The Utilization of Self-Access Centre (SAC) for Independent Learning of German Language Education Students

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Abstract
Self-Access Centre (SAC) is one of the learning facilities that supports students in developing their language skills independently. In the context of German language education, SAC provides various resources and support that can help students manage their own learning outside of the classroom. However, how students actually use SAC, what influences their decision to use it, and how they perceive its effectiveness may vary. This study explores how German language education students at Universitas Negeri Malang utilize the SAC for independent learning. It also investigates the factors that influence their usage and their perceptions of SAC's role in improving their German skills. Data were collected through a semi-open questionnaire completed by 49 students and in depth interviews with a separate group of 7 students. This study focuses on three key aspects: students' frequency of visits, their use of available facilities and tutor assistance, and their motivation for using the SAC. The results show that students are encouraged to use the SAC not only because of its comprehensive resources and support from tutors, but also through peer influence. Most students agree that the SAC provides a helpful environment that boosts their motivation and interest in learning German independently. These findings suggest that the SAC can play a significant role in supporting autonomous language learning when its resources align with student needs and preferences.

Keywords: *Self-Access Centre (SAC), independent learning interest, Educational German Language Learning, facility usage, motivation, student perception*

Introduction

Independent learning is one of the essential skills that university students must develop to achieve their academic goals. It refers to the initiative to learn that comes from within the student, whether or not supported by others (Tampubolon, 2020). In general, independent learning can be seen from two perspectives: as a process or method of learning, and as a characteristic of individuals who are responsible and actively involved in their learning process (Oishi, 2020). Another view explains it as a learning process where a person becomes fully responsible for planning, implementing, and freely controlling their own learning materials (Baharuddin et al., 2022). From these perspectives, independent learning can be understood as a learning activity driven by the learner's own sense of responsibility.

Interest in a subject is an important element for independent learning to run effectively. A high level of interest can motivate students to explore and engage more deeply with the

material. Without it, the learning process may feel difficult and less productive. Nisa (in Kurnia & Sunaryati, 2023) explains that interest is a psychological reaction that shows a positive feeling toward an object, encouraging individuals to participate in related activities. When someone is interested in a topic, they tend to show greater enthusiasm and commitment to learning. This interest also helps them deal with challenges that arise during the learning process. Therefore, having a strong interest plays a key role in developing independence in learning.

There are several internal and external factors that influence a student's interest in independent learning. One of the internal factors is intrinsic motivation. Motivation plays a crucial role in various aspects of human life, particularly in the process of acquiring a new language (Sobara, 2021). In addition, metacognitive ability also supports the development of independent learning. Metacognition is the ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate one's own learning process (Witt, 2016), which helps learners understand their needs and how to fulfill them. Besides internal factors, external aspects such as the learning environment also play a significant role. A supportive learning space with adequate facilities can help increase a student's motivation and interest in engaging in independent study (Buchholz et al., 2022).

In practice, many students are still unaware that a supportive environment and complete learning facilities can be important in encouraging independent learning. Several universities have already provided various learning support facilities such as Self-Access Centres (SACs). At Universitas Negeri Malang, the SAC was established to support students' independent learning. This space is specially designed to give students access to resources that help improve their German language skills, literacy, and academic abilities in general. In the SAC's German Corner, students can access learning materials independently. There is a dedicated area to support students in carrying out self-directed learning activities. Facilities include desks, chairs, computers, language learning software, books, and audiovisual materials. Students are free to use the room based on their individual needs for reading, watching educational videos, using software, or conducting independent research. The design of the SAC aims to create a supportive environment where students can learn independently while exploring topics based on their interests and needs.

Facilities like the Self-Access Centre (SAC) are essential to support students in independent learning and to make the learning process more enjoyable. However, students may still overlook the value of a supportive environment and complete facilities in enhancing their interest in learning independently. Based on this background, this study aims to describe how students use the SAC for independent learning, the factors that influence their use of the SAC, and their perceptions of its effectiveness in helping them improve their German language skills. This research focuses on undergraduate students in the German Language Education Program at Universitas Negeri Malang and is expected to raise awareness about the importance of a supportive environment and sufficient facilities in increasing students' interest in independent learning.

Method

This study employed a descriptive research design, which emphasizes in-depth and detailed data collection. The research was conducted at Universitas Negeri Malang, with participants drawn from students in the German Language Education program who utilize the SAC German Corner facility. The data sources consisted of both primary and secondary

data. Primary data were obtained through structured interviews, while secondary data came from the results of a semi-open questionnaire.

To maintain respondent confidentiality, interview participants' names were anonymized using their initials. For example, "Andi Setiawan" is written as "AS" and "Budi Santoso" as "BS." Secondary data also included SAC visitor data provided by the SAC administrators, along with a literature review relevant to the research topic. The instruments used for data collection included structured interviews, semi-open questionnaires, and documentation. The data analysis technique followed the model proposed by Miles and Huberman, consisting of three steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

Results

Utilization of the Self-Access Centre (SAC) by Students

To gain a deeper understanding of how undergraduate students from the German Language Education Program at Universitas Negeri Malang utilize the Self-Access Centre (SAC) for independent learning, the researcher collected data through three methods: interviews, questionnaires, and documentation. The data were gathered from students who had visited the SAC German Corner in the past six months. Based on this data, the research findings are as follows:

Student Visit Frequency to the SAC

The results of the semi-open questionnaire regarding visit frequency to the SAC revealed notable patterns. Most students reported visiting the SAC 1–2 times a week and spending varied amounts of time per visit, including more than two hours, 1–2 hours, or 30–60 minutes. This indicates that the SAC is actively used by students for independent learning. On the other hand, some students stated that they visited the SAC irregularly, with frequencies ranging from daily, 3–4 times per week, to never. Responses of "never" suggest that some students do not visit the SAC weekly but rather use the facility as needed. These findings indicate that the SAC plays an important role in offering flexibility for students in managing their learning time and methods. Most students visit the SAC based on their needs, and their time spent there varies depending on their learning activities.

Independent Learning Activities

Independent learning involves self-motivated efforts to gain knowledge driven by personal interest or necessity, with or without the help of others. This aligns with student experiences shared in interviews. One participant, MA, stated that their motivation for using the SAC stemmed from a lack of German language learning in high school, prompting them to catch up on material independently. Another participant, AK, initially had no intention of visiting the SAC but later felt the need to do so to keep up with peers. These experiences show that the SAC supports students in bridging knowledge gaps and cultivating independent study habits.

Tutoring Support

The SAC German Corner not only provides a comfortable space for learning but also offers tutor support. These tutors are German Language Education students undertaking internships at the SAC. Their role extends beyond room management to guiding and assisting fellow students with academic tasks, creating an encouraging and interactive learning environment.

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Interviews with students revealed that the presence of tutors significantly helped them, especially when they encountered difficulties. For instance, AA described how tutors patiently explained materials when needed, similar to additional classes. VA echoed this sentiment, highlighting the tutors' approachable personalities and effective explanations.

Utilization of SAC Resources and Facilities

The SAC German Corner offers diverse learning tools, including educational software, TVs, projectors, a collection of books and audiobooks, games, and other learning materials. It consists of three function-specific rooms: an exhibition room, a speaking room, and a reading room. Interviews revealed that educational software was the most frequently used facility, particularly for completing class assignments like posters and infographics. Students preferred the computers in the speaking room for their better display quality. Questionnaire data supported these findings: 38.8% of respondents used educational software, 32.7% utilized learning games, and 26.5% relied on textbooks. A small percentage (2%) combined software and textbooks. Overall, SAC facilities play a vital role in supporting German language independent learning.

Factors Influencing SAC Utilization

Peer Encouragement

Social encouragement from friends can strongly influence a student's learning interest. Supportive peer environments help promote effective learning. This is reflected in interview responses where students noted that invitations from friends were key motivators to visit the SAC. AK, for example, shared that their initial SAC visit was prompted by a friend's suggestion. Similarly, VA and AA mentioned peer encouragement as a motivating factor to complete tasks and adopt independent learning habits.

Tutor Support and Guidance

Peer tutors in the SAC were identified as crucial for encouraging SAC use, particularly among beginners. Students noted that they often felt more comfortable asking tutors for help than approaching lecturers. AK explained that learning with a peer tutor felt more relaxed, while VA emphasized the ease of asking questions in the SAC setting. These observations highlight how the presence of tutors fosters a safe and supportive environment for independent learning.

Availability of Resources and Facilities

According to Putri et al. (2023), facility availability significantly affects usage intensity. The SAC offers customized spaces, comfort, and a strategic location that encourage students to develop independent learning habits. Students' testimonies supported this: TF preferred the speaking room for group discussions, MU appreciated the SAC's comfort compared to their dorm, and VA highlighted the physical comfort of the space, particularly seating near windows. Jamilah et al. (2019) emphasized that complete learning resources are crucial. Tools such as books, dictionaries, audio materials, computer software, and online access facilitate student learning. MR noted frequent use of computers, followed by books and educational games. TF also used physical items like books and props for contextual learning. Questionnaire results showed that 59.2% used educational software, 16.3% joined programs like Deutsch Club and Kino Tag, 14.3% used books, 8% accessed thesis archives, and 2%

combined software with books. These findings highlight the SAC's important role in supporting German language self-study.

Students Perceptions of the SAC in Enhancing German Language Proficiency

Students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the SAC play an important role in informing improvements in SAC management policies, curriculum development, and the provision of resources that support autonomous learning within the language education program. To understand these perceptions, the researcher conducted interviews and distributed semi-open questionnaires to assess how students perceive the effectiveness of the SAC in helping them improve their German language proficiency independently. The results are outlined below.

Effectiveness of Resources and Facilities in the SAC

Effectiveness refers to the degree to which the goals or expected outcomes of an activity or intervention are achieved (Fadila et al., 2020). In this study, effectiveness refers to how well the SAC's available resources and facilities support students in learning German independently. Interview findings showed that students perceived the resources and facilities in the SAC as effective in enhancing their German proficiency. One participant, MR, stated that the available facilities were proven to be effective because they offered a variety of tools including computers and games that helped reduce boredom and improve time efficiency during study sessions. The questionnaire results supported this perception, with 44.9% of respondents stating that the SAC's resources and facilities were effective in enhancing their German skills. Additionally, 28.6% rated them as fairly effective, and 26.5% even considered them very effective. These findings suggest that students generally find the SAC's facilities and resources to be useful and effective in supporting independent learning of the German language.

Learning Experience in the SAC

Students' learning experiences in the SAC provide insights into how the facilities are typically used. These experiences can offer valuable input for improving existing facilities and for designing support programs that better match students' needs. They may also serve as a reference for developing training or additional activities that align with students' goals in enhancing their German language skills independently. Interview results revealed positive experiences. One student, TF, expressed feeling comfortable studying in the SAC and reported receiving helpful guidance from tutors in learning the basics of the German language. TF, along with classmates who had no prior exposure to German in high school, was able to acquire foundational knowledge through SAC sessions. TF also emphasized the friendliness of the tutors, which greatly contributed to a positive learning experience in the SAC.

Impact of Independent Learning in SAC on German Learning Interest and Motivation

Students' learning experiences in SAC play a role in shaping their interest and motivation in learning German. As shared by AK, regular visits to the SAC helped increase their

confidence about their choice of major. A positive experience at the SAC became a turning point that boosted their enthusiasm for learning. Questionnaire results revealed that the majority of respondents felt that their SAC experience influenced their interest and motivation in learning. Specifically, 40.8% of respondents stated that their experience at the SAC influenced their interest, 24.5% said the influence was very strong, and 34.7% considered it quite influential. These results reinforce the idea that the SAC serves not only as a learning facility but also as a source of motivation for students to engage in self-directed German language learning.

The Role of the SAC in Supporting German Language Learning

The SAC plays an important role in supporting language learning in the university environment (Wu, 2011). The available facilities and resources allow students to study German more flexibly and comfortably on their own. Students can access books, audio materials, and software to enhance their language skills. In interviews, MU stated that the SAC's facilities and tutor guidance were very helpful, providing clear direction in learning. Similarly, MR described the SAC as a fun and beneficial alternative learning space aside from the library. AK added that the SAC could also be used for group discussions, making the learning experience more interactive. Questionnaire data supported these findings: 44.9% of respondents said that the SAC played an important role, 34.7% considered it very important, and 20.4% viewed it as quite important in supporting German language learning at Universitas Negeri Malang.

Challenges Encountered

Several challenges have been identified in using the SAC, including issues related to the use of facilities, room arrangements, and the availability of learning resources. One of the most frequently mentioned challenges is the unannounced use of the SAC for other activities. When the SAC is used for events or classes without prior notice, students who intend to study may feel disrupted or unable to access the needed facilities. Interviews indicated that this issue was encountered by several students. AA stated that the SAC is sometimes used for teaching and learning activities. According to AA, one major drawback is the lack of information regarding room usage schedules. AA suggested that it would be better if students were informed in advance about room usage instead of being notified after the activity had already started.

This concern was supported by the questionnaire, where 55.1% of respondents reported experiencing the same issue—unannounced use of the SAC for other activities. TF, however, reported a different type of challenge: most learning resources in the SAC are in German. TF mentioned that although the SAC provides educational games, the instructions are in German, which made it difficult to understand the rules. Since TF was not yet proficient in the language, they often felt confused and had to ask the tutor or try to understand the content word by word. Similarly, MR also encountered difficulties when using SAC resources, particularly because the games and many of the books were exclusively in German. MR found this to be a considerable challenge due to the language barrier. Questionnaire results confirmed this, with 28.6% of respondents indicating that the learning resources—such as textbooks and games—were in German, making it harder for students who are still at the beginner level to use them effectively.

Another challenge faced by students was the occasional absence of tutors when their support was needed. VA noted that there were times when no tutor was present during their learning sessions. According to VA, tutor presence in the SAC was inconsistent, meaning that they were sometimes available and sometimes not. As a result, VA often had to study independently or discuss with peers. VA's statement illustrates the importance of tutors in facilitating independent learning, and when they are not present, students may feel lost. This was echoed in the questionnaire, where 8.2% of respondents reported that tutors were sometimes too busy to assist them when they faced difficulties in their learning process

Discussion

The frequency of student visits, in the context of education, refers to how often students visit a particular place, such as the library, campus, or university-provided facilities like the SAC room, within a certain period. The frequency of student visits (FKM) can be measured by counting the number of visits within a specific timeframe—for example, in a month, a year, or another determined period. This can serve as an indicator of student activity, interest, and participation in both academic and non-academic activities (Sitorus, 2019). Based on this concept, the researcher selected the student informants based on their number of visits to the SAC over the past six months or during the odd semester of 2023/2024. Using visitor data obtained from SAC administrators, the researcher identified seven students with the highest number of visits. This step was taken to gain meaningful information about how the SAC room is utilized by students.

The researcher also distributed a semi-open questionnaire to gather additional data. The questionnaire included multiple-choice questions while also providing open-ended sections for respondents to share answers not covered in the options. Unlike the interview informants, the questionnaire respondents were students who had visited the SAC within the last six months or during the odd semester of 2023/2024. Based on the interview and questionnaire results, visit frequency varied according to students' needs, ranging from daily, 3–4 times a week, to never. The answer "never" indicated that some students did not visit the SAC regularly every week, but used the facility when needed. This data shows that the SAC plays an important role in offering flexibility for students to manage their learning time and methods. Most students visit the SAC based on their needs, and the time they spend there also varies. Some spend more than two hours, while others spend between 1–2 hours or 30–60 minutes. This reflects that students have different study habits and ways of using the SAC space. Students typically utilize the SAC for doing assignments, watching learning videos, attending Deutsch Club programs, or preparing presentations. Some students even combine independent and collaborative learning by inviting peers to work together in the SAC.

Interview data also revealed that students generally utilize the SAC to deepen their understanding of the German language and to supplement classroom learning. This is aligned with the concept of independent learning, where students take the initiative to explore academic material on their own. One student, MA, shared that their motivation to use the SAC stemmed from not having studied German in high school and feeling the need to catch up independently. Another student, AK, said they initially had no intention of visiting the SAC, but eventually joined after noticing friends who had advanced knowledge thanks to using the facility. These experiences show that the SAC helps students improve their understanding and encourages initiative in learning independently.

The SAC German Corner is also supported by tutors who are students from the German Language Education Program undergoing internship placements. Besides maintaining the SAC, they assist visitors in using the available tools and guide them in completing assignments. This helps students become more independent and comfortable using SAC facilities. Students' statements revealed that tutors provide explanations about how to use learning software, correct pronunciation, and share study tips and tricks. Tutors are also responsible for registering student visitors and submitting weekly reports to the program's SAC supervisor. Their presence is highly appreciated by students. VA, for example, said that SAC tutors were helpful and good at explaining material. Meanwhile, AA stated that when students encounter difficulties with vocabulary or assignments, tutors would patiently assist, similar to an additional class. TF also shared a positive experience, saying that although they had never studied German in high school, they learned the basics in the SAC with their classmates under the guidance of a tutor. In addition to the facilities, students are drawn to the SAC because of the welcoming and comfortable atmosphere, which supports focused and enjoyable learning.

The variation in students' visit frequency reflects a strong interest in utilizing the SAC as a flexible learning environment. Additionally, the differences in the amount of time spent indicate that the SAC offers freedom for students to manage their learning schedules according to their level of concentration, individual needs, and preferred study methods. This aligns with Reinders (2012), who states that a Self-Access Centre is designed to help students develop the ability to control the pace and methods of their learning based on personal needs. Based on interview findings, students used the SAC to catch up on German language material that they did not fully understand in class. They also considered the SAC an ideal space for independent study. This supports the opinion of Tampubolon (2020), who asserts that independent learning stems from personal initiative. Students showed initiative in trying to understand material they had not yet mastered in order to achieve their learning goals—namely, comprehending the course content.

Furthermore, the SAC provides a comfortable learning environment for both individual and group study, which is why students prefer it as a space for independent learning. This shows that the SAC offers facilities that support students' learning needs. The availability of specialized rooms, each with different functions, and the presence of tutors who provide assistance, enables students to study independently in a calm and comfortable atmosphere. Thus, the SAC not only serves as a place to study but also as a space to develop independent learning skills, which are essential for university students. This finding is in line with Barreto (2019), who emphasizes that a SAC functions not only as a learning space but also as a place to foster self-directed learning skills.

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that one way students utilize the SAC is by receiving assistance in learning German from tutors. According to Werner & Joo (2018), SAC tutors serve as interactive companions who help students enhance their language skills and other competencies. Tutors may also act as coordinators for organizing events and programs held in the SAC. In line with this, when experiencing confusion, students seek help from tutors for guidance. They feel supported by the tutors' friendliness and assistance, allowing self-directed learning to proceed more effectively and purposefully. The presence of tutors in the SAC is crucial in creating a comfortable and supportive learning environment for students. This indirectly contributes to increasing students' interest in independent learning. A supportive environment is one of the external factors that plays an important role in the success of independent learning. Buchholz et al. (2022) argue that a learning

environment that facilitates and supports independent study can boost learners' interest and motivation to take initiative in their own learning process.

This study found that the seven interview participants and the majority of questionnaire respondents utilized SAC resources and facilities to support their independent learning. The most frequently used resource was computer-based software, often accessed to complete German language assignments via the internet. Additionally, students used learning games to enrich their German vocabulary, while others relied on textbooks to support their self-study at the SAC. These findings are consistent with Hidayana (2021), who found that well-designed learning facilities can create a supportive learning environment, thereby increasing student motivation, focus, and interest. Adequate facilities also help reduce learning barriers and enhance learning outcomes.

Students' perceptions are essential in improving facilities in educational institutions. By providing feedback, students help institutions identify which aspects need improvement. Furthermore, their feedback contributes to creating a better learning environment. By upgrading facilities based on students' input, institutions can provide an ideal learning space that aligns with students' needs and expectations (Mulyawati, 2022). The Self-Access Centre provides various facilities and resources to effectively support students' independent learning. Its effectiveness can be measured by how well it achieves its goal of facilitating self-directed learning. The availability of comprehensive resources allows students to learn in ways that suit their individual learning styles, making it easier to understand material and improve both their learning process and outcomes.

The research revealed that students found the SAC's resources and facilities to be effective. Some interview participants mentioned that resources such as books, educational software, and learning games helped maintain their interest and efficiency while studying German. Therefore, it can be concluded that students perceive SAC resources and facilities as effective in supporting their independent learning. This aligns with Mubarok et al. (2023), who found that educational institutions equipped with comprehensive facilities and resources can increase student engagement, facilitate material comprehension, offer varied learning methods, and improve learning outcomes. Thus, complete and well-equipped facilities positively contribute to learning effectiveness.

In the context of modern education, the SAC offers a new perspective on student learning experiences. The SAC is not just a place to access resources but also promotes exploration and personal development, both independently and with tutor support. The findings show that students feel comfortable learning in the SAC and appreciate the help of tutors in acquiring German language basics. However, students also faced challenges related to changes in SAC management across semesters. The rotation of SAC coordinators among internship students led to confusion when students sought help from tutors. This is in line with Jannah (2018), who found that human resources significantly affect service quality.

Independent learning experiences in the SAC have the potential to influence students' interest and motivation in learning German. Interest, as defined by Marleni (2016), is a tendency to actively engage with an object or activity due to the belief that it can help achieve personally meaningful goals. External factors such as social environments (educational institutions, families, communities, peers) and non-social environments also shape this interest. The SAC, as part of an educational institution's environment, can influence students' learning interest. Research findings indicate that the SAC significantly impacts students' motivation and interest in learning German. By providing support to overcome challenges, the SAC enhances student engagement and motivation. The

interaction between students and tutors also has a positive effect on students' interest. Additionally, the availability of complete facilities encourages deeper understanding. Balcikanli (2017) also found that the SAC significantly impacts student interest and motivation in language learning. Students who used the SAC reported positive attitudes and found it beneficial for improving their language abilities.

The Self-Access Centre plays a crucial role in supporting German language learning in academic settings. Through its resources and facilities, the SAC enables students to develop their German language proficiency independently and effectively. Based on this research, sufficient facilities, complete learning resources, and tutor support all contribute to independent learning. Furthermore, the SAC's function as a space for discussion among peers further supports German language learning. Reinders (2012) similarly concluded that the SAC helps facilitate language learning in academic environments by offering the tools and support students need to develop autonomy and become more self-directed learners.

Despite its positive impact, students also face several challenges when using the SAC. One key issue is the use of the SAC for other activities without prior notice. Additionally, learning games and several books available in the SAC are exclusively in German. This creates difficulties for beginner-level students who struggle to understand the rules or content. Another challenge is the inconsistent availability of tutors when students need assistance. These obstacles occasionally disrupt the effectiveness of students' learning in the SAC.

Conclusion

This study described the utilization of the Self-Access Centre (SAC) and its impact on students' interest in independent learning among German Language Education students at Universitas Negeri Malang. The findings revealed a variety of usage patterns, with students visiting the SAC with differing frequencies—from daily, 3–4 times per week, to only when needed. Although some students reported never visiting the SAC regularly, they still made use of its facilities when necessary. The SAC was widely used for independent learning activities and was often chosen as a preferred space by students. Tutor assistance in the SAC was found to provide valuable support, helping students to study more effectively and with clearer direction. Access to learning resources and facilities, such as books, software, and educational games, also played an important role in enhancing the learning process. Several factors influenced students' use of the SAC, including encouragement from peers, tutor guidance, adequate facilities, comfortable and spacious rooms, as well as complete learning materials. These elements were seen to increase students' learning motivation and the frequency of SAC usage. Overall, students considered the SAC's resources and facilities effective in supporting their independent German language learning. The presence of tutors, along with a supportive atmosphere, made learning more comfortable and allowed students to interact in a relaxed way. However, some challenges were identified, such as unannounced use of the SAC for other activities, the exclusive use of German in resources that made them difficult for beginners, and the occasional absence of tutors when students needed help.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made regarding the utilization of the Self-Access Centre (SAC) to enhance students' interest in independent

learning. First, SAC administrators should provide early notifications regarding the use of the room to avoid disruptions caused by unannounced activities. One of the main challenges highlighted in this study is the inconsistency in tutor availability. To address this, adjustments to the tutor schedule or an increase in the number of tutors may be necessary to ensure students can receive timely assistance when needed. Considering the difficulties experienced by some students due to learning resources being exclusively in German, it would be beneficial for the SAC to expand the variety of available materials, particularly those suited for beginner-level learners. Furthermore, to minimize confusion during tutor transitions, SAC administrators are encouraged to implement regular training sessions for intern tutors to ensure consistent and high-quality support for students.

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