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Research Article

Emotion Regulation In, For, and Beyond Language Learning: A Practitioners' Perspective on Learner Engagement with a CLIL Course in Japan

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how emotion regulation was addressed in a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) course in Japan and examines how learners developed an understanding of emotion regulation in, for, and beyond language learning. The course focused on the exploration of emotions in language learning, with four sessions dedicated specifically to emotion regulation, in line with recent calls to incorporate affective dimensions into language education. Drawing on students' reflections documented in reflective diaries and portfolios, the study highlights how participants cultivated emotional awareness and engaged with experience-based strategies to regulate their emotions effectively. By foregrounding emotion knowledge as a foundation for effective regulation, this study addresses a critical gap in research on learners' emotion regulation strategies from a classroom-based perspective. The findings underscore the pedagogical potential of integrating emotional literacy into CLIL contexts to support learners' (meta-)affective strategies, offering practical implications for language educators aiming to foster emotionally resilient, self-regulated learners across diverse language learning environments.

Keywords: learner emotions; emotion regulation; classroom-based research; content and language integrated learning

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the need to address the emotional dimensions of language learning more explicitly. Researchers, educators, and practitioners have increasingly acknowledged that we must support learners in navigating challenging emotions such as anxiety, shame, and frustration, while also cultivating positive emotions like curiosity, self-acceptance, and joy. Jacobs and Gross (2014) suggest that wherever there are emotions, there is potential for emotion regulation. Since emotions are ever-present in language classrooms, these environments seem like a natural place to begin this work. Yet, as Oxford (2016) notes, affective strategies in language learning remain underexplored in research and practice.

Emotion regulation has been studied with a focus on teachers (e.g., Morris, 2025) and learners (e.g., Bielak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020), but there is still a need for research that examines learners' engagement with emotion regulation from within the classroom. In particular, there is a scarcity of studies that explore how learners interact with emotion-related content through the language they are learning, and how this engagement supports their development of emotion regulation strategies. In a previous study, we demonstrated that when learners are invited to reflect on their emotional experiences in language learning and provided with support to do so, this can lead to meaningful changes in their self-concept as they gain insight into not just what they are doing, but why it personally matters to them (Castro & Shelton-Strong, 2024).

In this article, we build on a previous study by presenting examples of how learners on a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) course at a Japanese university engaged with a focus on emotion regulation, both in the context of their language learning experiences and in broader aspects of their lives. The course included a range of activities that encouraged students to explore their emotions, as well as structured opportunities for reflection through reflective diaries and portfolios. Our aim is to show how students began to recognise and apply emotion regulation

strategies in the context of their language learning. We begin by introducing the course and the theoretical framework that informed its design, followed by a description of how emotion regulation was integrated into the syllabus. We then share examples from students' reflective diaries and portfolios, which focus on how they experienced and implemented regulation concepts and strategies from the coursework "in", "for", and "beyond" language learning, before concluding with implications and suggestions for other teaching contexts.

The Course 'Exploring Emotions in Language Learning'

Since 2022, we have been teaching the course 'Exploring Emotions in Language Learning' (hereafter EELL) to students majoring in international communication at a small private university in central Japan. This university specialises in foreign language education, cultural studies, and global liberal arts, with approximately 4,000 students enrolled annually. As part of the institution's commitment to supporting continued language development beyond compulsory English classes in the first and second years, all students are required to take elective CLIL courses during their third and fourth years. These courses are taught entirely in English and follow a format of two 90-minute classes per week over a 15-week semester.

In our context, CLIL is implemented as a dual-purpose approach (Coyle et al., 2010). According to the department's official documents, CLIL courses aim "to have students learn exciting and interesting content through English to further develop their fluency and strategic use of English." These courses are positioned as distinct from both traditional language skills courses they have in their first and second years and lecture-based content courses taught during their degree courses. They are expected to integrate content learning with the continued development of language proficiency. While course topics may vary, instructors are encouraged to align their courses with one of the curriculum's four designated content areas: Linguistics and Language

Pedagogy, Communication Studies, Cultural Studies, or Regional and International Studies.

We conceptualized and created the EELL course from inception to implementation, situating it within the Communication Studies branch as it puts emphasis on how students can communicate their emotions effectively in language learning situations. Our aim was to support students' language development by engaging them in the exploration of emotions as meaningful content. The motivation for creating this course emerged from our work as learning advisors, where we frequently encountered students who expressed a desire to talk about their emotional experiences in language learning and asked for ways to manage those emotions. We thought that a classroom-based approach could offer a more structured and supportive space for exploring such experiences while catering to a wider audience. Since its launch, the course has consistently reached full capacity with 28 students each year, and many others have expressed interest but were unable to enrol due to limited availability.

A comprehensive and detailed outline of the course content and structure is provided in Castro and Shelton-Strong (2024). In general, the course explores topics such as emotion-related vocabulary, the connection between emotions and learning experiences, identity and the self, motivation, confidence, emotion regulation, and aspects of positive psychology, including character strengths, empathy, and well-being. Emotion regulation is interwoven throughout the course in various forms. For instance, emotion regulation is addressed through weekly diary writing and peer sharing, which provide opportunities for students to reflect on emotion-laden experiences within their learning journey. These activities foster feelings of acceptance and a sense of community and belonging, both within and beyond the classroom. In addition to this ongoing integration, we dedicated four classes specifically to the explicit exploration of emotion regulation, which are the focus of this article. During these classes, students were supported to examine how to manage emotions, cope with negative feelings, and, importantly, consider what can be gained by accepting rather than avoiding difficult emotions, an approach aligned with

integrative emotion regulation (Benita, 2020; Roth et al., 2019), as described in the following sections.

Emotional Literacy in Language Education

In designing the EELL course, we drew on the framework of emotional literacy to guide both the planning and delivery of the content. Emotional literacy is understood as "the ability to recognise, understand, express, and manage one's own emotions and the emotions of others, serving as a foundation for empathetic and effective social interactions" (Pentón Herrera & Darragh, 2024, p. 11]). It can be developed and nurtured in the classroom through a focus on specific competencies. These include self-understanding; the ability to understand, express, and manage one's emotions; and the capacity to interpret social situations and build relationships (Weare, 2004). We believe that such competencies can serve as an essential toolkit for learners, helping them manage their emotions while learning an additional language. They can also support learners in understanding how their emotions influence their learning behaviours and attitudes, inform their decision-making, and shape their relationships both within and beyond the classroom. Such awareness is likely to lead to personal growth and transformation (Castro & Shelton-Strong, 2024). In the EELL course, for example, classes were designed to include not only a theoretical starting point for discussion but also opportunities for learners to connect this content with their language learning and life experiences, thereby expanding their emotional self-awareness.

In the field of English language teaching, Pentón Herrera and Darragh (2024) argue for the integration of social-emotional learning into the language curriculum. Drawing on post-method pedagogies, they advocate for tailoring educational experiences to support both personal and academic development, thereby fostering learners' holistic growth across cognitive, emotional, and social domains. A similar position is taken by Clare et al. (2025), who advocate the inclusion of global life skills,

such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, problem-solving, emotion regulation, well-being, resilience, socio-cultural competence, digital literacy, ecoliteracy, and global citizenship, within language education and argue that a CLIL framework is well suited to this kind of integration. They contend that this framework enables learners to use the target language to explore personally meaningful content, thus creating an effective pedagogical opportunity to develop both linguistic competence and key life skills.

In line with this perspective, we agree that CLIL provides a malleable structure for exploring emotion-related content through the target language as it enables learners to engage with meaningful topics while simultaneously developing their linguistic competence, making it particularly appropriate for integrating personal development and emotional exploration (Castro & Shelton-Strong, 2024; Clare et al., 2025; Mercer et al., 2018). A CLIL course centred on the exploration of emotions in language learning can therefore offer a holistic approach that supports both academic achievement and personal growth.

The integration of emotional literacy into language education aligns closely with the broader principles of positive language education, which promotes teaching approaches that develop both linguistic skills and psychological well-being (Clare et al., 2025; Mercer et al., 2018; Mercer & Gregersen, 2023). In this regard, Mercer et al. (2018) argue that the nature of language learning with its focus on communication and self-expression makes it an ideal context for such integration. From our perspective, a more holistic approach recognises them as mutually supportive, indicating that language development and emotional development could be treated together. Teaching through the lens of emotional literacy can enhance learners' self-awareness and emotion regulation, while also deepening their engagement with both the language and the learning process more broadly.

Emotion Regulation and Integrative Emotion Regulation

An essential aspect of developing emotional literacy involves understanding and managing emotions in learning situations, a process known as emotion regulation. Gross (1998) defines emotion regulation as "the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions" (p. 275). Classrooms provide a natural setting for such processes to occur, as each day, learners enter this environment bringing with them a range of emotions, experiences, and expectations that shape classroom dynamics and impact their learning readiness, motivation, and predisposition to interact with others. In language learning, these emotions are particularly significant as it often involves a deep reconfiguration of learners' identities and self-perceptions, as they work to express their thoughts, feelings, and selves in unfamiliar and often vulnerable ways (Mercer, 2006).

In the field of education, emotions have been shown to influence how students engage with learning, how they perform, and how they experience their education overall (Harley & Pekrun, 2024). Positive emotions can support motivation and persistence, while negative emotions may result in disengagement and avoidance (Harley et al., 2019). Emotions are not secondary to learning; they are central to students' academic development and personal growth (Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2014). For language educators, this indicates the importance of creating classroom environments where learners can better understand, navigate, and manage their emotional experiences (Arnold & Brown, 1999).

In language education, emotion regulation has often been explored through the perspective of affective learning strategies (Oxford, 2016; Oxford & Gkonou, 2021). Oxford (2016) suggests that learners should be regarded as active participants in developing these strategies, as they frequently have valuable ideas of their own about how to manage their emotions, particularly when asked in targeted and supportive ways. Oxford (2016) introduces a set of broader meta-affective strategies that help

learners to become aware of and manage their emotions in general terms. Drawing mostly on Gross's (1998) process model of emotion regulation, she outlines six core strategy sets: selecting the situation to influence emotions, modifying external situations to manage emotions, directing attention to manage emotions, changing cognitive appraisals of situations, modulating emotional responses, and finding meaning as a way of managing emotions.

Oxford's (2016) framework offers a useful set of tools for learners and teachers. However, in practice, the author acknowledges that it can be difficult to provide structured instruction on all of these strategies. From our perspective, rather than focusing only on offering pre-defined strategies, we see great value in beginning this exploration with learners' own emotional experiences (Oxford, 2016). When this is informed by broader theoretical frameworks, such as emotional literacy (Topçu, 2025; Weare, 2004), social-emotional learning (Singh & Duraiappah, 2020), or self-determination theory (SDT) (Benita, 2020; Curren & Park, 2024; Roth et al., 2019), the outcomes can be particularly meaningful, empowering learners to develop strategies that are both personally relevant and grounded in established educational theory. As the first two frameworks have been discussed earlier, we now turn to SDT to deepen our understanding of emotion regulation in language learning.

A natural extension of the above discussion is to consider integrative approaches to emotion regulation, which move beyond simply managing or minimising negative emotions. Drawing on SDT, Benita (2020) argues that "all emotions foster psychological growth" (p. 2). From this perspective, emotions, both positive and negative, are not obstacles to be avoided, but essential signals that inform learners about their needs, values, and experiences. SDT emphasises that psychological growth is achieved through an integrative process, in which individuals assimilate and synthesise emotional experiences into a coherent sense of self (Curren & Park, 2024). This process relies on three key conditions: autonomy (a sense of ownership and volition in experiencing emotions), awareness (open access to one's internal states),

and non-defensiveness (a willingness to approach and accept all emotions, rather than compartmentalising or avoiding them).

In language education, fostering integrative emotion regulation (IER) means supporting learners in developing these capacities. Rather than encouraging students to suppress or bypass uncomfortable emotions, educators can create spaces where all emotional experiences are acknowledged and explored as part of the learning process. Such an approach aligns with holistic and positive language education frameworks described earlier (Clare et al., 2025; Mercer et al., 2018; Mercer & Gregersen, 2023), which recognise that emotional and linguistic development are mutually reinforcing. By helping learners regulate their emotional experiences, teachers not only support psychological well-being but also empower students to engage more deeply and authentically with language learning itself.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The general aim of this article is to illustrate how emotion regulation can be meaningfully integrated into language education through a CLIL framework. More specifically, it aims to describe how students in the EELL course engaged with emotion regulation content, drawing on their reflections on strategies applied both within and beyond the context of language learning. To do so, we draw on the experiences of 27 third-year Japanese students (24 female and 3 male), aged between 21 and 22, who were enrolled in the 2023–24 academic year. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the university's ethics committee, after which participants were provided with a consent form outlining the nature of the research in line with institutional ethics guidelines. Although the research instruments were integrated into the EELL course structure, students were clearly informed that participation was voluntary and would have no bearing on their grading. Of the 28 students enrolled, 27 consented to take part in the study.

As noted earlier in the section describing the course, classes included a range of topics related to emotions including how they are interconnected with motivation, identity, and confidence, and aspects of positive psychology, such as character strengths, mindsets, empathy, and well-being (see Castro & Shelton-Strong, 2024, for a detailed course description). Emotion regulation was addressed explicitly in four dedicated classes, with content designed to help students recognise, understand, and manage emotional experiences related to language learning and other areas, such as personal life and work-related examples. Table 1 provides an overview of these four classes.

Table 1. *Overview of Emotion Regulation Classes in the EELL Course*

Topic	Aims	Activities
1. Introduction to emotion regulation	Understand what emotion regulation is, why it matters, and how it works. Focus on regulation goals and general strategies.	Group discussions on personal experiences with emotion regulation and critical incidents in language learning.
2. Emotion regulation strategies	Explore specific emotion regulation strategies and expand related vocabulary.	Emotion regulation journal (students record incidents where they regulated their emotions and explore alternative strategies); scenario-based activity (they reflect on how they might manage emotions in specific learning situations); diary writing on how emotions were regulated in learning contexts.
3. Emotion regulation in context	Examine how emotion regulation occurs in workplace settings and how context shapes emotional experiences and management.	Reading and discussion on emotional labour; reflections on part-time jobs and future careers; diary writing.
4. Dealing with negative feelings	Understand the nature of negative or uncomfortable emotions. Explore strategies for managing and embracing them with curiosity as important informational inputs.	Group work on strategies for coping with negative emotions; introduction to and experimentation in-class with integrative emotion regulation.

In our research, we followed the principles of exploratory practice (Allwright, 2003; Hanks, 2017), using students' classwork both as a pedagogical tool and as a research instrument. Specifically, we focused on reflective diaries and portfolio reflections. Diaries, as a qualitative tool, are widely recognised for their ability to capture the complexities of language learning, particularly in revealing learners' needs, motivations, beliefs, goals, strategies, experiences, feelings, and emotions (Mercer, 2006, 2013). Similarly, portfolios, as a purposeful collection of student work, highlight their effort, progress, and achievement (Paulson et al., 1991). As such, they are considered effective tools for assessing learners' development (Little et al., 2017), while also promoting reflection, self-evaluation, and a sense of ownership over learning (Everhard, 2015). Altogether, these instruments offer valuable insights into how learners perceive themselves and their learning experiences, both as pedagogical and research tools, providing a holistic, contextualised, and dynamic perspective on the language learning process.

Each student in the EELL course completed a total of eleven diary entries throughout the academic semester, but this study focuses on three entries specifically related to emotion regulation, along with a final diary entry written at the end of the semester. The final diary entry served as a retrospective account of their emotional experiences in the course and was purposefully designed to be more comprehensive than the weekly entries (see Castro & Shelton-Strong, 2024). In addition to the diaries, the EELL course included a portfolio component, which allowed students to select five activities or tasks that they believed demonstrated their interests, progress, and best work, followed by the inclusion of a rationale for each selection. For the purpose of this study, we focus only on the reflections accompanying portfolio items that were explicitly related to emotion regulation. In total, 73 emotion regulation-related entries were analysed, as summarised in Table 2. The appendix provides a description of the diary prompts and portfolio instructions.

Table 2. *Emotion Regulation-Related Entries*

Entry Type	Description	Number of Entries
Diary #6	Reflections on a meaningful course topic	4
Diary #7	Reflections on emotion regulation	27
Optional diary	Reflections on integrative emotion regulation	6
Diary #11	Final retrospective reflection on course experience	27
Portfolio	Reflections related to emotion regulation activities	9
	Total	73

All diaries were handwritten in English in student notebooks. To facilitate the analysis, the entries were transcribed into electronic format resulting in a final corpus of approximately 20,600 words. The data were qualitatively coded following Saldaña's (2009) framework, with both researchers initially coding the data independently and subsequently meeting to compare and refine our interpretations. This process combined first-cycle categorical theming with second-cycle focused coding (Saldaña, 2009). During this process of our reading of the data, sharing comments and trading insights regarding our understanding of what we noticed as salient, one insight came in noticing how students often discussed their experiences and strategies for emotion regulation while relating instances concerning specific moments and feelings arising while engaged in a related language learning task or activity. Also quite common were stories relating more widely to the learning process itself, where students reflected on how they face negativity and uncertainty, and maintain motivation as examples of engaging in emotion regulation for learning. Others pointed beyond these learning focussed boundaries, to include projections of experiences of emotion regulation in their future working context following graduation, identity management, in terms of regulating emotions within the scope of change and personal growth, as well as within the family structure and with friends in personal contexts. These three areas (in, for, and beyond) served as a priori focused codes in a second-cycle analysis to reexamine the data, providing a natural, but specific, and coherent frame for our purposes of

understanding the data and presenting it here. The outcome of this process is summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. *Categories of Emotion Regulation in, for, and Beyond Language Learning*

Category	Definition	Focus
Emotion regulation ***in*** language learning	Managing emotions during specific language tasks and skills	Task-specific emotion regulation within language learning moments
Emotion regulation ***for*** language learning	Regulating emotions to support language learning processes	Process-focused emotion regulation for learning success
Emotion regulation ***beyond*** language learning	Emotional growth and self-awareness extending beyond the language learning process	Emotion regulation as part of broader personal development beyond the course

Findings

This section presents findings from students' reflections on classroom activities, discussions, and diary entries focused on emotion regulation, considering how they experienced, understood, and applied emotion regulation strategies in relation to their learning. The analysis was organised into three overarching dimensions: (a) how they managed emotions during specific language tasks and interactions, (b) how they regulated emotions more broadly to sustain motivation, self-awareness, and long-term engagement with the language learning process, and (c) how they extended their engagement with emotion regulation to broader personal development beyond the course. At times, the diary excerpts presented in this section are slightly longer in order to provide sufficient context for understanding learners' reflections, ensuring that their engagement with emotion regulation is not presented in a vacuum. The diary entries were not reviewed or corrected for language.

Emotion Regulation in Language Learning

In this subsection, we focus on how learners engaged in emotion regulation within specific moments of language learning. Students often described immediate strategies they used to reduce negative emotions while performing language tasks such as discussions, presentations, and assignments. The data illustrate a range of emotional challenges and regulation mechanisms, including self-talk, positive self-reflection, and distancing or reappraisal in the moment. Some students shared previous experiences avoiding difficult emotions during language learning, recognizing how they had masked or minimized these experiences. For example, one participant described how this awareness emerged and opened space for alternative emotional strategies:

> I noticed that I felt negative emotions when I was learning another language through this activity (IER in-class activity). Before that, I didn't understand clearly why I feel these negative emotions, where they come from, and also I had avoided facing and thinking deeply about these, I just faked like positive or hide. However, it is possible I find a way to deal with these negative emotions if I try looking at it from a distance. It's still threatening and powerful now, but it will be non-threatening if I continue to try looking at it from a distance, and try to deal with it. (Participant 18, Portfolio)

Here, the student begins to see distancing and self-reflection as tools for managing emotional responses, instead of suppressing them, in language learning situations. This awareness was echoed by others who described the specific emotions they frequently encountered, such as anxiety and feelings of inferiority, especially during speaking tasks or evaluations. Another student provided a detailed account of how self-talk and positive affirmations helped her to manage anxiety in real time:

> I often have felt negative emotions in my language learning. The negative emotions are anxiety, sense of inferiority, and strain. When I talk with people in English, I don't have confidence in my English speaking skills. That's why I have felt anxiety. When I am in class and I am given discussion time to talk about some topic, I often have difficulty in expressing my ideas in English, and the other classmates always start to talk their opinions fluently in English. That's why I've felt inferior. Also, before making a presentation, I feel very nervous. I couldn't help worrying about the evaluation of my performance. Usually, I have regulated these emotions by saying to myself "it's ok" or "I can do it!". By doing that, my negative emotions are relieved and I can be calm. (Participant 2, Diary #7)

In the excerpt above, the participant describes the use of positive self-talk as a way to manage her speaking in discussions and presentations, which seems to reduce the emotional pressure of the language learning situation. Similarly, other students mentioned how deliberate focus on positive traits or prior successes could counteract negative feelings in the moment. For example, one participant wrote:

> I have controlled my emotions in learning languages by thinking of my positive things. When I had negative emotions or lost confidence in my language skills, I usually tried to find good or positive things about me. For example, my strength or good experience in using other languages. (Participant 11, Diary #7)

This form of selective attention redirecting focus toward strengths demonstrates how emotional regulation is linked with self-perception and self-efficacy, suggesting the importance of helping students visualise previous positive language learning experiences. Similarly, another form of regulation described by participants was the acceptance of uncomfortable emotions in an attempt to help them reengage with

learning tasks rather than continue avoiding them. For example, the excerpt below illustrates how facing discomfort directly, rather than avoiding it, can enable the learner to engage with academic work with renewed emotional clarity.

> I have been feeling very impatient and worried lately. This feeling is probably due to a lot of homework still left to do. Right now is the time of midterm exams. I have been ignoring this feeling for a long time, because in order to resolve this feeling, I have to face my homework. By accepting this feeling, I have become positive that I can face my classes and catch up on what I have missed so far. (Participant 14, Optional Diary)

A final recurring theme in emotion regulation in language learning refers to changing self-talk as a powerful and intentional strategy in order to reduce comparisons with others, as shown below:

> I have regulated my emotions in learning to not compare with others. When I don't get good results in learning, I always compare myself with others around me and lose confidence. So I have stopped comparing myself and changed my thinking. "Everyone is everyone. I am me!" "I have good skill! It's OK!" I continued to have confidence! (Participant 25, Diary #7)

The excerpt above shows how learners used language not only to communicate in the target language, but to regulate and reframe their inner dialogue, supporting emotional resilience in pressuring learning contexts. Taken together, these reflections reveal how students developed emotion regulation strategies conducive to immediate language learning situations. Whether through inner dialogue in forms of positive self-

talk or distancing, students gained greater awareness of how to navigate emotional responses during specific language tasks.

Emotion Regulation for Language Learning

In contrast to regulating emotions during immediate language tasks, students' reflections also provided examples of how emotion regulation helped them sustain their overall learning process. Three interrelated strategies similar to the ones described in the previous section emerged: reappraisal, facing and accepting emotions, and drawing on past experiences to build motivation. These strategies reflect students' evolving emotional awareness and agency in the broader context of language learning. For example, a number of students described learning to reframe difficult emotions as a way to stay motivated. By consciously shifting their perspective, they were able to engage more positively with language learning, even in moments of discomfort or self-doubt. The excerpt below illustrates this shift in thinking:

> Even if I have negative feelings during the discussion, I want to connect the contents of the discussion to my motivation for language learning. For example, when I discuss my experiences about emotion regulation, I come up with a lot of negative ideas. However, my group member had a positive opinion for emotion regulation. I was surprised about that, but I thought I have to be more positive and regulate myself more. I think I want to regulate my emotions in a more positive way in the future because I want to be more positive. For example, when I learn language, I think of many negative things like boring, difficult, less-confident… However, I want to regulate these negative emotions to positive thinkings. If I can regulate my negative emotions well, my motivation for language learning can be raised more. (Participant 3, Diary #7)

In this example, the student moves from a position of emotional struggle to one of intentional reappraisal, suggesting the importance of helping students to be aware of their thought patterns and how they can actively work on them to shape their motivation. Similarly, another student highlighted reframing frustration as an opportunity for growth:

> In language learning, I think it is important to manage my feelings when I have negative emotions such as frustration, sadness, and stress. This is because I learned in class that negative feelings lead to negative results. For example, if I feel frustrated with language use, I may hesitate to speak and lose confidence. However, I can't grow unless I overcome such negative situations and do trial and error. Therefore, I want to regulate myself to be in a good emotional state. If I have negative emotions in language learning, I try to remember successful experiences and motivate myself! In class, I discussed the way to cope with negative feelings with my classmates, so I want to keep all solutions in mind.
>
> Example: Doing exercise, watching favorite movies -- distraction
>
> Praising myself, talking to friends about feelings -- reappraisal
>
> Now I'm studying Korean and English, and sometimes I lose confidence when I can't express my opinion clearly. However, I want to use some solutions which I learned from this class's activities, and overcome negative emotional states. Emotion regulation is needed in any situation, such as working place, so this unit was valuable (Participant 9, Diary #7)

In this reflection, reappraisal is supported by concrete strategies and peer dialogue, showing the role of both individual and social elements in building emotional competence. Another participant also reflected on the long-term impact of this change of perspective:

> I couldn't continue studying languages with a positive mindset because I didn't care about my feelings and just felt obligated. But in this class, I understand my internal factors such as positive emotions and confidence are helpful to do my best for my goals and achieve them. Even if I can't have positive feelings and build my confidence, changing my perspective such as focusing on good aspects, not bad results and emotion regulation strategies which I learned have developed me as a language learner more. (Participant 16, Diary #11)

Another recurring theme was the importance of facing emotions honestly rather than avoiding or suppressing them. Several participants noted that before taking the course, they tended to ignore or dismiss their emotions during learning. Through the emotion regulation activities, they seemed to develop a more open and accepting relationship with their feelings.

> I noticed that I didn't know much about emotions having a huge impact on my language learning. Also, I discovered that I didn't try to deal with my emotions and I didn't try to face it before taking this course. So, when I give a presentation, I feel very nervous every time. When I say something in English, I'm worried if I make a mistake every time. In this way, the same situation continues and I couldn't improve myself before this class. To control my emotions, I have to face my emotions. And if I can understand, manage and regulate them, I can control them appropriately. I want to care about my emotions from now on!!! I was pessimistic, but I think I could become optimistic a little through this course. During the discussion, we talked about what emotion is, and how emotions are connected with language learning many times. I could think about it from a variety of perspectives. I have hesitated to challenge new things, but I could think

> about the things positively, so I want to try it without being afraid of making a mistake. (Participant 21, Diary #11)

This excerpt shows a clear emotional progression from avoidance to reflection and intention, suggesting that changes in emotion regulation begin with emotional awareness. Many learners also used past experiences as a motivational tool. By reflecting on both successes and challenges, they identified patterns in how they had previously regulated their emotions and used this new understanding to reframe future learning goals. For example, one of the participants described how conscious reflection enhanced their self-understanding and motivation:

> Through this course, I became a positive person. By reflecting on my previous experiences, including both positive and negative sides, I could realize how I felt, how I overcame, and what I did. I learned that it is important to know deeply about myself, because my previous experiences are connected to my motivation. Now I know how I overcame the difficult situations, so I'm not afraid of making mistakes anymore. Before taking this course, I was afraid of being criticized by others, but now I'm willing to take actions positively and try something new. Also, the activity "confidence building diary" was very valuable for me. I realized that the way of thinking affects my motivation to study. Consciously, I used positive words such as "can", "was able to", "happy", "glad" and so on, and then I got motivated by these words. Thinking positively is connected to positive results. Learning languages is always tough, difficult and takes time. However, it is important to change the way of thinking. For example, treating mistakes as a necessary step to moving forward, and feeling pressure help me to grow. (Participant 9, Diary #11)

In the excerpt above, it seems that reflection on past experiences served not only as a source of emotional clarity, but also as a foundation for developing future resilience. For example, the student articulates how the course encouraged metacognitive awareness of both emotions and language learning.

Emotion Regulation Beyond Language Learning

In this final subsection, learner reflections draw on their rationales for selecting portfolio classwork and a wide range of diary entries. These reflections focus not only on how learners extended their engagement with emotion regulation beyond the course, particularly in relation to their experiences of autonomy, awareness, and willingness to engage with emotions, but also how they consciously intended to integrate this understanding into current and future relationships and real-life contexts, including work, school, and family. The first four excerpts illustrate how an IER in-class awareness activity was relevant to participants' perceptions and understanding of their past experience with negative emotions. They also reveal how learning to take an interest in and accept a range of emotions was seen as beneficial for them in the future. This recognition led to a heightened awareness of the importance of using emotions as sources of information to support personal development and growth beyond the university and course setting. The first two student reflections, in particular, focus on an increasing self-awareness, the acceptance of negative emotions, and intentions for future actions aligned with their ideal selves as language learners and future professionals.

> Especially during language learning, everyone may feel negative emotions such as frustration, sadness, shame, and so on. Therefore, it is necessary to understand my own way to reduce stress and to change negative situations to make it more positive. I think I'm going to make mistakes and suffer from difficulty in the future, but I want to think about these negative things as necessary to lead

> to my own growth, instead of seeing negative situations negatively. From next Spring, I'm going to start working at a company and emotion regulation is really important while working, so this activity was helpful for me to prepare mentally. (Participant 9, Portfolio)

> Through this activity, I could try to understand my current situation about learning, school life, daily life and feelings. Then I could understand I often fake my own negative emotions as if I don't feel threatened even when I feel threatened. And also I thought the threat was bigger than it actually is. Because of these reasons, I think it is important to continue to conduct such activity on a regular basis in the future. This activity connects to my goals such as "become confident person", "become a woman who can keep trying", "become a great English speaker", and other goals because I can know what is lacking now and how to do my best by grasping. Additionally, I can keep trying and get confidence from it. (Participant 18, Portfolio)

Both learners in the first two reflections indicate an increasing sensitivity to the depth of their emotional lives, developed through their engagement with the course. Participant 9 demonstrates a forward-looking orientation, recognising the likelihood of experiencing negative emotions, especially in language learning. However, rather than succumbing to these emotions, they reflect on the importance of understanding and engaging with them with curiosity and interest, treating them as sources of information that can guide growth-oriented decisions and actions. This approach reflects an emerging willingness to view emotional experiences not as obstacles to be avoided, but as motivations for personal development. Participant 9 applies this perspective to their preparation for entering a new working environment.

Participant 18's reflection is characterised by a deepening self-awareness and a similarly forward-looking, constructive mindset. They describe how the IER activity

helped them better understand their emotional patterns, such as a tendency to mask negative feelings and overestimate threats. Importantly, this self-awareness is not framed as a personal deficit, but as an impetus for growth. They explicitly express a desire to continue engaging in such reflective practices regularly, noting that it helps them “know what is lacking now and how to do my best by grasping,” which they link to personal goals, such as becoming more confident, persistent, and proficient in English. This reflection demonstrates a growing sense of agency and optimism, highlighting a belief in the value of ongoing self-inquiry and a commitment to using IER strategies as tools for autonomously motivated growth, resilience, and self-determined identity.

While both learners show a clear awareness of how accepting emotional experiences can positively influence their well-being and development, Participant 18 explicitly connects this process to authenticity and openness when dealing with negative or conflicting emotions. Both reflections show a willingness to use emotional awareness as informational support for personal growth. This recognition of the value of IER strategies is particularly meaningful, as both learners express clear intentions to actively integrate this awareness into their evolving sense of self while pursuing personal goals and preparing for future life contexts in both professional and personal domains. The following two diary excerpts (Participants 16 and 12) continue this theme of IER strategies. These reflections further underscore the value of engaging with emotions with curiosity and interest, as well as the benefits of accepting and sharing emotions with others.

> For me, emotion regulation strategies were meaningful and I believe this skill will help me change my mind and reduce negative emotions. I had focused on the existence of emotions, but this lecture told me that thinking about what is causing this feeling and where it is coming from would be solutions. If I can find the

> reason why I feel so, it will be easy to regulate my emotions. (Participant 16, Diary #6)

> Actually, I have hidden my emotions today because I take care about others' reactions. So I pretend my feelings and attitude. But, my group members have different opinions. They (think) accept their own emotions, then these emotions will make use of this experience next time they said. I sympathized with this opinion, also I got a new way to think. I thought that it was important to adjust my emotions to the surrounding environment, but I realized that it was also important to accept my emotions and show them to others. In the past, it was told that I didn't like negative or positive emotions because she had different emotions at that time. But after taking this class, I tried to share all the happy and sad things with my close friends and family. As a result, I was able to feel my emotions honestly. I also found that sharing emotions creates new opinions and other emotions!! (Participant 12, Optional Diary)

Participant 16's reflection highlights how the course content fundamentally reconceptualised their approach to emotions. Moving beyond merely acknowledging and recognising emotions, they came to understand the value of actively exploring their origins ("thinking about what is causing this feeling and where it is coming from") as a pathway to both emotional insight and more effective regulation. This shift toward curious self-inquiry is seen as a valuable future skill, enabling them to "change my mind and reduce negative emotions."

Participant 12 reached a similar conclusion through group class discussions, which prompted a new understanding of how the social learning environment within the classroom shaped their approach to dealing with and expressing emotions. Initially, they describe a pattern of concealing emotions due to concern for others' reactions ("I pretend my feelings and attitude"). However, they explicitly credit their group members'

differing perspective, namely, that accepting emotions allows one to “make use of this experience next time”, as the catalyst for transformative insight (“I sympathized with this opinion, also I got a new way to think”). This example underscores the power of peer modelling and discussion within an open, respectful, and non-judgmental classroom environment in challenging pre-existing beliefs (e.g., that emotional adjustment to the environment is paramount). It also fostered a new understanding that emotional adaptation can coexist with the acceptance and authentic expression of emotions. As a result, Participant 12 made concrete efforts to share emotions more openly with close friends and family, leading to increased emotional honesty and an appreciation for the generative potential of emotional sharing, described enthusiastically as something that “creates new opinions and other emotions!!”

The final three reflections explicitly reference a variety of course topics and related activities that learners connect to future personal growth and emotional regulation beyond the classroom. These accounts further illustrate the link between course content, engagement in focused learning activities, and the development of self-awareness. As with earlier examples, they show how this growing awareness leads to broader perspectives and increased autonomous motivation.

> Also, self-regulation is also important, especially after getting into society and starting working at a certain company. Taking advantage of all classes in this semester, I would like to continue writing the confidence-building diary, reviewing experiences every 6 months to understand myself. These activities got me motivated and make me realize that what I have to do in order to achieve my future goals. (Participant 9, Diary #11)

Here, Participant 9 identifies a connection between self-regulation and functioning as a responsible citizen and future member of the workforce. Drawing on their learning experiences from the course, they reflect on their growing motivation and highlight the

specific activity of keeping a confidence-building diary, a tool used to document and reflect on positive daily learning experiences (see Shelton-Strong & Mynard, 2020). By making a forward-looking commitment to regular self-review ("reviewing experiences every 6 months"), they demonstrate an emerging capacity for self-regulation, driven by a deepening interest in personal growth and aligned with their future goals beyond university.

> When we learned about our mindsets, I realized the importance of a growth mindset. Basically, I tend to think in negative ways and limit my ability by myself. Then, I understood that positive emotions lead to our best performance, so now I try to unlock my potential by facing challenges and not escaping from them. (Participant 15, Diary #11)

Moreover, Participant 15 focuses on positive emotions and connects this to nurturing a growth mindset to overcome negative self-imposed limits on their potential. There is an explicit shift in perspective stemming from their new understanding of how cultivating positive emotions initiates a cycle of expanding possibilities. Participant 15 explicitly connects positive emotions to cultivating a growth mindset, recognising how negative self-perceptions had previously limited their potential. This new understanding motivates them to actively challenge self-imposed limitations by confronting difficulties rather than avoiding them, aiming to unlock their capacity for growth and optimal performance.

DISCUSSION

The learners' reflections in this study illustrate how emotion regulation, when thoughtfully integrated in the language learning curriculum, can serve as both a catalyst for learner engagement and a scaffold for broader personal development. Rather than viewing emotion regulation as a discrete set of skills or strategies, the

findings suggest that it functions more dynamically, as a situated, relational, and evolving practice that learners appropriate and personalise across time and context. This aligns with the notion of integrative emotion regulation (Benita, 2020), in which learners actively engage with their full range of emotional experiences as a means of understanding themselves and moving toward greater psychological coherence facilitated by basic psychological need supports and autonomous self-regulation (Curren & Park, 2024).

This dynamic process is illustrated in the final learner reflection (participant #15, in the previous section) where they begin to understand how actively nurturing positive emotions enables them to realise their full potential. This account resonates with both Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory and SDT's view of integrative emotion regulation (Curren & Park, 2024). The learner's insight that "positive emotions lead to our best performance, so now I try to unlock my potential by facing challenges and not escaping from them" exemplifies the broaden-and-build concept, with positive emotions expanding cognition and generating personal resources such as courage and resilience. Simultaneously, their self-analysis and deliberate efforts to challenge limiting beliefs and align emotional understanding with growth-oriented goals reflect the IER process of taking an interest in emotions and integrating emotional understanding with personal goals (optimal performance, growth), linking emotional awareness with autonomous motivation and psychological integration.

The data also indicate that learners' ability to regulate their emotions in specific difficult language learning moments (e.g., during discussions, presentations, and assessments) developed in tandem with more enduring shifts in mindset and motivation. Through self-talk, reappraisal, and distancing, students learned to navigate these more immediate challenges. At the same time, many came to view these emotional episodes not as obstacles, but as invitations to reflect on their values, needs, and aspirations, supporting Oxford's (2016) argument that emotion regulation in language learning is most meaningful when rooted in learners' own affective experiences, rather than imposed as a top-down set of strategies. Indeed, examined

through an IER lens, SDT posits that by learning to view negative emotions as informative rather than threatening, individuals can volitionally choose adaptive coping strategies and behaviours in which reflection and action are likely to promote learning, including seeking outside support (Sharabi & Roth, 2025). Sharabi and Roth's (2025) findings from two recent studies, one cross-sectional and the other longitudinal, further suggest that being attentive to and curious about negative emotions can facilitate learning even when learners face frustration in challenging emotional experiences, similar to those described in our examples. The learners' progression toward emotional agency noted in our examples suggests that fostering meta-affective awareness in terms of their ability to observe, take an interest in, be curious about, interpret, and work with their emotions should be a core objective in language education.

Moreover, the distinction between emotion regulation in, for, and beyond language learning enabled us to notice and appreciate more clearly the range of contexts in which students demonstrated a growing awareness of how and when they felt the need to regulate their emotions, as well as how they could use this understanding to cope with future challenging situations. The CLIL configuration of the EELL course seemed particularly conducive to this kind of integrated learning (cf. Clare et al., 2025), as it offered a space in which personal and linguistic development were not only compatible but mutually reinforcing. In other words, the course appears to have provided a space through which emotional growth could be explored. In future studies, it would be valuable to present instances of individual learners' trajectories, thereby shedding light on the developmental shift from emotion regulation in language learning to emotion regulation beyond it. To this end, longitudinal diary studies could offer important insights.

The reflections also underscore the importance of classroom environments that prioritise authenticity, safety, and community (Castro & Shelton-Strong, 2024). Learners frequently described the EELL classroom as a space where they could express themselves without fear of judgement and where they could examine their

emotional responses in collaboration with peers. The regular use of reflective writing and dialogic activities supported this process, encouraging learners to move beyond performance and into self-exploration. These findings echo Mercer and Gregersen's (2023) view that positive, psychologically safe learning environments are foundational for transformative emotional learning. Importantly, this also suggests that emotion regulation should not be reduced to individual coping but viewed as socially mediated, relational, and contextually situated.

Pedagogically, integrating emotional literacy into CLIL or language-focused curricula is not only feasible but highly impactful. The course design drawing on emotional literacy, integrative approaches to regulation, and social-emotional learning principles, can provide a flexible model for other educators seeking to engage learners in both emotional and linguistic development. Second, the experiences described in this study suggest that emotion regulation instruction is most effective when it is dialogic, experience-based, and student-led. Rather than positioning learners as recipients of emotional strategies, it is important to encourage them to be co-constructors of their own emotional understanding (Oxford, 2016).

Finally, the learners' reflections serve as a reminder that the emotional lives of students extend well beyond the classroom. Many participants explicitly linked their learning to future goals, employment contexts, and interpersonal relationships. This not only indicates the relevance of emotion regulation in education but also underscores its ethical imperative. By supporting learners to explore and work with their emotional experiences, and to make sense of them in relation to their goals, relationships, and future selves, language educators contribute not only to their academic and linguistic development, but also to their capacity to thrive as emotionally literate, self-aware individuals beyond institutional contexts.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we described how learners engage with emotion regulation in, for, and beyond language learning through a CLIL course. By adopting a classroom-based, reflective approach, we were able to foreground learners' voices and capture how their emotional awareness and regulation strategies evolved across different contexts. Through diary entries, portfolio reflections, and peer discussions, students developed a deeper understanding of their emotional responses and began to approach difficult emotions not as barriers, but as meaningful experiences that could support their learning and personal growth.

The findings suggest that emotion regulation plays an important role in supporting learner agency, motivation, and well-being. More than a set of strategies, it emerged as a practice of self-inquiry, self-exploration, and self-reflection, influenced and shaped by dialogue, reflection, and interpersonal connection. In this way, the course described in this article represents an example of how emotion regulation can be meaningfully integrated into language learning, aligning with broader frameworks of positive language education and social-emotional learning. It demonstrated that by cultivating emotional literacy, learners can engage more authentically with the language classroom and transfer these skills to wider areas of their lives.

While the study offers rich insights into learners' engagement with emotion regulation, it is important to acknowledge some limitations. This study was carried out within a single elective CLIL course at a private university in Japan, involving a relatively small and homogenous group of participants, the majority of whom were highly motivated, proficient students specialising in international communication, which may not reflect the realities of more diverse language learning environments. Furthermore, the study relied primarily on learners' self-reported reflections through diaries and portfolios that, although deeply personal and revealing, are shaped by the learners' perceptions and the classroom dynamic. These limitations, however, encourage future research to investigate how emotion regulation develops across

longer timeframes, in other cultural or institutional contexts, or in relation to other learner variables such as identity, autonomy and reflection.

Nevertheless, the learners' reflections highlight what is possible when emotion regulation is treated not as an ancillary concern but as integral to language education. Even within the limits of a single course, the emergence of emotional agency, reflective depth, and interpersonal sensitivity points to the potential of language classrooms as spaces for meaningful human flourishing. It is important to mention that this study does not offer a prescriptive model, but rather an invitation to reimagine language education as a site where emotional and linguistic growth unfold together, dialogically, relationally, and over time. The qualitative analysis reveals how this was achieved through students' collective engagement with course materials, opportunities to share experiences in group discussions, and moments of quiet reflection in diary writing. These practices fostered a deeper awareness of emotion regulation as an integrated aspect of identity, understood as an active choice, and expressed in their reflections, voices, and future aspirations. As such, the study affirms the value of creating pedagogical spaces that respect and support learners' emotional lives, not as peripheral to their academic and language goals, but as essential to achieving them.

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Authors' Contributions

Both authors participated in all stages of the project, including the study design, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript writing. They jointly drafted the manuscript and collaboratively interpreted the results. Both authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Ethics Approval & Consent to Participate

This study was approved by the participating University's Ethics Committee of Research; however, an approval number was not issued by the committee. Prior to data collection, participants provided informed consent through an online form and were given a Plain Language Statement in both English and Japanese, in accordance with the university's guidelines.

Declaration of GenAI and AI-Assisted Technologies

In the preparation of this work, Microsoft Copilot was used to improve readability and grammar in limited sections of the manuscript. The tool was used minimally and did not contribute to the generation of content or ideas, and its use was guided by institutional guidance, as it is a licensed tool recommended by the first author's institutional affiliation. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed, verified the accuracy, originality, and appropriateness of any GenAI-assisted outputs, and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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APPENDIX

Prompts for the Reflective Diaries and Instructions for the Portfolio

Diary 6: Reflections on a meaningful course topic

- For this week's diary, it's your turn to choose what you'd like to write about! We are halfway through the course. Think back over the last weeks and choose something from the course

that you found interesting and want to explore further. For example, something that was not clear to you or that was especially meaningful to you.

Diary 7: Reflections on emotions regulation

- We have had many discussions about emotion regulation and emotional labour, and how these may affect our learning and future professional lives. For this week's diary entry, use your notes from our recent discussions to reflect on the following points: (a) how you have regulated your emotions in your learning and (b) how you plan to regulate your emotions in the future.

Optional diary: Reflections on integrative emotion regulation

- Let's write about your experience today of taking an open and curious approach to looking at your emotions and thinking about what you are feeling, and why. By being attentive, accepting and interested in your emotions, how different was it for you instead of trying to change them or hide them?

Diary 11: Final retrospective reflection on course experience

- What were your expectations at the beginning of the course and the learning progress you hoped to make?
- How do you feel about what you have accomplished on the course?
- What have you learned or improved the most?
- What do you want to focus on next? Why?
- What did you discover about yourself while taking this course?
- How have you changed and developed as a language learner and as a person?
- What do you value most from the experience of being on this course and exploring emotions in language learning?

Portfolio Instructions

The portfolio is related to your in-class work. Please create a portfolio that showcases what you have learned throughout the semester in this course. You may use a binder for this.

Select five activities or areas that represent:

- your interests
- your best work
- your growth and progress

Include relevant coursework accompanied by a rationale explaining your reasons for selecting each piece. Your portfolio should contain examples of work completed in class, such as worksheets, written assignments, and, where relevant, your notes.