB students are not in general sure how to go about planning and executing their studies. The students themselves are aware of this and are asking for assistance.

In all of this the NUCB Self-Access Center Coordinator has come to play an increasingly important role. For the past three years in response to the questionnaire results he has developed a series of seminars targeting those areas identified as weaknesses in student learning. The NUCB SAC seminars have been introduced to help students become more active and independent language learners.

In practical terms, the SAC Coordinator chooses two topics per month and then schedules the number of seminars according to the number of students who express an interest. The titles and a brief description of the seminars offered at the present time follows. The SAC seminars are currently not compulsory.

1. How to Improve Listening Skills
   A few short paragraphs with audio-tapes are used. Students learn how to catch all the words they hear in a short period through various exercises including reading aloud, dictation and so on. A way to increase vocabulary is also taught in this seminar.

2. Self-analysis Skills
   Students analyze their weaknesses and strengths by referring to their TOEIC scores. Depending on the area in which students wish to improve, various materials are recommended together with effective ways to make use of them.

3. Goal Setting
   A set of questionnaires is used to refine students' aims in language learning. Students learn how to set simple and realistic learning goals in both the short and long term.

4. How to Use Graded Readers
   The idea of this seminar mainly comes from the booklet *Guide to the "Why" and "How" of Using Graded Readers* published by Oxford University Press. As the title suggests, students learn how to optimize their

use of graded readers.

5. Use of the On-line TOEIC Practice Web-site
   The university provides a comprehensive e-learning system created to improve TOEIC scores. Students learn various ways to make use of this program.

Maintaining and Developing the System

The NUCB Self-Access Center is now well established in terms of equipment and materials. It also successfully plays a key role in many of the language courses taught in the Faculty of Foreign Languages. Students are required to attend on a regular basis and complete the tasks that have been set. In terms of external examination results we can assume that the SAC plays an important part in the regular improvements that are seen in students' TOEIC scores.

At the same time the Self-Access Center administrators try to remain responsive to student attitudes and needs as revealed through the SAC questionnaires. We are aware that in general students feel themselves to be motivated but at the same time are not sure how to plan or go about their studies. For this reason the SAC seminars were introduced. Over the past year about 10% of the students have taken up the option and actually participated in a seminar. As with student attendance during SAC periods, the next question that faces the SAC administration and the Faculty of Foreign Languages is whether to make attendance at SAC seminars compulsory or to discuss ways to promote them more energetically.

Even though the compulsory nature of much of what is done in the NUCB Self-Access Center may seem contradictory to the notion and goals of independent learning, the measures are rather an attempt to remain responsive to expressed current student needs. We have been led to look more closely at the problems of motivation and academic self-esteem students may experience during their time at the university. This has directed our attention to investigate more fully the whole area of learned helplessness (Peterson, Maier, & Seligman, 1993) and learned hopelessness (Au and Watkins, 1997) and how this may affect our students in particular and Japanese university students as a whole.

In a desire to keep pace with the richness in terms of materials and equipment that the NUCB SAC now offers, we must ensure that we remain equally responsive to student needs in the areas of encouragement and training so that they make sound use of the available resources and continue to benefit from them as much as possible.

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