Language Learning Through Socialization: Diversified Use of a Self-Access Center

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Abstract—**Through the establishment of interactionally rich environments, conversation rooms and self-access centers encourage attendees to be extremely competent and resourceful language, cultural and social learners. The following paper outlines four unique yet contrasting aspects of one such self-access center—the English Resource Center at Saitama University, Japan. In the first section, a brief history of the Center is provided, outlining its socially situated learning community. The second section details a special event occurring in the Center, which prepares students for formal academic presentations in foreign institutions. The Center's Drama Workshop is discussed in the third section, focusing on the linguistic and cultural growth that participants experience as they each experiment with their own developing English identity. Finally, the fourth section quantitatively analyzes attendees' English proficiency gains by comparing examination results over time. All in all, the differing interactive contexts of this self-access learning center work together in unison, strongly supporting linguistic growth and cultural development.**

Index Terms—**drama, interaction, language learning, proficiency, self-access center, TOEIC**

I. AN OVERVIEW OF THE ENGLISH RESOURCE CENTER AT SAITAMA UNIVERSITY, JAPAN

A. The Emergence and Development of the Center

The English Resource Center (ERC) was designed by the Center for English Education and Development (CEED) at Saitama University, Japan, to be a space where learners in the university-wide community could further improve their English skills outside of their departmental curriculum and elective courses (i.e., those classes taught in English by various departments including the CEED). From its humble beginnings, the ERC has continued to develop and grow as the need and demand for suitable English resources increased exponentially. In 2004, a general classroom was secured at which students could gather and at which full-time instructors could provide linguistic support in English to those who sought it. Previously, at its inception, the ERC had no fiscal support, depending at that time on generous donations of English resources from instructors and people in the community to build an alternative English learning environment and support network. By the following year, however, the ERC had grown rapidly and it had become an obvious service for the university's student body, relocating at the same time to a larger portable structure on campus.

Following the CEED's financial backing by the university, a state-of-the-art electricity and water-saving smart room was designed for our learning community, and in 2006 the ERC relocated to its current permanent site. Justifying the benefits of establishing such a learning environment to the trustees of our public institution was a significant accomplishment. To some degree this was to be expected as it is known that language learning centers involve a considerable amount of planning, organizing, and political negotiating, all of which take time, money, and effort [1]. Unfortunately, many language programs around the world cannot afford to see their planning nor efforts toward building resource-rich centers realized.

The creation of the current larger site has paved the way for the Center to meet the increasing demand for supporting various needs of our learners, who hail from diverse majors, interests, and backgrounds. Along with the growth, the Center was able to retain important traditions—such as providing beverages, light snacks, and having some spaces to relax and view art in the room—that have worked in our context and which learners suggest are more relaxing and less 'institutional.' Preservation of these features provide a basis for supporting our students' language learning while celebrating the diversity of over 350 Japanese and both native and non-native English speakers who have frequented the ERC in the past two years alone.

B. Supporting the Needs of Social and Global Interaction in Our English Center

While noticing signs of language improvement in our core programs (cf. English for Academic Purposes, Academic Lectures, Preparation for the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) Test Programs, and The ERC Drama Workshops)—as well as from the students who join the ERC from 3-5 P.M. on weekdays—we felt that making additional improvements to meet the needs of our learners was required. In February 2010, after analyzing the traffic flow of students who participated in the ERC, obtaining student feedback, and observing language centers at universities in Hong Kong via the Self-Access Centre Tour at the Independent Learning Association 2009, the four authors designed a floor plan. As a result, unneeded furniture and several shelves of excess resources, which did not fit the

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students' interests or language levels, were removed. This simple re-envisioning and re-designing created much needed space to accommodate the growing needs of our Center. It should be noted that we work together with the learners to address their individual language needs (with questions or concerns they themselves bring), however, we also support authentic dialogue in the ERC so that more language interaction can occur—benefiting a wider circle of learners. This concept reminds us of Esch's work on the conceptual distortions and discursive dissonances between individual personal learner autonomy (crash) and critical socially situated learner autonomy (clash) in language learning [2]. In the ERC, the tension leans towards the clash side, not to exclude the individual cognition of learners, rather so we can focus more on the whole community approach of socially situated learning. In turn, this focus helps students and teachers to promote learning gains for all parties on their own terms.

C. Typical Representation of What Goes On in the ERC

On a typical afternoon when the ERC is open, one author at a time facilitates the daily two-hour session during the week, where a consistent average of about 15 to 25 students come to practice English communication. Others also seek purpose-specific help, such as feedback on term papers, assistance with scholarship applications, advice on English aptitude tests (including the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), and TOEIC), English job interview practice, letters of recommendation, and support with study abroad and homestay applications. The occasional request may also be made concerning how to enter various foreign institutions. Often during the two-hour period, attendees come to borrow resources—including English DVDs, graded readers, novels and books on various subjects (graded in levels based on TOEIC bands), English study guides, English language proficiency tests, and English games. We also hold special cultural events and concerts when possible. This year we will hold the Eighth Annual ERC Drama Workshop and have various symposiums—including visiting guest experts and special events.

In short, this socially situated approach to running the ERC seems to support more of the learners' own language community and helps individual members to consider their own identity as a whole (yet exploring notions of 'identity' and 'self' often in a language different to the learners' native tongue). The ERC environment also supports language growth through formal presentations for academic purposes, as described in Section II, and by allowing for experimentation with identity and language construction through theater, as detailed in Section III. All things considered, the students are experiencing heightened English language proficiency gains for those who attend the ERC, as explained in Section IV.

II. ACADEMIC PRESENTATION SYMPOSIUM: AUDIENCE CASE STUDY

A. Setting the Scene

The ERC promotes an interactionally rich setting for language learning and socialization. To narrow the focus for a moment specifically upon conducive environments for language acquisition, former studies of interactions involving learners in different activities and participant configurations suggest that 'ordinary conversation' (the predominant interaction occurring in the ERC) can be a particularly productive context for language learning—the learning in conversational interaction being not limited simply to the negotiation of meaning [3]. Importantly, both 'ordinary conversation' *and* 'institutional talk' (such as classroom interaction or formal speech events) offer differing—but equally valuable—opportunities for language learning [4]. Thus, not only does the ERC serve as a conversation room, but it also provides an ideal site for special and specific events. One such event worthy of note here—bringing together staff and students from a range of departments across the university—includes an Academic Presentation Symposium. The Academic Presentation Symposium is a gathering held in support of students about to embark on international study, an endeavor requiring high proficiency in a second or foreign language and a readiness to participate in formal speech situations.

B. Intention of the Case Study

Rather than looking directly at participants at this time, the goal of this small case study was to evaluate the event by way of examining the audience's reaction(s) to an Academic Presentation Symposium, held in the ERC space. Findings will be added to participant self-reflections (in a future study) in order to build a fuller picture of the ERC environment. As a first step toward that end, the audience's input is examined here in order to better comprehend the interaction and learning occurring in the ERC, and to better implement subsequent gatherings.

C. Event in Brief

Student participants each prepared a 20-minute presentation on a current real-world matter of personal relevance. Topic choice varied considerably—from 'plagiarism,' to 'global arms issues,' to the notion of 'the social contract.' Before a live audience, participants delivered their presentations and individually fielded questions from the audience (which were spontaneous and not pre-prepared in any way).

D. Significance

For those students eager to learn language(s), or for those seeking careers with strong multinational ties, international study opportunities are of great consequence. Often, in order to enter foreign study programs (in foreign institutions) students are obliged to come to grips with the academic skills and standards required of the foreign educational environment—those institutions often demand this and will be working from such assumptions. Therefore, an Academic Presentation Symposium provides a fine platform for the development and practice of the formal speaking qualities and skills expected of students intending to study abroad—being, for this particular case study, the skills of research, academic rigor and formal public speaking (in English for US-based universities). Such a gathering provides students with a life-like experience—that is, real

practice of a formal presentation under naturalistic conditions. In terms of preparation prior to the actual event itself, participants are required to access authentic (research) resources and media—such materials providing important and realistic models for learners [5], [6]. During the event (held before a live audience of interested guests) participants are provided with the opportunity to practice core skills learned in class and to receive valuable feedback [7].

E. Procedure

To survey audience members' thoughts and impressions, a short questionnaire was administered following the completion of an Academic Presentation Symposium. The gathered responses were examined and collated. A summary of essential findings follows.

F. Principal Findings

The questionnaire analysis revealed the following:

1) The Academic Presentation Symposium became life-like—hence authentic—as student presentations were made in front of an audience of interested guests (with ensuing open audience forum).
2) The audience indicated that the event made possible a valuable and unique experience for the presenters, providing them with opportunities for academic improvement and linguistic development, along with positive pressure to mature scholastically, and a chance to practice a formal presentation under realistic conditions *before* being required to do so abroad.
3) The attendees noted that the presentation event provided opportunities for reflection—for audience members and participants alike—drawing attention to positive characteristics of the event itself along with challenges yet to be faced.
4) Respondents enjoyed hearing the opinions put forward by the student presenters, they were impressed with the students' efforts and display of confidence, and they were eager to extend the topics covered through exploratory questioning.

G. Ancillary Findings

Derived also from the questionnaire analysis, supplementary findings include the following:

1) Attendees found the ERC to be a suitable location for such an event.
2) On the whole, audience members attended the event because of an existing personal connection with the ERC—they were already acquainted with the ERC in some way and/or with its staff.
3) ERC staff members were able to collaborate with other university departments, better guiding future developments of university courses, requirements and directions.

H. Case Study Conclusions

Today the focus of language learning tasks and assessment items ought to be to prepare speakers for real-world language use [8]-[11]. The ERC and the Academic Presentation Symposium do just that—all of the requisite social actions of producing a formal presentation occur. The ERC proves itself to be an extremely versatile setting, not only for reaching out to other departments and centers across the university, but also—and especially—for social interaction and language learning. To take but one example of its flexibility, the Academic Presentation Symposium provided a fine platform for the development of the qualities and skills expected of students soon to study abroad—being the skills of research, academic rigor and formal public speaking. The ERC environment provided students with a realistic experience of delivering a formal presentation—encouraging students to be competent and resourceful. Crucially, from across the university, both students and staff alike were able to reflect upon performances, noting strengths as well as those weaknesses in need of attention. In preparation for study abroad, the Academic Presentation Symposium held in the ERC provided a unique opportunity for students to work through all the processes necessary of preparing a formal presentation and delivering it to a critical audience—endeavors integral to academic development and life-like social interaction for language learners.

III. THE ERC DRAMA WORKSHOPS

A. Drama as a Strategy to Enhance EFL/ESL Performance: Introduction

The benefits of using drama in early education have been studied extensively, but not much is available about the effects of theatrical techniques on language learning programs for young adults and adults [12], [13]. The simple interaction and improvisation games can go far with young adults, but not *so far* as to provide a firm basis for the development of clearer understanding of cultural differences. Fortunately the social and cultural value of theater as a learning tool has been analyzed by sociologists like Ervin Goffman, whose studies on the organization of experience provide a fascinating insight on the effects of theater action and language on the actors as well as on the audience [14].

Based on the experiences acquired during the seven ERC Drama Workshops (2006 – 2010), we firmly believe that it is necessary to achieve a better understanding of EFL/ESL university students in Japan as a population with distinctive and specific needs, and to acknowledge that these needs are deeply connected to the challenging development of a higher level of language competence and communication skills.

B. Outline of the Research

1) Objectives and Development

This research combines the theoretical framework obtained from drama studies sources with the available sociological studies on language, performance, and behavior to create an environment in which the participants have the opportunity to interact using a variety of 'dramatic' or theatrical elements. This project is also contributing to the design of a more complete and efficient EFL/ESL curriculum, where creative spaces may become key elements to develop a new understanding of the meaning of 'language performance' and the psycho-emotional implications of second language development, both at the individual and group levels.

Sharing with the national and international community of

educators not just our findings, but also our methods, expectations, and professional experiences in the search for a more comprehensive educational environment is vital to the Workshops' growth, and to its success as an educational tool that aims at expanding beyond our institution.

2) Outline of the Methodology

As the great bard said: "Though this be madness, yet there is method in it!" [15].

Simple activities, such as role-playing, dramatic reading, and story telling are used to introduce the participants to the 'other side' of language learning. The plots and characters they read and learn about allow the players to comprehend, identify, deconstruct and reconstruct situations and identities, improving their skills to understand and communicate facts, ideas, and feelings, and to 'read' the reactions of other players.

During the workshops, participants are expected to grow to know the characters they are responsible for bringing to life by allowing the dialogue between the literary sources and their personal experiences in situations that provide a frame of identification. This dialogue is expected to help the participants to approach, identify, internalize, and finally experience some of the cultural elements that define the language they are learning, and to establish a connection between its structures and its 'humanity.'

Through movement and improvisation, participants are introduced to new ways of connecting their physical and emotional levels with their language skills. The physical barrier is one of the most difficult and challenging problems we face during the process of theatrical interaction, since the story lines and scripts have a definite 'Western' flavor, but most participants find themselves at a loss when it comes to providing the expected physical frame that contains and illustrates the actions of the characters. Getting 'comfortable' with their bodies appears, year after year, as the main difficulty to overcome, and the most rewarding experience once it has been achieved, especially because it clearly reflects on the participants' level of intercultural and inter-linguistic efficiency outside the domain of the Workshop.

The structure of the sessions provides the frame to contain the natural fear that learners feel when attempting to use a new language in a social situation. Participants face their fears step by step, from the initial reaction towards the other players to the eventual interaction with an audience. The identification and resolution of fear leads to self-confidence building and even to the manipulation of the new language to respond to personal needs [16]. Getting into the cultural structure created by the plot of a play or by the drama guidelines provided during a session requires that the participants learn to 'jump in' through a series of emotional, intellectual, and physical exercises, which are gradually and carefully guided at the beginning of our sessions, and develop towards a *sidecoaching* method [17], [18].

C. Closing Remarks: Language = Performance

Language is performance, and as such it allows us to communicate beyond words: we learn the rules of interaction through communication, we learn about different mentalities and cultures, we discover the sociolinguistic value of gestures, and learn to understand and respect difference. Our players (particularly those who participated in more than one workshop) have demonstrated a clearer understanding of situational verbal and body language, in many cases beyond the expectations of the researcher.

Their level of confidence in a 'foreign' situation increased dramatically, and although further data needs to be obtained, it is possible to say (based on follow-up meetings) that they developed a deeper emotional connection with the language. As they 'act' it out, they begin to 'own' it. The question is not 'what' but 'who else' you can be, and those fantastic roles we were taught as children to perform as part of the impossible scenes of the life we would not have as adults, come back to the stage we offer, and our players become the stars in a rediscovered universe of shared language.

IV. TOWARD A QUANTITATIVE EVALUATION OF THE BENEFITS OF ERC ATTENDANCE

A. Background

The quantitative investigation in our previous study demonstrated that students who attended the ERC more than once during the period between their pre- and post-TOEIC examinations experienced significantly higher gains in their TOEIC scores than non-attendees with identical pre-test scores [19]. Although, this finding was very exciting, we still do not know what caused those significant relative gains.

The body of literature investigating the factors that lead to second and foreign language proficiency gain continues to grow (see [20] for a lengthy review). One way of categorizing this research is to break it into studies which focus on external factors such as language program characteristics on the one hand and studies which focus on internal factors such as individual differences in student L2 motivation on the other. Saegusa's study in the former category found instructional time to be the best predictor of proficiency gains as measured by the TOEIC, and based on those findings concludes that a 150 point gain on the TOEIC would require approximately 400 hours of classroom instruction [21]. Boldt and Ross help to qualify Saegusa's prescription with their findings that certain aspects of a language program—such as teacher qualification, use of authentic materials, and in-service training—also have a significant impact on students' gains [22].

Investigating internal factors related to language proficiency gain, Gardner, Tremblay, and Masgoret found empirical support for a causal model in which L2 motivation combined with language aptitude led to gains in proficiency as measured by a battery of proficiency tests (which did not include the TOEIC) [23]. In another study focused on learners' individual differences, Yashima and Zenuk-Nishide found that students' willingness to communicate (WTC) not only predicted changes in proficiency as measured by TOEFL pre- and post-tests, but also predicted changes in international posture and frequency of communication over a two-and-a-half year study period [24]. In addition, and importantly for the current study, Yashima and Zenuk-Nishide noticed that students' WTC seemed to predict

the choices they made when given the option to study abroad: Students who chose to study abroad had a higher WTC than those who did not.

B. The Present Study

The current study employs newly available TOEIC score and academic performance data from 2009 combined with the data used in our previous research to uncover clues as to what accounts for ERC attendees' significant TOEIC gains relative to their non-attendee counterparts. The study has four aims. First, it seeks to reconfirm that ERC attendees experience significant TOEIC gains over non-attendees, focusing on the 2009 ERC attendees for whom the other academic data used in this study was available. Second, the study compares the number of English courses attendees enrolled in versus their non-attendee counterparts before beginning their first semester at Saitama University. Attendees' enrollment in a significantly higher number of English courses than their non-attendee counterparts would suggest *a priori* differences in their respective L2 motivation and WTC and indicate the possibility that the ERC simply attracts those who would likely experience extraordinary gains regardless of whether they attended the ERC or not. On the other hand, a lack of significant differences would support the possibility that attendees' gains were due in large part to ERC attendance rather than *a priori* individual differences. The third aim follows from the second by investigating attendees' versus non-attendees' English course performance. A finding of no significant difference between attendees and non-attendees with regard to performance would suggest that attendees' higher comparative TOEIC gains cannot be explained by greater-than-usual efforts with regard to regular English course work. Finally, this study seeks to uncover a significant relationship between the frequency of ERC attendance and attendees' relative gains on the TOEIC despite the imperfect records from which attendance data was drawn. If such a relationship can be found, it would lend support to the hypothesis that ERC attendance has a significant direct effect on English proficiency.

C. Sampling and Data Collection

Since our previous study, course enrollment and grade data as well as additional TOEIC score data for the spring and fall semesters of 2009 has become available for most of the students who entered Saitama University at the beginning of that year (*N*=1581) [19]. This study focuses on 17 ERC attendees from this cohort who took their pre-TOEIC test before beginning their first semester began and their post-TOEIC test immediately after completing their second semester, while attending the ERC at least once during the period between the tests. These attendees were among the 21 students already found in our previous study to have experienced significant TOEIC gains over their non-attendee counterparts [19]. However, because 4 of those 21 students must now be omitted (either because they took their post-test at a later date or because they had not yet attended the ERC before completing their second semester), re-analysis of the remaining 17 students was deemed appropriate in order to reconfirm that attendees experienced significantly higher

TOEIC gains than non-attendees who shared the same initial score. Among the rest of the 2009 students for whom all relevant data was available, 224 students shared identical or, in the case of two ERC attendees, near identical (within 40 points higher or lower) TOEIC pre-test scores with the 17 ERC attendees. Attendees' initial scores ranged from 425 to 740 with a mean of 548.82 (*SD*=105.70). As with the previous study, the ERC log book, in which attendees were supposed to sign their names upon visiting was the only record we had of who attended the ERC and how many times they attended [19]. It is important to emphasize that students' failure to consistently sign the log book along with the researchers' inability to decipher students' handwriting and match aliases to real names all but guarantees that the true number of freshman for which the relevant academic data is available and who visited the ERC in 2009 was larger than 17 and also that the average frequency of attendance was higher than the book would indicate. Thus, as is often the case in education research, this study makes due with imperfect data.

D. Analysis and Results

1) Reconfirming TOEIC Gains

To test if the target group of 17 ERC attendees experienced significantly higher TOEIC gains compared to non-attendees, ten *t*-tests contrasting attendees' versus non-attendees' post-TOEIC scores were performed pairing each attendee with a randomly selected non-attendee who had a matching pre-test score. Results showed that, whereas non-attendees' post-test scores averaged 591.21 (mean *SD*=119.32), ERC attendees' post-test scores averaged 684.71 points (mean *SD*=98.45). Thus, the 17 ERC attendees scored an average of 93.5 points higher than their non-attendee counterparts (with a mean standard deviation of 114.96 points, a mean lower limit of 27.88 points and mean upper limit of 152.61 points at the 95% confidence interval). This difference was significant for all ten contrasts ($p<0.05$, one-tailed) with a mean *t* of 3.40, thus reconfirming the findings of our previous study [19].

2) Contrasting First Semester English Course Enrollment

To investigate whether attendees enrolled in significantly more English courses before beginning their first semester at Saitama University, ten more paired *t*-tests were performed with the same attendee-non-attendee pairings (matching by initial TOEIC score) as before, only this time contrasting the number of first-semester English courses in which those students enrolled. Results showed that, on average, ERC attendees enrolled in one (1.08) more first-semester English course than non-attendees (with a mean standard deviation of 1.06, a mean lower limit of 0.53 and mean upper limit of 1.62 at the 95% confidence interval): Whereas non-attendees enrolled in an average of about two (2.16) courses, future ERC attendees enrolled in an average of about three (3.24) English courses. This difference was significant for all ten contrasts ($p<.01$, one-tailed) with a mean *t* of 4.19.

3) Contrasting Total Second-Semester English Course Grade Points Earned

Before comparing attendees to non-attendees with regard to academic performance, preliminary Spearman rank correlation analysis was performed on the entire set of

available enrollment and grade data for the 2009 student body (*N*=1581) to determine what measurement of academic performance (if any) best predicted TOEIC score gains. Measurements included the number of English courses passed, English grade point average, and total grade points earned in English classes (the sum of all of the final scores they received for all of the English courses they took). This analysis revealed that the total grade points earned by a student in second-semester English courses was the best predictor of that student's TOEIC gain, *rs*=.34, *p*<.001, with second-semester English course grade point average close behind at *rs*=.32, *p*<.001 (interestingly, the correlations were much weaker for the same measurements with regard to the first semester: *rs*=.14, *p*<.001, and *rs*=.11, *p*<.001, respectively).

Given the above findings, we decided to contrast attendees and non-attendees with regard to their total second-semester English course grade points earned using the same repeated paired *t*-test method employed in previous sections and maintaining the same pairings as before. Results indicate that ERC attendees earned an average of 101.10 more English course grade points than their non-attendee counterparts or the equivalent of taking one additional course and getting a perfect score in it (with a mean standard deviation of 102.20 points, a mean lower limit of 48.56 points and mean upper limit of 153.65 points at the 95% confidence interval). This difference was significant for all ten contrasts (*p*<0.01, one-tailed) with a mean *t* of 4.12.

4) The Relationship between Frequency of ERC Attendance and TOEIC Score Gain

Spearman rank correlation analysis was employed to investigate for a significant relationship between the frequency of ERC attendance among the 17-member target group during their first two semesters and gains in their TOEIC scores. Although not significant, a positive correlation was found between the number of times attendees signed the logbook and their TOEIC score gains (*rs* =.25, *p*=.17). Still, knowing that students often forgot to sign the book, we decided to search further and looked for a relationship between how early in the year a student first signed the book and that student's TOEIC score gain, postulating 1) that even if students often forgot to sign the book, they probably at least signed it once upon their very first visit to the ERC, and 2) that at least some of those students probably visited several times during the semester after their first visit without signing the book. Thus, we rank correlated attendees' TOEIC score gains with the number of ERC days left in the year on the day their signatures first appeared in the log book. The resulting correlation of *rs*=.37 approached significance at p=.07.

E. Conclusion

As in our previous study, ERC attendees were found in this study to have experienced significantly higher gains in their TOEIC scores than their non-attendee counterparts with matching pre-test scores. Further analysis, though, revealed important clues with regard to the underlying relationship between ERC attendance and those proficiency gains [19]. First, the finding that students who would in the future attend the ERC had enrolled in a significantly higher number of first-semester English courses than their non-attendee counterparts, suggests that they may have, from the beginning, possessed a significantly higher L2 motivation and WTC than their counterparts, which Gardner et al. and Yashima and Zenuk-Nishide, respectively, found to lead to higher language proficiency gains [23], [24]. Although this does not eliminate the possibility that ERC attendance has a direct significant effect on students' proficiency, it does mean that some of the credit for attendees' extraordinary gains must be given directly to the students themselves and whatever prior experiences they had which led to their higher apparent L2 motivation and WTC. Likewise, attendees' earning significantly higher total English course grade points than their counterparts suggests that a portion of their gains must be attributed directly to the additional efforts they made with regard to their regular English course work. For example, if we take Saegusa's conclusion to heart while assuming attendees made similar additional efforts in their first semester English courses, we may postulate that at least 17 points of attendees' gains over non-attendees' were due directly to these extra efforts [21]. Again, this finding simply means the ERC cannot take all the credit for attendees' extraordinary gains; it does not eliminate the possibility that ERC attendance leads directly to higher proficiency gains. Indeed, we may hypothesize a spiral relationship in which ERC attendance helps raise attendees' L2 motivation, WTC, and English proficiency, which in turn helps them make greater and more effective efforts in their English courses which further increases those attributes. Although testing such a hypothesis is beyond the scope of this study, the near-significant positive relationship between attendees' TOEIC gains and how early in the year they first signed the ERC log book suggests that the longer one is a member of the ERC community, the higher the proficiency gains one can expect.

V. Final Comments

The ERC is a place of and for social action. Through examining four contrasting aspects of this self-access center, this study enabled us to move deeper in observing, recording, and reflecting in order to have a more complete view of this environment and its community of interactive learners. Similar to the process outlined by Smith, the authors consolidated their understanding of interaction in the ERC through a reflective process in order to gain expertise in the Center's experiences and to learn—just as learners do [25]. The first section provided a holistic overview of the Center. The second narrowed in focus, detailing a specific speech event occurring within it. The third discussed the Center's Drama Workshop activities, and the final section analyzed English proficiency gains by the Center's regular attendees. The four sections of this brief study combine to suggest that both the provision of support for learning *and* increases in linguistic proficiency go hand in hand with interactive learning contexts.

Saitama University, Japan, and to the learners and volunteers in the ERC for all their unwavering support.

Further, in addition to the campus-based ERC, we would like to thank all participants for their input and assistance with building a virtual presence—especially over the past three years. Details concerning all aspects of the ERC (including overviews of its objectives, structure, personnel, events, as well as interactive activities and more) are freely available at the Center's website [26].

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