

Supporting Student-run Workshops in a Self-Access Learning Centre

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Abstract

In order to maximise learning opportunities for students, SALCs often encourage students not only to use services and facilities to develop their autonomous learning skills and improve their foreign language proficiency, but also to get involved in the running of the centre. This paper describes the evolution of the student workshop program at English Café at Otemon (E-CO), Otemon Gakuin University's self-access learning centre (SALC). These workshops allow students to develop presentation and teaching skills, and provide them with opportunities to share their cultures and experiences. In addition, the students who deliver these workshops often act as near peer role models (Murphey, 1998), inspiring others to study or to get more involved in E-CO activities and pursue language learning activities.

Keywords: self-access language learning, community of practice, intercultural learning

Introduction

Self-access learning centres (SALCs) in Japan tend to have a strong focus on social and peer learning (Thornton, Taylor, Tweed, & Yamashita, 2021). Promoting student involvement in and a sense of ownership over a SALC can help build a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) within a SALC. This in turn creates a friendly, supportive atmosphere that makes student users want to come more often, and helps them sustain motivation for learning. One way to promote this student involvement is through a student staff system. The SALC at Otemon Gakuin University, English Café at Otemon (E-CO), has had an active group of student volunteers since its inception in 2013, and conversation facilitators since 2016 (Thornton, 2023). Datwani-Choy (2016) has shown that having active student staff attracts more users to a SALC, and that has certainly been the experience at E-CO.

Contributing to a SALC by become a member of staff can have many benefits for the staff themselves, as well as the wider SALC community. Previous research into staff experiences has shown that by

becoming staff, students gain a sense of belonging (Acuña González, Avila Pardo, & Holmes Lewendon, 2015), and can increase their own motivation to learn and contribute to the community (Heigham, 2011). They can also develop autonomy, becoming more proactive and engaged in the community (Kanduboda, 2020, Watkins, 2021, Yamaguchi, 2011), and develop transferable skills which will make them more employable post-graduation (Kanduboda, 2020).

However, not all student users are willing or able to devote the amount of time necessary to become regular volunteers, which requires several hours of commitment each week. One way to involve more students, on a more limited basis, is for students to run one-off workshops on topics in which they are interested, or have some specific skill or knowledge.

While E-CO has hosted student-run workshops since its very first year, in recent years this has developed into a more structured programme. This paper will describe the aims of the programme and how it has evolved since the early days. It details the current structure and gives examples of recent workshop content. It then highlights some of the benefits of the programme, through the findings of a small survey with some of the student presenters.

Aims of the Workshop Programme

There were several reasons to include student-run workshops at E-CO. Firstly, in terms of student development, they give students chances to develop presentation, teaching and communication skills, outside the classroom. The programme also encourages students who may not be interested in a full-time staff position at E-CO to get involved on a more limited basis. This kind of participation can also increase their sense of ownership of E-CO and help them feel like more central members of the community. In turn this can increase their motivation to learn and contribute further. These workshops encourage peer learning, in line with the university's aim to promote 学び合い、教え合い [teaching each other, learning together]. They also provide E-CO users with role-models, as students who take part in the workshops can be impressed and inspired by the facilitators. Being close in age and experience to those who attend the sessions, these near-peer role models can have a powerful influence (Murphey, 1998). In addition, many workshops, especially those run by international students, can provide a more multilingual focus, offering a counterbalance to the English dominance of most of E-CO services. They also help these international students to feel that their cultures are appreciated and more visible on campus.

Evolution of the Workshop Program

Student workshops have taken place at E-CO since the early years of its operation, but, in those years, they tended to be arranged in a rather ad-hoc fashion, when students passionate about sharing their knowledge and experience expressed an interest in running their own sessions. These workshops can generally be assigned to one of the following categories:

- 1) Learning Workshops—Otemon students share their experiences learning English
- 2) Culture Workshops—overseas students introduce aspects of their home cultures, or Otemon students share their experiences overseas

All students who expressed an interest were asked to write a simple workshop proposal and met with the E-CO program director before their workshops. If students desired, rehearsals also took place. All workshops were conducted on a voluntary basis.

The first student workshop was conducted in January 2014, at the end of E-CO's first year, by an international student from China who wanted to share his knowledge of online language learning apps with other E-CO users. Workshop topics that followed in those early years included: Learn about Cantonese Culture and Language, Effective Vocabulary Learning, and 留学経験なしで TOEIC 800 点をとる勉強法 [How to get 800 on TOEIC without studying abroad] (see Figure 1). These were all run by home or international students studying full-time at Otemon, and were conducted in a combination of English and Japanese.



Figure 1: Two students giving a TOEIC workshop in 2017

Exchange student workshops

Between Spring 2017 and 2019, regular Indian culture workshops were run by the visiting Indian exchange students, who were often educated to a high level in Indian music and dance cultures. Their workshops included hands-on traditional dance and musical demonstrations and were attended not only by E-CO users but also students studying Indian language and culture as part of their seminar classes (see Figure 2 for an example of a poster of these workshops, and Figure 3 for photos from the workshops).

These were followed by workshops by other exchange students from Germany (Figure 4), Finland, the USA, the UK, and Australia. The workshop programme was paused with the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, but was able to be restarted, in its current form, in 2021.



Figure 2: A poster to promote Indian culture workshops



Figure 3: Students and staff practicing dances and drumming in Indian workshops



Figure 4: Students who joined the Germany workshop in 2019

Structure of the Current Student Workshop Programme

Since 2021, moves have been made to systematize the student workshop programme. Workshops generally last for 45 minutes and are paid under the university's Student Job (SJ) system. Reservations are not required, and students can choose to conduct their workshops in English or Japanese. All workshop facilitators follow the same steps to prepare and conduct their workshops:

- 1) Proposal & initial meeting
- 2) Promotion
- 3) Rehearsal
- 4) Workshop
- 5) Reflection

The following section details these steps.

Step 1: Proposal

Students fill in a simple proposal form with a title and short description of their workshop. They then meet with the E-CO Program Director to flesh out these initial ideas and get advice on how to present the information in an interactive and engaging way. Only then do they start to make the slideshow and lesson plan for their workshop.

Step 2: Promotion

Students are given the option of designing their own poster for the session. If they choose to do so, E-

CO staff give feedback on their poster content until it is of publication standard, and then it is shared through E-CO's usual promotion channels—social media accounts, and university services such as the digital signage boards on campus and Campus Square announcements. Students are also asked to do their own promotion for their workshop by informing friends and using their own social media accounts. Through this step, students can learn how to create engaging posters with clear information. Figure 5 shows examples of posters from student workshops in 2022 and 2023.

Step 3: Rehearsal

Once students have put together a draft of their slides, they conduct a rehearsal with the E-CO Program Director. This can take the form of just going through the slides together, or a complete rehearsal using the display screen and speaking as if there were participants in the room. The E-CO Program Director then gives some feedback and asks questions to encourage student reflection on the current content. At this stage, issues regularly discussed include time management, activity structure, and slide design. Students then revise their content and resubmit their slides to the E-CO Program Director.

Step 4: Workshop

On the day of the workshop, student presenters are responsible for setting up the room and announcing the workshop, then conducting it within the advertised time. These are designed to be small group sessions so the atmosphere is usually friendly and informal, helping to calm the nerves of the student presenters. E-CO staff are available to check attendance and give technical support if necessary.

Step 5: Reflection

After the workshop, students do a short oral reflection with the E-CO Program Director. If they have chosen to give the workshop more than once, for example on another campus, or a similar session in the future, they can identify areas for improvement at this stage. This step helps to consolidate what students have learned from the experience.



안녕하세요!
K-class
韓国の留学生インヘンとヒョビンが紹介します!
韓国の文化やネット用語について一緒に学びましょう。
予約不要 (先着順・定員20名)
日時: 11/28 (月) 16:00~16:45 (45分)
場所: 総持寺 E-CO (A131)

ECO
Ecole de Commerce



短期留学・本学のインターンシッププログラムを経験した2名の学生が、現地で感じたこと、得られた経験などお話しします。これから留学や海外インターンシップに参加したい人必見!

留学・海外インターンシップ^o体験記

IN THE PHILIPPINES & MALAYSIA

日時: 7月4日 (火) 14時~14時45分
場所: E-CO (総持寺キャンパスA131)
定員: 先着順20名 申込不要

Kota FUKUHARA (国際教養学部5年生)
フィリピンのセブ島で留学しました!

Saki TANIYAMA (国際教養学部5年生)
「海外プロジェクト実践」プログラムでマレーシアに短期出張。日本人学生のグループを導きながらインターンシップをしました。

お問い合わせ先: E-CO
TEL:090-3264-4048 (対応時間: 平日9:30~17:15)
e-MAIL: e.co.atemon@gmail.com



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Workshop
モンゴルのことを学ぼう!
06.06.2023
02:00~02:45 PM
Sojiji Campus A131



ECO
INDONESIA GO!
インドネシアゴー!

2023年6月13日

インドネシアのことを知りましょう!
総持寺A131教室 (E-CO)
14:00~15:00 予約不要



Figure 5: Posters for student-run workshops

ShabeChina (しゃべっチャイナ)

The above format is now in place for one-time workshops. E-CO also has a regular monthly session, ShabeChina, (run by students with a Chinese background who want to share this part of their culture with their peers). Figure 6 shows a student-made poster for their workshop. It has run since Spring 2022, led by the same students, and has become a regular E-CO event. For their first sessions, these students also got teacher feedback on their content before the actual workshop, but as they have grown in skills and confidence, and their sessions follow a pre-arranged structure, rehearsal time with teacher feedback and advice is now only given when students request it.

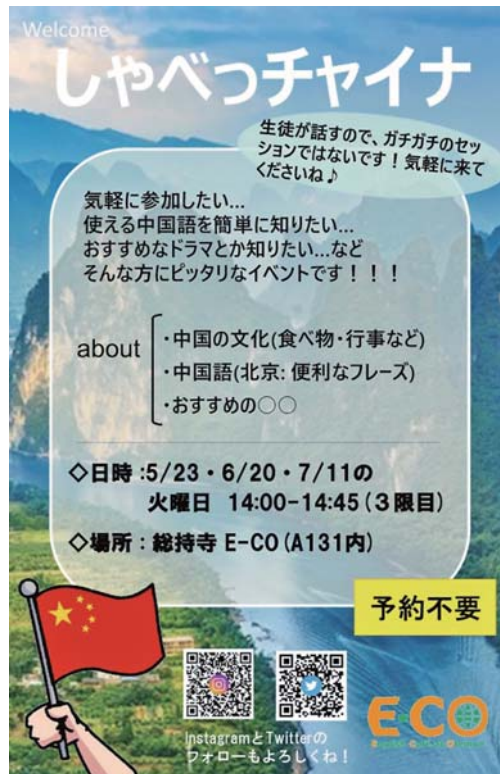


Figure 6: Poster promoting the ShabeChina session

Peer Learning Circle

In addition to culture or experience-based workshops, in 2022 E-CO also had a student-run peer learning circle, called E-CO Learning 座談会 (Figure 7). This was run by an E-CO student staff member based on Ai campus. His idea was to encourage the habit of language study by developing a support group to help students keep motivation and share their study ideas and experiences. This session ran between June and December 2022. It attracted mainly psychology-major students who were studying for graduate school exams and needed to practice English reading skills. The students met once a week in E-CO, but also used a habit formation app called *みんなちやれ* (Minchalle) to sustain motivation over the summer break. Overall, a core group of 5 students joined this session from Spring to Fall in 2022, with several others joining occasionally.



Figure 7: Poster for the peer learning circle

Student Voices—Feedback from Presenters

In May 2023, a short survey was conducted to find out more about the experiences of the student presenters. 4 presenters gave their opinions about hosting a workshop. Questions included the reason for wanting to do the workshop, their preparation and rehearsal process, their feeling about the actual workshop, skills they have gained and advice they would give to others interested in giving workshops. The responses cited below are given in the language originally used by the respondent, with translations added by the author where necessary.

The responses showed that students with international roots really appreciated the opportunity to share their culture:

E-CO を通して国際交流して、自分たちの文化や言葉を伝えたいからです。[Through E-CO I want to experience cultural exchange and share our culture and language]

文化を広めたい [I want to spread our culture]

The most commonly cited skills gained were presentation skills, mentioned by all students.

The responses also revealed a social benefit to the workshops. One student was inspired to lead their own workshop after seeing other students do one: “When I saw *しゃべっチャイナ*, I thought it will be interesting to do a workshop of UK”, and another commented how they were happy to see how people make friends through their regular workshops: みんなで笑顔で楽しそうにワークショップに参加し、新しい友達や新しい知識をつけてもらうことです。[Everyone is smiling and seems happy to take part and they can make new friends and get knowledge].

The rehearsal time was appreciated by the presenters, two of whom commented that it helped to check

the time management of their session : 実際かかる時間やワークショップの進み方が、当日問題なくスムーズに進むことに繋がりました。[It helped the workshop run smoothly on the day as we were able to check the flow and how long it took]. The importance of the rehearsal and other preparation time was also mentioned in the advice to other workshop facilitators : リハーサルはとても大事!! 内容に関しては、アクティビティを入れることでもっと楽しくなります。[Rehearsal is really important! Concerning the content, it's more fun if you include some activities], along with the importance of time management and the importance of being well prepared. Overall, the survey responses revealed that the students found giving the workshops to be an overwhelmingly positive experience.

Conclusion

Student staff and facilitators will always have a core role in sustaining E-CO's learning community. Potential E-CO users may not only be interested in English and those cultures closely associated with English, but also other languages and cultures. Having workshop facilitators is an effective way to encourage more students to contribute to E-CO while at the same time providing a more international and multilingual programme to Otemon students. Each semester Otemon welcomes a diverse group of students to study at the university, so E-CO hopes to help these students share their experiences and contribute to the wider Otemon community through the workshop programme. We hope to continue to be able to offer a wide variety of student workshops, and to support the presenters to improve their own skills, in the coming semesters.

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