

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

This final chapter presents a discussion of the findings followed by the pedagogical implications and recommendations of the study. It concludes with the limitations of this study and directions for further research.

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the development of learner autonomy through strategy training in the Malaysian ESL classroom. The study rested on the premise that for learners to become autonomous learners they must be systematically guided through learning opportunities where they can learn to take responsibility for their own learning (Dickinson, 1987; Holec, 1981; Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Nunan, 1997; and Sheerin, 1997). Ellis and Sinclair (1989) suggest that one such effective approach is through learner training programmes. Hence, this study implemented a 15-week Strategy Training Programme where students were exposed to language learning strategies, which were integrated explicitly into regular ESL lessons.

This study investigated whether strategy training increased the use of language learning strategies (LLS) among ESL learners and whether it had an effect on developing learner autonomy among ESL learners in terms of managing their own learning process. Finally, it looked into both the teacher's and the students' perceptions of strategy training.

Discussion of Findings

The study found that strategy training was effective in fostering the development of learner autonomy among learners in the Malaysian ESL classroom. This was evidenced firstly in the statistically significant increase in the frequency use of language learning strategies (LLS) among students in this study. More specifically, strategy training had a positive effect on the students' abilities to manage their own learning. Furthermore, the implementation of strategy training which placed an equal emphasis on both 'product' and 'process' helped students to become better language learners who felt committed to and responsible for taking charge of their own learning.

The discussion of the findings below looks into two main aspects, that is, the teaching and learning environment and autonomy in learning.

Teaching and Learning Environment

Triangulation of findings revealed that that the classroom teaching and learning environment did have some sort of influence on students' development of learner autonomy. The positive teaching and learning environment seen in the ESL classroom probably brought about students' success in managing their learning process.

Teaching Environment

Firstly, the particular way in which strategy training was provided requires attention. In this study, direct strategy instruction was integrated into regular ESL lessons. The 15-week Strategy Training Programme was one where the students' learning needs were the main point of reference. Built into their required needs (to improve reading and writing skills) and the stipulated area of content as specified by the English language syllabus, were related LLS that would enhance their language learning process. Such a move enabled the teacher to pay equal emphasis on both the product (content) and the process of learning. Therefore, each ESL lesson consisted of task-based activities into which were incorporated LLS that were specific to the language learning task.

Wenden (1995) notes that "it is these real life tasks that should be the focus of course development and lesson planning" in learner training programmes that seek to promote learner autonomy (p. 190). Jones et al. (1987) add that in such a case, language learning would not be compartmentalized and this would allow for effective transfer of knowledge and skills to take place. Oxford (1990) stresses that when strategy training is incorporated into regular lessons "learners better understand how the strategies can be used in a meaningful context" and this makes it "easier to remember strategies" (p. 206).

Secondly, explicit or informed training was provided to enhance and facilitate the learning process. During each language lesson students were introduced to LLS and were told 'when', 'how' and 'why' LLS would prove useful. Each lesson incorporated a

very process-orientated framework, which moved from presentation to practice and production. At the presentation stage, the teacher provided the model which was incorporated in authentic language learning tasks. At the practice stage, students got the opportunity to practise the strategies learnt with the teacher providing scaffolding whenever necessary. This was followed by production, evaluation and enrichment processes. This process-orientated step-by-step informed training probably enhanced students' language learning and awareness of LLS that helped them to manage their own learning. Wenden (1987b, p. 160) highlights the fact that informed training "places emphasis on learning to learn" and it has "proven to be more effective" in language learning. Oxford (1990) elaborates that extensive research carried out by Brown and Palinscar (1978), Dansereau (1985), Ellis and Sinclair (1989) and O'Malley et al. (1985) all reveal that the most effective strategy training is informed training.

Thirdly, through informed strategy training the teacher was able to introduce to her students a variety of strategies in each of the three observed training sessions. In fact, through implicit and explicit means, Karen succeeded in introducing all of Oxford's (1990) six categories of strategies during each of her three observed English Language lessons. This probably provided the 42 students the opportunity to pick and choose strategies that would best suit their individual needs. According to Oxford (1990), the introduction of a variety of strategies during classroom lessons can be interpreted as the teacher's sensitivity to the varied needs and learning styles of her students. The teacher's sensitivity towards her students' needs was also evident in the rather equal time spent on the three modes of instruction - that is addressing the whole class, individual work and co-operative learning. This indicated Karen's awareness of

differences in learning styles and she provided opportunities for students who liked to study on their own or with their peers.

Fourthly, the findings of this study revealed that the teacher succeeded in striking a balance between direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies, which help students in language learning (product) accounted for 48.2 per cent of the strategies introduced during the three observed language lessons. Meanwhile, indirect strategies that help students manage their learning (process) accounted for the remaining 51.8 per cent. Such a move probably helped to provide students with the necessary skills and knowledge to enhance both the product and process of their language learning experience.

This study indicated that, classroom instruction had a strong influence on students' learning. For example, though the teacher provided help in all the four aspects of managing the learning process (planning, organizing, monitoring and evaluation), more emphasis was given to the organization and monitoring aspects of learning. Findings (Table 12) revealed that approximately 64.3 per cent of the total number of instances depicting management of the learning process were allocated to helping students to organize and monitor their learning. In contrast to this only 21.4 per cent was set aside for planning whilst another 14 per cent was spent helping students to evaluate their learning. The greater emphasis on organizing and monitoring learning probably resulted in students experiencing more success in organizing (mean score-3.2) and monitoring (mean score-2.8) their learning as contrasted to evaluating (mean score-2.3). This indicates that the classroom teaching environment did have some influence on the students' success in managing their learning process.

A similar influence was also seen with regards to the students' preference and choice of strategy use. Prior to the training programme, students indicated a great preference for social strategies. Post strategy-training SILL scores, however, saw students displaying a great preference for metacognitive and cognitive strategies. This was followed closely by compensation and social strategies. Affective and memory strategies continued to remain the least favoured strategies prior to and after the training programme. Classroom observations indicated that in all the three observed lessons, the teacher placed more emphasis on metacognitive and cognitive strategies. In fact, out of the total number of strategies introduced during her lessons, 29 per cent of them were metacognitive strategies while another 25 per cent were cognitive strategies. Together these two categories of strategies accounted for approximately 54 per cent of strategies introduced in the classroom. Meanwhile, social strategies accounted for 13.4 per cent with equal emphasis been given to compensation and memory strategies (11.6 per cent). The least emphasized strategies were the affective strategies as they accounted for only 9.4 per cent of the total number of strategies introduced.

While Brown (1987, p. 99) acknowledged that the "affective domain is impossible to describe within definable limits", Oxford (1990, p. 140), stressed that the "affective side of the learner is probably one of the very biggest influences on language learning success or failure." Classroom observations indicated that in all three lessons only one aspect of affective strategies (taking your emotional temperature) was introduced. This aspect was carried out through the writing of a language diary and activities, which encouraged students to discuss feelings with others. No help was provided to students in other affective strategies such as helping them to lower their

anxiety or to encourage themselves by making positive statements or rewarding themselves. This could perhaps be one of the reasons why students did not have the confidence to self-assess their own learning, even though their written documents and the teacher's responses indicated otherwise.

Therefore, it may be said that the most frequent and least frequent categories of learning strategies used among students in this study might be due to the strategy exposure provided in the students' learning experience. This finding is similar to the findings in research studies carried out by Bialystok (1979) and Nyikos (1990) who suggested that classroom environment may foster the use of a restricted range of learning strategies.

In the present study it was rather evident that the classroom teaching environment fostered the use of metacognitive and cognitive strategies. This most probably influenced students' preference to both these two groups of strategies. Findings in this study showed that the attention given to these two groups of strategies could have actually helped students become better learners. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) note that while metacognitive strategies involve thinking about the learning process (that is, planning, arranging, monitoring and evaluating), cognitive strategies involve interacting with the materials to be learned, manipulating the material mentally or applying a specific technique to a learning task. Therefore, the classroom teaching environment that fostered the students' preference for these two groups of strategies most probably resulted in the students experiencing marked improvement in both language learning (product) and management of the learning process (process).

Learning Environment

Students' success in managing their own learning was probably enhanced because of the positive learning environment. Firstly the learning environment encouraged students to use cognitive tools such as learning journals and learning contracts. This most probably facilitated the students' language learning process. Both these documents emphasized *reflection and self-diagnosis*.

The learning contract used in this study provided a supportive framework and a sense of direction and evaluation through which learners could plan their own learning. When preparing learning contracts students were required to identify learning objectives, determine learning tasks, select suitable learning materials, determine deadlines for completing work and evaluate their own performance. According to Nunan and Lamb (1996) and Dickinson (1987), all these are crucial decisions in effective learning that will help learners to not only develop greater awareness of language learning but also help them develop learner autonomy.

Findings in this study revealed that 81 per cent of the students perceived that they benefited from using learning contracts. These students claimed that by using learning contracts they could concentrate on their weaknesses and carry out activities that could give them the freedom to work to suit their own needs. A majority of the students felt that working using learning contracts enhanced their planning abilities and

this helped them to manage their own learning. More importantly, they felt learning contracts made them more responsible for their learning as learning contracts instilled in them self-discipline. In fact, researchers like Anderson, Boud and Sampson (1996), Hammond and Collins (1991) and Knowles (1990) assert that learning contracts acknowledge individual differences and encourage personal growth. They also highlight that learning contracts are a practical way of guiding learners towards learner autonomy as they encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning and prepare learners for life-long learning.

In the learning journals, students recorded their understanding and awareness of LLS introduced in each lesson. Smith (1990) reports that this kind of awareness and self-understanding encourages reflection in learning. Approximately 73.8 per cent of the students in this study felt they benefited from keeping a learning journal. They acknowledged that the learning journal helped them keep track of what they had learnt and felt it was a good way to make them aware of the learning strategies introduced in each lesson. Some hinted that the learning journal helped them manage and monitor their learning more effectively while others implied that it helped develop their affective side as it allowed them to express their 'feelings without feeling discomfort.'

Investigation into students' learning journals revealed that a majority of the students wrote reflective entries. According to Morgan (1995) reflection is a powerful tool for improvement as it can turn failure into a source of information and constructive feedback that can help learners to learn better next time around. This learning from mistakes also brings about a change in awareness and leads to more self-directed or

autonomous learning. In fact, some students wrote rather critically reflective entries.

For example Student 17 had this to say about the topic on environmental issues:

I'm starting to find these lessons on environmental issues a little self-contradictory. To create awareness on Mother Nature we have been fed with about a dozen A-4 sheets. I feel the teacher is merely imparting language skills and not playing Greenpeace. I think a teacher should 'instil practical moral values' and this makes the lesson real for us. I don't mean scrolls of theory on model environment-friendly behaviour, but perhaps printing on both sides of the paper and starting a rough paper recycle bin in class and I feel this could help us connect what we learn in class with the world around us. Maybe this could be a new strategy - associating physical activity with mental learning. Does this sound plausible?

According to Smith (1990) such critical reflection is critical to effective learning because progress is made when learners engage themselves upon outcomes of their studying. He adds that awareness, reflection and self-monitoring all interact to make critical contributions in the learning process as they help learners "to identify and cope with barriers to learning and make satisfactory resolution of issues of self-direction and control" (p. 23). Numerous other authors and researchers like Brookfield (1990), Dickinson (1989), Diez and Moon (1990) and Oxford (1990) have testified to the effectiveness of keeping learning diaries.

Secondly, students' were probably able to achieve success in managing their learning because of their initial exposure to 'ice-breaking' sessions that helped create student awareness for taking responsibility for their own learning. Both Dickinson (1987) and Kenny (1993) note that if we want our learners to become active participants of their own learning process, we must first release them from the psychological pressures of learning and from the behaviour of being passive learners. Kenny (1993) believes that this can be done through a session which he calls an 'unfreezing

experience.' In this study, during the ice-breaking sessions, students were exposed to activities that helped them discover more about learning and themselves as learners. During these sessions the students' assumptions and preconceptions about their own learning prior to strategy training were challenged through questionnaires, discussions and sharing sessions. For example Student 36 had this to say in one of her journal entries:

Under this training programme, (through a questionnaire) I discovered I was a 'tactile' learner. This means that I study / receive information better when I write it down. So for the last exam I wrote all the important information down as I studied and, guess what? - it worked! Now I realise that I can remember things and understand concepts easier. My marks have improved too. I will continue using this method in my future studies.

Most probably these ice-breaking sessions instilled in the students a growth of awareness about their own learning and this probably aided them in taking charge of their own learning.

Thirdly, the learning environment in this study was further enhanced because it took into consideration aspects of the learner-centred approach. Researchers like Brindley (1984), Clarke (1991a), Littlejohn (1985) and Nunan and Lamb (1996) stress that in an ideal situation in a learner-centred approach the participatory role of the learners should be seen in relation to curriculum planning, implementation and evaluation. In fact, some of these aspects were observed in the implementation of the Strategy Training Programme employed in this study. For example, at the planning stage, the teacher took into consideration Nunan's (1995) view that most learners do not learn what teachers teach because there is often a mismatch between the pedagogical agenda of the teacher and the learner. Therefore, before the strategy training schedule

was drawn up the teacher ensured that the needs' analysis procedure took into consideration both the students' and teacher's perspectives. This way the students were consulted on what aspects of language learning they wanted to improve.

During the implementation stage, students were involved in learning activities that involved all the five levels of autonomy put forward by Nunan (1997), i.e. awareness, involvement, intervention, creation and transcendence. Classroom observations, however, indicated that more emphasis was given to activities on creating awareness and involvement in contrast to intervention, creation and transcendence. In Interview III, Karen acknowledged that she was aware of this and emphasized that learner autonomy was a slow and gradual process. She, however, stressed that the duration of 15 weeks was insufficient to develop fully autonomous learners. Nevertheless, she felt that strategy training was effective in helping to foster the development of learner autonomy among students in this study. She pointed out that on a scale of 1 to 10, "a majority of the students are on a scale of 7."

Karen's view that the development of autonomous learners is a slow and gradual process has also been put forward by researchers such as Farmer and Sweeney (1994), Nunan (1997) and Sheerin (1997). All these researchers stress autonomy is a gradual developmental process based on a continuum from relatively less to more learner autonomy. Nunan (1997) emphasizes that it is usually well into a course before learners can make informed choices in order to take full responsibility for their own learning.

Autonomy in Learning

Findings in this study indicated that strategy training was effective in developing learner autonomy among the ESL students. These students not only experienced a significant increase in the use of language learning strategies necessary for the development of learner autonomy but also displayed a number of characteristics evident in autonomous learners.

Language Learning Strategies

A growing body of researchers (Benson & Voller, 1997; Dickinson, 1987; Holec, 1987; Oxford, 1990; Tudor, 1996 and Wenden, 1987b) have pointed out that if learners are equipped with the right learning tools such as LLS, they can be helped to take charge of their own learning.

The findings in this study indicated that strategy training probably resulted in a significant increase in the frequency use of LLS needed for the development of learner autonomy. The pre strategy training SILL score increased from 3.1 (medium frequency use of LLS) to 3.5 (high frequency use of LLS) at the end of the 15-week Strategy Training Programme. More specifically, students experienced an increase in the frequency use for all of Oxford's (1990) six categories of LLS (memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social). According to Oxford (1990) though all the six groups of strategies work in tandem with each other, memory, cognitive and compensation strategies (direct strategies) directly involve learning the target language. On the other hand, metacognitive, affective and social strategies (indirect strategies) aid students in managing the language learning process.

Findings from the SILL Questionnaire revealed a significant increase in the frequency use for both the direct and indirect group of strategies. The students' mean score for direct strategies increased from 2.9 (medium frequency use of LLS) to 3.5 (high frequency use of LLS) at the end of the 15-week Strategy Training Programme. This increase in the frequency use of LLS probably equipped students with a variety of strategies and students' written documents indicated that by the end of the programme all six participants in the case study were able to determine suitable learning strategies to successfully accomplish their learning tasks. Such understanding of LLS probably equipped students with the ability to become better language learners.

Findings obtained from Feedback Forms, showed that a total of 40 students in the study had changed their method of studying English to using LLS. This finding was further corroborated by interviews carried out with students who indicated that LLS made language learning "easier", "faster" and "less disorganized." Oxford (1990) concurs with such a view of the efficacy of learning strategies. She said that LLS would "make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, and more transferable to new situations" (p. 8).

All 42 students stressed that LLS facilitated their language learning and helped them to become better learners. They pointed out that their grades for the English Language tests improved under the training programme. The teacher, Karen, further confirmed this fact. She reported that the students' displayed marked improvement in language learning. Their mean score for the English Language test increased from 62 per cent prior to the training to 75 per cent after the provision of strategy training. Furthermore, Karen noted that the students exhibited increased improvement in both

their reading comprehension and writing skills. This finding is similar to a study carried out by O'Malley and his colleagues (1985) that indicated that "classroom instruction on learning strategies with integrative language skills can facilitate learning" (p.577).

Learning can only be considered effective if students are able to transfer and use knowledge gained in new situations. The students in this study saw the potential of LLS and acknowledged that they found them useful in other settings. They claimed that they were able to transfer strategies learnt during English to other academic subjects such as the national Malay language (*Bahasa Malaysia*) and History. Researchers like Sternberg (1988) and McKeachie (1987) confirm that the transfer of learning is a significant issue and when students are able to transfer what is learned to other new settings, they reach to a step of higher learning which indicates that 'real learning' has actually taken place. Sternberg (1988) argues that "if we are unable to carry over knowledge to new situations, the knowledge is essentially useless to us" (p. 286). The students' success in transferring strategies to other settings could again be due to their successful pairing of cognitive and metacognitive strategies as these two groups of strategies were the most preferred groups of strategies among students. In fact, experiments carried out by Ellis and Sinclair (1986), revealed that the successful combination of cognitive and metacognitive strategies made it easier for learners to transfer strategy use to other appropriate learning tasks in other settings.

Students also recorded an increase in the frequency use of indirect strategies (metacognitive, affective and social strategies). The students' mean SILL score increased from 3.1 (medium use of LLS) to 3.5 (high frequency use of LLS) at the end

of the training programme. Indirect strategies such as metacognitive strategies help students support and manage the learning process (Oxford, 1990) and are a "prerequisite to self-regulation, helping learners to become active participants in their own performance" (Wenden, 1998, p. 520).

The increase in the frequency use of indirect strategies most probably helped *students in managing their own learning*. This was evident in the fact, that, *by the end of* the Strategy Training Programme, 81 per cent of the students felt that they were successful in managing their own learning. Students' written documents (journal entries and learning contracts) revealed that although students entered the training programme with rather limited capabilities in managing their own learning they were able to achieve success in planning, organizing, monitoring and evaluating their own learning process towards the end of the training programme. The rate of improvement however, varied from one individual to another.

Characteristics of Autonomous Learners

The explicit introduction of language learning strategies probably equipped the students with the ability and willingness to take responsible for their own learning. Findings indicated that *towards the end of the training programme*, students displayed a number of characteristics of autonomous learners that have been put forward by researchers such as Dickinson (1987 and 1993), Holec (1981 & 1987), Ho and Crookall (1995) and Little (1996).

According to Dickinson (1993) autonomous learners have the ability to plan and formulate their own learning objectives. Findings in this study, revealed that strategy training did have a positive effect on students' planning abilities (mean score-2.8). Students' written documents and their responses to interviews and the Feedback Form indicated that they were able to achieve success in determining and formulating learning objectives. They were, however, more successful in advance planning (mean score 2.9) when compared to their ability in determining and formulating learning objectives (mean score 2.6). Findings also suggested that students who displayed an early awareness and application for advance organizational planning achieved greater success in planning. For example, the early success in advance organizational planning experienced by Students A2, A3 and B3 resulted in them experiencing early success in determining and formulating their learning objectives. Interview sessions held with students and the teacher further revealed that strategy training helped students to write better and more focussed learning objectives and it gave them the confidence needed to successfully plan their own learning. The teacher asserted that the students planned better using the learning contract. Students also acknowledged that strategy training encouraged them to make a conscious effort to plan and think of strategies to use before launching upon a learning task.

Holec (1987) highlights that autonomous learners have the ability to make decisions not only in planning but also in organizing and carrying out a learning programme. This includes choosing suitable content or materials to accomplish the chosen learning objectives and having the knowledge to apply techniques or strategies to accomplish the learning task. In this study, the students exhibited success in all

aspects of organizing the learning process. The mean score of 3.0 indicated that they were successful in determining suitable learning tasks to achieve their own learning objectives. They also displayed success in pacing their own learning (mean score, 3.2) as they were able to set and keep to target dates that they had planned. Furthermore, the mean score of 3.3 revealed their confidence in locating suitable learning materials to achieve their learning tasks. Furthermore, the training programme probably equipped the students with a variety of learning strategies and the mean score of 3.1 exhibits the students' success in determining suitable LLS to accomplish learning tasks. Finally, the mean score of 3.2 showed that they were successful in their overall ability to organize their own learning. All these findings of students' success in organizing their learning was further corroborated by the findings obtained by analyzing the written documents of the six students who were the focus of the case studies.

Both Dickinson (1987) and Holec (1987) stress that autonomous learners are able to monitor and self-access their own learning. Researchers like Stern (1975) and O'Malley and Chamot (1990) state that good language learners consciously monitor their own performance and since self-monitoring provides learners with feedback on their language performance, a self-monitoring behaviour characterizes autonomous and successful learners. Findings from both written documents and the Feedback Form (mean score of 2.8) revealed that the students were capable and successful in checking and correcting their own work.

These students, however, had some reservations about their own capability in evaluating their learning. Although investigation into students' written documents and feedback received from the teacher indicated that the students were successful in self-

assessing their work, responses gained from student interview sessions and the Feedback Form indicated otherwise. The mean score of 2.3 displayed their lack of confidence in self-assessing their own work. This probably indicates that the Strategy Training Programme did not provide students with sufficient help and guidance to boost their confidence needed in self-evaluation. On the other hand, this perception could be due to a cultural factor. Detaramani and Shuk (1999) indicate that a majority of Asian students due to their Eastern cultural training often see the teacher as an authority figure and often perceive evaluation to be the role of the teacher.

By the end of the training programme a majority of the students (81 %) acknowledged that they were successful in their ability to work independently and to manage their own learning. Holec (1987) in discussing "The Learner as a Manager" points out that good and autonomous learners have the ability to make decisions necessary to plan and carry out a learning programme. They also have the ability to choose suitable learning objectives and choice of content or materials that will be used to accomplish the chosen learning objectives. This also includes the methods or strategies to be used to accomplish the task, and then have the ability to self-assess the outcome. Since a majority of the students in this study displayed all the above characteristics, it can be concluded that the increase in the frequency use of LLS under the Strategy Training Programme perhaps did help equip students with the ability (skills and knowledge) needed to achieve learner autonomy.

Little (1995) emphasizes that for learners to be truly autonomous they must not only have the 'ability' (skills and knowledge) to make and carry out choices in the learning process but also the 'willingness' (motivation and confidence) to take

responsibility for carrying out the chosen alternatives. This means that an autonomous learner is one who has "acquired the strategies and knowledge to take some (if not all) responsibility for her language learning and is willing and self-confident enough to do so (Wenden, 1991, p.163).

Perhaps it can be assumed that once the students are equipped with the ability (skills and knowledge) to take responsibility for own learning, they are probably more willing to take charge of their own learning. Dickinson (1995) notes that literature on motivational studies often discuss the cause-effect relationship between success in learning and motivation. He points out that researchers do not know for certain whether "it is motivation that produces successful learning or successful learning that enhances motivation" (p. 172). He explains that, on one hand, we have researchers like Skehan (1989) who conclude that the balance is slightly in favour of the view that motivation produces successful learning. On the other hand, researchers like Deci and Ryan (1985) have shown that improved learning has a 'positively synergistic effect' that enhances motivation and this in turn leads to further success.

The findings in this study, however, show that once the students had the 'tools' for effective learning they were more willing to take responsibility for their learning. Karen highlighted this fact when she pointed out that at the beginning of the training programme some of the students were rather skeptical about the efficacy of LLS. However, once they were able to see, experience and reap the benefits of strategy training, they became more motivated and committed towards language learning.

This commitment was seen in their responses in the Feedback Form where approximately 95 per cent of the students felt that they were most responsible for their

own learning. These students pointed out that when faced with a learning problem they would first try to solve it on their own before turning to their peers or teachers. Students also revealed that strategy training made them more committed to their own learning. This commitment was revealed through students' success in attending English Language classes and completing all their homework. More importantly, both the teacher's and the students' responses indicated that they were now doing more additional language work on their own. The teacher stressed that prior to the training programme, hardly any students took the initiative of doing extra English Language work on their own. She pointed out that although students had to complete three learning contracts, on the average, each student was able to complete five learning contracts for the duration of 15 weeks.

Students' willingness to take charge of their own learning was also indicated by their ranking of the roles of a student and a teacher. Their rankings of both the learners' and the teacher's role were rather consistent with literature on learner-centredness that encourages learner autonomy (Cotterall, 1995; McCombs & Whisler, 1997; Tudor, 1996, and Van Lier, 1996).

The students' ranking of the roles of a learner indicated that managing their own learning that is planning, organizing, monitoring and assessing their own learning was more important than completing their homework. Cotterall (1995) points out that learners who subscribe to this view correspond to the profile of autonomous learners as they are in agreement or constant with beliefs about how autonomy could be fostered.

In ranking the roles of the teacher, students responses showed that they felt a teacher should be more of a guide and helper who could empower them to take charge

of their own learning by providing them 'learner training' through the use of LLS. They also perceived the teacher's didactic role as tester and evaluator as least important. Cotterall (1995) states that when learners show an awareness of the teacher's role as helper and facilitator, "they are ready for autonomy and willing to break away from the traditional authoritarian view of teacher's role (p. 197).

Hence, it may be concluded that the 15-week Strategy Training Programme which brought about a significant increase in the frequency use of LLS equipped the students with the ability (skills and knowledge) and willingness (motivation and confidence) to take charge of their own learning. This proves that strategy training did help develop learner autonomy among students in this study and perhaps these students are now on the path of becoming autonomous life-long learners. The efficacy of strategy training in developing learner autonomy has been attested to by researchers such as O'Malley and Chamot (1990), Oxford (1990) and Tudor (1996). All stress that learning strategies are tools that provide students with the skills and knowledge they need to develop learner autonomy.

Findings obtained from this study also showed the efficacy of strategy training in developing learner autonomy in a large ESL classroom of 42 students, each with different needs and learning styles. This finding is in contrast with views held by researchers like Reese-Miller (1993) and Park (1997) who are rather skeptical of the efficacy of strategy training when conducted in a large classroom. They argue that in a large classroom in which a variety of learners with different learner characteristics exist, teachers cannot introduce LLS that fit every student's individual learner characteristics. In this study, Karen managed to introduce all six categories of strategies using both

implicit and explicit instruction in each lesson. This probably provided students with the choice and freedom to choose strategies that best suited their needs.

This study also proved that Malaysian ESL students are capable of taking charge of their own learning. This finding is in direct contrast to studies carried out by Detaramani and Shuk (1999) who reported that their learner autonomy programme (Self-Access Centre- SAC) was rather unsuccessful with their Asian (Hong Kong) students as they were reluctant to use the SAC. They felt that Asian students find it "difficult to accept a system, which does not have teacher-directed language learning programmes" and "eastern cultural training has taught learners to follow and not to question the voice of authority, namely the teacher, who is there to hold their hands throughout the learning experience" (p. 146). This study however, showed that given systematic guidance, most students are capable of achieving learner autonomy.

To conclude, there is much that can be inferred from the findings of this study. Firstly, the main finding in this study indicated that direct intervention in the form of strategy training into regular ESL lessons was successful in developing learner autonomy among ESL learners. This finding is similar with studies carried out by researchers such as O'Malley et al. (1985) and proponents of informed training such as Ellis and Sinclair (1989), Oxford (1990) and Wenden (1987b).

Secondly, the success of the 15-week Strategy Training Programme was probably due to the increased frequency use of LLS among learners and the effective implementation of strategy training that emphasized both the 'product' and 'process' of learning. The explicit and implicit integration of strategies into regular English Language lessons resulted in the significant increase use of LLS among students. This

increased frequency use of LLS helped to equip students with the 'ability' (skills and knowledge) and 'willingness' (confidence and motivation) to take responsibility for their learning. Though strategy training helped students to effectively plan, organize and monitor their learning, it nevertheless failed to give students the confidence needed to self-assess their own work. Overall, the Feedback Form and interview results indicated that both learners and the teacher perceived strategy training as being useful in the development of learner autonomy. The teacher revealed that with strategy training her students became more responsible, diligent and motivated to learn English. All the students admitted that strategy training helped them to become better language learners and 81 per cent of them acknowledged that they had the confidence to work independently on their own by the end of the training programme.

Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study yield information that has some pertinent pedagogical implications. Given below are some of the pedagogical implications and recommendations.

ESL Curriculum

This study indicated that strategy training has the potential to help learners gain learner autonomy. This finding implies that it is critical that language learning strategies (LLS) be considered and incorporated in the planning and designing of formal

ESL curricula. A similar view is also shared by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) who stressed that LLS should be "among the first consideration of any ESL/EFL teacher or researcher who wants to enhance students' learning" (p. 19).

Even though the LHTL concept has been a topic of significant interest in Malaysia there have been relatively very few ideas that have been reflected in the school curriculum. At present, the Malaysian KBSR and KBSM English Language syllabi seem to be over concerned with the 'product' - that is the aim to complete the stipulated language syllabus or components of learning. Such a view, perceives "language learning as an end in itself rather than as a means to an end" (Richards, 1988, p. 14). Therefore, for effective learning to take place the ESL curriculum should have dual objectives with a key focus on learning at all levels and an appropriate balance between 'product' and 'process.'

The 'product' should highlight the language content to be learnt. This includes the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), grammar, vocabulary and the sound system to be learnt and acquired. In addition to this, the focus of the 'process of learning' should be highlighted to help students to 'learn-how-to-learn.' This would mean equipping students with 'tools' such as language learning strategies that they can use in formal education in order to become managers of their own learning. With an equal emphasis in these two areas students can be guided to take charge of their learning and help them become autonomous life-long learners.

Furthermore, there still exists in the Malaysian educational and classroom practice a top-bottom approach to teaching and learning where educational experts decide 'what', 'when' and 'how' learning should be carried out. We must realize that a

curriculum should be made to reflect the needs and concerns of learners. Moreover, learners have a right to decide on 'what' to learn. Perhaps the time has come to allow for more learner participation in deciding and designing the ESL curriculum. Needs analyses need to be carried out in order to tailor ESL curricula that cater to learners' needs and goals. Such a step can be seen as a positive movement towards a more learner-centred approach where learners can be seen as both planners and monitors of their own learning.

Language Learning

At the end of the 15-week Strategy Training Programme, 81 per cent of the students in this study claimed that they were successful in managing their own learning. This finding implies that learners can attain learner autonomy if they are encouraged, guided and provided with opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning.

We must bear in mind at all times that only the learner can learn and the learner will learn best if he or she is involved in taking a proactive role in the learning process. The first step in encouraging students to take upon a participatory role is by making them aware of their role in the learning process. This can be carried out through the use of procedures such as discussions, oral reports and the administration of formal and informal inventories and questionnaires that challenge learners to re-evaluate their beliefs and preconceptions about learning.

Another successful way of creating awareness for learning is through the use of cognitive and self-reflective learning tools such as learning journals or learning diaries.

By getting students to respond and react to daily lessons, students are encouraged to take a proactive role in the learning process. They are consciously made to think about what they have learnt and how successful they were in each learning experience. Such metacognition often leads to more effective learning as it helps develop critical and reflective learners.

While learning journals help in the development of a critical and reflective learner necessary for effective learning, the learning contract helps learners take charge of their own learning process. Through the use of learning contracts, learners get the opportunity and freedom to plan their own learning based on their own learning needs. Moreover, learning contracts encourage learners to take a proactive role in organizing, monitoring and self-assessing their own performance. Such opportunities in the long run help to foster the development of learner autonomy.

Language Teaching

The effectiveness of direct instruction in strategy training, especially in equipping students with the language learning strategies (LLS) necessary for fostering learning autonomy, implies that the teaching of strategies needs to be 'informed' or explicit. Such training explicitly teaches learners not only the 'why' and 'how' to use new strategies but also to evaluate the effectiveness of different strategies and decide when it is appropriate to transfer a given strategy to a new situation. The emphasis in classroom instruction must, therefore, be systematic and guided so that students can 'learn-how-to-learn' using LLS. Baumann (1984) stressed that in any strategy

instruction "the teacher should teach the lesson, not the textbooks, games or media" (p. 113).

This means when providing explicit instruction on LLS, language teaching needs to focus on the 'when', 'how' and 'why' aspects of the learning strategy being introduced. This can be done through a process-orientated framework, which illustrates to students a step-by-step process for strategy instruction. This process-orientated framework should start with 'presentation', where the teacher models the strategy. Next, the students must be provided with opportunities and necessary scaffolding that would give them sufficient practice to use the new strategies. This should be followed by production, evaluation and enrichment activities so that, students are able to transfer the learning strategies to other related or new learning contexts.

Furthermore, the findings in this study imply that for effective learning to take place, strategy instruction should place an equal emphasis on both 'direct' and 'indirect' strategies. While 'direct' strategies such as memory, cognitive and compensation strategies help in the learning of the target language, indirect strategies such as metacognitive, affective and social strategies help students to manage and support the learning process. This means that for each lesson, teachers should plan ahead to ensure an equal emphasis is given to both these categories of strategies.

Results of this study indicated that students felt they were more successful and confident in planning, organizing and monitoring their learning when compared to evaluating their own learning. This implies that perhaps classroom instruction should provide students with more opportunities to encourage peer-evaluation and more guidance should be given to how students can effectively self-assess their own

performance. Such opportunities would help to instill in students a sense of confidence in self-evaluation.

Moreover, teachers should realize that their ultimate aim is not only to teach but to help learners gain the confidence and ability to take charge of their own learning. Therefore, besides providing learner training in the form of learning 'tools' such as LLS, the teacher should also provide opportunities to students so that they can be systematically helped towards less teacher dependence and more learner independence. At this juncture, teachers may perhaps take into consideration Nunan's (1997) proposal of the five levels of learner autonomy. In language teaching, teachers could plan language tasks and activities that guide students to move from awareness and involvement to intervention, creation and finally transcendence - where learners become teachers and researchers capable of learning on their own.

Action Research

Findings in this study indicated that the nature of instructional practices have an important and direct influence on student learning. For example, classroom observations indicated that the teacher's instructional nature provided greater emphasis to organizing and monitoring as contrasted to planning and evaluating the learning process. This resulted in students experiencing more success in organizing and monitoring their own learning in comparison to planning and self-evaluating. Similarly, the teacher's instructional emphasis on metacognitive and cognitive strategies resulted in students' experiencing greater enhancement in the frequency use of these two categories of

learning strategies. This implies that teachers need to be actively involved in conducting action research in order to self-evaluate their classroom instructional behaviour.

Action research can be carried out through the use of research procedures such as self-evaluation, peer-evaluation and student-evaluation. In conducting self-evaluation, teachers can be encouraged to keep a learning log where they can personally react, record and reflect upon their teaching experience for each day or week. Johnson (1995) stresses that journal writing makes teachers "more aware of not only how they teach, but why they teach the way they do" (p. 31). Such critical reflection can help teachers to identify their strengths and weaknesses and perhaps take steps to further improve themselves.

If resources and time permit, teachers can either video-record or audio-record their classroom lessons and later look into various aspects of their instructional procedures. Teachers can also get their colleagues to view or listen to audio taped lessons in order to get peer-evaluation. Getting colleagues to sit in for classroom observations is another form of peer evaluation. Such classroom observations and professional sharing sessions can provide good and constructive feedback into aspects such as the nature of student-teacher interaction, instructional nature and classroom behaviour. In fact, action research and professional sharing can enhance the profession by making teachers more aware of their limitations and shortcomings. Finally, getting students' feedback through the use of simple questionnaires or tests can help provide useful insight as to the effectiveness of classroom instruction.

Logistics and Management Issues

The findings of this study also imply that more attention should be paid to logistical issues related to the development of learner autonomy. For example, the teacher in this study faced difficulty in providing a suitable time for counselling,

It is important to bear in mind that in order to foster the development of learner autonomy, both the students and the teacher should be seen as partners in the learning process. This means that students need to be provided with ample opportunities to talk about their learning. Perhaps a suitable time within the school curriculum hours should be set aside for effective counselling sessions. Such a move would perhaps encourage more students to be able to talk about their learning difficulties and help them take more responsibility for their own learning.

Findings in this study showed that Karen had difficulty providing effective counselling due to the large number of students in her class. Hence, another issue to be considered is the reduction in the number of students in a classroom so as to enable the teacher to implement effective counselling sessions. One alternative is perhaps having two teachers to provide counselling for one large classroom of students.

Karen pointed out that the implementation of strategy training also involved a detailed preparation of a variety of materials and activities in order to create awareness among learners to take responsibility for their own learning during the 'ice-breaking' sessions. Besides that, a variety of learning materials had also to be prepared for each lesson in order to give the 42 students the freedom and choice to work with learning materials catered to suit their individual learning needs and proficiency levels. Such

preparation directly increased the workload of the ESL teacher. In addition to that, the teacher had to monitor the progress and self-study rate of a rather large number of students - that is 42. In such a scenario, education authorities should perhaps work towards a reduction in the workload of teachers so that more effective implementation of learner autonomy programmes.

Limitations and Directions for Further Research

This study is based on only one intact ESL class in an urban secondary school. The small sample size employed does not give it the statistical support for any conclusive findings that may be directly generalizable to the whole Malaysian student population. Nevertheless, the results obtained from the chosen sample has provided some useful insights on fostering learner autonomy through strategy training.

Furthermore, with the absence of a control group it is difficult to make such conclusive remarks that the development of learner autonomy was solely due to the treatment provided under the 15-week Strategy Training Programme. The students' development of learner autonomy could be due to a number of other extraneous variables such as student maturation and the use of research procedures such as interviews, learning journals and learning contracts that encouraged reflective thinking.

Moreover, there is again the novelty effect of a new Strategy Training Programme and the effect of social desirability on subjects' responses in both the questionnaires and interviews are other limitations that have to be taken into consideration. Even though every effort was made to remind respondents to give their true and honest perceptions during the administration of the SILL Questionnaire, the

Feedback Form, and the interview sessions, the validity of their views and perceptions cannot be altogether established.

In order to get a better perspective into the development of learner autonomy through strategy training, the results of this initial exploratory study could be verified through a follow-up parallel research study. Such future studies could perhaps utilize a larger sample size that includes schools located in both urban and rural settings.

Perhaps a more in-depth study, which tracks the frequency use of strategies as reported in the SILL Questionnaire with strategies that students display in their learning tasks could be carried out.. Furthermore, further studies on developing learner autonomy may involve working with subjects with limited English Language proficiency. Future researchers could perhaps investigate the development of learner autonomy through strategy training using a different research design. An ideal study should perhaps involve a comparative study of the treatment group with a non-treatment group. In such a study, it is perhaps important to first establish the current level of autonomy at the beginning of the learner autonomy programme.

This study has only focused on the teaching of language learning strategies and perhaps neglected other aspects such as learners' motivation to learning, learners' attitudes to autonomy, learners' beliefs and expectations of learning and the learners' learning styles. Future research may want to investigate these aspects for a more in-depth analysis of learner autonomy.

Conclusion

This study showed the effectiveness of strategy training in fostering learner autonomy in the Malaysian ESL classroom. While this study has provided some

valuable information in the target situation it cannot be regarded as the sole reference for the formulation or the implementation of learner autonomy programmes through strategy training in Malaysian ESL classrooms. The development of learner autonomy is a slow and gradual process and any learner autonomy programme needs to be implemented with great care and sensitivity while taking into consideration the complexities of each learning environment.

What we can, however, conclude from this study is that, if the seeds for autonomous learning are sown in the ESL classroom, our learners are capable of acquiring learner autonomy. Allwright (1988) stressed that no matter how "infertile the soil may be in the whole-class environment" we can find seeds of autonomy "even in that apparently inhospitable place" (p. 35). Since very few learners are spontaneously self-directed, learners need to be systematically guided and provided with skills and knowledge through learner training programmes such as strategy training. Bertoldi, Kollar and Ricard (1988) point out that once learners are equipped with the learning tools such as learning strategies, "many learners develop original innovative steps that enable them to manage the learning process better and thereby make significant progress" (p. 163). Furthermore, the implementation of such learner training programmes will help to ensure that the 'seeds of autonomy' are nurtured and given a chance to 'thrive' so that learners can manage their own learning. Therefore, learner autonomy programmes such as strategy training and LHTL should be perceived not as an end in itself, but the first step towards autonomous and life-long learning.