

# 徳島大学「イングリッシュ・サポート・ルーム」：大学生の授業時間以外の英語学習のモチベーションを高める対策について

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## 1. Abstract

This presentation is about the the ‘English Support Room’(ESR), an English learning facility established by Tokushima University’s Centre for General Education’ in 2008. This presentation will explain the philosophy behind this unique English learning facility and describe strategies used to motivate students to study English outside their regular classes. Points addressed will be how to create a learning environment in which students with already functional English skills can improve these and students who have problems in coping up with acquiring the necessary level of English demanded by Tokushima University are led to losing their fears of the seemingly unlearnable ‘language English’. The presentation will also describe the process of planning and executing ‘Special English Learning Programs’ and the results of these programs. Finally this presentation will give an outlook on future programs for university staff held at the ‘ESR’ in order to implement the ‘English Support Room’ not only as a place of studying and supporting students, but also as a support of Tokushima University’s English teaching staff.

## 2. English Support Room – Learning Philosophy

The ‘ESR’ is based on an approach, which is based on students learning English in a ‘natural way’, by training their speaking and listening skills through active usage. The most efficient tool for doing so is the so called ‘English Only’ policy: Visitors and users have to speak only English in the ‘ESR’. This policy serves not only to give users the chance to actively use their English, but also to help students on a weaker English level to work on their listening skills.

The idea behind this strategy is analogue to the language acquisition of small children: Before uttering his first understandable sentence a child spends time with listening to his environment. This also counts for newcomers to the ‘ESR’ who spend their first few visits usually silently, reading the books, comics and magazines which are provided in the ‘ESR’ before they start communicating with other users.

Implementing the ‘English Only’ policy has shown itself as astonishingly easy as users usually take extreme care of not using Japanese.

## 3. Extra-Curricular English Learning Programs

While the consequent use of English in the ‘ESR’ results in obvious improvement of the users, two problems have become obvious: (1) Speaking a lot of English does not necessarily mean that students acquire a ‘feeling’ for the English language, something which is important to reach a ‘native’ or ‘near native’ English level. (2) Although weaker students show improvement in their English skills, those students with a better grasp of English usually stay on the same level or in a worst case scenario, even lose some of their English skills.

In order to avoid the ‘ESR’ turning into an ‘English Conversation Room’ and to help all students to improve their skills in other fields like writing, reading and ‘English communication strategies’ the ‘ESR’ offers supporting ‘mini courses’. Here the idea was to offer students interesting programs which are not found in the syllabus of regular university courses. The ‘ESR’ offers since September 2011 four hours of ‘Daily Just Talk’. This is a program where students have the chance to practice their English with a native speaking teacher by talking about any subject they

want to. In order to expose students to a variety of English, every day several teachers from different English speaking countries are in charge of these 'Daily Just Talk Sessions'. As a side result, some English teachers of Tokushima University have started to send their students as a homework to participate in these 'Just Talk Sessions'. Another of these extra curricular programs, which has been established after a short and successful trial during summer semester, is 'Creative Writing', a program consisting of thirteen units, where students can write their own short stories which will be published after the end of the program. Further courses of the 'ESR' are programs in 'Pronunciation', 'Polite English Communication Strategies', 'Reading Understanding', 'Writing Official Letters' and 'Debating Courses'

These extra programs were not only initiated by the teacher in charge of the 'ESR' feeling the need for improvement in these fields, but were also founded on requests from students and in consultation with an English teacher from another faculty of Tokushima University. Here a rather astonishing fact was that in spite of the assessment of several English teaching colleagues that 'students do not like writing in English' the idea for the 'Writing Official Letters' program was based on several requests from students. Another important ingredient for an efficient and relaxed learning atmosphere in the 'ESR' is peer teaching.

This willingness of students to teach each other has also become an important trademark of the 'ESR': In the 'ESR' there is no *kouhai/senpai* system, all users come with the same goal of learning English and there is no rivalry among users. Newcomers are welcome and introduced to the 'ESR's' facilities by regular visitors or the 'ESR' student staff, who take care that shy newcomers feel comfortable. All this leads to a very relaxed and efficient learning atmosphere without any pressure, which shows its positive results in the daily number of visitors of the 'ESR'.

In the winter semester 2012, the ESR's extra programs were further expanded by offering English learning support for faculty teachers too.

#### **4. A Future Outlook On Further English Learning Programs**

In order to make the 'ESR' even more efficient, its future role should also be to support Tokushima University's English teaching staff in their work. Here it is of great importance to establish a stronger working relationship between the teacher in charge of the 'ESR' and Tokushima University's English teaching staff. With the establishing of the extra curricular programs mentioned above and the fact that these courses are being promoted among students by their teachers an important first step has been taken. Also, that some teachers send their students as a homework to the 'ESR' shows that teachers start to use the 'ESR' in their classes. It is now hoped, that with such a stronger cooperation teaching staff will also suggest future programs to be held at the 'ESR' in order to further students' English skills.