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# Promoting positive feelings and motivation for language learning: the role of a confidence-building diary

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## ABSTRACT

In this study, Japanese university students learning English in Japan were asked to keep a confidence-building diary (CBD) for one week in order to understand the benefits of maintaining a positive outlook for learning. The researchers investigated what activities the participants engaged in and what emotions they felt as a result, how the activity influenced their motivation for learning English and also whether participants later continued to engage in confidence-building activities. Drawing on basic psychological needs theory, self-determination theory, research on effect in language learning, and positive psychology, the researchers conducted a qualitative analysis of the diaries of 39 participants. The researchers also conducted follow-up interviews approximately five months later with seven participants. Participation in the CBD activities resulted mainly in positive emotions, occasionally in combination with negative emotions, and supported basic psychological needs. All participants considered the activity to be worthwhile, and there was evidence that some participants continued to intentionally engage in activities that produced positive emotions as a result of the CBD activity. The researchers suggest that the CBD is an effective tool for promoting positive feelings and supporting students' basic psychological needs which are necessary to thrive and maintain motivation for sustained learning.

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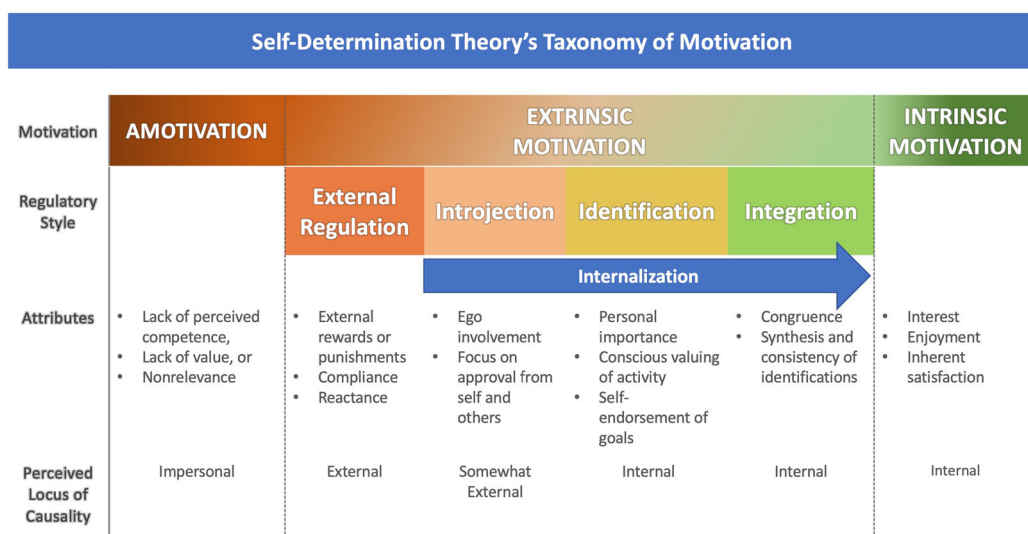
Basic psychological needs theory; self-determination theory; motivation; confidence; positive psychology; self-directed learning

In this paper, the authors explore how students engaged with an intervention wherein Japanese undergraduate learners of English in a university in Japan were asked to keep a confidence-building diary (CBD) over a period of one week. In this diary, the learners recorded language learning activities they had chosen to engage in, and reflected on how they felt about the activities. The purpose of the CBD exercise was to raise students' awareness of the importance of maintaining a positive outlook while learning English and how this can help to regulate and generate feelings of confidence and motivation. Following an overview of the theoretical framework of self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan and Deci, 2017) and its associated basic psychological needs theory (BPNT) which is used to evaluate the learners' CBD responses, the authors briefly explore the literature on emotions in learning and positive psychology and make connections to the pedagogical implications of these theories. The authors then provide a description of the qualitative methods used to investigate the activities chosen and the feelings the learners' expressed resulting from their engagement in these activities. The article concludes by suggesting that participation in the CBD was effective in supporting students' basic psychological needs (BPNs), and in promoting positive emotions, which are necessary to flourish and maintain intrinsic motivation for sustained learning.

## Self-determination theory (SDT) and basic psychological needs

Self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan 2000; Ryan and Deci 2017) is an empirically based meta-theory of motivation and personality comprising six supporting sub-theories. SDT places motivation along a continuum of self-determination, distinguishing different types according to the extent to which people's actions and behaviours are intrinsically motivated, or the degree to which the origins of a person's acts and decisions stem, or are controlled from outside of the person's own interests, values, or desires (extrinsic/controlled motivation). As an organismic approach (Deci and Ryan 2000), SDT views the internalisation of externally regulated motives as a natural process, whereby individuals actively integrate and restructure external regulations so that they become self-endorsed and self-determined when acted upon. In other words, those actions, behaviours and decisions which are based on interest and enjoyment, or those which through the process of internalisation have become accepted into one's own sense of self (primarily, identified or integrated regulation), are understood as either intrinsic or extrinsic forms of autonomous motivation. This is detailed in Figure 1.

As a framework for researching motivation in language learning, SDT allows for a focus on the learner, and the reasons for the actions and behaviours associated with learning, helping us to understand the origins or motives therein (Noels et al. 2019). In addition, it places importance on the social context, or learning environment, and those who influence it. In particular, SDT's mini-theory of BPNT details how not only autonomy but also competence and relatedness act as nutrients to sustain autonomous motivation. SDT recognises the importance of the social learning environment, as well as the quality of communication with significant others (teachers, advisors, other learners, etc.) within it, in supporting these needs (Noels et al. 2019). Such a focus enables educators to investigate how supportive a learning activity or a learning environment is, of these basic needs, and the degree to which it facilitates a need-supportive climate which can promote healthy development, well-being, and deeper learning (Ryan and Deci 2017).



*Note. From the Center for Self-Determination Theory © 2019. Reprinted with permission.*

**Figure 1.** The motivation continuum (Centre for Self-Determination Theory, 2019).

### **Basic psychological needs theory (BPNT) – autonomy, competence, and relatedness**

As noted above, one of the central aims of SDT is to facilitate understanding of how social-contextual factors support or frustrate the inherent human capacity for growth, activity, and development through the fulfilment, or thwarting of the BPNs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. This understanding fosters an approach to education and learning whereby facilitating the social-contextual conditions to support autonomous motivation via need satisfaction is encouraged. Such an approach is vital, as research has consistently shown that when support for BPNs is present, this leads to enhanced learning and performance, and other factors conducive to sustained well-being (Ryan and Deci 2017; Vansteenkiste and Ryan 2013).

The three BPNs are briefly defined as follows:

*Autonomy* from an SDT perspective is defined by a sense of volition, and a feeling that one's actions are self-endorsed, and in accord with one's own values and interests, and refers to self-regulation.

*Competence* concerns the need to interact effectively with one's environment and is associated with challenge, effort, and mastery, leading to feelings of confidence and efficacy.

*Relatedness* refers to feeling socially connected with others, and the experience of being involved in close, caring relationships where a reciprocal sense of belonging and inclusion are noted.

In practice, facilitating an autonomy-supportive environment which encourages and sustains integrated development and wellness (Ryan and Deci 2017) is underpinned by the behaviours and attitudes of those involved as social agents (i.e. teachers or advisors, for example), as well as other affordances present within the social learning environment. This has important pedagogical implications in that helping the learner to become more attuned, or 'in sync' with their learning activities is highlighted as an essential component of fostering such a climate. This is achieved when students are introduced to ways of proactively engaging with their environment and learning activities, to promote 'need satisfaction, curiosity, interest, and goal progress' (Reeve 2016, 135). The CBD which we explore in this study was designed as such an activity and provides opportunities to facilitate self-discovery, reflection, and self-awareness. The present study explores how, and in what ways, learning opportunities prompted by the CBD led to positive feelings and motivation for language learning. SDT/BPNT is used as the principal framework to identify the extent the activity can be viewed as need-supportive. This enables us to examine the activities the learners chose and the feelings they produced, and use the theoretical underpinnings of SDT and positive psychology to explore the role of the CBD in motivating language learning.

In the following sections, we explore how positive feelings, or affect, are related to learning, and make connections to positive psychology and the aims underlying the CBD as a learning tool. This allows us to explore how positive affect and confidence are associated with the satisfaction of learners' BPNs in this study. That is, through the lens of SDT and BPNT, we will examine the different ways in which the CBD is perceived to build confidence and motivation through promoting reflection on learning, and the feelings involved in engagement, and how this can lead to greater wellness and integration.

### **Emotions and feelings in language learning**

There are a number of positive or negative affective factors that influence individual learning processes (Oxford 2016), for example, preferences, evaluations, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings. The affective factors most relevant to this paper are *feelings* and *emotions*. An emotion is an unconscious biological response to a stimulus, for example, tears, increased heart rate or trembling (Damasio 2000). On the other hand, a feeling is a *conscious* mental representation in the brain of that emotional state. Positive emotions are closely tied to feelings such as happiness, enjoyment and interest, and negative emotions are associated with feelings such as nervousness, difficulty, or disappointment

(Miller 2011). These feelings can have an important impact on learning, and fluctuate over time (Tassinari 2016).

### ***Why is positive affect important for learning?***

There are three main ways that we can say positive affect is important in learning. Firstly, feelings and emotions are among the most influential agents relating to sustained perseverance in language learning in the face of difficulty or challenging circumstances (Oxford 2015). Becoming a confident user of a second or additional language requires continued trial and error, experimentation and failure, as well as success. Within this process, while cognition and reasoning are undeniably present and needed, the affective dimension is also actively involved. Indeed, affect is viewed as an expression of emotion, playing a fundamental role in the way in which we interact with our environment (Duncan and Barrett 2007).

Positive affect in social cognitive theory (Bandura 2001) is seen to be closely intertwined with efficacy beliefs and human agency. Importantly, when taking this view, self-reflection is considered to be essential for past learning experiences to remain available and accessible and is portrayed as a forerunner to successful future action in language learning (Cotterall 2017). Critically, Ryan and Deci (2017) highlight the key role of reflection as an autonomy-supportive function in SDT, leading to the appraisal and self-endorsement of one's motives and actions as being congruent with one's inherent values and interests. Thus, and central to the present study, positive affect, efficacy beliefs, agency and learning appear to be closely interrelated and highly involved with language learning and autonomy.

Secondly, when positive affect is present (and nurtured), this has a beneficial effect on cognition (Forgas 2000). Affect and cognition are widely considered to be bidirectional (Schunk, Pintrich, and Meece 2008). Affect has been shown to have a crucial role to play in memory, language fluency and lucidity, and acts as a core influence on cognition (Duncan and Barrett 2007; Forgas 2000).

Thirdly, attention to affective factors may enhance the learning experience as without it, we may sometimes '... experience a world of facts rather than feelings ... {and} affect gives us a sense of confidence in those facts' (Duncan and Barrett 2007, 1203). Positive affect can influence motivation (Forgas 2000). For example, while the enjoyment of a task may generate intrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci 2017), negative affect may lessen intrinsic motivation. In addition, Schunk, Pintrich, and Meece (2008) note that extrinsic motivation can be triggered by anxiety or fear.

It is useful to note here that both negative *and* positive feelings and emotions are a normal part of language learning (Dewaele 2019). In other words, when learning a language, a range of feelings and emotions are experienced. When learners reflect on this, the overall positive experience is often more fully valued.

### ***Positive psychology and language learning***

It is important to consider the field of positive psychology (PP) when exploring the role of emotion and affect in language learning for several reasons. PP is considered to be a branch of the broader field of psychology which focuses on 'the scientific study of what goes right in life' (Peterson 2006, 4). Seligman et al. (2005) highlight the accumulative and ongoing work of PP practitioners and how it continues to enhance 'our understanding of how, why, and under what conditions positive emotions, positive character, and the institutions that enable them flourish' (874). Sheldon and Ryan (2011) connect the broader aims of PP with SDT as attempting to understand what it is that supports or allows people to flourish and what is it about our own nature that helps us do that. Applied to the whole-person experience of learning languages, which takes not only time, but also requires a degree of perseverance, positive optimism and

resilience, PP focuses on how feelings such as happiness, well-being, empathy, confidence, and so on, are central to successful learning and long-term motivation (MacIntyre, Gregersen, and Mercer 2019).

Positive psychology interventions (PPI) are considered to be ways in which PP is applied to practice. PPIs are purposeful and deliberate attempts to engender positive feelings, actions and thoughts (Sin and Lyubomirsky 2009). These often take the form of focusing the mind on character strengths, expressions of gratitude, or producing diaries of positive events. Focusing on well-being, manifestations of growth and building on emotional strengths, PP (MacIntyre, Gregersen, and Mercer 2019) and SDT (Deci and Ryan 2016) share the aim of unlocking the potential for a learner to flourish and experience positive vitality, accentuate empathy and healthy relationships with others. In the present study, the CBD is an example of a PPI as it focuses on learners engaging with the learning environment to gain confidence and develop a positive, responsive relationship with it.

### ***Promoting confidence in language learning***

To sum up, feelings of confidence play a key role in language learning. The belief that we can be successful at a particular task is developed in part through reflection on our own experiences and our changing interpretations of these. From this internal dialogue can emerge attributions, or ‘internal explanations’ which are used to put past experiences into perspective, aiding in the development of self-efficacy (Bandura 1997) or (perceived) confidence in our abilities (Oxford 2016). This confidence, or self-belief, plays an important role in a learner’s continued efforts to attain their goals in the face of difficulties. Perseverance in language learning is an important factor related to sustained learning behaviours and successful mastery experiences (see Dörnyei 2018) and is associated with satisfaction of the need for competence, autonomous motivation and behaviour (Reeve 2012; Ryan and Deci 2017).

In the language classroom, a common activity for raising students’ awareness of how they approach learning is to include reflection activities. These activities can include learner logbooks, written reflective diaries, or group discussions. These tasks provide opportunities for learners to not only document and reflect on their learning and feel a sense of achievement, but to think deeply about the process (Dam 2018). In addition, they may uncover affective factors in learning and encourage the development of the metacognition needed to realise what works, or to make necessary changes (Ma and Oxford 2014). In a related diary study (not based on language learning), Seligman et al. (2005) asked participants in a randomised trial to record three positive things that happened to them each day for a week and to also include an explanation to explain why it was seen as a positive occurrence. The results indicated that after three months participants were generally more satisfied than at the onset, and reported feelings of happiness that continued up to six months. Such studies indicate the effectiveness of using diary-related activities in ways that not only help to focus on learning but also ways in which raising awareness of affective factors can influence our approach to learning and living.

### **Background to the study**

The CBD tool is a learning task that is completed outside the classroom as a component of a self-directed learning course. Although much could be said about self-directed learning, this is somewhat outside the scope of this paper as its focus is on the affordances of the CBD itself. However, it is relevant to note that the course is one where students not only learn about ways to learn languages effectively, and eventually make and follow their own language learning plan, but they also complete the majority of the coursework outside the classroom. (For a summary of self-directed learning and details of the course see Shelton-Strong and Mynard 2018; Mynard and Stevenson 2017.)

In this study, learners' responses to the CBD activity are analysed from an SDT perspective by focusing on how the learners perceived the activities they had chosen, and the extent to which the CBD can be seen to support their needs of experiencing autonomy, relatedness and competence. In order to systematically understand the effect (if any) that the CBD related activities had on the learners in this study, the following research questions were formulated:

- (1) What positive learning activities do students choose to focus on in their confidence-building diaries?
- (2) What feelings emerge from doing the activities?
- (3) How did the CBD activities affect the students' motivation for learning English?
- (4) How do students view the confidence-building strategies one semester later?

## **The study**

### **Context**

The study took place at a private university specialising in language studies in Japan. The activity is a component of a self-directed learning course which is designed to promote autonomous learning. On this course, students first learn and practice skills and concepts integral to developing a personalised language learning plan, after which they then implement the plan over a six-week period. Throughout the course, the students are asked to provide weekly reflections on their activities and progress, with these being supported through continuous reflective dialogue in the form of written comments from the instructor, based on the students' personal learning trajectory (see Shelton-Strong and Mynard 2018 for details). The CBD is one of the weekly activities within this course. The authors are two of the instructors on the course, and the data used in this study is work completed by students taking the course (with their permission). Although this task has been an integral part of the course for more than ten years, no research had been conducted prior to this study.

### **Participants**

The participants were 39 students taking the self-directed learning course offered in the spring semester of 2018. They were all Japanese nationals aged 18–20 years in either their first or second year at the university with low- to mid-English language proficiency. They were all majoring in languages (including English), and all of them were taking required English classes in addition to the optional self-directed learning course. Eight participants were male and 31 were female (which reflects the proportion of male to female students in general in the university). 22 of the participants were majoring in English, seven in Spanish, four in Portuguese, three in Chinese and three in Indonesian. After completing the activity, the students agreed for the researchers to make copies of the relevant activities for use in this study. Approximately five months later, participants who had originally expressed an interest in being interviewed were contacted again, and seven participants took part in follow-up interviews.

### **Methodology**

The CBD is a task to be completed during a one-week period and includes a subsequent set of follow-up reflection questions whereby learners are asked to (1) report on positive activities related to language learning, (2) explain how the activities made them feel, and (3) to reflect on the overall process. Figure 2 shows relevant extracts from the task activities:

# Confidence-Building Diary

Tell yourself everyday about something **GOOD** and **POSITIVE** related to studying or using English. This will increase your confidence and motivate you to continue through even the most difficult times.

In this diary, write something good and positive about using your English. Think about how that makes you **feel** about your ability to use English:

**Day 1:** *"I went to the English Lounge and enjoyed talking with a teacher and other students. I was able to use some of the new words I learned in our conversation in class the next day!"*  
*"I felt happy and it helped me realize my progress."*

	"GOOD" & "POSITIVE" things about English study
Day 1	Activity:  Feelings:
Day 2	Activity:  Feelings:
Day 3	Activity:  Feelings:

## Reflection

1. Did the confidence-building diary motivate you? Why or why not?

2. Other than the confidence-building diary, what can you do to help yourself to maintain a positive attitude when you are learning a new language?

**Figure 2.** Extract from the weekly activities.



In the first part of the research (once the diaries were completed), the authors analysed the participants' diaries and reflections in order to identify the kinds of activities that the students autonomously chose to engage in. Feelings that were expressed as a result of doing the activities were also analysed. Finally, learners' views on the CBD activity itself were analysed.

The diary data were coded qualitatively (Hatch 2002) by the two researchers working together. The process involved the researchers discussing each item carefully one by one in light of relevant literature on affect and SDT, and how they related to the research questions. This led to allocating provisional codes according to emergent themes as they arose, using the qualitative analysis software HyperResearch. This process was repeated three times. During this lengthy process, items were discussed and re-coded or re-named where appropriate until eventually the researchers were satisfied with the categories which will be presented in the next section.

In the second part of the study, which took place approximately five months after the initial diary activity, seven of the original participants who had indicated a willingness to participate were interviewed to determine how they later viewed the confidence-building activities. The researchers were particularly interested in discerning whether the participants continued to engage in the confidence-building activities, or whether the activities appeared to have had any effect on subsequent learning. Following a semi-structured interview guide, the researchers attempted to ascertain the following information during the interviews:

- (1) What the participant remembered about the CBD activity.
- (2) Whether the participant continued to engage in any of the activities that they had previously indicated as positive or motivating (including the process of keeping a CBD).
- (3) How the participant felt about the activities (if applicable).
- (4) Details of other activities (if any) that the participant was currently engaged in that helped them to feel positive about their learning.

The interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed by the two researchers, and analysed by one. Occasional conferring helped the researchers to answer each of these points.

## Findings and discussion

### ***Research question 1: what positive learning activities do students choose to focus on in their confidence-building diaries?***

The activities that students reported as positive were coded into one of 12 emergent codes by the researchers and these are shown in Table 1. The codes could be broadly placed into one of four categories: *in-class events* (15 items), *language-related activities* (outside class) (113 items), *using media* (23 items), and *metacognitive activities* (33 items).

To summarise, the majority of the learning activities the students chose to focus on took place outside of the classroom environment. The activities often resulted in actions supportive of the learners' BPNs. For example, choosing to talk about a favourite character (autonomy, choice), persevering to improve listening skills, planning for future success, and organising to-do lists (competence, feelings of affectance). We will return again to this focus as we examine the data and our findings in our discussion below.

**Table 1.** Positive activities noted in participants' CBD over a one-week period.

Category	Code	Number of instances	
In-class events	Class activity	15	15 (8%)
Language-related activities (outside class)	Language study	34	113 (61%)
	Listening	10	
	Reading	15	
	Writing	3	
	Speaking	34	
	Singing	1	
	Test-related	11	
	Work-related	5	
Using media	Music and other media	23	23 (13%)
Metacognitive activities	Reflecting	19	33 (18%)
	Planning ahead	14	
Total			184 (100%)

### **Research question 2: what feelings emerge from doing the activities**

Although the activities the participants had chosen to focus on produced a diverse range of feelings, the majority of these were associated with a positive response, resulting in 11 positive feelings codes emerging from the data. These were collated into two categories, and are shown in [Table 2](#). In addition, and of particular interest, are the specific examples describing the act of learning and how it made the learners feel, which suggests ways in which feelings of competence, autonomy and relatedness were experienced. The examples that follow indicate satisfaction; interest and other positive feelings; relatedness; perceived competence; and satisfaction in achievement. A majority of the activities chosen also suggest acts of volition, or autonomy. As noted earlier, the need for competence, autonomy and relatedness is a strong motivating driver which can lead learners to actively search out and craft the kinds of experiences that will satisfy these needs, particularly within autonomy-supportive environments (Vansteenkiste and Ryan 2013). The opportunity to focus on positive feelings produced by self-chosen learning activities while completing the CBD facilitated a space wherein learners were allowed to choose and engage in the kinds of activities which would satisfy their BPNs.

**Table 2.** Positive feelings reported in participants' CBDs over one week.

Category	Code	Number of instances	
Feeling good	Happiness	32	71 (73%)
	Enjoyment	16	
	Fun	9	
	Feel good	9	
	Excitement	4	
	Energetic	1	
Interest	Interest	17	26 (27%)
	Motivation	5	
	Satisfaction	2	
	Comfort	2	
Total			97 (100%)

As [Table 2](#) shows, two categories of positive feelings emerged from the data. The first, 'feeling good' includes happiness and enjoyment, feelings related to having fun, feeling good, as well as those producing excitement and energy. As an example, one learner reported:

I went to {The Self-Access Center} and studied with my friend and helped each other. I was able to finish my homework. I was happy to find my friend studying with me.

To relate this to SDT, this example indicates the presence of all three BPNs (Deci and Ryan 2017): choosing to go to the Self-Access Centre (autonomy); a sense of achievement at completing something (competence), and feelings of happiness and working with others (relatedness). Similarly, in the following example, the learner felt a sense of competence resulting from engaging in a discussion with an exchange student:

I talked with exchange student. And we talked about culture. I felt so fun. Because I could know about foreign culture.

The second category includes feelings of interest, motivation, satisfaction and comfort. Again, to relate the examples to SDT, feelings of competence among other BPNs were expressed by the learners. For instance, in the following example, the learner expresses positive emotions as their reading competence improves:

I could read difficult book better than before. I could understand the meaning of the book. I feel happy because I can understand the story. I reading my favorite book and I feel excited!

The sense of competence expressed here was a pattern that the researchers observed in several cases – in fact in 10 out of the 15 reported in-class events – where students noted something that they were able to overcome or succeed in, they generally reported feeling a sense of pleasure and competence. Examples include:

Because of my part time job, I didn't have many time, so I read the news written in English. I was able to find new words. I felt finding new words is interesting.

watching Ted talks motivated. I learned how to give a presentation and Ted talks was very interesting. Motivated.

Using English outside of the classroom helped to satisfy BPNs, with a participant sharing the following:

I had a part time job. There are customer who speak English. Then I could help them. I was very satisfied because this case isn't happen so many time and I could make it. They said 'Thank you' to me!

While positive feelings prevailed, negative feelings also surfaced (see [Table 3](#)) despite the focus of the CBD, and the prompts indicating that the learner should write something good and positive about the activity chosen. Nervousness and levels of difficulty were the main obstacles to a positive reaction, with pessimism, lack of interest and low energy being other negative reactions associated with a limited number of learning tasks that had been attempted. As previously mentioned and cited in the literature (Dewaele and MacIntyre 2014), language learning provokes a range of feelings both positive and negative that are important for the language learning experience.

**Table 3.** Negative feelings reported in participants CBD over one week.

Code	Number of instances
Nervousness	8
Difficulty	7
Feel bad	3
Tiring	3
Boredom	1
Total	22

**Research question 3: how do the CBD activities affect the students' motivation for learning English?**

This research question was designed to explore whether the activities had an effect on the participants' general motivation towards learning English. In order to answer this question, the researchers included all of the responses collected in the three activities described in the students' diaries and their responses to the question 'Did the CBD motivate you? Why or why not?' Firstly, all 39 of the participants felt that the CBD activity was beneficial and the researchers explored the reasons for this through the analysis of the data within a SDT framework. Overall, the reasons given were either related to a sense of competence or relatedness. The third BPN of autonomy was also inherently in evidence in all of the responses, as these activities were ones which the participants had chosen to engage in, relating to and matching their own interests and/or goals, thus indicating

integrated regulation, or intrinsic motivation (Ryan and Deci 2017). Five codes contributed to the category of competence: Balance of learning activities (showing a sense of control); challenge and achievement; reflecting and feeling a sense of achievement; completion of task; and confidence.

An illustrative example of competence is:

[Did the CBD motivate you? Why or why not?] *Yes. it did. Because I can recheck*

*what I did yesterday and my feeling. Also I can improve my learning schedule so it*

*will helps me to achieve my goal as fast as I can.*

Some students ( $n = 11$ ) specifically mentioned how the CBD improved their confidence. As previously noted, confidence and competence are closely linked in BPNT and one of the aims of the activity was to increase feelings of confidence.

I strongly think that building confidence for daily studying motivate me for two reasons. First, in the process of confidence building diary I could come up with the new actions related to boost my confidence and I had an image of being successful in the long way to a good English speaker.

The last example indicates that by focussing on positive daily actions, the student could imagine him/herself as a successful English user in the future (Table 4).

**Table 4.** How the CBD activity influenced motivation (competence).

Code	Number of instances
Challenge and achievement	37
Reflecting and feeling sense of achievement	24
Confidence	11
Completion of task	8
Balance of learning activities	6
Total	86

Examples of the learners' activities from the data were coded to relatedness when there was evidence, or an indication of engagement, caring, or closeness with others. As these were activities undertaken to promote language learning, they all involved interacting with or talking to people, for one purpose or another. A summary is given in Table 5.

**Table 5.** How the CBD activity influenced motivation (relatedness).

Code	Number of instances
Talk to friends/classmates	20
Talk to teacher	15
Talk to foreigners	9
Helping others	5
Talk to international students	4
Talk with advisor	2
Total	55

In more than half of the cases, there was some overlap, for example, if the participant described helping a foreigner, this was coded twice (helping others / talk to foreigners).

Examples given include helping others, e.g.

I talked with my friends in English. We talked about our favorite store. I couldn't understand all words what my friends said. But they told me word's mean. So, I felt enjoy and happy.

Here, a feeling of understanding and care is clearly expressed, as difficulties are collectively overcome, and gaps in communication are bridged. Other examples involved talking to foreigners, e.g.

Last Sunday, I worked DAISO in Chiba. A man asked me way to Yodobashi Kamera. So I tried to tell way in English. He said 'Thank you' so I was very happy, and I want to study English and speak fluently!

This final example indicates an authentic reciprocal exchange of social behaviour that enabled the student to feel useful to, and appreciated by others. Among the most frequent responses noted

were those having to do with contact with classmates or friends, and the teacher. One student mentioned:

I changed opinions about book with my classmates. I felt happy. Because I could tell about a book and change my opinion.

An example involving a teacher was:

I went to Yellow sofa [conversation lounge] and enjoyed talking with a teacher and friends. I talked about love with my friends and a teacher. It was very interesting. But I was very nervous when I talked with a teacher.

As both of these make plain, satisfaction at being successful in exchanging thoughts and feelings with others led to enjoyment and contentment in the language learning related activities they had chosen to take part in. What is more, engaging autonomously in relational support and activities in which there is a reciprocally satisfying interaction based on interest, care and authentic communication has been shown to act as a conduit, where a 'mutuality of autonomy support' facilitates basic psychological need satisfaction for both parties involved, leading to greater wellness and positive relationships over time (Ryan and Deci 2017, 293).

#### **Research question 4: how do students view the confidence-building strategies one semester later?**

Approximately five months after the CBD activity had concluded, participants who had indicated an interest in being interviewed were contacted and seven students were interviewed by either one of the researchers.

The interviews were analysed by one of the researchers and a summary of the responses can be seen in Table 6.

**Table 6.** A summary of the interview responses.

Participant (pseudonym)	1. What they remember	2. Tasks being continued	3. Feelings about the tasks	4. Details of other activities
Kayo (F)	Recalled the activities when prompted	Giving presentations	Previously feelings were negative, but now they are positive	N/A
Taka (M)	Recalled the activities when prompted	Talking to international exchange students; talking to foreigners in Tokyo	Positive: great, fantastic, interesting, precious, new, challenging, fun	Meeting friends every day at the university to talk in English; keeping a lexical diary; engaging in coping self-talk
Noriko (F)	Recalled the activities when prompted	None as she is too busy	Generally positive	Talking to herself in front of the mirror; keeps a diary and writing about her learning experiences (both positive and negative) to stay positive
Minami (F)	Recalled the activity in general (but not the details until prompted)	Being active in class	Satisfying, feeling competent	Keeping a diary in English to include both positive and negative feelings; watching DVDs; reading challenging books
Nana (F)	Recalled the activities she did	Watching movies; talking to friends in English as part of her weekly self-directed learning plan	Enjoyable, 'good for me'	Speaking to friends from other countries; watching movies
Ryohei (M)	Remembered the tools and the activities	Going to the English conversation lounge	Enjoyable and motivating	Talking to foreigners in bars; talking with teachers and other students in English; watching movies; recording vocabulary in a notebook.
Ena (F)	Remembered an activity that made her feel confident	Speaking up in class	Previously feelings were slightly negative, but now they are positive	Watching inspiring YouTube videos of a woman who is a proactive English learner.

In general, with little prompting, the participants recalled the activities that they had engaged in during the CBD activity, and how the activities had made them feel. All of them continued to engage in positive activities, either ones they had started as a result of the CBD activity, or ones they began later. It is difficult to fully answer the research question of how participants in general viewed the CBD activity five months later with such limited data, but we can say that the seven interviewees viewed the CBD activity favourably. In addition, there was some clear evidence to indicate that the activity had influenced subsequent actions. The activities described generally tended to include a fulfilment of BPNs as students discussed the meaningful activities they volitionally chose to engage in (autonomously), such as seeking out opportunities to use the target language. Many of the participants were motivated by feelings of competence, fulfilment or challenge that these activities afforded. Finally, many of the examples included participants seeking out others, and expressing feelings of relatedness. Clearly, this question needs further research involving more participants, but these limited results indicate that it would be beneficial to subsequently revisit the CBD activity with all of the learners and help them to reflect on their ongoing activities as a normal part of any self-directed study.

## Conclusions

As a result of this study, the researchers suggest that the CBD is an effective tool for promoting positive feelings and supporting students' BPNs, which are necessary to thrive and maintain autonomous motivation for sustained learning. The activities students chose ranged from language skills and classroom-oriented tasks, to personal interests and media-oriented resources, and reflective, higher order thinking tasks. The feelings reported were largely of a positive nature, with high levels of satisfaction and interest-based feelings being the most salient. As noted, there were instances which produced less positive feelings, as well. However, overall, engagement with the CBD was valued highly by the students involved, with opportunities for engaging effectively with their chosen learning environment and relating with others being amongst those most valued. This was also evident in other actions beyond those prompted by the CBD to increase positive feelings, with a large share of these being coded as supportive of competence or relatedness.

While research has shown that teachers can be instrumental and play an important role in creating classroom climates supportive of students' BPNs (Deci and Ryan 2016; Reeve 2016), the evidence from this study supports the premise that providing choice, structure and guidance to promote self-directed learning outside of the classroom is also valuable and effective in fostering a learner-centred, autonomy-supportive learning climate. PPIs such as the CBD have potential to support autonomy, competence and relatedness as learners engage with their feelings, and are free to choose and reflect on learning tasks, and act in accordance with their own interests.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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