追手門学院大学 基盤教育論集 第 7 号（2020）ISSN 2188-4536

Adapting an existing self-access model to a new space: “WIL”ifying E-CO

Katherine THORNTON

English Cafe at Otemon (E-CO) のWIL化：自律学習施設の両キャンパス化の利益と課題

ソーントン・キャサリン

[Keywords] learning space design, self-access centre

The Context

E-CO, established as a collaborative project between Otemon Gakuin University (OGU) and Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS), opened in 2013. Several parties had input into the design of the original space. From the OGU side: staff from the Information and Media Division, and staff in the Center for International Studies, to which E-CO was affiliated; and from the KUIS side the the managers who run the self-access facilities at KUIS and the E-CO director and lecturer employed by KUIS to run the facilities at OGU. The result of this collaboration has been a colourful and comfortable space with different areas for different kinds of language study with attention paid to learning space design concepts such as noise flow and facilitating interaction between learners.

Designing E-CO as a community-supportive space

E-CO and its designers adopted a social learning space approach (Murray & Fujishima, 2013; 2016) to facilitating language learning, in which the space itself is a key factor in facilitating and sustaining a learning community of students who come together and influence each other to learn languages. This is often termed a Community of Practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in which “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). For E-CO, the common point among its users, the glue which holds the community together, is

a desire to learn languages (primarily English but other languages too), and an interest in the world beyond Japan’s borders. Anything connected to these common points, from individual quiet study using grammar books to noisy conversation or participation in culture workshops can be completed in the space, thus facilitating interaction between different users with different purposes and goals. Any activity can be cooperative, and the space is designed to promote this so DVDs can be watched as a pair or group of three, and the listening booths also have two chairs to enable two students to work together on their listening skills. The Café and Group Spaces, and even Individual Study Spaces were designed so different groups can work separately but in close proximity to each other, maximising opportunities for interaction and peer learning (see Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1: Design of Café Space enables different groups to communicate in close proximity



Figure 2: Quiet Study Space on Ai Campus – individual but proximal studying

The focal point of E-CO is the Counter, at which E-CO's full-time manager works, along with a variety of student staff (Figure 3). Each student is greeted as they enter the space, with new students given particular attention. The manager and student staff make efforts to not only show new students what they can do in E-CO, but also to introduce them to other users, and help them feel a part of the learning community from their first visit.



Figure 3: Students interacting at E-CO Counter on Ai Campus

Through interacting with each other as the space design encourages, a number of positive effects have been recorded since E-CO opened. The first is the development of a strong and supportive community of learners and an enthusiastic group of volunteers who work at the counter, greet new users and organise different events to make the space as welcoming and friendly as possible. The other major effect is seen in how users influence each other to start, improve and persevere with language learning. A student may start using E-CO primarily to study for TOEIC using our materials, but in seeing others taking part in conversation sessions, decide to try this kind of activity too, thus expanding their exposure to English, and hopefully their enjoyment of learning. In a similar way, students who came to practice speaking with a teacher but did not intend to work very hard, can be inspired by students around them studying seriously and making significant progress in their language skills.

However, the small community that E-CO has become, no matter how inclusive it tries to be, can also have some detrimental effects, particularly on those who do not consider themselves full members of that community. Previous studies into E-CO users have shown that this is partly due to the perception that all users are very proficient in English, and that they will also be expected to speak English, and maybe only English, when they enter the facility. Another factor is the perception that, regardless of English proficiency, all people in E-CO know each other well (and therefore a new user will be outside this "in-group". This difficulty in joining an established group is recognised as one of the challenges in building a

CoP (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Staffing the community One way in which E-CO has attempted to counter this closed impression is in its student staff recruitment policy. There is a deliberate variety in English proficiency and learning experiences among E-CO student staff, from bilingual exchange students, high proficiency Japanese learners of English to less confident learners who are just beginning their English learning journey. It is hoped that any Otemon student who uses E-CO will see their experience reflected in the student staff body. Student staff are trained to prioritise making connections with and between other users, and to encourage repeat visits, over explaining practical information about E-CO, even though this is very important.

The New Campus

In 2017, OGU announced plans to open a new campus, and E-CO immediately started planning how it could adapt to this change in circumstances. In 2018 it was confirmed that, although it would not have a dedicated space as on the current campus, a large space in an excellent location on the first floor of the new campus would be available to house E-CO activities. This space would be shared with other groups on campus, most notably the International Liberal Arts department, and teachers would be encouraged to hold events, sessions and their office hours in the space, potentially broadening the number of students who would use the space.

WIL (Work is Learning) and the new campus space

As the planning for the new campus facilities advanced, it became clear to E-CO that the new campus was designed with a somewhat different philosophy of space use than E-CO. Whereas E-CO encourages all activities connected to its mission of effective language learning and international exchange to happen in the same space to maximise interaction, the new campus philosophy envisaged different kind of activities taking place in different areas of campus (Mikami, 2019). Social and collaborative activities (WIL - Work is Learning) would take place on the first floor, in the open centre (WIL Hall) with more focused group work taking place in the glass-fronted WIL Studios around its side (of which one, Global Studio, was the space that E-CO would use for its activities). Quieter activities such as private study could take place in the wide hallways lined with books on the upper floors (Discovery Promenade), while silent study was designed to take place in the upper level of the library. To what extent could E-CO's community adjust to this new space, with its different philosophy, and how could the two accommodate each other? The following section details the ways in which E-CO has tried to adapt its model to the new space, and some challenges it has faced in doing so.

At first glance, E-CO should fit in perfectly with the university's push for more peer learning (学びあい、教えあい) and WIL (Work is Learning – 行動して学び、学びながら行動する). Following the CoP model, E-CO students already learn from each other every day, both informally, by interacting in the space, and also more formally, facilitated by student staff, one of whose roles is to act as Peer Supporters who support others in fixed sessions where students can ask for advice and learn about their senpai's experiences. The events that students organise, while limited to on-campus, are examples of students learning from doing, reflecting on their experiences and passing these experiences on to other students, which fits in with the WIL concept.

Adapting E-CO to a New Space

The following section documents the initial measures which were taken in the early months of conducting E-CO activities on both campuses to maximise the affordances offered by the new space and compensate for any disadvantages.

Creating & Sustaining a Learning Community on the New Campus

To be successful, E-CO relies on creating a sense of community between users, as explained above. There have been several challenges to this since the opening of the new campus. The most significant one is staffing, but physical layout of the space also plays a role in this.

Staffing As soon as we knew the university would be opening a new campus, we realised this would have serious consequences for E-CO, most notably in the splitting in two of our community of learners. In order to combat this, we realised immediately that staff, both full-time administrators and academic staff, and student staff, would be key to minimising potential downsides to the split. Unfortunately, due to the tight budgets imposed by the university, E-CO was required to manage the space on Ai campus as usual and conduct activities in the new space using only existing resources (in terms of professional full-time staff), with some additional resources provided for part-time teachers and student staff.

Luckily, as the Global Studio is a shared space, there is no obligation for E-CO to manage it completely or to have a presence there all day (although not doing so has had negative effects on attempts to build the community). It was decided that there could be a staff presence at lunchtime and the 30-minute communication hour (when no students have classes) everyday, and at some other times of day. At these times, the E-CO teacher and/or learning advisor hold conversation or advising sessions, and student staff (including exchange students), hold group English conversation sessions (Easy Chat). These sessions also take place on Ai campus over the lunch break, again held by student staff. On occasions where the Global Studio is booked for other events, these sessions take place in a corner of the Studio

available for teachers' office hours. Counter services (reservations and book borrowing and returns) are overwhelmingly done by student staff, although the E-CO teacher and advisor help out when they are available, particularly in booking follow-up sessions. E-CO's administrator is based in the facility on Ai Campus, and during spring 2019 was only able to be present on Sojiji campus two mornings per week.

Student Staff roles In Spring Semester 2019, there were nine E-CO Student Staff who worked in Global Studio, manning the makeshift counter for a minimum of an hour per week (with another 10 students working as Conversation Facilitators). Their role is to greet students and explain the different facilities and services available, conduct book borrowing and make reservations for services, and to help students feel comfortable in the space. In their training, building rapport and making connections with users is heavily emphasised. They also run events and conduct projects (making displays, starting new initiatives to attract users etc.) Student staff can work anytime between second and fourth periods, but need to be supervised by a full-time staff member, who is the only one who can collect the keys to open the cabinets in which the tablets and PC on which reservations and book borrowing is conducted are kept. This means that the actual times student staff can work is limited.

In order to compensate for the lack of a full-time presence in the space, a number of adaptations have been made to E-CO systems. On Ai Campus, all reservations are done at the counter, in order to maximise potential for relationship building and to encourage users to speak a little English. On Sojiji campus, we have made our online reservation system available online through QR codes on our services posters, in links sent out on the online campus management system (Universal Passport and Campus Square) and on our website, although the vast majority of students still sign up in person (as of 31 October 2019, only 21 students who are not staff have made an account with the reservation system). On Ai campus, teachers run sessions for our English Practice service back-to-back with no break, and reservations are all made at the counter, but, as there are often no staff available in Global Studio, an extra five-minute break has been added between sessions so the teacher can help students to make their follow-up reservation.

unreliable presence (frustration from students - long lines during Commn hours etc.)

Physical layout of Global Studio One criticism of E-CO's space on Ai campus is its perceived closedness. A survey conducted in January 2018 with 103 freshmen (about two-thirds of the year group) from the International Liberal Arts department, who major in English, revealed that over 50% found it a little difficult (43%) or very difficult (9%) to enter the space. The entrance way is narrow, and even on entering, one has to turn a corner to see the full space. When the facility was built, 2 sections of wall were converted to glass, but as one of these is a classroom, a section of frosted glass was added to avoid passers-by distracting students taking classes. In contrast, Global Studio has a long glass wall with an open ceiling area to the central WIL Hall, although a long shelf prevents a clear vision of what people

in the space are doing, especially if they are seated. The idea behind the design was for those outside to get a sense of activities happening within, without those inside the space being distracted (similar to the frosted wall in E-CO on Ai Campus). There are two entry points, and the facility is on the ground floor where many students pass by every day. Unlike other WIL Studios on the first floor, some of the furniture in Global Studio is colourful and hopefully inviting.

One advantage of the Global Studio space is its openness. Whereas the large bookcases in E-CO make it easy to create different spaces within the larger one, it is not possible to move them, so space for larger events is limited. The classroom space is a closed one, so workshops and other sessions are not very visible to those not participating. In contrast, the open space in Global Studio makes it ideal for bigger events, and the workshops, held in one corner of the space, can be seen by other users, increasing their visibility, which can lead to more participation. On the downside, noise can often be an issue, either from other users in the space or the nearby WIL Hall, and microphones can only be used across the whole space, making it impossible to use them for smaller workshops or activities.

Counter The main hindrance from the physical layout in Global Studio has been the lack of an obvious Counter space. In Ai campus this is directly opposite the entrance and any entering student is greeted, and, if new, shown around by counter staff. As the Global Studio is a shared space, and sometimes used for events or classes, it is not possible to have a permanent Counter space. Using cabinets and an existing table near the big shelf, a makeshift and moveable counter has been established, but it is far from ideal. Unfortunately, the existing furniture (leaf shaped tables where students face inwards to each other) while they may be ideal for groupwork, do not allow student staff to easy face out to students entering the space, or send a message that it is a counter area where newcomers can get help or information. The location of this counter area, which is next to the large shelving in order to provide access to the cabinets where E-CO's files and equipment have to be stored, means that student staff, if seated, are not visible from outside the space, and cannot face both students entering the space and those already using it inside, making it difficult to interact smoothly with everyone in the space.

In addition, other aspects of the physical layout of the WIL Studio have presented challenges to building a learning community. While it is useful to have shelves for displaying and storing materials, there is only location for this, the long shelf near the entrance, and the majority of the shelves face out, towards WIL Hall, rather than inwards, towards users of the space. The results in the materials being a less central presence in the space, with only the most popular materials, TOEIC materials and graded readers, plus a few newspapers and foreign comics, being displayed inside the main space. For graded readers, a moveable rotary bookshelf was brought down from E-CO for this purpose, and is placed near the "counter" area.

Encouraging interaction through physical layout In E-CO on Ai Campus, careful positioning of different materials in different areas gives students reasons to walk around the space, meaning they are more likely to use different areas and interact with more people. In contrast, in Global Studio students enter, choose a seat and then usually do not move around within the space. There are eight tables provided in the space, but the distance between them means that students on different tables rarely interact, unlike the careful design of the Ai Campus space where students are always in close proximity to others. They have been described by one user as "islands", which highlights the sense of isolation between each one.

The Global Studio space may also appear too similar to a classroom space, with the result that students only enter when asked or required to do so. The different furniture design in E-CO on Ai Campus was designed to send a clear message about what could be done in each space - sofas and a TV screen in the Café Space, individual booths in the Quiet Study Space, and comfortable chairs in the Reading Space. In Global Studio, only two different kinds of furniture are available - pod chairs with small work desks attached, usually arranged in a classroom format with all chairs facing a large display screen, and small leaf-shaped tables that can fit three to six chairs around them. There is no obvious individual study area, or sofa area for more relaxed interaction. This may have given an impression that the space is designed mainly for teacher-led sessions such as classes or workshops, or groupwork sessions, rather than self-study, making it difficult for new users to access the space alone, especially as there may not be anyone there to greet them or an obvious counter space.

Several adjustments, within current constraints, have recently been made to try to improve the physical layout of the space. The counter area has been moved to the opposite side of the space, so that those staffing it can be more visible (if further away) to people both entering the space, and already using it. Pod chairs have been rearranged to make small groups among the leaf-shaped tables, hoping to reduce the perceived distance between groups. In future, we hope to acquire a long table which can more obviously function as a counter. It is hoped that this could create a more welcoming space for potential new users.

In order to combat the impression of the space as purely a classroom or groupwork space for specific groups or projects, and to attract more people to use the services, it is necessary to do effective advertising and promotion of E-CO activities.

Conducting effective PR Getting the message out about E-CO activities has always been a challenge for E-CO. From 2013 to 2108 the following strategies were used: posters around E-CO and on the counter, posters on the noticeboards outside E-CO and on noticeboards around campus; posts on the online university management system and emails generated by these posts, and direct mails to students who

signup for E-CO information. Posters are also shared on occasion with teachers, particularly those in the International Arts department. Occasionally we have also used video display boards around campus. Worth of mouth is also very important, and both full-time and student staff are encouraged to share information about monthly workshops and special events at the counter when students borrow books and make reservations. All PR is done primarily in Japanese with some English.

On Sojiji Campus, it is not possible to use paper posters around campus, and the only opportunity for visual PR are three big digital displays. Within Global Studio, E-CO uses some of the provided whiteboards as PR display boards with paper posters with added QR codes for signing up to join sessions, some facing inside to existing users, and others facing outside to appeal to students passing by the space or using the WIL Hall. A weekly slideshow of E-CO events and activities is also displayed on two of the large screens in Global Studio, one facing out to WIL Hall, the other inside the space. Originally, digital versions of the paper posters were displayed on these screens, but over the year we have come to realise that these are not very effective. There is often too much text, which is too small, and key information is not clear enough to be read in the time it is displayed. We are currently experimenting with more simple slideshow messages and digital posters to make more impact on those who see them.

Investigating E-CO usage on both campuses

In order to see to what extent Otemon students are using E-CO since the opening of Sojiji Campus, it is possible to examine the data for student participation in workshops and services, and borrowing records. The following sections show the numbers of students participating indifferent E-CO services over three years, from 2017 to 2019. While E-CO does have data for all users on Ai Campus, it is not possible to keep similar data for Global Studio as we do not have a permanent presence in the space, and not all users are there to engage with E-CO activities, but may come to consult teachers or join other sessions. In the following data figures, it should be noted that data for November to March of academic year 2019/20 was not yet available at time of writing.

There is no one clear picture that emerges from the data. Some kinds of services have been more popular than the previous year, while others are attracting fewer students. Possible reasons for these divergent trends are discussed below. It should be noted that the numbers for all services for June 2018 are about 75% of what would have been expected, had an earthquake not caused the university to close for a whole week.

English Practice

In the early months of the academic year 2019, English Practice, the 20-minute speaking or writing focused session led by teachers, was less popular than in the previous year, possibly due to the fact that it was more difficult to make reservations on Sojiji campus, but numbers recovered in the latter half of the semester, even showing a significant increase in July, with an increase on over 80% on the previous year (Figure 4). It should be noted that, due to staffing and schedule changes, the number of slots available for English Practice was more than doubled from September 2017, which explains the much lower totals for Spring Semester 2017.

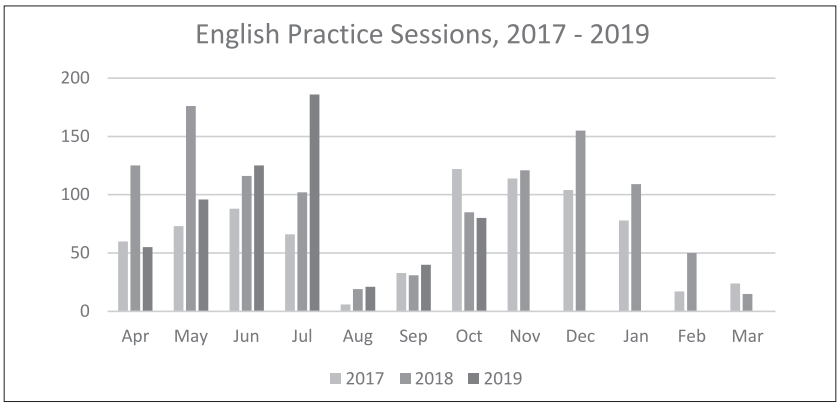


Figure 4: Comparison of English Practice Sessions, 2017 to 2019

Group Conversation Sessions

In contrast to English Practice, in Spring Semester, the number of students attending the Easy Chat and Coffee Talk conversation sessions was consistently lower than 2018 during the Spring Semester (taking into account the effect of the June 2018 earthquake)(Figure 5). In the Fall semester, numbers so far have

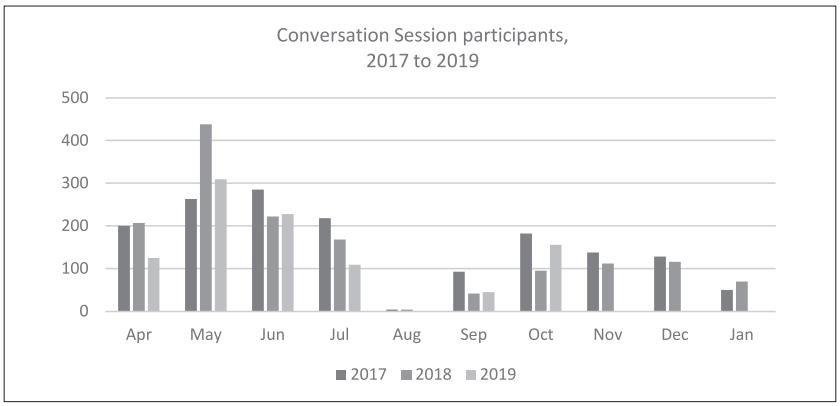


Figure 5: Comparison of Group Conversation Sessions, 2017 to 2019

been higher than 2018 but still lower than 2017 totals. One reason for this may be the change in the E-CO Passport system, which offers grade points for ILA freshmen. In 2018 10 E-CO Passport points were 10% of the final grade, whereas in 2019 only 6 points were offered in Spring, and these were for extra credit rather than a part of the whole grade. While it is likely that this has had some effect, the same system is in place for English Practice sessions too, and no such negative effect has been recorded.

Advising Sessions

A similar trend can be seen in Advising, which has been consistently significantly less popular in every month than in previous years (Figure 6). Advising sessions are offered in Japanese by the E-CO Advisor. As there is only one advisor, the number of sessions offered on each campus has halved this year, which can make it challenging or students to find a session time that they can attend. The drop may also be because most advising sessions are made as a result of a counter interaction where a full-time staff member explains and recommends advising to a student. With much less counter contact time on Sojiji, fewer sessions may have been booked. This points to the importance of a well-informed counter presence in Global Studio. Better training about Advising for student staff may also be necessary to increase the uptake of this valuable service.

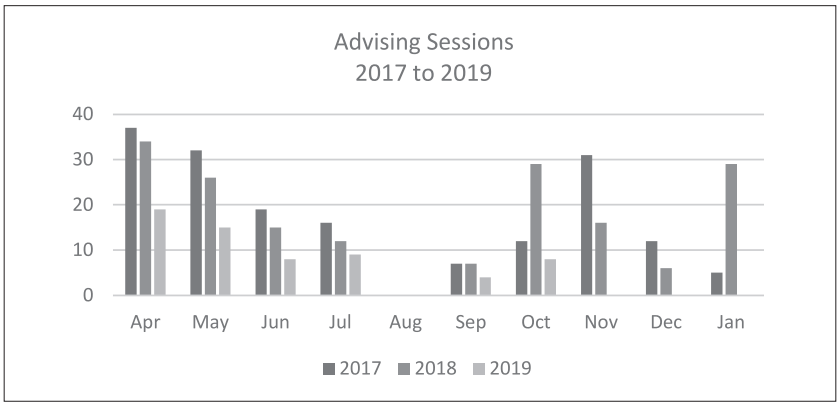


Figure 6: Advising Sessions, 2017 to 2019

Workshops and Courses

It is more difficult to offer comparisons between the number of participants for workshops and courses, as the provision of these varies each year, due to the relative non-E-CO workload of full-time staff, the number of exchange students on campus and different types collaborations with the Center for International Studies.

Borrowing Records

An additional way to get a sense of how the split over two campuses is affecting how E-CO is used is to examine the book borrowing records before and after April 2019. In addition to general book borrowing by all students, freshmen from International Arts are required to read graded readers, which they can borrow from either E-CO or the library. A comparison between E-CO borrowing records the most popular books – graded readers and TOEIC® books - in both Spring 2019 and 2018 (Table 1) reveals that book borrowing in both these categories fell by 41% this year. This is likely to be because of the lack of a permanent counter presence in Global Studio, which limits the times students can borrow books.

Table 1: Book borrowing over 2 years at E-CO (both campuses)

Borrowed books	2019 Ai	2019 Sojiji	2019 Total	2018 Total	% change
TOEIC®	68	47	**115**	**162**	-41%
Graded Readers	74	409	**483**	**681**	-41%

Perceptions of Global Studio from Freshmen students

A recent survey to International Liberal Arts freshmen in September 2019 provides information about how Global Studio is being perceived by students. In this survey, only 34% stated they found Global Studio a somewhat difficult (30%) or very difficult (4%) to enter, which is a welcome decrease on the 52% recorded about E-CO on Ai Campus in January 2018 with the previous year's freshmen. While this is a decline, there is still work to be done to reduce this number further for the Global Studio. This number is likely to be significantly higher in other departments, even among students interested in

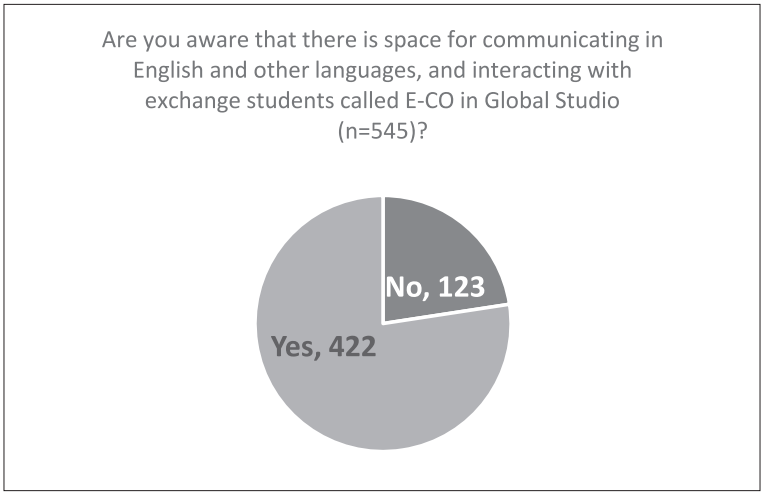


Figure 7: Awareness of E-CO among freshmen

learning English.

A survey conducted by the *Gaikokugo Kyoiku Shitsu* in July 2019 to freshmen in all departments about their general attitudes to English and learning habits also included some questions about E-CO. The survey revealed that over 75% of freshmen surveyed did know of E-CO's existence, but only one quarter (143) had actually visited (Figure 7).

In this survey, it was confirmed that International Liberal Arts student were most likely to visit and be interested in E-CO. Among the general freshmen population, around a half stated that they were interested or somewhat interested in joining E-CO (Figure 8), but for International Liberal Arts, that percentage rises to 85%, or 121 of the students surveyed (Figure 9). However, of these, about one third (44) stated that they had not actually used E-CO.

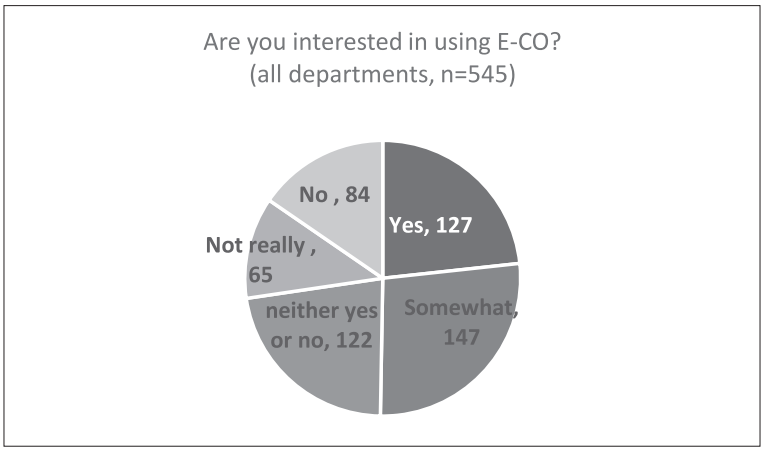


Figure 8: Interest in using E-CO (all departments)

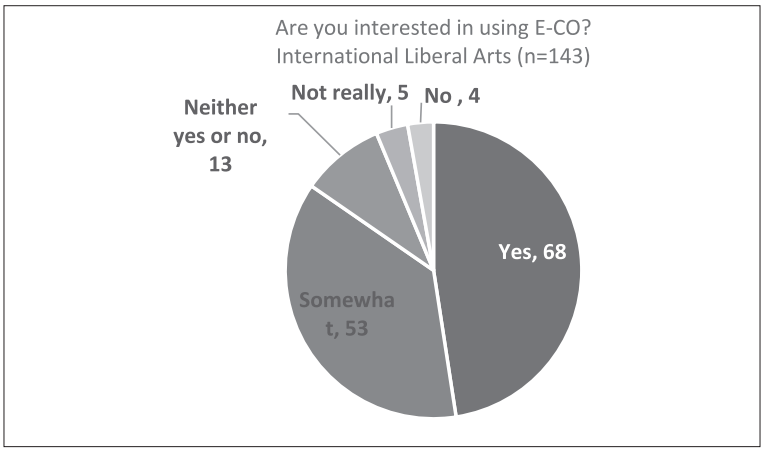


Figure 9: Interest in using E-CO (International Liberal Arts)

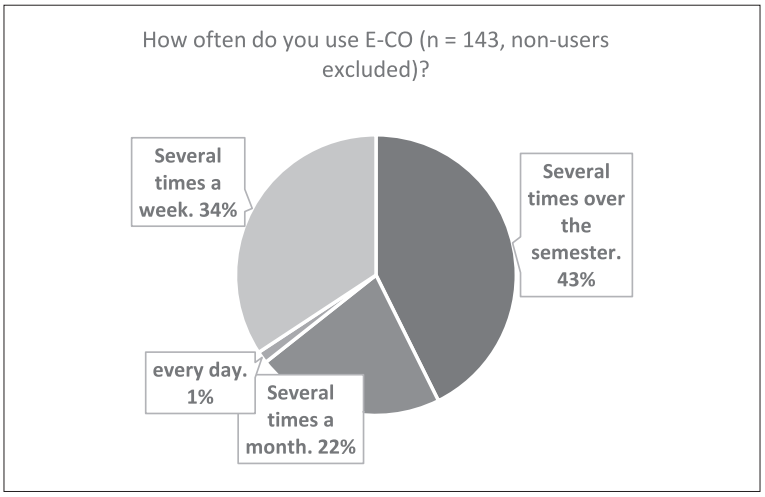


Figure 10: Frequency of E-CO usage

While about 4/5 (402 out of 545) respondents said they've never used E-CO in Global Studio, 143 had. Of these just over one-third said they came everyday (2) or several times a week (49) (Figure 10).

Conclusion

Despite operating over two campuses with no significant increase in full-time manpower, E-CO has been able to sustain a certain level of service provision, especially in the provision of one-on-one English speaking and writing sessions with teachers (English Practice). However, the challenges in working over two campuses and adapting the social learning space model to a WIL Studio are ongoing. A shared rather than dedicated space, while more open and in a better location than on Ai Campus, and a lack of a permanent presence in that space has made it difficult to develop a sense of community in Global Studio, as it is more difficult to build connections between staff, who visit less frequently and are often busier when they are there, and users. As a result, the number of students borrowing books has dropped considerably this year.

In order to attract more students to use E-CO in Global Studio more often, a number of improvements to be made have been identified:

Physical space

- Additional or different tables to encourage more interaction between users
- A proper counter space in a location that allows staff to be visible across the whole space, including to those entering (albeit one that can be moved to make way for other activities in the space)

- Some kind of individual study space, to encourage more students to use the area for self-study.
- More PR facilities across campus. It is also necessary to improve the way we communicate with students through posters and other PR messages. Messages need to be concise, clear and welcoming.

Staffing

- Ideally, some kind of more permanent presence from an administrative staff member in Global Studio would allow student staff to feel more supported and enable E-CO to offer more frequent counter services. This would make it feel more convenient to students, who could then borrow books and make reservations at times other than lunch time and communication hour, when they are often rushed and do not have time to relax in the space.
- Improvements in training for student staff, so they can feel more comfortable approaching and interacting with users, identifying their needs and recommending suitable materials and services

While some of these can be achieved through E-CO's efforts alone, some require collaboration with other departments using the space and the university and campus administration. E-CO looks forward to developing these relationships in a way which is beneficial for everyone across the university.

References

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511815355

Mikami, T. (2019, June). Presentation given at Otemon Gakuin University Institute of Liberal Arts "Waigaya Kenshu" Faculty Development Session, 19th June, 2019.

Murray, G., & Fujishima, N. (2013). Social language learning spaces: Affordances in a community of learners. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics, 36*(1), 141-157. doi:10.1515/cjal-2013-0009

Murray, G., & Fujishima, N. (2016). Understanding a social space for language learning. In G. Murray & N. Fujishima (Eds.), *Social spaces for language learning: Stories from the L-café* (pp. 124-146). Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave. doi:10.1057/978113730103.0023

Wenger, E., McDermott, R., & Snyder, W. M. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice: A guide to managing knowledge*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Abstract

For six years, from 2013 to 2019, Otemon Gakuin University's self-access facilities, named English Cafe at Otemon, or E-CO, were based in a custom-designed facility in the Central Building on the university campus. In 2018, when it was announced that the university was opening a new campus, E-CO started preparing to make its activities accessible on both campuses. This paper documents how E-CO has attempted to adapt to the new situation, and the benefits and drawbacks of both the new space in which it functions on Sojiji Campus, and how it is addressing the challenges it faces.