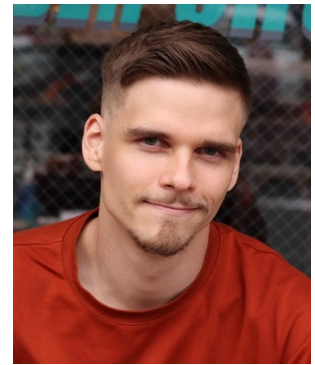


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University	Aalto University
Duration	10/2019 - 8/2020
Graduate School	Information Sciences
Academic Advisor	Professor SUGANUMA Takuo
Research Theme	User Experience of Learning: Improving Student Motivations in a Mobile Language Learning Application
IRTLab	3 (Fall Semester) 3 (Spring Semester)



Reasons you chose COLABS

As final year master's student, I was aiming to land a master's thesis topic during my exchange year. In the search of a suitable laboratory, I considered the COLABS program in Tohoku University to be a viable option, as the program offers the facilities for independent research.

Your COLABS life at TU (i.e. average working-hour in the lab., weekly lab.-meeting, your role in a project etc.)

I worked in my laboratory for around 6-8 hours a day. We had weekly meet-ups with my supervisor, Takashi MITSUISHI, to check the progress and bi-weekly seminars rotating between the lab members. My project was to continue the design and development of a mobile language learning app, KoToToMo Plus, which is used to study basic level Chinese in the university. It would be an understatement to say my laboratory group was small. For the first couple of months, I was the only member of the lab. Eventually, I was joined by another foreign student, and towards the end of my exchange, one Japanese student joined the lab.

Overall experience through COLABS

The COLABS program centers around a personal research project under the supervision of appointed professor. This type of program reflects Japanese universities quite well, since students are usually divined to work in labs immediately after starting their master's studies. Eventually, the students write the thesis in the appointed laboratory. Contrary to universities in Finland, there are no laboratory groups for master's students, and getting a thesis topic is left much to students' own initiative. Given the laboratory environment, seminars and continuous teacher support, I think the COLABS program enabled me to focus on the final year thesis, while simultaneously enjoying other aspects of the exchange.

Besides laboratory work, I participated in Japanese language courses twice a week. With the language course levels ranging from 1 to 6, the students are able to challenge themselves as much as they want. The upper-intermediate courses definitely give me a run for the money, and I constantly felt I needed to catch up after the classes.

Your experience at TU, Sendai and Japan

Besides studying, Tohoku University offers an abundance of activities for an exchange student, ranging from cultural classes to more experiential and action-oriented ones, such as archery, rugby or even street-dancing.

As for my day-to-day Sendai life, I spent majority of my leisure time with the other exchange students or with my girlfriend. Often, we would go to downtown, or do sightseeing in the outskirts of the city. Sendai is famous for its many open air baths near the mountains. Sendai has also a vibrant club and live house scene for those interested in music.

Japan is said to be one of the safest countries in the world, and I had no experiences to prove otherwise. Day or night, I felt completely safe everywhere. It's really hard to point out any serious negatives, except for the outrageous prices of fruits and some vegetables.

I could observe some similarities between Japan and Finland.

In both countries, people respect personal space and try not to be a nuisance to other people, although this is a lot more accentuated in Japan.

For example, talking in to a mobile phone is frowned upon in trains.

People in general really seem to be considerate of others.

My tip to students thinking of going to Japan is to study the language as much as possible.

It really opens doors and makes the whole experience a lot more enjoyable.

Also, participate in exchange student activities.

The places we visited and the things we did provided me a ton of memories and laughs for years to come. I wish the relationships that I managed to create with the people would last longer than the quickly passed year that I spent in Sendai.

