CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Learning and Teaching Implications

Group work has been a much researched and discussed topic in many ESL/EFL classrooms today. A great deal of research has been done on the nature of peer interaction and its effect on student achievement. Wright (1991) suggested that teaching/learning activity is a long-term process, and the changes in a learner's behaviour and knowledge are usually difficult to evaluate and measure. In the second language teaching process, the teacher has to make appropriate judgements about the learners and provide them with opportunities that are most favourable for learning (Brown 1987). This aims at a shift in focus on the teaching/learning paradigm – a shift from the teacher – centred to a learner – centred approach. Hence, teachers should perceive the merits of group work as a means to encourage learner - centred language learning. This technique of learning/teaching entails interactions amongst students in pairs or groups, whereby students can be provided with opportunities to draw on their linguistic resources, in non - threatening or uninhibited situations to complete tasks set. the teacher can also extend the activities into a full - class discussion, examine errors that students made during group work, or discuss general problems that they may have had with their exercise. Thus, with follow up and discussion of an activity, the learners will feel that they are working with a purpose (Wheeler, 1995).
In schools, there are limited opportunities or an absence of natural acquisition situations provided. In this context, it is necessary for teachers to select materials and activities that would provide learners with opportunities for natural language acquisition. Hence, the study has shown that it is possible to provide learners with situations within the classroom situation for natural language acquisition through the use of group work. In such learning situations, the emphasis is to get the meaning across as clearly as possible rather than to speak in grammatical sentences.

Mentally active learners are better students and therefore, it is asserted that different processes and techniques facilitate learning (Chamot and O'Malley, 1994). Concepts of learning must be appropriate to the learner's maturity level in the target language. For competent independent functioning in language learning, there should be a transfer from the teacher to the student.

5.1 Current Situation

In schools at present, teachers are faced with many constraints such as the examination-oriented syllabus and the time factor, and thus, shy away from time-consuming methodologies of teaching and learning the English language. Teachers also need to complete the syllabus before the examination dates, especially the PMR (Penilaian Menengah Rendah) Examination for students in Form Three and the SPM (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia) Examination for students in Form Five. Parents and teachers have high performance expectations for these
students and the nature of the educational system requires the students to sit for numerous tests and exams throughout the year. Thus, teachers are rushed with time and it is not surprising then, that teachers are not motivated enough to try out new techniques or resource materials. It is essential for language teachers to adapt their perspectives of teaching and learning to enable the learners to learn the language through less - stressful and non - competitive techniques, which would in the end, help facilitate the learning of the language in a more enjoyable and relaxed manner.

5.2 Pedagogical Recommendations

The study indicates that it is possible to provide students situations within the classroom for the acquisition of the second language. Group work / activities provide situations whereby language is used naturally among peers, in contrast to language teaching practice where students are expected to produce target language structures correctly. This usually discourages learners who constantly make language mistakes and thereby, making them passive to language learning.

Teachers wishing to employ group work methods must acknowledge the fact that their learners face formidable barriers when using group-learning methods and try to help these learners overcome them. One of the barriers that the learners face was the inconsistent instruction on the part of the teacher, which wasted a lot of time and caused confusion among the learners. The teacher should
give precise instructions at the outset and the time set for each task should be clearly stated.

The study has concluded that, through the discussions stated earlier, learner difficulties in group work is brought about by various factors such as the lack of language competence in the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing and, other factors like low self - confidence and shyness in using the target language. Teachers then should utilize a number of techniques to reward and reinforce student anticipation of what would be covered, needed or expected in the group activities set. Learners should be trained to work independently and would be better organized and prepared for learning if they are made aware of the reasons and purposes for which they are asked to participate in.

Teachers need to be trained to plan activities that help learners to acquire confidence to develop, express and value their own responses. The major objective for teachers in an educational system therefore has to be to enhance the thinking processes of the learners so that they are able to access information from a variety of sources without much difficulty.

5.3 Suggestions for Further Research

There have been many previous studies that have given us useful information on the use of group work in the language class. These studies can guide us to select appropriate group work tasks for classroom use and also to help
teachers to present to their students the best possible opportunities to practice and develop their language skills in a classroom environment. It appears that a search in the UM Library revealed that research in the area of Group Work is still a relatively new phenomenon in Malaysia.

It is suggested that to achieve results that can be generalized to a larger population, a larger sample of learners need to be studied. Next, the study should be longitudinal so that outcomes over a longer period of time will give a clearer perspective of the technique in the study.

Finally, small group learning is an instructional technique that is starting to be widely used in secondary education. More research needs to be carried out to determine the effectiveness of the approach as well as its applicability to a variety of learners. The results from such research may throw some light on the language learning in the ESL situation especially in the Malaysian context and may provide insights that can elucidate language learning problems.