Introduction

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It is with great pleasure that we present the latest issue of JASAL Journal, the second installment in the sixth year of the journal's publication. This issue includes contributions from SALC practitioners, classroom teachers, and students. Taken together, these papers and reports reveal a picture of self-access learning as a social, reflective, and developmental undertaking which is shaped by relationships, emotions, and participation in wider learning communities. A recurring theme across the contributions is the way in which engagement and learner agency are nurtured through interactions with others, be that through relationships with Neer Peer Role Models (NPRM; Murphey, 1998) in a social language learning space, structured classroom tasks that scaffold reflection, or participation in academic conferences. Reflection is highlighted as not simply an individual cognitive activity, but as a socially mediated process that deepens awareness, motivation, and growth. Similarly, we see the importance of supportive environments, where *senpai-kōhai* (senior-junior) relationships, networks of peers, and emotionally attuned self-access learning spaces play a key role in sustaining engagement and creating positive learning experiences.

The first contribution is by **Clair Taylor** and **Mao Yasuda**, a professor and an undergraduate student, respectively, from Gifu Shotoku Gakuen University, and consists of a research paper that explores how Social Language Learning Spaces (SLLSs) and *senpai-kōhai* relationships can support language learning and personal growth. Using a narrative inquiry approach, the study draws on Yasuda's reflective writing and a speech she delivered at an open campus event, tracing her journey from a reserved first-year student to an English recitation contest prize winner. Through a process of co-production and collaborative analysis of Yasuda's personal narrative, the paper examines how NPRM relationships and the social

environment of the SLLS fostered her motivation and self-actualization. The study highlights aspects of *senpai-kōhai* dynamics that have received little attention in self-access research and offers insights for educators and researchers on how supportive peer relationships can enhance learner engagement, growth, and motivation.

Following this, **Brandon Lodenquai** and **Jason Wills** present a reflective paper on a pedagogical approach designed to deepen student engagement in reflection at Kanda University of International Studies. The adapted 90-minute lesson combined a communicative bridge-building activity, which followed a task-based language teaching approach, with explicit reflection training and pre- and post-training reflections on the task. Teacher reflections showed that this approach helped students become more aware of their reflective skills, analyze and improve their reflections, and engage more fully in the reflective process. The paper highlights the value of linking concrete tasks with structured reflection in order to foster deeper learning.

The second part of this issue consists of three conference reports. The first one is written by **Christopher Ho**, a student volunteer staff member from Gifu Shotoku Gakuen University and recipient of a JASAL student bursary. He reflects on his experience of the JALT PanSIG 2025 conference, held at Kanda University of International Studies in May 2025 under the theme *Agency and Autonomy in Language Education*, where he represented Lounge MELT in the SALC Showcase. In addition to inspiration for new ideas for his SALC, the author shares insights gained from attending a variety of sessions, such as the importance of reflecting on our actions as educators and the effect that emotions can have on learning. The report highlights how participating in the event broadened his understanding of teaching and learning and contributed to his development as a future language educator.

Then, we have two reports on the JASAL 2025 Annual National Conference at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University in Beppu in October 2025, themed *Emotions in Self-Access Language Learning*, one by **Ryo Mawatari**, an undergraduate student from University of Miyazaki and recipient of a JASAL student bursary, and another by **Jonathan Baker**, a lecturer from Reitaku University. Mawatari reflects on his experience presenting an English-language poster at the conference. The report outlines key insights gained from both his own presentation and those of others, gives advice for junior students preparing to engage in similar academic events, and underscores how he benefitted from the chance to interact with academics and fellow students from both Japan and overseas. Baker provides a chronological overview of the events he attended and concludes with reflections on the social

and practical aspects of the conference, highlighting strategies for fostering positive emotional experiences for both students and staff in self-access learning environments.

We would like to give our congratulations and thanks to the authors who contributed to Issue 6(2) of the *JASAL Journal*. We would also like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the reviewers for generously giving their time and expertise to support this issue. Your valuable feedback helps ensure the high quality and relevance of the work we publish.

On behalf of the entire *JASAL Journal* team, we wish all our members and readers a joyful winter break and a happy, healthy, and inspiring 2026!

References

Murphey, T. (1998). Motivating with near-peer role models. In B. Visgatis (Ed.), *On JALT'97: Trends and transitions* (pp. 201–205). JALT. https://jalt-publications.org/archive/proceedings/previous/jalt97.pdf#page=209