Reviewing a One-year Deployment of a Nintendo Switch in a Self-Access Learning Center

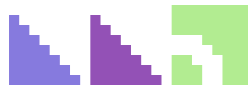Derrick Wong

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Short summary:

In the past academic year (from April 2024 to January 2025), a Nintendo Switch has been parked in the iFloor, a Self-Access Learning Center (SALC) in Reitaku University. Our goal for using the console is to attract students into the SALC to participate in communicative practice with or without the use of the game console. This presentation is a simple overview of what was done, what affected the implementation of the Switch, feedback from the iFloor staff, and things to change for the following academic year.

Your constraints plus the who and what of your teaching context

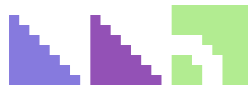|	
Context (Where do you work? What kind of institution? What is your role? etc.)	I work in Reitaku University, a private tertiary education establishment in Kashiwa, Chiba, Japan. My role is a lecturer in the Center of English Communication, with a secondary role as an iFloor/Writing Center developer.
Students (goals, wants, needs, knowledge, skills, hobbies, hates, worries)	The iFloor, as a SALC, provides all students in the university with a space to practice English communication. However, data indicates that a majority of our visiting students come from the Faculty of Foreign Studies. Therefore, while some of them may be motivated to practice English, observations and visitation statistics indicate that a majority of students only attend due to assignment requirements or do not visit at all. Context: Students enrolled in the English for Communication courses in year 1 and year 2 are assigned a set number of required visits to the iFloor each semester, typically 5-6. Year 3-4 students, therefore, come to the iFloor of their own volition. Student proficiency is diverse, with TOEIC scores ranging from 200s-high 700s.
How much freedom do you have? (What can you do? What can't you do? Why? Who do you need to ask? What will they say?)	Main limitations are as follows: 1. Budget: limited budget restricts the games we may procure for the Nintendo Switch. 2. Space: the iFloor consists of an entire floor of a building (pictures and floor plans available on the iFloor website

	(https://www.reitaku-u.ac.jp/global/ifloor/), however, the main communicative area where students visit and hangout is a small subsection known as the iLounge. The iLounge is where we have the necessary television, power outfits, seats, and shelves to use a Switch properly.
Language (goals) (the goals of your course or curriculum, what you must teach, what you want to teach, what students need to know, etc.)	My preliminary goal is less linguistic and more motivational in nature. Between discussions with the iFloor lead developer, we think that a game console on the iFloor provides several potential benefits: 1. Alternative communicative medium parallel to our board games and card games. While some students tend to use our board games and card games rather than engage in direct conversations, video games might help attract students who are not interested in either. 2. A display that attracts onlookers: In previous semesters, through observations by teachers and iFloor staff, we have noticed a number of students who linger around or outside the iLounge furtively. Through student surveys we realized some of these students hesitate coming into the iLounge as they were intimidated by pure conversation groups. Through games, we hope to pull some of these students in. 3. Discovering scenarios or requirements in which productive communication may occur through co-op gameplay in a SALC. While game choices may impact the communicative experience of SALC users, how the games are presented, assistance by SALC staff, and the environment in which the games are played might contribute to the experience as well. 4. Identifying effective games that suit our context of cooperative play and local player communication. Game choices were based on games that encouraged or required teamwork and communication. Without cooperating and communicating with each other, students would not be able to progress the puzzles or scenarios presented by such games. (see Trial Implementation in the breakdown table)

Evaluating the choice of using a Nintendo Switch using the Bates (2019) SECTIONS model:

The decision to use the SECTIONS model for evaluating the suitability of a gaming console in our SALC must be credited to a prior research conducted in Sojo University's SILC (Sojo International Learning Center) on an attempt at using Minecraft in their SALC (Remmerswaal, 2022). SECTIONS stands for Students, Ease of use, Cost, Teaching functions, Interaction, Organizational Issues, Networking, and Security and privacy. SECTIONS is a framework designed to help researchers effectively choose media for use in teaching and learning (Bates, 2019). Due to logistical and technological challenges, while I initially planned on testing out a similar setup on the iFloor, I was unable to visualize successfully deploying a service of that magnitude and I had to give

up on implementing a Minecraft-based project before financial investments were devoted to it. However, Remmerswaal's decision to use Bates's SECTIONS model for evaluating media use informed my decision to do so similarly and pointed us towards a great direction.

The following table represents an evaluation of the Switch based on the SECTIONS model and the reasons why the Switch was ultimately implemented on the iFloor based on the criteria listed in the SECTIONS model.
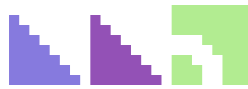
An Evaluation of a Gaming Console (Switch) on the iFloor	
Students (student demographics, access to technology, learning differences)	• iFloor welcomes students from all undergraduate school years • A gaming console on the iFloor means students do not need to own a gaming device of their own to participate in a co-operative gaming session, hence lowering the barrier for entry. • Discussion questions, board games, card games in use on the iFloor; caters to students that prefer video games
Ease of Use (simplicity, tech literacy, reliability)	• Students fairly tech literate; most aren't gamers but are fascinated by them • Games chosen have simple controls with tutorials • One gaming console means easier monitoring for iFloor staff to provide guidance
Cost (production, delivery, maintenance, overheads, time invested)	• High initial cost (main weakness of the implementation) • Minimal maintenance cost (apart from potential equipment damage, replacement, and electricity) • Additional costs are new games acquisitions
Teaching Functions (media usage in teaching design, media selection)	• Providing students with an additional form of media over which to communicate with other students • A scenario in which students may infer and organically foster language used in a teamwork context; taking up leadership roles; peer learning occurs frequently, usually for imparting game knowledge
Interaction (student to student/teacher interaction; inherent, designed, user-generated interaction)	• Student to student interaction is the priority of the implementation • As mentioned above in Teaching Functions, students were observed during our trial period (breakdown and explanation available after the next section) to voluntarily teach other students and some adopt leadership roles • The games chosen also require communication with each other to plan strategies, otherwise the players cannot progress in the games (inherent interactivity).
Organizational Issues (support for media and technology use,	• Limited by space and availability of power outlets and television screens; power outlet restriction was an unforeseen and very real

organisational challenges)	• problem and it was an extremely difficult problem to solve and limits our placement of the gaming console • University also pushes back on the spending of research funds on gaming consoles and games; understandable due to the nature and reputation of games in conventional education establishments
Networking (networking beyond the material or media use, integrating social media)	• Firstly, due to internal school policy and infrastructure we restrict internet communications for the console. This results in an inability to play online and interact with the outside world • Secondly, we do not yet encourage users to bring their own games to the iFloor. Students are, however, welcome to use any of the curated games available on the iFloor for English practice. However, some students do come to use the console as part of their English Communication class assignment • No supplemental social media component
Security and Privacy	• No online access whatsoever • No chance of online toxicity and interaction with potentially unsavory players or gameplay

🌎How do you create SPACE in the methods, materials and mediation of your teaching and learning playground?

	Methods	Materials	Mediation
Safe: learning from failure, inclusive, competence, supportive	Students state what skills or language they would try to use before gaming. Student staff available to play with them and facilitate/jumpstart communication.	Pre-game journal and post-game journal. Pre-game journals ask students what they would practice. Post-game journals ask if they achieved their goals and their thoughts about the session.	iFloor staff would assist and monitor the pre-game journal entries to the best of their abilities.
Participation: society, community, choice, self-direction, culture	All Reitaku students are welcome to use the Nintendo Switch and to select the games they want. However, we require students to play in groups and never alone.	Co-op Switch games	Student staff would join students who wanted to play if they came alone or with odd numbers. We also encourage students to invite other students to join them on the couch to play and to watch.
Agency: autonomy, freedom, dialogue, interaction	SALC context, therefore students are completely free to	Rules are posted right in front of their seats as a reminder.	iFloor staff monitors the game session and keeps track of language

	decide if they want to play, how long they want to play, and if they would be willing to participate in a post-game discussion. Students also come with their own friends or get matched with a student staff or other iLounge visitors. Language use is moderated, mostly for English use.		use to ensure students remain in English.
Critical: challenge, reflective, interdisciplinary, purposeful	Students are encouraged to move beyond just producing reactive sounds and instead engage in conversations between players as the games are cooperative in nature and require teamwork. Post-game journals also elicit some reflection on their gaming session and students check themselves for language or skills practiced.	Post-game journal. If students are willing, a post-game discussion to break down the session will be held with a student staff.	Student staff are usually available to lead or initiate conversations. Such conversations typically consist of teaching game controls, teaching of game mechanics, and post-game discussions, should the students wish to do so.
Experiences: relatedness, identity, relevant, meaningful	Some students, especially the Faculty of Engineering students, resonate with the Switch and we do notice an increase in the usage of the iLounge due to the Switch from the Engineering students. Students generally do try their best to keep to English, but struggle to produce meaningful conversations in some games, which caused the removal of those games.	We focus more on cooperative games and games that seem to produce much more meaningful conversations. Games like Overcooked 2, Nintendo Sports, and Mario Party were extremely successful in that regard.	

Other? If you've found other ways to play in your context, explain them here: ✍️	Limited events (during pre-holidays or last week of the semesters) seem to work well and get returning students. Events were promoted using posters and organized and facilitated by teachers who volunteered.	Super Smash Bros. Christmas Brawl.	

The study will be broken down in a chronological order and present implementations, thoughts, and findings for each stage.

What we do (teaching and learning)	What is the result (learning/outcomes/actions)

Trial Implementation (December 2023) The Switch was deployed for 4 weeks in December. The goal of this implementation was to 'test the waters' and gauge student interest and usage frequency within the span of a single month. Additionally, this was a period in which we tested the full array of games we acquired and saw how the students responded to each game. Objectives:
 1. Gauge student interest
 2. Determine the number of uses within a month
 3. Evaluate the suitability of each game
 4. Find out if there are any adverse effects that radiate outward from the play area that may negatively affect other users?
 	
 Implementation:
 1. Barebones. Rules were not introduced yet.
 2. Switch, 7 games, and 8 pairs of Joycons:
   a. Super Smash Bros.
   b. Mario Party
   c. Mario Kart
   d. Kirby and the Magic Mirror
   e. Overcooked 2
   f. Monopoly
   g. Nintendo Switch Sports
	Learning: We registered 250+ users (not unique) in a month. Students were generally very interested in the Switch but we quickly noticed an issue: quite a number of students are game illiterate. This meant that some students, while interested, do not actually know how to use the Joycons nor how basic in-game controls worked. Additionally, staff required time to get used to a new form of media on the iLounge, and as such, I am required to be present quite often to fix issues with Joycon connections and to remind student staff to store the console and games away at the end of each operation day. Speaking to student staff, I realize that they too require quite some time to figure out how things worked, as not all of them have experience with a Switch. We had one incident of theft of a single Joycon controller but it was promptly returned to us, with the student citing a mistake. One incident of student staff forgetting to keep the Switch away for the night (that was quite a moment). Some students got too immersed into the gaming and were very loud. Staff of course were present to control that but these outbursts still happen occasionally. Some games like Super Smash Bros. and Mario Kart produced undesirable play scenarios where students were either not speaking or were completely silent. We realized that competitive games, despite their popularity, may not be appropriate to our context as a SALC.

Outcomes:

Despite that, students responded quite positively. Through observations and through conversations with the students after game sessions, we discovered that a majority of students enjoyed the games and thought they were useful communicative tools. However, some students did mention it was challenging to talk while playing. Some playgroups were formed and they came back as repeat users. Some students that are more familiar with gaming or are avid players of a specific game would take it upon themselves to teach other students. These groups were the most productive groups communicative-wise and tend to produce more returning students.

Actions:

After discussion with other iFloor developers, we thought about doing game rotations for the following semester, but decided to just curate and narrow the list of games instead.
Super Smash Bros. and Mario Kart were removed immediately.

We determined that the Switch should only be used when the full-time iFloor staff is on duty. Therefore, the Switch is operational only on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays between 10.40am and 5.30pm.

Some form of self-reflection is needed for students who used the Switch, and so we created a very simple post-game reflection questionnaire. As a SALC, we are technically not supposed to force students to do something, but we highly encourage them to fill in the post-game journal as data that would help us determine if the Switch was well-received or not.

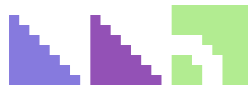| Name:	Student ID:	Date:	Time:			
What game did you play? _____		1: Not at all				5: Very
How much did you enjoy playing the game?		1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	
How much English did you use?		1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	
Did the game help you practice English communication?	1 ☐	2 ☐		3 ☐	4 ☐	
What new words or language did you notice or use in the game today? Write up to 5.						
What are you going to do or practice the next time you play this game?						

A gaming meetup was scheduled and conducted before the following semester amongst the student staff. This one day 3 hour event was created to allow the student staff to familiarize

themselves with the games console. During the event, they were asked to playtest all of the games we had.

Simple rules were created and posted right in front of the play area so that students would be aware.

RULES FOR USING THE NINTENDO SWITCH

1. Fill in the **Sign-in Sheet**.
2. Fill in the **Pre-game Journal**.
3. Play with other people.
4. **SPEAK IN ENGLISH**.
5. Practice Number 1, Play Number 2. Focus on **communication**.
6. Sign-out and **fill in the journal** when you are finished.

Most importantly, have fun while practicing English!

First Semester Implementation (April 2024 - August 2024)

The Nintendo Switch was deployed for 14 academic weeks. No meaningful changes were made during the semester in order to fully test our measures taken following the previous trial implementation. The first semester implementation is important because while the trial implementation was done in the later parts of the second semester of the previous academic year, this would be done in the first semester from Week 1, with newly enrolled students.

Game list has been narrowed down to:
1. Mario Party
2. Kirby and the Magic Mirror
3. Overcooked 2
4. Monopoly
5. Nintendo Switch Sports

Learning:

I felt as if student feedback and reflection collected from the journals was inadequate due to the extremely simplistic post-game journal we had. We originally made it simple because we were concerned that students might not stick around long enough to fill it in if it's too long as it's an optional thing.

Jonathan deHaan provided me with some sample questionnaires and reflective questions during LLPx02 which proved useful. Additionally, some materials, particularly the post-game discussion sheets and grading rubrics in his earlier work provided me with a lot of inspiration and some starting points, especially when it comes to the type of questions we should ask and list of skills to focus on in the pre-game journal (deHaan, 2019; 2020). While we still want to keep the length of the post-game journal short, the samples provided along with some feedback from other iFloor developers gave us an indication of how we would take it further. An updated sample of the post-game journal will be displayed at the end of this section below.

Student response remained warm and supportive. We realized Overcooked 2 was a massive success. It was very popular and based on feedback from the iFloor staff (who sits next to the Switch everyday), students produced the most productive conversations and peer learning compared to other games.

Nintendo Switch Sports was surprisingly successful but it produced a different type of conversation and timing of conversation. While Overcooked 2 produced conversations and communications during the rounds, Switch Sports produced post-game commentary and gameplay evaluation between players and onlookers, similar to conventional sports.

Kirby was not popular. I hypothesized that story-based games would be difficult for students to start and pick up where they left off even though it is a co-op game. We steered clear of that game since.

Outcomes:
Students responded positively in the likert scales, but did not demonstrate willingness to respond to longer form questions.
Student staff members were far more capable in supporting the students compared to the trial implementation.

Actions:
I wanted to get more games like Overcooked 2. Doing some research, I had my eyes on Human Fall Flat, Pico Park, and Moving Out. However, the administration does not seem too happy with the purchases made previously despite 3 long-form written explanations.

After further discussions with the iFloor developers and observations from the iFloor staff, we decided to implement a Pre-game journal and a Post-game journal.
Pre-game journal will require the students to think about the skills and language they would like to practice during the gaming sessions. We made them 'promise' to do so.

Name: _____ **Student ID:** _____ **Date:** _____ **Time:** _____

What game will you play? _____

Why did you choose this game?
_____

What skills will you practice while you play? Circle as many as you like.

| Pronunciation | Asking Questions | Giving Comments | Problem S... |
| Giving Feedback | Teamwork | Listening | Using Full Sentences | Mak... |

Will you try your best to only use English while playing?   YES   NO

Will you try your best to speak as much as you can with other players?   YES   NO

The Post-game journal will be a slightly expanded version of our previous Post-game journal, with an added section to ask if students were aware of the words they used during the game sessions.

Name: _____ **Student ID:** _____ **Date:** _____ **Time:** _____

What game did you play? _____   1: Not at all/No   5: Very...

	1	2	3	4
Did you enjoy playing the game?	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐
How much English did you use?	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐
Did the game help you practice English communication?	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐
Did you practice all the skills you circled?	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐
Did you communicate with other players?	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐

What new words or language did you notice or use in the game today? Write up to 5.

Briefings were provided to student staff asking them to encourage students to participate in post-game discussions for the following semester.

Second Semester Implementation (October 2024 - January 2025)

The Nintendo Switch was deployed for 14 academic weeks. No meaningful changes were made during the semester in order to fully test our measures taken following the previous trial implementation. We did produce a Japanese translation of the pre-game and post-game journals later in the semester after some feedback but did not deploy them. This is reserved for the following semester.

Game list remains the same but bolded games were heavily pushed:
1. **Mario Party**
2. **Kirby and the Magic Mirror**
3. **Overcooked 2**
4. Monopoly
5. **Nintendo Switch Sports**

Learning:

If anything can be taken from this semester, it's that we need more games. I am probably going to put my own money into the project.

Students are still quite reluctant to answer the long form questions in the game journals.

Students are more honest in answering the Likert scale questions now. Instead of marking all 1s or all 5s we are receiving more well-rounded responses with 2-4 score answers.

A Japanese translated journal might help.

A long interview was conducted with the iFloor staff. This was done as the staff has had a year to observe closely in person how the Switch was used. Additionally, as the staff is retiring (retired at the time of writing), their feedback would be a huge loss if not recorded for future reference. I will try to break down the responses into a few key points.

1. The Switch allowed us to expand our reach towards students which typically do not visit the iFloor. Since the implementation, we have noticed an increase in the number of students from the Faculty of Engineering and Business.
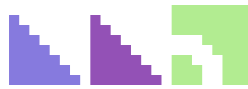
Those students usually would not have used the iFloor otherwise, as the Faculty of Engineering has another SALC in the engineering department building.

2. The staff stated that the Switch attracted different students compared to the board games and card games, and neither are particularly more effective than the other, as even students who play board games and card games could be silent students as well.

3. Roughly one-third of student conversations during game sessions were beyond silence or simple remarks. Most game sessions did not produce meaningful conversations or peer guidance. However, the staff remarked that the groups that did speak perform very well and were quite excited during the game sessions.

4. The staff stated that the most productive groups were the ones which had a figurehead. That is, a student which is either highly proficient in English or in gaming. These students lead or initiate conversations without the help of student staff.

5. Student staff were excited and willing to conduct post-game discussions, but most students were not willing to do so.

6. As a final remark, the staff said that the Switch was a positive implementation.

Outcomes:

I think a different format could be tested for the following semester based on the feedback provided this academic year.

While students responded well, the nature of a SALC made monitoring the use of the Switch difficult, especially when student staff or teachers are occupied with other student groups wanting to practice English discussions.

Actions:

1. Buy more games. (Human Fall Flat, Pico Park, Moving Out)

2. Include a Japanese translation for the game journals if we retain that format.

3. We are thinking about either changing or offering a new format for the use of the Switch. This is a format we are thinking

	about implementing for other forms of media like music, movies, etc., named (tentatively) 'Mini Clubs'. a. A Student staff will be in charge of each Mini Club, which specializes in one form of media. b. Each Mini Club will convene either once a week or once every two weeks to do activities related to their form of media. c. The Gaming Mini Club could conduct student staff-led game sessions with worksheets and post-game feedback and discussion sessions. d. This could be a more structured form of play compared to the free open-use that we have done over the past year. e. Details will be hashed out before the following semester, but we are considering adding this format on or completely replacing the old freeplay format. To be determined.

5 key takeaways for other teachers. Share tips, materials, etc that others can use immediately.

Takeaway		Details
1	Feedback is key in a SALC.	Ask the students, ask the staff, ask the teachers, ask anyone. You need to know how the program works in the field, especially since as teachers we are not able to spend as much time as we would like to in a SALC.
2	You always need staff on duty, always.	Without a full-time staff, this project would not have been possible. A full-time staff on a SALC ensures that forms are filled, etiquette is observed, and THEFT is prevented.
3	Be prepared to be a tech support.	Game literacy and tech literacy is not universal. Some students are more familiar with games and tech while others aren't. Be on call to solve tech problems regarding cables, Joycon connections and game patches.
4	Briefings, lots of briefings.	Keep the student staff in the loop. Communicate often regarding changes or days when the Switch should not be used. Make sure each student staff remembers and stays aware of the rules and things to encourage the students to do.
5	Learning first, playing second.	Students should be made aware of this fact. Student staff should be made aware of this fact.

Implications and Future Plans

While this study does not present an immediate solution or conclusion towards the question of the suitability of free-use video game consoles in a self-access learning center, we can draw some meaningful lessons with which to better equip ourselves to tackle future, similar endeavors. Observations of play sessions and data from staff members indicated a close and mutually supportive relationship between game choice and delivery method. Both factors present specific challenges when aimed to be implemented as effectively as possible.

Game choice when done from scratch can be challenging as games have to either be purchased or borrowed from someone in order to be tested in a specific setting. Therefore, the stress and financial loss taken upon realizing a game that was purchased was not suitable for use in the target context and student demographic can be emotionally and financially draining. Additionally, replicating this study with minimal or no game knowledge or game playing habits could present a challenge when it comes to identifying which games might be or might not be suitable. Granted, based on the study, even possessing a certain level of game knowledge might not provide the researcher with a completely accurate opinion on which games may be effective. Students are different, contexts are different, and the restrictions we teachers face are different from institution to institution. Therefore, hopefully, this study would provide fellow teachers with a simple glimpse into what is and what isn't suitable based on a specific context so that teachers may draw a better, more educated conclusion than what we started with at the beginning of this study.

> Students are different, contexts are different, and the restrictions we teachers face are different from institution to institution.

How we deliver or present the games to our students could also be a variable as major as game choice. At the end of the year-long study, the inclination towards assuming this stance looms ever closer and ever larger. While the study was done and continues to be done in a self-access learning center context, that is to allow students as much freedom as possible in deciding when and what to play amongst our list of games, continual work has to be done on the teacher and the staff members' part to ensure that students not only enjoy themselves in the SALC, but also to produce meaningful conversations and practise discussions amongst their peers. How can we encourage students to step

away from simple complements and verbal acknowledgements? How can we scaffold students towards more strategic discussions and planning in puzzle games? How can we introduce sentence structures and encourage asking questions and offering guidance? These are questions and objectives we are constantly striving and struggling towards. Further research and adjustments will be made to improve upon these points and answer these questions.

Conclusion

Parking video game consoles in self-access learning centers is far from being a smoking gun, it is barely a whisper in the wind. However, working towards diversifying the types of media and communicative mediums used in self-access learning centers could help cater to and appeal to more students with different interests and preferred methods of interaction. Hopefully, this study could provide likeminded teachers with a place to start and know what mistakes to avoid. Cost will be a huge factor owing to the inherent price of games and gaming consoles. Scaffolding and providing guidance are also challenges to overcome as student support staff, as helpful as they are, can only help so much. They are students themselves, and as such, like everyone else, may have different preferences and interests. It is, admittedly, an expensive, time-consuming, staff-dependent tool in a SALC context, and I loved every second of it.

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