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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!

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"I wanted to make memories with her": Motivation and a Cherished *Senpai–Kōhai* (Senior-Junior) Relationship

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Clair Taylor is a professor in the Faculty of Humanities at Gifu Shotoku Gakuen University. She is also the Director of Lounge MELT, her university's social language learning space. Her research interests include learning space design and learning beyond the classroom.

Mao Yasuda is a third-year undergraduate student at Gifu Shotoku Gakuen University. She has participated in volunteer activities in her university's social language learning space and also serves as an open campus student advisor. She is currently researching English pronunciation in her seminar.

Abstract

Adopting a narrative inquiry approach, this research paper shares a story of transformation that illuminates how the affordances of a Social Language Learning Space (SLLS), particularly the *senpai–kōhai* (senior–junior) relationships forged in these spaces, can foster growth. The co-constructed story presented and explored in this study drew on two texts. The first text is a reflective piece of writing which Mao Yasuda (co-author of this paper) produced following a year of serving as a volunteer in her university's SLLS. The second is a speech Yasuda made at an open campus event for prospective students, reflecting on how she had grown from a reserved first-year student to an English recitation contest prize winner by the end of her second year at university. These texts became the basis for a series of oral interactions between Yasuda and Clair Taylor, the Director of the SLLS and the teacher in charge of the volunteer activity course in which Yasuda participated. Notes from these sessions were also utilized in the inquiry. These reflective narrative-weaving processes uncovered some aspects of the *senpai–kōhai* relationship and motivation which have received little attention in the field of self-access language learning. Some implications for researchers and professionals working in self-access are discussed.

本研究はナラティブ・インクワイアリーのアプローチを採用し、ある学習者の変容の物語を共有する。それはソーシャル・ランゲージ・ラーニング・スペース（Social Language Learning Space: SLLS）の特性、特にその空間で築かれる「先輩・後輩」の関係が、いかに成長を促すかを明らかにするものである。本研究で提示・考察した協同的に構築されたストーリーは、二つのテキストに基づいている。一つ目は、安田茉央（本論文の共著者）が大学SLLSで一年間ボランティアを務めた後に執筆した省察的エッセイである。二つ目は、安田が新入生対象のオープンキャンパスで行ったスピーチである。そこでは、大学1年生の控えめな学生から、2年生終了時には英語朗読コンテストの入賞者へと成長した自身の軌跡が語られている。これらのテキストを基に、安田と共同研究者であるクレア・テイラー（SLLSディレクターであり、安田が参加したボランティア活動コースの担当教員）との間で一連の対話が行われた。これらのセッションの記録も調査に活用された。こうした省察的ナラティブを紡ぎ考察するプロセスを通して、セルフ・アクセス型言語学習の分野ではほとんど注目されてこなかった先輩・後輩関係や動機付けの側面が明らかになった。セルフ・アクセス言語学習分野の研究者や専門家に向けた示唆についても議論する。

Keywords: personal growth, near-peer role models, directed motivational currents; *senpai–kōhai* relationships

In Japan, hierarchical relationships between *senpai* (seniors) and *kōhai* (juniors) are ubiquitous, and these dynamics permeate educational settings. The *senpai* is a student who is a year or more ahead of the *kōhai* in the school system. University students regard those in a higher academic year as *senpai* and treat them with respect and deference. In *senpai–kōhai* relationships, the *senpai* is expected to provide guidance and support as the *kohai* is socialized into the group. The involvement of love and status in the social exchange can make the bonds between *senpai–kōhai* long-lasting (Qie et al., 2019). Similar relationships are found in other countries rooted in Confucian culture (Qie et al., 2019).

In English-language learning environments, the *senpai–kōhai* dynamic can be both beneficial and detrimental. It can sometimes add certain stressors, such as guarding and restraint (Doyon, 2000), when *kōhai* feel pressure to use respectful language and behaviors. However, the interdependent relationship characterized by the respectful stance of the *kōhai* and friendly, supportive advice-giving from the *senpai* works effectively in language tutoring contexts (Harwood, 2022). It can also be beneficial in the context of asynchronous written peer advising (Moriya & Kawasaki, 2023). In self-access learning communities, *senpai* can serve as "relatable role models" who provide "guidance, encouragement, and motivation" for younger students (Hooper, 2025, p. 19), positively influencing their learning trajectories (Hooper, 2020).

In this paper, we take a self-narrative approach to explore a story involving a *senpai–kōhai* relationship forged in a Social Language Learning Space (SLLS). We will begin with the story of its origins. On March 22, 2025, our university held an open campus event for prospective students to sample lectures and tour the facilities. At this event, Faculty of Foreign Languages undergraduate student Mao (co-author of this paper) gave a speech in which she described how a *senpai* friendship formed through English volunteer activities in the university's SLLS supported her participation in an English recitation contest. Clair, who is the faculty member in charge of the volunteer course, the SLLS' director, and co-author of this paper, was in the audience. She experienced an emotional response to the speech, witnessing Mao's transformation from a reserved first-year student to a confident public speaker. In a later consult, we, Mao and Clair, decided to proceed with this narrative inquiry, beginning a series of meetings in which we discussed Mao's experiences. In the process of co-constructing the personal narrative, we utilized the open campus speech, a reflective report Mao had written about her volunteer activities, and the notes from the meetings. Through this inquiry, we aimed to understand and illuminate the motivational currents that brought about this change so that the findings may be utilized by language teaching and self-access

professionals to create fertile conditions for other language learners to have similar transformative experiences.

Motivation for Language Learners

This section summarizes the research literature in three areas relevant to the topic of individual transformation in a SLLS setting, which were used as a lens to explore the story: personal growth, near-peer role models, and directed motivational currents.

Personal Growth

The quest for personal growth has been a focus for some researchers exploring language-learning motivation. In her rich narrative studies, Ros i Solé (2016) foregrounded that people learn languages not just for pragmatic purposes, i.e., to acquire transferable skills for the workplace, but as a personal journey of "self-development, self-cultivation and the development of a cosmopolitan self" (p. 59). Similarly, Consoli (2024) found that some Chinese students are motivated to study in the UK in order to become "a better self" (para. 27).

Personal growth has also been explored in SLLS contexts. Murray and Fujishima (2016) show how SLLS enable learners to benefit from other language users in the community in ways that both support language learning and enrich university life. They list a number of things students can do in SLLS that lead to personal growth, including the following:

- Make friends.
- Enhance motivation [by being surrounded by other motivated students who serve as role models].
- Receive and give help, encouragement and support.
- Get advice.
- Make memories.
- Have fun. (pp. 127–128)

Murray and Fujishima discuss how these positive experiences can help students feel safe and connected, which promotes sociability and self-expression, engendering self-actualization (Maslow, 1971), i.e., the full realization and fulfillment of their potential. Building on this, Hooper (2025), in his narrative studies, highlights the "altruistic mission" (p. 67) that motivates learners in SLLS, where they often seek to support others and foster a welcoming English-learning community. Through such prosocial actions, he argues, learners strengthen

their own "sense of personal value and competence" (p. 123). In essence, Murray and Fujishima (2016) and Hooper (2025) found that language development activity and personal growth can be intrinsically linked.

Near-Peer Role Models

There has been extensive research on the ways that (near-peer) role models can serve as powerful sources of motivation for language learners. Muir et al. (2019) found that the majority of language students have a role model, a target-language speaker (sometimes a celebrity or fictional character) whom they respect and want to be like, and for young people, this is more likely to be someone personally known to them. Based on a range of research projects, Murphey (1998) proposed that near-peer role models (NPRM), individuals close to the learner in key characteristics (such as age, nationality, and gender), present a more achievable and attractive target than native-speakers of the target language. He found that NPRM can affect motivation and choice of learning strategies and self-efficacy beliefs, and that the influence can be long-term. Similarly, Haye-Matsui (2018) found that for female students, gender may be the most important of these shared characteristics. The young women she interviewed reported feelings of friendly rivalry with same-age, same-gender students, and a desire to emulate older women (mothers and teachers) they admired as confident speakers of English.

Research has explored NPRM in the Japanese context, relating it to the *senpai-kōhai* dynamic. Nonaka (2018) found that while some Japanese learners of foreign languages experience *akogare* (yearning, desire, in Japanese) for foreign places or a romantic relationship, others have similar feelings of *akogare* to be like a *senpai*, or to have the qualities (such as power, courage, and confidence) that other female peers possess. She argues that this *akogare* can be a powerful motivating force for language learning. Similarly, Walters (2020) uncovered culture-specific factors at play in NPRM in Japan. He examined how an NPRM intervention (in which first-year university students watched videos of slightly older, more advanced peers speaking together) affected students' beliefs about language learning. Lower-proficiency and less confident students reported stronger aspirational responses than those with higher proficiency or confidence. Notably, students who referred to the people in the videos as *senpai* were more likely to find the videos helpful than those who referred to them as "Japanese people" or by name. Walters suggests this was because some of the more confident viewers were exchange students and did not share their Japanese classmates' cultural frame of reference.

Directed Motivational Currents

Over the past decade, considerable attention has been given to "directed motivational currents" (DMCs)—unique periods of heightened motivation in which an emotionally significant goal becomes a dominant force in an individual's life, emerging from the alignment of personal, temporal, and contextual factors (Dörnyei et al., 2014; Dörnyei et al., 2015). Furthermore, Muir and Gümüş (2020) highlight that DMCs can be an individual or group experience. Examples of DMCs include rehearsing for a play, preparing for a competition, or learning a language for a trip overseas, when intense activity leads to rapid, trackable progress in a short period of time (Dörnyei et al., 2014). There are four key elements: 1. generating parameters (factors that come together to launch the process, typically involving a trigger); 2. goal/vision-orientedness (an inner sensory representation of the goal which guides the process); 3. salient facilitative structure (including the launch, subgoals, and automated routines); and 4. positive emotionality (in which activities are experienced as enjoyable due to the emotional loading of the target vision) (Dörnyei et al., 2015). Dörnyei et al. (2014) stress that DMCs are temporary, short-term periods of motivation, with energy "over and on top of the steady motivation any student will exhibit throughout the year" (p. 12). They disrupt normal life until the short-term goal is reached, and the student returns to their normal routine and "long-term goals and visions once again assume control of directing thoughts and actions" (p. 12).

Language educators have considered how they might intentionally generate DMCs, e.g., through projects and study abroad experiences (Dörnyei et al., 2015). To this end, research has focused on understanding the generating parameters, in particular, the triggering stimuli that launched the DMC for individual students. For example, Zarrinabadi and Khodarahmi (2021) interviewed 14 Iranian students who had experienced DMCs, and through qualitative analysis identified the triggers in each case. They grouped these triggers into two main categories: other-related factors and social-situational factors. Pertinent to this narrative inquiry, and to the understanding of how DMC may be triggered in SLLS in general, is the researchers' finding that others can induce a DMC in two ways 1. *goal contagion*, in which a learner decides to adopt the same goal as another person, due to their enthusiasm and rationale, and 2. (being a) *salient other*, someone who demonstrates attractive language abilities which impress the learner and may also give the learner positive attention, such as advice and compliments.

Weaving a Narrative Together

Narrative Inquiry

To make sense of Mao's transformative experience, we took a narrative inquiry approach. Narrative inquiry is an umbrella term for research approaches that explore language learning through stories, focusing on making sense of experience through the narration and analysis of learners' narratives (Barkhuizen, 2011; Clandinin, 2022; Zhang, 2020). Furthermore, narrative "not only conveys information, but brings information to life," adding realism, authenticity, emotions, and values to research (Cohen et al., 2010, p. 553). Rather than treating storytelling and analysis as separate, sequential stages, narrative inquiry views storytelling itself as an analytical process (Barkhuizen, 2011; Clandinin, 2022; Ellis, 2004; Oxford, 2013). Oxford (2013) argues that co-constructing narratives is a multi-stage process in which learners first "filter, organize and structure information" (p. 102) as they tell their stories, followed by further analysis during the researcher's "re-storying" stage. In our inquiry, this stage was conducted collaboratively with the learner as co-researcher.

Traditionally, when researchers have explored the stories of language learners, the learner participants are only included in selected phases of the project, and their identities are hidden by pseudonyms, which means they receive no credit for their involvement in the study. In recent years, there has been a growing movement within educational research to *co-produce* research with learners, including the learner to a greater extent in all phases of the research project from inception to analysis and the development of practical applications of the findings (Hanks, 2020; Hanks, 2024; Manor et al., 2009/2023; Ota & Yamamoto, 2018). Hanks (2020) advocates researching *with* rather than *on* learners, arguing that if social justice is a genuine aim of research, "there is an ethical imperative for learners as well as teachers to be acknowledged and to be included (not hidden by pseudonyms unless they wish this) as full participants and co-investigators" (p. 16). She contends that this inclusive, emancipatory approach offers substantial benefits: by collaborating with educators, students become more engaged in reflective and analytical processes, contribute meaningfully, and are empowered to effect change within their learning communities. We adopted this approach in our inquiry, co-producing and collaboratively analyzing the narrative.

Research Questions

Through this inquiry, we attempted to make sense of Mao's experience, trying to gain a better understanding of how this change process came about and how it was lived and experienced. Guiding our inquiry were the following two research questions:

- What motivational currents propelled Mao's transformation from a reserved young woman into a confident public speaker?
- What role did Mao's *senpai* play in this process?

Background

The Setting

The setting for this story is Gifu Shotoku Gakuen University and its SLLS "Lounge MELT" (an abbreviation of Maximum English Learning Together). Lounge MELT consists of one spacious lounge with sofas, books, games, and musical instruments. It has a small, quieter annex with learning booths and an advising room. Its core mission is "to sustain a thriving plurilingual community by providing a comfortable, immersive environment where people use their English (and other additional languages) in real conversations" (Gifu Shotoku Gakuen University, n.d.). Lounge MELT has an average of 22 users per day, and hosts several events per year, each of which attracts up to 200 visitors. Most of these events are planned by students enrolled in an elective one-year credit-bearing course called "English Volunteer Activity." Clair teaches this course, in which Mao enrolled in the 2024 academic year.

The "English Volunteer Activity" syllabus is structured to develop teamwork and other soft skills. The students complete three 90-minute training sessions in Lounge MELT before they begin two types of volunteer activity: 1. facilitating play in English at English World, the sister SLLS at the university-affiliated elementary school, and 2. planning and running Lounge MELT events. After the first semester of volunteering, Clair holds a reflection session in which volunteers share memories and individually draw a metaphor representing their experiences to promote deeper reflection and discussion. The volunteers are required to log 39 hours of activity in a web application over the year and submit a final reflective report.

The Recitation Contest

A key event in Mao's story is our university's English recitation contest, which is held every December. Participating students select a two-minute-long speech (often from YouTube), memorize it, and perform it on stage, focusing on pronunciation and delivery. This live-streamed event typically attracts 20–30 participants competing for attractive prizes. Although competitive, students usually engage in the contest cooperatively, forming supportive rehearsal communities where they practice and give one another feedback. Many participants make extensive use of Lounge MELT, with learning advisors assisting in

selecting materials and providing feedback. Mao took part in the 2024 contest alongside her *senpai*, choosing for her recitation, "Learning a language? Speak it like you're playing a video game" by Pascal (2017).

Our Story-Weaving Process

Our synergic story-weaving process unfolded over several weeks as we co-constructed the personal narrative in the following way. We drew on Mao's open campus presentation slides and script (originally written in Japanese and collaboratively translated into English), her illustrated year-end reflective report on volunteering, and notes from our oral discussions, during which we explored Mao's experiences through the lens of Clair's professional knowledge. The process involved questioning, listening, clarifying details, recalling events, and elaborating examples. We worked primarily in English, using translanguaging, dictionaries, and translation tools as needed to synthesize the texts and re-story the narrative for an audience of language educators and of self-access professionals. Collaboration took place in a shared online document, both synchronously and asynchronously, to preserve Mao's voice and ensure her intended meaning was fully conveyed.

Following the story-weaving, there was a further analytical process. We manually coded the written story, initially highlighting sections related to motivation, and later recoding in a non-linear, iterative process (Clandinin, 2022) involving more reference to the research literature, discussion of our interpretations, storying, and further reflection.

Ethical Considerations

There were several ethical considerations in undertaking this narrative inquiry. In self-narrative research, the presence of others in the story can create dilemmas (Sparkes, 2024). Autoethnographers highlight key issues such as story ownership, limits to confidentiality and anonymity in a digitally connected world, the feasibility of obtaining informed consent during an evolving narrative process, challenges with member-checks, and the need to avoid harm (Sparkes, 2024). We regard Mao as the owner of her story and determined that sharing it poses no harm to any participant. Because her *senpai*, Airi, appears prominently in the narrative, Mao obtained informed consent at the outset, following Airi's preference to use her real name. As the story developed, we reconfirmed her willingness to participate through a second oral and written consent process. A final member-check was conducted after completing the paper to verify factual accuracy and invite comments.

Preserving the Narrative Arc

In narrative inquiry, researchers consider how best to share the findings of their narrative knowledging (Barkhuizen, 2011). Many narrative inquirers want to share the stories they have crafted in addition to their thematically organized discussion. In studies involving multiple stories, intact stories may be shared in separate chapters in the volume (e.g., Murray & Fujishima, 2016) or in a separate companion volume (Dörnyei & Mentzelopoulos, 2022). In studies involving only one participant, the story or stories may be shared within the research text (Murray, 2009; Rahaman, 2025; Yamamoto, 2019). In Mao's story, the story structure is important. Thus, instead of decontextualized snippets of text, we have chosen to share as findings an abridged version of the story, preserving the narrative arc.

Mao's Story

When I became a sophomore, I decided that I wanted to output the English I had been inputting in lectures, so I took a class called "English Volunteer Activity." As volunteers, we went to the university-affiliated elementary school and played games using English with children during lunchtime. It was hard at first, but we were able to transcend the language barrier by watching the children's reactions and making repeated efforts to speak slowly and smile. We also planned parties in Lounge MELT for university students. We bought a lot of snacks and decorated the lounge. Thanks to the parties, I was able to make friends.

In that volunteer class, I met a senior who greatly influenced my life. Her name is Airi. She was very active and confident, worked several part-time jobs, and spoke English, Chinese, and Korean. She had so much life experience and was full of confidence. I admired her and wanted to be like her. There were only three girls in the group, so I wanted to get along with her.

Airi and I became best friends. She inspired me to keep challenging myself in many ways. In my first year, I had volunteered as a timekeeper at an academic conference, and in my second year, I became a manager of a club—something I had always wanted to try as I wanted to support the athletes. I also helped make videos for the new faculty's Instagram page.

In October, Airi asked me to enter the university's annual English recitation contest with her. To be honest, I did not want to at first. I am a nervous person, and I really do not like talking in front of people, even in Japanese. But Airi kept trying to persuade me, telling me I could put it on entry sheets when applying for jobs and trying to find a suitable talk for me to use. Watching the TED talks she showed me, I started to think, "Maybe I can do this!"

I realized that Airi was going to graduate that year, and it would be a waste not to do something with the senior I loved and respected. I wanted to make memories with her. Imagining the sound of the audience's applause and Airi and I laughing together, I decided to enter the contest.

From then on, I practiced a lot—every single day. I practiced in front of the mirror in my room every night. I memorized the words, and I performed them to my seniors, receiving advice and encouragement from them. We made videos of each other reciting and watched them back. I also received pronunciation instruction from my teacher and learning advisors. As a result, I received a special award. I was not nervous at all during the performance, thanks to the countless hours of practice, and I performed as well as I had in practice. I felt confident, excited. My senior also got second place, which was a great memory for me.

This year was really fulfilling, and I am glad that I chose the English volunteer class. I liken volunteering to the process of turning a stone into a jewel. A gemstone is just a nondescript stone at first. But if you polish it, it is transformed into something shiny and attractive. Let us say that we volunteers are just a stone of nothingness at first. But hosting a party to make people happy or playing with children using English to help them grow will benefit many people. We grow by putting thought and ingenuity into working for the good of others.

I especially appreciate Airi. I would not have done the recitation contest without her.

I would like to share what I learned from these experiences. I want to remember that I only live once, so I am going to do what I want to do and not regret it. I will keep that mindset. Looking back on my university life, it is better to think, "I did a lot of things," rather than "I didn't do anything." I will always try something new. I learned the importance of challenging myself to do many things, because I gain confidence when I have accomplished something. And I want to remember to cherish my relationships with others. It is important to value this.

Analysis and Implications

Our analysis identified both personal growth and NPRM as long-term, ongoing motivational sources, and a shorter period of intense motivation leading up to the recitation contest, which has the characteristics of a DMC.

Ongoing Motivational Sources: Personal Growth and NPRM

One ongoing source of motivation for behavior that permeates Mao's story is the sense of altruism and personal growth. The use of words such as "challenge", "growth", "fulfilment", "confidence", "smile", "glad" and "love" show that Mao's experiences and interactions with others, including her *senpai*, are loaded with positive emotions. Mao had a vision of serving as a club manager to help others even before entering the university, and her altruistic motives gave meaning to her group volunteer endeavors, helping the volunteers form bonds and providing the conditions for the *senpai–kōhai* relationship to flourish. Mao benefited from the kindness and care of her *senpai*, and a similar sense of duty and care to the incoming freshmen underpinned her decision to share her story at open campus. The metaphorical representation of students as "nondescript stones" who become shiny through the process of English volunteer activity shows Mao's awareness of her own personal transformation that she actively cultivates. The story arc illustrates how English is not an end in itself; the activities she engages in using English are involved in her ongoing self-actualization. The trajectory shows a journey towards fulfilment in which English learning, English use, increased sociality, public speaking skill-building, and genuine care for others are fused in a general movement of growth, connection, and personal development. Hooper (2025) similarly identified altruistic mission driving prosocial behavior in the SLLS community he studied. Murray and Fujishima (2016) discuss the affordances of SLLS for students' self-actualization. Exploring how this fusion of altruism and language learning manifests in different individuals or SLLS cultures and developing ways to further cultivate it could be interesting directions for future research.

Another long-term source of motivation is Mao's *senpai* Airi, who served as a powerful and attractive NPRM (Murphey, 1998). Mao is impressed by Airi's confidence and experience, which creates a possible future self as a goal: "I admired her and wanted to be like her." Airi is someone of the same gender to emulate (Haye-Matsui, 2018), as a sophisticated, multilingual student in her final year of university. As an NPRM, Airi represents an attractive possible future self, which energizes Mao's journey of self-growth: "She inspired me to keep challenging myself." It is also evident that Mao's *senpai* did not simply serve as a role model (Muir et al., 2019) to follow, but actively supported her *kōhai* both practically and psychologically, as we discuss in the next section.

DMC

Mao's participation in the recitation contest has the core characteristics of a DMC, entailing a period of intense activity in which the contest becomes dominant in Mao's life. The *generating parameters* (discussed in more detail below) include the opportunity to take part, *goal-contagion* (Zarrinabadi & Khodarahmi, 2021) from the *senpai*, and the watching of speech videos, which help Mao realize that the goal is achievable ("Maybe I can do this!"). The activity is *goal-oriented*—Mao's goal is to make memories with her *senpai* (a non-linguistic goal which drives her language learning efforts). The *facilitative structure* is evident, starting with a launch (deciding to join the contest). We also see *subgoals* (choosing the speech to perform, working on pronunciation targets set by getting feedback from others) and *automated routines* (practicing in front of the mirror, videoing practice sessions, watching the videos). There is evidence of *positive emotionality*—Mao willingly engages in "countless" hours of practice for the contest in a surge of activity and feels "confident" and "excited" as she performs.

There is only one way in which the DMC deviates from Dörnyei et al.'s model (2015). Dörnyei defines DMCs as goal/vision oriented, i.e., goals are sustained predominantly by a vision (a mental picture that students see and hear). Mao remembers the inner representation that guides her goal as exclusively auditory, with no visual component: "hearing the sound of the audience's applause and Airi and I laughing together, I decided to join."

The DMC Generating Parameters

Multiple factors aligned to launch Mao's DMC, with Mao's *senpai* playing a major role. The *senpai* decided to enter the contest first, and then actively persuaded Mao, so *goal contagion* (Zarrinabadi & Khodarahmi, 2021) can be considered a significant factor. Airi can also be understood as a *salient other* (Zarrinabadi & Khodarahmi, 2021), impressing Mao with her language abilities and giving Mao positive attention. However, the *senpai*'s role in the launch was more comprehensive and complex than these two categories suggest. First, she presented the opportunity of taking part in the recitation contest, an activity outside Mao's comfort zone, as she was afraid of public speaking even in her first language. Airi then encouraged Mao to believe herself capable of the challenge, and persuaded Mao of the value of attempting it, noting that it can be helpful to record this experience on an entry sheet when applying for employment, drawing on her status as a fourth-year student with experience in the job-hunting market. The *senpai* also makes the goal of speaking on a stage seem more achievable by taking the first step of selecting material for Mao, making it possible for Mao

to imagine herself speaking on the stage. Ultimately, though, the key factor in triggering the launch of Mao's DMC was a temporal one, arising from the transience of the *senpai–kōhai* relationship: the awareness that the *senpai* will graduate before the *kōhai*. Mao was spurred to take part in the contest because she knew that this would be the last opportunity to have such a meaningful shared experience with her *senpai*: "I realized that Airi was going to graduate that year, and it would be a waste not to do something with the senior I loved and respected. I wanted to make memories with her."

The *senpai* was involved not only in the initial triggering of the DMC, but also in continually retriggering it, as she nurtured her *kōhai*. She scaffolds Mao's practice, by engaging in activities such as video recording with her and giving explicit feedback, which helps the DMC maintain momentum. Throughout this rehearsal process, the *senpai*'s astute selection of material continued to be impactful, enabling progress that feeds the forward drive of the DMC. Pascal's (2017) TEDx talk encourages the audience to recognize that it is not necessary to have a high level of English to communicate well, and that non-native speakers of English should focus on the listener and the outcome when speaking, instead of worrying about accuracy and feeling judged. This message will have been internalized through repeated exposure and performance. Moreover, the repeated recital practice, which Airi encouraged and supported is associated with personality growth and trait change. Wirag (2024) has argued that by repeatedly immersing themselves in a role which embodies positive states, actors experience state-on-trait change, which can lead to (among other changes) more confidence and lower anxiety. It follows that by modeling the confident, upbeat, self-assured speaker Pascal, embodying her posture, intonation, eye-contact patterns, and gestures, Mao was repeatedly experiencing a confident state of flow which she became able to access whenever she subsequently steps onto a stage (even, as in her open campus speech, when she is presenting in Japanese). The *senpai*'s support in the DMC led to tangible progress, which not only fed the DMC but made lasting change.

The DMC Goal

The goal (to "make memories") in Mao's DMC may not be unique. This desire to make memories as a motivating force has been associated with the rise of social media platforms for documenting and sharing memories; Wiking (2021) claims that the Instagram generation are "architects of their future memories" (p. 210). Annabell (2022) documents this new perspective in the young women that she interviewed, finding that they actively pursue experiences that are "worth remembering" and noting that "articulating a desire to 'create memories' situates memories as a prospective experience [… not] active (re)constructions of

the past in the present […]. For these young women, memories are particular types of experiences that should be sought after" (p. 1544). According to Heath and Heath (2017), memorable experiences, or peak "defining moments" (p. 12) have four key elements: elevation, pride, insight, and connection. The recitation contest meets all these characteristics for Mao—elevation (the high stakes contest, appearing on stage), pride (in performing well and winning a prize), insight (into her new public speaking abilities), and connection (with her cherished *senpai* and other contest participants). Peak moments are associated with self-actualization (Maslow, 1971), in line with Mao's long-term motivation drives.

The current younger generation's desire to "make memories" (with *senpai* or in general) is an underexplored source of motivation in language learning research, opening potential avenues of research inquiry. Researchers could explore how widespread this drive is and how common it is as a DMC trigger. It might be interesting to investigate the kinds of experience which learners may deem "worthwhile", and whether and how this perspective can be leveraged by (for example) actively encouraging learners to think about and seek out the memorable experiences they hope to have in their university lives and beyond.

Practical Applications

Mao's story shows that the affordances of a SLLS support both Mao's long-term motivational drives and have a role in triggering a DMC (brief period of heightened motivation). Our analysis uncovered how one *senpai–kōhai* relationship formed in the SLLS had a particularly powerful role in these processes, both in the support provided by the culturally-specific role and due to the time pressure generated by the transience of the *senpai–kōhai* relationship which acted as a powerful trigger for a DMC in this case. These findings suggest a number of practical steps that faculty and SLLS professionals could take in tertiary settings, potentially benefiting language learners.

Faculty and other SLLS professionals in Japan could establish and develop activities to promote *senpai–kōhai* relationships aside from the established university clubs and circles. Activities where junior students can work alongside senior students, such as open campus events and volunteer activities, offer a means for students to share a sense of altruistic mission and may be ideal conditions for these supportive relationships to flourish. Faculty may recruit students to serve as interns at academic conferences, providing students of different ages an opportunity to work together in a stimulating environment where English may be used. Involving students in the production of university, faculty, or SLLS promotional material can also generate meaningful encounters between junior and senior

students that have the potential to lead to deeper ties. A "junior-interviews-senior" format lends itself well to SLLS promotional activities, where it can serve to inform students about spaces, events, and services while showcasing senior students who might serve as role models and informal mentors.

In addition to activity-based initiatives, SLLS professionals and student staff can promote *senpai–kōhai* relationships through more direct forms of interpersonal support. Facilitators can actively introduce younger students to their seniors, creating opportunities for *senpai–kōhai* relationships to kindle. We are aware (through personal communication from students) of cases in our own SLLS where such introductions have led to *senpai* support which continues post-graduation. SLLS professionals may also consider introducing Hooper's (2025) suggestions of student ushering and *buddy systems* (in which experienced peers support hesitant newcomers in their early SLLS visits). These practices could foster NPRM and positive *senpai–kōhai* relationships.

In Japan and beyond, educators may consider increasing the range of events organized by their SLLS or wider institutions, which students consider "worth remembering" (Annabell, 2022) and could potentially trigger DMCs. These anticipated events could include excursions, performances, presentations with large audiences, poetry readings, community activities, publications, and tours for visitors. The activities should involve some aspect of novelty and risk and serve to stretch students, taking them out of their comfort zone (Heath & Heath, 2017). This can create the conditions to motivate sustained autonomous learning behaviors as students prepare for them.

Conclusion

This paper presented a collaboratively produced analysis of a transformative student narrative, with the learner protagonist participating as a co-investigator. By focusing on the story of a single undergraduate student involved in a self-directed language-learning space (SLLS), the scope of the findings is necessarily limited. Mao's experience may not reflect those of other Lounge MELT volunteers or users, nor of students at the university more broadly. In addition, aspects of the *senpai–kōhai* relationship central to this narrative are likely influenced by cultural and gendered dynamics that may operate differently in other contexts.

Our intention in sharing this story was to uncover the motivational sources, pivotal moments, and supportive conditions that shaped Mao's development. We identified self-actualization and NPRM as ongoing sources of motivation and uncovered factors that

launched and guided a powerful DMC, demonstrating how a *senpai–kōhai* relationship supported this motivational surge and shedding light on the desire to make memories as a source of motivation, which could potentially be leveraged in SLLS. The narrative highlights the perhaps underappreciated value of *senpai–kōhai* relationships in Japanese self-access settings and suggests practical implications for self-access and language teaching professionals, as well as directions for future research.

The collaborative story-weaving process also proved deeply reflective for both authors. As we traced the forces that shaped Mao's decisions, sustained her motivated behaviors, and supported her growth, we found ourselves learning alongside her. Clair, a British educator who had long found the *senpai–kōhai* dynamic unfamiliar despite two decades in Japan, gained new insight into this relational structure and its parallels with her own teacher–student relationships. Mao, in turn, drew on the inquiry process to make new choices in her learning journey: she entered the 2025 recitation contest not as a *kōhai* but as a *senpai*, supporting two younger students in their preparations. This shift underscores the cyclical and generative nature of the *senpai–kōhai* relationship highlighted throughout the narrative.

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Engaging Students in Deeper Reflection:

Reflections on Combining Tasks and Reflections

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Abstract

This reflective paper examines a pedagogical approach developed by two new English Language Institute lecturers at Kanda University of International Studies, Japan, aimed at effectively integrating mandatory reflective lessons with classroom tasks in an English language lesson to enhance engagement in the reflective process. Facing challenges with scheduling and student proficiency when utilizing established learning advisor-led reflective materials, the authors adapted a 90-minute lesson. The adapted lesson followed a task-based language teaching (TBLT) framework that was then expanded to provide training to reflect deeply, in which students wrote and analyzed their own reflections. TBLT was chosen due to its integrated connections to reflection in the post-task phase, the abundance of literature regarding implementation, the communicative focus matching the teachers' course focus, and the emphasis on a clear outcome occurring from the task. Drawing on teacher reflections, the authors highlight how the task provided an engaging experience for the students to reflect on. Furthermore, by giving explicit training, the lesson appeared to help raise students' awareness of their current reflective skills and teach them what is needed to improve their reflections. Finally, the teachers believe that having students write and analyze their own reflections led to increased engagement in the reflective process. This approach highlights the importance of intentionally combining concrete tasks and personal reflections with explicit reflective training to promote deeper reflection in language education.

本省察論文は、神田外語大学英語教育研究所の新任講師2名が開発した教授法を検証するもので、英語授業における必修の省察活動を教室内タスクと効果的に統合し、学生の省察への関与を高めることを目的としている。従来のラーニングアドバイザー主導の省察教材には、授業スケジュールや学生の英語力との不一致といった課題があったため、著者らは90分授業をタスク中心言語教授法（TBLT）に基づいて再構成した。この授業では、学生が省察を書き、その内容を分析する訓練を取り入れ、より深い省察を促している。TBLTを採用した理由は、タスク後活動との親和性、研究の豊富さ、コミュニケーション重視の特性、明確な成果物が得られる点にある。教師の省察によれば、このタスクは学生にとって省察を行う魅力的な経験となり、明示的な訓練によって自身の省察スキルへの気づきや改善点の理解につながった。また、省察の記述と分析を学生自身が行うことで、省察過程への関与も高まったと考えられる。本アプローチは、深い省察を促すには、具体的なタスクと個人的な省察に明示的な訓練を組み合わせることが重要であることを示している。

Keywords: in-class reflection, task-based language teaching, teacher collaboration, learner engagement

In April 2024, we (Brandon and Jason) began as lecturers in the English Language Institute (ELI) at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS), a private Japanese university. At KUIS, we teach Freshman English, a mandatory English course for first-year students, which focuses mainly on English communication skills. Freshman English spans two semesters, with each semester being broken into three units. Our classes consist mostly of Japanese first-year university students and a few students from other countries, with class sizes of around 20 students. We each teach three classes of Freshman English, totaling six different classes, resulting in approximately 120 students. The students are of mixed English proficiency, ranging from what we would estimate to be around Common European Framework of Reference for Languages level A2 to B1 (Council of Europe, 2001). Freshman English, like all ELI courses, follows an English-only policy, meaning students may speak only English in the classroom.

At KUIS, students have access to a Self-Access Learning Center (SALC), staffed by Learning Advisors (LAs) who work individually with students to support their language learning process. LAs also collaborate with the ELI, bridging the English classroom and the SALC. For example, they lead or assist with mandatory reflective lessons during classroom visits in the Freshman English course. A group of ELI teachers and LAs designed the materials for these lessons to encourage reflective practices and equip freshman students with skills that support their success at university. (See the design process described in Curry et al., 2023 and Lyon et al., 2023.)

As new ELI lecturers, we had an issue properly integrating LAs' class visits into our lessons due to scheduling difficulties, as the tight three-unit semester sometimes made it hard to find times that were suitable for both LAs and lecturers. We also had two concerns when conducting the mandatory reflective lessons. First, students seemed less interested in these lessons than in typical lessons. We thought this might be because students did not understand how the content connected to them personally. The second concern was the students' varying English proficiency: the reflective lessons and materials were sometimes too advanced for them to engage with effectively. To address these issues while delivering the reflective lessons, we adapted the activities from the second semester to be more active and student-centered, without changing the content.

This paper examines a 90-minute lesson in which we followed a task-based language teaching (TBLT) framework that we then expanded to teach content from one of the mandatory reflective lessons. The paper begins with a brief literature review, followed by an explanation of the adapted lesson. The next part of the paper provides our observations of the

students during the lesson. Finally, possible improvements and future directions are discussed, concluding with overall reflections on the experience.

Literature Review

Reflection in Language Learning

Reflection is defined by Mynard (2023) as "the intentional examination of experiences, thoughts and actions in order to learn about oneself and inform change and personal growth" (p. 23). According to Thejll-Madsen (2018), reflection is used in multiple fields, including nursing, engineering, social sciences, as well as education, indicating its relevance in both professional and educational settings. Some potential benefits of reflection in the language-learning context include helping students notice their strengths and weaknesses, increasing self-efficacy, and spurring self-motivation (Maher, 2015).

However, there is evidence that students lack reflective skills, and those new to university, especially in the Japanese context, may have little or no experience with reflection (Sakata & Fukuda, 2018). Studies by Sampson et al. (2020, as cited in Mynard, 2023) and Sampson (2023) found that even after two years of practice, most students produced only basic, descriptive reflections, emphasizing the need for explicit reflective training. This idea is shared by Mynard (2023), who states that reflection "should coincide with training or awareness-raising for students about the purpose, process and benefits of reflection so that they see the value" (p. 29). Nonetheless, while explicit instruction requires classroom time, evidence shows that incorporating reflective activities into lessons improves both reflective and self-directed learning skills (Pemberton & Mynard, 2023), helping students become more familiar with the reflective process; however, the development of reflective ability is not necessarily linear. For example, Ambinintsoa and MacDonald (2023) found that over the course of an academic year, some learners' reflections deepened, while others became shallower or showed little change, suggesting that factors such as learners' interests, physical or emotional conditions, and their perceived value of reflection may mediate the impact of reflective instruction.

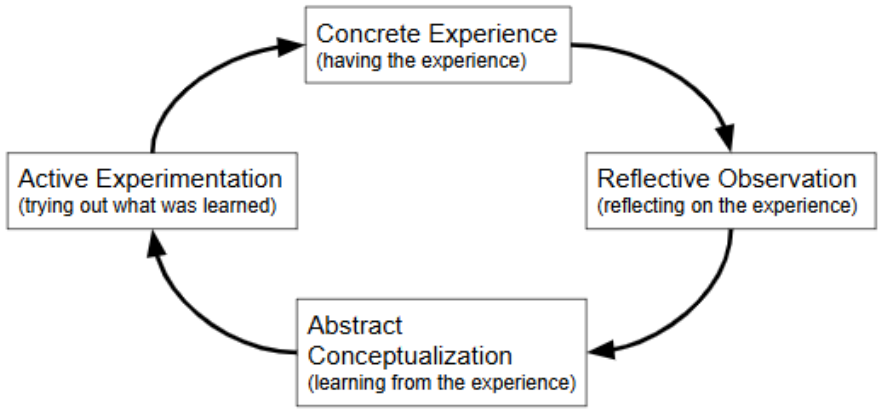
Experiential Learning and Task-Based Language Teaching

Reflection needs to have a purpose and not be implemented haphazardly (Boud & Walker, 1998; Thejll-Madsen, 2018). Therefore, it seems important to consider what students are reflecting on. Reflection often emerges from experiences (Boyd & Fales, 1983; Kolb, 1984; Mynard, 2023), highlighting the value of an experience-rich classroom that supports

reflective practice. Kolb's (1984) well-known experiential learning cycle clearly establishes these connections between experience and reflection: learners have a concrete experience, reflect on it, learn from it, and apply what they learned in the next iteration of the cycle (see Figure 1). In other words, experiential learning emphasizes "learning by doing" (Nunan, 2004). Incorporating the experiential learning cycle into the classroom can strengthen the connection between students' experience and their reflections.

Figure 1

Experiential Learning Cycle



Note. Adapted from Kolb (1984, p. 33)

An approach whose conceptual basis stems from the experiential learning cycle is TBLT, which frames experiences as "tasks" and similarly emphasizes "learning by doing" (Nunan, 2004; Wilson, 1986). TBLT is used in many contexts, and literature discussing its implementation is easy to find (Chunliu & Guangsheng, 2025). Tasks typically include four components: 1. focus on meaning; 2. some sort of gap; 3. use of learners' own linguistic resources; and 4) a clear communicative outcome (Ellis, 2003; Ellis & Shintani, 2014; Nunan, 2004). Tasks follow three phases: pre-task, task, and post-task (see Table 1) (Ellis, 2002). The post-task phase is critical for learners to help them understand their performance through reflection and feedback. For example, Khezrlou (2021) found that students who engaged in guided reflection between repeated tasks outperformed those who did not, demonstrating the value of reflection following concrete experiences.

Table 1

Phases of a Task

Phase	Main focus	Typical activities
Pre-task	Preparation	Introduce topic, teach key words, model task
Task	Communication	Complete a goal in group
Post-task	Reflection and feedback	Reflection, feedback, focus-on-form, reporting

Note. Adapted from Ellis (2002, p. 80)

TBLT has proven to have positive benefits on language learning, leading to increased language proficiency and communicative competence, and positive affective outcomes such as motivation, engagement, confidence, and reduced anxiety (Bao & Du, 2015; Chua & Lin, 2020; Chunliu & Guangsheng, 2025). Considering these points, implementing TBLT in communicative-based courses could work towards the overall goals of the course.

Based on the literature, it appears that while explicit student training can provide learners with the tools needed to become more effective reflective practitioners, a lack of "concrete experience" can leave students uncertain about what they are reflecting on (e.g., Ambinintsoa & MacDonald, 2023; Pemberton & Mynard, 2023). To address this, we designed a classroom lesson intended to provide such experience, beginning with a communicative task followed by an initial reflection. Explicit training to reflect deeply is then given, culminating in students reviewing and analyzing their earlier reflections. In doing so, we aim to help students engage more in the reflective process by having an experience directly tied to their own reflections.

Adapting a Reflective Lesson Through a TBLT-Informed Approach

Original Reflective Lesson

The original reflective activity, part of the mandatory reflective lessons for Freshman English, was designed to introduce students to deep reflection. It begins with the teacher or LA explaining how reflection can help students notice aspects of their language learning (e.g., difficulties or effectiveness of learning resources) and then describes the benefits of reflecting deeply. Key features of deep reflection are then highlighted, including examining

their feelings, thinking of solutions to problems, providing evidence to their claims, and brainstorming future directions. Then, the class reviews and discusses two example reflections–one deep and one less so. Finally, students work in groups to read, analyze, and discuss additional prepared sample reflections.

Rationale and Description of Adaptations

As mentioned in our introduction, we had two primary concerns regarding the original lesson, which led us to adapt it (see Appendix for the adapted lesson plan).

First, we thought that discussing prepared sample reflections could reduce engagement. To foster a more personal connection to the reflective process, we wanted students to write their own reflections. To address this concern, we adapted the lesson to follow the TBLT cycle: 1. pre-task warm-up discussion; 2. task to establish an experience; and 3. post-task written reflection about the task. While this provided the students with an experience to reflect on, we determined that the TBLT cycle alone was insufficient in providing the training necessary for students to reflect more deeply and the opportunity to analyze their own reflections.

To solve these deficiencies, we expanded beyond TBLT by including three more parts: 4. training to reflect deeply using the original reflective lesson; 5. revision of written reflections from the post-task; and 6. group discussion about improvements. However, this still left us with our second concern, that the original lesson might be too difficult for our students due to the language used and the amount of text to read. To address this, language from the original lesson was shortened and simplified for part four.

The lynchpin to the reflections was the first part of the adaptation: the experience, or task, as it shall be referred to henceforth. We decided to incorporate TBLT for four reasons. First, as stated in the literature review, its conceptual foundation in Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle aligns the task with reflection in the post-task phase, supporting improved performance. Second, we felt that TBLT offers extensive literature and practical guidance for classroom implementation. Third, both the Freshman English course at KUIS and TBLT emphasize communication. Finally, the focus on achieving a clear task outcome provides a concrete experience that supports meaningful reflection.

Description of the Task to Establish an Experience

In step two of our adapted lesson, we introduced a task to our students where they worked in groups to build a bridge using straws and tape. After 20 minutes, each bridge was

tested by placing it between two desks to see how much weight it could hold. The rules were simple: students could use only 25 straws, limit their use of tape, and speak only in English.

Teacher Reflections

Our modified lesson had six parts: 1. pre-task, 2. task, 3. post-task, 4. training to reflect deeply, 5. analysis, and 6. discussion. Since student data from the written reflections cannot be discussed, we will focus on our impressions of how the task was performed, student engagement with the training on how to reflect deeply, and the final discussions students had regarding their reflections. Our observations come from what we saw or heard in class, our feelings about it, and from discussions we had with one another following the lesson.

Task Performance

During the task, students appeared challenged by the language component, yet the classroom atmosphere remained positive, and engagement was consistently high. When communication breakdowns occurred, it looked as though students used gestures, manipulated the materials to convey their thoughts, or searched online for phrases to express their ideas and real bridge examples from which to draw inspiration for their own. These observations suggest that students' motivation to use English was likely high, as we did not notice the use of Japanese, indicating that tasks like this may support adherence to the ELI's English-only policy.

It appeared to us that the collaborative and unique nature of the task also helped lower the tension. Throughout the class, we witnessed students laughing as they talked to each other and often noted peer-teaching occurring as they demonstrated how to use the materials. When weights were added to the bridges, the class often reacted with excitement, creating a game-like atmosphere. We consider all of these as indications that students not only enjoyed the task but also remained engaged from start to finish.

To our knowledge, none of our students had previously experienced a task like this; they appeared to value the freedom it offered. While most groups focused on building a strong bridge, some prioritized aesthetics, going so far as to name them. In one class, this idea seemed to spread, and we sensed that the goal shifted from "holding the most weight" to "being the most beautiful and holding the most weight". We believe that in a traditional activity, students would not have had this opportunity to explore a different facet of the task.

We also felt that the task lent itself to facilitating richer reflection, as students observed the outcomes of their classmates' bridges. While we initially worried about distraction, students engaged analytically, discussing why a bridge succeeded or failed, suggesting thoughtful consideration of peers' ideas.

Training to Reflect Deeply

Our impression was that while the training fulfilled its role, it may have been the weaker part of this lesson. We noticed that students tended to lose focus, and during group discussions, several appeared unsure of what to do. We suspect this may be due to the energy expended during the task or the volume of new information presented at once. Specifically, Brandon observed that some students looked to be struggling with the amount of input, implying that more scaffolding might have helped streamline this section of the lesson. Regardless of these issues, we both agreed that the training seemed to have a positive impact on the students, as student discussions appeared to be self-analytical.

Discussions

A key adaptation from the original lesson was having students write and discuss their own reflections rather than using prepared examples. This change appeared to enhance engagement, with students openly sharing areas needing improvement with enthusiasm. In contrast, Jason observed that students discussing sample reflections in later classes were reluctant, and their discussions remained brief and superficial. This suggests that connecting reflections to personal experiences promotes deeper engagement.

Future Directions

When considering future directions, one key point is how tasks are integrated with reflection. This can be done in several ways. First, the task we described above could be repeated with the students. There is evidence that task repetition leads to improved language usage (Ellis, 2018), and further benefits arise when teachers ensure reflection is integrated (Khezrlou, 2021). An additional step could be combining task repetition with reviewing written reflections, which could provide the students with a stronger understanding of the benefits of deeper reflection. Second, similar hands-on tasks, such as building towers or egg-drop activities, could be paired with reflection to reinforce learning. Again, it would benefit the students to review past reflections from these tasks to remind them of previous experiences. This could be achieved through a reflective journal, which can help them check and monitor their progress, and create a habit of reflection (Kato & Mynard, 2016).

While the in-class training to reflect deeply appears to be effective, changes to its implementation could also be beneficial. Instead of front-loading everything into one lesson, it could be taught to students over several lessons, each with a different reflective focus. For example, one lesson could focus on the importance of feelings, and another could be solution-focused. This might help the students better understand the parts that make up the whole.

Final Thoughts

Integrating reflection in the classroom is not a novel idea; however, we believe combining reflection with tasks is an engaging and fun way for our students to practice both their language and reflective skills. Tasks lend themselves to reflection by helping the students focus on a condensed experience. We are thankful to be in a place that provides a rich environment for students to continue developing their reflective skills and that strives to integrate the SALC and the classroom. It is through our interactions with the SALC and LAs that we were driven to develop our own reflective practices and provide meaningful experiences to our students.

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Appendix

Lesson Plan Adapting TBLT with Training to Reflect Deeply

Estimated time	Step Teacher and students' role	Material	Type of classwork
5 minutes	1. Pre-task Teacher welcomes students and assigns groups. Students talk about what they have built and the useful language needed for making something.	● Slideshow	Group work
30 minutes	2. Task Teacher explains the task, hands out the material, and shows an example gap between two desks so they know how wide their bridges should be. Students make bridges in groups. After 20 minutes, each bridge is tested by adding weights until it collapses.	● 25 straws per group ● Roll of tape per group ● Weights to place on bridges	Group Work
15 minutes	3. Post-task Students write a reflection about their experience doing the task.	● Online worksheet	Individual
10 minutes	4. Training to reflect deeply Teacher lectures students about how to reflect more deeply.	● Slideshow	Whole class
15 minutes	5. Analysis Students review their reflection to identify strengths and areas for deeper reflection.	● Online worksheet	Individual
15 minutes	6. Discussion Students discuss their reflections and explain how they can make them deeper.	● Online worksheet	Group work

PanSIG 2025 Conference Report

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Author Biography

Christopher Ho was raised in Hong Kong and is now a fourth-year undergraduate student at Gifu Shotoku Gakuen University in Gifu, Japan. He is a student volunteer staff member at Lounge MELT, the social language learning space at his university. He is currently researching voice acting and intonation and plans to be a language teacher after graduation.

This short report is a review of and my reflections on the JALT PanSIG 2025 conference held from May 16th to 18th, 2025, at Kanda University of International Studies in Chiba, with the theme of *Agency and Autonomy in Language Education*. I participated in the SALC Showcase as a student volunteer staff member representing Lounge MELT (an acronym of "Maximum English Learning Together"), a self-access learning center located at Gifu Shotoku Gakuen University. As a future language teacher, I was delighted to be given the opportunity through the support of the JASAL bursary to attend different sessions throughout the conference to further broaden my knowledge of teaching and learning.

SALC Showcase

At the SALC Showcase, there were multiple exhibits of SALCs from other educational institutions, with posters and photos of events held lining the walls, while representatives explained the operations of their SALC. By attending the showcase, it helped expand my views and provided inspiration to further develop my SALC, the two main institutes I interacted with being English House from Chiba University and English Café at Otemon (E-CO) from Otemon Gakuin University.

English House at Chiba University holds activities such as Lunch Chats on a regular basis with rotating topics depending on the month, many social events focusing on different cultures around the world, and conversations with student advisors, as well as study groups for serious learners. I was intrigued by the sheer variety of services and events offered to the students, which give them so many opportunities to access different pathways of foreign language learning that can apply to different needs. Whether by multicultural events, peer consultation, or just through casual conversations, there is a way for each student to enjoy accessing the SALC.

The most striking aspect of E-CO at Otemon Gakuin University is the use of cooperative video games as an asset for self-access learning. I thought it must be an effective addition to a SALC, as having such a method would be a way not only to attract students through interest but also to increase the amount of second language usage and interpersonal contact, bond-developing by practicing natural and contextual communication along with plentiful amounts of problem-solving activities within the said video games.

Inspiring Sessions

Of the many presentations and workshops I attended over the three days, two in particular inspired me. As a volunteer with native Cantonese and near-native English-

speaking ability, I often teach or tutor students learning Chinese and English in Lounge MELT, and these sessions gave me ideas on how I can change my ways of teaching to effectively support autonomy in student language learning.

One of the Friday workshops, entitled *Becoming Aware of Cognitive Differences: Based on Korthagen's Reflection Theory* and led by Eriko Yamabe of Waseda University, focused on exploring how our cognitive processes function, using the Korthagen Reflection Model (Korthagen et al., 2001), and highlighted the role of both rational and subconscious elements in teaching. Participants engaged in group activities where we shared recent teaching experiences and reflected on our actions, thoughts, feelings, and intentions from multiple perspectives. We talked in small groups, and I shared the difficulties I faced as an international "outsider", which led to some useful and uplifting comments from my group members. The exercise made me realise that it is of paramount importance not only to reflect on our own actions as educators but also to assume the role of the learner to assess if our methods of teaching are sufficient or if someone is struggling and requires further support.

On Saturday, Nicholas Marx from Kanazawa Seiryu University gave a compelling presentation titled *Lived Emotional Experiences—What Can They Tell Us About Our Students and Our Teaching?* on how emotional experiences influence students in second language acquisition. He explained that perezhivanie—a concept from Vygotsky's (1994) theory—is rarely explicitly stated and yet is deeply ingrained in second language learning, showing the importance of emotional experiences such as engagement in classes, positive evaluation, and other intrapersonal factors. The session resonated with me as I have run into multiple negative emotional barriers during my learning of additional languages, mainly fear of peer expectations and negative evaluation, which used to shape my motivation, confidence, and willingness to participate.

Through the two sessions, I have learned that in order to support effective language learning, it's extremely important for teachers to have an understanding not only of what they want to teach, but also of how their students feel and what teaching methods would be productive for them both academically and emotionally.

Reflections on My Practices in My Current SALC Role

An idea I have for my SALC, inspired by Otemon Gakuin University's E-CO, is purchasing a Nintendo Switch console with the language set to English. By having a game console, Lounge MELT can offer cooperative and competitive video games as tools for language learning. As an avid gamer myself, I believe that offering the option of carefully

selected wholesome video games, such as *Super Smash Bros Ultimate*, *Overcooked!2* and *Pico Park*, Lounge MELT can create authentic opportunities for students to speak and listen to English in real time, encourage spontaneous conversation, and help build confidence in using English in a relaxed, enjoyable setting. It would also make the space more appealing to a wider range of learners, including those who might feel shy about traditional language learning activities such as holding presentations and parties. In comparison to other consoles on the gaming market, the Nintendo Switch sports a much more affordable price along with a more family-friendly library of games, both cooperative and competitive. Overall, I believe that the console would support Lounge MELT's goal of fostering autonomous, interest-driven, and communicative language use, while being at an affordable price, and would contribute to being a livelier, engaging environment for all. I am currently planning a gaming event in Lounge MELT with one of the learning advisors, putting what I learned at PanSIG 2025 into practice. I hope to play a role in adding a new dimension to our social language learning space.

At the PanSIG 2025 conference, by attending I had the opportunity to explore the operations of different self-access learning centers by attending showcases from different educational institutions, as well as multiple sessions introducing me to new ideas to language learning such as the importance of reflection and positive emotional experiences to overcome barriers of language learning. I look forward to using what I learned from this conference to expand my own way of running a SALC and to effectively assist in self-access learning as a whole.

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JASAL 2025 学会参加報告書

Report on JASAL 2025 National Conference

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馬渡 瞭は、宮崎大学工学部電気電子工学プログラムに所属する４年生であり、太陽電池モジュールに関する研究を行っている。その一方で、学生が気軽に英語に触れられる環境づくりを目的として、英語サークル「Direction」を立ち上げ、学生主導の英語活動の運営に携わっている。

2025 年 10 月 11 日に APU で開催された JASAL 2025 National Conference に参加し、英語によるポスター発表を行いました。本報告では、参加前に抱いていた期待と実際の経験、発表内容とそこから得られた示唆、他の発表からの学び、今後の実践への応用と後輩への助言について整理します。

本研究の発表にあたり、JASAL より学会参加のための旅費補助を受けました。ここに深く感謝いたします。

期待と実際の経験

参加前は「これまで参加したことのない国際学会での英語発表・質疑にどれだけ発表者として対応できるか」を試したいという期待がありました。また、国際的な環境として知られる APU を実際に見てみたいとも考えていました。実際には、多くの留学生や研究者が APU に集い、英語での会話が絶え間なく行われる活気ある環境でした。JASAL 2025 National Conference に参加したことで、英語での発表と質疑応答の難しさを痛感すると同時に、様々な国籍の研究者がもたらす異文化の環境に身を置くことで発表方法や質疑応答での対応方法を学ぶことができました。さらには学会テーマである「セルフ・アクセス・ラーニングにおける情緒要因」に関して、学習者の感情は学習が行われる環境や人との関わり方によって大きく左右されるという視点を得ることができ、英語活動を運営していくうえでの手がかりとなりました。

自分の発表（ポスター）の概要と学び

私は、指導教員である宮崎大学の川崎先生と共にこの学会に参加し、「Student-led English Activities in Engineering Faculty」というタイトルで宮崎大学工学部の学生主導による英語学習活動について、ポスター発表を行いました。具体的には、昼休みに行われている英会話活動 Lunchtime English を基盤とした学生リーダー組織の形成や、英語サークル「Direction」による英語活動、ワークショップ、大学祭での英語ブース運営など、多様な取り組みの実践を示しました。また、学生が主体となるこ

とで生まれた変化として、英語を使う心理的ハードルの低減、学習コミュニティの形成、留学生との交流による国際的視野の拡大などの成果を報告しました。さらに、後継学生の不足や活動のマンネリ化といった課題にも触れ、今後の活動の方向性について考察を述べました。

多くの方々にポスター発表に来ていただき、来訪者との双方向でのやり取りを通して英語を使って説明することができました。ポスター発表を通じて感じた主な点は次の通りです。

① 英語運用能力の課題：相手の質問を正確に聞き取る力、求められる回答を短時間で構成する表現力の不足を痛感しました。

② 感情と動機づけへの関心：聴衆からは、発表で紹介した英語活動へ取り組むモチベーションや感情に関する質問が多く寄せられ、自身の研究テーマと学会テーマ（感情・自律学習）が結びついて評価された点が印象的でした。

また、「自分の関心や好きなことに結びつけた英会話会やプレゼン会」を実施することで、より熱量のある英語環境作りが可能であり、異文化交流を促進できるというフィードバックを得られたことで、これからの英語活動のアイデアとして参考になりました。

印象に残った講演・発表

Dr. Maria Giovanna Tassinari（Freie Universität Berlin, ドイツ）による基調講演：学習者は単なる個人ではなく、「文脈の中の人」、つまりその人のアイデンティティ、歴史、将来のビジョン、社会文化的背景が学び方や感情、自律性の形成に大きく関わっており、その自律性は、必ずしも直線的ではなく、学習者のビジョンや他者、環境との相互作用によって生まれる動的なプロセスであることを知りました。特に印象に残ったのが、自己決定理論（Deci & Ryan 1985）の観点から導かれる、人の動機づけを支える 3 つの基本的欲求についての話です。まず一つに、自律性、自分で選び行動できること。次に、有能感、自分の能力を効果的に発揮し、目標を達成で

きるという感覚。最後に関係性、他者とつながっているという感覚。これらが満たされることで、学習への感情的安定、モチベーション、自己調整能力が向上するという説明があり、無自覚的に意識していたことが講演を通してより理論的に知ることができ、興味深く感じました。

また、口頭発表「AI-Powered Simulator for Advisor Professional Development」（Sina Takada, Vola Ambinintsoa, Emily Marzin, Jo Mynard, and Satoko Kato, 神田外語大学）：初心者から高レベル学習者まで段階的にAI英会話の難易度を変えられることが印象的で、教育現場での応用可能性を強く感じました。

さらに、ポスター「Enjoying Your Way to Fluency: Language Learning With Games」(Michael Hofmeyr, 東京理科大学）：実際に爆弾解除ゲームを体験し、ゲームの没入性と、二人で協力しながら相手に指示を正確に伝えなければ解除できないという仕組みにより、英会話を行う状況が自然に生まれることを実感しました。学習者の興味を引きつけ、集中を促す活動であり、学習デザインの重要性を改めて感じました。

ネットワーキングと交流

短時間でしたが、会場では国内外の研究者や学生と濃密に交流することができました。特に、異文化背景を持つ参加者との対話を通して、新たな視点や今後の英語活動につながる出会いを得ることができました。一方で、留学生との直接的な英会話体験は貴重で、発音・イントネーション・スピードの違いから生じる相互理解の難しさを実感しました。

後輩へのアドバイス

今回の学会に参加して、相手の英語を聞き取りながらその意図を素早く理解し、自分の考えを英語で組み立てて返す必要がある場面が多く、その大変さを実感しました。こうした瞬時の理解と発話を支える英語力は、日頃から意識して鍛えておくことが大切だと感じました。また、発表者となれば、事前に想定質問を多数準備

し、短く端的に答えられるよう練習することも必要となります。

自分が発表者となって参加してみたことで、発表内容を伝えたいという動機と熱意を意識的に示すと聴衆にも伝わりやすく、質疑応答では聞き取れなかったら聞き返す勇気を持つことで双方向のコミュニケーションとなり、相手との建設的な対話ができることが分かりました。

結び

JASAL 2025 National Conference は、幅広い学術的な示唆を得る場となっただけでなく、自分自身の英語による実践的な対話能力の課題と改善の方向性を明確にしてくれた貴重な機会でした。今後は今回の学びを踏まえてさらに英語学習活動の企画運営に積極的に携わりながら、大学院入学に向けて英語運用力と発表技術の両輪を高めることで、より効果的に研究成果を国際社会へ発信していきたいと考えています。

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JASAL 2025 Conference Report

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Author Biography

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The Japan Association for Self-Access Learning (JASAL) 2025 Annual National Conference was held on Saturday, October 11th, 2025, at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU) in Beppu, Oita prefecture, Japan. The theme of the conference was *Emotions in Self-Access Language Learning*. With 101 in situ attendees and 15 online, the JASAL community continues to grow. Conference attendees also had the opportunity to enjoy a tour of Ritsumeikan's self-access center on Friday, an evening networking reception on Saturday, and a post-conference social event on Sunday morning.

In this report, I will proceed chronologically through the events of the conference, beginning with the optional SALC tour, followed by a longer overview of the plenary presentation, then shorter summaries of the presentations and workshops I attended. The report will conclude with a reflection about social and practical aspects of the conference, as well as my personal takeaways, which revolve primarily around how to proactively build positive emotional experiences for students and staff at self-access learning centers.

SALC Tour

As a prelude to the conference presentations on Saturday, a tour of the self-access learning center (SALC) at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University was conducted by an enthusiastic pair of student peer advisors. 24 conference attendees were initially greeted by Steven C. Pattison and Lindsay Mack from APU, who gave us a history of the SALC there. Begun in 2006, it was founded in just one small room with limited materials including DVDs, extensive reading materials, and a small number of tutors focused primarily on administrative tasks. From those small beginnings, it has grown to be the large, varied facility today. Fabian Allen Valensius and Aoi Ozawa, the two peer advisors mentioned above, led us to each area of that facility. Rooms are designated by colors present in the décor, such as the blue room for self study; the sound-proof red room where language advisors give 30-minute advising sessions on Japanese or English language learning, aided by the ample standardized test preparation material present there; the green room, which features six booths for peer advising sessions for eight languages (Japanese, English, Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Korean, and Spanish), a number of options I found surprisingly large; and the tree room, the largest, central room of the SALC. The tree room includes a welcoming entrance area with conversational sofa for eight, a tatami-mat seating area and low table for six or more, a wide front desk where cheerful photos of every peer advisor are hung on the wall, extensive collections of board games, card games, manga, graded-readers, and a very special *tomodachi board*. This is a bulletin board on which students can record their contact

information, the language they wish to practice, and the languages they themselves are proficient in, for the purpose of finding friends and opportunities for practice conversation.

It was inspiring to visit such a successful and well-organized SALC. With around 400 unique students having made peer and learning advisor sessions last semester, it is clear that not only I as a visitor, but also the students at APU feel that the space is both a supportive and fun learning environment. With a myriad of events (picnics, talks on topics chosen by peer advisors, art events, etc.), students with a variety of interests clearly like to get involved.

Not to be forgotten, I was not only impressed by the number and variety of students who come to learn there, but also in the exceptional student staff. Our student tour guides were thorough and enthusiastic, even giving a workshop before the tour, which was a truly novel experience for me on a SALC tour, and shared with us their thorough training process. Peer advisors undergo weekly training sessions focused on both language and pedagogy, which no doubt contributes to the level of professionalism and confidence I saw displayed by Allen and Aoi.

From the start, with the introduction to APU's SALC goals (language proficiency, learner autonomy, and intercultural competence) to the final group reflection, the Friday afternoon tour of the SALC was surely a success.

Plenary Presentation

On Saturday the following morning, the plenary presentation, *Addressing Affect in Self-Access Learning Settings,* was delivered by Maria Giovanna Tassinari, PhD (Free University Berlin). She began by briefly clarifying key concepts such as affect for participants. She then explained how self-access language learning contributes to affect, emphasizing that the unity of emotion and cognition of learners in conjunction with the environment forms the basis for learning and decision making. Sources of affect in SALC were identified as the learning environment itself, the overall structure and provision of the self-access center, the activities and communities within it, and both learner–staff and staff–staff interactions.

Giovanna then engaged participants in a reflective activity. There were four scenarios related to supporting learners and staff in SALCs, and we reflected on what our emotions would be in the situations in order to understand the impact of affect more personally.

The presentation's final section examined affect within the advising process, highlighting advising sessions as privileged contexts for expressing, reflecting on, and regulating emotions throughout the learning journey. Drawing on Tassinari (2016), Giovanna

discussed research revealing a significant discrepancy between the emotional traces in learner and advisor discourse, with learners exhibiting far more emotional expression. Advisors, she argued, can enhance learning by helping students recognize and reflect on their emotions metacognitively (Tassinari, 2016). Giving ideas for emotional regulation strategies would also be beneficial (Shuman, 2013).

The session underscored the importance of integrating affective and meta-affective dimensions into advising practice for students (Tassinari, 2016), as well as being transparent about one's own emotions during sessions. The concept of metacognitively eliciting learners' emotions so as to guide them towards more positive emotions, regulation, and mindfulness was particularly compelling (Beseghi, 2022; Mozzon-McPherson, 2019; Shelton-Strong & Tassinari, 2022). Advisors themselves must become more empathetic and improve their own self-regulation in order to be more effective (Marzin et al., 2022).

Giovanna concluded by noting that there is much room for further research on emotions, feelings, and well-being of advisors, tutors, and SALC staff.

Concurrent Sessions

Following the plenary, the JASAL Annual General Meeting was briefly held before the concurrent sessions began, which included 29 presentations, two workshops, 10 poster presentations, and an additional opportunity for a tour of the Ritsumeikan APU SALC. Presenters came from all over Japan, and we were even privileged to have several international scholars attend and present, such as our plenary presenter. A few of the presentations are outlined below.

Yanki CHUNG — *Emotional Realities of an LLS in a Public High School in Tokyo*

In her practice-based presentation, Reitaku University's Yanki Chung described how she created an English learning space in a school where there was originally no out-of-class English learning and very low student interest, but which slowly gained in popularity. She shared several profiles of those involved in the space, highlighting how a large variety of emotional responses are likely to be present in both students and teachers who are unfamiliar with self-access language learning. Chung herself experienced enthusiasm, disappointment, and anxiety but found the project deeply rewarding overall. In her words, "mixed emotions, including discouraging moments, are part of the reality, not a failure". Her primary points for takeaway were how important student involvement is, as well as to bring a non-judgmental attitude to student disengagement.

Eucharia DONNERY — *Empowering Student Writers through Staff Training Sessions*

Eucharia Donnery described how she and others at Soka University aim to emphasize humanist education in her practice-based presentation. They do so by believing in students' "innate goodness" and "focusing on emotional well-being, learner- and learning-centeredness". The presentation promoted viewing students in terms of what they can do rather than what they cannot, giving feedback in order to guide them "from confusion to clarity, from turmoil to calm, from paralysis to empowerment". Advisors in writing centers should act as counselors rather than graders. When training writing center staff, they should practice active listening through techniques such as (1) using minimal encouragers, (2) speaking more slowly with longer pauses, (3) paraphrasing to ensure accuracy, and (4) asking students to summarize on their own. Trainings at Soka are held twice a semester, where students educate one another—seniors guiding juniors—and are conducted in both Japanese and English to ensure the principles are conveyed accurately.

Noriko KAWASAKI — *Process to Develop Student English Leaders at a Local University*

Noriko Kawasaki, from University of Miyazaki, explained her efforts to foster "global engineers" within a regional Japanese university context in her practice-based presentation. Her faculty's mission includes developing not only technical skills but also communication, language proficiency, and international mindsets. She identified several barriers to this goal, including the absence of a SALC, only one staff member being available to support these goals, the introverted culture of engineering students, and the potential misalignment between teacher and student interests. To address these challenges, Kawasaki organized joint research projects among local universities, established a student English club, and formed a student leader group. She has been able to sustain these activities thanks to willing student volunteers and emphasized that financial and institutional support remain essential for anyone seeking to maintain such initiatives. One main takeaway was that engineering students may have some fundamental differences from students majoring in communication or language, needing smaller steps towards involvement, a very clear sense of making progress, a feeling of loyalty or belonging to their university, and that a closeness to international students can be particularly beneficial.

John BANKIER — *When a Conversation Lounge Becomes a "Clique"*

In his practice-based presentation, John Bankier of Kanagawa University discussed the challenges that arise when a small number of students dominate conversation spaces, monopolizing teacher attention and creating an atmosphere that feels unwelcoming to others.

Having been present at the university in question while these issues were occurring, but not for the resolution, this presentation was of particular interest to me. Bankier noted that while intervention risks undermining the principles of self-access, self-access was being restricted regardless because students themselves were choosing to stay away from the SALC. Key factors included the lounge's separate location, the absence of SALC-specific staff, its perceived association with a single faculty rather than the entire student body, and the lack of a tradition of self-directed learning across ability levels. To address these issues, he implemented greater integration and oversight with the broader SALC, as well as more structured lounge sessions, such as posting daily topics to ensure discussions stayed on track. He also revised teacher/advisor training to give them the tools needed to include all students and gently guide cliques to be more inclusive. As a result of these changes, student comments about cliques disappeared from open-response feedback, indicating a more inclusive and balanced environment.

Satoko KATO — *Visualizing Learner Well-Being across 15 Dimensions*

From Kanda University of International Studies, Satoko Kato introduced an excellent new technological tool in her research-based presentation. Her research explored the relationship between autonomy and well-being, asking what lies beyond autonomy and why learner well-being matters. She defines autonomy as living and learning in line with one's authentic self, finding one's own voice and purpose in the process of learning. Well-being is more than happiness, she explained, and also includes meaning, connection, relationships, and accomplishment. The tool Kato introduced was designed to measure these aspects within language learning. It consists of a series of 60 questions, which, when answered, yield interactive graphs. The instrument measures 15 dimensions—meaning, achievement, engagement, positive emotions, relatedness, competence, autonomy, digital well-being, resilience, finance, physical environment, time, humor, vitality, and overall well-being—and is available in both Japanese and English (you can find the tool here: https://well-being-questionnaire.web.app/). Kato pointed out that it should not only yield scores but can also serve as a launching point for reflective activity, which I felt connected well with Giovanna's plenary presentation on the benefits of helping students assess their own affect and its impact on learning. This tool could serve well to that end.

Jordan SVIEN and Colleen SEKI — *Running a SALC-Integrated Bonus Credit Point Card System*

Hiroshima Bunkyo University's Jordan Svien and Colleen Seki shared how they developed a point card program to address declining second-term SALC usage in their practice-based presentation.

As only a small number of students are intrinsically motivated, the system was designed to appeal to extrinsically motivated learners. Their SALC had already used an attendance point card and prize raffle, which they expanded to operate year-round. Uniquely, they were also able to convince administrators to link the new system with course grades: students can earn up to 10% extra credit for completing the entire point card, or 1% per stamp if incomplete, in addition to eligibility for prize draws. Eligible activities include conversation practice, events, clubs, planning study goals, and advising sessions. The design of the cards is highly professional, and consistency and integration in advertising for events and eligible activities helped create recognition in the student body.

The results were positive as well. The program resulted in a 13% increase in overall SALC usage from 2023 to 2024 and reduced the usual second-term decline, though challenges remained in areas such as institutional approval, data tracking, communication with students about the policy, and avoiding a negative bell curve in student motivation.

Chhayankdhar Singh RATHORE — *Empathy in Action: SALC New Teacher Onboarding*

Finally, Chhayankdhar Singh Rathore from Konan Women's University led an extremely thoughtful workshop addressing the emotional and professional challenges faced by new SALC faculty. The session began with icebreakers and discussions to help participants envision the emotional landscape at the start of a new job. This was followed by an overview of faculty hierarchy and the role of SALCs within the traditional Japanese academic system.

A key issue identified was the disconnect between the qualifications required to manage a SALC and those listed in hiring criteria, which can lead to identity crises for new hires. While generally hired based on research or teaching qualifications, SALC managers must also function as advisors, managers, interlocutors, and teachers, as well as have a certain degree of technological affinity (due to the frequent use of data tracking or scheduling systems).

In order to help such overburdened staff, Rathore emphasized the importance of mentoring and structured onboarding, including (1) early advocacy to address discriminatory practices (such as native speakerism); (2) proactive outreach and onboarding sessions planned well in advance; (3) the content of the onboarding sessions themselves, such as time for incoming teachers' concerns, details of job responsibilities, clearly outlined expectations, addressing working and communication styles/culture openly, and the mechanisms in place for conflict resolution; and (4) continuous care through weekly well-being check-ins, constructive feedback, and power sharing by giving staff opportunities to exercise their own expertise.

Being rather new myself to working in a SALC, I felt strongly that the kind of onboarding presented in this workshop would have significantly eased my transition, and I believe it could be beneficial if administered again and more broadly. I look forward to implementing its principles in my own context.

Networking and Social Aspects

In addition to the presentations, there were ample opportunities to connect with other attendees. The Friday SALC tour included several opportunities for casual conversation. On Saturday morning, a morning mixer was held for 30 minutes or so before the opening remarks. Saturday evening saw the primary networking event take place, a two-hour dinner at a restaurant near Beppu Station. Finally, the Sunday post-conference social event was a particularly relaxed chance to get to know colleagues while exploring Beppu together. As a first-time conference attendee and new member of JASAL, I can attest to the truth of a phrase I heard repeated several times by various JASAL members: there was a friendliness, openness (lack of cliques), and mutual respect shown at every part of the conference that made even someone as inexperienced as I am feel I was an honored and important part of the group. I was immediately welcomed by everyone I interacted with.

Review of Practicalities

I must briefly note how well-organized the conference was. In the materials distributed before the conference, every possible piece of information needed to plan attendance had been thoughtfully prepared, including bus schedules, recommended hotels, and conference lunch information. The venue itself was organized conveniently, with all the presentations in close proximity and very clearly marked. Time was kept carefully by student

volunteers, so the entire conference was able to proceed almost exactly to the timetable posted. Overall, it was quite an impressive feat.

Reflection

I am coming away from this conference with a firm sense of how possible it is to anticipate and address the emotional needs of students and staff in SALCs and thereby improve the experience for all. I was deeply impressed by the idea of metacognitively addressing negative affect as presented in Giovanna's plenary presentation. In the weeks that have elapsed since the conference and the writing of this report, I have already begun to put into practice what she taught. Whenever I hear students speaking negatively about their learning or when I have heard student staff in our SALC speaking negatively about aspects of their position, I have drawn attention to their framing, offered positive reinforcement of my own, and invited them to be sure to include space for positivity in their own thinking.

Thanks to several actionable presentations focusing on staff training, I am also looking forward to discussing an overhaul of our own SALC staff training with my supervisor and team members. Weekly check-ins, clearer expectations, and focusing on active listening are three places I think will be easy to start.

Reflecting on the event as a whole, from the myriad of high-quality, information-dense presentations to the many convivial social and networking opportunities, the JASAL 2025 National Conference seemed to be a great success on every front. As I heard new friends and colleagues mention, perhaps the only unfortunate aspect of the event is that one is not able to attend every single presentation on the schedule. However, I am sure all who attended look forward to the conference next year, and, most of all, are coming away equipped with knowledge, skills, and aptitudes that will help us improve our self-access centers, no matter where we are.

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