

The English Speaking Lounge at Osaka Jogakuin College

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大阪女学院大学・短期大学のイングリッシュ・スピーキング・ラウンジ

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Abstract

The speaking lounge at OJC is an attempt to provide an English speaking environment where students who wish to speak English for fun can go. It is hoped that the chance to speak English in a non academic atmosphere will give students the motivation and practice to become more confident speakers of English. This article reports on what has been achieved so far, what problems there are, and makes some recommendations for the future of the English Speaking Lounge (ESL). This report refers to the initial trial period in Autumn 2007.

Key words : English village, speaking lounge, facilitator, total English-speaking environment

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抄 録

大阪女学院大学・短期大学におけるスピーキング・ラウンジ（談話室）は、英語を話す一環境を提供する試みであり、楽しく英語を話したいと思う学生が集う場である。勉学にとらわれない環境で英語を話す機会を得ることで、学生がもっと自信を持って英語を話す動機が高まり、またそのための練習活動にもなる。この論文（研究ノート）はこれまでのESL実施で何を果たしたか、どのような課題があるか、そして今後の活動に何が望まれるかを報告する。このレポートは2007年秋の試験的实施期間にかかわるのである。

キーワード：英語村、スピーキング・ラウンジ（談話室）、会話促進者 英語スピーキングのトータル環境

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Creating a Total English-Speaking Environment

“English Villages” in Asia

In recent years in Asian countries, notably Korea and Taiwan, various projects have been introduced to create “authentic” English speaking environments, in which it is hoped that students will be better able to use their English skills. Such “English Villages” provide mock-ups of banks, stations, airplanes and other buildings where “teachers” are trained to play the roles of bank clerks, flight attendants and even doctors.

Krashen, (2006), has criticized these English Villages for their high cost. In addition Krashen questions the authenticity of the programs and whether these programs can improve the quality of English spoken by the students who participate. As the cost of running these programs is so high, not surprisingly, there are reports that some of them are now losing money (Kim, 2008).

The e-cube (English Village) at Kinki University

An ambitious project called “E-cube” at Kinki University’s Nagase (Higashi Osaka) campus has recently been initiated. “E-cube,” which stands for “English, enjoyment and education” is also called an “English Village.” It is a purpose-built center in which students can participate in a wide variety of activities. It is open from Monday to Friday and also has a holiday schedule. Special features are a café featuring a fast food menu, free chat with native speakers and special events, such as salsa dancing classes, quizzes and informative cultural talks. In addition there is help for students ranging from pronunciation to help with homework (E3 Guide).

The e-cube is a building set apart from the rest of the facilities on the campus. In order to enter, students have to have a “passport” which they get by completing an application form completely in English. This form is based on an application form for an American passport. Students can either download it from the e-cube homepage or get one from their regular class teacher. The passport also includes sets of questions to help students start speaking.

The key point about the e-cube is that only English can be spoken there from the moment you step in the door. No Japanese is written anywhere in building. All signs and reading materials are in English. The staff at e-cube speak only English.

The English Speaking Lounge (ESL) at Osaka Jogakuin

Historically Osaka Jogakuin has provided an excellent English environment for students. However it is no longer unique in this respect. Other universities have also adopted an “All in English” approach in some of their facilities and are attracting more and more students. For example the e-cube at Kinki University has the potential to draw a lot of English majors there.

The ESL at Osaka Jogakuin College is an attempt to provide an English-speaking environment for our students. Unlike the English-Speaking environments mentioned above, and considering that OJC has fewer students, the ESL is a small-scale project.

Goal

The goal of the ESL is neither to teach English, as is the case in the English Villages in Korea and Taiwan, nor to engage in tasks such as giving students pronunciation coaching or helping them with their homework as is offered by the e-cube. In fact Osaka Jogakuin College already has a Self Access Student Study Center (SASSC) where students can go for help or advice in their studies, for example, students can consult and get help with their writing class assignments. Unlike the SASSC however, the idea of the ESL is to provide a place where students can go to enjoy speaking English as they like in a relaxed, non-academic atmosphere. While having a SASSC style “Discussion Help” teacher may not be successful in motivating students to use spoken English, an English-only environment where students can use English in an enjoyable way not directly connected with their studies may be. Chatting with native speakers (not teachers) and doing other activities such as watching and talking about movies, reading English language magazines or playing games in English will give students enjoyment and motivation to use English.

Staffing and Administration of the ESL

As the purpose of the ESL is for students to be able to enjoy chatting with native speakers, it was decided to look for part-time staff whose native language is English and who were not English Teaching professionals. The staff of the ESL can come from any country in the world as long as they are native speakers. This policy was decided to allow students the possibility of experiencing a variety of accents and expressions.

The reason for hiring people who are not qualified English teachers was to avoid situations where the part-time staff may be asked for advice about Discussion Projects, or other class work. This would be unacceptable because it negates the stated purpose of the ESL.

Initially the ESL was staffed on two evenings a week by a student from the Osaka University of Foreign Languages and overseen by an OJC faculty member whose job is to plan schedules, help when special sessions of the ESL are conducted, interview prospective staff and liaise with the part-timers conducting the sessions.

Initial Trial Period of the ESL

In keeping with the goal outlined above the initial schedule suggested below for the ESL was ambitious. Sessions were scheduled from 6:15 – 8:15 p.m. twice a week.

(see table 1)

However, due to various problems, (see below), only a small portion of the schedule above was possible. The ESL opened later than planned for a trial period from the first week of December. The schedule consisted of general conversation and there was a Christmas carol singing event during the last week of term.

Attendance during the Trial Period

The ESL was attended every night it was open. On the first night only one student came but on other nights there were three or four students. The average period of time a student stayed was about 45 minutes. The shortest visit was 20 minutes and the longest visit was one hour and 15 minutes. On the night of the special event, Christmas carol singing, more than 6 students were present. The main need of those who attended was to chat in English, though, as can be seen, special events can draw more students.

Main problems encountered

Staffing Problems.

Finding staff during the trial session was the biggest and probably the most serious problem encountered. To be true to the goal of the ESL, we did not seek qualified English teachers, but native speakers without specific teaching qualifications to staff the ESL. It was very difficult to find such people.

The staffing problem was also exacerbated because, due to recent restructuring of committees at OJC, it became unclear who was in charge of advertising for the ESL staff. This had previously been an administrative job taken care of by the management staff though now it appears to have been taken over by a committee member of the Student Support Committee. However nobody is certain whose jurisdiction the ESL really falls under.

Finally, as suitable staff are so difficult to find, the opening hours and days originally proposed had to be reduced to suit the availability of ESL facilitators.

Location and “presence” of the ESL

At present the ESL is held in the Wilmina Café in an area opposite the SASSC. While quiet and reasonably isolated from the rest of the school, the Wilmina Café is not the perfect location. It is not sufficiently isolated from the rest of the college to create the atmosphere of an intimate and separate, non-Japanese environment. People regularly enter and leave SASSC speaking Japanese and students and teachers regularly pass by the ESL to the offices in the adjacent building. Secondly it is too large to create the right kind of atmosphere. As a result, it cannot be “controlled” sufficiently to give the impression of an “English Language”

environment. In addition it can be very cold in winter, making it unsuitable for the purpose of relaxing while speaking English at that time of the year. Also the Wilmina Café has poor acoustics. There is a lot of echo which can be distracting if other groups are using the facility at the same time. Finally the ESL needs to have a bigger “presence.” This means appropriate advertising to raise awareness that it exists.

Future Directions and Recommendations

Staffing

Finding ESL facilitators is a major problem which needs to be overcome. First of all it needs to be established exactly which committees or persons are responsible for advertising for staff for the ESL and what procedure is to be followed. In addition advertisements need to be placed in appropriate places *in a timely fashion*. As the requirement is not for highly trained teachers it would be appropriate for advertisements to be placed in places where such people might look for jobs. These might include the classified ads sections of local magazines such as “Kansai Time Out” or internet-based locations such as “Ohayo Sensei” or “Dave’s ESL Café” where people looking for part time work might check. One rule of OJC is that ESL “facilitators” must be female. This, of course, reduces the chance of finding staff. However, working within this rule, it should be possible to find suitable staff if the procedures above are followed. Finding appropriate staff for the ESL should be a priority for whichever persons or committees are responsible. Moreover all possible assistance should be given to the people responsible for this part of the ESL.

Activities

From the admittedly short time the ESL has been in operation it appears that students want to attend the ESL firstly in order to be able to have general conversation with a native speaker of English, and secondly to attend special events. In view of this, it seems that the original version of the schedule was overly ambitious and unnecessary. Future schedules should mostly focus on general conversation with occasional “special events” scheduled perhaps for one session a month.

Facilities

The present location of the ESL is not entirely satisfactory for reasons already mentioned. In the short term, a more isolated room is needed. This should be a room which is always designated as the ESL room. It could be a classroom. If so it should not be scheduled for classes after 6:00 p.m. on any day to allow the ESL maximum flexibility of scheduling. It should be easy for students to find. Everything in the room should be written only in English.

Signs should be written in English all over the college directing students to the room and specifying the times and days the ESL is held. The room should be decorated with posters only in English. It should have Internet and video facilities. The computers should have English language operating systems. For this reason an OS such as Windows Vista Ultimate, which allows multiple languages or Apple's OS X, which can be easily set up to be only in English. All signs and writing in the room should be in English. The room should have a selection of popular magazines and newspapers written in English so that students can visit and quietly read if that is what they want to do. There should be video materials available in English for students to watch. The room, or available space, should be comfortable and welcoming. In the long term, a specially designed space would be appropriate for the ESL

Funds

At present the ESL has received funding due to grants received by OJC. A budget is available to conduct ESL activities until the end of the 2008 school year but it is important that the ESL becomes established as a viable entity during the rest of this year and that money is procured in time for the next academic year.

Advertising

This includes two important areas. The first is advertising for suitable ESL facilitators as mentioned above. The second, and equally crucial point is that the ESL needs to be promoted to OJC students. It appears that not all students are aware that the ESL exists. While some second year students have attended, it appears that some third and fourth year students had not been informed that the ESL existed. In addition, the ESL was not attended well by first year students during its trial period.

It is important that the ESL is advertised clearly to all students at OJC and that they are aware of what it is, why it exists and what they can do if they attend. While flyers are being placed in students' mailboxes, it would also be appropriate to advertise the presence of the ESL to students on the Wilmina homepage. The option of transferring appropriate ESL advertising data to students' cell phones should also be considered.

Conclusion

An English Speaking Lounge (ESL) can provide a "total" English language speaking environment at OJC where students can engage in English conversation and other activities conducted in English in a natural, non academic fashion. Such an opportunity to engage in non academic English speaking activities can have the effect of improving students' motivation to communicate orally in English and thereby improving their communicative

competence especially in the areas of speaking and listening. An ESL has been instituted at OJC. It has enjoyed a degree of success but it could be more successful if certain recommendations involving staffing, activities, facilities, funding and advertising are followed. Providing an excellent English language learning experience to all students is one of the goals of OJC. Facilities such the ESL are an important part of that experience.

Table 1**Suggested Schedule for English Speaking Lounge (ESL) 2007-2008**

Session	
11/26	General Conversation using topic talk cards and/or students' own topics
11/27	Games Night – Games in English/English games.
11/28	General Conversation using topic talk cards and/or students' own topics
11/30	Movie night – show a short/full length movie. Talk about it, or follow with general conversation
12/3	Short Informal Talk in English (15 minutes) by guest speaker (could be a student/ex student etc.) followed by general conversation
12/4	General Conversation using topic talk cards and/or students' own topics
12/5	Quiz Night – students make a quiz (music, movies etc) in teams and give it to other teams (or participate in a ready made quiz)
12/7	General Conversation using topic talk cards and/or students' own topics
12/10	General Conversation using topic talk cards and/or students' own topics
12/11	Movie night – show a short/full length movie. Talk about it, or follow with general conversation
12/12	General Conversation using topic talk cards and/or students' own topics
12/17	General Conversation using topic talk cards and/or students' own topics
12/18	General Conversation using topic talk cards and/or students' own topics
12/19	General Conversation using topic talk cards and/or students' own topics
12/21	Christmas party. Songs & carols Games
WINTER VACATION	
1/15	General Conversation using topic talk cards and/or students' own topics
1/16	Demonstration class – students learn & explain how to do things in English
1/18	General Conversation using topic talk cards and/or students' own topics

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