

A Reflection on Pedagogical Rationale in the Neoliberal University: The Case of Self-Access Language Centres

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Abstract

This article describes the findings of a project which reviewed self-access Language Centres (SALC) in the UK between 2014 and 2016. The aim was to delineate current practices and better understand the very irregular format of these facilities which do not exist, or have not survived, in some universities and range from state of the art buildings to a few shelves in the corner of libraries in others. Ten SALC were visited and twelve interviews of managing staff were conducted. The data collected established the landscape of SALC in terms of spaces, equipment, staffing, activities as well as planned development and challenges. The data analysis revealed that although their pedagogical mission, rationale and benefits have been demonstrated and widely accepted since the 1990s, SALC encounter major challenges in the second decade of the 21st century and find it difficult to justify their existence, attract regular funding and ensure their continuation. This situation is then considered in light of the latest educational reforms and the place given to the discipline of Modern languages. A discussion on pedagogical needs in the age of the corporate reform leads to suggesting a series of avenues to rethink SALC. Overall this project highlighted the importance of reflecting on our disciplines, facilities and values in a critical fashion and the urgency to connect our practices with a rapidly changing educational and political UK.

Keywords: modern languages; language centres; self-access; learning needs; pedagogical rationale; neoliberalism; higher education; educational policies; educational reforms

Introduction

Self-Access Language Centres (SALC)¹ thrived in the 1990s as one of the responses to the resourcing difficulties making education for an increasing number of language learners a challenge. At the time, language educators had to ask themselves how to provide the ‘mass learner’ with ‘the learning competences, opportunities and challenges [...] traditionally associated with the education of the few?’ (King, 1994: foreword). In line with the shift of teaching philosophies towards constructivism² and with the development of analytic language learning methods encouraging a more natural and gradual acquisition of the target language system (Little, 1989), SALC constituted a move away from the traditional model of ‘a classroom, a teacher and a book’ and transformed the language tutor into a facilitator within an environment focused on the learner (Gardner and Miller, 2014). Today, language educators and researchers agree that, by encouraging student choice and self-reliance, SALC promote the development of personal learning strategies and metacognitive knowledge (White, 2008). They also allow to respond to a greater variety of users’ needs and expectations of language learning (Esch, 1994). With the support of such facilities outside the classrooms, students have the opportunity to practice the language more regularly and develop their own learning strategies with various degrees of independence

In the second decade of the 21st century, although their pedagogical benefits are widely known, the development of SALC seems to be facing obstacles and justifying their existence is becoming a major issue. Great imbalances can be observed between SALC structures in UK Higher Education institutions: while a handful of universities market state of the art facilities, SALC are decreasing in size or disappearing in the majority of institutions. As research on SALC have already pointed out, this could be due to the fact that self-access learning does not have the same seal of approval as classroom teaching and can be questioned by those who are unknowledgeable or hostile to them (Gardner and Miller, 1999). More recent studies have also suggested that, as self-access language learning is moving into virtual spaces through the impulse of new technologies and e-learning, physical SALC spaces may become threatened (Mynard, 2012; Reinders, 2012). The lack of recognition of SALC and the advances

1 For the purpose of this study, my definition of SALC is: an educational space dedicated to students learning a foreign language for the autonomous, semi-autonomous or blended practice of a language outside class time.

2 John Dewey (1859-1952); Maria Montessori (1870-1952); Jean Piaget (1896-1980)

of new technologies can certainly explain why the development of these structures has become erratic in the UK. However, with such strong pedagogical rationale and benefits, at a time where contact hours are reduced to a minimum and where students' commitment to independent language study is crucial, it seemed important to push further the investigation.

The Project

This piece details the particulars, findings and critical evaluation of a project carried out between 2014 and 2016³ which aimed to explore the mission, values, practices and challenges of SALC in the UK, to identify the key factors that may explain the current unbalanced landscape and to envisage the potential future of these facilities. The methodology I adopted was to carry out a field investigation of a sample of ten SALC facilities⁴ and to conduct an in-depth interview of the managing staff. In addition, I talked to the former managers of two now disappeared facilities⁵, which brought the number of interviews to twelve. I then compared and critically analysed the data collected in light of relevant literature and latest studies. The ten facilities - nine manned and one unmanned - were selected to reflect the variety of 'large scale', 'small scale', 'controlled' and 'uncontrolled facilities detected by Gardner and Miller's typology (1999). In what follows, I summarise the findings of the field investigation with the support of the qualitative data gathered during the interviews; I then expand on the key obstacles encountered by SALC and propose a critical reading of the data by examining it in light of the current UK educational context. The scope of the overall discussion opens up to a larger debate on the place of pedagogical needs at the age of the corporate reform of UK higher education.

The SALC Spaces

In their typology of self-access, Gardner and Miller state that 'self-access is very flexible. It can be used on a large scale or on a small scale' and the environments and variety of systems in which they are applied make 'each self-access facility unique' and 'adapted to suit the context in which it occurs' (Gardner and Miller, 1999: 11-20; 51-58). Unsurprisingly, the field investigations confirmed that considerable variations in format exist between SALC in the UK. Their sizes vary from reduced shelves and corners within the walls of university libraries to fully dedicated floors or buildings. The latter are either designed as open spaces with separate activity corners or as a series of separate activity rooms reflecting the practice of the four key language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking). All visited facilities offer the basic equipment described in the literature as what constitutes the minimum required for a facility to be a SALC (Little, 1989; McCall, 1992; Gardner and Miller, 1999; Hughes, Krup and Vye, 2011; Kodate, 2012); namely at least one computer cluster and/or a laptop area, access to foreign channels television, a study area with tables and a variety of printed resources from textbooks, dictionaries, newspapers, journals and magazine to audio and video material. All facilities, including the uncontrolled one, also have a virtual extension of some sort (VLE site, Moodle or online presence).

A very wide range of additional spaces and equipment can then be identified in the largest facilities: the nine controlled facilities all have a manned entrance or desk, separate study and more social spaces and language software and programmes. Five SALC provide a library space, language labs equipped with Sanako, as well as listening, speaking, and interpreting booth or suites. Four SALC also offer separate television and/or cinema rooms (one with a DVD renting machine). Six of the structures work actively on creating a sense of language learning community to encourage students to spend more quality time within their walls. They achieve this in six facilities by offering a programme of activities⁶ organised to stimulate interest in language and connections between learners. In five SALC, the presence of a language advisor – considered as crucial in the literature (Garner and Miller, 1999: 180-204) - creates an active link between guided, semi-guided and independent learning and ensures the assessment and maintenance of the attractiveness of the facility and needs of the learners. Finally, three SALC provide students with an additional social hub with equipment such as coffee machines, kitchenettes, pool table, table tennis table, games and televisions. The managers of the latter all agree that 'the more alive

³ Carried out between 2014 and 2016 and supported by the Leicester University College of Arts, Humanities and Law Teaching Development Fund and the Leicester Learning Institute Travel Fund.

⁴ These will be referred to as SALC1 to SALC10 here to preserve confidentiality.

⁵ SALC11 and SALC12

⁶ Ranging from language skills workshops, daily news of the world sessions, themed evenings, karaoke events, speed chatting, language cafés, etc.

and social the facility, the more students perceptibly enjoy the contact with the centre and commit to their studies' (SALC 3) not only linguistically and but also culturally.

The SALC Mission

All managing SALC staff state that the main objective of their facility is to support students in practicing and taking control of their language learning. In their own words, they all describe their centre as a dedicated and safe environment where language students can study and practice the language among a physical community of learners and with the help of specialised technologies, resources and guidance. Four of the managers maintain that the regular use of SALC provides better chances for a language student to be successful. One of them expanded on this idea by adding that 'the centre recreates more authentic and playful possibilities to listen, speak and practice written language and gives confidence and regular practice to students' (SALC5). This statement can be supported by a closer look at research on language learning acquisition and mechanisms, which confirm that language learning relates to language in meaningful use. Natural exposure to the target language, in addition to instruction, is shown to be more facilitative of second language development. Little insists that by reflecting on social interaction in first language acquisition, one immediately recognises that interactions between infants and caregivers create 'action dialogue' which essential in furnishing learners with rules of interactive behaviour and relational concepts. Interactions between non-native speakers and a native context provide 'scaffolding', 'tuned input' and 'corrective modelling' and have a 'dramatic effect' in accessing a target language that is 'very markedly more proficient [...] not only in terms of fluency and communication, but also, and especially, in terms of formal accuracy' (Little, 1989: 3).

Although a SALC is a contained space artificially set up, it certainly constitutes the closest setting to a natural exposure to foreign language one can find in a UK university (the opportunity to spend time abroad notwithstanding). In addition to recreating exposure opportunities to practice the language more regularly, SALC do provide possibilities for social interactions considered necessary to establish a supportive framework for language learning. This was backed up by a study conducted at the Chinese University of Hong-Kong, which found that a high percentage of students 'wanted to have interaction with fellow students rather than work on their own' and 'wanted teacher guidance rather than independent work'. The study concludes that 'there is a need for learners to come to a certain time, to a certain room' in order to practice and study their target language (Fung-Kuen Lai, 1994: 146). Because languages are linked with geographical and cultural spaces, language learning is about communication and encounters. Research on language learning considers that the 'right mix of linguistic, sociolinguistic, sociocultural and strategic competences' are needed for proficiency to take place (Alvarez and Garrido, 2001: 152). Another survey on distance language learning reveals that even when students are highly motivated, they struggle to develop the conditions and characteristics associated with excellence in learning outside classes. The survey recorded that they consider that 'the ideal learning environment is provided by face-to-face teacher-mediated language classes with immediate support from the teacher, opportunities for regular commitment to study, language practice in a non-threatening situation and the opportunity to make social contacts' (White, 2008: 9). Although SALC are not authentic environment, they undeniably provide a context where not only language can be practiced, but also where linguistic, cultural and social encounters can happen. In this, they have a major role to play in developing students' capacity for cultural learning of a cognitive and metacognitive nature and providing pedagogical, social and affective support. The immersive community and language experience produced by physical SALC provide physical and psychological access and play an active role in breaking barriers making language learning difficult in a non-native context. And indeed:

the fact is that, worldwide, the socio-psychological barriers we create for ourselves collectively by the notion 'foreign' are very successful in preventing individuals from learning languages. In other words, psychological access is at least as important as physical access for language learning, (Esch, 1994: 1)

Manned physical SALC with online extensions are in this sense excellent language learning tools able to reproduce real-life practice, to various degrees, and stimulate language capacity in UK higher education contexts.

Key Challenges

The in-depth interviews highlighted very relevant additional elements beyond the investigation of the SALC space and purpose; in particular regarding the place of the facility within their institution. Seven of the centres visited function independently or semi-independently, which confirmed that language centres are often 'an independent entity' and that their functioning 'reflects a particular philosophy within language departments which does not count language teaching among its main concerns' (Ife, 1994). It is without doubt striking to think that Modern Languages departments would see language teaching as a marginal activity, especially as the desire to establish or re-establish more links was clearly expressed by three of the managers. Research shows that language lecturers and tutors have indeed the power to promote the SALC by including them in their curriculums and working on familiarising their students with their use and benefits (Gardner and Miller, 20014: 66). More importantly, it became evident during the interviews that setting is a key issue currently encountered by SALC. The main commonality between the seven independent or semi-independent centres is that they all have, at a point or another, suffered from a lack of support (more often financial) which has threatened their facilities and led them to make decisions to ensure their survival. In four cases, these decisions had to be taken at the expense of keeping a connection with their languages departments. As one of the managers puts it, there has always been a 'discrepancy between discourse and practical support, and by practical I mean financial. Our centre is talked about as having great pedagogical importance, especially during recruitment events, and yet there is no real investment in the facility' (SALC2). This statement confirms the contradiction identified by latest research on the management of SALC between, on the one hand, the emphasis placed on the pedagogical importance of language centres and, on the other hand, the minimal effort made to define its management and provide relevant training for its managers (Gardner and Miller, 2014). Only two facilities out of the ten visited currently run with a certain peace of mind regarding their future. Only one of the facilities visited has been fully supported (financially and in spirit) by its institution from the very start. The manager admits that this support is down to the individuals currently in charge in the immediate hierarchy. This centre not only obtained a considerable start-up grant, but it is also supported by substantial ongoing funds that allow the maintenance and upgrade of a full dedicated building which is constantly adapted to the changing needs of the learners. This seems to be a rare situation in the UK where it may be relatively likely to obtain once-off funding or top-up funds, but where the sourcing of long-term regular funding is a major issue (Gardner and Miller, 2014: 64). All the facilities, even those who do not feel an immediate threat, state that they continuously have to make a case for their legitimacy.

As detailed in the previous section, the pedagogical needs for SALC are known and accepted, and yet the majority do not benefit from the support of their universities or even from a link with their language department. In comparison to the support of facilities which encourage autonomous experimentation and learning in other disciplines (such as labs in science departments), facilities such as SALC in Humanities disciplines struggle to convince and ensure their maintenance. It is by finding creative ways to promote and prove the need for their existence that all the SALC visited have, over the years, managed to ensure their continuation. Five of them have for instance joined forces with other departments such as ELTU and expanded their foreign language provision to English for international students. Four of them have acquired a budget by delivering their own programmes of non-credited language classes and embark on advertising campaigns to ensure that students keep coming through their doors. One of the SALC has even gone through a long series of steps to become an accredited business and now runs semi-independently and very successfully on the grounds of the university where it is set. Another SALC is surviving painfully thanks to the good will and voluntary time of some modern languages tutors who organise its running and place regular internal bids to secure small sums and keep improving the facility.

Because the support of SALC comes down to the backing of some of the informed individuals in the internal hierarchy, they are at the mercy of sudden restructurings which could radically turn funding away from them. Changing institutional and planning priorities currently translate into the loss of valuable physical space and staff. The managers of four SALC deplore that this results in 'unstable and precarious positions' which are described as 'a day to day preoccupation for most of the staff employed' (SALC 2). The language advisor and sole remaining staff of the smallest facility, reduced to a few shelves within the walls of the library, indicates that they still feel they have a physical presence and a sense of identity as a language resources area. The space is still seen as a 'focal point for language students to

come and consult the materials [...] and also to consult me in my role of Language Learning Adviser face-to-face' (SALC8). They explain that the changes happened as part of a general institutional 'desire to be constantly updating facilities (quite understandable) for both practical and marketing purposes' linked with plans to 'enhance the student experience' (SALC8). Similarly, the former manager of a now disappeared structure indicates that 'financial reasons, and by that I mean the university wanting to cut costs on non-recruiting areas' (SALC 12) was the key reason to interrupt the running of the facility. In this context, accountability is key to demonstrate at institutional level that 'the resources (both human and material) are being well used and that results are being achieved' (Gardner and Miller, 1999: 80). Four of the facilities visited conduct regular evaluations by seeking staff and users' feedback, keeping learners' profiles and tracking progress records. They do so not only to assess and adapt to learners' changing demands, but also to record and be able to prove their achievements.

Interestingly, the managers who are not currently facing space restrictions also mentioned physical space as a challenge in terms of considering their place amidst the changes stimulated by e-learning. A 2012 study confirms that

there is clear evidence for the blurring of lines between physical and virtual resources throughout the case studies [...] With the high level of digital literacy among users in the context of these case studies, moving to the web is not only efficient but it is expected. (Gardner and Miller, 2012: 69)

This issue is of importance as all but one managers agree that they 'must participate in learners' training to use new technologies' (SALC1) and that 'virtual extensions will widen the access and efficiency of the physical space' (SALC2). It is clear from the interviews that, as far as SALC facilities are concerned, the choice to use a particular e-learning tool does not always come from a pedagogical rationale. SALC must undoubtedly participate in training learners to use new technologies, as an essential transferable skill and also because online extensions can will allow them to reach more users. Indeed, a study concluded as early as 1995 that online services were 'successful in breaking the isolation of people working on their own' and in lending support to learners in environments or situation where they have less possibility of a physical access to the centre (Makin, 1994: 95). However, all managers are also aware that 'an online extension which makes sense pedagogically is a very different proposition than that of a virtual replacement for budgetary rationalisations' (SALC6). As confirmed by a manager who is pushing towards the use of new-technologies, online extensions and even the in-house creation of online resources, 'the reduction or the discontinuation of a manned physical facility would be detrimental though, because many pedagogical outcomes could not be obtained by a sole virtual space' (SALC2).

A facility at odds with HE context

In light of the fact that despite evidence emphasising their pedagogical important, SALC only benefit from sporadic and insubstantial support in the UK, I decided that looking at current educational trends could help pinpoint why this may be the case. The first finding of my analysis of the latest educational is that SALC, as structures virtually unknown outside the discipline of Modern Languages, are not discussed in general policies. The only mention of language centres can in fact been found in point 2.13 of the Languages, Cultures and Societies subject benchmark which states that a 'language resources centre' is a useful structure 'offering students access to a wide range of language learning facilities, resources and reference material' and that it 'may be located within the school or department [...], operate as a free-standing central resource' or as a 'free standing central resource' (Subject Benchmark Statement - Languages, Cultures and Societies, 2015). The 'may' appears as the green light for Modern Languages units to opt not to invest in such facilities and confirms that there are no central instructions on SALC. From this, I looked at general educational policies to understand the place of Modern Languages as a discipline and uncover further reasons why SALC facilities do not benefit from central support.

The perspectives of the latest UK educational policies contained in the 2015 Green Paper and 2016 White Paper leave no doubt that neoliberal ideologies⁷ are at the heart of recent reforms. These texts are clearly channelled by ideologies that commodify knowledge and see it as a participating agent in the drive making universities places where money can be made. These perspectives on education first

⁷ First developed by the Chicago School of Economics in the 1940s.

appeared in the UK in the post-Thatcher discourse made by Junior Minister for Education and Science Robert Jackson in 1987 and in which he described universities as central to the economic sector in the context of the globalized market. As primary sites for knowledge distribution, business imperatives have from then on led the academic agenda and monitored research and teaching (Connolly, 2014). The current Minister of State for Universities and Science, Jo Johnson, talks about the role of universities as 'to address the gap in skills that affects the nation's productivity' and students as consumers of education to whom we must deliver 'better value for money' (Department for Business, innovation and Skills, Green Paper 2015). The issue with such ideologies for disciplines such as Modern Languages becomes clear when Minister Johnson explicitly warns that units that are not performant in providing value for money will have to disappear:

We must accept that there may be some providers who do not rise to the challenge, and who therefore need or choose to close some or all of their courses, or to exit the market completely. The possibility of exit is a natural part of a healthy, competitive, well-functioning market and the Government will not, as a matter of policy, seek to prevent this from happening (Department for Business, innovation and Skills, White Paper 2015)

Such a statement confirms why disciplines such as Modern Languages which have a less direct link with the participation in the production of wealth and encourage skills current branded as 'soft' are not points of focus and do not benefit from central backing. In such disciplines, facilities like SALC, which are not direct recruiting and money-making agents, are automatically faced with managerial discourses which use the pretext of an economic reality beyond control to brand them 'inefficient'. Budgetary priorities and the emphasis on STEM subjects as disciplines⁸ that train students more directly to become money-making agents both explain why the creation, continuation or development of SALC facilities is left to local initiatives.

As pedagogically meaningful units but units which do not add numbers to the student population, SALC are a prime example that pedagogical needs have little weight at a time of financial expediency. The fact that all managers and institutions do not accept the situation uncritically explains why SALC still survive in some institutions. A minority of them even serve the neoliberal machine when their state of the art facilities are used as key recruitment tools: 'open day tours are strategically centred around our language centre simply because the facilities work like an attractive window promising language student a fabulous experience' (SALC 2). The managers of the three biggest facilities concur in admitting that that their centre is also used as a marketing tool.

Rethinking SALC

The biggest emerging challenge identified for all SALC lies in the uncertainty of their future or, at the very least, the energy to be spent in a constant battle to justify their existence. Claiming the values of language learning and the pedagogical rationale for SALC does have an impact in institutions that are able to see beyond financial objectives and believe in the important mission of language learning. This mission can be perceived throughout the history of language teaching in the UK where intercultural knowledge and human interaction have often been reiterated as aspects of language learning. Cultural opening as a component intrinsic to learning the basic structures of a language can for instance be found as early as in a 1336 French teaching treaty. This document contained not only conversation samples dedicated to travellers, but also a variety of local, geographical and historical accounts on contemporary life and manners (Foster, 1909). From the end of the nineteenth century, the study of a language was often described as providing crucial mental proportion and perspective to its learners, through skills such as the 'development of trans-national awareness', an 'inclusive approach towards difference and diversity' and a 'criticality regarding one's own personal, cultural and social circumstances' (Benson, 1907). Various reports also presented language teaching as a modern Humanities subject and not just a practical skill. For example the 1918 Leathes reports asserted that, like the Classics, learning a language encouraged the replenishment of the national source of knowledge, the cultivation of public awareness of foreign countries and the development of general education and

⁸ STEM subjects have benefitted from a full dedicated review conducted by Wakeham in parallel to the Green and White Papers: http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/16297/2/ind-16-6-wakeham-review-stem-graduate-employability_Redacted.pdf

culture (McLelland, 2014). Unfortunately, as shown in the previous section, these human values at the root of the discipline are nowadays at odds with current national educational perspectives.

Therefore, while making a case for an educational structure such as SALC in a neoliberal context, alternative narratives against current educational perspectives seem to have little impact. As expressed by a former SALC manager, 'the loss of identity happened way before we closed, with slow but inevitable changes, and yet our work did receive continuous very good feedback from students. But claim this was no use' (SALC12). It is nowadays not uncommon to find institutions and career literature which cite linguistic competences as a key reason to study a language. They promote it as a secondary skill rather than as a humanities discipline worthy of consideration and investment (Canning, 2009: 2). The findings of this research project thus make it clear that there is an urgent need to find ways to rethink SALC and replace these facilities within the values of the current system. As suggested by the former manager of a now disappeared centre, it is important to claim the 'maybe invisible and yet very real role we play[ed] in giving students their confidence back and certainly in preventing from falling behind' (SALC 11). Indeed, although SALC do not recruit students directly, the focus could be placed on how the facilities help retain students. Tracking performance in a way that focuses on elements that match the priorities of current educational policies is certainly a path to take. It is striking that the most comfortable SALC are those who run their own programme of classes and have, on top of supporting degree or specialist language students learning, become direct money makers.

More research to try and link students' retention rate and performance with the use of SALC should also be done. Research on affect in learning has already shown that language students often become confused, angry, demotivated and disoriented outside classes (Knowles, 1975; Brown, 2006; White, 2008). The fact that language students often 'develop negative beliefs about their own abilities' when left in isolation (Brown, 2006) demonstrates that the management of affect is critical to support and subsequently retain them. A study conducted in Hong-Kong found that 'there is a need for learners to come to a certain time, to a certain room' to practice and study their target language (Fung-Kuen Lai, 1994). With the added presence of a language adviser SALC are a place that can help regulate emotions by providing advice. These facilities create a much needed supportive human structure that functions as a grounding place beyond the class and they should be reconsidered and presented as such.

It is also important for SALC managers or supporters to become familiar with ruling educational texts to be able to upgrade these facilities in a way that matches current educational priorities. As already stated, the Languages, Cultures and Societies subject benchmark is one of the only texts that mention language centres (in point 2.13). Although it presents them as optional, the statement is nevertheless an authority for the subject to maintain disciplinary standard. By looking at the benchmark more closely, one can for instance detect particular points which can be used to link essential discipline criteria and the mission of SALC. Point 2.5 states that 'to achieve an appropriate degree of fluency in a chosen language, the learner must devote a great deal of time seeking active exposure to the language and in practising it on a daily basis'. With current limited resources and reduced contact hours (usually an average of three contact hours for a language degree student), only a language centre can provide this daily opportunity to practice the language. Another example is point 2.9 which stipulates that 'many programmes enhance [the contact with competent users of the language] through advanced educational technology'. SALC are in fact the only facilities that offer these technologies and, at the same time, control and regulate them with human agency. It constitutes an asset for language departments to remain attractive, competitive and more importantly provide this crucial support to students.

Finally, as suggested by one of the managers 'on top of providing a supportive language network for students, the centre ensures we cater for a variety of students' needs' (SALC 9). This remark is incredibly valuable when linked to latest education reforms which focus, as stated earlier, on making education a cost-effective service, but also promote this service as a champion for accessibility. It is undeniably ironic that educational reforms promoting access to education for all may do so while adhering to a neoliberal system; and it is difficult to fully understand how universities can promote equality, diversity and accessibility while embracing the very socio-economic system that creates inequalities. However, inclusivity and diversity are without doubt much-needed notions that have a place on the current educational agenda. Because SALC offer a variety of learning methodologies that adapt to a wider-range

of students, there is a lot have to say about the part they play in the equality and accessibility agenda. Their ability to cater for a variety of learning needs makes them ideal environments open to diversity. These facilities are consequently consistent with the values of the UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in Higher Education. This is particularly true in their providing a variety of tools and methods that 'respect individual learners and diverse learning communities' as expected by UKPSF value 1. Their mission is also to 'promote equality of opportunity for learners by adapting to their needs outside the class and providing a range of teaching support methods, which is exactly what UKPSF value 2 stipulates. More research should therefore focus on the exploration of further links between the mission and environment created by SALC and the current values fostered by latest educational texts.

Conclusion

From a varied sample of ten field visit and twelve in-depth interviews, this project has allowed to better understand the current landscape of SALC and also to draw and analyse the current challenges encountered by these facilities. SALC are dedicated and safe physical environments where students can study and practice the language in a variety of ways with specialised technologies, resources and human guidance. This piece of research also gained in scope through the data analysis stage which observed SALC in light with the current Higher Education context. Physical SALC, their staff and their activities are essential components of language teaching and learning and yet they do not benefit from central support and are left to sporadic local and individual initiatives. As support facilities in disciplines currently considered of less importance, SALC are not obviously and as directly seen as recruiting and money-making agents. The project has revealed an urgent need to research the values of SALC and that it may be possible to rethink them in light of informed considerations of latest educational policies and texts. In the next few years, it will be essential to connect our practices with the rapidly changing educational and political UK landscape and to make sense of our inheritance and its place in the current context. This project will hopefully open the way for further critical engagement with our discipline or investigations in other similar subjects and keep us aware that we have a responsibility in the survival of our disciplines and attached facilities.

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