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Investigating and Supporting Emotions in Self-Access Language Learning

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Similarly to the research on second language learning, research on self-access language learning (SALL) has recognised the importance of addressing the affective dimension both in research and in pedagogical practice. In a different way to the language classroom, self-access settings can provoke manifold and sometimes contradictory emotions in learners. Entering a self-access centre (SAC) for the first time can trigger insecurity, even anxiety, which may overshadow the curiosity, motivation, and desire to learn that brought them there. A learner needs to feel welcomed and supported in exploring the resources, and at the same time they need to feel free to act. Communities, such as conversation groups, may attract a learner's interest while simultaneously making them feel shy or even ashamed. Courage and openness are necessary to address a learning advisor. SAC staff, particularly student staff, may feel excited and motivated by the role they take on but also insecure, not competent enough, and then frustrated if their initiatives are not successful.

The body of research on affective aspects of self-access language learning in SACs is already significant. Following the JASAL National Conference in October 2025, which had the theme *Emotions in Language Learning*, the present issue of JASAL Journal serves as another forum to add questions and findings concerning this field. With regards to support for learners, those questions include how to design SACs in order to make them welcoming

spaces in which learners feel at ease; how to create pathways to participation that lower psychological barriers for students who are feeling anxious; how to support learners in reflecting about their well-being; how to provide structured support that aligns with a learner's level of autonomy; and how spaces and practices outside traditional self-access contexts might contribute to learner motivation, agency and well-being. Regarding the development of those who work in SACs, questions include how to find a balance between guiding student assistants while giving them the autonomy to contribute with their creativity; how to use technology to develop advising skills while supporting advisors' basic psychological needs; and how experience as educators in self-access centres can inform classroom teaching practices. Acting as a foundation for this research and the pedagogical practices it supports, self-determination theory, complexity theory, agency, and communities of practice approaches are some of the theoretical underpinnings which recur in the explorations of this exciting and complex field.

We start this issue with four research papers that look at different aspects of learners' affective processes and how to support them. The first of these is a study by **Geradine McCrohan** of Kagawa University, **James Broxholme** of Kwansei Gakuin University, and **Adam Sol Brod** of Kagawa University, who investigate patterns of willingness to communicate (WTC), anxiety, and confidence among frequent users of a SAC using survey data collected between 2015 and 2025. The post-COVID period has seen a shift in how users engage with the SAC, with a smaller proportion of students taking part in organised SAC activities and more students using the space for informal social interaction only. While the results show little variation in mean reported levels of WTC, anxiety, and confidence in pre- and post-COVID cohorts, analysis reveals that students who participated in structured activities reported higher levels of both WTC and anxiety than social-only users. This coexistence of WTC and anxiety suggests that anxiety does not necessarily preclude participation, and the authors argue that anxiety should be viewed as a normal part of learner development, not as a deficit to be eliminated. They recommend designing a variety of entry points and pathways to participation, integrating opportunities for language use into social spaces, and supporting communication that is "brave", not just "comfortable".

John Rowberry's paper similarly deals with the complex interactions between learner agency and emotions such as enjoyment, boredom, or foreign language anxiety. Drawing on data from self-directed learning portfolios and stimulated recall interviews with participants of a self-directed learning programme at Sojo University, the study investigates how emotions facilitated or constrained the learners' agency and what impact this had on

their use or non-use of the services and resources at their institution's SAC. Findings suggest a reciprocal relationship between positive emotions and agency, in which the freedom to choose activities that aligned with their personal interests and goals contributed to students' feelings of enjoyment and increased confidence, which in turn encouraged them to take further agentive action. Conversely, while some participants were able to overcome negative emotions, with those emotions even motivating learning in some cases, there were some participants for whom anxiety and fear of negative evaluation constrained their agency and limited their uptake of the learning affordances of the SAC. The author discusses implications for SACs and gives suggestions for how to help learners overcome such psychological barriers.

In "Visualizing Learner Well-Being in Language Learning: An Exploratory Classroom Implementation Supporting Reflective Dialogue", **Satoko Kato**, from Kanda University of International Studies, introduces a Language Learning Well-Being questionnaire, a tool designed for learners which scaffolds learners' reflection on their well-being in the language learning process. The questionnaire entails 60 items, covering 15 dimensions of well-being, such as meaning, positive emotions, relatedness, autonomy, time, vitality, and achievement. These dimensions are derived from a thorough analysis of theoretical frameworks, integrating research in self-determination theory, positive psychology, and language learner autonomy. The scores of the questionnaire are displayed as a radar chart, thus enabling learners to visualise their profiles as well as the relationships among the dimensions. The items were discussed with and validated by a group of experts and the pilot version of the questionnaire, both in Japanese and in English, was administered to a group of students in a self-access centre at the beginning and at the end of the semester. The findings suggest that making well-being visible through multidimensional visualisation may support autonomous learning by encouraging reflection and serving as a potential shared reference point for reflective dialogue.

Branden Carl Kirchmeyer, **Alison Koga** and **Kayoko Horai** of Sojo University explore the effects of emotions on students' agency and motivation through a case study in an interesting and novel context: self-access centre-hosted camping excursions. Through qualitative survey data, email interviews, field notes and post-camp observations, the authors found that social opportunities and the desire to spend time in nature motivated students to participate in the excursions, and that while some students experienced negative emotions at the beginning of the camps, by the end of them, these shifted positively. After the camps, increased participant motivation and agency emerged for engagement in activities beyond the

camping excursions, not only in language study, but also in the participation and development of further events. Their results highlight the benefits and potential of such events outside traditional self-access spaces. Based on their findings, the authors encourage other self-access practitioners to consider hosting similar events.

Next, we have two papers concerned with supporting the development of those who work in SACs and SALL. In *"*Colorful Conversation: Weekly Topics and Their Impact on Basic Psychological Needs at SAC Group Chat Sessions," **Christopher Cladis, Jeremy Eades,** and **Christopher Phelps**, from Osaka Institute of Technology, research the impact of an intervention aimed at providing student assistants in charge of conversation groups at the SAC of their university with support in the form of weekly topics. Drawing on the framework of basic psychological needs theory (BPNT), they aim to identify how the Weekly Topics system influences satisfaction of basic psychological needs both in student assistants and in students participating in the conversation groups. To do so, they interviewed two of the student assistants in charge and two regular participants and analysed their answers in the light of BPNT. Despite the limited sample and possible language challenges—the interviews were conducted in English, the target language of the participants—the findings of the research show several benefits of the intervention. Among others, the student assistants felt supported in providing more varied activities within the suggested topics, thus contributing with their own ideas and creativity, and further increasing their confidence and sense of competence. In addition, they communicated more often with their fellow student assistants, thus feeling their sense of community grow. The authors reflect on the experience and on the results of their investigation and draw conclusions for its further development and research.

Sina Takada, **Satoko Kato**, **Emily A. Marzin**, **Jo Mynard**, and **Dominique Vola Ambinintsoa**, of Kanda University of International Studies, present a research paper on the development of a web-based application that facilitates the practice of advising skills through simulated dialogues with AI avatars while supporting basic psychological needs. Takada and his colleagues surveyed eight participants, including teachers and learning advisors, and analysed their feedback through the lens of self-determination theory. Despite some technical issues with the application, and those related to the perceived depth of the conversations it replicated, the authors find that their participants respond positively to the application. Simulated dialogues within the application are perceived as similar to authentic advising sessions, providing a safe space to improve skills and enhancing the participants' sense of competence. Their study provides an innovative and practical example of how AI can be utilised in advisor education to promote growth in an autonomy-supportive manner.

In their discussions of practice paper, **Masako Wakisaka and Hiroaki Kobayashi** compare two eTandem projects, one between students in Japan and Korea, and one between students in Japan and Germany. In both projects, students were offered support in the form of a logbook app and advising sessions, with the aim of helping learners to reflect, solve problems, and adjust learning strategies. In the Japan–Korea project, in which the logbook and advising were optional, student uptake of the support was minimal. In the Japan–Germany project, however, the logbook and advising were systematically integrated into the programme as standard components for all participants. Analysis of logbook entries and post-programme interviews suggests that this structured framework helped students to sustain their learning activities. The authors discuss the importance of finding an appropriate balance between structure and flexibility that tailors support to learners' developmental stage of autonomy.

In their paper "When Advisors Become Teachers: Learner-Centered Classroom Practice", **Yuri Imamura**, from Shukutoku University, and **Robert Stevenson**, from Tamagawa University, reflect on how their background as language learning advisors at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) influences their classroom teaching. Drawing on their experiences at KUIS and robust theoretical frameworks including the reflective judgement model, transformative learning theory, and learner-centred environment principles, they discuss how they shaped their pedagogical approach with the aim of fostering learners' cognitive, metacognitive, and emotional development, through dialogic and reflective activities, using learning journals and peer- or self-assessment phases. Despite working at different institutions, they share their experience and reflect together on the opportunities and challenges of introducing a pedagogy for learner development in mandatory English courses.

George Hays of Tokyo International University contributes a reflective paper that considers how small choices in visual design may affect learners' emotional experiences in SACs. Drawing on self-determination theory, complex dynamic systems theory and self-access language learning literature, he examines the emotional impact of multiple design elements through informal conversations, observation, and reflection, while acknowledging the limitations of these methods. The paper highlights learners' positive reactions to vibrant colours and graphical design, as well as to student interns' photos and displays featuring students' work. Through this reflection, Hays offers several suggestions for creating visually inviting spaces that communicate safety and support and promote ownership, while considering issues surrounding inclusivity in SACs. He also invites further research based on

interviews with learners to deepen understanding of how various visual or spatial design elements contribute to emotional experience in self-access spaces and whether there are cultural differences in how they are perceived.

We finish this issue of JASAL Journal with a report by **Daniel Hooper**, **Sam Reid**, **Suwako Uehara**, and **Katherine Thornton**, who summarise the JASAL Forum at JALT2025. The presentations this year detailed initiatives at two self-access centres which highlighted the importance of reaching out to the wider university community and building strategic partnerships.

We would like to congratulate and thank the authors who contributed to Issue 7(1) of the *JASAL Journal*. We would also like to express our appreciation to the reviewers for their insightful and constructive feedback, and to the copyeditors for all their work behind the scenes.

A Repeated Cross-Sectional Study of Willingness to Communicate in a University Self-Access Centre Before and After COVID-19

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Abstract

This study investigates patterns in willingness to communicate (WTC), anxiety, and confidence among frequent users of a university self-access centre (SAC) across a ten-year period spanning pre- and post-COVID contexts. Using repeated cross-sectional survey data collected biennially from 2015 to 2025, the analysis compares overall trends and differences between two engagement types: students who participated in SAC classes or events alongside social interaction and those who primarily used the space for informal social interaction. Results showed that mean levels of WTC, anxiety, and confidence remained broadly stable over time, with no statistically significant differences between pre- and post-pandemic cohorts. However, engagement type revealed consistent variation. Students involved in organised SAC activities reported higher WTC than social-only users, but also higher communication-related anxiety, indicating that active participation may involve both motivation and perceived communicative risk. Descriptive patterns further suggested a post-pandemic shift in user composition toward more socially oriented participation. Overall, the findings suggest that frequent SAC users' willingness to communicate, anxiety, and confidence remain fairly stable, but their ways of engaging in the SAC may change in response to wider social and educational disruptions. This highlights the importance of SAC programming that encourages gradual, low-pressure participation.

本研究は、大学のセルフアクセスセンター（SAC）の頻繁利用者を対象に、COVID-19 前後を含む 10 年間（2015 年、2017 年、2019 年、2023 年、2025 年）の意思疎通意欲（WTC）、不安、自信の長期的傾向を検討した。繰り返し横断的調査データを用い、組織的活動にも参加する学生と主に交流目的で利用する学生の利用形態の差異を比較した。結果として、WTC、不安、自信の平均値は経年的に概ね安定しており、パンデミック前後で有意差は見られなかった。一方、組織的活動に参加する学生は WTC が高いが、不安も高い傾向が示された。さらに、パンデミック後にはより社会的志向の利用構成への変化が示唆された。以上より、基盤的なコミュニケーション傾向は安定している一方、参加様式は環境変化に応じて適応する可能性が示された。

Keywords: willingness to communicate, self-access centres, student usage patterns, repeated cross-sectional design

Since the concept of willingness to communicate (WTC) in second language acquisition was first introduced by MacIntyre and colleagues in the 1990s, it has been widely conceptualised as a dynamic construct shaped by the interaction of affective, cognitive, and situational factors (MacIntyre et al., 1997; MacIntyre et al., 1998) that influence an individual's readiness to initiate communication. Within educational contexts, research suggests that these dimensions operate in systematic ways: affective factors such as communication anxiety tend to be negatively associated with WTC, whereas confidence is positively related; cognitive factors, particularly perceived communicative competence, are consistently linked to higher WTC; and situational factors, including the affordances of specific learning environments, can either facilitate or constrain opportunities for communication (Le et al., 2018; Peng & Woodrow, 2010). In Japanese higher education settings, research conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic indicates that students' WTC varies across interactional contexts, with greater willingness typically observed in small-group or familiar peer interactions than in whole-class or high-stakes speaking situations (Yashima, 2002). These findings point to the potential importance of semi-formal environments such as self-access centres (SACs), which may provide lower-pressure opportunities for participation and thereby support communicative engagement and confidence development.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought rapid shifts in language-learning ecologies, most notably through the transition to emergency online and hybrid instruction. A growing body of research has examined how these changes influenced learners' WTC. Studies during periods of remote instruction frequently reported reduced willingness to speak in synchronous online environments, particularly for spontaneous or interaction-heavy tasks, with technological constraints, reduced social presence, and heightened communication anxiety identified as key factors (Altunel, 2021; Parkin, 2021). However, findings have not been uniformly negative; some learners demonstrated greater willingness to participate in dyadic or text-based interactions (Abulhaija et al., 2024). This pattern is consistent with pre-pandemic research on modality and WTC, which suggests that different interactional modes can differentially shape learners' willingness to communicate (Le et al., 2018).

More recent research comparing pre- and post-pandemic groups suggests that the long-term effects of COVID-19 on communicative dispositions may be complex rather than uniformly detrimental. For instance, studies of Japanese university students report that overall motivation and global WTC remained relatively stable across pre-, mid-, and late-pandemic

groups, although declines were observed in presentation-related communication and interest in international engagement (Mayers et al., 2023). Similarly, Afidawati et al. (2024) found that some learners developed passive communicative behaviour during remote learning that persisted into face-to-face contexts, manifesting as lower confidence and increased anxiety when speaking in front of live audiences. Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of examining multiple affective dimensions, such as WTC, confidence, and anxiety, rather than treating WTC as a single, isolated variable.

Despite these developments, research spanning extended pre- and post-COVID timeframes remains limited, particularly in informal or semi-formal learning environments. This gap is important because SACs occupy an intermediate space between formal classroom instruction and autonomous learning. Participation in SACs is typically voluntary, socially situated, and less performance oriented, meaning that communicative behaviour may develop differently from that observed in compulsory classroom settings. Examining patterns in WTC, anxiety, and confidence across multiple SAC user groups, therefore, provides a context-specific perspective on whether communicative dispositions have shifted over time and how these patterns align with, or diverge from, classroom-based findings. Accordingly, the present study compares pre-COVID (2015, 2017, 2019) and post-COVID (2023, 2025) SAC participants using three sections of a WTC questionnaire to explore changes in communicative and affective profiles.

WTC in Self-Access Centre (SAC) Setting

Self-access centres (SACs) represent a shift in language education beyond the traditional classroom by supporting learner autonomy through flexible, learner-driven opportunities for study and social interaction (Benson, 2011; Reinders & Benson, 2017). While early SACs primarily functioned as resource repositories, contemporary SACs are increasingly conceptualised as social learning spaces in which collaboration, identity formation, and authentic communication play central roles in language development (Murray et al., 2017; Mynard et al., 2023). These environments typically involve reduced performance pressure due to the informal and voluntary nature of participation in SACs. Such conditions may be particularly supportive for learners who are hesitant to speak in formal instructional settings, while also encouraging more confident learners to engage in extended interaction. These conditions may also have implications for SAC practitioners. Learners who participate

actively in SAC activities may still experience relatively high communication anxiety, suggesting that anxiety and active engagement can coexist.

In addition, socially oriented participation may function as a pathway toward greater familiarity and involvement within SAC communities rather than simply representing non-academic use. Qualitative research in Japanese SAC contexts suggests that sustained participation can enhance learners' confidence and reduce fear of making mistakes due to the supportive and collaborative atmosphere characteristic of these spaces (Bibby et al., 2016; Noguchi, 2015).

Environmental design and social affordances also play an important role in shaping communicative behaviour. Jauregi-Ondarra et al. (2022) argue that learners are more willing to speak when environments are perceived as safe, purposeful, and socially meaningful. Similarly, Murray et al. (2017) conceptualise SACs as communities of practice in which participation is invitational rather than compulsory, allowing learners to gradually increase communicative engagement through socially meaningful interaction. Although previous research in Japanese university contexts has examined SACs from perspectives such as motivation, advising practices, and usage patterns (Gillies, 2010; Hooper, 2021; Tweed, 2019), relatively few studies have focused specifically on learners' WTC or tracked changes in communicative dispositions over extended periods.

Moreover, much SAC research remains qualitative, cross-sectional, or focused on specific subgroups such as highly engaged users or student staff. Quantitative research examining patterns in WTC, anxiety, and confidence across time within SAC contexts is therefore limited. This gap is particularly salient in the post-pandemic context, as disruptions to physical learning spaces may have altered patterns of participation and interaction in informal language environments. The present study addresses this need by examining affective variables among frequent SAC users across a ten-year period spanning both pre- and post-pandemic periods.

The Communicative Disruption: The COVID-19 Pandemic and L2 Willingness to Communicate

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered opportunities for spontaneous interaction, a key component of communicative language learning. Beyond broad shifts in participation patterns, research has highlighted how specific features of online environments reshaped the conditions under which WTC emerges. Task design, interactional format, and teacher facilitation played an increasingly central role in shaping learners' willingness to

participate (Altunel, 2021; Liu, 2024). These findings suggest that WTC in online contexts is not uniformly diminished, but highly sensitive to the configuration of interactional conditions. At the same time, learners reported divergent affective responses: some benefited from reduced performance pressure, whereas others experienced increased anxiety related to camera use, technological uncertainty, and the absence of non-verbal cues (Altunel, 2021).

From Physical to Virtual Hubs: SAC Participation During the Pandemic

Disruptions to physical SACs were also substantial during the pandemic. Studies have noted the temporary loss of key environmental affordances, including drop-in culture and spontaneous social encounters that typically characterise self-access spaces (Davies et al., 2020; Ohara & Ishimura, 2020). In response, many SACs transitioned to virtual platforms, offering online advising, digital conversation lounges, and remote support services (Hayashi et al., 2021; Kelly et al., 2020).

However, participation patterns shifted in important ways. Engagement often became more structured and advisor-mediated, while casual interaction declined among students who primarily valued SACs as low-pressure social environments (Davies et al., 2020; Mynard et al., 2023). Although online advising was positively received in some contexts, comparisons of pre- and post-pandemic preferences suggest that physical SAC spaces remain particularly important for building interactional confidence and fostering a sense of community (Mynard et al., 2023; Sullivan & McAuley, 2023).

Implications for Pre/Post-Pandemic SAC Research

While short-term studies documented immediate pandemic-related shifts in communicative behaviour, research comparing extended pre- and post-pandemic periods within the same institutional SAC context remains scarce. Analyses across multiple time points are therefore needed to determine whether observed changes reflect temporary disruption or more enduring shifts in communicative patterns. By examining WTC, confidence, and anxiety across multiple data collection points spanning a decade, the present study provides a longer-term perspective on how changes in the self-access environment may relate to patterns in learners' communicative orientations.

Study Setting

The study was conducted in a university Self-Access Centre (SAC) in Japan, centrally located on the main campus. The facility is introduced to first-year students during orientation and functions as a multilingual social learning space where students can engage in

informal conversation, peer interaction, independent study, and optional workshops and events. The centre includes areas designed for individual study, collaborative work, and social interaction, allowing students to use the space flexibly according to their personal goals.

Like many SACs worldwide, the centre's operations were significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The facility was closed throughout the 2020 academic year and reopened in 2021 under public health restrictions, including reduced operating hours and time limits on student stays. Although these measures were gradually relaxed in 2022, full return to standard operations was not achieved until 2023. By 2025, usage indicators such as footfall and duration of stay suggested a return to pre-pandemic levels.

Nevertheless, observational data from staff indicated that patterns of engagement had shifted. While students returned to the physical space, participation in organised classes and events appeared lower than before the pandemic, while staff observations suggested increased use of the SAC for informal social interaction. Such interaction typically involved students spending time with friends, eating lunch, or engaging in casual conversation within the SAC rather than participating in organised classes, events, or advising sessions This observed change in participation profiles provided the institutional motivation for the present study, which investigates whether psychological constructs, specifically WTC, confidence, and anxiety, differ between pre- and post-pandemic frequent SAC users.

Research Questions

The study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: Do WTC, Anxiety, and Confidence differ across survey years?

RQ2: Do scores differ between the pre-COVID (2015–2019) and post-COVID (2023–2025) periods?

RQ3: Do these outcomes differ between users who participate in SAC classes/events in addition to social interaction (Group A) and users who use the SAC only for socialising (Group B)?

These questions enable comparison across multiple time points and examination of engagement-related differences within the SAC, where affective variables may strongly influence participation. Unlike classroom settings, SACs rely on self-directed, socially situated interaction, meaning that learners' willingness to communicate, confidence, and anxiety may influence patterns of participation in activities, events, and informal learning opportunities.

Participants and Methodology

The WTC scale was originally developed by McCroskey (1992), and the Japanese version, based on Yashima (2002), was used in this study. It was administered in paper format to frequent SAC users identified through attendance records (see Appendix for Japanese and English translations of the WTC questionnaire). Questionnaires were distributed directly to students upon entry to the SAC, and the majority were completed and returned during the same visit; however, formal response rates were not recorded. The questionnaire was administered in Japanese using a six-point Likert scale and drew on established WTC instruments used in prior research with Japanese learners (e.g., MacIntyre et al., 1998; Yashima, 2002). While the items reflect general communication situations rather than SAC-specific interactions, they capture learners' willingness to initiate L2 communication, conceptualised as a context-sensitive construct applicable across different interactional settings. In this study, WTC is therefore interpreted as a general communicative disposition that may influence patterns of participation within the SAC, rather than as a direct measure of SAC-specific behaviour.

Participants were asked to indicate their typical SAC usage patterns (multiple responses permitted), including participation in classes/events, private study, and social interaction. In this study, *social interaction* refers to informal, unstructured use of the SAC space (e.g., spending time with friends, chatting in Japanese, eating lunch, or engaging in non-academic activities such as playing games), rather than participation in organised language-learning activities such as conversation tables, advising sessions, or events. The language used during these social interactions was not systematically recorded and may have included both Japanese and English. In practice, language choice likely varied according to the composition of the group, with interactions involving international students often including English, whereas interactions among Japanese students were frequently conducted primarily in Japanese.

Self-reported usage was cross-referenced with participation records to enhance accuracy. For analysis, responses were recoded into two usage categories based on the presence or absence of participation in organised SAC activities. Students were classified as Group A if they participated in at least one organised SAC activity during the semester, while Group B included students who did not participate in any organised activities. In practice, Group A students were regular participants who typically attended SAC classes on a weekly basis and participated in one or more events during the semester. Given the regular availability of organised activities (e.g., multiple classes per week, student-led sessions, and

special events), this threshold distinguishes between students with any engagement in structured SAC programming and those whose use of the space was exclusively informal.

Only students who used the SAC regularly (defined as an average of at least one visit per week across the 15-week semester, based on attendance records) during the autumn semester of each data collection year were asked to participate. Because frequent SAC users are predominantly first- and second-year undergraduates, the survey was conducted biennially (2015, 2017, 2019, 2023, 2025) to ensure independent samples rather than repeated responses from the same individuals. Consequently, each dataset represents a distinct sample of frequent users (2015: n = 34; 2017: n = 30; 2019: n = 32; 2023: n = 21; 2025: n = 28). Across all years, participants were primarily first- and second-year students (over 70%) drawn from a range of faculties, with Economics and Education most strongly represented. As the study focuses exclusively on this subgroup, the findings cannot be generalised to the wider student population.

Following data collection, responses were entered into Excel, with reverse-coded items adjusted prior to analysis, and then imported into JASP (an open-source statistical analysis program). Responses were scored by calculating mean scores for three eight-item questionnaire sections: (a) Willingness to Communicate (WTC), (b) Anxiety, and (c) Confidence. Higher values indicated greater WTC, higher anxiety, and higher confidence, respectively. Analyses focused on these subscales, as they represent conceptually distinct constructs. Inter-scale correlations were calculated to examine the relationships among the three subscales. WTC was moderately positively correlated with both anxiety ($r = .48$) and confidence ($r = .48$), while anxiety and confidence also showed a relatively strong positive association ($r = .66$). These results indicate that the constructs are related but not simply oppositional, supporting their treatment as distinct dimensions of learners' communicative experience. The use of parallel situational items may contribute to shared variance across subscales; however, the moderate correlations observed suggest that the constructs are not reducible to a single underlying dimension.

Table 1

Correlations Among WTC, Anxiety, and Confidence

	WTC	Anxiety	Confidence
WTC	—	.48	.48
Anxiety	.48	—	.66
Confidence	.48	.66	—

To address RQ3, participants were classified into two usage groups: (a) users who attended SAC classes and/or events in addition to social interaction (Group A) and (b) users who used the SAC only for socialising (Group B). Independent-samples Welch's t-tests were used because group sizes were unequal and homogeneity of variance could not be assumed. Hedges' g was reported as the effect size measure because it provides a more conservative estimate for small or unequal samples. Comparisons were conducted both within individual years and using pooled pre-COVID (2015–2019) and post-COVID (2023–2025) datasets. Pooling was undertaken to increase statistical power and improve the reliability of comparisons, given the relatively small sample sizes in some individual years.

Results

Across the five data-collection points, only minor numerical fluctuations were observed. WTC ranged from 3.13 to 3.27, Anxiety from 2.82 to 2.95, and Confidence from 2.68 to 2.75 (Table 2). Confidence intervals overlapped substantially across years for all scales, indicating that differences between specific groups were small in magnitude.

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and 95% Confidence Intervals by Year for WTC, Anxiety, and Confidence

Scale	2015 (*n*=34)	2017 (*n*=30)	2019 (*n*=32)	2023 (*n*=21)	2025 (*n*=28)
WTC	3.15 (0.49) [2.98, 3.32]	3.18 (0.48) [3.00, 3.36]	3.13 (0.50) [2.95, 3.31]	3.27 (0.45) [3.07, 3.47]	3.21 (0.48) [3.03, 3.39]
Anxiety	2.82 (0.54) [2.63, 3.01]	2.85 (0.54) [2.65, 3.05]	2.82 (0.54) [2.63, 3.01]	2.95 (0.50) [2.73, 3.17]	2.91 (0.53) [2.71, 3.11]
Confidence	2.72 (0.34) [2.60, 2.84]	2.75 (0.34) [2.63, 2.87]	2.73 (0.34) [2.61, 2.85]	2.68 (0.31) [2.55, 2.81]	2.69 (0.35) [2.56, 2.82]

Note. Values are M (SD) [95% CI].

Looking at RQ2, (pre- vs post-COVID comparisons), independent-samples Welch's t-tests comparing pre-COVID (2015–2019) and post-COVID (2023–2025) groups revealed no statistically significant differences for any outcome measure (Table 3). Effect sizes were small ($|d| \leq .25$), with only slight tendencies toward higher anxiety and marginally lower confidence in the post-COVID group. These findings suggest that the communicative orientations of frequent SAC users remained largely stable across the pandemic period.

Table 3

ANOVA and Pre–Post COVID Comparisons with 95% Confidence Intervals

Scale	Test	Statistic	*p*	Effect size	95% CI -mean difference
WTC	ANOVA (Year)	F (4,140)=0.31	.87	η^2=.009	—
	Pre vs Post	t=−1.00	.32	d=0.17	−0.28 to 0.09
Anxiety	ANOVA (Year)	F (4,140)=0.30	.88	η^2=.008	—
	Pre vs Post	t=−1.06	.29	d=0.18	−0.34 to 0.10
Confidence	ANOVA (Year)	F (4,140)=0.21	.93	η^2=.006	—
	Pre vs Post	t=0.87	.39	d=−0.15	−0.08 to 0.20

Note. CIs in the t-test rows represent 95% CIs for the mean difference (Pre − Post). Pre-COVID = 2015–2019; Post-COVID = 2023–2025. Welch t-tests were used where variances differed.

RQ3 examined whether WTC, anxiety, and confidence differed between students who used the SAC for both informal classes/events and social interaction (Group A) and those who used the SAC primarily for socialising (Group B). Year-by-year Welch t-tests (Table 4) indicated that Group A generally reported higher WTC than Group B, although most annual differences did not reach statistical significance, likely due to smaller Group B sample sizes. For Anxiety, Group A also tended to report higher scores, with the largest group difference observed in 2023.

Table 4

Year-by-Year Comparisons of Group A (A) and Group B (B) (Welch t-Tests)

Year	Scale	A n	A M	A SD	B n	B M	B SD	t	df	p	g
2015	WTC	23	3.22	0.47	11	3.01	0.52	1.14	18.03	.270	0.42
	Anxiety		2.92	0.52		2.63	0.54	1.50	19.08	.151	0.54
	Confidence		2.68	0.32		2.81	0.38	−0.92	16.90	.370	−0.35
2017	WTC	24	3.23	0.46	6	2.98	0.53	1.07	7.04	.322	0.51
	Anxiety		2.89	0.53		2.69	0.62	0.74	6.91	.485	0.36
	Confidence		2.70	0.32		2.94	0.39	−1.35	6.79	.220	−0.68
2019	WTC	25	3.24	0.45	7	2.77	0.51	2.19	8.80	.057	0.98
	Anxiety		2.91	0.52		2.50	0.54	1.78	9.44	.107	0.75
	Confidence		2.73	0.33		2.75	0.40	−0.15	8.56	.882	−0.07
2023	WTC	10	3.40	0.46	11	3.15	0.43	1.29	18.52	.212	0.54
	Anxiety		3.18	0.50		2.74	0.42	2.16	17.61	.045	0.91
	Confidence		2.81	0.27		2.56	0.30	2.04	19.00	.056	0.85
2025	WTC	12	3.34	0.44	16	3.12	0.49	1.28	25.06	.214	0.47
	Anxiety		3.09	0.50		2.77	0.53	1.64	24.67	.115	0.60
	Confidence		2.75	0.30		2.64	0.38	0.85	25.94	.401	0.30

Pooled pre- and post-COVID comparisons (Table 5) showed a consistent pattern across eras. In the pre-COVID period, Group A reported higher WTC ($p = .016$, $g = 0.63$) and higher anxiety ($p = .022$, $g = 0.57$) than Group B, while confidence did not differ significantly. In the post-COVID period, the same directional trend remained: Group A showed higher WTC (trend-level, $p = .070$) and higher anxiety ($p = .011$, $g = 0.76$), with a small, non-significant tendency toward higher confidence.

Table 5

Pooled Pre- and Post-COVID Comparisons of Group A and Group B

Era	Scale	A n	A M	A SD	B n	B M	B SD	t	df	p	g
Pre	WTC	72	3.23	0.46	24	2.93	0.51	2.54	36.02	.016	0.63
Pre	Anxiety	72	2.91	0.52	24	2.60	0.54	2.39	37.95	.022	0.57
Pre	Confidence	72	2.70	0.32	24	2.82	0.38	−1.38	34.78	.178	−0.35
Post	WTC	22	3.37	0.44	27	3.13	0.46	1.86	45.75	.070	0.52
Post	Anxiety	22	3.13	0.49	27	2.76	0.48	2.67	44.70	.011	0.76
Post	Confidence	22	2.78	0.28	27	2.61	0.35	1.92	47.00	.062	0.53

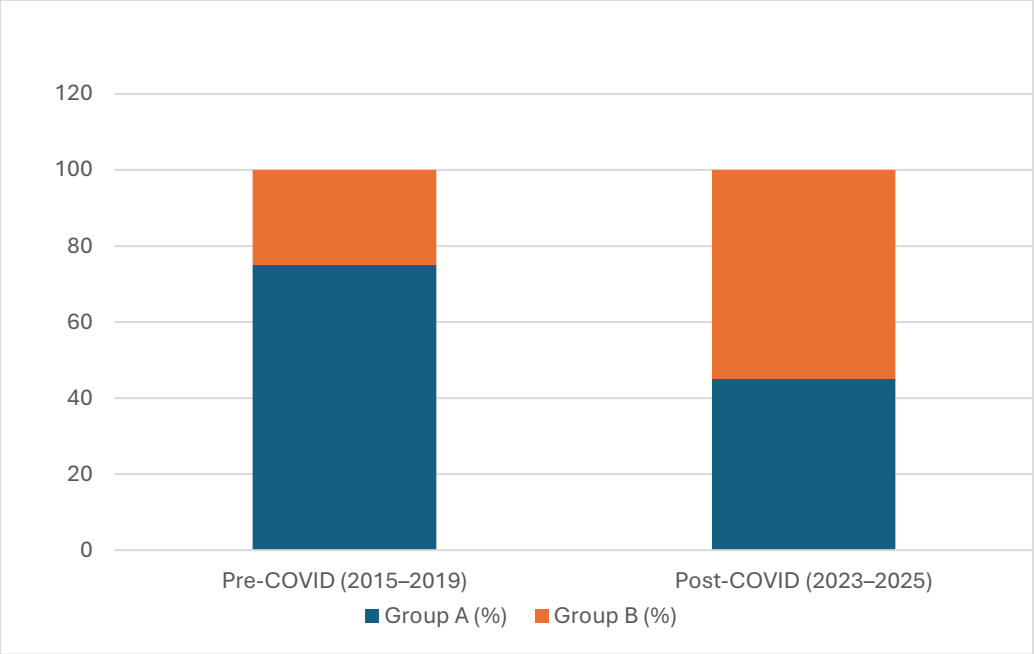
Overall, students who participated in organised SAC activities (Group A) reported higher willingness to communicate but also higher levels of communication-related anxiety than social-only users (Group B). This pattern was consistent across both time periods, suggesting that participation in structured activities may be associated with greater perceived communicative challenge rather than reduced anxiety.

A descriptive comparison of user composition further indicated a substantial shift in participation patterns. In the pre-COVID period (2015–2019), 72 of 96 frequent users (75%) were classified as Group A and 24 (25%) as Group B. In the post-COVID period (2023–2025), this distribution changed to 22 of 49 users (45%) in Group A and 27 (55%) in Group B, indicating a relative increase in social-only users after the pandemic (Figure 1). A chi-square test of independence confirmed that this shift was statistically significant, $\chi^2 (1) = 12.98$, $p < .001$.

This change suggests a notable transformation in how students engage with the SAC, with fewer users participating in structured activities and a greater proportion using the space for informal social interaction.

Figure 1

Proportion of Group A and Group B SAC Users (Pre- vs Post-COVID)



Taken together, the results indicate a stable overall profile of WTC, confidence, and anxiety among frequent SAC users across the decade, with no significant pre- to post-COVID shifts at the aggregate level. However, engagement type revealed a more nuanced pattern: activity participants consistently demonstrated higher WTC alongside higher anxiety. Moreover, the post-pandemic period was characterised by a greater proportion of social-only SAC users.

Discussion

Stability of WTC, Anxiety, and Confidence Across Survey Years

A primary finding of this study is the high degree of stability in WTC, anxiety, and confidence among frequent SAC users across the ten-year period. The post-COVID cohorts consist of different students, most of whom were not enrolled at the university during the pandemic. As such, the findings reflect post-pandemic patterns of engagement rather than continuity in the behaviour of the same individuals. Mean scores fluctuated only marginally; notably, overlapping confidence intervals and small effect sizes indicate limited year-to-year variation. This stability across pre- and post-COVID periods suggests that the communicative

dispositions of frequent SAC users remained broadly consistent across cohorts, despite changes in the educational context.

This pattern aligns with theoretical frameworks that conceptualise WTC as shaped by both situational factors and relatively enduring affective tendencies (MacIntyre et al., 1998). While the pandemic fundamentally altered learning ecologies and temporarily reduced opportunities for spontaneous interaction, the affective profiles observed in SAC users did not show a substantial decline. This stability should be interpreted with caution, as the study reflects cohort-level patterns rather than individual continuity and focuses on a self-selected group of frequent SAC users rather than the broader student population. That being said, the voluntary nature of frequent SAC users' participation may provide a useful lens for interpreting these findings. Unlike classroom contexts, where interaction is often mandatory and structured, SAC environments are socially self-selected. Students who frequently use the SAC may therefore represent a subgroup with stronger intrinsic motivation for communication and social engagement. In this sense, the SAC may function as a relatively stable interactional ecology for learners who are inclined to seek communicative opportunities, even when broader educational conditions are disrupted.

Participation Patterns

The stable affective measures contrast with a clear shift in how students utilised the SAC. While dispositional variables remained steady, participation in organised activities (Group A) dropped from 75% pre-COVID to 45% post-COVID, with a corresponding rise in social-only engagement (Group B). This statistically significant transition suggests that the longer-term post-pandemic changes may be more visible in patterns of participation than in broad affective dispositions. Thus, the most significant shift may lie in participation culture rather than in core affective variables such as WTC or confidence.

One possible interpretation is that a greater proportion of students now use the SAC primarily as a low-pressure social environment rather than as a space for structured participation. While the present study does not directly examine the causes of this shift, it may reflect broader post-pandemic changes in student behaviour, including altered social habits, reduced participation in structured activities, or changes in SAC programming and participation opportunities. This interpretation is also consistent with research suggesting that students may conceptualise self-access learning primarily in relation to the SAC as a social or environmental space rather than as participation in specific learning activities (Warrington, 2022). From a practical perspective, these findings highlight the importance of maintaining a

range of engagement pathways within SAC environments, including both structured and low-pressure social interaction opportunities, to accommodate evolving student needs.

Engagement Type and the WTC–Anxiety Relationship

Analysis by engagement type revealed a consistent, albeit nuanced, trend: students involved in both organised SAC activities and social interaction (Group A) reported higher WTC than social-only users (Group B). This is consistent with community-of-practice perspectives (Murray et al., 2017), where deeper participation supports communicative investment.

Interestingly, Group A also reported higher anxiety. This suggests that WTC and anxiety often coexist; for active participants, the perceived value of engagement likely outweighs the discomfort of communicative risk. This finding is consistent with recent SAC research indicating that anxiety remains a significant factor even among learners who actively participate in self-access environments (Suzuki & Hooper, 2024). However, a distinction must be made between the dispositional WTC measured by the questionnaire and the actual participation behaviour recorded in SAC attendance logs. While the survey captures hypothetical willingness across various scenarios, the Group A/B classification provides a behavioural proxy. The fact that those who participated more actively in the SAC (Group A) also reported higher willingness on the survey suggests a possible relationship between communicative disposition and participation patterns, even if the questionnaire itself is decontextualised.

These findings challenge linear assumptions that higher WTC must stem from reduced anxiety. Instead, it supports a dynamic view in which engagement involves navigating emotional challenges. Anxiety may not necessarily inhibit participation; in socially meaningful contexts like the SAC, it may accompany a learner's communicative effort (Suzuki & Hooper, 2024).

Implications for SAC Practice and Design

These findings have implications for SAC practice and design. The relative stability of WTC among frequent users suggests that SACs can function as important sites of continuity during periods of institutional disruption. However, the coexistence of high WTC and high anxiety among active participants indicates that these environments often attract motivated learners who are nevertheless navigating communicative apprehension. This has important implications for SAC programming and pedagogical design.

First, confidence should not be treated as a prerequisite for participation. Instead, SACs can benefit from normalizing anxiety as a standard component of communicative development. Designing tiered participation pathways that begin with low-pressure social interaction and gradually introduce structured activities can help lower psychological barriers to engagement. Informal drop-in interaction can serve as a legitimate entry point, followed by lightly structured formats such as themed conversation tables, peer-led sessions, or short, low-commitment workshops.

Second, the post-pandemic increase in social-only usage suggests that informal interaction has become a central mode of engagement rather than a peripheral one. Rather than viewing this shift as a decline in academic engagement, SACs can integrate micro-language opportunities into these social spaces. Using conversation prompts, rotating discussion themes, or near-peer facilitators helps institutions align with current participation patterns while maintaining the SAC's role as a language-rich environment.

Additionally, framing communication anxiety as a normal part of language use, not a deficit to be cured, helps learners see discomfort as part of the learning process. By explicitly treating the SAC as a space for gradual, socially supported risk-taking, practitioners can better support sustained student investment and identity growth.

For practitioners, the implication is clear: anxious learners are not disengaged. In fact, in this study, they are often the individuals who actively invest the most effort in their communicative development. Offering low-barrier entry points is vital to sustain participation among students who want to communicate despite their anxiety

Limitations

Several limitations should be noted. The repeated cross-sectional design captures cohort-level patterns rather than change in individuals over time. Additionally, as a single-site study in a specific Japanese university context, the results may be shaped by local demographics and staffing structures, limiting generalizability. The language used during informal social interaction was also not systematically recorded, making it impossible to determine the extent to which Group B participation involved English-language communication.

Most importantly, there is an inherent tension between the static measurement of WTC via the questionnaire and the dynamic, context-sensitive nature of communication in the SAC. While the use of behavioural data (Group A/B classification) helps bridge this gap, the questionnaire remains a measure of self-reported, hypothetical intent. Furthermore,

although participation categories were informed by behavioural records, the study did not incorporate detailed activity logs, duration of participation, or qualitative accounts of learner experience. Future research, using real-time observational methods, participation tracking, or qualitative interviews, would better illuminate how these hypothetical dispositions are enacted within the fluid social landscape of the SAC.

Conclusion

This study examined WTC, anxiety, and confidence among frequent users of a university SAC across ten years, covering both pre- and post-COVID periods. The results revealed a consistent pattern of stability: no significant differences were observed across survey years or between pre- and post-pandemic periods. These findings suggest that the communicative orientations of frequent SAC users may be relatively stable, even in the context of major educational and social disruption.

At the same time, analysis by engagement type revealed a more complex pattern. Students who participated in SAC classes and events in addition to social interaction generally reported higher WTC but also higher anxiety than social-only users. This indicates that active engagement in structured SAC activities may involve increased communicative challenges rather than a straightforward reduction in anxiety. In addition, the post-COVID period was characterised by a greater proportion of social-only users, suggesting that the most significant pandemic-related shift may lie in participation patterns rather than in underlying affective dispositions. These findings highlight the importance of viewing SACs as dynamic social learning spaces situated between formal instruction and autonomous learning. The persistence of stable affective profiles suggests that SACs can provide continuity of communicative engagement and social connection for motivated learners, even when broader learning environments change. At the same time, the observed coexistence of high WTC and high anxiety challenges deficit-oriented models of learner psychology and underscores the need to support “brave” rather than merely “comfortable” communication.

Overall, this study demonstrates that while communicative dispositions among frequent SAC users may remain stable over time, patterns of participation and modes of engagement can shift in meaningful ways. For SAC practitioners and researchers, this underscores the importance of examining not only differences in mean scores but also patterns of engagement in informal learning spaces.

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Appendix

Willingness to Communicate Questionnaire (English & Japanese translations)

(1) Please choose how willing you are to speak in English in each of the following 8 situations.

Scale: 1 = Always speak; 2 = Usually speak; 3 = Sometimes speak; 4 = Rarely speak; 5 = Seldom speak; 6 = Never speak

1. When you have an opportunity to give a speech in front of a large audience
2. When you are standing in line and someone you know is in front of you
3. During a group discussion in an English class
4. When you have a chance to speak in a group of people you are meeting for the first time
5. When you have an opportunity to speak freely during an English class
6. When you are standing in line and a friend is in front of you
7. When you have an opportunity to speak in front of the class in an English lesson
8. When you take part in a discussion with a group of friends

(2) Please choose how anxious you feel when speaking in English in each of the following 8 situations.

Scale: 1 = Always anxious; 2 = Usually anxious; 3 = Sometimes anxious; 4 = Rarely anxious; 5 = Seldom anxious; 6 = Never anxious

1. When you have an opportunity to give a speech in front of a large audience
2. When you are standing in line, and someone you know is in front of you
3. During a group discussion in an English class
4. When you have a chance to speak in a group of people you are meeting for the first time
5. When you have an opportunity to speak freely during an English class
6. When you are standing in line, and a friend is in front of you
7. When you have an opportunity to speak in front of the class in an English lesson
8. When you take part in a discussion with a group of friends

(3) Please choose how confident you feel speaking in English in each of the following 8 situations.

Scale: 1 = Always confident; 2 = Usually confident; 3 = Sometimes confident; 4 = Not very confident; 5 = Seldom confident; 6 = Not confident at all

1. When you have an opportunity to give a speech in front of a large audience

2. When you are standing in line and someone you know is in front of you
3. During a group discussion in an English class
4. When you have a chance to speak in a group of people you are meeting for the first time
5. When you have an opportunity to speak freely during an English class
6. When you are standing in line, and a friend is in front of you
7. When you have an opportunity to speak in front of the class in an English lesson
8. When you take part in a discussion with a group of friends

2. What do you usually do at the [SAC]? (You may select more than one answer).

a. participate in classes and/or events

b. study privately or with friends

c. socialise with friends

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) 尺度

(1) 以下 8 つの状況下で、自分がどれだけ**英語**で話す**意欲**があるかを選んでください

1	2	3	4	5	6
常に話す	たいてい話す	ときどき話す	あまり話さない	めったに話さない	決して話さない

	英語で					
1. 大勢の前でスピーチをする機会があるとき	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. 列に並んでいて知り合いが前にいたとき	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. 英語の授業中のグループディスカッションのとき	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. 初めて会う人のグループで話す機会があったとき	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. 英語の授業中に自由に発言する機会があるとき	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. 列にならんでいて友達が前にいたとき	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. 英語のクラスで前に出て話す機会があるとき	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. 友人のグループで議論するとき	1	2	3	4	5	6

(2) 以下 8 つの状況下で、**英語**で話す際、どれだけ**不安**に感じるかを選んでください

1	2	3	4	5	6

常に不安	たいてい不安	ときどき不安	あまり不安にならない	めったに不安にならない	決して不安にならない

	英語で					
1. 大勢の前でスピーチをする機会があるとき	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. 列に並んでいて知り合いが前にいたとき	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. 英語の授業中のグループディスカッションのとき	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. 初めて会う人のグループで話す機会があったとき	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. 英語の授業中に自由に発言する機会があるとき	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. 列に並んでいて友達が前にいたとき	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. 英語のクラスで前に出て話す機会があるとき	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. 友人のグループで議論するとき	1	2	3	4	5	6

(3) 以下 8 つの状況下で、どれだけ**自信**を持って**英語**を話すことができるかを選んでください

1	2	3	4	5	6
常に自信がある	たいてい自信がある	ときどき自信がある	あまり自信がない	めったに自信がない	決して自信がない

	英語で					
1. 大勢の前でスピーチをする機会があるとき	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. 列に並んでいて知り合いが前にいたとき	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. 英語の授業中のグループディスカッションのとき	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. 初めて会う人のグループで話す機会があったとき	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. 英語の授業中に自由に発言する機会があるとき	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. 列にならんでいて友達が前にいたとき	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. 英語のクラスで前に出て話す機会があるとき	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. 友人のグループで議論するとき	1	2	3	4	5	6

2. [SAC]では、普段どのようなことをしていますか？（あてはまるものすべてにチェックを入れてください。）

a. 授業やイベントに参加する

b. 一人、または友人と自習する

c. 友人と交流する（おしゃべりなど）

"It's Easier to Study Something You're Interested in": How Emotions Shape Agency for Language Learning Beyond the Classroom

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Author Biography

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Abstract

Emotions play a vital role in shaping language learner agency (White & Pham, 2017), yet the ways in which the two interact are complex, dynamic, and context dependent. Anxiety, for example, may either hinder or enhance agency depending on particular configurations of internal and external factors (Gkonou, 2015), while positive reciprocity between enjoyment and agency has been associated with successful language learning (Chen et al., 2025). This study investigates how emotions and agency interact within a self-directed learning program at a Japanese university supported by a well-resourced self-access center (SAC). Addressing two research questions on how emotions facilitated or constrained their agency, data from students' self-directed learning portfolios and stimulated recall interviews were analysed using thematic content analysis. Participants commonly associated prior classroom learning with dissatisfaction and inadequacy, yet as they transitioned into self-directed learning, many reported increased enjoyment and a sense of liberation that enhanced their agency and opened new affordances for learning. However, persistent language learning anxiety continued to inhibit their engagement with SAC services and resources. The findings suggest that while Japanese learners' negative emotions toward language learning may be more malleable than previously assumed, anxiety remains a significant barrier to SAC use. The paper also includes recommendations for SAC practices to help learners overcome this barrier.

感情は言語学習者のエージェンシーを形成する上で重要な役割を果たすが（White & Pham, 2017）、その相互作用は複雑で、動的かつ文脈に依存する。本研究では、セルフアクセスセンター（SAC）を備える日本の大学で実施された自律学習プログラムにおいて、学習者の感情とエージェンシーの関係を検討した。本研究は、感情がどのように学習者のエージェンシーを促進または制限するのかという 2 つの研究質問に取り組み、自律学習ポートフォリオおよび刺激再生法によるインタビューをテーマ別内容分析を用いて分析した。従来の教室学習に対して不満や自己効力感の低さを感じていた学習者が、自律学習への移行を通して、楽しさや解放感を経験し、エージェンシーを高め、新たな学習アフォーダンスを見出したことが明らかになった。一方で、持続的な言語学習不安は、学習者の SAC 利用を妨げ続けていた。これらの結果は、日本人学習者の言語学習に対する否定的感情が、従来考えられていたよりも可変的である可能性を示した。一方で、言語学習不安が SAC 利用に対し、大きな障壁であり続けていることも示唆された。本論文では、学習者がこの障壁を克服するため、教員およびラーニングアドバイザーの実践を含むセルフアクセス学習環境の調整について提案し、考察する。

Keywords: language learner agency, language learner emotions, self-directed learning, self-access, language learning beyond the classroom

Interest in the relationship between emotions and language learning stretches back well over 50 years comprising various threads such as the affective filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1982), humanistic approaches (for example, Stevick, 1990), foreign language anxiety scales (Horwitz et al., 1986), affective strategies (Oxford, 1990), the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2005), positive psychology (for example, MacIntyre et al., 2019), and many more. Interactions between emotions and learning are particularly powerfully implicated in self-directed learning contexts (Chamani et al., 2023), while learner emotions are held to be integral to the practice of language learning advising (Tassinari, 2016). Research has investigated how emotions interact with language learner agency to impact learners' experiences and learning trajectories. Since agency is not a stable trait but emerges through interactions between individuals and their environment, it is situated, dynamic, complex, and relational (Mercer, 2012). Emotions shape how learners perceive possibilities for action and whether they feel able to act. Meanwhile, agentive action generates emotions which impact agency by creating or preventing affordances for learning (Gkonou, 2015; Mercer, 2012). This means that agency and emotions co-evolve through reciprocity which can serve to either facilitate or constrain learning (White & Pham, 2017).

This report will outline findings from a longitudinal case study investigation of language learner agency in the context of a unit of study called the Self-Directed Learning Unit (SDLU) at a university in Japan. The research aimed to shed light on interactions between learners' agency and their emotions in the SDLU environment, including in relation to their use of services and resources from the university's Self-Access Center (SAC). SDLU is based around a series of 90-minute cycles in which learners set language learning goals, identify suitable learning methods and materials, engage in their planned learning activities, and write a reflection in which they evaluate what they have done and consider how to revise their approach for the subsequent cycle. The unit was designed as a bridge between classroom-based learning and language learning beyond the classroom (LLBC) to help prime students for autonomous, lifelong language learning. Although SDLU takes place on campus during scheduled class periods, students have a great deal of choice regarding what and how they study. Since the building offers Wi-Fi and the SAC offers various services and a wide array of physical resources, the number and type of potential affordances for learning is far greater than found in traditional classrooms. These contingencies leave more space for learners to enact agency than is generally possible in teacher-fronted language classrooms. This means SDLU provides a particularly fertile environment for investigating interactions between emotions and learner agency.

Literature Review

Research interest in the construct of language learner agency acknowledges that "learners are not simply passive or complicit," but make informed choices, resist or comply, and otherwise exert influence on their learning and use of language (Duff, 2012, p. 413). Agency is a multifaceted and complex construct (Ahearn, 2001), generally associated with choice and action, but also encompassing non-visible behaviours, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings (Mercer, 2012). Self-directed language learning, meanwhile, can be understood as a process in which learners intentionally shape their own learning by making informed choices about goals, strategies, and resources (Benson, 2011; Reinders, 2007). This process is inherently agentive, emerging through learners' engagement with the social, material, and institutional conditions that afford or constrain their actions (Murray, 2014; van Lier, 2004).

Self-access centers are dedicated, open-access learning environments designed to facilitate autonomous language learning by providing learners with a range of resources, guidance, and opportunities to make decisions about their own learning beyond the classroom (Gardner, 2022). While the term self-access language learning (SALL) is sometimes specifically associated with learning based in or around self-access centers, the pedagogy underpinning SDLU aligns with a more inclusive interpretation of SALL exemplified in Mynard and Shelton-Strong's (2022) definition of it as "language learning that takes place outside a formal language classroom with some kind of support" (p. 2). This broader conception of SALL is appropriate for this study because SDLU is designed to support learners' self-directed engagement with English beyond the classroom, whether or not they choose to make use of SAC services and resources.

Investigation of language learner emotions encompasses positive emotions, such as enjoyment (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014) and foreign language peace of mind (Zhou et al., 2021), as well as negative emotions, such as boredom (Kruk et al., 2021) and foreign language anxiety (FLA), a situation-specific form of anxiety that arises during language learning and use and may limit learners' sense of control and their ability to act agentively (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Horwitz, 2001; Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre, 1995). A growing body of research highlights how emotions can shape learners' agentive engagement. Chamani et al. (2023) found a correlation between positive emotions and persistence in self-directed language learning contexts, highlighting the role of affect in sustaining learners' autonomous engagement. Similarly, studies of LLBC have demonstrated that learners' personal interests, such as engagement with popular culture, online communities, or hobby-

related content, can provide powerful drivers for autonomous language use and development (Benson & Reinders, 2011; Lai, 2017). Research in the field of self-access has also demonstrated how emotions influence learners' willingness to act. For example, Kushida (2018) found that even highly motivated learners were reluctant to use SAC services because they felt nervous and lacked confidence in their English ability, with anxieties further amplified by social factors such as learners not feeling they belong to established user communities (Gillies, 2010), or concern about being negatively evaluated by others (Suzuki & Hooper, 2024). Conversely, agency has been associated with self-regulation processes connected to emotion regulation, such as the use of affective strategies to lower anxiety, monitor one's emotional state, and encourage oneself (Oxford, 1990).

Although agency and emotion have been framed as interrelated constructs (White & Pham, 2017), precisely how they interrelate in specific contexts remains under-researched. Interactions between learners' emotions, beliefs, and agency are highly complex (Nilsson, 2021). For example, Gkonou (2015) found that learner agency had both positive and negative effects on students' FLA, providing an instance where agency shaped emotional experience rather than the reverse. Her analysis shows that learners' emotional states were shaped not only by external conditions but by their own agentive decisions and the meanings they attached to those decisions. These findings underscore the bidirectional but context-dependent nature of the relationship between agency and FLA. Similarly, while FLA can manifest in performance problems or communication avoidance (Luo, 2013) and has been negatively associated with engagement (O'Reilly & García-Castro, 2022), Swain et al. (2011) highlighted the case of Grace, an EFL learner whose FLA had a positive impact on her language learning trajectory. Grace described how an incident in a junior school language class, in which she had been mocked for making a mistake, served as a powerful stimulus for agentive engagement with English study. Grace subsequently became an EFL teacher.

Although existing research has illuminated the range of emotions experienced by language learners and highlighted interactions between emotion, agency, and learning, our understanding of how these dynamics unfold within specific SALL environments, such as the SDLU, remains limited. In particular, little is known about how shifts in agency influence learners' uptake of the learning affordances provided by self-access centers. This study aimed to deepen this understanding by examining how learner agency and emotion interact for individual learners in the context of the SDLU, addressing the following research questions:

- How do learners' emotions facilitate or constrain their agency in the context of the self-directed learning unit?

- How do learners' emotions influence their agency in relation to their use or non-use of self-access center services and resources?

Insights into how emotions shape the exercise of agency and learners' uptake of affordances in SALL environments can help instructors, learning advisors, and administrators understand why learners may be reluctant to use SACs and, in turn, enable them to target services and resources more effectively.

The Research Context

The study was conducted at a regional university in Japan, offering degree programs in science and engineering disciplines. The students tend to have relatively low levels of English proficiency as measured by the university's placement test, with scores typically equivalent to 'Basic User' (A1/A2) in the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2001). However, while attitudes to English and English study vary widely, many students express a desire to develop their English skills, and many view English proficiency as supportive of their future study or career aspirations (Bollen & Faherty, 2016; Edwards & Rowberry, 2021; Rowberry, 2025).

SDLU constitutes a component of the university's compulsory English Communication curriculum for second-year students. It is based around a series of what Ohashi (2018) terms *planning-action-reflection cycles*. For each of these cycles, learners spend 15 to 20 minutes setting goals, planning what to study, and searching for suitable materials, 60 minutes implementing their plan, and finally, around 15 minutes evaluating the resources used and writing a learning reflection focusing on the effectiveness of their plan. The unit also includes group and individual activities based around goal setting, resource selection, and strategy use to encourage students to reflect on themselves as language learners and to orient them to the unit, as well as peer sharing and discussion tasks. Each learner records details of work done in a *self-directed learning portfolio* alongside their learning plans and reflections, which are typically written in L1 (Japanese), though learners are free to write in English if they prefer.

SDLU sessions are conducted in established class groups under the supervision of the English Communication class teacher and clustered around a five-week period in the first semester and a three-week period in the second. Although devised as a classroom-based intervention, data for this study were collected when the university was still operating under restrictions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, approximately half of the SDLU sessions were done on campus with the remainder done online. Once oriented to

SDLU procedures and parameters, learners are free to choose what to study, what resources to use and how to use them, as well as whether to work in the classroom or the SAC, and alone or with peers. From this point the teacher's role is focused on supporting students by, for example, answering questions, suggesting resources, and providing encouragement, both in person and in writing via the self-directed learning portfolios. Examples of the kinds of activities participants engaged in during SDLU included reading comic books and graded readers, studying vocabulary via apps or textbooks, practicing extensive listening with websites, TED Talks, or movies, and engaging with YouTube channels or Instagram sites hosted by "micro-celebrity English teachers" (Aslan, 2024) such as Rupa-sensei or Bilingirl Chika. Further details of SDLU structure, procedures, and resource selection are described in Rowberry (2022), Rowberry (2025), and Rowberry and Aslan (2024).

The SAC at the research site is a purpose-built facility occupying the entire second floor of the building in which SDLU takes place. During SDLU sessions students can borrow materials such as graded readers, DVDs, or reference books, which they can take back to the classroom or use in the SAC itself. The space includes areas designed for individual and group activities, including a Conversation Lounge, where they can talk with peers or instructors. Students can also access services such as learning advising and a Skills Center, where they can meet an instructor to practice and get feedback on speaking or writing. Because it is rarely practical to reserve these services during scheduled SDLU sessions, students are encouraged to use them at other convenient times.

Method

The data analysed in this paper form part of a broader practitioner-research investigation into language learner agency conducted for the author's doctoral thesis (Rowberry, 2025). The larger study tracked two first-year English communication classes over the course of an academic year and drew on multiple sources of data, including classroom observations, a teacher journal, learners' SDLU portfolios, and three rounds of stimulated recall interviews with 14 students. For the purposes of the present article, the analytic focus was narrowed to the emotional dimension of agency, and a smaller subset of the dataset was selected for in-depth analysis. Specifically, this current study draws on the SDLU portfolios and interview transcripts, as these sources provided the richest insights into how emotions shaped learners' agentive engagement.

From the original pool of 14 interviewees, six were selected based on the depth, clarity, and emotional salience of their data. Their selection was consistent with the principle

of purposeful sampling, in which the goal is to select cases which are "information-rich" (Patton, 1990, p. 169). The focal group comprised four male students, Hiroaki, Jun, Naoyuki, and Osamu, and two female students, Sora and Yui (all pseudonyms), all of whom were second-year undergraduates enrolled on STEM programs. Exclusion of the remaining eight participants reflects the narrower analytic focus of this study and does not deny the role of emotions in their enactment of agency. However, including all 14 would have diluted the depth of the analysis without altering the core themes identified.

Three rounds of semi-structured, stimulated recall interviews were conducted, one after SDLU in the first semester, one after SDLU in the second semester, and a follow up interview approximately one year later. However, due to attrition only Hiroaki, Jun, and Yui attended the final interview. Interviews were conducted in Japanese by a learning advisor colleague at the research site using the participants' self-directed learning portfolios as the stimulus. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection, and the project complied with the ethical guidelines and approval procedures of both the author's doctoral programme and the host institution. Further details of the data-collection procedures can be found in Rowberry (2025).

Interview recordings were transcribed and translated by the author following protocols recommended by Thompson and Dooley (2020) for situations in which the researcher has proficiency in both the original and target languages and is directly involved in data generation and analysis procedures. All interview excerpts cited in this paper were translated into English by the author following this procedure. Consistent with a multilingual approach to research (Holmes et al., 2013, 2016), interview data were uploaded into MaxQDA for analysis in both spoken-audio and written-text form.

Data analysis followed a thematic content approach combining inductive and deductive procedures. I began by conducting open coding of portfolio entries and interview transcripts to identify salient emotional expressions, agentive learning behaviours, and contextual influences. These initial codes were then compared with relevant literature on emotions, agency, and self-directed learning, informing the development of a provisional coding framework for a second cycle of hypothesis coding. This analytical approach draws on coding procedures outlined by Saldaña (2021) and aligns with the methodology used in Ishikawa's (2023) investigation of self-regulated learning among first-year students at a vocational college in Japan. Through iterative refinement and constant comparison, this framework was consolidated into five higher-order categories: *feeling, exploring, reflecting, regulating, and relating.*

As the present article focuses specifically on the emotional dimension of agency, only data from the six selected participants associated most closely with the feeling category were analysed further. These data were then re-examined in relation to the two research questions, and a set of interpretive themes was developed to capture the ways in which emotions facilitated or constrained learners' agency, both in relation to SAC use and independently of it.

Findings

The findings are organised around the two research questions, examining how learners' emotions shaped their agency during SDLU and how these emotions influenced their uptake of affordances in the self-access center. The first two subsections address emotional experiences that facilitated or constrained agency within SDLU, beginning with positive emotions and then turning to foreign language anxiety. The final subsection focuses on how emotions and agency interacted in relation to students' use or non-use of SAC services.

Positive Affect and Feelings of Freedom as Drivers of Agency

Across the dataset, enjoyment and personal interest emerged as powerful emotional drivers that supported learners' active engagement with SDLU. Participants frequently described SDLU as enjoyable or satisfying. Sora, for example, particularly enjoyed engaging with Lyrics Training (https://lyricstraining.com) since it allowed her to use her favourite songs to develop her listening skills. As well as enjoying practicing English by singing the songs, she described a feeling of satisfaction when she could decipher the lyrics. For example, she said, "When you realize, 'Ah, so that's what they're saying'—it makes you feel pretty smart" (Sora, First Interview). This sense of enjoyment and accomplishment encouraged her to persist with the activity and enhanced her awareness of music lyrics as a tool for language learning.

In Naoyuki's case, his rejection of TOEIC textbooks in favour of sports videos as his preferred SDLU learning resource, precipitated an emotional shift which left him feeling much more relaxed about his English use. His interest in sport and familiarity with the genre of basketball commentary, in which much of the Japanese terminology is borrowed from English, served to render more of the input comprehensible and, even when it was not, he could still enjoy watching the game, creating conditions that afforded new ways of engaging with English. Moreover, by attending to the commentary, he realised there were various ways

of communicating meaning beyond the formulaic language he had been studying. “It’s like hearing things expressed in ways that are natural and thinking, ‘Oh, you can express it like that.’ You engage with it without having to worry too much about it” (Naoyuki, Second Interview). This emotional shift that accompanied Naoyuki’s decision to work with sports commentaries opened him up to new learning affordances and a more flexible exercise of agency.

For Yui, a clear association was evident between her use of TED Talk videos for SDLU and positive emotions, as demonstrated by her frequent use of the word *tanoshii* (enjoyable) when talking about her self-directed learning. This contrasted strongly with her experience of English classes at school, in which her test results had been disappointing, and she had been left with “a feeling that I’m not good at English” (Yui, Second Interview). The freedom to choose her learning resources prompted a significant shift as she discovered that “it’s easier to study and to acquire knowledge if it’s something you are interested in” (Yui, First Interview). As a result, she was able to overcome her negative emotions and enact agency to the extent that she “became more motivated to learn English” and wanted to “come into contact with English even if it’s not in class” (Yui, First Interview).

Several participants described SDLU as freeing them from the constraints of the approaches to learning they had encountered in formal English classes, and this expanded their perspective on language learning and use. Release from these constraints often generated positive emotions, such as relief, enjoyment, and renewed confidence, that played a central role in how they exercised agency in SDLU. For example, Hiroaki frequently used the word *jiyū* (free) to describe SDLU. He resented the grammar-translation approach of junior high school which did not align with his goal of communicating with people from other countries. Conversely, he revelled in the flexibility afforded by SDLU which allowed him to align his learning with his personal interests by studying with animated videos in English. Noting “there’s a huge difference between being asked to do something and choosing to do it yourself,” (Hiroaki, First Interview), Hiroaki realized he was able to sustain his motivation much longer than had previously been possible, and self-directed learning opened him up to new learning affordances:

> At school, I was told specific vocabulary was really important, and I had to focus mainly on those words, but when I no longer needed to worry about that, I was able to learn from various directions using my ears and eyes.
>
> (Hiroaki, First Interview)

SDLU also served to validate Hiroaki's participation in conversations on social media with foreign friends he had met online through their mutual interest in Japanese manga and anime, as a legitimate form of language learning. Engaging with anime in SDLU, as well as interacting in English via his online community, gave Hiroaki a feeling of liberation which positively impacted his agency. The emotions associated with exercising choice in SDLU were evident in how Hiroaki talked about his learning, and he described this sense of freedom as making it easier to choose activities he enjoyed and to continue engaging with English in ways that felt personally meaningful.

Yui experienced a similar shift. She described feeling increasingly confident during SDLU, which led her to reassess her English abilities. In her second interview she noted, "perhaps I'm not so bad at English," then in the third interview she explained that she had chosen to join a particular research team specifically because they read and discussed academic papers written in English. This transformation in her feelings about English stimulated active manipulation of her environment in order to generate further opportunities for learning. As in Hiroaki's case, positive reciprocity between emotions and agency had tangible benefits for Yui's learning trajectory. She described how being free to choose her own activities made her feel more positive about English, which in turn encouraged her to take further agentive steps.

Taken together, these accounts indicate that the relationship between emotions and agency was not one-directional. Participants described how positive emotions supported greater freedom and willingness to act, while the freedom to choose activities and act on their own initiative also contributed to more positive emotional experiences, suggesting a reciprocal, cyclical relationship between the two. Although the study was designed to examine how emotions influenced learners' agency, participants' accounts also showed that their agentive choices and the freedom to act within SDLU contributed to more positive emotional experiences, revealing a reciprocal process that extended beyond the original focus of the research questions.

Complex Interactions Between FLA and Agency

Foreign language anxiety was widespread among participants and often constrained their agency by limiting their willingness to engage with English. However, the data also revealed instances in which anxiety actually motivated learning, illustrating the complex, unstable, and non-linear relationship between agency and emotion.

Like both Yui and Hiroaki, negative experiences of formal English classes had led Jun to describe himself as "not very good at English at all" (Jun, First Interview). He spoke not only of a lack of enjoyment but also of feeling anxious and discouraged about English, and he explained how interactions between these negative emotions and his language learning behaviours acted as a vicious cycle. "Because I couldn't do it, I didn't enjoy it and I didn't want to do it, so I was steadily getting worse at it" (Jun, First Interview). In describing this pattern, Jun linked his lack of desire to engage with a withdrawal from learning activities, showing how diminished emotions were reflected in reduced agentive behaviour. This illustrates that reciprocity between agency and emotions can be negative as well as positive. However, Jun's case also demonstrated how anxiety can motivate engagement. Despite "hating English," he said, "I feel I need to work twice as hard as other people because I don't think I can keep up without putting in that extra effort" (Jun, First Interview). Although he expressed this as a "need," Jun described it as something he decided to do in order to keep up, indicating that he was taking deliberate steps to manage his learning. Further, during and following SDLU, Jun's emotional trajectory shifted significantly, a development he linked to feeling more able to engage with English on his own terms during the unit. By the third interview, he reported that he had "started to enjoy" reading in English, and he attributed this change to "feeling more invested" in his studies, a feeling he associated with the ways he had been able to engage with English during SDLU.

Unfortunately, not all participants were able to overcome FLA in this way. Osamu's account echoed that of Grace, the case described by Swain et al. (2011), insofar as he had also experienced ridicule in language classes a child. However, while Grace transformed her resulting FLA into a powerful motivation to act, for Osamu it severely constrained his agency. Ever since his elementary school classmates laughed at his mispronounced English, he had "felt quite self-conscious" about his pronunciation to the extent that he avoided speaking English aloud during SDLU, even when practicing at home alone (Osamu, Second Interview). Although he viewed English ability as a desirable attribute and cited wanting to develop his communication skills as his learning goal, he was unable to overcome his FLA to enact agency. Grace and Osamu's divergent responses to painful childhood memories serve to further highlight the complex, dynamic nature of the person-environment interactions that constitute agency.

Emotions and Agency in Relation to SAC Use

Despite being encouraged to use the SAC during SDLU, most participants chose not to do so. Emotional barriers, such as anxiety and lack of confidence, played a central role in limiting their uptake of learning affordances associated with the SAC.

A common theme that emerged from the data was a gap between wanting to communicate in English and having the confidence to do so. This gap was particularly evident through participants' reluctance to use the SAC's Conversation Lounge, even though they wanted to do so. Despite the best efforts of the SAC team to make the lounge as welcoming as possible, this psychological barrier proved too much to overcome for many students. As Naoyuki put it, "it was difficult for me to go there. I think everyone wants to speak English at some point but can't take the first step" (Naoyuki, First Interview).

On the other hand, SAC interactions also provided moments where emotions and agency interacted productively. When Naoyuki needed to ask SAC staff to photocopy some pages from a textbook, he "felt quite anxious" about it, but he resolved "to be more confident next time," noting that this was a good opportunity to "engage in more natural conversation" (Naoyuki, SDLU Portfolio Reflection 1). This illustrates how small, emotionally charged encounters can shape future agentive behaviour.

Jun was one of the few participants who did endeavor to practice speaking in the SAC. Following encouragement from his SDLU teacher, Jun booked a conversation practice session with an instructor in the SAC's Skills Center. However, he felt anxious during the session and his concerns about being overheard constrained his participation in the conversation. As he put it, "there's a part of me that's embarrassed for some reason" (Jun, First Interview). Despite these anxieties, Jun expressed regret about not using the SAC's Conversation Lounge or Skills Center more. He recognised that "there are a lot of opportunities for conversations" in the SAC, and he said, "I wish I'd used it a bit more" (Jun, First Interview). This demonstrates how emotional vulnerability in semi-public SAC spaces can curtail agency by denying learners access to desired learning opportunities.

Discussion and Implications

The following discussion is structured around the two research questions. In each case, the analysis is presented first, with practical implications outlined subsequently to highlight the relevance of the findings for teaching, advising, and SAC provision.

RQ1: How Emotions Facilitate or Constrain Agency in SDLU

Analysis of the data highlighted several instances of reciprocity between emotions and agency, sometimes in a positive direction, such as in Yui's enjoyment and Hiroaki's feelings of liberation, but also in a negative direction, such as Osamu's reluctance to vocalise English because of an embarrassing incident many years previously. These findings show how emotions can both facilitate and constrain learners' agentic engagement in SDLU. This supports White and Pham's (2017) view of agency as situated and emotionally constituted and aligns with Gkonou's (2015) argument that interactions between emotion and agency are complex, dynamic, and bidirectional. Particularly encouraging were cases such as Yui, Hiroaki, and Jun, who successfully overcame their FLA and dislike of English study, and who continued engaging with LLBC long after SDLU had finished, for example, by reading English materials, interacting with online communities, and using English language media. This demonstrates that it is possible for learners to overcome their negative emotions and discover (or rediscover) the joy of language learning and that this joy can in turn facilitate agency.

The freedom SDLU afforded for participants to choose their own resources was associated with positive emotions and allowed them to enact agency by aligning their personal learning goals with their feelings and learning behaviours. When learners select resources that align with personally meaningful goals, they experience positive emotions that support agentive action (Murray, 2014; Ushioda, 2009). Meanwhile, learning environments that support agency can generate enjoyment, interest, and satisfaction (Reinders, 2012). The findings show that interventions such as SDLU can stimulate this positive reciprocity between emotions and agency by helping learners connect emotionally with language learning processes, primarily through the freedom to choose activities and resources, but also through the legitimacy and supportive structure the unit provided for their self-selected engagement. This resulted in enhanced awareness and increased uptake of learning affordances. However, interactions between emotions and agency are complex and vary considerably from learner to learner. For example, while most participants valued the openness of the SDLU environment, Naoyuki found it overwhelming and said he would have preferred more explicit instruction about how or what to study.

The practical implication of this finding is for instructors to encourage learners to identify resources and approaches that they are likely to enjoy. Although this may seem obvious, it is surprising how many participants initially resisted using materials which were not specifically designed to target language learning. For example, Naoyuki's agency-

emotion trajectory shifted significantly only after he abandoned studying TOEIC textbooks and started working with sports commentaries. For many participants, the use of everyday cultural resources, such as songs, animated films, and manga, allowed them to align their interests with their learning, and this was strongly associated with feelings of enjoyment and satisfaction. This supports previous research highlighting virtuous interactions between pop culture as a resource for language learning and learner emotion, identity, and agency (Werner & Tegge, 2021). However, leaners may hesitate to use such resources out of concern over their legitimacy (Lai et al., 2015; Murray & Fujishima, 2016; Sockett, 2014). It is therefore important to reassure learners about the pedagogic value of informal resources and to normalise their use within language learning. Moreover, since it can be challenging to make effective use of informal resources, students may benefit from opportunities to critically engage with potential applications of such materials as tools for language learning both in and beyond classroom settings. They may also benefit from participating in peer sharing activities as opportunities to showcase their own uses of resources and to receive information and support from their peers. Such activities were included within SDLU and appeared to provide additional sources of ideas and encouragement for learners.

RQ2: How Learners' Emotions Impact Their Agentic Use of SAC Resources

The analysis highlights that, while SACs offer rich affordances for learning, they are emotionally charged environments and this impacts whether and how learners enact agency within them. Echoing previous research by Gillies (2010), Kushida (2018), and Suzuki and Hooper (2024), a salient finding was the apparent durability of the psychological barrier which prevented participants from using the SAC for communication practice. Although the SAC provided a scaffolded environment in the form of its Conversation Lounge, and several participants directly expressed a desire to talk with instructors there, few of them actually did so. This demonstrates that negative emotions, such as FLA and fear of negative evaluation, can prevent learners acting on their intentions even when affordances are visible and valued. When discussing this failure to act during their interviews, they expressed negative emotions such as frustration or regret which, given the reciprocity between emotions and agency, likely served to further constrain their agency.

More encouragingly, encounters such as Naoyuki's simple interaction with SAC staff regarding photocopying highlight how SACs can provide a safe, low-stakes environment in which learners can enact small acts of agency and experience corresponding boosts in confidence. Such moments can help counter the feelings of uncertainty or anxiety that

Japanese students may experience, having typically been "conditioned" to learn English in a way that is conducive to the specific context of the high school classroom (Curry et al., 2017, p. 19). Learners' assumptions about agency vary considerably between their places of learning, and traditional classrooms constrain the expression of both emotion and agency (Stanfield, 2013). It is perhaps no coincidence, therefore, that participants who were most successful in enacting agency in SDLU were those who seemed most willing and able to break free of learning behaviours associated with traditional classrooms.

SAC instructors, administrators, and particularly student staff can play a valuable role in helping learners manage the challenging transition from instructional to LLBC contexts (Thornton, 2018). Working with near peers can significantly reduce language learning anxiety, and low-stakes opportunities for confidence-building interactions with staff may help learners bridge the gap between intention and action (Murphey & Arao, 2001; Suzuki & Hooper, 2024). Student staff can also foreground everyday cultural resources and provide structured opportunities for learners to share and discuss how they use them, helping to normalise these practices and validate their pedagogic value. Jun's fear of being overheard in the Skills Center also suggest that careful consideration also needs to be given to the physical layout of SACs to ensure learners feel safe and minimize FLA.

Conclusions

Findings from this study support previous research highlighting both positive and negative reciprocity between learners' emotions and their agency. There was evidence that shifts in learners' emotions arising through their interaction with SDLU enhanced their agency and positively impacted their learning trajectories. However, some learners struggled to overcome their FLA during SDLU, and this constrained their use of SAC resources and services. Moreover, because the ways emotions and agency interact can support one learner yet inhibit another, instructors and SAC administrators face significant challenges in designing agency-enhancing learning environments.

A severe limitation on the findings was the fact that pandemic restrictions were in place while the research was conducted. This meant that some SDLU sessions had to be conducted online and social distancing measures constrained SAC use. This may have discouraged learners from using the SAC entirely or impacted which services or resources they chose to use. In addition, the study's small sample size and focus on a single institutional context limit the generalisability of the findings. The analysis also relied heavily on self-reported data, which may not fully capture learners' actual behaviours, and the

researcher's close involvement in data generation and interpretation may have resulted in interpretive bias. Future research, therefore, might target other self-directed learning contexts, with different populations and using alternative research designs.

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Visualizing Learner Well-Being in Language Learning: An Exploratory Classroom Implementation Supporting Reflective Dialogue

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Abstract

This study introduces a language learning-specific conceptualization of learner well-being and presents the Language Learning Well-Being (LLWB) questionnaire as a web-based tool designed to support visualization and reflection. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory, positive psychology, and learner autonomy research, the LLWB framework organizes well-being into 15 interrelated dimensions, including meaning, positive emotions, relatedness, autonomy, time, vitality, and achievement. The 60-item instrument generates dimension-level scores displayed as individualized radar charts, enabling learners to view profiles in their learning experiences. Content validity was examined through expert review using Aiken's V coefficient, and item refinement remains ongoing. The tool was piloted with university students in a self-access learning context at two points within one semester. No specific intervention aimed at enhancing well-being was implemented between administrations given the developmental nature of this pilot phase; accordingly, no substantial statistical changes were observed. However, the visualizations revealed consistent configurations across dimensions that learners found personally meaningful. The findings suggest that making well-being visible through multidimensional visualization may support autonomy-supportive learning by encouraging reflection and serving as a potential shared reference point for reflective dialogue.

本研究は、語学学習に特化した学習者ウェルビーイングの概念化を提示し、Web 上で利用可能な可視化・内省支援ツール Language Learning Well-Being（LLWB）を紹介する。LLWB は自己決定理論、ポジティブ心理学、学習者オートノミー研究を基盤とし、学習の意義、ポジティブ感情、関係性、自律性、時間、健康、達成感など 15 の相互関連する側面からウェルビーイングを捉える。60 項目の質問紙の回答はレーダーチャートとして可視化され、学習経験のプロファイルとして把握される。内容妥当性は専門家評価に基づき Aiken の V 係数により検証され、現在も改訂が進められている。本研究では大学のセルフアクセス環境において一学期間に 2 回パイロット調査を実施した。両時点間で特定の介入は行われなかったため、大きな統計的変化は見られなかったが、可視化により側面間の関係性や学習者の経験の特徴が明確になった。これらの結果は、ウェルビーイングの可視化と内省を促し、自律学習支援に資する可能性を示唆している。

Keywords: learner well-being, reflective dialogue, learner autonomy, visualization, autonomy-supportive pedagogy

Language learning is often discussed in terms of strategies, goal setting, and self-regulation (Benson, 2011; Holec, 1981). However, even learners who demonstrate strong strategic skills may experience fluctuations in motivation, vitality, and sense of meaning (Ryan & Deci, 2017). These shifts are not always immediately visible to learners themselves, making it difficult to recognize how their psychological experiences influence engagement over time (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Learner autonomy has long been positioned as a central aim of language education (Benson, 2011; Holec, 1981; Little, 2007). Yet sustaining autonomy involves more than managing strategies effectively. Learners' sense of agency is closely connected to their emotional experiences, relationships, sense of balance, and overall well-being both inside and outside the classroom (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2017). When well-being is unsettled, even capable learners may find it difficult to maintain engagement or a sense of fulfillment in their learning. Although learner well-being has received increasing attention in applied linguistics, the construct often remains abstract and challenging to articulate (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020; Oxford, 2016). Well-being shifts across contexts and time (Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2020), yet learners are rarely given structured opportunities to observe these profiles or to reflect on how they relate to their developing autonomy. Without ways to make well-being more visible and open to dialogue, its role in sustaining autonomous learning may remain insufficiently explored.

In this study, a distinction is made between behavioral aspects of learning (e.g., strategy use, goal setting, and self-regulation) and psychological aspects (e.g., motivation, vitality, sense of meaning, and engagement), with learner well-being conceptualized primarily in relation to the latter. In addition, while autonomy is used as a central construct referring to learners' capacity to take charge of their learning, agency is understood here as a more situated expression of this capacity within specific contexts.

In response to this pedagogical need, this study introduces the Language Learning Well-Being (LLWB) tool, a visualization-based digital instrument designed to support ongoing reflection in language learning. The study positions the tool within autonomy-supportive pedagogy and reports on an exploratory classroom implementation. Given the exploratory nature of this pilot implementation, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What profiles of learner well-being emerge across multiple dimensions through the LLWB questionnaire in a pilot self-access implementation?
2. How do learners make sense of their visualized well-being profiles?

In this study, the term "profile" refers to the configuration of scores across the 15 well-being dimensions as visualized in the radar chart. The following section outlines the theoretical foundations that inform the conceptualization of learner well-being and the design of the LLWB tool.

Theoretical Foundations: Autonomy and Learner Well-Being

Learner Autonomy and Psychological Sustainability

Learner autonomy has long been regarded as a central concept in language education. Since Holec's (1981) definition of autonomy as the ability to take charge of one's own learning, research has emphasized learners' capacity to set goals, select strategies, monitor progress, and evaluate outcomes. Later studies expanded this perspective by highlighting the cognitive, metacognitive, and contextual dimensions of control (Benson, 2011), as well as the relational and dialogic processes through which autonomy develops (Little, 2007). Therefore, autonomy is understood not simply as independent action, but as a socially situated and mediated capacity. At the same time, sustaining autonomy over time involves more than effective strategy use. Learners who appear strategically capable may still experience fluctuations in motivation, emotional energy, or sense of purpose. From the perspective of self-determination theory, ongoing engagement is supported by the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, including autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). When these needs are not sufficiently met, learners' capacity to sustain agency may gradually weaken.

These observations suggest that autonomy can be viewed not only as behavioral self-direction but also as a psychologically sustainable process. In extended and often uncertain language learning journeys, conditions that nurture vitality, connectedness, and a sense of balance become increasingly important. From this perspective, learner well-being emerges not as an additional outcome, but as a foundational dimension of sustaining autonomy.

Learner Well-Being in Language Learning

The Dynamic and Multidimensional Nature of Learner Well-Being

Learner well-being has been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that extends beyond momentary happiness to encompass meaning, relationships, functioning, and personal growth (Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2011). In educational contexts, well-being involves both feeling good and functioning effectively within social and contextual environments. It is increasingly understood as something that emerges through interaction, engagement, and

shared experience rather than as a purely internal state (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Within language learning, interest in well-being has grown as researchers have acknowledged the long-term and emotionally demanding nature of the process. Language learning involves sustained motivation, identity development, and social participation. Experiences such as enjoyment, anxiety, resilience, and hope shape learners' engagement and persistence over time (Dörnyei, 2009; Pekrun, 2006). In this view, well-being can be seen not simply as an outcome of successful learning but as a condition that supports ongoing engagement and autonomy (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020).

Several theoretical perspectives contribute to this understanding. Self-determination theory emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness for optimal functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Positive psychology highlights the roles of positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011). In the field of language education, Oxford's (2016) EMPATHICS framework brings together emotional, motivational, and contextual dimensions specific to language learning. Together, these perspectives suggest that learner well-being is inherently multidimensional.

Importantly, well-being in language learning is not static. Learners' psychological experiences shift across time and contexts as they respond to changing task demands, relationships, and life circumstances. From a complexity perspective, well-being may be understood as emerging from the interaction of multiple factors rather than as a stable trait (Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2020). Even small contextual changes may influence learners' sense of vitality or balance, making one-time assessments insufficient for capturing lived experience.

Despite this growing theoretical recognition, learner well-being often remains difficult for learners themselves to articulate. Shifts in energy, connection, or meaning may be felt but not easily named. When such experiences remain implicit, they are less likely to be integrated into reflective dialogue, understood here as a collaborative process in which learners articulate and explore their learning experiences through interaction with others, or autonomy-supportive practice. This challenge points to the importance of pedagogical structures that help learners notice, describe, and interpret fluctuations in their well-being over time. A number of well-being measurement instruments have been developed in psychology, including Ryff's (1989) Psychological Well-Being Scale and assessments based on Seligman's (2011) PERMA model. While these scales provide valuable general indicators of psychological functioning, they were not designed specifically for the situated, longitudinal, and pedagogical realities of language learning. Moreover, most existing tools aim to produce aggregate indices rather than to function as reflective resources embedded in

dialogic practice. These limitations point to the need for a context-sensitive instrument that supports both measurement and reflective engagement within language learning environments.

Conceptualizing Learner Well-Being Across 15 Dimensions

Existing well-being frameworks have offered important insights into psychological functioning. However, most were developed as general models and were not designed specifically for the lived realities of language learning. Language learning is typically a prolonged and effortful process that unfolds across classroom and everyday contexts. It involves cognitive engagement, emotional regulation, identity development, relational dynamics, and the management of time and energy in daily life. In response to this complexity, the present study develops a language learning-specific conceptualization of learner well-being that draws on major theoretical traditions while remaining pedagogically usable.

The 15 dimensions were identified through an iterative process of theoretical integration and practical reflection. An initial review examined central well-being frameworks in psychology and applied linguistics, including self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017), the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011), and Oxford's (2016) EMPATHICS framework. This review generated a broad set of constructs related to psychological needs, affective experience, motivational resources, contextual conditions, and personal functioning. During the consolidation phase, areas of conceptual overlap were carefully considered. Constructs that appeared across multiple frameworks were compared and, where appropriate, integrated. For instance, engagement is emphasized in both PERMA and EMPATHICS, and perseverance shares conceptual space with resilience. Related constructs such as grit and persistence were therefore incorporated within resilience to maintain clarity and avoid redundancy. Optimism was examined in relation to positive emotions, and self-esteem and self-confidence were considered alongside competence, with distinctions evaluated in terms of pedagogical usefulness. Flow, while theoretically distinct, was integrated into engagement due to strong experiential overlap in language learning contexts. Through this iterative process, dimensions were retained when they demonstrated both clear theoretical grounding and practical relevance in advising practice and reflective dialogue. Constructs that lacked consistent resonance in language learning settings were not included. The resulting framework, therefore, reflects a dialogue between theory and practice rather than a simple aggregation of existing models.

Development of the LLWB Framework

In addition to theoretical integration, the framework was further refined through close attention to language learning-specific experiences. In advising practice, certain contextual factors repeatedly emerged that were less visible in general well-being scales. These included time management, vitality (such as sleep, health, and energy), digital well-being, physical environment, and financial pressures. Although often regarded as peripheral in psychological models, these factors were found to shape learners' engagement and persistence in meaningful ways (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020; Oxford, 2016). Their inclusion reflects an understanding of language learning as situated within broader life contexts rather than limited to classroom performance alone. The number of dimensions was also determined with pedagogical usability in mind. Initial mappings suggested a larger set of categories; however, a highly segmented structure made reflection more complex and potentially difficult for learners to interpret. The 15 dimensions were therefore selected as a balanced structure that maintains theoretical breadth while remaining practically manageable. The intention was not to provide an exhaustive taxonomy of well-being, but to offer a coherent framework that supports recognition of emerging patterns and facilitates reflective dialogue.

From a dynamic systems perspective, the 15 dimensions are conceptualized not as independent or additive variables, but as interrelated domains within a learner's lived experience. Changes in one area may influence patterns across others. For example, changes in time management can affect vitality, which may in turn shape engagement and perceptions of achievement. This relational view resonates with complexity-informed perspectives in applied linguistics, which highlight interaction and non-linearity among psychological processes (Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2020). From this standpoint, well-being is viewed not as a stable trait, but as an evolving configuration shaped by ongoing interaction among dimensions.

The framework comprises the following 15 dimensions: meaning in learning, achievement, engagement, positive emotions, relationships, competence, autonomy, vitality, time, digital well-being, resilience, humor, physical environment, finance, and overall well-being. Together, these dimensions provide the conceptual foundation for the design of the Language Learning Well-Being (LLWB) questionnaire. To clarify the integrative process underlying this framework, Table 1 summarizes the principal theoretical sources informing each dimension. The table illustrates how the framework was developed through systematic integration across established well-being models, autonomy research, and advising practice.

Table 1

Theoretical Grounding of the 15 Learner Well-Being Dimensions

Dimension	Primary theoretical grounding
Meaning in learning	PERMA (Seligman, 2011); reflective dialogue (Kato & Mynard, 2016)
Achievement	PERMA; Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017); Dweck (2006)
Engagement	PERMA; EMPATHICS (Oxford, 2016); reflective dialogue
Positive emotions	PERMA; EMPATHICS; Fredrickson (2001)
Relatedness	Self-Determination Theory; Mercer & Gregersen (2020); reflective dialogue
Competence	Self-Determination Theory; EMPATHICS
Autonomy	Self-Determination Theory; Tassinari (2012); reflective dialogue
Digital well-being	OECD (2013); UNESCO (2023)
Resilience	EMPATHICS; Martin & Marsh (2008); reflective dialogue
Finance	Self-Determination Theory (contextual resources); EMPATHICS
Physical environment	Mercer & Gregersen (2020); EMPATHICS
Time	EMPATHICS; reflective dialogue
Humor	EMPATHICS (character strengths); PERMA (positive emotion)
Vitality (health, sleep, exercise)	EMPATHICS; PERMA; Fisher (2000)
Overall well-being	Integrative construct across frameworks

As shown in Table 1, each dimension reflects cross-framework integration rather than reliance on a single theoretical source.

Advising in Language Learning and Reflective Dialogue

Advising in language learning (ALL) has developed as a learner-centered approach that supports autonomy through intentional dialogue and structured reflection. Rather than focusing on direct instruction, advising creates dialogic spaces in which learners interpret

their experiences, question underlying assumptions, and take greater ownership of their learning decisions (Mozzon-McPherson, 2001; Mynard, 2020; Mynard & Carson, 2012). Reflection, in this context, is not treated as an isolated cognitive act but as a relational process shaped through interaction.

Research on autonomy has consistently emphasized the importance of reflection and learner awareness in sustaining self-directed learning. Tassinari (2012) described autonomy as a dynamic capacity that develops through ongoing reflection on goals, emotions, strategies, and contextual conditions. Building on this perspective, reflective dialogue has been conceptualized as a collaborative process in which learners and advisors co-construct meaning by exploring experiences, beliefs, and emotions related to learning (Kato & Mynard, 2016). Through purposeful questioning and empathic listening, advisors support learners in developing awareness and translating reflection into informed action (Mynard, 2020).

In practice, advising conversations frequently extend beyond strategy use to include learners' vitality, relationships, balance, and sense of purpose. This suggests a close connection between reflective dialogue and learner well-being. Advising approaches informed by Self-Determination Theory have been shown to nurture learners' psychological needs, thereby supporting both autonomy and well-being (Shelton-Strong, 2025). Recent work has further argued that advising can be conceptualized as a psychologically sustainable practice in which dialogue supports learners' ongoing meaning-making and well-being (Kato, 2026). From this perspective, advising can be understood as an autonomy-supportive environment that links dialogue with psychological sustainability.

At the same time, engaging in reflective dialogue requires a certain level of awareness. Learners may sense fluctuations in energy, connection, or motivation without being able to articulate them clearly. When such experiences remain tacit, it can be difficult to bring them fully into dialogue. This points to the value of structured scaffolding that helps learners notice and describe patterns in their well-being before or during reflective conversations. The present study responds to this need by introducing a visualization-based tool designed to support reflective dialogue within autonomy-supportive pedagogy.

Previous research suggests that autonomy cannot be sustained by strategic regulation alone. Rather, it is shaped by learners' evolving psychological experiences over time (Murray, 2021). While advising offers dialogic spaces for meaning-making, learners may benefit from additional support that helps them notice and articulate these experiences more clearly. The following section introduces the design of a visualization-based questionnaire developed with this purpose in mind.

Method

Questionnaire Design and Visualization Principles

The Language Learning Well-Being (LLWB) questionnaire was developed to represent the 15-dimensional framework described in the previous section. Consistent with the view of well-being as dynamic and multidimensional, the tool was designed primarily as a reflective and dialogic resource rather than as a diagnostic instrument. This orientation draws on pedagogical work that positions structured reflection as central to learner development in language learning contexts (Mynard et al., 2023). Although established well-being scales such as PERMA-based instruments (Seligman, 2011) and Ryff's (1989) Psychological Well-Being Scale informed the broader conceptual background, the LLWB questionnaire was created specifically for language learning contexts. Its purpose is not to classify learners or generate fixed judgments, but to support awareness, comparison over time, and meaning-making within autonomy-supportive environments.

The questionnaire consists of 60 items, with four items representing each of the 15 dimensions. This number was selected to balance conceptual coverage with practical usability. Item development was guided by three considerations: theoretical alignment, experiential relevance, and clarity for reflection. Rather than relying on abstract psychological terminology, items were written to reflect learners' lived experiences. For example, items targeting meaning include statements such as "I feel that my language learning is important and valuable in my life," while the dimension of time includes statements such as "I can secure enough time for my language learning." Each dimension includes one negatively worded item. This design invites careful reading and aims to reduce the likelihood of uniform response patterns. It also encourages learners to reflect on possible tensions within their experience. For instance, alongside positively framed statements about engagement, learners encounter items such as "I often feel too exhausted to engage fully in language learning." Negatively worded items were reverse-scored prior to analysis. All items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. A 7-point scale was chosen to capture nuanced differences while remaining manageable for reflective interpretation. The instrument was developed for bilingual use in Japanese and English. Translation was conducted through careful review to maintain conceptual equivalence, with attention to clarity and cultural appropriateness.

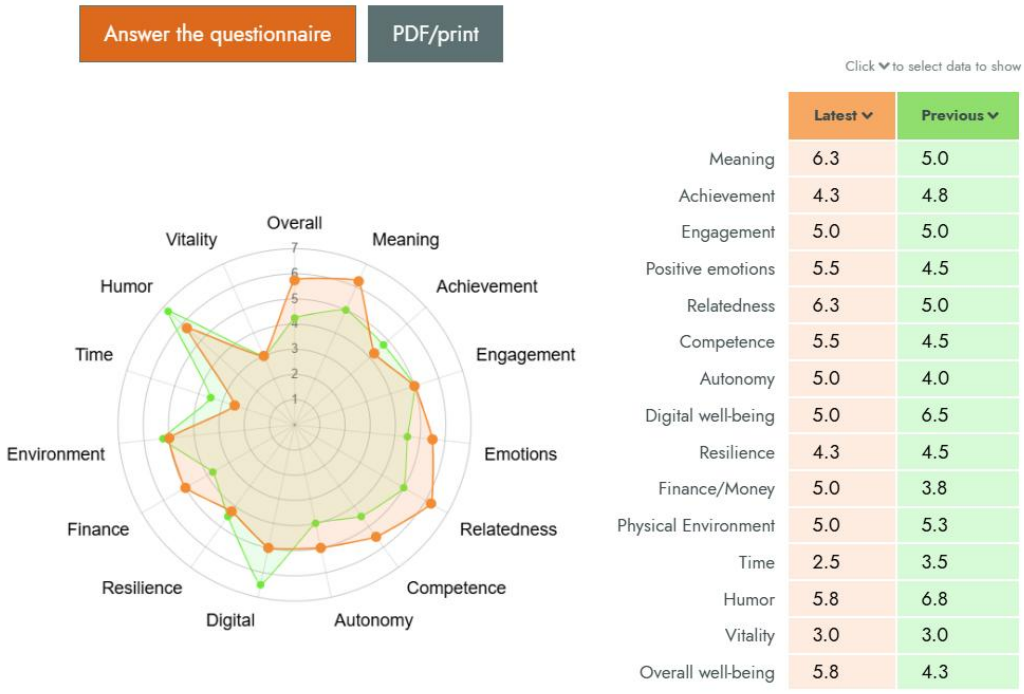
The understanding of well-being as a subjective and multilayered experience was influenced by Maeno and Maeno's (2022) well-being circle framework. The questionnaire

builds on an earlier exploratory learner well-being framework (Kato & Yoshinaga, 2026) and extends it through visualization and language-learning-specific refinement.

A central feature of the LLWB questionnaire is its visualization component. Upon completion, responses are converted into dimension-level scores and displayed in an individualized radar chart. Rather than producing a single composite score, the chart highlights relationships across well-being dimensions. This approach reflects an understanding of well-being as interconnected and encourages learners to notice relationships among dimensions. The LLWB questionnaire is intended for repeated use. Because well-being is viewed as evolving and context-sensitive, a single administration is not treated as definitive. Learners are encouraged to revisit the questionnaire at different stages of their learning and compare profiles over time. In this way, visualization supports reflective dialogue by providing a shared and concrete reference point. A sample screenshot of the web-based interface is provided in Figure 1. A prototype online version of the LLWB tool, including all questionnaire items, is currently available in both Japanese and English to support classroom and advising use. (URL https://well-being-questionnaire.web.app/)

Figure 1

Screenshot of the Web-Based LLWB Questionnaire Showing a Visualized Well-Being Profile



Validation and Pilot Implementation

Content Validity

Content validity of the LLWB questionnaire was examined through expert review using Aiken's V coefficient. Aiken's V was selected because it allows quantification of expert agreement regarding item relevance while accommodating small panels of specialists, which is common in instrument development research (Aiken, 1985; Penfield & Giacobbi, 2004). Five experts participated in the review process, including three Japanese scholars and two native English-speaking scholars. Reviewers had established backgrounds in learner autonomy, well-being research, Self-Determination Theory, positive psychology, and advising in language learning. The inclusion of both Japanese and English-speaking experts ensured conceptual clarity across the bilingual versions of the instrument.

All 60 items were evaluated for relevance to their intended dimension using a 4-point scale (1 = not relevant, 4 = highly relevant). A 4-point scale was selected to avoid a neutral midpoint and encourage clear evaluative judgment. For each item, Aiken's V coefficient was calculated using the standard formula:

$$V = \Sigma (s_i - l) / [n(c - l)]$$

where s_i represents each expert's rating, l the lowest possible rating, c the highest possible rating, and n the number of experts.

The overall mean Aiken's V across all items was 0.66. In line with commonly referenced interpretive guidelines for small expert panels, a value of 0.65 was adopted as a practical threshold for acceptable content validity. The majority of items met or exceeded this level. Subscale-level averages were also examined to identify dimensions requiring refinement. Items that received lower ratings in the expert review were revised to improve clarity and conceptual alignment. The revisions focused on refining wording rather than changing the underlying dimensions. For example, an autonomy item originally phrased as "I evaluate myself based on what I personally value, rather than what others consider important" was revised to "I make choices and decisions based on what I personally value." This revision reflected feedback that autonomy, within Self-Determination Theory, relates more directly to volitional action than to self-evaluation. In total, 21 items were revised before the questionnaire was implemented in the pilot study.

The LLWB questionnaire should be understood as an evolving instrument rather than a finished product. After the initial validation and revisions, a second phase of content review began with the same panel of experts. This follow-up allows comparison across versions and

supports continued refinement of item wording and conceptual clarity. This step-by-step approach reflects the developmental nature of the project. Validation is treated not as a one-time event, but as an ongoing process. The present study therefore reports findings based on the first revised version of the questionnaire.

Participants and Procedure

The LLWB questionnaire was piloted with 30 university students enrolled in a self-access learning module. The pilot implementation was guided by the following research questions: (1) What multidimensional learner well-being profiles emerged through the LLWB questionnaire in a pilot self-access implementation?; and (2) How did learners make sense of their visualized well-being profiles?

Participants included first-year (n = 24), second-year (n = 3), and fourth-year (n = 3) English-major undergraduate students. The questionnaire was administered online at the beginning and end of the spring 2025 semester. Upon completion, participants received immediate visual feedback through the web-based interface. No structured reflective dialogue activities were implemented as part of the pilot; however, participants were invited to reflect on their visualized profiles, and brief qualitative feedback was collected through classroom discussions and obtained during an oral interview with the course instructors to explore their interpretations. Future research will incorporate structured reflective dialogue activities, including positive interventions, to examine their potential impact on learners' well-being profiles.

Findings

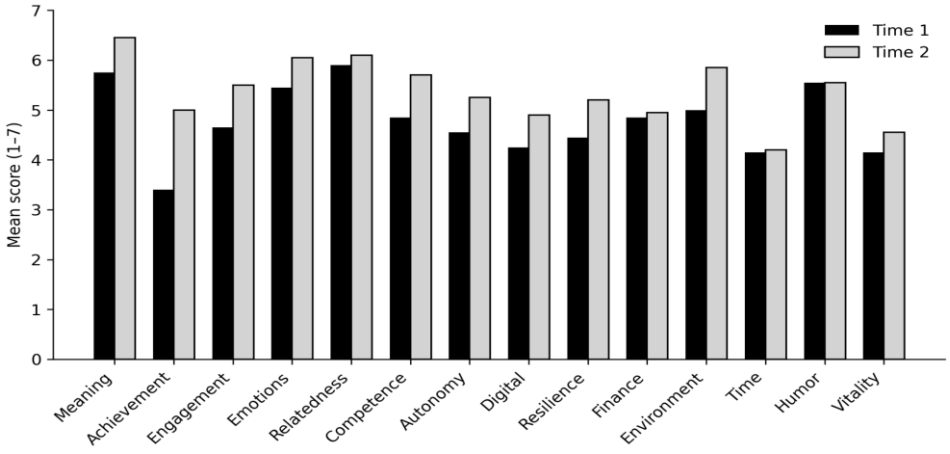
As this study was exploratory in nature and involved a relatively small sample, no inferential statistical analyses were conducted. The descriptive profiles are therefore presented to illustrate tendencies rather than to claim statistical effects. Descriptive results from the first administration showed variation across the 15 well-being dimensions. Higher mean scores were observed in meaning in learning (M = 5.75), positive emotions (M = 5.45), relatedness (M = 5.90), and humor (M = 5.55). In contrast, lower mean scores appeared in achievement (M = 3.40), time (M = 4.15), and vitality (M = 4.15). These profile-based findings suggest that learners felt emotionally engaged and relationally connected to their learning, while at the same time perceiving less progress and fewer personal resources, such as time and energy.

A second administration was conducted at the end of the semester, approximately two months after the first. Figure 2 presents mean scores across the two time points. As shown in

Figure 2, differences between Time 1 and Time 2 remained minimal across most dimensions, indicating relative stability over the semester. While modest upward shifts were observed in several dimensions, including achievement, competence, and environment, overall differences between Time 1 and Time 2 remained minimal. For example, time remained relatively stable (4.15 → 4.20), and humor showed no noticeable change (5.55 → 5.55).

Figure 2

Mean Scores Across 15 Learner Well-Being Dimensions at Two Time Points (n = 30)



Note. Scores range from 1 to 7.

The relative stability across the semester was not unexpected, as no intentional well-being intervention was introduced. The questionnaire was used primarily as a reflective and dialogic resource rather than as a structured enhancement program. In this context, the absence of substantial change can be understood as theoretically coherent rather than problematic. More noteworthy than overall change was the consistency of the profiles across dimensions. Across both administrations, meaning in learning, positive emotions, relatedness, and humor remained comparatively high, whereas achievement, time, and vitality consistently appeared among the lower-scoring dimensions. This configuration suggests that learners valued and emotionally engaged with language learning, yet did not uniformly experience a strong sense of progress or sufficient time and energy.

Qualitative insights were drawn from classroom discussions following completion of the questionnaire. These insights were obtained through an oral interview with the course instructors and were examined thematically to identify recurring themes. The classroom discussions provided further insight into how learners engaged with their visualized profiles. Many students reported that the radar chart encouraged comparison across dimensions and

made previously diffuse concerns easier to articulate. Several noted that language progress did not necessarily correspond to overall well-being, prompting reflection on balance rather than performance alone. Repeated use appeared particularly meaningful: learners who completed the questionnaire twice described greater awareness of subtle shifts and interconnections among dimensions. Some initially focused primarily on lower scores and required facilitative prompts to identify strengths and possible next steps, highlighting the importance of guided dialogue. The bilingual format was generally perceived as accessible and easy to interpret.

Although limited in scale and exploratory in nature, this pilot implementation suggests that the LLWB questionnaire can reveal structural profiles of learner well-being and support reflective awareness within autonomy-supportive contexts. The next phase of this research will involve the design and implementation of targeted well-being-oriented pedagogical interventions to examine whether intentional support produces measurable shifts in specific dimensions.

Discussion

The findings offer tentative responses to the two exploratory research questions. First, the LLWB questionnaire revealed relatively stable multidimensional profiles across the two administrations. Meaning, positive emotions, relatedness, and humor tended to appear higher, whereas achievement, time, and vitality appeared lower. These configurations suggest that emotional engagement did not always align with perceived progress or available resources. Second, learners' reflections indicate that the visualization supported the interpretation of their experiences. The radar chart helped learners compare dimensions and articulate previously diffuse concerns, functioning as a shared reference point in advising dialogue.

Visualization as Pre-Dialogic Scaffolding

The primary contribution of the LLWB questionnaire lies not only in the scores it produces, but in the reflective space that visualization creates. Reflection has long been recognized as central to learner development in language education (Mynard et al., 2023). The present study extends this perspective by exploring how visualization may support reflection before dialogue begins. Although structured reflective dialogue was not implemented in this pilot study, the visualized profiles were positioned as potential shared reference points that could support reflective dialogue in advising or classroom contexts.

When learners see their experiences displayed graphically, what feels vague or difficult to explain becomes visible. Once visible, it becomes easier to talk about. In this way, the radar chart serves as a mediational artifact that supports reflection rather than evaluation.

The pilot findings showed uneven well-being profiles across dimensions. Meaning, positive emotions, and relatedness were relatively high. Achievement, time, and vitality were lower. These differences are important because they reveal relationships among dimensions. A single overall score would not show this structure. The visualization allowed learners to notice how different aspects of their learning experience were connected. Students' responses help clarify this process. Many said that the wheel chart helped them compare dimensions and talk more deeply in peer and advising contexts. Some noticed subtle shifts when they completed the questionnaire a second time. Others realized that language progress did not always match their overall sense of well-being. A few focused first on lower scores. This made the role of guided dialogue especially important, as it helped them reinterpret their profiles more constructively. Taken together, these findings suggest that visualization can function as pre-dialogic scaffolding. It provides a shared reference point. It reduces the difficulty of putting complex feelings into words. It supports movement toward more structured reflection.

Stability and the Dynamic Nature of Well-Being

Two administrations were conducted, but significant overall shifts were not observed. This was not unexpected, as no intentional well-being intervention took place during the semester. Well-being does not necessarily increase through routine participation in learning. The relative stability may reflect a form of dynamic balance. When learners compared their profiles, changes appeared as shifts in configuration rather than clear improvement or decline. This finding aligns with complexity-informed perspectives, which view psychological states as context-sensitive and evolving rather than linear.

Theoretical Implications: Autonomy as Psychologically Sustainable

The multidimensional profiles observed in this study suggest that learner autonomy depends on more than strategies or goal-setting. Agency appears closely connected to affective tone, relational support, available time, and physical vitality. This perspective also aligns with relational views of autonomy, which highlight the role of high-quality relationships in sustaining learner agency over time (Kato, 2022). Viewing well-being as an enabling condition shifts the focus from performance to sustainability. The LLWB questionnaire offers learners a way to monitor these conditions over time. Autonomy, in this

sense, becomes an ongoing process rather than a fixed outcome. It appears to be shaped through learners' relationships, contexts, and evolving life conditions, rather than existing as a stable personal quality.

Pedagogical Implications for Self-Access Learning and Advising

The findings show how visualization can be used within autonomy-supportive pedagogy without imposing fixed targets. In advising and self-access contexts, the radar chart can serve as a shared tool that helps learners talk not only about strategies, but also about workload, relationships, health, and balance. The LLWB questionnaire does not prescribe what a "good" profile should look like. Learners interpret their own data. This approach aligns with principles of awareness, choice, and ownership, understood here as learners' sense of control and responsibility over their learning processes. Measurement becomes a starting point for dialogue, not a judgment of performance.

The Reflective Visualization Cycle

Taken together, the findings also suggest that the LLWB questionnaire functions not only as a measurement tool but as part of an ongoing reflective process. This process links visualization, interpretation, dialogue, and action within an autonomy-supportive framework. The cycle begins with completion of the questionnaire and the generation of a radar chart. The visualization makes multidimensional patterns visible. It gives learners something concrete to look at. From there, learners interpret their profiles. The tool does not provide normative standards. Instead, it invites learners to notice relationships, imbalances, and tensions across dimensions. The next phase unfolds in dialogue. The visual profile serves as a shared reference point. It supports discussion and reduces the difficulty of explaining complex internal experiences. Through this dialogue, learners may begin to identify possible adjustments in strategies, priorities, or learning conditions. These actions are not prescribed. They emerge from the learner's own interpretation.

When repeated over time, this cycle enables learners to notice reconfigurations rather than linear improvement. Well-being does not simply increase. It shifts. It reorganizes. This longitudinal orientation reflects a dynamic understanding of well-being as context-sensitive and evolving. In this way, visualization becomes more than a display of scores. It becomes a bridge between multidimensional well-being theory and everyday pedagogical practice.

Limitations

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. The pilot involved a relatively small sample from a single institutional context, and the findings should therefore be interpreted as exploratory rather than generalizable. The study relied primarily on self-report data, which may reflect response tendencies or subjective interpretation. Initial content validity was supported through expert review using Aiken's V coefficient. However, further psychometric examination will be important. This includes analysis of internal consistency, dimensional structure, and longitudinal reliability. A second validation phase is currently underway to refine item clarity and strengthen conceptual alignment.

Conclusion

This study introduced a language learning-specific conceptualization of learner well-being and presented the Language Learning Well-Being (LLWB) questionnaire as a web-based visual and reflective tool. By organizing well-being across 15 interrelated dimensions and displaying individualized radar charts, the LLWB framework makes visible profiles of learners' well-being that might otherwise remain unnoticed. The exploratory classroom implementation suggests that multidimensional visualization can support reflection before dialogue begins. Rather than treating well-being as a fixed outcome to be optimized, this study views it as a dynamic configuration that can be revisited and reinterpreted over time.

Future research will extend this exploratory phase by incorporating structured positive interventions designed to support specific dimensions of learner well-being. Through repeated visualization and guided dialogue, the LLWB tool may illuminate how patterns shift in response to intentional pedagogical support. A practical guidebook for classroom and advising implementation is currently in preparation, with the aim of integrating well-being-oriented practices more systematically within autonomy-supportive learning environments.

Acknowledgments

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Multicultural Camping Excursions: A Case Study of Emotions and the Emergence of Motivation and Agency in L2 Learning

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Abstract

Emotions play a central role in shaping motivation and engagement in second language (L2) learning, yet they remain underexplored in learning-beyond-the-classroom (LBC) contexts. Responding to calls for studies of emerging LBC settings, this mixed-methods case study investigates how emotions experienced during multicultural camping excursions relate to university students' motivation to participate and the subsequent emergence of learner agency in L2 learning. The study focuses on three voluntary overnight camping excursions (*SILCamps*) organized with support by a self-access learning center in Japan, involving 37 participants from two universities. Data were collected from three qualitative sources: open-ended reflective surveys, asynchronous email interviews, and researchers' field notes and direct observations. Survey data were coded and quantitatively analyzed using frequency counts, interviews were analyzed for themes, and field notes and observations were analyzed as participant-level cases. The three data sets were integrated in a single convergent parallel mixed methods case (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Findings indicate that participants experienced an interplay of positive and negative emotions, with anticipation and anxiety prominent prior to participation and increasing reports of fun, happiness, and relaxation during and after. These emotions were linked to social interaction, engagement with nature, and low-pressure communication with peers and faculty. Beyond the excursions, participants reported changes in motivation, English use, and agentic behaviors such as taking initiative, joining new activities, and assuming leadership roles. The study suggests that socially meaningful, low-barrier extracurricular experiences can function as affective catalysts, fostering motivation and supporting the development of learner agency beyond formal instructional settings.

感情は第二言語学習において動機づけや学習参加に中心的な役割を果たすが、教室外学習の文脈では充分に検討されていない。本研究は、多文化型キャンプ活動において、大学生の第二言語学習への動機づけや学習者エージェンシーの創発と感情の関連について検討する混合研究法によるケーススタディである。3 回の任意参加型宿泊キャンプにおいて 2 大学から 37 名が参加し、自由記述調査（キャンプ参加前、参加中、参加後）、キャンプ後のメールインタビュー、研究者によるフィールドノートと観察記録の 3 種のデータを独立して分析した後、統合して解釈する収束的並行デザイン（Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018）を採用した。

その結果、参加前は期待と不安が顕著であった一方、キャンプ中および参加後は楽しさ・幸福感・リラックスといった肯定的感情が増加した。これらは他者との交流、自然体験、教員・仲間との低負荷なコミュニケーションと関連していた。キャンプ後も、動機づけや英語使用、主体的行動の増加といった変化が報告された。以上より、参加ハードルの低い社会的課外活動は、動機づけとエージェンシーの発達を促す感情的触媒として機能し得ることが示唆された。

Keywords: emotions, motivation, learner agency, learning beyond the classroom, camping

Emotions have long been recognized as playing a central role in shaping learners' motivation and engagement in second language (L2) learning. Specifically, the term "affect" encompasses learners' feelings, attitudes, and emotional dispositions, and plays a decisive role in L2 achievement (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Early socio-psychological research demonstrated that learners' attitudes toward the target language community form a key component of this affective dimension (Gardner, 1985). In the Japanese EFL context, Yashima (2002) showed that learners' international posture and affective orientations significantly influence their willingness to communicate. Language anxiety has also been identified as an important affective factor affecting performance (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Expanding on this line of research, Dörnyei (2005) underscored the motivational power of future self-images, while Pekrun (2006) emphasized the role of achievement emotions in sustaining engagement.

While much of this foundational work conceptualizes emotion as an individual psychological construct, emerging research highlights that emotions are also shaped, transformed, and sustained through social participation in communities (Murray, 2014) and satisfy basic psychological needs (Watkins, 2022). In self-access and advising contexts, emotional experiences are often dialogically co-constructed through supportive interaction. Research in language advising has demonstrated that reflective dialogue can help learners reframe negative emotions, clarify goals, and develop intentional action (Kato & Mynard, 2016), positioning emotions as relationally mediated and developmentally transformative. Such dialogic engagement reflects Little's (1991) view of autonomy not as independence, but as interdependence, where learners' capacity for self-directed action develops within supportive social relationships.

Self-access learning centers (SALCs) have long been recognized for their capacity to facilitate socially supportive learning environments beyond classrooms, but interest has been growing regarding the potential of environments that are located even further outside traditionally defined boundaries (Reinders & Benson, 2017). This paper directly answers the call made by Reinders and Benson (2017) for in-depth studies of how emerging settings are used for learning-beyond-the-classroom (LBC) by individuals or small groups of language learners. Within the context of emotions in self-access language learning, we applied a case study approach to investigate how the emotions felt by English language learners in and around social camping excursions connected to motivation and agency related to their L2 learning.

Emotions as Precursors to Motivation and Agency

Motivation has been regarded as a key predictor of L2 learning success (Boo et al., 2015; Dörnyei, 2009; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Gardner, 1985, 2010) and can be understood as the driving force that transforms learners' feelings and intentions into sustained action. From this perspective, emotional experiences do not remain internal states but become catalysts that energize goal-directed behavior. Conceptually, Dörnyei's (2009) *L2 Motivational Self System* comprises the *ideal L2 self* (the learner's desired future self as a competent L2 user), the *ought-to L2 self* (attributes one believes one should possess due to expectations or obligations from others), and the *L2 learning experience* (situation specific motives related to the immediate environment and experience). In contexts such as Japan, where social expectations (Taylor & Yasuda, 2025) and interactional norms influence self-concepts (Murray, 2014; Murray & Fujishima, 2013; Murray et al., 2018), and where socially mediated learning experiences in self-access environments (Kato & Mynard, 2016) further shape learner engagement, the o*ught-to L2 self* and contextual learning experiences may play a particularly significant role. Motivation, therefore, may emerge not only from individual aspiration but also from socially mediated responsibility and interaction.

In the Japanese context, Yamashita (2015) demonstrated how affective experiences are mediated through advising relationships, where supportive interpersonal dialogue fosters autonomy and sustained motivation. Similarly, narrative inquiry research in a Japanese social language learning space has shown that emotionally meaningful *senpai–kōhai* (senior–junior) relationships, defined as hierarchical yet supportive ties between students in different academic years, can trigger and sustain motivation through relational encouragement and shared goals (Taylor & Yasuda, 2025). In this regard, Oxford (2011) highlighted the dynamic interplay between affect, self-regulation, and intentional action, suggesting that positive emotional states can facilitate motivated behavior and strategic engagement.

Regarding agency, Bandura (2001) conceptualized it as intentional, goal-directed action, and Ahearn (2001) defined it as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (p. 112), emphasizing that the ability to act is shaped through social interaction and cultural context. This relational understanding aligns with Vygotskian perspectives on development. Within the zone of proximal development, commonly known as ZPD, learners extend their capabilities through socially mediated interaction, and development emerges through collaborative activity rather than isolated competence (Vygotsky, 1978). In educational discourse, the OECD Learning Compass 2030 (OECD, 2019) similarly highlights student agency as the capacity to set goals, reflect, and act responsibly, underscoring the importance

of co-agency in mutually supportive relationships. Taken together, these perspectives indicate that experiences which may appear indirectly related to language learning, such as participation in a camping excursion, can foster positive emotions, reshape learners' motivational self-concepts, and create conditions for enhanced engagement and agency.

Facilitating Socially Meaningful Experiences

The SALC at Sojo University comprises the entire second floor of the Sojo International Learning Center (SILC). Students here can access a variety of resources and opportunities to use English and find encouragement for sustained, self-directed learning. For example, SALC staff organize and host different events throughout the year, such as holiday parties and presentation contests within the SALC. Beyond the SALC, faculty sometimes invite students to join them in community activities, such as the Kumamoto City relay marathon or street cleaning. Although these activities were not specifically designed for English use, they fostered communication, thereby creating informal learning spaces.

Recently, the SALC management team has placed greater emphasis on accessibility and low-threshold participation for students from diverse academic backgrounds. These efforts are conceptualized as "micro-events" (Horai & Fukushima, 2026): small-scale, student-led or department-collaborative initiatives that use English as a tool for participation rather than as an explicit learning objective. By reducing performance pressure and fostering psychologically safe interaction, they are meant to encourage voluntary engagement and shared ownership within the SALC community. Reflections from student staff who have organized and led micro-events in this SALC indicate increased ownership and proactive engagement through planning and facilitation roles, while the low-pressure structure appears to lower psychological barriers to English use among general participants (Horai & Fukushima, 2026). The importance of social interaction in developing learner agency has been discussed in research with learners in this context (Rowberry, 2022). Taken together, these findings suggest that motivation and learner agency may emerge through accessible, community-based participation rather than performance-focused language tasks alone. Even though the focus on English learning is indirect, the experiences themselves can be very powerful.

The *SILCamps* Program

As part of an overarching research project investigating a range of outcomes in outdoor learning environments, the SALC at Sojo University has, since the 2024-25 academic

year, been hosting single-night camping expeditions once a semester with SILC faculty at a local campsite. Called *SILCamps*, the excursions were proposed as a means by which students could make new friends, enjoy nature, learn camping skills, and use English to interact with university faculty and staff in a novel, multicultural environment (see Kirchmeyer & Ott, 2025). As such, the excursions were designed to meet several criteria relating to self-access and the aims of the SILC. First, they would be entirely voluntary and accessible to all students, which was ensured by covering all costs with the personal research allowances of the organizing faculty. Second, the excursions would feature communicative and participative activities that required communication and teamwork such as communal cooking, hikes, games, campfires, etc. Third, faculty and staff were encouraged to take an awareness-raising approach to their interactions with student participants. This meant that English was encouraged but not mandated, and that personal stories and anecdotes relating to multi- and intercultural experiences should be shared whenever appropriate.

Research Questions

This study mainly aimed to investigate the range of emotions reflected in the participants' descriptions of their experiences. Moreover, we hoped to identify connections between emotions and motivational factors that contributed to participants' decisions to join the excursions, as well as any impacts that emotions experienced during participation may have had on their subsequent motivation and agency in L2 learning. We outlined three questions to direct our investigation:

RQ1. What emotions did participants experience throughout the excursions?

RQ2. What did participants retrospectively cite as having influenced their motivation to participate?

RQ3. What did participants retrospectively cite as having influenced their motivation and/or agency in other aspects of their lives after the excursion concluded?

Methods

This study was designed as a single convergent parallel mixed methods case study, based on both mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) and case study design (Yin, 2018) literature. In other words, the three excursions were embedded within a single bounded case, defined as the *SILCamps* program. Findings were based on the merging (convergence) of multiple types of evidence and analyses (mixed methods) and were determined separately and simultaneously (parallel) rather than consecutively. This design

has been used in educational contexts (e.g., Rech et al., 2023), and is supported by research claiming that programs, rather than individual events, can be more appropriate as cases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Importantly, this design allowed the researchers to effectively utilize data collected from multiple excursions despite not having equal collection rates of data types across the excursions.

Participants

Participants included 37 students from two universities. Participants from the researchers' institution (Sojo University) were recruited via in-class announcements made by their course instructors and with posters displayed in highly visible areas around campus. Participants from nearby Kumamoto Gakuen University (KGU) were recruited via a course instructor known to the researchers, as well as through personal connections via one Sojo University SALC student staff member, who was also an excursion participant.

Roughly one week prior to each excursion, participants attended a hybrid briefing during which they were informed of the research project details and of their ability to participate in the excursion without consenting to the use of their data. All participants willingly consented and their general demographic information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Variable	All (*N*=37)	Excursion 1 (*n*=13)	Excursion 2 (*n*=12)	Excursion 3 (*n*=19)
Age (range, mean) [a]	18–33, 19.8	18–33, 21.6	18–33, 20.3	18–21, 18.6
School year [a]	1st (16), 2nd (15), 3rd (2), 4th (1), Grad.(3)	1st (3), 2nd (6), 3rd (1), Grad. (3)	1st (4), 2nd (7), Grad. (1)	1st (11), 2nd (6), 3rd (1), 4th (1)
Gender	f (23), m (13)	f (9), m (4)	f (5), m (7)	f (12), m (7)
Nationality	Japanese (33), Korean (2), Chinese (1)	Japanese (10), Korean (2), Chinese (1)	Japanese (11), Korean (1)	Japanese (19)
Institution	Sojo (30), KGU (6)	Sojo (13)	Sojo (9), KGU (3)	Sojo (15), KGU (4)
Excursions attended	1(31), 2(5), 3(1)	1(13)	1(6), 2(6)	1(17), 2(1), 3(1)

[a]If data changed over time, data reflects participants' status at the time of their first excursion.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected from three sources. The first data source (hereafter, DS1) comprised qualitative responses to open-ended questions as shown in Appendix A, which were collected via paper-based surveys immediately before, during, and after the excursions. For this paper, only data from the first excursion's surveys were analyzed. This dataset was then quantitated as frequency tables. The second data source (DS2) included qualitative responses to asynchronous interviews conducted between the researchers and participants via email after Excursion 3. The third data source (DS3) consisted of direct observations made by researchers relating to the participants both during and after all excursions. Figure 1 depicts how these sources were converged to form evidence in a single case design as modelled by Yin (2018, p. 129), and Figure 2 positions these sources in a flowchart of the convergent mixed methods design as modeled by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018, p. 70).

Figure 1

Convergence of Evidence

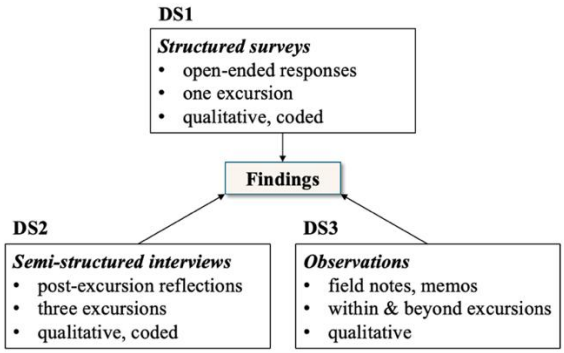
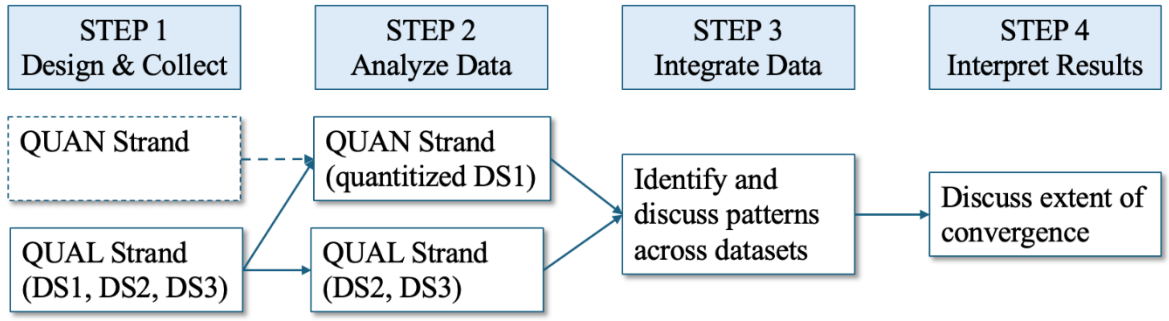


Figure 2

Flowchart of Datasets in Mixed Method Procedures



DS1: Qualitative Survey Responses

Participants were prompted with two open-ended questions during each of three short reflective sessions scheduled throughout the excursions. Researchers announced and explained the purpose of these surveys just before each session and encouraged participants to engage deeply with them as part of the collective excursion experience.

Responses were coded in a four-stage process. In the first stage, researchers digitized and translated raw data using Microsoft Excel to create a data table which separated the original responses into sentence-level units of analysis and an English translation (or revision) of each unit. In the second pass, researchers individually analyzed the data table, using inductive thematic analysis (Naeem, et al., 2023) in which researchers tagged units with original thematic codes. Researchers then met to create a standardized coding protocol, which they applied individually during the third stage. In this stage, the edited (translated or revised) units were coded separately from the raw units. This allocation was designed to ensure a robust analysis which would mitigate translation errors. Results from the third stage were collated in the fourth stage, wherein researchers met to achieve consensus on all units, resulting in the final dataset. To determine the prevalence of each code, a frequency analysis was conducted by calculating the number of occurrences of each code.

DS2: Asynchronous Interview Responses

To capture retrospective perceptions of participants' experiences, semi-structured asynchronous email interviews were conducted. This method was chosen because respondents would have a comfortable amount of time to reflect and craft a response (Pell et al., 2020), and the interviews would already be transcribed (Ayling & Mewse, 2009). In addition, researchers believed the physical distance maintained between interviewers and interviewees, who were characterized by other relationships such as teacher-student and

senior-junior colleague, might facilitate more honest responses. To align the researchers' understanding, reduce biases, and maintain consistent protocol, a bilingual email template containing three open-ended questions (see Appendix B) and interviewing guidelines (see Appendix C) were created and discussed among the researchers before the interview period commenced.

Each researcher was assigned a subset of the participants based largely on their familiarity with the participant and a balanced allocation of gender and academic year. Depending on the participant, email interviews commenced one month to one year after their most recent excursion participation and lasted up to a month. The email responses were compiled and organized in a spreadsheet, translated into English, and analyzed using an inductive thematic coding approach (Naeem, et al., 2023). Recurring ideas were identified and themes were developed based on the content of the participants' responses. Each response was subsequently coded according to the identified themes. A frequency analysis was then conducted by calculating the number of participants who referenced each theme and how often the themes occurred in the responses.

DS3: Direct Observations

As part of the overarching *SILCamps* research project, researchers took field notes and made observations before, during, and after each excursion. Field notes are widely recommended as a means of documenting contextual information and preserving rich detail necessary for rigorous qualitative analysis (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). During the excursions, researchers relied on a semi-structured observation protocol (see Appendix D) to ensure consistency of focus and comparability of data. After each excursion, researchers met to debrief the event, discuss their observations, and compile minutes of these debriefing sessions for future reference.

For the purpose of this study, which included research questions that targeted participant agency beyond the excursions, data was also collected from unstructured observations made directly by researchers at unscheduled times outside the excursion timeframes. As most of the participants were students at the researchers' institution, the researchers often saw or interacted with participants beyond the excursions, such as in the SALC. Some of these interactions and observations held meaningful insights relating to this study and were thus included as anecdotal references which are intended to expand on the quantitative analyses of the more structured instruments used to assemble DS1 and DS2. Concerns regarding the credibility (Rose et al, 2019, p. 103) of unstructured observations

were addressed using multiple observers, member checking with target participants, and thick descriptions.

Results

DS1: Qualitative Survey Responses

Completed surveys were collected from all 13 participants in the first *SILCamps* excursion. After researchers individually completed the first stage of inductive coding, they met to discuss and create a standardized coding protocol. Researchers' keywords were condensed to a total of 41 distinct codes which were further organized into three themes: "Affect" was used to categorize units that described participants' feelings, attitudes, and moods, "Activities" described units in which participants mentioned specific actions, and "Environment" was used to categorize units that mentioned features of the participants' immediate physical surroundings. The final dataset included 395 sentence-level units, each of which could be individually tagged with any number of applicable codes by each of the three researchers. Through consensus-building discussions of each coding discrepancy, a final dataset was confirmed, and a frequency count analysis was performed on the final dataset, which are presented in Tables 2 through 4.

Table 2

Frequency Count for "Affect" Category, Ranked

Affect (11)	Total	R1	R2	Before	R3	R4	During	R5	R6	After
Anticipation	59	17	25	42	1	11	12	1	4	5
Fun	57	3	3	6	13	12	25	6	20	26
Happiness	42	4	2	6	13	6	19	10	7	17
Anxiety	34	12	4	16	2	13	15	0	3	3
Relaxed	25	1	1	2	8	4	12	7	4	11
Achievement	14	0	0	0	4	1	5	2	7	9
Regret	10	0	1	1	0	4	4	1	4	5
Safe	6	2	2	4	0	1	1	0	1	1
Interest	5	3	1	4	0	1	1	0	0	0
Alive	3	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	1	1
Bittersweet	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Total	258			81			96			81

Table 3

Frequency Counts for "Activities" Category, Ranked

Activities (13)	Total	R1	R2	Before	R3	R4	During	R5	R6	After
Camping	60	14	8	22	3	21	24	3	11	14
Hiking	40	0	5	5	9	13	22	0	13	13
Eating	35	0	2	2	6	15	21	0	12	12
Cooking	31	0	1	1	5	8	13	6	11	17
Talking	29	1	2	3	7	11	18	3	5	8
Meeting people	27	3	7	10	3	12	15	1	1	2
Experiencing nature	18	1	5	6	4	3	7	1	4	5
Cooperating	16	0	0	0	1	6	7	4	5	9
Giving/receive help	16	0	0	0	0	7	7	4	5	9
Learning	15	1	3	4	0	5	5	2	4	6
Gaining perspectives	14	1	2	3	2	3	5	2	4	6
Using English	12	1	4	5	1	1	2	3	2	5
Playing games	10	0	2	2	2	3	5	0	3	3
Total	323			63			151			109

Table 4

Frequency Counts for "Environment" Category, Ranked

Environment (17)	Total	R1	R2	Before	R3	R4	During	R5	R6	After
Food	54	0	3	3	7	14	21	13	17	30
Nature	38	2	9	11	8	6	14	4	9	13
Friends	34	3	4	7	6	11	17	6	4	10
Campfire	26	0	5	5	7	6	13	2	6	8
Equipment	18	2	0	2	1	6	7	4	5	9
Teachers	13	1	3	4	1	3	4	1	4	5
English	12	1	4	5	1	1	2	3	2	5
Strangers	9	3	2	5	0	4	4	0	0	0
Zoo	9	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	7	7
Kindness	7	0	0	0	1	2	3	3	1	4
Games	6	0	2	2	2	1	3	0	1	1
Structured activities	5	0	1	1	0	3	3	0	1	1
Children	3	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1
Digital detox	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
Culture	2	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
Music	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Puzzles	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Total	242			47			96			99

DS2: Asynchronous Interviews

Researchers initiated interviews by sending individual emails to all 37 participants who had joined at least one of the three excursions and received 20 responses (54.0%). As per the interviewing guidelines (Appendix C, 2.e.), researchers often consulted with each other throughout the interview period and sent 18 follow-up emails at their own discretion, which were uniquely tailored to each response. Of these, 16 responses were received (88.9%), and three interviews progressed to a third exchange which received two final responses (66.6%).

In total, 38 email responses were analyzed, including 20 initial and 18 follow-up responses. As a result of the two-pass coding process, seven themes were identified. The prevalence of each theme was subsequently calculated, and based on each theme, initial codes were assigned to segments of the responses that reflected participants' reported experiences, emotions, and motivations. Results of the two-pass coding and frequency analysis are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Frequency Counts for Codes, Ranked

Theme	Students	Percentage	Occurrences
Initiatives taken / agency / mindset change	13	65%	15
English use / practice	11	55%	13
Interaction with teachers	11	55%	11
Making new friends	10	50%	11
Nature	10	50%	11
Digital detox	3	15%	4
Low cost / no preparation	2	10%	2

DS3: Direct Observations

During the concluding debriefs held onsite, participants were asked to share one main takeaway from the experience with the entire group and were observed making comments directly related to their current motivation. For example, comments such as "I feel motivated to do my best tomorrow" (paraphrased and translated) that referenced behavior in academics or part time jobs were heard. These kinds of comments were often stated in direct connection with having challenged themselves to try something new during the excursion. This observation was made repeatedly across each excursion and confirmed in all researchers' field notes.

In addition to the semi-structured observations, three specific unstructured observations were made by researchers outside the excursions' specified timeframes. The first took the form of a painting, created by one of the participants after participating in the first excursion. The student explained in the email interview that the experience inspired them and the memory of it was so vivid that they created the painting (included in Appendix E).

The second observation related to a third-year participant from Sojo who took the initiative to plan and hold a "coffee hour" event series in the café on the first floor of the SILC. During these events, students were invited for free coffee and snacks provided by the SALC and were encouraged to meet and mingle with other students and use English wherever possible. Though supported by the SALC with funding, this micro-event was conceptualized and realized entirely through the effort of one student participant, who later delivered an English-language academic presentation about his efforts (Koyashiki, 2026).

The third observation can be described as the continuation of personal relationships that were formed during the excursions. Observations of these outcomes were observed by all researchers in several contexts, including observations of formerly unacquainted participants socializing and studying together in the SALC, or interacting more closely with each other in a class. One noteworthy example occurred when a researcher discovered that two participants who had met during one of the excursions had thereafter started a romantic relationship. In all cases, pre-excursion degrees of acquaintance were verifiable through the excursion registration form, which asked potential participants if they were joining with a friend.

Discussion

In line with the convergent parallel mixed methods case design used in this study, the discussion serves to integrate data sources and identify convergence (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), thereby constructing meaningful answers to each research question. Our findings indicate that participants were motivated to join as a means to satisfy individual needs, that participants experienced a shift in emotions from negative to positive, and that boosts in motivation and agency were, for some participants, transferred to contexts beyond the camping excursions.

Supporting Learner Agency Through Need Satisfaction

Participants' motivations to join the excursions can be understood as emerging from the desire to satisfy key psychological needs, particularly the desire for social connection,

emotional comfort, and supportive learning conditions. Once these needs were met, together they contributed to increased engagement and the development of learner agency.

In the post-excursion email interviews (DS2) 50% of participants reported that their reason for joining the excursion was to make new friends. In the coded "Activities" category in DS1, while not the highest ranked, "talking" and "meeting people" were common in the responses. This emphasis on interpersonal engagement indicates that opportunities for communication and social connection were both strongly desired and experienced as meaningful, influencing participants' perceptions and engagement before, during, and after the excursions. One participant reported maintaining friendships formed during the excursion several months after its conclusion, a finding further supported by researchers' observations of participants continuing to interact in the SALC and around campus. In line with Little's (1991) view of autonomy as socially situated, these sustained interpersonal connections may have provided learners with a supportive context for continued engagement and agency.

This leads to another reason for joining *SILCamps* that was commonly cited in the datasets: a desire to relax and spend time in nature. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) argue that anxiety-inducing environments can interfere with cognitive processing and lead learners to associate negative emotions with language use. For university students who may experience anxiety or fatigue related to classroom learning or university life, the opportunity to spend time outdoors may therefore provide an appealing alternative environment that supports emotional comfort and mental refreshment, creating conditions more conducive to engagement and communication. A student stated, "Right after finishing entrance exams, I had just started my unfamiliar university life, and it was a really tough time. That's why I wanted to spend some time in nature and relax."

Notably in DS2, 55% of participants indicated that the presence or the encouragement of SILC teachers was influential on their decision to join or contributed to their sense of comfort during the event. One student said, "I like new experiences and love camping and nature. I felt reassured by the fact that I would be participating with the SILC teachers." The teachers' involvement appears to have functioned as a form of affective support, lowering barriers to participation, and enabling students to engage more fully in the experience. This finding aligns with Watkins' (2022) argument that supportive social learning environments can help satisfy learners' psychological needs and encourage participation and engagement. This affective support from the teachers may have also facilitated positive experiences that contributed to post-excursion increases in confidence and agency. Murray (2014) argues that learner autonomy develops through social relationships and participation in supportive

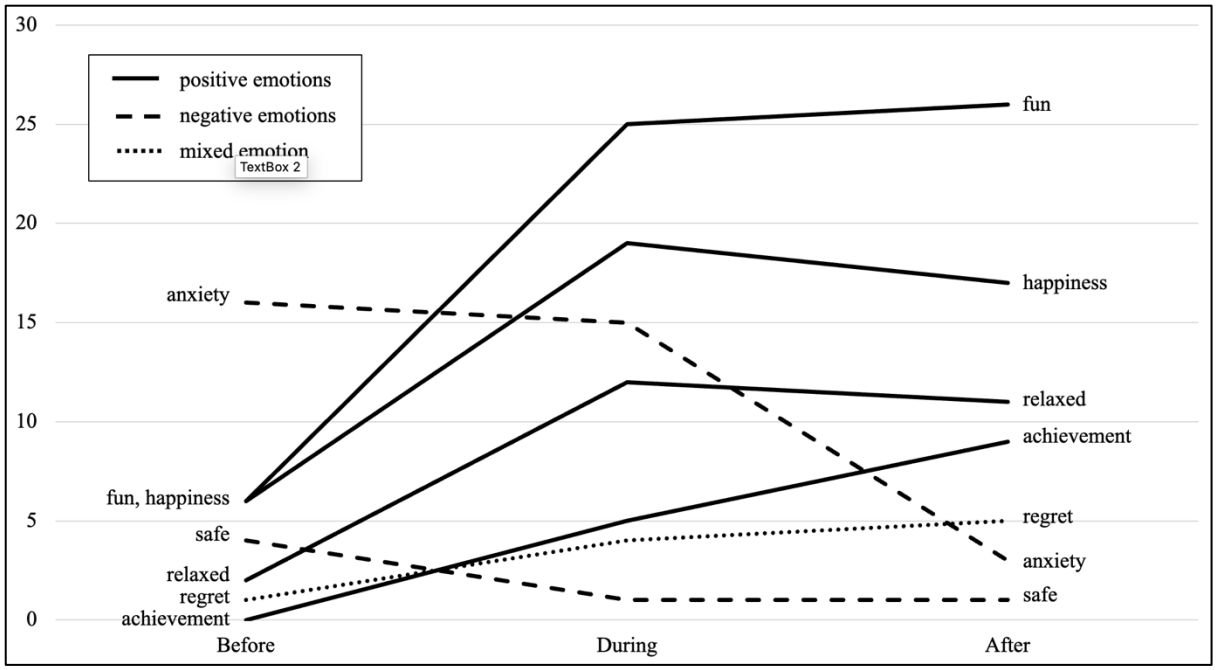
learning environments. Taken together, these findings suggest that participants' motivations were shaped not only by practical interests, but also by emotional needs, including the desire to reduce anxiety, increase comfort, and develop a sense of belonging within the university environment.

Shifting the Balance of Emotions

Analysis of survey responses (DS1) provides important insight into the emotions and lived experiences of the participants of the *SILCamps.* Within the coded "Affect" category, the most frequently occurring term was "anticipation," followed by "fun" and "happiness." The prominence of "anticipation" hints that participants joined the excursion with a sense of expectancy and emotional investment, indicating that the experience held personally meaningful significance even prior to their participation, perhaps due to both excitement for a new experience and uncertainty associated with unfamiliar social and linguistic environments. This anticipatory emotional investment may have functioned as an important motivational precursor, influencing participants' willingness to participate and their openness to the experience. It is also important to note the shifting tone of codes appearing in participants' responses during the excursion, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Shift in Prominent Emotions Experienced During an Excursion



At the beginning of the excursion, participants often wrote of their anxieties, which primarily included speaking with new acquaintances, trying new things, and camping safely. The presence of these negative emotions (dashed lines) clearly decreased over time, whereas positive emotions (solid lines) increased. Notably, "regret" (dotted line) was expressed throughout the excursion with regards to participants' level of preparedness, for example by regretting that they had not packed a certain item. However, the term often appeared in post-excursion reflections with relation to having participated in more structured, communication-building activities. In all cases, the term "regret" was used to communicate a realization that the participants could and should have acted differently to produce a more desirable outcome, demonstrating the kind of self-monitoring necessary for the realization of *future-selves* (Dörnyei, 2005).

From the beginning of the excursion to the end, it can be said that participants experienced a general shift in emotions from mixed to positive. This shift is demonstrative of the transformational potential of participation in social communities (Murray, 2014) and micro-events (Horai & Fukushima, 2026). Moreover, it may have helped to create conditions that supported participants' motivation and agency when they engaged in subsequent academic, social, and language-learning contexts as determined by Kirchmeyer & Ott (2025).

Transfer of Motivation and Agency Beyond the Excursions

Participation in the excursion appeared to reshape some learners' perceptions of English use, contributing to increased motivation and the development of agency. Over half of the participants who responded to email interviews reported that their mindset towards English use changed after joining. For example:

> "In university classes, English conversation always feels like an extension of the lesson itself. Until now, I hadn't really experienced these kinds of natural, everyday conversations like I did during this camp. I think it was a turning point that shifted my awareness from seeing English as just a subject to seeing it as a tool for talking with people."

This shift in perception reflects not only a cognitive reframing of English use, but also an emotional transformation, in which English became associated with meaningful interpersonal interaction rather than academic evaluation. Consistent with Yashima's (2002) work on willingness to communicate, this emotional reframing to English as a tool for social connection may have encouraged greater engagement with the language while also reducing anxiety.

Importantly, a significant percentage of participants in DS2 (65%) described taking greater initiative following the excursion, including joining more university events, shifting their mindset about expressing opinions or will, or taking increased ownership of their personal language learning goals. One student expressed the following:

> "Through this experience, I realized that even when you feel anxious or nervous, taking action can change your perspective. Since then, I have developed a mindset of trying new things without fear, especially when something interests me. When faced with a difficult choice, I now try to choose action rather than regret not trying."

This reported increase in agency aligns with patterns observed in DS1, where the frequency of the word "achievement" can be seen to have increased in post-excursion responses, suggesting a growing sense of achievement and agency (Pekrun, 2006). Observation data (DS3) provide further support for these self-reported changes, as researchers documented concrete behavioral evidence of increased agency. For example, the participant who independently initiated and hosted the "coffee hour" English café created opportunities for continued language use and peer interaction. This behavior reflects a transition from participation to leadership as the student moved beyond engaging in provided opportunities to independently creating opportunities for others, demonstrating autonomy.

In another instance, motivated by a desire to share the experience of digital detox in nature, relaxation, and social connection that they had found meaningful in their initial experience with *SILCamps,* a participant reported organizing their own camping excursion for their classmates. The participant noted that limiting cell service encouraged deeper conversations and stronger interpersonal relationships, while the natural environment provided a sense of refreshment and well-being. This action demonstrates not only continued engagement, but also the emotional significance of the experience and the development of personal agency. Consistent with Dörnyei and Ushioda's (2011) view of learners as active agents capable of shaping their own learning experiences, the participant appeared to internalize the positive affective and social dimensions of the excursion and took initiative to recreate a similar environment for their peers.

Across the three datasets, these findings show that the *SILCamps* excursion functioned as a place for participants to experience emotions as a key mechanism to influencing agency development. Pre-excursion initial anxiety and uncertainty were followed by positive emotional experiences including happiness, relaxation, and achievement. These positive affective experiences may have contributed to increased confidence, reduced fear of failure, and greater willingness to engage in new activities, including those aimed at L2

learning. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) state that learners are active agents who can shape their own learning trajectories when they develop confidence, motivation, and a sense of ownership over their actions. The emotional progression experienced by the participants appears to have supported transitions from hesitant individuals to more proactive learners capable of independently initiating new personal, academic, and social opportunities

Limitations

Some limitations should be noted. First, only 20 of 37 participants responded to the email interviews (DS2), introducing potential response bias; percentages reported from this dataset reflect respondents only and may not represent all excursion participants. Second, the time elapsed between camp participation and interview ranged from one month to approximately one year. Even though stimulating photos of the event were sent alongside the interview questions, this raises concerns about memory accuracy among later respondents. Standardizing the interview timing would help address this in future studies. Finally, the voluntary nature of participation means the sample may not represent the broader student population, as participants may already have been more open or motivated than their peers.

Conclusion

This research explored university students' motivations to participate, shifting emotions, and subsequent expressions of agency following a series of multicultural camping excursions, using three qualitative data sources: written surveys (DS1), asynchronous email interviews (DS2), and researcher observations and field notes (DS3). The findings demonstrate that these *SILCamps* excursions functioned as emotionally and socially significant experiences that influenced participants' engagement with L2 language learning and may have served as catalysts for increased learner agency beyond the events themselves. As shown in this case, increased agency in one learner paid dividends in the SALC, resulting in the creation of a new series of student-organized micro-events. The increased frequency of positive emotional expression over the course of the excursion suggests that participation in collaborative activities, particularly those involving communication and social interaction, along with being surrounded by a natural environment contributed to the subsequent motivation and agency taken by students after the event.

Based on these findings, we conclude that multicultural camping excursions can serve as a viable LBC environment with positive outcomes for L2 learning and personal and academic growth. Furthermore, the authors suggest that, since these kinds of micro-events

can stimulate motivation and encourage learners to take initiative in subsequent endeavors, staff and faculty at SALCs should consider organizing and offering similar excursions for the students they serve. While the barriers to organizing individual excursions may be high (Kirchmeyer & Ott, 2026), the potential return may be higher, as participants may return to the center with the desire to pay it forward in their own actions, empowered with an improved sense of agency.

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Appendix A

Structured Surveys

- This survey is designed to elicit your thoughts and feelings as you embark on a social camping excursion.
- Please answer each prompt honestly, legibly, and with as much detail as you are able. We recommend writing in your preferred language.
- Remember, your responses will be kept anonymous, and you can withdraw your responses anytime.

- このアンケートは、ソーシャル・キャンプに参加する際に、あなたがどのようなことを考え、どのような感想を抱いたかをお聞きするためのものです。
- できるだけ詳しく、読めやすく、正直にお答えください。お好きな言語で書くことをお勧めします。
- 回答は匿名としいつでも撤回できるものとします。

Pre-excursion Survey | 出発前アンケート

1. Describe **how you are feeling right now**. You might include specific emotions or thoughts that you are experiencing, and potential factors contributing to your current mood.
   あなたが**今どのように感じている**かを述べてください。あなたの具体的な感情や考え、今の気分を引き起こしている可能性のある要因などを含めてもよい。

2. Describe **your expectations** of this event. You may wish to discuss specific activities you expect to participate in, aspects of the excursion you're looking forward to (socialization, learning, exploring, etc.), or aspects of the excursion you're anxious about. Your expectations might regard yourself, other participants, or the entire group.
   この行事に対する**あなたの期待**について述べてください。あなたが参加することを期待している具体的な活動、楽しみにしている小旅行の側面（社交、学習、探検など）、または小旅行について不安に思っている側面について話し合うとよいでしょう。あなたの期待は、あなた自身、他の参加者、あるいはグループ全体についてかもしれません。

Day 1 Evening Survey | 1 日目夜アンケート

3. Describe **how you are feeling right now**. You might include specific emotions or thoughts that you are experiencing, and potential factors contributing to your current mood.
   あなたが**今どのように感じている**かを述べてください。あなたの具体的な感情や考え、今の気分を引き起こしている可能性のある要因などを含めてもよい。

4. Describe **your experiences on the first day** of this event. You may wish to discuss specific activities you expect to participate in, aspects of the excursion you're looking forward to (socialization, learning, exploring, etc.), or aspects of the excursion you're anxious about. Your expectations might regard yourself, other participants, or the entire group.
   この行事に対する**あなたの期待**について述べてください。あなたが参加することを期待している具体的な活動、楽しみにしている遠足の側面（社交、学習、探検など）、または小旅行について不安に思っている側面について話し合うとよいでしょう。あなたの期待は、あなた自身、他の参加者、あるいはグループ全体についてかもしれません。

Day 2 Morning Survey | 2 日目朝アンケート

5. Describe **how you are feeling right now**. You might include specific emotions or thoughts that you are experiencing, and potential factors contributing to your current mood.
   あなたが**今どのように感じている**かを述べてください。あなたが具体的な感情や考え、今の気分を引き起こしている可能性のある要因などを含めてもよい。

6. Describe **your overall impressions** of this event. You may wish to discuss specific activities you participated in, aspects of the excursion that made an impact on you or that you think will be memorable, or aspects of the excursion you didn't enjoy. Your reflections might regard yourself, other participants, or the entire group.
   この行事の全体的な印象を述べてください。参加した具体的な活動、小旅行で印象に残ったこと、思い出に残ったこと、楽しめなかったことなどについて述べてください。あなたの考察は、あなた自身、他の参加者、またはグループ全体についてかもしれません。

Appendix B

Bilingual Email Template

***SILCamp* 体験についての研究協力へのお願い**

Hello _____! This is _____ from the SILC!
_____さん、こんにちは！SILC の____です。

これまでに SILCamp にご参加いただいた皆さんに、お願いがあり、連絡しました。SILCamp の経験における研究への協力の依頼です。特に「なぜ参加しようと思ったのか」「その後、自分にどんな影響があったのか」などを中心に、みなさんの声を集めています。アンケートの詳細は、添付の PDF にありますので、まずはそちらをご確認ください。
We are contacting all previous participants of the SILCamp expeditions to invite you to further contribute to valuable research relating to your experiences. In particular, we are now interested in learning more about how specific features of the expeditions motivated you to participate, and whether or not your experiences have made any lasting impact. Specific details regarding participation in the research project are included in the PDF we have attached.

参加方法はとてもシンプルで、7 月 11 日（金）12 時までにこのメールにそのまま返信する形で OK です。日本語でも英語でも、書きやすい方で大丈夫です。丁寧で詳しい回答はとてもありがたいですが、忙しいかと思いますので、無理のない範囲でご協力ください。
You can begin your participation anytime by replying directly to this email with responses to the following questions before Friday, July 11th at noon. Please write in whichever language you can most clearly convey your ideas. While we certainly appreciate thoughtful and detailed responses, we understand you are busy students, and we are grateful for any level of depth you are willing to write.

回答の前に 以下のリンクで SILCamp の写真を見て当時のことを思い出すことをおすすめします。
Before you begin, we recommend taking a look at some of the photos to refresh your memory.

質問 Questions:

1. 当時、SILCamps に参加しようと思ったきっかけは何だったでしょうか？振返ってみてください。 イベントの内容や期待していたこと、あるいは当時の自分の状況などについて触れて書いてもかまいません。
   Looking back, what do you remember as motivating you to join the event? You may wish to talk about features of the event that were enticing to you, expected outcomes you wanted to achieve through participation, and/or personal circumstances that contributed to your decision to participate.

2. SILCamps 後、自分自身の経験が何かの場面や出来事に影響を与えたと感じたことはありますか？ もしあれば、どのような状況で、どんなふうに役立ったかを教えてください。
   Since your participation in the event concluded, can you think of a time when your experience as a SILCamps participant influenced your approach to a certain situation or scenario?

3. SILCamps に興味はあるけれど参加を迷っている学生がいたら、どんなアドバイスをしますか？
   What advice would you give to a student who may be considering attending a future SILCamps event but is uncertain?

どうぞよろしくお願いします。
Thank you!

Appendix C

Email Interview Guide

Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to facilitate the collection of rich, honest, and comparable qualitative data from *SILCamps* participants regarding their experiences, particularly as they relate to the current study's research questions listed below. It is also intended to reduce interviewer bias and maintain consistent interviewing protocol across the research team.

Research Questions

RQ1. What features of the events and their personal circumstances do participants retroactively cite as influencing their decision to participate?

RQ2. What, if any, features of the event do participants remember as having an influence on their behaviour after the event concluded?

Email Interview Process

1. *Initial Contact.* Use the template and instructions shared in Microsoft Teams to send initial emails.
2. *Following up.* Consider the following points when following up with individual participants:
    a. Avoid leading or loaded questions. Use neutral language wherever possible.
    b. Use your best judgement deciding when and how to reply, and to what extent you are asking for elaboration or clarification. Not every response to every prompt requires follow-up, but we are aiming at rich, detailed responses, and some participants may require more prompting than others to reach this.
    c. Prioritize narratives that relate directly to the two research questions stated above but also remain open to pursuing particularly interesting narratives if you think they may be of significance (in these cases, it is especially important to remember point d.).
    d. Keep a personal record of your own thoughts and rationale regarding your choice of follow-up questions and responses. These notes may be useful in later stages of analysis. (Source: Berger, R. (2015). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), 219–234.)
    e. Maintain an open communication thread among the team, so that we can share and reflect on the interview process and address any issues as they arise as a team.
3. *Concluding.* When you feel that a given interview has reached the end of its usefulness (you have sufficient data, the participant has stopped replying, etc.), then use the template and instructions shared in Microsoft Teams to conclude interviews.

Appendix D

Field Notes for SIL*Camp* Event Research Project

Instructions for Observers

- Use this packet to record any observations that you think might be useful in addressing the research question listed below:
    1. How did the university student participants perceive an overnight outdoor "learning beyond the classroom" experience?
    2. How did students engage with key camping activities (pitching tents, making and maintaining fire, breaking down camp, campfire conversations, etc.)?
    3. What were participants' immediate overall impressions of this experience?
- Your notes can take any form (e.g. bullet lists, narratives, illustrations, concept maps, etc.), and you can contribute to them at any point during the excursion.
- It will be useful to mark your notes with timestamps or activity markers (see the table below) so that your observations can be triangulated with other observers' notes.
- To help guide your notetaking, please consider the following table of guiding questions. Note that this list is not exhaustive and that you may choose to make meaningful observations not included in the table below.

Activity	Guiding Question / Target
transport in	What are they doing? What are they saying?
games	How many people? What are they playing / choosing?
hike	How many people went hiking? What was spoken about? Who did the speaking?
setting up / tearing down	Who helps who? Who asks questions to whom?
mealtimes	What are they eating? Are they sharing?
campfire	What topics are discussed? Who instigated conversations? Were all participants engaged? Small discussions? One large group discussion? Follow-up questions, often? Movement amongst/between small groups? Short-length utterances or longer narratives? Physical positioning of people (standing/sitting? Looking at each other or at fire, big circles, on logs?)
transport out	What are they doing? What are they talking about?
other times	Other noteworthy instances as they arise Student-to-student or student-to-teacher observations

Appendix E

Participant Artwork Inspired by Excursion Experience

Title: A lingering night (translated from Japanese: 名残の夜)

Size: F50 (1167 × 910)

Materials: Torinoko hemp paper, water-soluble pigments, mineral pigments, gold leaf

Artist: You Yesol (ユ イエソル)

Reproduced with permission from the artist.

Colorful Conversation: Weekly Topics and Their Impact on Basic Psychological Needs at SAC Group Chat Sessions

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Abstract

During a tour of the self-access center at Soka University, the authors observed signage for a system of topics used to facilitate conversation. Following the tour, they developed a similar system of weekly topics for a self-access center group conversation service at a private technical university in Kansai, Japan. The system was established to provide guidance for student staff members who help run the service as well as focus for participating student users. This paper explores student perspectives of the system via interviews with two student staff members (SSMs) and two student users, the content of which is analyzed using basic psychological needs theory (BPNT) (Ryan & Deci, 2017), to understand how the system may impact students' well-being and motivation. Expected benefits include reduced preparation demands and repetition, which support SSM autonomy and competence needs by providing structure without removing flexibility. Unexpected benefits include pedagogical advantages for users, increased inter-SSM communication, and potentially greater ease of participation. These benefits are interpreted as supporting relatedness needs through increased collaboration, competence needs through the removal of barriers to participation, and autonomy needs through perceived non-intrusivity. These findings highlight the potential of lightly structured, autonomy-supportive systems within SACs to improve both SSM and user experiences. Limitations of the study are also considered, along with practical implications for BPNT-informed approaches at SACs.

本研究では、創価大学の自律学習センター見学時に観察された会話促進用トピック掲示を契機として、関西地方の私立工科大学の自律学習センターにおけるグループ会話サービスに週替わりトピック制度を導入した。本制度は、学生スタッフ（Student Staff Members: SSMs）への指針提供と参加学生の会話の焦点化を目的とする。本稿では、SSM2 名および利用学生 2 名へのインタビューを通じて本制度に対する学生の視点を検討し、基本的心理的欲求理論（basic psychological needs theory: BPNT）（Ryan & Deci, 2017）の枠組みからその影響を分析する。分析の結果、準備負担や発話の反復の軽減が確認され、これらは構造を保ちながら柔軟性を損なわない点で SSM の自律性および有能感の欲求を支える可能性が示唆された。また、教育的利点、SSM 間のコミュニケーションの促進、参加のしやすさの向上も確認され、関係性・有能感・自律性の各欲求の充足と関連づけられる。一方、一部のトピックは有能感の欲求に対する課題となる可能性も示された。以上より、軽度に構造化された自律性支援型の仕組みが、SSM および利用学生双方の経験向上に寄与する可能性が示唆される。最後に、本研究の限界と BPNT に基づく実践的示唆を述べる。

Keywords: group conversation, student staff members, basic psychological needs, well-being, motivation

Group language practice sessions are one way that self-access centers (SACs) may offer users opportunities to practice speaking target languages with peers. Such group language practice sessions align with Dam and colleagues' (1990) definition of learner autonomy, which highlights the importance of autonomous social learning alongside independent study. The SAC featured in this paper, located at a private technical university in Kansai, Japan, offers group language practice sessions in the form of casual group conversation. Given the role of such services in Self-Access Language Learning (SALL), improving their operation is crucial to benefit users and student staff members (SSMs) who may facilitate them. In this paper, we evaluate a weekly topics system introduced by the authors to help SSMs prepare group conversation sessions at the SAC by analyzing the experiences of student users who participate in the sessions and SSMs who help lead them.

We first discuss group language practice before introducing basic psychological needs theory (BPNT) (Ryan & Deci, 2017) as our analytical framework. After describing our setting and the context that led to the introduction of the system, we detail our research questions, participants, and methodology. We then explore key themes and evaluate participant perceptions of the system through the lens of BPNT. Finally, we conclude with takeaways and offer next steps in the hope that similar systems and approaches might benefit SSMs and users at other SACs.

Literature Review

Group Language Practice

Various forms of group language practice are commonly offered in SACs, including casual conversations (Acuña González et al., 2015; Moore & Tachibana, 2015; Werner & Von Joo, 2018; Zoni Upton et al., 2023) and discussions based around more formal topics (Jeanneau & O'Riordan, 2015; Sugie, 2023). The latter is recommended in Gardner and Miller's (1999) seminal work on running self-access environments, with faculty gradually removing their presence from the group as it matures.

Research on group language practice in SACs indicates that such activities can support the development of students' English communication skills (Sugie, 2023), promote participation and fluency (Jeanneau & O'Riordan, 2015), provide opportunities for regular speaking practice (Acuña González et al., 2015), and create relaxed, socially supportive environments for language use (Werner & Von Joo, 2018; Sigala Villa et al., 2019). In addition, such spaces can offer opportunities for informal interaction and social engagement

among peers (Zoni Upton et al., 2023), which may contribute to sustained participation. In many SAC contexts, group sessions may be SSM- or teacher-led, sometimes with the two working in tandem (Jeanneau & O'Riordan, 2015; Moore & Tachibana, 2015).

However, SALL literature also highlights challenges associated with group language practice. Without sufficient guidance or training, peer-led conversation activities may become inconsistent (Jeanneau & O'Riordan, 2015; Sigala Villa et al., 2019), overly dependent on individual facilitators (Werner & Von Joo, 2018), or repetitive (Sigala Villa et al., 2019). While these issues have been highlighted, there remains relatively limited research within SALL examining how group language practice, particularly informal, conversation-based services, might be supported and improved.

Basic Psychological Needs Theory

Basic psychological needs theory (BPNT) is one of six mini-theories in self-determination theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2017). It details three BPNs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) that, if supported, predict well-being and motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Autonomy concerns feelings of control and ownership over behavior; competence relates to feelings of growth and mastery; and relatedness concerns feelings of connection and unity with others in respectful relationships (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Satisfying or thwarting these needs facilitates or diminishes motivation and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Though it is outside of the remit of this paper to explore SDT on a macro level, of the forms of motivation it describes, intrinsic motivation is associated with autonomous acts predominantly engaged in out of interest, when BPNs are supported to a high degree (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Extrinsically motivated behaviors, however, vary in the degree to which they are autonomous (Ryan & Deci, 2017) as they are performed for reasons other than interest. Such reasons include receiving rewards, avoiding punishments, or because one endorses the behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Accordingly, it is viewed as a less potent form of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017, 2020). Crucially, several studies on university students have demonstrated that autonomous acts of helping others, or autonomous prosocial behavior, satisfy all BPNs (Martela & Ryan, 2016; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010).

Basic Psychological Needs Theory & Self-Access Language Learning

Such findings are of interest to SALL, as many behaviors observed in self-access contexts may be considered prosocial, including those seen in conversation groups. Hooper (2025) demonstrated through learner narratives that autonomous prosocial behavior is perceived as fulfilling by members of a SAC learning community. Similarly, Phelps (2025)

found that prosociality was one factor that motivated SSMs to start and continue in their roles. Findings such as these provide insight into the relationship between BPN satisfaction and behavior associated with SALL.

Indeed, over the last ten years, BPNT, alongside SDT more generally, has been increasingly applied in SALL, both as an analytical lens to study the field and as a guiding theory for devising improvements which foster greater motivation and well-being. Mynard (2022) focused on how SALL environments might be reimagined as BPN-supportive, while Shelton-Strong and Tassinari (2022) explored advising in language learning from the perspective of SDT and identified it as an autonomy-supportive practice which supports BPNs. Similarly, Watkins and Hooper (2023) promoted a model for developing student leaders in SACs who contribute to supporting student BPNs. Beyond these theoretical contributions, Watkins (2022) reported that students in SAC learning communities experienced BPN satisfaction, and as they found these environments to be low-stress and enjoyable, their motivation to learn was sustained.

Exploring a SAC and its language learning supports from the perspective of BPNT, Yarwood et al. (2019) and Asta and Mynard (2018) found university SAC users visited their SAC with the goal of communicating with others and practicing English. They argued that the students desired to do so in order to facilitate relationships, thereby satisfying relatedness needs (Yarwood et al., 2019). Asta and Mynard (2018) also proposed the careful introduction of systems that promote autonomy-supportive environments with a balance of structure and control.

In this paper, we add to this body of research by exploring SSM and user perspectives of a group conversation weekly topics system through the lens of BPNT to consider potential impacts on student motivation and well-being.

Context

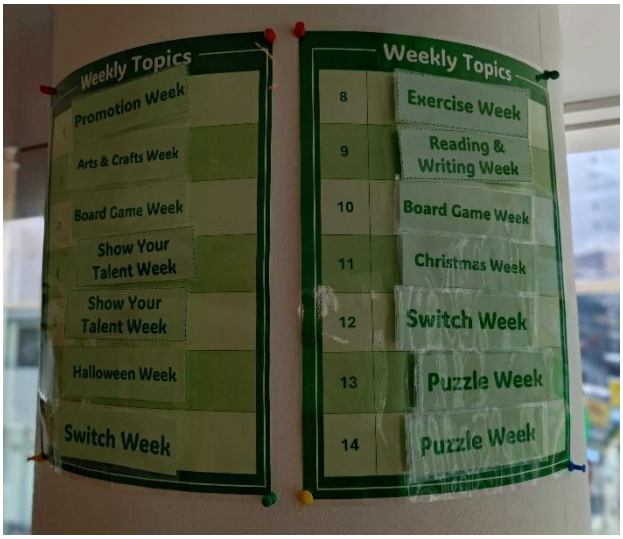
Since its establishment in 2012, the SAC has aimed to provide a dynamic, student-centered space that supports autonomous language learning and community building. It is coordinated by three full-time teachers and an office manager, with support from 16 SSMs. The SSMs are divided into four sub-teams, one of which, the English Conversation Assistant (ECA) team, leads the “Free Conversation” service alongside the SAC teachers. They use games, videos, and other activities to facilitate group language practice in the form of casual conversation sessions. Free Conversation is held Monday to Friday in termtime for 100

minutes during the lunch period. It is unreserved, allowing students to come and go freely, eat lunch, and engage in relaxed English conversation. At our SAC, prior to the introduction of the system that is the focus of this study, each ECA selected their own daily topic or activity for Free Conversation. While it seemed to us as SAC teachers that this practice gave ECAs the autonomy to choose from a wide range of activities, in reality we observed that they excessively repeated them. This may have negatively affected the overall quality and benefits of Free Conversation for users. In response, we developed a system of support to help the ECAs select appropriate activities.

The new system, which we refer to as the Weekly Topics system, was inspired by a comparable one observed during a tour of the SAC at Soka University in October 2024. In practical terms, the primary goal of our Weekly Topics system is to help ECAs select and prepare activities for Free Conversation by providing consistent starting points. A schedule of these topics is displayed near the Free Conversation space (see Figure 1) and announced on social media, serving as a shared reference for both ECAs and users.

Figure 1

Weekly Topics Schedule in Semester 2 of 2025



Topics such as Board Games and Arts and Crafts Week were selected to stimulate interaction and provide structure without being overly restrictive. Our intention was that the topics were broad enough to allow the ECAs to interpret them, encouraging ownership and creativity, while minimizing repetition by changing the theme weekly to encourage ECAs to

try new activities. We arranged topics to balance difficulty with academic demands. Lighter themes, such as those involving video games, were scheduled during exam periods, while comparatively intensive ones, such as TV Drama Week or Discussion Week, were placed during less demanding weeks. We trialed the Weekly Topics system at the end of the 2024 academic year, with full implementation in the first semester of 2025. Although topics were initially selected and scheduled by teachers, since this research was conducted, the ECAs requested ownership of this process for the second semester in 2025. Thus, new topics were added to the schedule and system maintenance shifted from the teachers to SSMs.

Research Questions

In exploring the impact of Weekly Topics on ECAs and Free Conversation participants, we were interested in the following questions:

1) What is the impact of the Weekly Topics system on ECAs' and student users' perspectives of Free Conversation?
2) Is the Weekly Topics system perceived as a source of support by ECAs and student users?
3) How does the Weekly Topics system impact students' BPNs?

In a general sense, we were interested in whether students perceived the Weekly Topics system as a positive addition to the SAC, and whether it supported or hindered the ECAs and users. For ECAs, we sought to determine whether the Weekly Topics system helped them choose activities and organize sessions efficiently or created extra work. As for users, we aimed to explore the pedagogical impact and whether they were aware of the system or if they felt it intruded on their regular experience of Free Conversation. With regards to question 3, as BPNT predicts motivation and well-being based on the degree to which needs are satisfied, we viewed evidence of needs satisfaction as indicators of the system's positive impact.

Method

Participants

To clarify the effects of the Weekly Topics system on ECAs and participating users, we interviewed a convenience sample of four students, two ECAs, and two regular users (see Table 1). Please note that all names have been anonymized to avoid disclosing their identity. Hana, a Japanese fourth-year student, had been an ECA for one semester, while Odi, a non-

Japanese first-year master's student, had been an ECA for several years and was serving as the team leader. Ryoma and Yoji were both Japanese students who had attended Free Conversation several times a week over a prolonged period at the time the research was carried out. We conducted interviews in English, as none of the researchers were comfortable doing so in Japanese. As such, we considered language proficiency when approaching participants, along with factors such as availability and willingness to be interviewed. Although our sample was small and included only regular users, we proceeded with the research due to the inherent difficulty of recruiting non-regular or first-time users to participate.

Table 1

Biographical Information on Research Participants

Participant	Role	University Year	Nationality	Length as ECA
Hana	ECA	Fourth	Japanese	One semester
Odi	ECA	First, Master's	Non-Japanese	Several years
Ryoma	User	Third	Japanese	N/A
Yoji	User	Second	Japanese	N/A

Procedure

We began our study by obtaining consent from the participants listed above, then two of the three authors interviewed participants individually via the video-conferencing app *Zoom* in 20-30-minute recorded sessions, following a semi-structured interview schedule with questions based on whether the participant was a SSM (see Appendix A) or a regular user (see Appendix B). After reviewing the automatically generated *Zoom* transcripts for errors, we sent them to the participants to clarify ambiguous sections. Following this, to identify emergent themes in the transcripts, we narrowed notable extracts to keywords or phrases that summarized participants' reactions to the new system. Finally, we analyzed these themes using BPNT to ascertain the impact of the Weekly Topics system on students and whether they perceived it as a source of support.

Findings & Discussion

Several themes emerged from the interview data related to the Weekly Topics system, organized below as expected benefits, unexpected benefits, and challenges.

Expected Benefits

Prior to beginning the study, we expected that the Weekly Topics would reduce repetition of certain activities, would provide some scaffolding for ECAs as they select topics, that the topics we chose would be somewhat interesting, and that it would support students pedagogically.

Reduced Repetition

One of the main drivers for instituting the Weekly Topics system was to reduce repetition. Both ECAs felt that the prior system resulted in repetitive sessions, with Odi stating that she was "just picking out like things that I like and due to that […] what I'm doing is really repetitive." Similarly, Hana said that without the Weekly Topics, "we sometimes become silent. [We] tend to do same things every day." Odi also revealed that "we [ran] out of ideas and […] only talking is boring, but only playing the same games is also […] boring," illustrating how ECAs previously defaulted to safe and familiar activities. In contrast, the new system encouraged them to select activities related to specific topics, leading to new activities each week. Odi noted that "once we get the weekly topics, we know what to do. Each day we have […] new ideas on what to do, even […] only by talking. We have topics to talk about. So, it's not boring at all." Thus, with topics planned from the beginning of the semester, ECAs had the information needed to plan activities for Free Conversation. Rather than limiting choices within particular sessions, Odi's comments reveal that the Weekly Topics system reduced repetition by encouraging ECAs to develop different activities within a weekly framework. This reduced repetition may mean that ECAs feel they can effectively facilitate more interesting sessions, which may satisfy competence needs as they perceive they are doing their job well.

Odi's comments highlight the shift from repetitive, boring activities to more varied and engaging ones under the new system, suggesting the presence of some degree of intrinsic motivation associated with her activities. SDT posits that intrinsic motivation, or doing activities perceived as interesting, indicates high levels of BPN satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Although Odi does not explicitly describe the sessions as "fun," by contrasting them with the previous, boring sessions, she alludes to them being so, hinting at high levels of BPN satisfaction. Odi's comments are supported by Hana, who stated that the Weekly Topics

system is, “really good […] because we have like a specific thing to talk and it makes the conversation more colorful.” Here, by describing the conversation as “colorful,” Hana points to the non-repetitive and comparatively interesting and BPN-supportive nature of Free Conversation under the new system.

Supportive Scaffolding

The Weekly Topics system was designed to offer light structure rather than impose strict rules. As such, we were especially interested in whether participants experienced the system as supportive. From a BPNT perspective, this is a central concern, as autonomy-supportive environments enhance motivation and well-being, while controlling structures can undermine them. Echoing Odi’s earlier comments, Hana noted that having set weekly topics gave her and the other ECAs clearer goals. She explained that “for ECAs, it got really easier because they know what they have to do on that day, like they have […] a very obvious vision like a goal to do.” She also outlined her process, stating, “I recognize the Weekly Topic. And then I kind of brainstorm some ideas […] on the bus,” and later mentioned that she starts her shift by searching for activities or preparing Google Slides with relevant discussion questions. The advance notice the Weekly Topics system provides appears to have supported ECAs, allowing them to focus on user needs, rather than on the various options available to them. Having a predetermined topic allows ECAs to brainstorm ahead of time and narrow the number of activities available, avoiding what previously may have been an overwhelming process. Simplifying the process of choosing activities may support competence needs as ECAs feel more confident in their ability to select good activities. Hana’s comments also suggest the scaffolding offered through the Weekly Topics system supports autonomy needs by giving ECAs further control of activity selection, while supporting competence needs through clarity of purpose. From this perspective, the Weekly Topics system may be viewed as an example of the type of non-intrusive need-supportive systems Asta and Mynard (2018) argue should be established within SALL contexts. Conversely, the previous system’s lack of structure may have frustrated BPNs, despite seeming autonomy-supportive from the teachers’ perspective.

Interesting Topics

Naturally, we tried to select topics both users and ECAs would appreciate. According to student responses, several topics were perceived as interesting, with the ECAs particularly enjoying Arts and Crafts Week. Odi thought, “It's a really good week. Because, like, all of '[the attending students] just either show off their own […] arts and crafts skills, or they learn

a lot of new things, and we make it together, although it's really fun." Likewise, Hana felt that this topic was enjoyable and allowed ECAs to be creative in how they ran their session. By describing the sessions as "really fun", Odi suggests a degree of intrinsic motivation resulting from the new topic, which is supported by Hana's perception that it was enjoyable. Based on their responses, the topic provided direction but promoted creativity, making it conducive to autonomy and competence needs satisfaction. The opportunity to learn new things and demonstrate skills signals growth and mastery, the two facets of competence needs satisfaction. Additionally, the topic's emphasis on making things together may satisfy relatedness needs.

User Support

Participants generally reported that the system preserved user autonomy and that they did not feel obliged to engage with it. Hana offered a particularly informative perspective, having participated in Free Conversation consistently as a user in her first year, then as a SSM in another team, and finally as an ECA in her fourth year. She opined that while the Weekly Topics system introduced clearer scaffolding for ECAs, it did not fundamentally alter how users experienced Free Conversation. Reflecting on the shift, she noted, "as a student, I'm a type of person who really enjoys the conversation, so personally it didn't really change, but I think for ECAs, it got really easier because they know what they have to do on that day." Her comments imply that the Weekly Topics system was experienced as a subtle, largely non-intrusive change from a user's perspective, that the core experience of casual English conversations with peers remained intact. Hana's views were supported by Yoji, one of the users, who indicated that his overall experience remained largely unchanged at Free Conversation. Being perceived as a subtle addition suggests that the system supports autonomy needs. Furthermore, rather than acting as constraints, the topics were perceived as helpful reference points, particularly for users lacking confidence in their ability to participate. Yoji, for example, argued that having a visible topic could make it easier for some participants to speak, as it provided a shared focus and reduced pressure to generate conversation independently, highlighting a potential role in supporting competence needs.

Unexpected Benefits

Although the Weekly Topics system was expected to improve Free Conversation sessions by reducing preparation time and repetition, several unexpected benefits also emerged, such as pedagogical advantages, increased inter-ECA communication, and ease of participation.

Pedagogical Advantages

One unexpected benefit was that participants believed the Weekly Topics system was pedagogically advantageous for students, offering a framework to support their learning needs. Odi stated, "it's a good balance cause now that the students, when they come to [the SAC], they know that we have […] a proper system to guide them." Here, she demonstrates the perceived benefits of a tangible structure that users can see and interact with. This structure may support users' competence needs as it develops or is perceived to develop language skills. Additionally, Odi seems to have re-interpretated leading Free Conversation sessions under the new system as increasingly prosocial behavior. Such behavior has been found to satisfy all BPNs (Martela & Ryan, 2016; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010) and to positively affect SSMs and student users in SACs (Hooper, 2025; Phelps, 2025). If interpreted as a more effective way of learning English conversation, and therefore an example of prosocial behavior, the new system may contribute to satisfying all BPNs of ECAs.

Increased Inter-ECA Communication

Another unexpected benefit was increased communication between ECAs as the Weekly Topics system reduced reliance on familiar activities. To avoid repetition throughout the week and improve user experience, Odi described an increase in the frequency of communication between ECAs, as they report to each other daily on what they did. Hana demonstrated her awareness of other ECAs' activities via this communication when she explained that "Arts and Craft [Week] was really fun, because every ECA student […] had their own idea, and what they wanted to do." Likewise, Odi mentioned that other ECAs ask her for ideas, while Hana acknowledged receiving help from Odi.

Communication quality, alongside frequency, also appears to have increased. Though all SAC teams meet monthly, the Weekly Topics system seems to have added direction to the ECA meetings, drawing attention to particularly effective or problematic topics and activities. For instance, according to Hana, "Every ECA said that [TV Drama Week] was a really tough week." Although an unsuccessful topic could be viewed negatively, the ECAs' ability to evaluate topics suggests growth in their role and in their understanding of what works well at Free Conversation.

From a BPNT perspective, increased inter-ECA communication may have several benefits. First, it creates more opportunities to satisfy relatedness needs through prosocial behavior, as ECAs support one another and build respectful relationships in the process. As previously discussed, behavior of this kind has been linked to satisfying BPNs (Hooper,

2025; Martela & Ryan, 2016; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010) and sustaining SSM motivation (Phelps, 2025). Additionally, interactions focused on specific topics and activities and subsequent feedback and advice create the potential for growth and skill development, and thus the opportunity for competence needs satisfaction. These suggestions echo observations by Sigala Villa et al. (2019) that shared planning and collaborative reflection among leaders of group-conversation-based SAC services can foster learning and socialization. ECAs are likely to learn from each other, feel more competent, and experience better relationships within their team, all of which may positively affect competence and relatedness needs. Through such learning, the benefits of the system may also extend to users, as they may find Free Conversation to be more engaging and thoughtfully planned.

Ease of Participation

Lastly, both ECAs and Yoji speculated that the system may also make it easier for first-time users to join Free Conversation. Yoji explained, "the Weekly Topics makes new participants easier to speak, because […] first time […] they don't know about the Free Conversation, and also [the SAC]. So, if they have topics, they can speak with topics, and […] they know the topics." Applying BPNT to explain Yoji's view suggests that advanced knowledge of the conversation topic supports competence needs and lowers the barrier for joining Free Conversation for new students, as it primes conversational themes, giving users time to think of relevant language. His comments contrast with Ryoma's, who implied that the system may, in fact, create barriers if topics are too challenging for some users. Thus, there is ambiguity to this argument, based on the discrepancy in their views. Moreover, follow-up responses from the users indicated that not all Free Conversation participants are necessarily aware of the Weekly Topics system. Yoji speculated that students who attend infrequently may not notice the topic at all, especially if the conversation organically shifts away from the day's theme. His view emphasizes the limits of the Weekly Topics system, which may only impact regular users or ECAs' BPNs. Though this may portray the system as inconsequential, his view supports the notion that the system is non-intrusive from an ECA and user perspective, and unlikely to be perceived as a source of BPN frustration. However, Ryoma's wording made it difficult to determine how strongly he felt the system affected first-time users. Here we may have highlighted a limitation in our research: that conducting the interviews in English may have prevented some participants from accurately communicating their ideas.

Challenges

There were also challenges associated with the implementation of the Weekly Topics system. As previously noted, the ECAs found TV Drama Week difficult, hinting at the potentially negative effect this theme may have had on competence needs. When chosen, teachers envisioned students discussing their favorite TV shows or making recommendations to one another. However, the ECAs interpreted the topic as necessitating shared experiences with foreign TV programs or watching episodes during Free Conversation as a group. Likewise, Yoji, a user, mentioned skipping one session due to perceived time constraints related to the type of activity the weekly topic promoted. Such disconnect emphasizes the importance of clear communication between SALL practitioners and students; clearly explaining topic-related goals and framing the Weekly Topics system as a supportive framework for ECAs and users alike, rather than as rules that require engagement in specific activities, may have avoided the overloading of SSMs, confusion among users, and potentially relatedness needs frustration.

Topic timing was also an issue when the teachers scheduled one topic related to a Japanese holiday during a week that would have made associated activities irrelevant, revealing a gap in their cultural knowledge. However, the flexibility of the Weekly Topics system allowed the ECAs to draw on their knowledge and make adjustments to the schedule. This problematic episode demonstrates the benefits of encouraging SSMs to take control of services by offering their ideas and suggestions, as students can contribute in SACs in ways practitioners cannot. Hooper (2025) discusses the value, in self-access contexts, of legitimizing non-canonical knowledge—that is, knowledge students possess but is often not readily accessible to teachers—arguing it may lead to BPN satisfaction. From a BPNT perspective, despite timing issues, the ECAs offering their input indicates they felt a degree of control over the Weekly Topics system and felt able to make changes to it, implying it may be autonomy supportive.

Looking to the Future: Implications and Next Steps

While it is difficult to precisely determine the extent to which BPNs are satisfied within individuals, the Weekly Topics system appears to contribute to the satisfaction of all BPNs. Its reduced repetitiveness and supportive scaffolding may contribute to competence and autonomy needs. Indicators of intrinsic motivation stemming from the variety of activities and new, interesting topics suggest high degrees of BPN satisfaction. The system

appears to support users' autonomy needs, as participants did not perceive it to drastically change Free Conversation, with participation remaining volitional. Unexpectedly, Odi felt that structuring topics weekly might make it seem more like a syllabus that students progress through. Her view may indicate that the system supports competence needs as users' skills develop or signal Odi's belief that leading Free Conversation under the Weekly Topics system is increasingly an example of prosocial behavior, which satisfies all BPNs. Additionally, increased inter-ECA communication may increase opportunities for relatedness and competence needs satisfaction. Some participants also speculated that the Weekly Topics system could assist new users' attempts to join Free Conversation, hinting at potential competence needs support.

Thus, the Weekly Topics system is a source of support for both users and ECAs, and its impact on BPNs appears largely positive, though influence may be limited to regular users and ECAs. These findings indicate that it may have a positive impact on student motivation and well-being. While some issues with the system's introduction may have frustrated competence needs, we hope that through clearer communication and the legitimization of non-canonical knowledge, such issues may be avoided in the future.

Therefore, our next steps will be to monitor and support the ECAs and continue to offer guidance while promoting their control over the system. Monitoring the ECAs as they schedule topics is central to this process. Their request for control after just one semester suggests a desire for greater ownership of the system and autonomy needs satisfaction. Moreover, it highlights the ECAs' agency to act autonomously on their non-canonical knowledge, while providing an opportunity to further support their BPNs.

Legitimizing non-canonical knowledge may not only benefit practitioners practically by helping them avoid issues but also contribute to respectful relationships between teachers and SSMs, validating their knowledge and skills, and satisfying BPNs. Therefore, we also aim to create more avenues in the SAC to legitimize student knowledge, for instance by setting up comparable systems for other SSM teams. That said, canonical knowledge will continue to play a role in the Weekly Topics system, based on Hana's desire for teacher input in topic selection and the success of teacher-selected topics such as Arts and Crafts Week. Teacher support may also satisfy relatedness needs by maintaining and reinforcing teacher-SSM relationships. This interplay between canonical and non-canonical knowledge underpins our plan to monitor and support ECAs, while creating space for SSM knowledge and autonomy.

Finally, through our study, we realized the importance of communicating expectations and guidance clearly within SACs. As previously noted, there was some ambiguity on the part of ECAs about what particular topics entailed and the degree to which they should be implemented into Free Conversation sessions. Therefore, we plan to communicate more clearly to ECAs and users that Weekly Topics are flexible starting points, not strict rules. We hope this approach will lead to further BPN satisfaction for both ECAs and users and contribute to their motivation and well-being. Moreover, for SALL practitioners considering similar systems, we recommend clearly communicating principles so that SSMs retain autonomy and feel competent in their roles.

While these results are promising, we have already highlighted the limitation of conducting interviews in English, which may have hindered some participants' communication. Although we tried to mitigate this issue through script validity checks, conducting the research in the participants' second language may limit the scope of our findings. Additionally, the small sample size of four individuals, the snapshot nature of the study, and our context limit the generalizability of our findings. Future research on analogous systems may need to be conducted with larger numbers of participants in their first language. Alternatively, conducting research over longer periods in several SACs may help ascertain whether such systems continue to contribute to BPN satisfaction.

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Appendix A

Questions for English Conversation Assistants (ECA)

1. How long have you been a student staff member?
2. How long have you been an ECA?
3. Why did you want to become an ECA?
4. Did you ever attend free conversation sessions before becoming an ECA?
5. We introduced the Weekly Topics system last semester. Could you talk about any changes you have noticed at Free Conversation sessions since then?
6. Based on your observations, how have participants responded to these weekly topics?
7. Can you tell me about any topics you remember and how you felt about them?
8. How do you usually prepare for the Free Conversation sessions under the Weekly Topics system? Has this changed since you first became an ECA?
9. How do you feel about the Weekly Topics system in terms of your creativity?
10. What impact have the weekly topics had on your experience leading the Free Conversation sessions?
11. If you were asked for advice about future topics or activities at Free Conversation sessions, what would you say?
12. How do you feel about ECAs choosing the weekly topic? (Do you have too much support? Not enough support?)
13. Do you have any general comments about being an ECA, Free Conversation, or the Weekly Topics system?
14. Do you have any questions?

Appendix B

Questions for Regular Users

1. When did you first attend a Free Conversation session?
2. How often do you come to Free Conversation at [the SAC]?
3. What do you like about the Free Conversation sessions?
4. Before you come to a Free Conversation session, how do you feel? And after the session, how do you feel?
5. Since we started the Weekly Topics system last semester, have you noticed any changes in the Free Conversation sessions?
6. Can you tell me about any topics you remember and how you felt about them? (Were there any that you particularly liked or didn't like?)
7. Do the sessions feel different now compared to before we had the Weekly Topics system? If yes, how?
8. Does the Weekly Topics system make it easier or harder for you to join Free Conversation? Why?
9. Have you ever skipped a Free Conversation session because of a weekly topic? If so, why?
10. If you were asked for advice about future topics or activities at Free Conversation sessions, what would you say?
11. What do you think about students having the opportunity to choose the weekly topics?
12. Do you have any general comments about Free Conversation or Weekly Topics system?
13. Do you have any questions?

Developing the Learner Interaction Simulation App (LISA): An AI-Powered Tool for Advisor Education

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Abstract

This paper reports on the development and preliminary evaluation of *LISA*—the *Learner Interaction Simulation App*—an AI-powered tool designed to enhance professional development for learning advisors. Rooted in the field of Advising in Language Learning (ALL) and grounded in self-determination theory (SDT), LISA offers educators a safe and accessible environment to practice and reflect on advising dialogues through simulated interactions with AI avatars. The app addresses a recurring challenge in advisor education: Finding opportunities for authentic practice. Eight learning advisors with varying experience piloted LISA and completed a post-use survey comprising Likert-scale and open-ended items. Findings indicated that participants found the interface intuitive, the experience authentic, and the simulation useful for practicing advising skills. However, they also highlighted areas for improvement, including increased response variety and interface enhancements. The results suggest that LISA may become a valuable supplement to existing advisor education, providing flexible, theory-informed practice opportunities.

本論文は、学習アドバイザーの専門的成長を支援することを目的として開発された、AI 搭載ツール LISA（Learner Interaction Simulation App）の開発過程および予備的評価について言及する。LISA は、学習アドバイジング（Advising in Language Learning: ALL）の理論的枠組みと自己決定理論（Self-Determination Theory: SDT）に基づき、教育者が AI アバターとの模擬対話を通して、安全かつアクセスしやすい環境でアドバイジング対話の実践と省察を行えるよう設計されている。本アプリは、アドバイザー教育において繰り返し指摘されてきた課題である「実践の機会を確保すること」に対応するものである。経験年数の異なる 8 名の学習アドバイザーが LISA を試用し、リッカート尺度項目および自由記述項目から成る事後アンケートに回答した。その結果、インターフェースの直感性、体験の真正性、アドバイジング技能の練習における有用性が評価された一方で、応答の多様性の向上やインターフェースの改善といった課題も示された。これらの結果から、LISA は既存のアドバイザー教育プログラムを補完する、理論に基づいた柔軟な実践機会を提供するツールとして有用となる可能性が示唆された。

Keywords: advisor education, AI-powered tool, advising in language learning, self-determination theory, reflective dialogue

In this fast-changing world where people are expected to learn and relearn throughout their lives, coupled with the ever-increasing array of resources available, promoting awareness and ownership of learning is more important than ever. Language teachers are having to rethink their roles and develop new skills for supporting 21st-century learners in developing learner autonomy, i.e., taking charge of their learning (Benson, 2011). One effective way to promote responsibility for learning is to foster reflection through powerful dialogue, which is known as advising in language learning (Kato, 2023). Advising in language learning is a one-to-one, reflective dialogue that promotes learner autonomy and awareness (Kato & Mynard, 2016). To become a proficient learning advisor, it is necessary to develop an awareness of skills that help people reflect deeply on their language-learning process. In addition to learning about the skills, it is essential to practice them. Not everyone has access to learners for practice purposes, and as the authors, who are instructors in an online advisor education program (AEP), have seen across generations of teaching the courses, many participants struggle to find real learners to practice with. While many AI tools exist for language learning (e.g., Liu & Reinders, 2025; Pan et al., 2025), and some apps serve as counselors or coaches (e.g., Gettel et al., 2025; Terblanche, 2024; Vowels et al., 2024), none target the professional development of language learning advisors. To address this gap, the authors have developed a purpose-built web-based application, the Learner Interaction Simulation App (LISA), which is a web-based AI simulator for advisor training. In this paper, drawing on the theoretical framework of self-determination theory (SDT), the authors discuss the app's design and development, present an initial study that collected feedback from users of the beta version of the app, and outline the next steps of the project, including implications for advisor education.

Theoretical Framework

Advising in Language Learning

Advising in language learning is defined as a one-to-one reflective dialogue between a language learner and a learning advisor, intentionally structured to promote language learner autonomy (Carson & Mynard, 2012; Karlsson et al., 2007; Kato & Mynard, 2016). Learning advisors will be sensitive to the learners' needs and individual differences (Griffiths & Soruç, 2020; Hurd & Murphy, 2012) and frame their advising accordingly. In other words, learning advisors take into account factors such as the learner's metacognitive awareness, preferences, previous experiences, motivations, interests, goals, willingness to take charge of the learning

process (i.e., their degree of autonomy), available time and resources, and other factors. Learning advisors are trained to read verbal and nonverbal cues, draw on a range of tools and discursive strategies, apply the appropriate degree of directiveness, and help learners to deepen their understanding and take action. Advising is skilled work and focuses on empathy, trust, and learner agency (Kato, 2024; Shelton-Strong & Tassinari, 2022). Throughout the process, learning advisors use reflective questions to foster self-awareness and self-endorsed goal-setting.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017) is central to advising practice and the Learner Interaction Simulation App (LISA)'s design. SDT is a meta-theory of motivation and wellness that situates learning within a person's sense of self and well-being. A thorough overview of SDT and its mini-theories is beyond the scope of this study. Still, it is important to note that 'autonomy' from an SDT perspective is conceptualized differently from the description of learner autonomy earlier in this paper. Autonomy, along with competence and relatedness, is considered a basic psychological need in SDT. The three basic psychological needs are interconnected and serve as crucial 'nutrients' that allow people to thrive. *Autonomy* in SDT refers to the need to experience volition and ownership over one's decisions and behavior. *Competence* is the need to feel effective in meeting challenges, to develop confidence, and to experience personal growth. This involves receiving feedback and moving towards mastery in a skill. *Relatedness* is the need to feel a sense of belonging and emotional connection with others, along with empathy, connection, and trust. LISA aims to simulate advising dialogues that help advisors reflect on how to meet these three basic psychological needs, both for learners and for advisors.

Advisor Education

Just as teacher education is necessary for classroom-based teachers, initial and ongoing advisor education is essential for learning advisors. This is the case even for experienced teachers retraining as learning advisors, as the skills and knowledge required are distinct from those required for teaching (Carson & Mynard, 2012). In the 1990s—the early years of the field—advisors were self-trained and often formed collegial groups to support each other in developing the necessary skills and knowledge (see Mozzon-McPherson & Vismans, 2001). Soon after, systematic training was established in some institutions, for example, the MA in advising from the University of Hull, UK, the *Diplomado Formación de Asesores de Centros Autoacceso de Lenguas Extranjeras* (Diploma in self-access for learning

advisors) from Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) (in Spanish), the *Advisor Education Program* from the Research Institute for Learner Autonomy Education (RILAE) at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS), Japan (in English and Japanese), and the *Advisor Education Program* from Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt Üniversitesi in Ankara, Türkiye (in Turkish, based on the KUIS program). In Japan, the private sector has also played a role. Since the mid-2000s, ALC (educational publishing company) has offered advisor training and certification, positioned differently from academically grounded, university-based advisor education programs.

If new learning advisors are unable to attend any of these courses, in-house training is usually provided, often by invited experts who facilitate workshops. In addition, the International Association of Teachers of English as a Second Language (IATEFL) Learning Autonomy Special Interest Group (LASIG) has held several online and hybrid events supporting advisor education. The programs generally cover the basic theory and practical skills needed to conduct advising sessions, but advisors still need to develop confidence and competence through practice.

Context - The Advisor Education Program (AEP)

The Advisor Education Program (AEP) offered at RILAE has been developed over more than a decade to equip educators with the knowledge, skills, and dialogic sensitivity required for advising (Mynard & Kato, 2025). The program consists of five 4-week online courses that integrate live lectures, live discussions, recorded sessions, and reflective forum tasks, forming a structured and scalable system for advisor preparation. Participation has continued to grow, so far with 341 course takers from 16 countries, 89 graduates, and 25 trained advisor educators, demonstrating the increasing recognition of advising as a distinct professional practice within language education. Many participants are faculty members at universities and other educational institutions, and a significant number already possess expertise in language education or applied linguistics. These educators join the program because reflective dialogue requires a different kind of pedagogical engagement. It is an approach that places the learner's motivations, emotions, and agency at the center rather than the teacher's expertise. This relational, question-guided, and learner-centered form of dialogue is challenging yet deeply transformative, which is why so many experienced educators are drawn to the AEP. The AEP highlights relational advising/mentoring as one of its strengths, where experienced instructors (mentors) and novice advisors (mentees) engage in a reflective dialogue that benefits both parties.

A distinctive feature of the AEP is the requirement to practice real advising dialogues after each class. However, two recurring challenges limit participants' opportunities for experiential learning. First, it can be difficult to find learners to practice with outside of class. Second, novice advisors often feel unprepared to begin advising real learners immediately. These barriers highlight a critical gap in advisor education: Although knowledge can be acquired through coursework, the development of advising competence requires repeated and safe practice. To address this need, we developed LISA, an AI-based simulator designed specifically for advisor training. LISA provides: 1) accessible practice anytime, anywhere, 2) realistic learner interactions with varied profiles, and 3) a review function for reflection and skill growth.

Overview and Design Principles

AI-Powered Tool for Advisor Education

The development of generative AI has opened new possibilities for fostering language learning, including tailored, dynamic, personally meaningful dialogues rather than relying on scripts or generic roleplays. Various options for Generative AI-assisted language-learning software (e.g., Language, Duolingo, Speak Buddy) have been developed in the past decade. However, they are typically targeted for language learners, not educators. While the flexibility of Generative AI provides some viable means to support professional development, general-purpose Generative AI tools like ChatGPT and Gemini are insufficient as educator training tools. They lack the tailored structure and user interface to provide a consistent practice environment for specialized skills, such as learning advising in language learning. LISA addresses such limitations by offering an interface specifically designed for practicing advising with virtual learners and reflecting on that practice. For the current study, the GPT 4o-mini was embedded to simulate natural speech responses, both in written and spoken formats.

Web Application

While the majority of internet access is through mobile devices, and the need for native applications (those installed on mobile devices) has been increasing, they have practical limitations, namely, platform-specific specifications, challenging optimization for application stores (Roumeliotis & Tselikas, 2022), and potential incompatibility for different OS versions (Cai et al., 2019). In order to address such limitations of native mobile applications while also enabling mobile access, LISA was developed in the form of a web

application, a software delivered via the web that runs on web browsers such as Chrome and Safari, making it accessible across different platforms, including mobile and desktop. This also enables users to authenticate their login and access their user data across different devices without the need to download separate applications from platform-specific application stores.

Features to Support Reflection and Basic Psychological Needs

Intended to provide on-demand practice advising sessions, LISA promotes self-endorsed behavior of novice learning advisors who seek supplementary practice opportunities. This aligns with autonomy in SDT, which is characterized by behaviors that are volitional and self-endorsed (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The wide range of customizable fields enables users to practice advising the kinds of learners they find difficult to advise (e.g., particular topics or personalities), thereby supporting the basic need of competence, i.e., the need to "feel effectance and mastery" (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 11). While simulating realistic advising dialogue, the simulation allows the user more time to consider their responses, fostering reflection-in-action throughout sessions. Additionally, the user can save the session transcript for further reflection. On the other hand, relatedness, i.e., the need to feel significant to others, is not directly addressed in the current version of LISA as it is primarily targeted for independent users. However, the need for relatedness can potentially be supported by integrating the app into an advisor education program, where participants share their experiences and reflections with other course-takers as part of a supportive community.

Core Functions

LISA encompasses three major functions: *Quick Simulator, Advanced Simulator*, and *Review & Reflect* (see Figure 1 for the selection page). Quick Simulator is primarily designed for first-time users and offers seamless access to an advising simulation with minimal manual settings. The AI avatar has prestructured character settings: A university student named Yuta, who wants to discuss a learning plan for his target languages, English and Spanish. Advanced Simulator is designed to cater to diverse advising experiences and offers a customizable AI avatar. The customizable learner profile fields include the main topic, learning goal, target language proficiency, metacognitive awareness level (Kato & Mynard, 2016), motivation type (Ryan & Deci, 2017), personality, and hobbies/interests (Figure 2 illustrates the user interface for editable fields; Table 1 presents examples of selectable options for each field). Review & Reflect allows the user to review saved transcripts from previous simulations, each of which also includes a text area for the user to save reflection notes. While AI functionality

is not currently embedded in this function, future editions potentially include a mentor avatar who provides tailored guidance to enhance the user's reflection on their advising practice.

Figure 1

Function Selection Page

Figure 2

AI Avatar Setting Page for Advanced Simulator

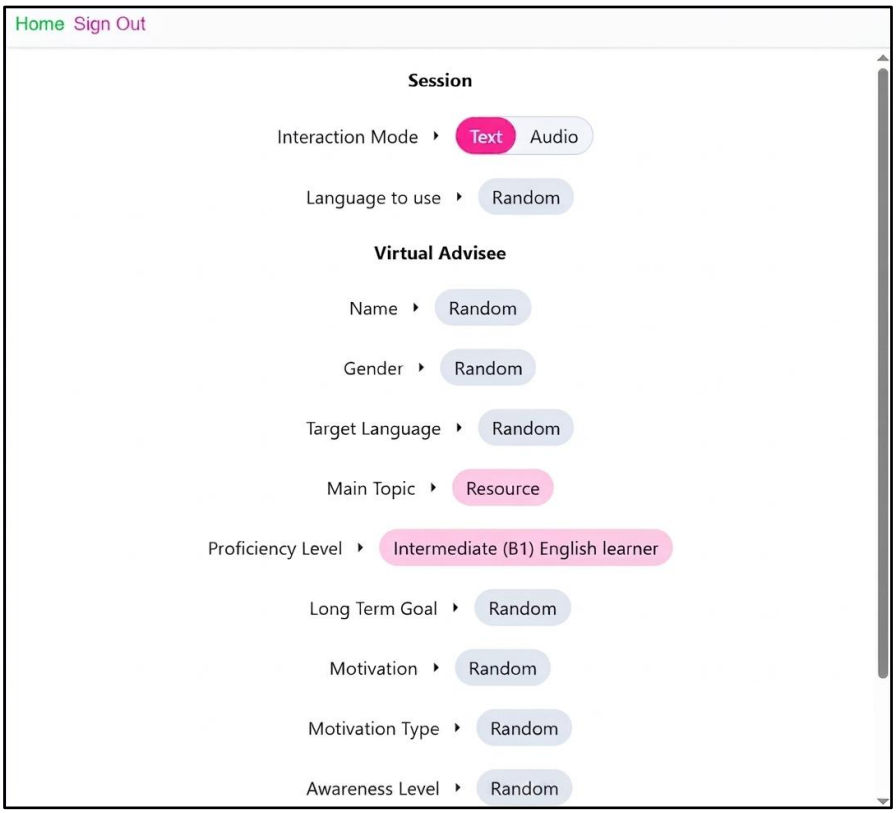


Table 1

Illustrative Examples of Selectable Options for Learner Profile Fields

Field	Example Options
Name	Aoi, Hikaru, Sora, Yuuki
Gender	Male, Female, Non-binary
Target Language	English, Japanese
Main Topic	Learning plan, Resources, Confidence, Motivation, TOEIC
Proficiency Level	Pre-beginner (Pre-A1), Beginner (A1), Intermediate (B1)
Long Term Goal	Study abroad in Canada, Become fluent in daily conversation, Read English novels without translation, Work in the hotel industry
Motivation	Travelling, Writing Poetry, Listening to music, Tabletop games
Motivation type	Amotivated (no motivation), Extrinsically motivated 1 (for external rewards), Extrinsically motivated 2 (for approval), Intrinsically motivated
Awareness Level	Low, Middle, High
Personality	Shy, Nervous, Easily confused, Friendly, Perfectionist
Hobbies/Interests	Hiking, Cooking, Movies, Birdwatching, Video games

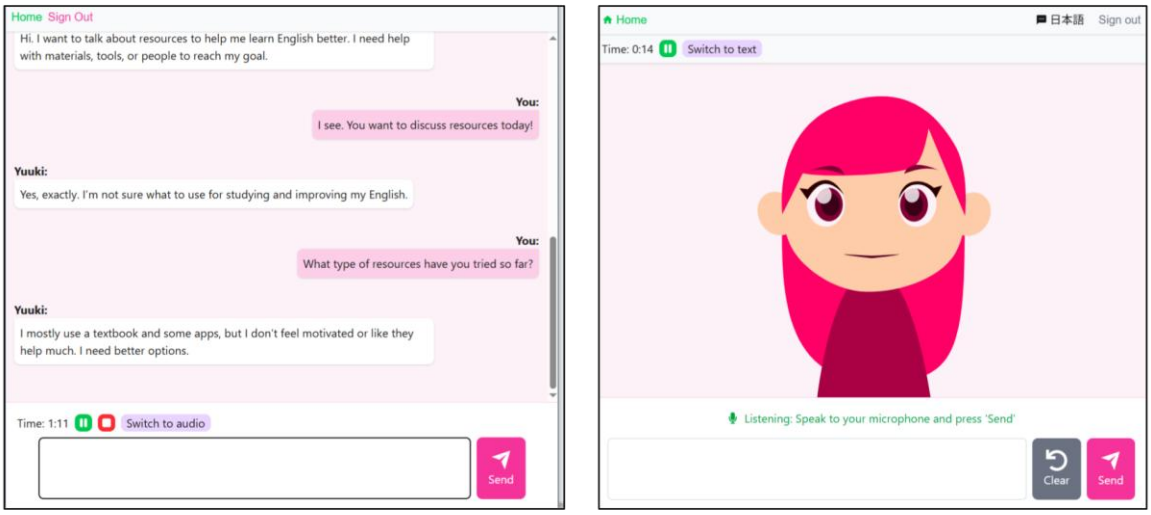
Interaction with the Avatars

During a simulation session, the avatar assumes the role of a language learner whose traits reflect the customized profile settings. For example, in Figure 3, an avatar's responses include "Hi, I want to talk about resources to help me learn English better. I need help with materials, tools, or people to reach my goal," and "I mostly use a textbook and some apps, but I don't feel motivated or like they help much. I need better options," reflecting the Main Topic set to Resources. Both types of simulators provide two interaction modes, *text mode* and *audio mode*, which can be selected and switched before and during a simulation session. Text mode functions similarly to conventional short messaging applications, allowing the

user to read previous responses, which encourages slower-paced dialogue and reflection before sending each response (illustrated in Figure 3, Text Mode). Audio mode displays an animated 2D avatar and uses speech recognition and text-to-speech capability to simulate real-time verbal communication, while also allowing the user to retake their speech and keyboard input to maximize accessibility (illustrated in Figure 3, Audio Mode).

Figures 3 and 4

Screenshots of Text Mode and Audio Mode



Text Mode **Audio Mode**

The Present Study

Rationale, Purpose, and Research Questions

As established in the previous section, opportunities for novice advisors to engage in realistic practice remain limited due to scheduling challenges and a lack of preparedness to work with learners. Consequently, there is a need for training tools that offer meaningful, low-stakes practice without involving real learners. LISA addresses this gap by providing a controlled but realistic environment in which advisors can develop, refine, and reflect on their skills.

The purpose of this research is to develop and evaluate a fully functioning version of LISA and to explore its potential contribution to advisor education. This project examines how simulated (text and voice/audio) interactions with virtual learners can help both novice and experienced advisors build confidence, strengthen advising skills, and connect theoretical

principles with practical application. By analyzing users' experiences, the study aims to gather initial impressions on how AI-based simulations can support professional learning in self-access and language-support contexts.

Research questions guiding this study are: 1) How do advisors perceive the usability, accessibility, and realism of the LISA simulation environment? and 2) To what extent do advisors consider LISA a valuable tool for developing advising skills and supporting advisor education?

Participants and Procedure

After receiving ethical approval from the University, the researchers contacted former and current AEP course participants by email, and eight volunteered to participate in this study. Each respondent first provided informed consent before participating, then individually interacted with LISA by conducting at least one simulated advising session, and finally completed a three-part online questionnaire (see Appendix).

The survey gathered:

1) background information (e.g., advising experience, training),
2) two sets of five Likert-scale items (5-point evaluation ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree) evaluating the interface clarity, avatar realism, practice value, accessibility, and potential for skill development (one set for the text version of LISA and another set for the voice/audio version), and
3) five open-ended questions regarding perceived benefits, challenges, and suggestions for improvement.

Drawing on the first part of the questionnaire, we established the profile of the eight participants. All of them reported having prior training in advising or reflective dialogue. Three participants were graduates of the AEP (and were also advisor educators), while the remaining five had partially completed the AEP. The cohort consisted of teachers, learning advisors, and a career consultant working in different educational settings, representing a broad range of advising experience, from novices with fewer than 10 sessions to highly experienced advisors with more than 100 sessions, spanning two to eight years in the field.

The second part of the survey, analyzed descriptively due to the small number of participants, provided quantitative insights on practical aspects of using LISA, and the third part of the questionnaire collected qualitative data on observed strengths, limitations, and suggestions for future development. The qualitative data were analyzed thematically by one of the researchers to identify emergent themes, which were then discussed with the research

team. The process broadly followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase thematic analysis framework. Findings are presented in the following sections.

Findings

Quantitative Results

All participants (N = 8) reported their experience using the text version of LISA, and half of the cohort (n = 4) also tried the voice/audio version. The results indicate a highly positive overall evaluation of the app. Most participants either agreed or strongly agreed with statement A, "The LISA interface was clear and user-friendly," and similar levels of agreement were reported for statement B, "The avatar's reactions felt close to how real learners would respond." The responses to both statements suggest that usability of the app and the authenticity of the interaction were the strongest aspects of the experience. Regarding statement C, "The session with the avatar provided me with a useful opportunity to practice advising*"*, showed more variability, indicating differences in the perceived value of the app for advising practice (one disagreed, three neither agreed nor disagreed, two agreed, and five strongly agreed).

The accessibility of the simulator was also viewed positively, with six participants agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement "Using LISA is more accessible than finding a real practice partner*"* (Statement D). Finally, most advisors agreed or strongly agreed with statement E, "Continued use of LISA would help novice advisors to improve their basic advising skills,*"* indicating that participants recognized its pedagogical potential.

Among the participants who evaluated both versions of the app, a few discrepancies emerged. Two participants rated the text version more favorably in terms of interface clarity, usefulness for practicing advising skills, and ease of finding an advisee. In contrast, one participant evaluated the voice-audio version more positively, agreeing that it was clear and user-friendly, whereas they selected "neither agree nor disagree" for the text version. These quantitative findings are supported and nuanced by the analysis of the qualitative responses, presented in the following sub-section.

Qualitative Results

Four themes emerged from the analysis of the responses to the five open-ended questions about the benefits, challenges, and suggestions for future development when using LISA: Authenticity and personalization, areas for improvement, strategic and reflective

practice, and experiencing hesitation and problem-solving moments. The sub-sections below provide an analysis of each theme with representative quotes.

Authenticity and Personalization

The most frequently mentioned theme concerns LISA's realism and relevance to real face-to-face advising sessions, with six participants describing the interaction as similar to an authentic communicative experience and contextually meaningful, while two highlighted subtle limitations in human-likeness. Three participants expressed surprise at the app's degree of authenticity and customization, with one participant noting, "It felt no different from interacting with a real learner," and another explaining, "In some way, this is actually how students talk, and it can be hard to get to the core issue, so that part is pretty realistic." Similarly, the comment "[...] it feels similar to talking to a student, especially with the 'ums' and the vocabulary it uses," highlighted how subtle conversational features were integrated into the dialogue. However, as the interaction progressed, one participant noted that the app struggled to sustain the same level of authenticity, explaining that "after a while, it feels like talking to a robot," and that "it was difficult to feel like he was a real learner after a while." The same participant also pointed to the absence of non-verbal cues typically present in face-to-face advising, observing that "real students are rarely like that," and that "with a real learner other aspects come in, how they look like, how they sit, etc."

Areas for Improvement

This theme was the second most frequent among the participants. Seven provided feedback regarding four aspects: User interface and technical issues, limited or repetitive dialogue, lack of realism, and lack of structure and flow. Firstly, five respondents reported that the interface and technical issues could interrupt the flow of the advising dialogue. Participants explained their confusion regarding the response input method, e.g., "Not being able to push enter after writing my response was impractical," and "Enter instead of a Send button might be more intuitive, but I know sometimes we mistakenly press enter although we just want to start a new line, and in a dialogue situation it will complicate the flow." While mentioned as minor, these concerns could be important barriers to seamless communication to consider addressing to mitigate possible impact on the flow of future conversations using LISA.

The second drawback highlighted in four comments was connected to the lack of depth and variety in the advising dialogue, contrasting with the app's aim of "naturalness". One participant noted, "After some sequences, the same sentences popped up. [...] After some time, it was clear that the advice had a loop." This limitation indicates that the app database

of responses or, perhaps, its generative skills are currently insufficient, leading to predictable interactions, potentially disrupting LISA users' sense of authentic simulation, according to the participants.

Beyond repetition and depth, three participants criticized the app's lack of realism. As mentioned in the previous sub-section, aspects of the dialogue were incoherent with the "typical" human advisees the participants interacted with. Specifically, in one cited case, the AI partner (avatar learner) did not have a genuine problem or a clear objective. The participant described, "[...] I felt like I did not really have to advise him, [...] He had the answers ready," In a similar case, another participant explained, "I got the sense that no matter how much I keep talking, there isn't going to be a core issue that I can grab onto." Also, one participant noted that the simulator "agree [*sic*] with me without having a will of his [*sic*] own," indicating the app's limitation to provide, to some extent, sufficient challenge, that would best mimic the reality of advising sessions, for a user to practice their advising skills.

Finally, three participants reported issues concerning the flow and structure of the interactions. In particular, one participant mentioned a lack of narrative closure, stating, "I also was not sure how the conversation ends [*sic*] or at what point the student felt like he had a sense of resolution." Another participant described the AI's inability to keep the focus on the conversation, as the simulator "kept talking to me and even steered the conversation to ask about my hobbies." These responses indicate that LISA occasionally has difficulty recognizing conversational cues for closure, which impacts the impression of authenticity.

Strategic and Reflective Practice

This theme connects to the participants' comments about strategic planning and metacognitive reflection while using the tool. Seven participants identified LISA as a space that not only required the use of the advising skills taught in the RILAE courses but also provided the possibility of "reflecting before asking questions or giving advice," often limited in face-to-face interactions. Furthermore, five respondents described conscious planning, noting for example, "I had to think really carefully about how I could get the learner to take responsibility in learning," leading to stating powerful questions, including "What do you think is your core issue?", and specific actions, mentioned in the written dialogue with AI, such as "Please summarize for me what you are going to do next."

Also, six participants mentioned the simulator's effectiveness in refining their advising skills; one described it as a "very good pedagogical decision" and indicated their intention "to use this more to improve my advising and questioning skills." Another

participant said it could be especially useful "to have novice advisors talk to the AI for a little while and then discuss to compare what strategies they used," showing the value of collaborative reflection. The advisors' comments indicate that their experience using LISA fostered reflection on their advising skills.

Experiencing Hesitation and Problem-Solving Moments

Five participants' responses also included comments about experiencing advisees' struggles, hesitation, and uncertainty, triggering problem-solving and reflective moments. Some comments validated the authenticity of those episodes to practice problem-solving moments in the advising dialogue, stating, "Sometimes the questions were so natural and challenging that I froze for a moment, which often happens in real life, too," or mirroring learners' insecurity, perceiving LISA as "really good at imitating the 'I don't know what to do' moments." Two respondents appreciated the possibility of reflective pauses in the conversation, not always possible in a face-to-face setting, noting, "It's nice that you have time to think of what you want to say next." These simulated challenging moments did not discourage the participants; they seemed to foster persistence and a desire to further practice their advising skills.

Discussion

The results showed that LISA has great potential to create much-needed opportunities for both novice and experienced learning advisors to develop their skills. In this section, we discuss the implications of the results by returning to the research questions: 1) How do advisors perceive the usability, accessibility, and realism of the LISA simulation environment? 2) To what extent do advisors consider LISA a valuable tool for developing advising skills and supporting advisor education?

Participants generally found the experience to be usable, accessible, and realistic. The data highlighted the satisfaction of the basic psychological need of competence. LISA replicates authentic advising challenges, such as hesitation and some contradictions in goal setting, that provoke reflective problem-solving on the part of the advisor, just as in a real session. The process showed that LISA was easy to access, and the systems were user-friendly. Whether voice or text mode was a matter of individual preference. The advisors who tested LISA found that they could comfortably rehearse the advising skills they learned in the course in a safe space free of the pressures and emotional load that a real session might entail. The practice opportunities that LISA provided are particularly helpful for novice advisors

who need to develop automaticity in using the skills they may have learned during their advisor training but might not have had time to fully internalize.

In terms of LISA's limitations, the data suggest that while many participants appreciated LISA's ability to replicate fluid, realistic, and low-pressure interactions, they also identified boundaries to this algorithm-based dialogue, indicating that affective and physical dimensions are key in this type of conversation. Nevertheless, the dialogues with LISA provided opportunities for reflection on practice, demonstrating the need for competence satisfaction.

Satisfaction of the other two basic psychological needs of autonomy and relatedness from SDT was more difficult to discern. As this was a research scenario, the participants were using LISA to give feedback to researchers, not because they had identified a personally meaningful autonomous goal. However, participants acknowledged that LISA could provide targeted and individually meaningful practice opportunities for learning advisors. Regarding relatedness, as mentioned earlier, this version of the app does not include mechanisms to satisfy this basic psychological need, but one participant did recognize the potential for the experience to serve as a useful starting point for a follow-up reflective group discussion. In our AEP, relatedness is satisfied through the sense of community participants feel from opportunities to practice and reflect in real time during weekly meetings and on an online asynchronous discussion board (Mynard & Kato, 2025), and LISA could provide another tool for stimulating such reflection.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The study shows the potential for LISA to serve as a supportive tool for advisor education, complementing instructor-led and peer-supportive courses. The purpose of LISA is not to eliminate the important process of relational advising/mentoring, but to provide helpful, on-demand, practice and reflection opportunities for learning advisors that will enhance the effectiveness of the mentoring and ultimately advisor development.

LISA represents an innovative step in AI-assisted advisor education. It extends opportunities for reflective practice and skill development while preserving the human-centered ethos of advising. The findings affirm that AI can simulate authentic advising conditions and promote advisor growth when grounded in autonomy-supportive, empathy-based frameworks like SDT. The study showed that LISA is an accessible, on-demand practice environment that complements advisor training courses.

Several further stages are planned for this project. After reviewing the feedback, we will continue to improve the interface and the range of responses available to the avatar and move into the next stage of usability investigation. The second stage of usability testing will involve following the UX Design Institute procedures to observe and record additional testers using LISA and asking them to think-aloud as they do so to describe their experiences. This will lead to further improvements to the interface and user experience. Currently, we have only been testing LISA in English, but we are due to trial a Japanese version shortly, and this might be followed by other languages in the future.

Following usability testing, we will explore whether users can effectively apply advising skills and whether using LISA supports their ongoing development as advisors by stimulating reflective processes. This research focus will also be useful for evaluating the AEP and improving the lessons and materials. This process is likely to involve the collection and analysis of transcripts of the avatar-based sessions and associated written reflections. In addition, follow-up interviews with users would be invaluable for establishing the effectiveness of LISA as a training tool for advisors. We plan to evaluate the long-term development of advising skills and awareness by collecting data from advisors over a one-year period. This longitudinal and systematic approach will ensure we can eventually share the theoretically grounded, research-driven potential of LISA as a tool for effective advisor education.

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Appendix

Survey Items

Part 1: Background Information

- Have you taken or completed any training in advising or reflective dialogue?
- Your current role
- How long have you been a Learning Advisor? (If applicable)
- How many advising sessions have you conducted with real learners?

Part 2: Experience Using LISA (Text version)

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding text interactions with the avatar: (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)

- The LISA interface was clear and user-friendly.
- The avatar's reactions felt close to how real learners would respond.
- The session with the avatar provided me with a useful opportunity to practice advising.
- Using LISA is more accessible than finding a real practice partner.
- Continued use of LISA would help novice advisors to improve their basic advising skills.

Part 2: Experience Using LISA (Optional - voice/audio version)

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements, regarding audio interaction with the avatar: (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)

- The LISA interface for audio interaction was clear and user-friendly.
- The avatar's reactions felt close to how real learners would respond.
- The session with the avatar provided me with a useful opportunity to practice advising.
- Using LISA is more accessible than finding a real practice partner.
- Continued use of LISA would help novice advisors to improve their basic advising skills.

Part 3: Open-Ended Questions

- What aspects of LISA did you find most helpful? Why?
- Were there any aspects you found confusing or difficult?
- How did the experience with LISA compare to practicing with a real learner?
- What suggestions do you have to improve LISA for future users?
- Any other comments or feedback?

Logbookと言語学習アドバイジングを統合した教室外Eタンデム：日韓・日独比較から見えた示唆

Integrating Logbooks and Advising in Out-of-Class eTandem: Insights from Japan–Korea and Japan–Germany Projects

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要旨

本稿では、日本–韓国および日本–ドイツの 2 つの E タンデム実践を比較し、振り返りを支える Logbook と言語学習アドバイジングの位置づけが学習者の行動と継続にどのように関与していたかを検討する。E タンデムは互恵性と学習者オートノミーを原則とする学習形態であり、その継続には内省を促す仕組みが重要である。両プロジェクトは共通のガイドラインとセッション構造を採用していたが、日韓 E タンデムでは Logbook とアドバイジングが任意であったのに対し、日独 E タンデムでは両者が標準プロセスとして組み込まれていた。結果として、日韓 E タンデムではアドバイジング利用は確認されず、Logbook の継続的な記入者も 1 名にとどまった。一方、日独 E タンデムでは全員が Logbook を継続的に記録し、アドバイジングを通じて目標設定や学習ストラテジーの調整が促進され、経験の共有も促され、全ペアが活動を継続した。以上の比較から、学習者オートノミーの発達段階に応じた適度に構造化された枠組みと内省を促す継続的なサポートの重要性が示唆された。

キーワード：タンデム学習、学習者オートノミー、Logbook、言語学習アドバイジング、内省支援

This paper compares two eTandem projects—Japan–Korea and Japan–Germany—to examine how the positioning of logbooks for reflection and language learning advising influenced learner behavior and continuity. eTandem is grounded in reciprocity and learner autonomy, and mechanisms that promote reflection are essential for sustaining engagement. Although both projects adopted shared guidelines and a common session structure, their support systems differed: in Japan–Korea, the logbook and advising were optional, whereas in Japan–Germany, both were integrated as standard components. Consequently, no participants in the Japan–Korea project used advising, and only one student continued logbook entries. In contrast, all participants in the Japan–Germany project maintained consistent logbook records, and advising sessions facilitated goal setting, strategy adjustment, and the sharing of learning experiences, with all pairs sustaining their activities. The comparison suggests the importance of an appropriately structured framework aligned with learners' developmental stages of autonomy, together with continuous support that promotes reflection.

Keywords: tandem learning, learner autonomy, logbooks, advising in language learning, reflective support

Eタンデムは、互恵性と学習者オートノミーの原則に基づき、異なる母語話者同士がオンラインで相互に言語・文化を学ぶ学習形態である（Little & Brammerts, 1996）。本稿では、学習者オートノミーを、外部からの構造的な支援が乏しい環境下においても自律的に学習サイクルを管理・継続できる能力として捉える。また、それは発達的な性質を持ち、学習者のレベルや学習環境に応じた適度な構造化が必要とされる（脇坂, 2014; Schwienhorst, 2009）。必ずしも理想的な学習環境でなくとも、既存の枠組みの中で教師や支援者の工夫により、学習者オートノミーを支援することは可能である（青木・中田, 2011）。

先行研究では、Eタンデムがコミュニケーション能力や異文化間能力の向上、学習者オートノミーの発達や学習動機の維持・向上などに寄与することが示される一方（Lewis & Walker, 2003; Wakisaka, 2018）、効果的なEタンデムには内省を促す仕組みが成功の鍵となる（Schwienhorst, 2009）。本稿の目的は、1）日本–韓国および日本–ドイツの2つのEタンデムの実践内容と枠組みを概説し、2）振り返りを支えるLogbookと言語学習アドバイジング（以下、アドバイジング）の組み込み方の違いが学習者の行動や学習活動の継続にどのように関与していたかを比較検討し、3）その知見に基づき、Eタンデムにおけるサポートの組み込み方について示唆を導くことである。

背景：振り返りをサポートするツールとしてのLogbookと言語学習アドバイジング

Eタンデムの継続を左右する要因として、目標言語の学習機会、学習時間、初期動機の性質、取り組みの度合い、学習内容の調整、パートナーとの交渉可能性等が指摘されている（脇坂, 2014）。また、Schwienhorst（2009）はEタンデムでの学習環境において、振り返りを促す学習環境の整備が気づきの深化や学習ストラテジーの更新につながることを報告している。

こうした先行研究を踏まえ、本研究で扱う2つのプロジェクトでは、学習者の内省を体系的に支援するためにLogbookとアドバイジングを導入した。Logbookは第一著者がタンデム学習における学習者自身の振り返りを促す目的で独自に開発したウェブアプリケーションである。アプリには学習目標のパートナーとの共有、学習計画や振り返りの記録、学習内容リストの閲覧といった機能が備わっている。また、支援者が学習者の記録を随時確認できる仕組みを有しており、学習状況の把握と問

題発生時の適切な支援を目的として、アドバイザーが Logbook の記録を適宜確認することについては、事前に参加者に説明していた。アドバイジングは、不安の軽減や課題の明確化、学習ストラテジーの調整を対話的に支援する場と位置づけられる（Elstermann, 2016）。それは、学習内容や方法を指導・評価するものではなく、対話を通して学習者の気づきと意思決定を促すプロセスである（Mynard & Carson, 2012）。本プロジェクトのアドバイジングでもこの理念に基づき、助言よりも問いかけを重視し、学習者が自身の学習を再構成できるよう支援した。タンデム学習におけるセッション内の振り返りがパートナー間で直前のやり取りの共有・確認を目的とするのに対し、アドバイジングはセッション外に設けられた第三者との対話の場であり、学習過程全体を俯瞰的に捉え直すことに主眼を置く。Logbook との併用により、学習者の内省を多面的に支える枠組みとして機能することを意図した。

事前ガイダンスと E タンデム・セッションの構造

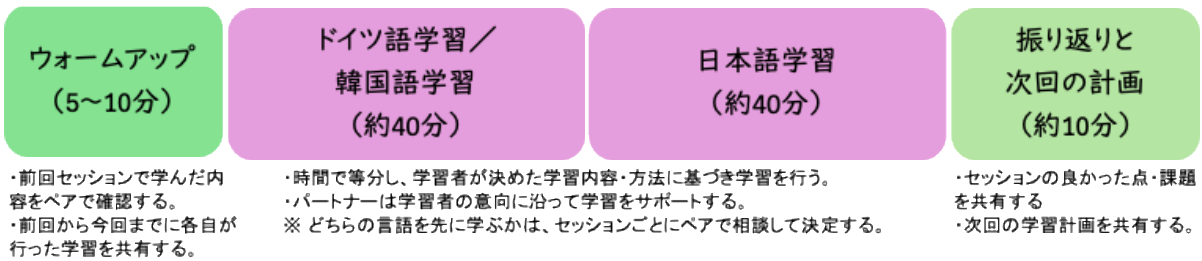
両プロジェクトでは、週に 1 回 E タンデム・セッションを実施し、参加者ごとに合計 7〜9 回のセッションが行われた。参加者は、事前ガイダンスを受けた後にパートナーと連絡を取り、初回セッションの日程を調整し、学習活動を開始した。

事前ガイダンスでは、書面によるガイドラインに基づき、E タンデムが学習者オートノミーと互恵性を原則とする学習形態であり、プライベートレッスンや日常的な交流とは異なる特性をもつことを説明した。加えて、具体的な進行方法、学習目標の設定と振り返り・計画の重要性、Logbook による記録の役割、アドバイジングの位置づけを共有し、効果的な実践のためのヒントを示した。

1 回の E タンデム・セッションは、次のような構造で行われる。

図 1

1 回の E タンデム・セッションの流れ（1 時間半の場合）



なお、両プロジェクトとも、コーディネーターの負担や運営上の制約を踏まえ、実施方法が設計された。

日韓Eタンデム

日韓Eタンデム・プロジェクトの概要

日韓Eタンデムは2024年11月下旬から2025年1月下旬にかけて実施され、11ペア（22名）が参加した。参加者は、日本語を学ぶ韓国側の学習者（CEFR A2–B1）と韓国語を学ぶ日本側の学習者（CEFR A2–B2）で構成され、いずれもEタンデムへの参加は初めてであった。学習活動は課外での自主参加を基本とした。

Logbookについては、操作説明動画の提供と利用の呼びかけは行ったが、その利用は任意とし、必要に応じた活用を促した。アドバイジングについても同様に、希望者を対象として実施することが事前に共有されていた。

日韓Eタンデムにおける観察結果

日韓Eタンデムではアドバイジングの利用者はおらず、Logbookを継続的に記入した学習者も1名にとどまった。多くの参加者はセッションには参加していたものの、記録や振り返りの実施状況や活動の継続状況は十分に確認できていない。これは、ペア間の活動状況が原則として参加者の自発的な連絡に依存しており、全体の活動状況を把握する仕組みがなかったことによる。そのため、活動の実態を外部から捉えることが難しく、結果として、問題解決をサポートする仕組みが学習過程に十分に組み込まれていたとは言いがたい。

Logbookへの記入を唯一継続した学習者（以下「ミキ」）は、事後インタビューにおいて、Eタンデムでの経験を韓国語使用に対する肯定的な体験として捉えていた。また、この経験が契機となり、翌学期の留学生チューターへの応募につながったと述べている。一方で、「アドバイジングを受けていれば、良い意味で緊張感が生まれたのではないか」とも述べており、サポートが枠組みに組み込まれていた場合、学習への主体的な関わりが促進された可能性が示唆された。さらにLogbookについても、「前回の内容を思い出すのに役立った」と述べており、記録が振り返りの手がかりとして一定の機能を果たしていたことが確認できた。また、ミキの語り

からは、学期の移行や生活上の変化が活動の継続に影響し得ることが見て取れる。ミキはプロジェクト終了後もEタンデムを継続していたが、両者の学期開始のタイミングが重なり、結果として活動が途絶えたと述べている。このことは、継続の意思があっても、外的要因の重なりによって活動が維持されない場合があることを示している。

以上を踏まえると、日韓Eタンデムではサポートが希望者に委ねられていたため、活動を振り返り、調整する機会が限られていた可能性がある。Eタンデムの継続や中断のあり方は一様ではないが、サポートが学習過程に組み込まれていなかったことが、内省や学習調整に影響していたと考えられる。

日独Eタンデム

日独Eタンデム・プロジェクトの概要

日独Eタンデムは、2024年11月初めから2025年1月中旬にかけて実施され、8ペア（16名）が参加した。参加者は、日本語を学ぶドイツ側の学習者とドイツ語を学ぶ日本側の学習者で構成され、いずれもCEFR A1–A2レベルでEタンデムへの参加は初めてであった。日本側は課外の自主参加を基本とし、ドイツ側はアドバイジングへの参加と学期末のポートフォリオ提出により単位取得が可能であった。

Logbookの使用およびアドバイジングは学習プロセスに組み込まれ、標準的な枠組みとして運用された。Logbookについては、初回セッション前に学習目標を記入し、各セッションの前後に学習計画および振り返りを記録することが求められていた。

日独Eタンデムにおけるアドバイジング

アドバイジングは、表1に示す3段階で計画的に実施した。各セッションは第一著者が担当し、1回約60分で行った。形式は主に対面とし、状況に応じてオンライン（Zoom）を併用した。特に、学習者がEタンデムでの経験を振り返り、それを踏まえて今後の学習をどのように改善できるかについて、対話を通して主体的に検討できるよう支援することを重視した。

表1

日独Eタンデムにおけるアドバイジング・セッション

実施時期	形式	主な内容・目的
アドバイジング① （初回前）	グループ／対面	・学習目標の具体化 ・初回セッションの準備 ・効果的に進めるためのヒント ・不安の共有と対策の検討
アドバイジング② （第1・第2回後）	個別／少人数 対面・オンライン	・初回の振り返りの共有 ・課題の把握と改善策の検討 ・他者の実践からの学び
アドバイジング③ （第6回後）	少人数グループ／対面	・学習経験の共有 ・目標達成の自己評価 ・今後の学習計画の検討

日独Eタンデムにおける内省の特徴

日独Eタンデムでは、全参加者が学習期間を通じてLogbookを継続的に使用し、3回のアドバイジングに参加した。以下では、その記述および事後インタビューの発話をもとに、内省の特徴を整理する。

まず、Logbookの役割についてみると、ある参加者は、Logbookがタンデム・セッションの内容の想起を支えていたことについて次のように述べている。

> Logbookは定期的な振り返りの機会になり、セッションがどんなものだったかを思い出す助けになったと思います。タンデムで交わした言葉や内容を書き留めることで、パートナーと何について話したかとか、何が興味深かったかを振り返ることができました。（中略）次に話す予定だったことを覚えるためのメモとしても役立ちました。（インタビュー）

この語りから、Logbookは学習内容の把握と次回への接続を支える振り返りのツールとして機能していたことがわかる。また、学習目標の調整や進捗の整理など、学習の見直しを支える役割も複数の記述から確認できた。

次に、アドバイジング・セッションの役割についてみると、別の参加者はアドバイジングが学習活動の選択に影響を与えた経験について、次のように述べている。

> アドバイジングで、Oさん（＝他の参加者）が、パートナーの影響で寝る前に（ドイツ語の）ポッドキャストを聴いていると話していたので、私ももっと実践的なことを試すべきだと思い、YouTubeでドイツ人の女の子がメイクや身支度をするVlogを見るようになりました。（インタビュー）

この発話から、アドバイジングは他者の実践の共有を通して学習の選択肢を広げ、学習行動の調整を促す契機として機能していたことが窺える。さらに、困難の共有やその解決、学習ストラテジーの調整にも関与していたことが確認された。

以上より、①Logbookが学習の継続を支える手がかりとなっていたこと、②アドバイジングが他者の実践を通じて学習行動の変容を促していたこと、③経験や困難の言語化を通じて学習調整が行われていたことが特徴として挙げられる。こうした支援のもとで全参加者が活動を継続し、終了後もその継続が見られたことから、内省の習慣化と共有の機会が継続を支える要因として機能していたと考えられる。

考察：二つのEタンデム実践の比較

両プロジェクトはガイドラインやLogbookなどの基本要素を共有していたが、サポートの組み込み方の違いにより、学習者の行動と継続状況に差が認められた。日韓Eタンデムでは、Logbookは推奨にとどまり、アドバイジングも希望制であったため、学習過程の中に十分に位置づけられていなかった。一方で、日独Eタンデムでは、Logbook記入と3回のアドバイジングが標準的なプロセスとして組み込まれており、全員が継続的に記録を行い、アドバイジングを受けられる条件が整えられていた。

この違いは、学習者にどこまで任せるかという問題ではなく、Eタンデムの枠組みの自由度と構造化のバランスの差として説明できる。脇坂（2014）が指摘するように、参加者の学習者オートノミーの発達段階やローカルな制約・資源を踏まえ、過度に自由すぎず、かつ拘束的でない「適度な自由度」をもつ枠組みを設計することが、学習の継続を支える。日韓Eタンデムでは、自由度の高い設計のもとで学習者が調整方法を見出しにくかった可能性がある一方、日独Eタンデムでは、適度に構造化された枠組みが学習行動を支えていたと考えられる。

例えば、初期段階ではアドバイジングを必須とし徐々に任意へ移行する、あるいはLogbookの記入頻度を段階的に調整するなど、柔軟な設計も考えられる。任意参加型のサポートは「必要なときに利用するもの」と捉えられやすく、日常的な振り返りや問題の早期把握につながりにくい。また、相談のタイミング判断や依頼に伴う心理的負担により利用を抑制した可能性がある。対話を通じて初めて課題が顕在化する場合も多く、希望制では潜在的な支援ニーズは表面化しにくい。

以上の知見を踏まえると、サポートの設計には実践上の配慮も重要となる。課外で行われるEタンデムでは、コーディネーターの負担を踏まえ、アドバイジングの実施時期や回数の調整、個別・グループの併用、対面とオンラインの使い分けなどにより、負荷を適切に分散することが求められる。

結論

本稿では、日韓と日独の二つのEタンデムの実践を比較し、Logbookとアドバイジングの組み込み方が学習者の行動に与える影響を検討した。サポートが任意であった日韓Eタンデムでは、Logbookの継続的記入者は1名にとどまり、アドバイジングの利用も確認されず、サポートが学習過程に組み込まれていたとは言いがたい。一方で、両者を標準的なプロセスとして組み込んだ日独Eタンデムでは、定期的な振り返りが定着し、全員が学習期間を通じて活動を継続した。

これらの結果は、学習者オートノミーの発達段階や学習環境に応じた「適度に構造化された枠組み」の重要性を示している。特に、タンデム学習の経験が浅い学習者や、学習者オートノミーを活かした学習に不慣れな学習者にとっては、学習開始段階のアドバイジングや、Logbookによる継続的な振り返りを促す仕組みが、Eタンデムの進め方の理解および学習活動の調整を支える重要な役割を果たしたと考えられる。

ただし、学習者オートノミーの発達段階には個人差が大きく、すべての学習者が同一のサポートを必要とするわけではない。そのため、枠組みには一定の標準化したサポートを組み込みつつも、学習者が自らに合ったサポートの受け方を選択できる柔軟性を確保することが重要である。これらの知見はタンデム学習に限らず、自律的学習の実践全般においても、学習支援の構造のあり方を検討する上で示唆を与えるものである。

今後の課題

本稿は、性質の異なる2つのEタンデム実践の比較を通じて示唆を導いたものである。特に日韓Eタンデムでは活動状況の把握が限定的であり、その知見は探索的に解釈する必要がある。今後はLogbookの記述やアドバイジングの対話データをより詳細に分析し、内省および意思決定の過程とサポートとの関係を明らかにする必要がある。

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Feeling Seen: Visual Displays, Affect, and Belonging in a Self-Access Learning Center

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Author Biography

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Abstract

This reflective article explores the potential role of student-generated visual displays in shaping the emotional climate of a self-access learning environment. Drawing on professional practice at Tokyo International University's Learning Commons and informed by scholarship on space, affect, and learner ownership, I consider how intern photos, comics, and student artwork may contribute to perceptions of belonging and emotional readiness for communication. Through practitioner observation and engagement with self-access learning center (SALC) literature, I reflect on how visual design elements appear to influence atmosphere, approachability, and learners' willingness to participate in informal language use. Rather than presenting empirical findings, this article offers a practice-based inquiry into the possibilities and limitations of visual space design, including the challenges of interpreting emotional impact without systematic data and ensuring inclusive representation in student-facing displays. The article concludes with practical considerations for educators interested in co-designing self-access environments that attend to learners' emotional experiences while maintaining reflective humility about the limits of practitioner interpretation.

本稿は、セルフアクセス学習環境における学生生成型の視覚的掲示物が、学習空間の情緒的雰囲気にどのような影響を与え得るかを省察的に検討するものである。東京国際大学ラーニング・コモンズでの実践経験と、空間・情意・学習者主体性に関する研究を踏まえ、インターン学生の写真、コミック風デザイン、学生作品などが、所属感やコミュニケーションへの情緒的準備性にどのように関わり得るかを考察する。本研究は実証的研究ではなく、実践者としての観察と理論的枠組みに基づく実践的省察である。あわせて、情緒的影響の解釈の難しさや、多様性を踏まえた表象の課題についても検討する。最後に、学習者の情緒的経験に配慮したセルフアクセス空間を協働的に設計するための示唆を提示する。

Keywords: self-access learning, learning space design, affective dimensions, learner belonging, visual environment

Self-access learning centers (SALCs) have evolved from resource repositories into social learning spaces that shape how learners experience participation and belonging. Murray (2018) argues that self-access environments can function as complex, dynamic ecosocial systems—spaces shaped by the interaction of social, environmental, and spatial factors that influence the affordances available to learners. From this perspective, space is not neutral; it communicates messages about what kinds of engagement are possible and whether learners feel comfortable taking risks.

As a facility supervisor working in Tokyo International University's (TIU) Learning Commons, I have become increasingly interested in the emotional dimensions of self-access space design. Over time, I have observed that students respond differently to various visual features in our center: Some displays invite engagement and spark conversation, while others go largely unnoticed. These observations have led me to explore what student-generated visuals might contribute to the emotional atmosphere of a SALC, particularly in terms of belonging, safety, and welcome.

Informal learning spaces that incorporate student-led displays and visual personalization have been shown to support emotional well-being and foster stronger identification with the learning community (Kashiwa, 2021). However, the mechanisms through which visual features—especially intern photos, comics, and student artwork—influence emotional readiness for communication remain underexplored.

This reflective article emerges from my ongoing work designing and maintaining visual displays in the TIU Learning Commons. I consider three questions: (a) Do recognizable peer- and learner-created visuals help visitors feel seen and welcomed? (b) How might color, design style, and content shape learners' emotional state and openness to communication? (c) What practical design principles can support emotionally responsive and inclusive self-access environments?

Literature Review

Affective Factors in Self-Access Learning

Affective dimensions, including motivation, anxiety, confidence, and emotional well-being, are increasingly recognized as important in self-directed language learning (Shelton-Strong & Mynard, 2018). Research suggests that learners' emotions and psychological states play an important role in autonomous learning processes and can influence how learners approach and manage their learning (Tassinari & Ciekanski, 2013). Tassinari and Ciekanski

(2013) argue that SALCs should address not only cognitive and metacognitive aspects of learning but also affective and subjective dimensions. They suggest that language advising provides an appropriate context for learners to reflect on the affective implications of learning, express feelings and beliefs related to their learning experiences, and develop strategies for coping with emotional challenges that arise during the learning process.

In response, many SALCs have incorporated affective support through advising, reflective activities, and other learner-supporting initiatives. Practical support such as guided reflective journals and one-to-one advising sessions have been successfully used to help learners monitor and develop awareness of their motivational and emotional states (Shelton-Strong & Mynard, 2018).

This body of research has shaped my thinking about the Learning Commons as not merely a collection of resources but as an emotionally attuned environment. If emotions are central to self-access learning, then every design choice, including what we display on walls and bulletin boards, carries potential affective significance.

Physical Environment and Visual Displays

Design and visual displays play a particularly important role in shaping the emotional tone of learning spaces. Asta and Mynard (2018) examined how self-access environments can support learners' basic psychological needs, providing a useful framework for understanding how such environments may foster autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Multimodal visual methods, such as language mapping activities, help learners externalize emotional associations with languages and prompt reflective engagement with the space (Yao & Jin, 2024).

These insights have prompted me to pay closer attention to what is visible in our Learning Commons, not just informational content, but the emotional messages conveyed through imagery, color, and representation.

Personalization and Student Ownership

Learner ownership of learning spaces has been associated with greater agency and meaningful engagement in self-access contexts (Kashiwa, 2021; Shelton-Strong & Mynard, 2018). When learners have opportunities to shape their environment through visible contributions and creative expression, they may develop a stronger sense that "the SALC is mine" (Kashiwa, 2021). This sense of ownership is theoretically grounded in self-determination theory (SDT), which posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fundamental psychological needs that drive intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

When learners contribute to the design and social life of a self-access environment, they may experience greater autonomy and relatedness, particularly when their voices and identities are visibly represented within the space. Institutional practices that intentionally enable students to shape the social and material environment promote sustained engagement and deeper identification with the learning space (Kashiwa, 2021).

This literature has reinforced my intuition that featuring student voices and faces in our displays is not merely decorative, it may be a powerful way to signal that the Learning Commons belongs to students, not just to staff or administration.

Theoretical Framework

My reflections are grounded primarily in SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering intrinsic motivation, and in Murray's (2018) conceptualization of self-access environments as spaces that communicate possibilities for engagement. Together, these frameworks allow me to consider both how the Learning Commons affords opportunities for participation and how these are experienced affectively by learners.

Context and Reflective Approach

Setting

My reflections emerge from ongoing work at TIU's Learning Commons, a SALC that serves undergraduate students across disciplines at the Ikebukuro campus. The center features study areas, resource collections, technology stations, and social zones designed to support autonomous language learning. Visual displays throughout the space include photos of student interns (who staff the center and assist visitors), comic-style graphics with speech bubbles, student artwork exhibited in a rotating "Commons Gallery," and informational posters about resources and events.

During the creation of the Learning Commons, feedback from faculty was actively sought; however, little feedback on design and aesthetics was elicited from students. While the space has some features that are welcoming, the overall environment can be described as industrial or lacking in warmth. Now that the Learning Commons has been operational at the Ikebukuro campus for 2.5 years, I have begun to examine more deliberately the overall feeling of the environment and students' emotional connection to the space. This reflective turn has been prompted in part by noticing differential patterns in how students comment on the space: International students tend to focus on the environment or notice the art displays,

while Japanese students seldom make comments about the physical space. These patterns have raised questions about whether the emotional atmosphere resonates differently across cultural contexts and whether our design choices inadvertently privilege certain ways of experiencing and responding to space. As shown in Figure 1, student-generated displays take multiple forms within the Learning Commons.

Figure 1

Examples of Student-Generated Visual Displays in the Learning Commons

(a) (b) (c)

(a) Student photography and artwork displayed in the Commons Gallery

(b) Interactive "Good Vibes" message wall featuring student intern and peer messages

(c) Collaborative message tree with handwritten student reflections

Note. Photographs taken by the author (2025).

My Approach to Observation and Reflection

My reflections draw on informal conversations with students, observations of how learners move through and interact with the space, and ongoing reflection on design decisions. The student quotations presented below are verbatim excerpts from informal conversations with students, all of which were conducted in English. These insights are informed by engagement with SALC literature, which has helped me interpret patterns I initially noticed intuitively. This is not formal research; rather, it represents practitioner inquiry grounded in accumulated experience and theoretical framing.

Reflections From Practice

Learner-Related Factors: Seeing Peers and Interns

One of the most consistent patterns I have observed concerns student responses to photos of peer interns. The Learning Commons employs undergraduate student interns who staff the center, assist visitors, and facilitate conversation practice. We display photos of these interns near the entrance and on bulletin boards throughout the space, often in comic-style frames with speech bubbles introducing their names, languages, and interests.

Students frequently comment that these photos make the center feel approachable. One student mentioned, “When I see the intern photos, I know there are friendly people here who can help me.” This anecdotal comment suggests that seeing recognizable faces may reduce the intimidation some students feel when entering a new space. The intern photos seem to communicate: “This space is staffed by people like you, students who understand the challenges of language learning.” From an SDT perspective, this can be understood as the basic psychological need for relatedness being supported: Seeing familiar, peer faces signals social connection and warmth, conditions that Deci and Ryan (2000) identify as central to relatedness need satisfaction.

Similarly, I have noticed that comic-style design elements tend to draw positive reactions. The playful aesthetic, bold colors, speech bubbles, and informal fonts seem to signal that the Learning Commons is not a formal, evaluative environment. Several students have described the space as “fun” or “relaxed,” and I wonder whether the visual design contributes to this perception. The informal aesthetic may communicate that this is a space for experimentation and enjoyment rather than high-stakes performance. In SDT, intrinsic motivation—the form of motivation most strongly associated with deep engagement and well-being—is fostered when activities feel enjoyable and self-directed rather than evaluative or obligatory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). If the visual environment of the Learning Commons signals “play” and “low stakes,” it may be contributing to conditions that support intrinsic motivation for language practice.

Visual Environment: Color, Art, and Atmosphere

I have also reflected on the role of color and visual vibrancy in shaping emotional tone. After redesigning several bulletin boards using brighter colors, students appeared to attend more closely to these areas, and some commented that the space felt more energetic and welcoming.

The "Commons Gallery," which rotates student artwork every few weeks, has prompted similar reflection. Students occasionally stop to examine the displayed pieces, and some have expressed appreciation for seeing creative work by their peers. One student remarked, "It's nice to see what other students are making. It makes me feel like this place is for students, not just about English." This response aligns with research on student ownership: When learners see evidence of peer creativity and agency, they may feel greater identification with the space (Kashiwa, 2021).

At the same time, I recognize that student artwork does not always produce positive or calming effects. While some displays may foster a sense of belonging and curiosity, others may be perceived as ambiguous, provocative, or even unsettling, depending on the viewer's background and emotional state. This variability highlights the importance of approaching visual curation with sensitivity to inclusivity and emotional safety. In practice, this has involved selecting and rotating artwork with attention to diversity of style and tone, while also remaining open to how different learners may experience these displays in unexpected ways.

Emotional Readiness for Communication

A third area of reflection concerns whether the visual environment influences students' willingness to engage in conversation practice. The Learning Commons offers informal opportunities for interaction: Students can chat with interns, join drop-in conversation tables, or practice with peers. I have wondered whether the colorful, informal atmosphere—featuring peer faces and student-created visuals—helps reduce the anxiety some learners feel about speaking English.

Several students have described the space as "less scary" than a classroom. One explained, "In class, I feel nervous to speak because everyone is listening. Here, it feels more casual, so I can try." While this perception may stem from the voluntary structure of the space, the visual environment may also contribute. Together, these elements may signal a low-stakes setting where experimentation feels safe.

However, I cannot isolate the effect of visual displays from other factors such as staffing, activity structure, or peer culture. These reflections suggest a plausible connection, but they do not constitute evidence of causation.

Tensions and Ongoing Questions

The Challenge of Measuring Emotional Impact

One persistent tension in this work concerns how to understand emotional impact without formal research methods. My observations are based on informal comments, behavioral cues, and intuition, all valuable sources of practitioner knowledge, but insufficient for making strong claims. I often wonder: Are students genuinely feeling more welcomed and emotionally ready because of the visual displays, or am I projecting my intentions onto their behavior?

This uncertainty has led me to adopt a stance of "reflective humility." I can observe patterns, notice what seems to resonate, and make design decisions informed by the literature and experience. However, I must remain open to the possibility that my interpretations are incomplete or that different students experience the space in ways I have not anticipated.

Inclusivity and Representation

Another ongoing question concerns whose faces, voices, and aesthetics are represented in our displays. The intern photos currently feature students who volunteered for these roles, a self-selected group that may not reflect the full diversity of our student body. Similarly, the "Commons Gallery" showcases students who chose to submit artwork, which may inadvertently privilege those who are confident in their creative abilities or familiar with gallery submission processes.

These considerations have prompted me to think more deliberately about co-design processes. Rather than making design decisions unilaterally, how might we invite broader student participation in shaping the visual environment? How can we ensure that diverse voices, aesthetics, and cultural perspectives are represented?

Inclusive design cannot be one-size-fits-all. What feels welcoming to one learner may feel overwhelming or unfamiliar to another. Differences in how students experience and respond to learning spaces, including their preferences for visual design and their willingness to provide feedback on aesthetics, must be acknowledged and respected. Moving forward, I am committed to creating more structured opportunities for students to share their perspectives on the visual environment and to co-create displays that reflect the diversity of the learning community.

Implications for Practice

Based on my reflections and engagement with SALC literature, I offer the following recommendations for practitioners interested in designing emotionally supportive self-access environments:

Feature Recognizable Peers and Staff

Displaying photos of student interns, advisors, or peer mentors may help visitors feel that the space is staffed by approachable, relatable people. Consider using informal, friendly imagery (such as comic-style frames or candid photos) to reduce perceptions of formality or hierarchy.

Use Color and Visual Vibrancy Intentionally

Bright, varied colors may contribute to an energetic, welcoming atmosphere. Consider moving away from neutral or institutional color schemes toward displays that feel warm and inviting. However, balance vibrancy with visual clarity: Overly cluttered displays may overwhelm rather than welcome.

Showcase Student Creativity and Voice

Rotating displays of student artwork, photography, or creative projects can signal that the space belongs to learners. Consider creating a "gallery" or "student showcase" area where learners can share their work. Ensure submission processes are accessible and invite diverse forms of creative expression.

Design for Emotional Safety

Visual cues can communicate whether a space is evaluative or supportive. Informal, playful design elements (such as comics, speech bubbles, or hand-drawn graphics) may signal that the space is low-stakes and welcoming of experimentation. Avoid imagery that emphasizes high achievement, competition, or perfection, which may increase anxiety.

Invite Co-Design and Iterative Feedback

Rather than making design decisions unilaterally, involve students in shaping the visual environment. Consider hosting design workshops, feedback sessions, or "suggestion walls" where learners can share what makes them feel welcomed. Be responsive to cultural differences in how students experience and comment on space.

Acknowledge Limitations and Remain Reflective

Recognize that emotional responses to the environment are highly individual and context dependent. What resonates with one learner may not resonate with another. Maintain

a stance of reflective humility, observe, adapt, and remain open to learning from students' experiences.

Conclusion

This article has reflected on how student-generated visuals—intern photos, colorful displays, and artwork—may contribute to belonging, reduced anxiety, and emotional readiness for communication in a self-access context.

My observations suggest that learner-related visuals, particularly photos of peer interns, help visitors feel that the space is approachable and staffed by people like them. Colorful, playful design elements may signal that the Learning Commons is a low-stakes, supportive environment where experimentation is welcomed. Student artwork showcased in rotating displays contributes to a sense that the space belongs to learners and values their creative voices.

However, I also acknowledge ongoing tensions and unanswered questions. Measuring emotional impact without formal research methods is challenging, and I remain uncertain about the extent to which visual displays, as opposed to other factors such as staffing, activity structure, or peer culture, drive the patterns I observe. Additionally, questions about inclusivity and representation persist: Whose faces, voices, and aesthetics are featured in our displays? How can we ensure that diverse students feel equally welcomed and represented?

Future research could build on these reflections by incorporating learner perspectives more systematically, for example through interviews or other qualitative methods that explore how a wider range of affective elements—such as plants, music, lighting, or other sensory features—interact with visual displays to shape emotional experience in self-access spaces. In addition, the cross-cultural differences observed in this context suggest a need for research that explores how learners from different backgrounds perceive and engage with SALC environments, and how design choices may resonate differently across cultural groups.

Moving forward, I am committed to more deliberate co-design processes that invite students to shape the visual environment. I recognize that inclusive design cannot be one-size-fits-all and that cultural differences in how students experience space must be acknowledged and respected. By creating structured opportunities for student feedback and participation, I hope to develop a Learning Commons that feels emotionally supportive to a broader range of learners.

For practitioners, these reflections offer an invitation to look closely at the affective dimensions of self-access space design. Small, everyday design choices—what we display, how we frame student presence, and how we use color and style—may shape how learners experience the space. By designing with intentionality, inviting student voice, and remaining reflectively humble, we can create SALCs that support not only learning, but also well-being and belonging.

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When Advisors Become Teachers:

Learner-Centered Classroom Practices

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Abstract

As Japanese higher education increasingly incorporates learner-centered approaches, differentiated instruction has gained attention for its potential to address individual learner needs and promote deeper engagement. However, this approach can be challenging when educators have limited experience in fostering learner development and when institutional curricula constrain course design and assessment. This reflective paper explores how our backgrounds as learning advisors inform and reshape our pedagogical practices within institutional English language classrooms. Drawing upon our experiences at the Self-Access Learning Center (SALC) at Kanda University of International Studies, we examine how an ethos based on dialogue, learner autonomy, and reflective pedagogy influences our current teaching. Our analysis is framed by the Reflective Judgment Model (King & Kitchener, 1994), Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991), and learner-centered environment principles (Bransford et al., 2002). We detail classroom-based interventions, such as intentional reflective questioning, dialogic activities, and structured self-evaluation, demonstrating how these activities facilitate cognitive and meta-cognitive growth. Furthermore, we critically touch upon the systemic tensions such as the conflict between standardized assessment and individualized development encountered during implementation. Finally, we argue that our experience as learning advisors can productively coexist with classroom authority, supporting students' development as more reflective, self-directed, and emotionally aware language learners.

日本の高等教育で学習者中心のアプローチが普及する中、個々のニーズに応じ深い関与を促す指導が注目されている。しかし、教育者の経験不足や制度的カリキュラムによる制約下では、その実践は容易ではない。本稿では、著者らのラーニングアドバイザーとしての経験が、制度的枠組みにおける大学英語教育の実践をいかに再構築しているかを検討する。著者らは神田外語大学セルフ・アクセス・ラーニング・センター（SALC）において、対話、学習者オートノミー、省察的教授法を中核とする教育実践に従事した。省察的判断モデル、変容的学習理論、学習者中心の環境の原理を理論的枠組みとし、意図的な省察を促す問いかけ、対話的活動、構造化された自己評価等の実践を提示し、これらが認知的・メタ認知的成長をいかに促進するかを示す。さらに、標準化された評価と個別化された発達との相克についても言及する。アドバイザーの経験は教員の役割と相補的であり、学習者がより省察的、自己主導的かつ情意的に自覚的な学習者へと変容する支援となり得ると論じる。

Keywords: classroom advising, transformative learning, reflective judgment model, learning environments, learner-centered classroom practices

From 2016 to 2022, we worked as learning advisors in the Self-Access Learning Center (SALC) at Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS). There, we supported learners both inside and outside the classroom. As learning advisors, we conducted one-to-one advising sessions, taught self-directed language learning (SDLL) courses and modules, developed advising and learning strategy tools, and created language learning environments that encouraged learners to take ownership of their learning.

Currently, we work at different universities in the Greater Tokyo Area. Both of us teach university-wide English language courses for first- and second-year students with assigned textbooks and institutional curricula. Prior to becoming learning advisors, we also taught in secondary education in Japan.

At the SALC, we were encouraged to engage in group reflection as part of our professional development and have continued to do so. Although we teach in different institutional contexts, it emerged in our reflections that how we structure reflection, how we respond to students' emotions, and how we balance authority and autonomy are rooted in our shared advising background. This realization led us to intentionally meet and compare our practices. We asked how advising lives on in our current practice, and this paper is the result of that collaborative reflection.

In this paper, we discuss how we ground much of our classroom teaching in the experiences and knowledge gained as learning advisors. We outline the theoretical grounding of our practice before describing the pedagogical framework, approach, and activities adapted from advising to classroom contexts, followed by a reflection on challenges.

Literature Review

To better understand and support our students' individual differences in language learning in classroom settings, we apply the concepts of the Reflective Judgment Model, Transformative Learning Theory, and the learner-centered environment within the How People Learn framework, as developed through our ongoing discussions.

Reflective Judgment Model

The Reflective Judgment Model (RJM) describes the stages of epistemological development, focusing on how individuals understand the process of knowing and justify their beliefs when faced with ill-structured problems (King & Kitchener, 1994). The RJM is grounded in Dewey's (1933, 1938) concept of reflective thinking and describes seven stages of epistemological development, categorized into three levels: pre-reflective, quasi-reflective,

and reflective thinking. At the pre-reflective level (Stages 1–3), learners typically assume knowledge is certain and gained through direct observation or authority figures. As they transition to the quasi-reflective level (Stages 4–5), they recognize that knowledge claims regarding ill-structured problems contain elements of uncertainty. During this transition, learners often experience the emotional weight of this uncertainty; they become more independent from authorities but may struggle with their own judgment, which often relies on personal biases. Finally, at the reflective level (Stages 6–7), learners actively construct knowledge, recognizing that conclusions must be evaluated within their generative context and justified by the weight of the evidence across various perspectives.

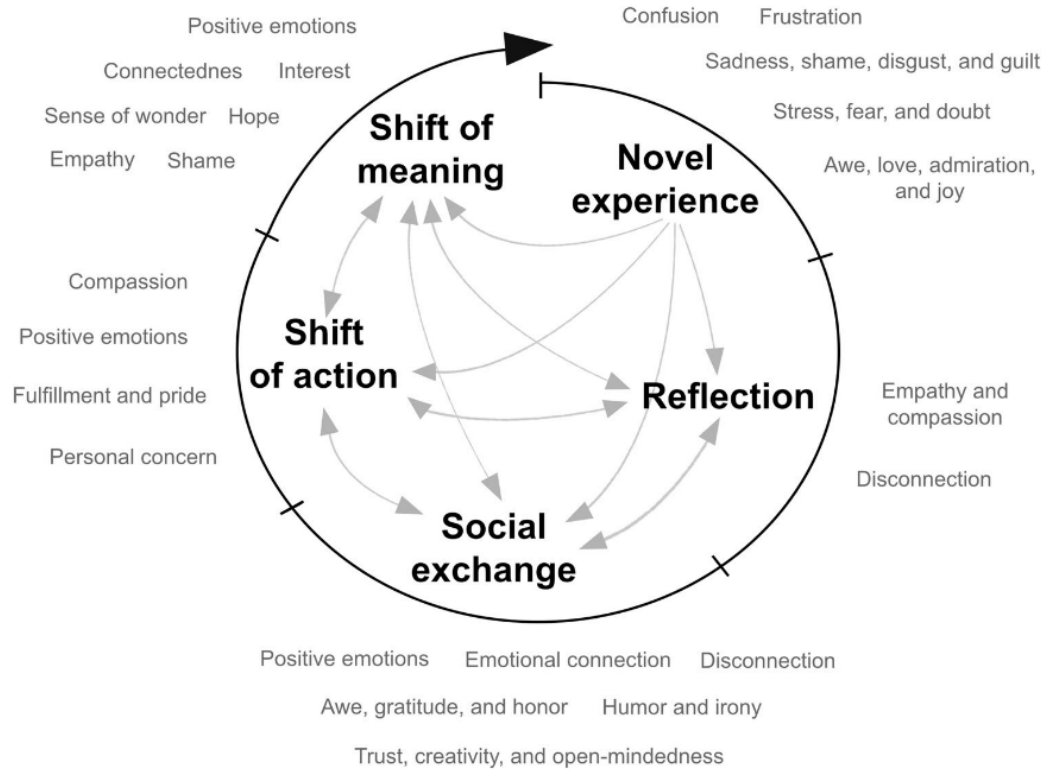
According to King and Kitchener (1994), many university students appear to operate at the quasi-reflective level, still needing appropriate scaffolding from educators while simultaneously expressing uncertainty about effective learning strategies. Given this, the RJM is particularly useful for understanding classroom reflection and metacognitive development.

Transformative Learning Theory

Mezirow (2000) describes Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) as a shift from "taken-for-granted frames of reference" to perspectives that are "more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective" (pp. 7-8). Early conceptions of TLT prioritized cognition and rationality over affect and emotion, but based on evidence from neuroscience, Taylor (2001) positioned emotion as integral to TLT, arguing that "without emotions rationality cannot work" (p. 233). More recently, Grund et al. (2024), in a meta-analysis of 20 empirical TLT studies, demonstrate that diverse emotions permeate the process (Figure 1) and that the most relevant phases were novel experience, reflection, shift of action, shift of meaning, and social exchange.

Figure 1

Emotions Relevant to Phases of TLT as Portrayed by Grund et al. (2024, p. 315)



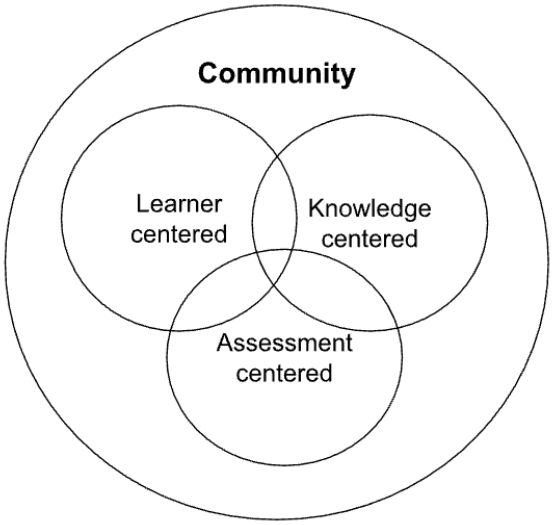
In language classrooms, disorienting dilemmas may emerge when students confront communication breakdowns, unexpected feedback, or alternative learning strategies (Leaver, 2021). Supporting students through these emotional moments becomes central to facilitating transformation.

How People Learn and the Learner-Centered Environment

Classroom learning operates at multiple levels, balancing individual development with institutional and societal expectations. Bransford et al.'s (2002) How People Learn (HPL) framework (Figure 2) conceptualizes effective learning environments as the integration of four interrelated dimensions: knowledge-centered, assessment-centered, and learner-centered, with community encompassing those three dimensions. This provides a useful reference for how to incorporate advising theories and practices beyond institutional requirements into the classroom.

Figure 2

Learner-Centered Environments Within the HPL Framework



Note. Adapted from Bransford et al. (2002, p. 166)

A knowledge-centered environment ensures instruction is organized around core concepts and disciplinary structure rather than isolated facts. Content knowledge is shaped by institutional requirements, but HPL emphasizes coherence and conceptual understanding over coverage. An assessment-centered environment prioritizes formative feedback and metacognitive development. Students learn to monitor their own understanding through reflection, dialogue, peer comparison, and structured feedback. A learner-centered environment utilizes students' prior knowledge, preconceptions, cultural backgrounds, and motivations. This extends beyond content to include attention to emotion, identity, and meaning making. Finally, the community of the classroom cultivates an emotional bond that develops as members invest time, energy, and shared effort. When students experience themselves as legitimate participants in a learning community, engagement and transformation become more likely. While each environment addresses a necessary need, all should be synthesized to create an optimal learning space. Of these four concepts, the learner-centered becomes central to our work as former learning advisors.

Summary

Grounded in RJM, TLT, and a learner-centered environment within the HPL framework, we view classrooms as spaces for epistemological and emotional development.

Students are encouraged to examine what they know, how they know it, and how they feel about what they know, recognizing emotion as integral to navigating uncertainty and growth.

Practices

In this section, we describe our pedagogical framework, the approach we adopted, and the activities we employed to promote learner development.

Pedagogical Framework

As former learning advisors, we draw heavily on Intentional Reflective Dialogue (IRD), as developed by Kato and Mynard (2016), to structure our classroom interactions. IRD is defined as "a conscious discourse with learners with the purpose of engaging them in transformation in learning" (p. 6). Advising in language learning does not simply involve providing advice or learning tips; rather, it aims to help learners critically reflect on their learning through active listening and meaningful questioning. Although one-to-one advising sessions differ substantially from classroom interaction, we strive to communicate with students individually and elicit their thoughts or reflection using basic advising skills such as repeating and summarizing. Within written feedback, we provide reflective questions to connect course content to their own experiences and to provoke further insights and development.

We also incorporate reflective activities and tasks developed through teaching SDLL modules and courses at the SALC. SDLL includes goal setting, using and evaluating strategies and resources, making and implementing a learning plan, and judging their progress (Curry, 2023). Students are encouraged to engage in ongoing self- and peer-reflection through guided reflective questions in journals and discussions. As most of our students are transitioning towards the quasi-reflective level in the RJM, which can be seen in the novel experiences in TLT, we emphasize fostering student ownership of their learning. Furthermore, we intentionally include tasks that allow students to identify and process their emotions during language learning.

Pedagogical Approach

Our classrooms are grounded in structured reflection, guided inquiry, and dialogic interactions in group conversations and written reflections. Both the RJM and TLT frameworks emphasize that development occurs when learners confront uncertainty, evaluate evidence, and reconsider previous beliefs. Accordingly, classroom discussions frequently include questions such as:

- What evidence supports this answer?
- Why do you believe this strategy works?
- Has your view changed over time?
- What emotions do you experience when you are learning English?

These prompts shift attention from correctness to reasoning, aligning with RJM's emphasis on justificatory logic.

We also design activities that create mild disorienting dilemmas as described by TLT. For example, when students encounter perspectives that challenge their beliefs about language learning (e.g., whether teachers are necessary for effective study), they are invited to compare viewpoints and examine their own assumptions. Structured dialogue and written reflection help them process the emotional and cognitive tensions that emerge.

Although advising emphasizes non-directivity, classroom teaching requires authority and alignment with institutional goals. We therefore distinguish between structural authority and epistemic authority. Structurally, we maintain grading criteria, curriculum objectives, and assessment standards. Epistemically, however, we decentralize authority by inviting students to evaluate strategies, interpret feedback, and assess their own progress. In this way, autonomy operates beyond defined pedagogical boundaries.

This approach reflects the HPL framework (Bransford et al., 2002): knowledge-centered through curricular coherence, assessment-centered through formative reflection, learner-centered through attention to prior beliefs and emotions, and community-centered through collaborative dialogue with the teacher and with each other.

Pedagogical Activities

These activities were designed to support students in transitioning toward the quasi-reflective stage of the RJM. Elements of TLT and the HPL framework are also incorporated. The participants are students enrolled in compulsory general English classes, with proficiency levels ranging from A1 to B2 in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001). Instruction is conducted in both English and Japanese, and each class typically includes approximately 25 students.

This or That Activity

At the beginning of the semester, we intentionally introduce activities that promote metacognitive awareness and create the possibility for TLT disorienting dilemmas, thereby setting the tone for reflective learning. One such activity, developed during our time as learning advisors, invites students to share and examine their beliefs about their learning. In

this “This or That” activity, students respond to statements by physically positioning themselves along an agree-disagree continuum and then sharing their reasoning with others. Statements include “I am a good learner,” “Learning a language is different from learning other subjects,” and “I think it is possible to learn effectively without a teacher.”

This activity serves multiple theoretical purposes. From an RJM perspective, it surfaces students’ epistemic assumptions about knowledge and authority. From a TLT perspective, encountering differing viewpoints often produces mild disorientation, prompting reflection. From a learner-centered perspective, the physical and dialogic format builds early classroom community and signals that diverse perspectives are legitimate.

Resource Evaluation

In SDLL courses and modules at the SALC, one of the key activities aims to enable learners to evaluate their learning resources that suit their goals, interests, and learning preferences. At the SALC, learners try out several resources available in the center and evaluate them using an activity sheet that includes evaluation criteria to scaffold their decision-making. In our classroom settings, as our institutions have fewer physical resources, we provide a list of online resources and ask first-year students to select one to try for a few days as homework. They also record their learning experience with the resource in their reflective journal. Subsequently, they give a short presentation in small groups with a resource recommendation sheet (Figure 3). Throughout the class time, students are encouraged to try out new resources and share with others. They are reminded that it is part of the learning process if their chosen resource proves ineffective when they actually use it.

Figure 3

Resource Evaluation Sheet (Front and Back)


Name: 2025S English Communication I

The name of the resource:_____

Skill(s) I worked on:

What I learned from resource:

My opinion:

My rating: ☆☆☆☆☆

Script（発表原稿）

Today, I will talk about the resource I used. The resource name is _____.
教材名

I practiced _____ with the resource.
学べるスキル（vocabulary, grammar, expressions, listening, reading etc.）

For example, I learned _____
using the resource. 教材を使って実際に学んだ内容

It was useful / not useful because _____.
どちらか選ぶ 理由を書く

Therefore, I give this resource _____ stars.
1〜5で評価する

If you are interested, please try it out!

The activity resonates with Grund et al.’s (2024) TLT cycle by enabling students to experiment with resources, evaluate their effectiveness, engage in social exchange with

classmates, and move toward a shift of action. It also encourages first-year students to develop a sense of ownership over their learning, moving away from authority-dependent thinking from an RJM perspective. Furthermore, the activity aligns with the HPL framework, as it addresses key dimensions such as learner-centered, knowledge-centered, and assessment-centered.

Reflective Journals

Reflective journals function as longitudinal records of both affective experience and epistemic development. Studies on expressive writing show that emotional processing can be traced in language, often moving from immediate emotional reactions toward more integrated and reflective understanding (Pennebaker, 1997). Within TLT, emotional disruption and critical reflection are central to perspective change and are frequently documented through reflective journals (Mezirow, 1991; Taylor, 2001).

In fulfilling an institutional requirement of our universities for writing, we use reflective journals as an opportunity for students to explore their learning styles and beliefs as well as emotions that affect their learning. Early prompts ("Are you a good learner?" "How did you feel before, during, and after the test? How do emotions affect your concentration?" etc.) ask students to evaluate their study habits, time and energy management, and beliefs about their abilities. Later in the semester, these questions are revisited, allowing students to observe shifts in reasoning and self-perception. Questions are answered as homework, and then are shared and discussed with others, opening several opportunities for repeated reflection.

Test Self-Evaluation

We allocate dedicated self-evaluation time whenever English language tests are returned. During this time, we provide scaffolding by asking students to use a favorite pen to mark questions they believe they would answer correctly if they retook the test and to write advice to their future selves for review and further study. Additionally, we provide reflective questions such as, "If you were the teacher, what advice or feedback would you give yourself?" This borrows from the viewpoint switching activity and sheet, which are designed to encourage learners to see their own situation from different perspectives (Kato & Mynard, 2016). Students can also choose their favorite person such as a historical figure. This activity is particularly effective in helping students distance themselves from immediate negative emotions and allowing them to view their situation more objectively and constructively.

This activity promotes shifts away from reliance on authority from an RJM perspective and helps students evaluate their performance through the HPL framework. This

also aligns with TLT's shift of action through reflection as learners practice internal dialogues utilizing alternative voices.

Our Reflection and Challenges

The theoretical frameworks underpinning our practice, the RJM, TLT, and the learner-centered environment within the HPL framework, emerged through our ongoing collaborative reflections after leaving the SALC. This process proved particularly valuable, as it enabled us to recognize how we each maximize learner development in the current classroom contexts. We then shared how we have implemented learner-centered pedagogical practices in our classrooms.

In classroom settings, while satisfying university standards, we strive to act as facilitators by promoting reflection and providing a safe space for students to engage with their emotions in language learning. For example, some students shift to view their language learning more reflectively, considering their emotions as a driving force. Even though both of us are no longer learning advisors officially, we maximize the essence of advising in classroom settings. While classroom advising and individual advising differ in scale and degree of personalization, the principles of reflection, dialogue, and emotional engagement can be meaningfully adapted to classroom contexts to help bridge the gap between advising and teaching.

While we do our best to develop self-directed learners, we face several challenges. Assessment is the most challenging aspect of classroom teaching. Although we assign tasks such as reflective journals and metacognitive discussions that aim to foster learners' growth, emotional awareness, and self-assessment, we are also required to administer chapter tests and adhere to mandated grading criteria focusing on English proficiency. This creates a dilemma as tasks designed to promote learner development and self-directed growth must also be positioned as assessable components within a formal grading framework. As a result, we must continually negotiate the tension between supporting transformative learning processes and satisfying institutional assessment requirements by providing pedagogical activities rooted in our experiences and beliefs as advisors which we introduce in this paper.

In addition, classes are mandatory, reducing learners' sense of autonomy and intrinsic purpose. Some students engage in reflective tasks primarily to satisfy course requirements, rather than to genuinely reflect on their learning, beliefs, and emotions in meaningful ways. Furthermore, compulsory English courses have complex classroom dynamics, including students with varying levels of language anxiety and uneven motivation. These factors can

limit students' willingness to engage deeply with reflective and emotionally oriented activities and reduce the sense of community necessary for effective learning.

Despite the imposition of these factors, we believe that our approaches are valuable in encouraging students to engage in intentional reflection on their language learning. These reflective tools and strategies offer opportunities for students to think beyond content and approach the classroom in more holistic, emotional ways.

Through ongoing collaborative reflections of our practices, we are able to learn from each other how we utilize our advising skills and learner-centered approaches in our classrooms. This process has also deepened our engagement with the theoretical frameworks that we were not able to explore fully while working as advisors. Additionally, it helps us sustain our motivation and find ways to work within institutional requirements to help learners navigate their learning and emotions. As this paper was developed from discussions between former advisors focusing on classroom-based practices, it is limited to our own experiences, and further research into literature by those with similar backgrounds will further inform our development.

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Helping Self-Access Learning Centres Thrive Through Strategic Partnerships, Community Engagement, and International Awareness-Raising Activities: Report on JASAL Forum 2025 at JALT2025

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Abstract

The JASAL Forum at JALT2025 explored two topics relevant for any self-access space: how to revitalise an underutilised self-access learning centre (SALC), and the ways in which a SALC space can support international exchange across the wider community. This report summarises the presentations given during the forum and the ensuing discussion. The team from Tokyo Kasei University detailed the strategic partnerships built through consultation and the process of conducting a needs analysis of student and faculty perspectives, while Suwako Uehara reported on how the International Week at the University of Electro-Communications, coordinated by the SALC in collaboration with faculty and other university departments, enhanced the visibility of global activities both within and beyond the university.

JALT2025 で開催された JASAL フォーラムでは、あらゆるセルフアクセス（自律学習）スペースに関連する二つのテーマ、すなわち「利用率の低いセルフアクセス学習センター（SALC）の活性化」および「SALC という空間がいかにして地域社会全体における国際交流を支援できるか」について議論が行われた。本報告は、同フォーラムで行われた発表およびその後のディスカッションの概要をまとめたものである。東京家政大学の発表者らは、学内のヒアリングを通じて構築された戦略的パートナーシップや、学生および教員を対象としたニーズ分析のプロセスについて報告した。一方、上原寿和子氏は、電気通信大学の SALC が教員や他部局と連携して企画・運営した「インターナショナル・ウィーク」を取り上げ、この取り組みが学内外におけるグローバル活動の可視性をどのように高めたかについて報告した。

Keywords: self-access language learning, needs analysis, learning community, international exchange

The self-access language learning (SALL) communities that thrive in self-access environments are increasingly important parts of a university's ecosystem, and the Japan Association for Self-Access Learning is proud to support the SALL practitioners who foster and help sustain these learning communities. One way in which we can do this is through an annual forum held at the JALT International Conference, where all delegates, whether or not they are members of JASAL, can join our event and engage in discussion with other practitioners. In 2025, this forum was held on Saturday, 1st November in Tokyo, and welcomed conference participants from all over Japan. This year's forum focused on initiatives from two self-access centres aiming to increase their reach and appeal to more members of their university communities. Strategic partnerships with stakeholders from across the institution and the wider community can be crucial to the success of a self-access learning centre (SALC). In the first presentation, Daniel Hooper and Sam Reid from Tokyo Kasei University detailed the reinvigoration of an underused SALC by focusing on building these relationships, while Suwako Uehara from the University of Electro-Communications reported on an International Week project, which connected students, faculty and administration, and the wider public through a series of coordinated international activities.

Daniel Hooper and Sam Reid: Revitalising the REAL Room: Creating a Learning Community

We (Dan and Sam) were delighted to participate in the JASAL Forum at JALT International as it was a valuable opportunity to not only share our current project but also draw upon the communal knowledge and experience of the supportive JASAL community. Our contribution to the forum centred on a needs analysis that our team implemented in order to establish a mission statement and plan of action for the REAL Room, a fledgling self-access centre at Tokyo Kasei University (Hooper & Namiki, 2025). The REAL room had been operational for a few years prior but had fallen into stagnation and eventual disuse in recent times. Moreover, as a team, we felt that the previous operational model of the REAL Room did not adequately integrate student input and was simply a venue where students could come and speak to assigned members of the foreign teaching staff during lunchtimes or free periods. In contrast to this passive model, where students would essentially just "consume" SALC services, we hoped to reconceptualize the space by including students and other local stakeholders in a more collaborative and empowering way. Based on a cursory review of existing literature, it became clear to us that developing a coherent mission statement was key to effectively focusing our future development of the REAL Room, as

well as acting as a point of orientation in regard to ongoing assessment and action research (Mynard, 2016; Werner & Von Joo, 2018). Furthermore, we found that numerous SALC practitioners and researchers (Datwani-Choy, 2016; Von Joo et al., 2020) advocated for the integration of multiple stakeholder voices (students, faculty, staff, administration) in the effective running of a SALC. In order to tie all of these guiding threads together, we set about creating and distributing needs assessment surveys to both students and faculty that would inform the construction of the REAL Room's guiding mission statement. As such, we hoped that the future direction of our SALC would be, at its core, driven by a wider community of active contributors rather than merely passive attendees.

Congruent with the broader shift from SALCs as materials repositories to SALCs as social hubs and sites for reflective dialogue (Thornton, 2021), our survey responses showed that both students and faculty members hoped that the REAL Room could become a social and communal space. Both surveys (student and faculty) cited the need for a place for users to make friends, receive guidance from teachers or senior students, and develop their interactional competence in English. Faculty also highlighted the potential value of the REAL Room as a PR tool for the department by foregrounding students' achievements and active educational engagement. Based on these survey responses and discussion within our team, we developed the following mission statement for the REAL Room:

> *The mission of the REAL Room is to provide an environment where our students have out-of-class opportunities to develop their communicative English ability while also deepening social connections with peers or teachers. We aim for the REAL Room to be an empowering space offering students support and opportunities for leadership while also acting as a means of sharing our students' visions and achievements with the wider world.*

Within the JASAL Forum, we gained some extremely valuable insights from the attendees. Many attendees were very experienced SALC managers and administrators, and it gave us a rare chance to share some of the concerns, anxieties, and questions that we had been holding on to with peers from our wider self-access community. We were also able to increase our confidence relating to our next steps by drawing upon this experiential knowledge and gaining a better sense of what might be successful or problematic before we actually tried it out ourselves. To us, this represented yet another time when touching base with the JASAL community helped us to access an ever-developing treasure trove of accumulated knowledge while also feeling less alone in our endeavours.

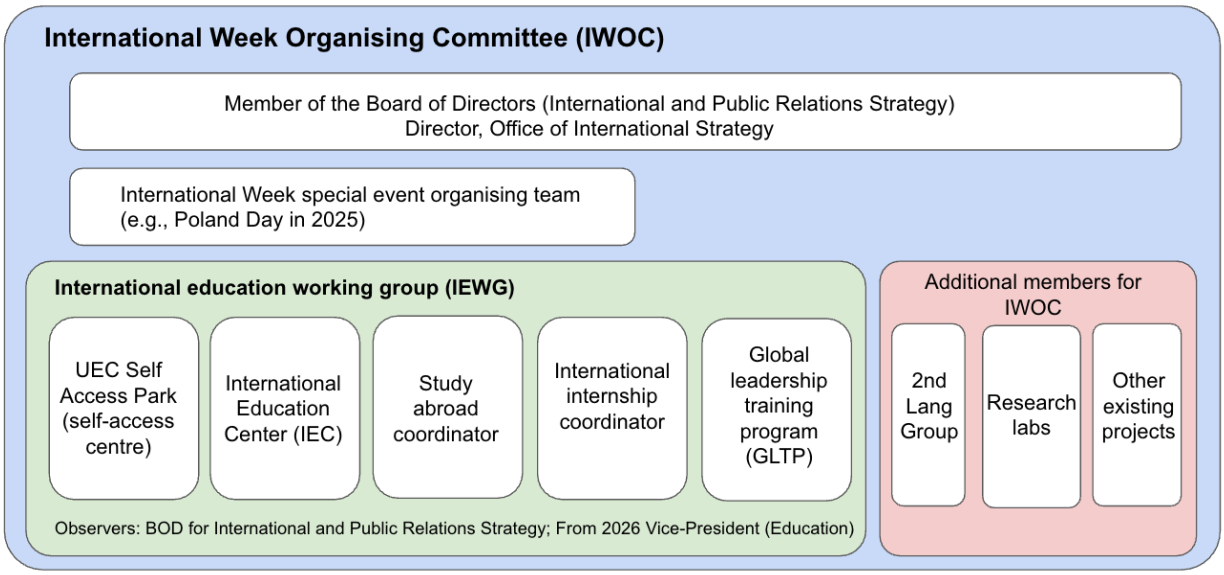
Suwako Uehara: Connecting Across Campus: The International Week Initiative

Since 2024, I (Suwako) have had the pleasure of sharing different aspects of UEC's SALC (UECSAP: The University of Electro-Communications Self Access Park) to the JASAL community. In the JASAL Forum at JALT2025, I introduced how the SALC has become part of a university-wide collaboration through a new annual project, UEC International Week. As chair of the International Education Working Group (IEWG), I shared how this initiative was designed and implemented to bring international activities across campus together and make internationalisation a more visible part of campus life. The IEWG at the University of Electro-Communications (UEC) was established in 2020 to promote internationalisation by increasing student participation in international activities and raising awareness of UEC's global initiatives among those on campus (students, faculty, and staff) and the wider public, more specifically, to current and prospective students, academic and research institutions, companies, organisations, and local community members. Since its establishment, IEWG has coordinated initiatives including study abroad presentations, information sessions, promotional videos, a centralised information website, and global outreach publications (The University of Electro-Communications, n.d.-a; Uehara, 2026).

Global awareness initiatives have been promoted by the United Nations (United Nations, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). One example of these kinds of initiatives is an International Week, which has been hosted by many universities across Japan (e.g., Chuo University, 2022; Sophia University, n.d,; Saga University, 2024). Such events can foster global awareness, intercultural communication, and international engagement (United Nations, n.d.-a; White, 2021). In 2024, drawing inspiration from such events, IEWG appointed an International Week organizing committee (IWOC), composed of key UEC representatives. The main goal was to launch UEC International Week (The University of Electro-Communications, n.d-c), a weeklong event that brings together international programmes and activities organised across the university. IWOC's responsibilities were planning, coordinating, and overseeing International Week and, in particular, promoting its visibility both within and beyond the university. See Figure 1 for the organisational structure.

Figure 1

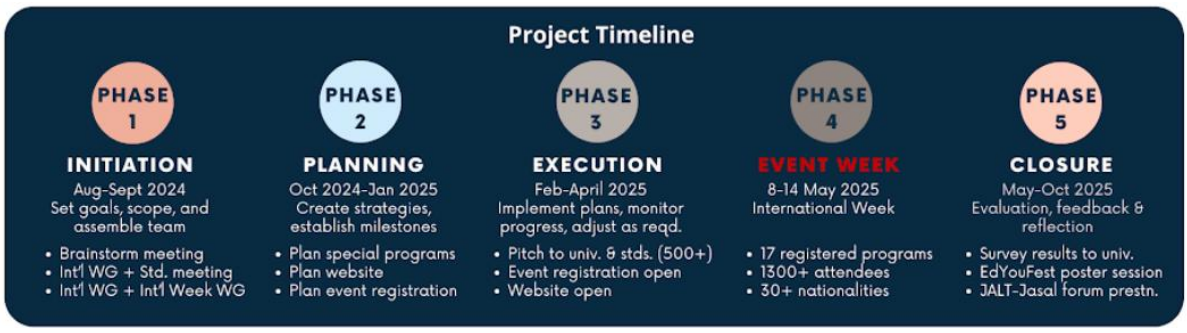
Organisational Structure



The event style allowed organisers to maintain flexibility while amplifying their collective impact. By showcasing UEC's global activities under a single banner, the event increased visibility, attracted broader participation, and contributed to making internationalisation a routine part of student life. See Figure 2 for the project timeline.

Figure 2

Project Timeline



Note. Int'l WG = International Education Working Group, JALT = Japan Association of Language Teachers, Std. = student, univ. = university.

Phase 1 involved defining the initiative's goals, scope, and team. Phase 2 focused on strategy development, including programme planning, website creation, and registration procedures. During Phase 3, the IWOC implemented and refined plans while promoting the initiative to over 500 students and faculty through programme calls related to international activities, lab introductions, and student-led activities. A pre-set sample program of events from the IEWG was also shared, such as Poland Day, International Day, lab tours, and study abroad information booths. Newly registered programmes were then integrated into the event website to maximise collective impact.

During Phase 4, International Week featured 17 registered programmes and attracted over 1,300 attendances. Attendance figures represent event participation rather than unique individuals and therefore include multiple attendances by the same participant. See Figure 3 for related photos and images.

Figure 3

Selected Photos from International Week

In Phase 5, International Week was evaluated through participant feedback, and the findings were presented at EdYouFest2025 (Uehara, 2025), and this JASAL Forum at JALT2025, further increasing the visibility of the event and its outcomes.

Survey responses from 288 participants indicated positive perceptions of International Week (overall M = 4.35). Participants reported enjoyment, learning, and increased interest in UEC's international and exchange programs, while exposure to different languages received comparatively lower ratings. See Table 1 for a summary of the results.

Table 1

Summary of Likert-Scale Results of Q1–Q4 on a Scale of 1 to 6 (in %)

		Likert-Scale Responses								
	Prompt	1	2	3	4	5	6	Low 1–3	High 4–6	Avg. Score
Q1	The event programme was interesting and enjoyable	0.3	3.5	13.2	25.7	27.8	29.5	17.0	83.0	4.66
Q2	I was able to use or hear different languages	4.2	9.4	21.9	28.1	18.1	18.3	35.5	64.5	4.02
Q3	I learnt something new about international cultures or topics	1.4	6.6	20.0	24.0	24.0	24.0	28.0	72.0	4.34
Q4	The event increased my interest in international programmes and exchange at UEC	1.0	5.3	20.8	25.3	23.6	24.0	27.1	72.9	4.37
		Average Likert-Scale Score from Q1–Q4								4.35

The qualitative responses suggest that International Week supported the IWOC's mission by increasing intercultural awareness, motivation, and interest in international opportunities. Across events such as Poland Day, International Day, and other programmes, participants highlighted the value of intercultural interaction, perspective-taking, and exposure to different languages and cultures. One student noted that "even small cultural gestures, like sharing food or language, can build meaningful connections," while another remarked that studying abroad "no longer feels like a distant goal; it seems like a realistic and exciting opportunity."

Many participants described international activities as more accessible after hearing peers' experiences and interacting with international students. Others reported increased motivation to learn languages after observing fellow UEC students communicate fluently in multiple languages. Experiential activities, such as dancing with Polish students and engaging in multilingual environments, further enhanced students' sense of immersion, with one participant commenting that it "felt like I was in another country even though I was still in Japan." Overall, the responses suggest that International Week not only raised awareness of global opportunities but also increased students' sense of relevance, accessibility, and motivation to engage in international activities.

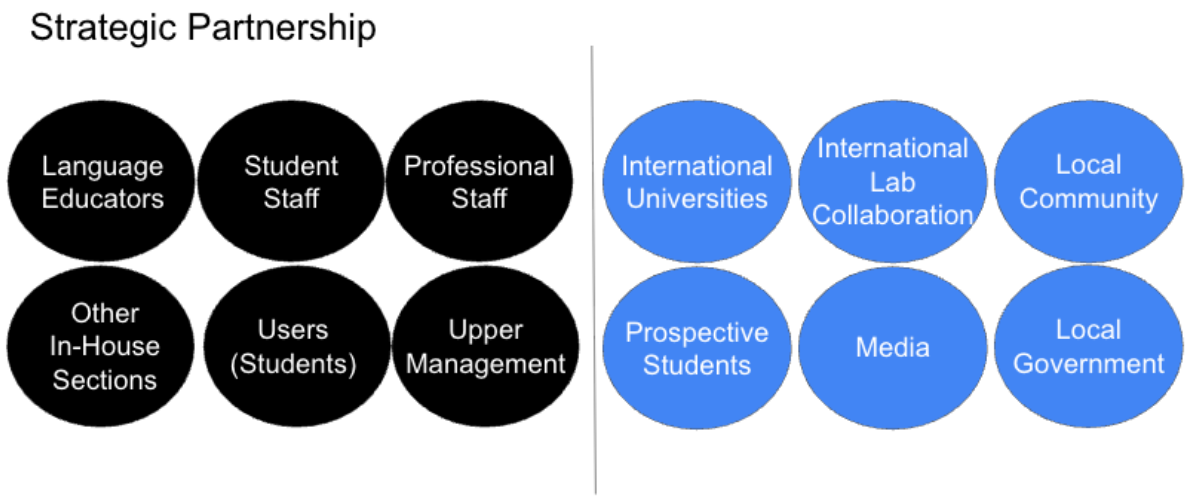
There was internal collaboration and raised awareness of the international opportunities at UEC across departments, university internal organizations, and student bodies. UEC was able to engage in international collaboration with Poznan University in Poland, resulting in the signing of official agreements with UEC. Reflecting on the activities during International Week, and in addition, receiving media coverage with J:COM TV (The University of Electro-Communications, 2025, n.d.-b), a letter of appreciation from a resident from Chofu city, and external recognition from a city council member (Aoyama, 2025) (see Figure 4), highlighted the importance and necessity of the strategic partnerships which were built across the wider community for the success (Figure 5) of the event.

Figure 4

Media Coverage, External Recognition, and Letter of Appreciation

Figure 5

Strategic Partnership



In conclusion, the findings suggest that International Week can serve as an effective mechanism for fostering international awareness and engagement at UEC. Future events should build on this momentum by expanding participation, strengthening stakeholder partnerships, and creating additional opportunities for meaningful intercultural interaction.

Conclusion

The presentations were followed by a lively discussion in which the presenters were able to engage directly with the audience on various issues raised in their presentations. Further discussion also focused on best practices for establishing a new facility. Those attendees hoping to start or revive facilities had the chance to share their experiences and ask questions in a supportive environment. Among other points, the presenters and other attendees with experience working in SALCs highlighted the importance of building strategic partnerships with as many parties as possible during the consultation period, both at the beginning of the process, such as that which Daniel and Sam from Tokyo Kasei University had reported on, and on an ongoing basis, as Suwako at UEC had emphasised in her presentation. JASAL Forums are an ideal opportunity for these kinds of discussions, so we were happy to once again provide this chance and welcome some new members into our growing community.

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