

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

The dawn of the third millennium, which has seen the surge of information and communications technology has brought about significant changes in every professional environment including the field of education. Today with virtual schooling that incorporates various technologies like e-mail, on-line discussion and virtual tutorials, education has become less physically binding and more individuals can gain access to education. This is in line with the current global philosophy of the liberalization of education for the masses.

There is no denying that we are living in a world that is both daunting and exciting for which many people are ill prepared. Under such circumstances knowledge gained yesterday is no longer sufficient to equip a person for a lifetime. Hence, conventional learning organizations like schools need "to learn at least as quickly as the prevailing rate of change, otherwise they will forever be playing catch-up" (O'Sullivan, 1997, p. 217).

According to Nixon (1995) there is wide agreement in training and management literature that in order to survive and prosper in such a scenario both individuals and learning organizations must have an attitude of welcoming change and one which is constantly searching for improvement. One has to realize that all changes cannot be ignored because "once a new technology rolls over you, if you're not part of the

steamroller, you're part of the road" (Brand, 1987, p. 9). In such a situation it is the trainers who can play an important part in helping both individuals and learning organizations to adjust to new possibilities. Therefore, educators all around the globe emphasize that in today's world of accelerating growth and change, "the ultimate goal of education should be life-long learning if we are to avoid the catastrophe of human obsolescence" (Knowles, 1990, p. 135).

Skager (1984) notes that a related question that comes to mind is, "How can this broad concept of lifelong education be translated into practice?" He asserts that the answer lies in learner empowerment. Gonzalez (1997) points out that while accelerating technology will facilitate learning, we should "put our bets not on gadgetry or technological aids but on human beings and their infinite capacity to learn and to adapt themselves to new challenges and conditions" (p. 64).

This means that educational organizations today have to recognize the importance of empowering people at all levels and move away from patriarchy, control, and dependency. According to Pont (1996), this calls for the development of a "training strategy backed by training systems that equip and empower individuals to cope with change" (p. 3). We need to move away from traditional didactic methods of teaching a menu of skills and transmitting knowledge to helping people to 'learn-how-to-learn.' This concept of 'Learning-How-To-Learn' (LHTL) therefore, is at the very heart of self-development. According to Smith (1990), LHTL is defined as possessing or acquiring both knowledge and skills in order to learn effectively in whatever learning situation that one encounters. He contends that this new shift towards LHTL becomes a central purpose in education where the teacher and the learners can become equal partners in

the teaching and learning process. This can be viewed as a step towards autonomous learning, which helps towards the development of a life-long learning individual and society.

What implications do all these have for the teacher in the classroom? It simply means that what is needed is a shift from teacher-centredness to learner-centredness. McCombs and Whisler (1997) state that this journey of change towards becoming more learner-centred stresses the critical role of teachers' basic beliefs and assumptions about learners, learning and teaching. The teacher in today's classroom needs to take into consideration her learners' perspectives about what they need to make learning more personally relevant, meaningful and challenging and to prepare them for successful life-long learning. More importantly, the classroom teacher needs to be a facilitator of the learning process and help learners equip themselves with knowledge, skills and competencies that will enable them to take responsibility for their learning.

Both Hedge and Whitney (1996) point out that the notion where teaching programmes should be learner-centred and take into account the learners' needs, goals and desires is not something new. What is new is the increasing importance of learner empowerment and the repertoire of approaches that are now available to educators to help put ideas of learner autonomy into practice.

Such new approaches emphasize that the 'age of the learner' has dawned upon us. Hence, we must bear in mind that the learners "bring with them their whole experience of learning and of life in classrooms, along with their own reasons for being there, and their own particular needs that they hope to see satisfied" (Allwright and Bailey, 1991, p. 18). Therefore, all decisions regarding learning must take into

consideration the learners' individual differences and their needs, interests, goals and motivations for learning.

Furthermore, classroom teachers need to focus on equipping learners with knowledge, skills and strategies and a range of learning styles that are appropriate not only for present learning but are also transferable to future learning situations. This means that the classroom teacher in teaching learners to LHTL should facilitate the learning process by helping students to adopt new strategies while at the same time strengthening existing styles, however weak. This can only be achieved if learners are equipped with the learning tools - that is, the learning strategies to do so.

Theoretical Background to the Study

The theoretical perspectives employed in this study are drawn from the principles of humanistic and cognitive psychology. The humanistic movement emphasizes the affective aspect of learning and deals with the learner's self-concept, personal growth and emotional development. In contrast to this, the cognitive aspect of learning is concerned with the intellectual growth of a learner. This includes the acquisition of basic intellectual skills such as reading, writing and the learning of facts and concepts.

Humanist psychologists like Rogers (1969) placed emphasis on the development of the 'whole person' and focused the teaching and learning process away from 'teaching' and towards 'learning.' This movement together with findings from studies on individual differences provided an impetus to the development of a learner-centred

approach. Ellis and Sinclair (1989) and McCombs and Whisler (1997) stress that the learner-centred approach focuses on the learner with a focus on learning (that is "learning-how-to-learn" - LHTL) to promote learner autonomy. Researchers realize that working with the multitude of individual differences and at the same time helping learners to acquire a second language, can only be achieved effectively if learners are taught to be self-reliant through 'learning-how-to-learn' (Dickinson, 1987; Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Holec, 1981; Little, 1991; Nunan, 1997; Tudor, 1996; and Wenden, 1987a). This saw the development of interest in a variety of means to cater for an active and participatory role of learners within the teaching-learning continuum - that is, learners having a say in the 'what', 'when', 'why' and 'how' aspects of the learning process.

As such, information from the learners should be built into every phase of the curriculum process. Both Clarke (1991a) and Nunan (1988 & 1995) propose a learner-centred curriculum as it encourages the collaborative effort between teachers and learners when making decisions on planning, organizing and evaluating the learning process. They emphasize that only when learners play an active and participatory role in the management of their own learning can they hope to achieve learner autonomy.

Holec (1981) defines an autonomous learner as a learner who has the ability of "taking charge of his own learning and nothing more" (p. 3). This 'ability' refers to the capacity to do something about his learning process. It is not something inborn but something that can be acquired either by natural means or by formal learning. He adds that an autonomous learner is also able to make decisions on the management of his own learning.

In justifying autonomy, Crabbe (1993) argues that "an individual has the right to be free to exercise his or her own choices, in learning as in other areas, and not become a victim of choices made by institutions" (p. 443). Such an argument shares the sentiments put forward by the humanistic movement's concern for responsibility, freedom of choice, intellectual development and Maslow's principle of 'self-actualization.' Knowles (1975) rationalizes that:

there is convincing evidence that people who take the initiative in learning (pro-active learners) learn more things and learn better than do people who sit at the feet of teachers, passively waiting to be taught (reactive learners). . . They enter into learning more purposefully and with greater motivation. They also tend to retain and make more use of what they learn better and longer than do the reactive learners (p. 14).

Hedge (1993) points out that since autonomy has so much to offer, reactive learners must be taught how to achieve learner autonomy. Such a move would only imply two things. Firstly, there is a need for "a change in perception about what language learning involves together with a change in the expectation that language can only be learned through the guidance of a specialist teacher." Secondly, there is the "need for the acquisition of techniques with which learners can manage their self-directed learning" (p. 92).

Robles (1998) asserts that in second language learning, this means paying equal emphasis on both the 'product' and the 'process' - that is, learning the content and learning a set of skills to use that content. The practical implementation of the learner-centred approach, which fosters learner autonomy through LHTL will inevitably raise a variety of questions arising from the preparation of learners for an active role in programme development to equipping learners with the right set of 'tools' for self-

directed learning. To help learners achieve learner autonomy teachers must offer the solution as to how to train students to be more successful language learners.

Proponents of learner-centred teaching have promoted the idea of equipping their learners with the appropriate tools and strategies needed for learner autonomy. Research indicates that in second and foreign language teaching, learner autonomy can be made possible through what is now termed as 'Learner Training' (Dickinson, 1987; Ellis and Sinclair, 1989; Tudor, 1996). Williams and Burden (1997) define learner training as being "concerned with ways of teaching learners explicitly the techniques of learning a language, and an awareness of how and when to use strategies to enable them to become self-directed" (p. 147). Learner training, hence, helps learners consider the factors that affect their learning and discover the learning strategies that suit them best. It focuses their attention on the process of learning so that the emphasis is on 'how to learn' rather than 'what to learn' (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989).

An important component of Learner Training is Strategy Training - an approach where "learners are explicitly taught how, when and why strategies can be used to facilitate language learning tasks" (Chamot & Rubin, 1994, p. 771). Learning strategies, according to Rubin (1987), are any set of operations, steps, plans or routines used by the learners to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval and use of information in order to regulate their learning. Nisbet and Shucksmith (1986) stress that understanding learning strategies helps learners gain self-knowledge in the form of awareness of the learning processes. Hence, 'learning-how-to-learn' is like creating awareness of one's own mental processes.

Cognitive psychologists who focussed on the learners' mental processes believe that learners are far from passive in their learning. In fact, all learners actively use strategies to make meaning or sense of the language tasks or language problems. Over the years a number of researchers such as Bialystok and Ryan (1985), Krashen (1977) and McLaughlin (1987) have put forward various theories of second language acquisition (SLA). O'Malley and Chamot (1990), however, suggest that the role of language learning strategies in SLA can best be understood by referring to the information-processing framework of learning. This framework explains how information is stored in the memory and how new information is obtained. They claim that information is stored in two ways - short-term memory (STM) and long-term memory (LTM). The role of learning strategies within this framework is to enhance effective learning through long-term retention. This is clearly put forward by Anderson (1985), a prominent cognitive psychologist who distinguished between linguistic information stored either as declarative knowledge or procedural knowledge.

Declarative knowledge is factual information in long-term memory and it is about things we 'know about' such as definitions of words, rules and facts. Procedural knowledge is information about 'what we know how to do' - that is, our ability to understand and apply our knowledge of rules to solve a problem through the employment of strategies and procedures. Procedural knowledge, hence, serves as an information processor through which learners are helped to acquire knowledge through learning-how-to-learn procedures. Brown (1989) notes that while declarative knowledge can be acquired quickly, procedural knowledge can only be acquired gradually when extensive opportunities for practice are provided.

Brown (1989) emphasizes that in order to proceed from rule-bound declarative knowledge to the automatic procedural stage, a learner goes through the following three stages of skill acquisition - the cognitive stage, the association stage and the autonomous stage. At the cognitive stage, learners consciously acquire knowledge such as learning of rules and memorizing vocabulary. At this stage the performance is usually laden with errors. At the association stage, errors in declarative knowledge that are stored are detected and eliminated and various components of the skills are strengthened. This is when declarative knowledge is slowly turned into procedural knowledge and at this stage there are few errors. At the autonomous stage, the performance is fine-tuned and the skill can be executed effortlessly with little reliance on short-term memory or conscious application of rules.

In fact, learning strategies function the same way as procedural knowledge as they have the capacity to transform declarative knowledge so that it is summarized and reorganized to form new information that can be stored in memory. In language learning, learners need to develop their cognitive skills through the use of learning strategies that would help them form their own concepts, generalizations and theories about how the language functions.

In the field of SLA studies of successful and less successful learners indicate that learners who succeed in learning have developed a repertoire of strategies from which they are able to choose, select and adapt flexibly to complete tasks successfully (Nisbet & Shucksmith, 1986). Findings from a number of studies indicate that learning strategies can be taught to learners. Research studies bear testimony that learners can be trained to master vocabulary skills (Cohen & Aphek, 1980 and O'Malley & Chamot,

1990), summarization skills (Brown & Day, 1983 and Hare & Borchardt, 1984), reading skills (Baumann, 1984 and Harris & Pressley, 1990) and other skills such as listening and speaking (O'Malley, 1987). All these studies suggest that strategy training (where learning strategies are explicitly taught), needs to be carried out for less skilled learners.

Oxford (1990) suggests that since learning strategies used by successful learners can be taught, they should be recommended to 'underachievers' who are seeking to improve their performance. This can be carried out through strategy training programmes that involve the introduction of learning strategies either explicitly or implicitly in everyday language lessons. Rubin (1987, p. 16) asserts that research into language learning strategies "rests on the assumption that both explicit and implicit knowledge can contribute to the learning" process.

Wenden (1987b) contends that literature in SLA suggests that learner training has great potential in the language classroom. She, however, cautions that all the following need to be taken into account in the development and implementation of activities and materials viz.: explicitness of purpose, content of training, evaluation of learner training and finally the integration of learner training with language training.

In implementing strategy training, Wenden (1987a) stresses the importance of critical reflection that leads to 'self-deconditioning'. She contends that together with equipping learners with learning strategies, they should be trained to "clarify, refine and expand their views of what language means and of what language learning entails" so that they become "critically reflective of the conceptual context of their learning" (p. 12).

One must, however, realize that very few learners are autonomous and the level of autonomy varies from one individual to another and from one context to another. Nunan (1995) notes that learner autonomy is not an 'all-or-nothing concept.' He stresses that there should be a gradual transfer of decision-making power and it requires a sensitive dosage of both teacher and student input. He advocates a gradual five-level implementation process that is based on a continuum, which takes the learner from awareness to involvement and later from intervention to creation. The final autonomous level, transcendence, occurs when learners can themselves become teachers and researchers.

The Malaysian Context

Education in Malaysia is under the jurisdiction of a national administrative body known as the Ministry of Education (MOE). Under Malaysia's national education system, children begin their formal education at the age of seven. They undergo six years of primary or elementary education (Standard 1 to Standard 6) and five years of secondary education (Form 1 to Form 5). There is automatic promotion for all students from Primary One to Secondary Three. Students at the age of 15, after three years of secondary schooling sit for a public examination, the Lower Secondary School Assessment Examination (known as PMR - *Penilaian Menengah Rendah*). A pass in the PMR Examination enables students to be promoted to Form Four. In Form Five, at the age of 17, students sit for another public examination called the SPM (*Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia*). The SPM Examination is an approximate equivalent to a high-

school leaving examination or the equivalent of the GCE O-levels examination. After this, students venture into post-secondary education such as matriculation and university education.

The aspirations of education in Malaysia are clearly spelt out in the Malaysian National Education Philosophy, which states:

Education in Malaysia is an on-going effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards, and who are responsible and capable of achieving high levels of personal well-being as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large.

(Ministry of Education, 1988, p. iv)

As Malaysia, a fast-developing third world country, steps into the third millennium there is a need for her to move from being an industry-based economy to being a leading knowledge-based economy in the Asian region. Likewise, the education system sees the need for a shift in a similar direction. The catalyst for this major change has come in the form of technology-supported Smart Schools. The Malaysian Smart School "is a learning institution that has been systematically reinvented in terms of teaching-learning practices and school management in order to prepare children for the Information Age" (Ministry of Education, 1997, p. 20).

The teaching and learning environment in the Malaysian Smart Schools focuses on four areas: the curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and teaching-learning materials. According to the MOE's Smart School Conceptual Blueprint (1997), the Smart School

curriculum "shall be meaningful, socially responsible, multicultural, reflective, holistic, global, open-ended, goal-based and technological" (p. 11). Its pedagogy is based on an "appropriate mix of learning strategies to ensure mastery of basic competencies" to promote holistic development that will accommodate individual learning styles and foster a "classroom atmosphere that is compatible with different teaching-learning strategies" (p. 11). Assessment is said to be flexible and learner-friendly and it is designed to give "accurate feedback of students' readiness, progress, achievement and aptitude" (p. 21). Finally, teaching-learning materials are said to be "cognitively challenging and motivating" and will accommodate "students' differing needs and abilities" so that students will be allowed to take greater responsibility for managing and directing their own learning" (p. 12).

The Smart School Project also highlights the provision for a full democratization of learning (a principle of life-long learning, which holds that education should be made available to all) where learning will not only continuous and reflective but also individually paced and self-directed. This element of independence and shared responsibilities in forming a smart partnership in learning is also highlighted in the National Philosophy of Education.

A study of the Smart School Conceptual Blueprint indicates that it calls for the re-engineering of schools to opt for a flexible, open-ended curriculum and a learner-centred pedagogy that take into consideration the learning of strategies, learner-centred materials and various forms of self-assessment. All these take into account learner differences, learner needs and goals. It also indicates that Malaysia too, is aware of and

consistent with the global educational concern for the development of learner autonomy.

The implementation of the Smart School Project has already taken off in stages beginning in 1999. The Malaysian MOE hopes that by the year 2010 all schools in Malaysia will be Smart Schools. Meanwhile, all sections in the MOE are preparing to meet the many challenges that lie ahead before this vision can become a reality.

The Teaching of English Language in Malaysia

Prior to the independence of Malaysia in 1957, English Language was the medium of instruction in all government-aided national public schools. However, with the implementation of the National Act of 1967, the national Malay Language (known as *Bahasa Malaysia*) was designated as the official medium of instruction in all national schools while English Language was to be taught separately as an individual school subject. Though English Language continues to be taught as a compulsory second language in Malaysian national schools, it is not considered in the accreditation of both the PMR (Lower Certificate of Education) and the SPM (High School Certificate of Education) certificates.

The study of English Language is, however, maintained because the Malaysian government is aware that the English language is "the key to international communication" and "a major source of up-to-date information and knowledge" (Gomez, 1991, p. 9).

Furthermore, the importance of mastering English is often emphasized by all quarters including the government. For instance, the Malaysian Finance Minister, in his 2001 Budget speech stressed that it is the government's hope that "students would take the opportunity to learn English as it was the main language of the information and communication technology world" (Chok, 2000, p. 1). A minister in the Prime Minister's Department, recently pointed out that the government is "paying attention to the teaching of English in schools as the subject is important for a developing country like Malaysia." He added that English will help students face the many challenges of globalisation. Therefore, students at all levels have to master English in order "to gain access to the abundant knowledge in various professional fields" so that they can "compete with their peers in other developing countries in the international arena" ('Master English', 2000, p. 9).

The many changes in the international field of SLA have brought about changes in the teaching and learning of English in Malaysia. The Malaysian ESL field has seen both curriculum and pedagogical changes over the past few decades. There was a shift to the English Language communicative syllabus in the 1970s after the structural-based ESL syllabi of the 1960s. Similarly, methodological trends of the 1960s, which focussed on teacher-centred learning moved towards learner-centred teaching under the communicative approach (Fernandez, 1991).

In the 1980s, the New Curriculum for Primary Schools (known as KBSR-*Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Rendah*) and the New Curriculum for Secondary Schools (referred to as KBSM - *Kurikulum Baru Sekolah Menengah*) were implemented. These curricula underwent a series of on-going evaluations and the findings prompted the

relevant authorities to re-examine the KBSR and the KBSM syllabi. As a result of the findings and in wanting to meet the challenges put forward by the needs of the Smart Schools, a new syllabus was needed. Therefore, the MOE - more specifically the English Language Unit of the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) drew up new syllabi. These syllabi are now referred to as the Integrated Curriculum for Primary Schools or KBSR (*Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah*) and the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools or KBSM (*Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah*).

The old syllabi were skills-based with the integration of grammar, vocabulary, sound system and moral values. The new KBSR and KBSM syllabi are extensions of the old syllabi. They have all the same components but they now include other aspects such as thinking skills, study skills, learning strategies, environmental awareness, good school culture, and science and technology. Furthermore, beginning in the year 2000, the study of English Literature in the language classroom has been included in the secondary ESL classroom.

Gomez (1991) notes that with the implementation of the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary Schools (KBSM), a number of changes have been introduced to the traditional ESL classrooms. One distinct change is the changes in the roles of both teachers and learners. The ESL (English as a Second Language) classroom requires a shift from a teacher-centred classroom to a learner-centred classroom. This means that teachers should encourage their learners to play a more active and participatory role in the language learning process. Learners are encouraged to take greater responsibility for their learning. This involves making decisions on their own learning process. It

cannot be denied that all these moves are indicative that the Malaysian ESL classroom has sown the seeds necessary for fostering learner autonomy.

Learner Autonomy Programmes

In Malaysia, the TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language) teachers teaching the secondary level ESL classes face a challenging task. They have to work within a national language programme with a common syllabus and a central evaluation system. This often makes it difficult for language teachers to tailor language programmes to suit their own students (Nackeeran, 2000).

The average time allocated for the teaching and learning of English is approximately 200 minutes per week. Within this limited time allocation, TESL teachers have to meet the aspirations put forth by the National Education Philosophy where education is seen as a life-long process. Teachers need to equip learners with the necessary skills that will enable them to "develop the ability to focus, reflect and take personal responsibility for their learning" (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 4).

On top of that, teachers are required to manage large classes (approximately 40 to 50 students) with wide differences in English Language proficiency among students. Furthermore, teachers teaching the upper secondary ESL classroom (Forms 4 and 5) have to prepare their students for the new and challenging SPM 1119 English Language Paper which was introduced in 1997. This new 1119 English Language Paper has more international acceptance as it is collaboratively prepared by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) in UK and the Malaysian

Examinations Syndicate (known as *Lembaga Peperiksaan*). The beginning of 2000 also saw the inclusion of English Literature in the language classroom for all secondary ESL classes. This literature component will be tested in both the PMR and SPM English Language Papers.

In such a scenario, most TESL teachers feel that the limited contact hours provided for the teaching and learning of English is insufficient to meet the increasing demands and challenges facing the Malaysian ESL classroom. These challenges have been the catalysts that spearheaded the need to promote learner autonomy among ESL students.

In the Ministry of Education's guide to LHTL (2000), the limited time allocated for the study of English was cited as one of the reasons for the introduction of the learner autonomy programmes. It was felt that the constraints faced by TESL teachers could partly be overcome if learners were taught how to be self-reliant. Moreover, learner autonomy programmes will help learners recognise their preferred learning styles and enable them to carry out independent language learning outside the stipulated classroom hours with limited assistance from the teacher.

Furthermore, the MOE has embarked on the Smart Schools project where learning is said to be continuous, reflective, self-directed and self-paced. Hence, learner autonomy projects are viewed as viable programmes that will enable student-centred learning where "learners will be facilitated in their pursuit of knowledge" (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 4).

Taking heed of the many challenges facing the Malaysian TESL teachers teaching the ESL classrooms and the aspirations put forward by the National Education

Philosophy and the Smart School Project, the English Language Unit in the CDC, took steps to foster learner autonomy through a number of projects. Among them were the setting up of Self-Access Centres and the introduction of the 'Learning-How-to Learn' (LHTL) Programme.

Self-Access Learning

According to Mokolus K. Rowther (personal communication, Feb. 8, 1999), an English Language officer attached to CDC, the Self-Access Learning (SAL) Programme was first introduced through the setting up of self-access centres (SACs) in selected Malaysian secondary schools in the early 1990s. The main aims of the SAL programme in Malaysia are to improve students' linguistic performance and to train them to become independent learners.

In SACs, learning materials are designed and organized in such a way that students can access them either during their formal English Language periods or during their own free time outside the scheduled English Language periods. At the SAC, learners select and work on language tasks based on their own needs and interests. They may work individually, with peers or seek the guidance of a teacher or facilitator. After completion of the tasks, learners can evaluate and obtain feedback on their performance.

Mokolus pointed out the English Language Unit in the CDC has been providing in-service training to both primary and secondary school teachers since the early 1990s. The training workshop on SAL conducted by the CDC is aimed at equipping teachers

with the practicalities of setting up and managing a self-access study facility. At SAL workshops teachers are exposed to the setting up and the management of SACs. They are also trained to prepare SAL materials and how to conduct 'Learner-Training.'

According to Mokolus, though there have been a number of schools where SAL has been successfully implemented, feedback received from teachers also indicate that it has been plagued by a host of problems. A lack of financial support and suitable space have been the primary grievances of most schools. Some ESL teachers feel that working within constraints such as having to cope with large ESL classes (40-50 students) and other extra-curricular and administrative duties, have left them with very little time to attend to the demands of running SACs. Furthermore, some teachers felt that there were not enough opportunities to attend courses that could help them in the effective running of a self-access facility. Moreover, there are cases where teachers who had attended courses went on transfer to other schools or failed to disseminate the information they obtained at the courses. This has greatly hindered the smooth and effective implementation of the SAL Programme in a number of schools.

Learning-How-to-Learn Programme

The main aim of the Learning-How-To-Learn (LHTL) Programme is to help learners develop self-awareness in learning so that they can gradually and consciously develop their own learning strategies and styles. Such a move can help learners become more effective learners who are capable of taking responsibility of their own learning (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 2).

According to Mohamed Abu Bakar (personal communication, Jan. 27, 1999), the CDC English Language officer-in-charge of the LHTL Programme, the programme was introduced to all Malaysian secondary school TESL teachers in 1997 after the success of a 1995 pilot LHTL project. He pointed out that by introducing the LHTL Programme, teachers would be more capable of helping their learners equip themselves with the ability, knowledge, skills and willingness to take charge of their own learning. This would lead to more effective learning as learners would be able to carry on learning outside their ESL classroom hours. Learners would also be able to self-pace and self-direct their own learning and this would put them on the path to becoming autonomous learners.

Beginning in June 1997, Terry Lamb (a lecturer from the University of Nottingham, United Kingdom) together with the English Language Unit of CDC conducted a series of nationwide training programmes for secondary school teachers on LHTL. The five-day national level course took participants on a step-by-step journey towards self-discovery of their own learning. Course participants were also provided information booklets and modules on LHTL and other aspects such as, aims and objectives of LHTL, definitions and reasons for the promotion of LHTL, models of LHTL, an introduction to learning strategies and reference resources on how to teach various skills under the LHTL concept.

Teachers who attended the course were required to disseminate the information through similar in-house courses to teachers at their district and school levels. Using this Cascade Model of training, the English Language Unit of CDC feels that by the end of 1997, all secondary school TESL teachers have been exposed to a course on LHTL.

Mohammed stressed that it is the hope of CDC that by 1998, TESL teachers nationwide would start experimenting with aspects of LHTL in their ESL classroom to encourage learner autonomy. To further enhance the implementation of the LHTL programme, a comprehensive guide to 'Learning How To Learn' is being prepared and the CDC hopes to send it out to all secondary schools by the end of 2000.

Problems in Implementing Learner Autonomy Programmes

Teacher trainers and other language officers from the MOE note that the Malaysian TESL teachers are not very receptive to learner autonomy programmes. This is despite the fact that the teachers have been exposed to learner training and there is an implicit provision for the teaching of learning strategies in the ESL curriculum. This shows that the teaching of language learning strategies continues to be a neglected area in the Malaysian ESL classroom. This poor response could be due to a number of obstacles or opposing factors that hinder the smooth implementation of learner autonomy programmes in the Malaysian ESL classroom.

First and foremost, the major obstacle is the Malaysian education system that continues to highlight the transmission of information and knowledge. A close look at the curriculum of most subjects in Malaysian schools indicates that the focus is on the teaching of content or product rather than process skills. For example, the focus of the ESL curriculum from Primary One to Form Five is on the four basic language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Integrated into these skills are the grammar,

vocabulary and sound system components with lip service being paid to moral values, thinking skills, study skills and learning strategies.

Ng (1992), in her doctoral thesis pointed out that the second discouraging factor is the Malaysian Examination system where students' academic performance from Primary One to Secondary Three is based on their ability to answer multiple-choice and short response questions that focus on information and knowledge rather than thinking skills. According to her, this form of testing is not only easier to prepare and grade but it also has high statistical reliability and validity. She contends that under such circumstances, "it is hard to conceive of any school wanting to put aside precious time and energy teaching and testing learning strategy to their learners" (p. 10).

Rohana (1983) in her doctoral thesis on individualized learning, felt that the over-laden curricula of secondary schools have resulted in teachers becoming over-concerned with completing the syllabus in order to prepare their students for public examinations. In her opinion, this has led to teacher-centredness and passivity among Malaysian students. On top of that, the pre-planned rigid teacher-initiated Malaysian ESL syllabi hardly leave room for learners to take on a pro-active role where they can claim ownership for their own learning.

Another opposing factor is the form of training provided to teachers. Due to time and financial constraints, the Malaysian education system often uses the Cascade Training Model for in-service courses. In such a training model, a five-day national level training stint is often reduced to a three-day training experience at the district or state level. This is further reduced to a one or half-day exposure course to teachers at

the school level. Hence, it is not surprising that most well laid out programmes often fail at the implementation level.

Informal discussions with TESL teachers from the Petaling district (a district in the state of Selangor in West Malaysia, where this study is located), revealed that although a majority of the teachers were aware of learner autonomy projects like LHTL, many felt they were ill-equipped to implement it in their ESL classrooms. They cited insufficient training, guidelines and instructional materials as their main grievances. Eliana's (1999) discussions with teachers also confirmed that many teachers had their reservations about introducing LHTL in their ESL classroom primarily because they felt they lacked the knowledge and skills to implement it. Some teachers were skeptical of the efficacy of the LHTL programme and felt that learner autonomy projects were not viable in their classrooms partly due to the large size of Malaysian classrooms (40-50 students) and partly due to their students possessing limited English language proficiency. In addition to that, this group of teachers pointed out that besides having to cope with a heavy teaching workload, they had to attend to other extra-curricular and administrative duties. This left them with little time to try out new and innovative teaching techniques.

Even though there is widespread recognition of the importance of encouraging learner autonomy programmes for life-long learning in the Malaysian education circles, the above discussion shows that there are a number of factors that militate against the smooth implementation of such a move. So, there is a need to investigate whether learner autonomy is viable in the Malaysian ESL classroom despite the above mentioned constraints.

Rationale for the Study

Present day educators and researchers are of the opinion that the learning of a second language should be meaningful, reflective and learner-centred so that learners can develop learner autonomy for life-long learning. They stress that learner autonomy can be attained through learner training- i.e. focusing on not only 'what' to learn but also 'how to learn' through the teaching of learning strategies (Dickinson, 1987; Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Holec, 1981; Littlewood, 1996; Tudor, 1996; and Williams & Burden, 1997).

Despite the effectiveness of learner autonomy projects, Wenden (1987a) notes that learner training is still "rather uncharted in the language classroom despite its great potential" (p.12). She is of the view that this could partly be due to the "scant empirical validation of its feasibility and effectiveness in second language teaching"; and the "lack of guidelines to direct more systematic approach in devising materials and activities for its implementation" (p. 159).

Furthermore, learner autonomy has been a subject of significant investigation in the west and up to date more than ten conferences under the Scientific Commission in LALL (Learner Autonomy in Language Learning) have been held all over the world. Many formal institutions in the west such as CRAPEL (*Centre de Recherches et d'Applications Pédagogiques en Langues*) in France, DTEO (Direct Teaching of English Operation) for the British Council and Moray House College in Edinburgh have

long started incorporating learner autonomy into their language programmes (Dickinson, 1987).

In comparison to these western institutions, there is hardly any significant investigation into learner autonomy in the Asian region. Smith (1996) highlighted this shortcoming in his paper entitled, "Group-centred Autonomous Learning: An 'Asian' Contribution." He pointed out that though the concept of learner autonomy is often seen as laden with western values, there was a place for 'appropriately revised conceptions' of learner autonomy for Asian contexts. He felt that teachers and researchers in Asia have an important contribution to make in this field.

In Malaysia, there is little emphasis given to the implementation of learner autonomy programmes due to a number of constraints that exist in the Malaysian ESL classroom. These constraints have been discussed on pages 23 and 24 of this study. Hence, it is not surprising that there has been scant research carried out in this particular field of interest. The little investigation that has been carried out has limited itself to the study of language learning strategies among learners (Joseph, 1998 and Zurina, 1999) and the setting up of Self-Access Learning Centres (Lee, 1993 and Lam, 1999). Further evidence of this is provided in Chapter II (pp. 114 -118) of this study.

Researchers like Lo Castro (1994) have pointed out that most of the successful learner autonomy studies carried out have worked with small samples outside the classroom environment (i.e. university settings). Therefore, she questioned the effectiveness of learner training for autonomous learning in particularly difficult learning situations - for example in large classrooms where the student-teacher ratio is 45 to 1 or 150 to 1. This study investigated the effectiveness of strategy training in a

difficult learning situation - that is a rather large ESL classroom where the student-teacher ratio is 42 to 1.

Since learner training is widely acknowledged as being crucial to the development of learner autonomy, it is only sensible, therefore, to heed the call by researchers that it can be taught. Furthermore, this study takes heed of Wenden's (1987a) view that there has been 'scant empirical validation' of the feasibility of learner training. In addition to that, this study can be viewed as a response to Smith's remark that there has been comparatively little contribution on autonomous learning in the Asian region. These are some of the reasons that prompted the researcher to investigate learner autonomy through strategy training in a Malaysian ESL classroom.

The Proposed Study

This study investigated the development of learner autonomy through strategy training. Learner autonomy in this study refers to the ability of students to take responsibility for their own learning. This involves making decisions on the management of their learning through planning, organizing, monitoring and evaluating the learning process. According to Chamot and Rubin (1994), strategy training refers to an approach where learners are "explicitly taught how, when and why strategies can be used to facilitate language learning" (p.771).

This study involved the use of a single intact ESL classroom of Secondary Four students in an urban government-aided public school in West Malaysia. A trained

TESL teacher provided strategy training to the 42 students in the selected ESL classroom for the duration of 15 weeks.

The data collection process of this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Did strategy-training have an effect on developing learner autonomy among ESL students in terms of managing their own learning through:
 - a. planning - the ability to determine and formulate learning objectives and to propose a plan of action to handle future learning tasks?
 - b. organizing - the ability to decide on time, learning tasks, learning materials and learning strategies to be used in order to successfully accomplish learning tasks?
 - c. monitoring - the ability to check, verify and correct oneself in the performance of language tasks?
 - d. evaluating - the ability to evaluate or check the outcome of one's own performance of language tasks?
2. Did strategy-training increase the use of language learning strategies among the ESL students?
3. How did the students and the teacher view strategy training?

Significance of the Study

First and foremost, this study is apparently one of the first few attempts to investigate learner autonomy in terms of management of management of the learning process in the Malaysian ESL classroom context. Therefore, this study may provide a useful launching pad for further research in this area of interest. The findings of this study could provide some form of empirical data for future research in this area. It could perhaps also help in the more effective implementation of not only the LHTL programme in the ESL classroom but also the Smart School project, that advocates self-directed, individually-paced and reflective learning.

Since this study investigated the development of learner autonomy through strategy training, it could perhaps provide feedback as to the effectiveness of strategy training in increasing the learners' repertoire of strategies necessary for more effective and autonomous learning. Indirectly, this study could shed some light as to the effectiveness of learner autonomy programmes such as strategy training in large classrooms. It could also show whether Malaysian ESL learners can be trained to equip themselves with the knowledge and skills necessary to take ownership for their learning.

At the pedagogical level, this study would of course stand to benefit the students and teachers in the selected class and school in the study as it would provide invaluable insight into the effectiveness of learner autonomy projects such as the 'Learning-How-to-Learn' programme. Finally, this study hopes to make some pertinent observations and recommendations for the further enhancement of learner autonomy programmes in the ESL classrooms.

Definitions of Terms

Some of the terms employed in this study may carry different connotations and interpretations in differing contexts. To avoid different interpretations and any conceptual confusion, given below are the operational definitions and explanations of some of terms as they are used in this study. These definitions have been adapted from a number of sources such as Chamot and Rubin (1994), Dickinson (1987), Ellis and Sincalir (1989), Farrell, (1998), Holec, (1981), O'Malley and Chamot (1990) Oxford (1990), Rubin and Wenden (1987) and Williams and Burden (1997).

1. Learning-How-To-Learn (LHTH): refers to an approach where learners are trained and encouraged to discover the best way to learn so that they can be helped to become autonomous learners. Learners are trained to have control and make decisions as to 'what' to learn, 'why' it is to be learnt, 'how' it is to be learnt and 'when' and 'where' it is to be learnt (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989).
2. Learner Autonomy: refers to one's ability to take responsibility / ownership for the management of one's own learning - i.e. to make decisions regarding the planning, organizing, monitoring and evaluation of one's own learning process (Holec, 1981).
3. Planning: refers to one's ability to determine and formulate learning objectives. It also encompasses advance planning which refers to the one's ability to propose a plan of action or strategies to accomplish future upcoming learning tasks (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

4. Organizing: refers to one's ability to understand and determine the conditions that would help one to successfully accomplish a learning task and arrange for the presence of those conditions. This includes the ability to:
- determine suitable learning tasks to accomplish the learning objectives
 - decide and locate suitable materials to accomplish the learning task
 - determine suitable strategies to successfully accomplish the learning task
 - pace the learning process - i.e. to set and keep to target dates of completion (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).
5. Monitoring: refers to one's ability to check, verify and correct oneself while performing or carrying out a language task. This includes:
- "comprehension monitoring: checking, verifying and correcting one's understanding"
 - "production monitoring: checking, verifying or correcting one's language production"
 - auditory monitoring: using one's 'ear' for the language to make decisions
 - visual monitoring: using one's 'eye' for the language to make decisions
 - "style monitoring: checking, verifying or correcting one's language production based upon an internal stylistic register"
 - "strategy monitoring: tracking how well a strategy is working"
 - "double-check monitoring: tracking across a language task, previously undertaken acts or possibilities considered."
- (Chamot, Kupper & Impink-Hernandez (1988) cited in O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, p. 137).
6. Evaluation: refers to one's ability to judge and check the overall execution and performance of a language task once it has been completed. This includes:
- "production evaluation: checking one's work upon completing a task
 - performance evaluation: judging one's overall execution of a task
 - ability evaluation: judging one's ability to perform a task
 - strategy evaluation: judging one's strategy use upon completion of a task

- language repertoire evaluation: judging how much one knows of L2, at the word, phrase, sentence and concept level."

(Chamot, Kupper & Impink-Hernandez (1988) cited in O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, pp. 137-138)

7. Strategy Training: refers to lessons where learners are explicitly taught language learning strategies and explanations are given as to when, how and why these strategies can be used to facilitate language learning.
(Chamot & Rubin, 1994)
8. Learning Strategies: refers to conscious or unconscious mental steps, procedures, techniques or specific actions that are employed by learners to aid in the acquisition, storage, retrieval and the use of information to regulate one's effort in learning a target language. Learning strategies help to make language learning easier, faster, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations (Rubin, 1987 and Oxford, 1990).
9. Learner Training: refers to a process where learners are explicitly taught techniques of learning a language and an awareness as to 'how' and 'when' to use strategies to enable them to become self-directed learners (Williams & Burden, 1997).
10. Learning Contract: refers to a detailed learning agreement / statement prepared by the learner or with the help from the teacher or peers. It usually contains details as to what and how something will be learned, when it would be learnt, what resources will be utilized, and what criteria will be used to evaluate what has been learnt (Dickinson, 1987).
11. Learning Journal: is a learner's diary where a learner can describe, explore and record his personal feelings, reactions, questions and doubts to a learning experience after a lesson in strategy training (Farrell, 1998).

12. Teaching Environment - refers to the both the content of the teaching and the methodology used in providing instruction in language learning strategies during ESL lessons in the Malaysian ESL classroom environment.
13. Learning Environment - refers to both the use of cognitive learning tools (such as learning contracts and learning journals) and the different modes of learning that take place in the Malaysian ESL classroom environment.
14. Explicit Instruction - refers to instances in ESL lessons where students are given clear and informed training as to when, how and why a learning strategy can be used to facilitate the language learning process. Together with the rationale for learning it, students are given feedback about their performance so that they can estimate the effectiveness of the training. (Wenden in Wenden & Rubin, 1987, p. 160)
15. Implicit Instruction - refers to instances in ESL lessons where students are instructed to perform certain tasks / strategies but are not helped to understand their significance. The emphasis is on learning something rather than learning-to-learn. It is hoped that by performing the task, students will unconsciously learn it. (Brown, 1983)
16. Introduce Strategies - refers to instances where the teacher not merely makes students aware of a strategy but more importantly she brings it to their notice and causes them to formally learn and use it. (Cambridge International Dictionary of English, 1995)

Organization of the Study

This study consists of six chapters. Chapter I provides a brief introduction to the proposed study. It presents an overview and the theoretical background to the study. It also gives a concise description of the teaching and learning of English Language in Malaysia and the learner autonomy programmes that have been introduced into the Malaysian ESL classroom.

Chapter II reviews and discusses related research that examines some current issues in the teaching and learning of a second language that have guided the formulation of this study. The review of literature also takes a closer look at the learner-centred approach and both the rationale and the development in the area of learner autonomy. It also provides a focus into learner training approaches such as strategy training.

Chapter III presents a description of the research study and the subjects selected for this study. It provides a detailed presentation of the various research methods that were used to collect and analyze the data. Meanwhile, Chapter IV presents a description of the instructional design employed in the implementation of the 15-week Strategy Training Programme.

Chapter V presents the findings according to the four research questions posed in this study. Finally, Chapter VI presents a discussion of the findings and the pedagogical implications. It also puts forward the limitations of the study and directions for further research in the area concerned.