

## **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十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 *ought-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) <sup>a</sup>	18–33, 19.8	18–33, 21.6	18–33, 20.3	18–21, 18.6
School year <sup>a</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup> (16), 2 <sup>nd</sup> (15), 3 <sup>rd</sup> (2), 4 <sup>th</sup> (1), Grad.(3)	1 <sup>st</sup> (3), 2 <sup>nd</sup> (6), 3 <sup>rd</sup> (1), Grad. (3)	1 <sup>st</sup> (4), 2 <sup>nd</sup> (7), Grad. (1)	1 <sup>st</sup> (11), 2 <sup>nd</sup> (6), 3 <sup>rd</sup> (1), 4 <sup>th</sup> (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)

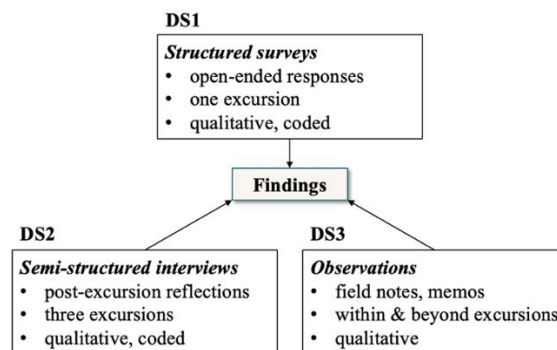
<sup>a</sup>If data changed over time, data reflects participants' status at the time of their first excursion.

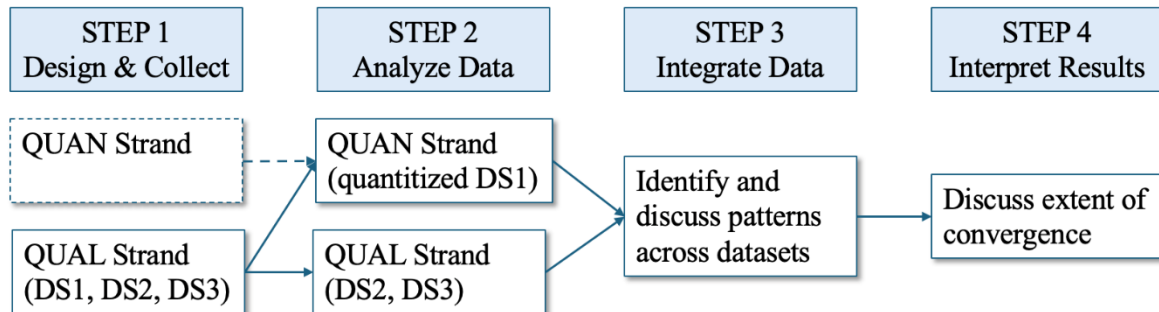
**Data Collection and Analysis**

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.”

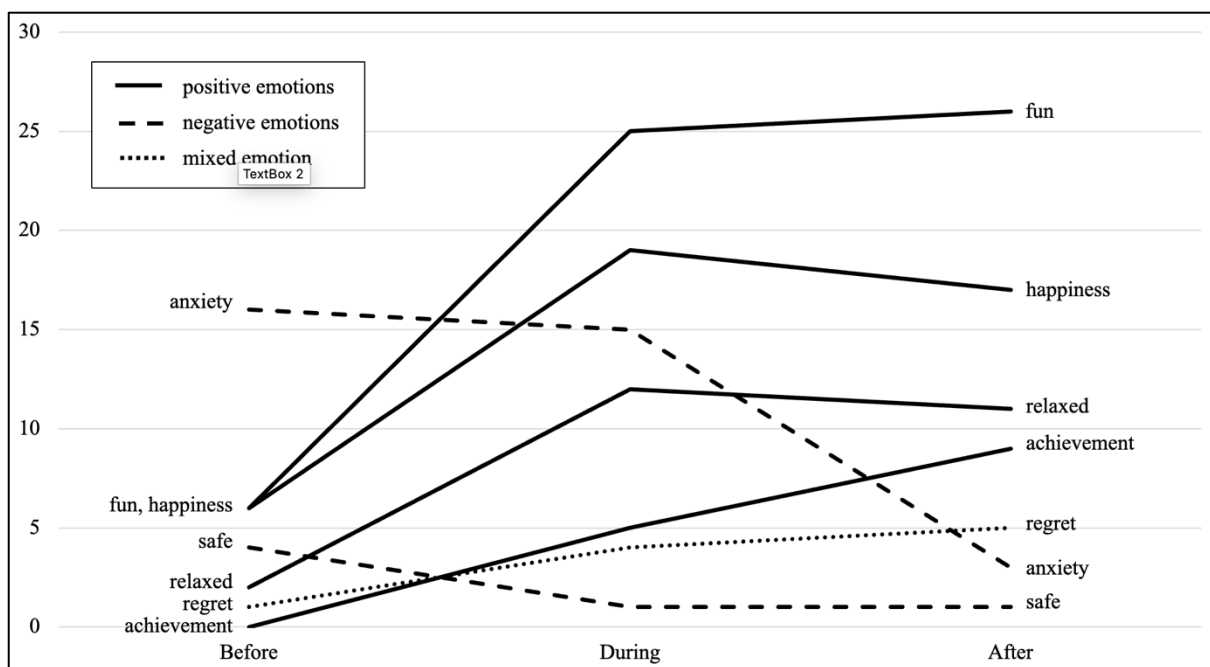
Notably in DS2, 55% of participants indicated that the presence or the encouragement of SILC teachers was influential on their decision to join or contributed to their sense of comfort during the event. One student said, “I like new experiences and love camping and nature. I felt reassured by the fact 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.

### Acknowledgments

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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。丁寧に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のでしょうか？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ひします。

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 SILCamp 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.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Guiding Question / Target</b>
<b>transport in</b>	What are they doing? What are they saying?
<b>games</b>	How many people? What are they playing / choosing?
<b>hike</b>	How many people went hiking? What was spoken about? Who did the speaking?
<b>setting up / tearing down</b>	Who helps who? Who asks questions to whom?
<b>mealtimes</b>	What are they eating? Are they sharing?
<b>campfire</b>	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?)
<b>transport out</b>	What are they doing? What are they talking about?
<b>other times</b>	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.