# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

### Background to the study

Changes in education are necessary if it is to keep pace with political, socio-economical and technological developments in society. One aspect of educational change relates to the curriculum and efforts are made to ensure that the learning and teaching processes meet the needs of the individual and society. In line with Vision 2020, the Education Ministry of Malaysia, realising the vital role of education in creating a thinking society, decided to implement the new Sixth Form Geography curriculum effective from 25th of May 1996, replacing the old Geography curriculum which was found to be outdated and thus not relevant for today's society.

The new Geography curriculum is developed based on four important components which form the core of Geography studies. They are:

(a) the physical environment as man's habitat;

(b) human activities in the above habitat;

(c) the dynamics, uniqueness and universality of man's habitat, and

(d) the importance of geographical skills for gathering, analyzing, interpreting, explaining, presenting and synthesizing information and data.

The new curriculum combines these four components and looks into the interdependence between each of them. Thus, the new curriculum stresses on the dynamics of human relationship and interaction with the natural environment. In the paper of Physical Environment (Paper 1), natural environment is seen as a

system and topics taught include the system of the earth and energy flow, the system of geomorphology, the system of hydrology, the system of ecology and the system of atmosphere. The importance of such systems to man and man's role as an agent of change in these systems is very much discussed, especially through discussion of issues.

In the paper of Human Environment (Paper 2), the dynamics of human geography processes like urbanization, migration, population change, landuse change, economic development, cultural transformation and technology are taught. The dynamics in the processes of human geography enable one to see the connection and interdependence between physical geography and human geography (Zaharah, 1996).

This integrated approach in the new curriculum is seen as more relevant for today's society in view of the many changes in the natural environment such as global warming, deforestation, environmental pollution, population explosion, poverty, underdevelopment, and many others. It is hoped that the new curriculum will not only impart skills to synthesize basic geographical concepts but also help to create awareness among students of the importance of the environment as a system, therefore preparing them to be better future administrators, planners and decision makers.

## Need for the study

In reviewing the literature on curriculum implementation, the importance of understanding implementation as an on-going process and that the users of the innovation (teachers) are the most important in the implementation process has been emphasized by many studies. Among them are the Ford Teaching Project (Elliot and Adelman, 1974) and the Rand Studies (Berman and McLaughlin, 1977).

Fullan (1983) has identified four potential kinds of change that affect the teacher. These are (a) use of new materials; (b) changes in structure, for example, use of new teaching aids; (c) use of new teaching approaches, and (d) incorporating of new or revised beliefs underlying a particular approach. Thus it is crucial to consider teachers who are the users of the curriculum innovation in the implementation process – both in terms of their feelings (concerns) and their skills (levels of use) in the use of the innovation.

The process of developing feelings and skills in the use of an innovation must be viewed as developmental. Hall (1974) argues that most implementation studies show unfavourable results because they have not taken into account the concept of developmentalism in the implementation process. In order to facilitate successful implementation, it is therefore important to know where teachers stand in this developmental process in terms of both their expressed concerns and their classroom behavior.

Based on their concerns and their levels of use in the implementation of the Geography curriculum, the study will make recommendations for appropriate

support and services to promote the successful implementation of the Geography curriculum in the upper secondary school.

## The Statement of the Problem

Since teachers are the actual users of the innovation at the classroom level, it is very important to know the concerns and levels of use of innovation of the teachers concerned. Failure to know and address these concerns in the change process can result in implementation failure. Hall and Hord (1987) found that successful implementation can occur if teachers are adequately prepared for change and if a strong instructional leader, such as the school principal or an expert teacher, is readily available to address teacher concerns as they arise. Thus, to implement the new Sixth Form Geography curriculum successfully, it is vital to study the concerns and levels of use of the teachers who are using the innovation.

## Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study is to describe the Stages of Concern (SoC) and Levels of Use (LoU) of selected Sixth Form Geography teachers from the First and Second Divisions of Sarawak, in the implementation of the new Geography curriculum innovation as a whole; and also according to their demographic variables of gender, teaching experience and the location of school.

Studies which focussed on the feelings and behaviors of the innovation users in Malaysia are still few and far in-between. Thus this study is timely as it

focuses on the teachers who are the actual users and implementers of the curriculum innovation.

**Research Questions**

Specifically, the study addresses the following questions:

(1) What are the concerns of the Sixth Form Geography teachers in the implementation of the new Geography curriculum innovation?

(2) What are the concerns of the Sixth Form Geography teachers according to the variables of gender, teaching experience, and the location of the school in the implementation of the new Geography curriculum innovation?

(3) What are the levels of use of the Sixth Form Geography teachers in the implementation of the innovation?

(4) What are the levels of use of the Sixth Form Geography teachers according to the variables of gender, teaching experience and the location of the school in the implementation of the innovation?

Since the Sixth Form Geography teachers are the actual users of the new Geography curriculum innovation, it is appropriate for this study to focus on their concerns and. levels of use of the innovation. This is vital to ascertain where teachers stand in this implementation process so that appropriate intervention measures can be taken by the relevant authorities to ensure its success.

## Significance of Study

It is important to know where Sixth Form Geography teachers stand in the process of change in terms of both their expressed concerns and their classroom behavior. By knowing teachers' concerns and levels of use of an innovation, appropriate intervention measures such as staff development courses, coaching, provision of materials etc. can be planned and implemented by the Ministry of Education of Malaysia to meet the many different needs of the various demographic groups.

Studies on educational change in Malaysia are few and far between, and the focus has been mainly on organizational planning, support structures, attitudes towards change and variables that affect the degree of implementation (Charlesworth, 1975; Chew, 1979; Siti Hawa, 1986). Studies pertaining to Sixth Form Geography teachers in Malaysia have yet to be undertaken. Thus it is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute to a better understanding of the concerns and behaviors of Sixth Form Geography teachers so that relevant assistance can be provided to aid them in the Geography curriculum implementation process.

**Definition of Terms**

The key terms involved in this study, as listed below, are most appropriate for the context of this study only. These are as follows:

(1) Stages of Concern (SoC) : Describes the concerns or feelings that individuals experience with regard to the innovation. It has seven stages : awareness, informational, personal, management, consequence, collaboration and refocusing.

(2) Levels of Use (LoU) : Describes individuals' behaviors as they experience the process of change. It refers to the eight different ways an innovation is used by individuals and these are : non-use, orientation, preparation, mechanical, routine, refinement, integration and renewal.

(3) Change or innovation : These two terms tend to be used interchangeably. It has three aspects:

(a) it is fundamental in nature,

(b) it is deliberate and planned, and

(c) there is the intention of improvement (Nicholls, 1983).

According to Schon (1976), an act is considered innovative only if it is an addition to the sum of known inventions and not merely a borrowing or part of a wider diffusion or transference of the original act. However, Shoemaker's definition does not restrict innovation as necessarily something which must add to the sum of known inventions. It is the newness as perceived by those people using it that defines an act as innovative (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971). Roger's and Shoemaker's definition is most

appropriate for the context of this study, given that the innovation is not entirely novel in nature but it is new to those who rarely or who have not used it before.