

V. Discussion and implication

The study investigated three main aspects concerning English self-access learning by undergraduate students at Prince of Songkla University —both in the university English self-access center (ESAC) and elsewhere at will. The study covered the following aspects: the number of learners who practiced and those who did not practice self-access learning; reasons of those who did not practice the learning mode both in and outside the ESAC; activities they did in their SI and material and media they used in the SI, both in and outside the ESAC; and the frequency of their SI.

It also examined the subjects' opinions on the university's ESAC and their assessment of the result of their SI.

As for the result of the data analysis, first it was found that a larger proportion of students undertook SI. The ratio of those who did and those who did not undertake SI was approximately 4:1.

As described above, the ESAC at PSU was established to provide a collection of material to all PSU students in general in order that they would improve their English proficiency. Considering the ratio, it seemed that the purpose was served—approximately 80 % of the students did make use of the ESAC. However, as mentioned earlier, this study should be viewed as only a study—there needs to be a larger scale of in order that the result could be more appropriately applied to further ESAC development plan.

Related to this is the small proportion of students who offered reasons for not yet having undertaken SI.

When considering the reasons for not carry out SI, although the most obvious reason being spending most of their time doing homework from other subjects, there

were two things instructors might be able to help. One concerns the four reasons related to English learning – namely, English was not important; English from the classroom was sufficient, English was too difficult; English was boring. We believe that should these four weak points were amended, we would be able to draw these students' attention leading to their allocation time to English SI. It is, thus, the mission of us, English instructors, to work on these problems.

Concerning the material they used, music cassette tapes were found the most frequently used. Basically, linguistic structure components of songs are rather distinctive. Slang, colloquial and shortened forms of spoken language are common in songs, although sentences of written form do exist. Simply listening to music, thus, could hardly help learners to improve language proficiency. Therefore, producing various forms of supplement worksheet to songs and encouraging them to work on the worksheet may enhance their SI purpose, which entertaining purpose is still served.

The other was involved with the students' time management. It was found that they spent too much time on extracurricular activities and chatting. It would be worthwhile to find the information on their activities. If the activities were found not of benefit to their study, we might need to put effort to provide more useful and interesting SI activities. More importantly, the activities provided in the ESAC should be publicized effectively to motivate these students.

Besides getting the ESAC ready and more interesting to gain users attention, we might have to carefully plan how to implement the SI to students.

One important finding as mentioned earlier, especially that related to Asian students, was that most students preferred to have English instructors in the centers. Littlewood (1999) in his article "Defining and developing autonomy in East Asian

contents” proposed that different aspects of autonomy should be matched with learners of different characteristics and contexts.

Should we wish to implement SI to Thai students we need to find out major characteristics of Thai students and adjust the learning mode to them.

Based on an assumption derived from informal observation that Thai learners are rather similar to their counterparts in Asia in many aspects, such as learning styles, perception on teachers and students roles. Thus, absolute withdrawal of instructor—in full form of SI—might cause negative reaction and a total failure in SI implementation. Rather, SI with instructor as counselor implemented as a part of conventional course or suggested as a personal remedial strategy is believed worthwhile being encouraged to PSU students, should sufficient English instructors are available to proceed this learning mode.

SI has been implemented in different ways—as full course, for remedial purpose, for specific interest and for the practice in particular skills (Dickinson, 1994, p. 107). Having informally observed students at Prince of Songkla University, besides considering problems encountered in some Asian countries, (Littlewood, 2000), it is suggested in this study that SI be implemented as a remedial purpose as corresponded with the objective of the ESAC establishment in the outset. It is further believed that if sound and clear instruments and user-friendly audio-visual materials, as well as printed materials were provided, learners would be able to make better use of the ESAC. In particular, those who are behind their classmates in their knowledge or skills should be strongly encouraged to utilize the useful learning materials provided.

Another aspect of the findings related to the university’s ESAC was the finding that 36.2 % (or 187 out of 517 students) mentioned not knowing the ESAC. The finding seemed to imply that ESAC needs significantly more publicity. The fact

that language learning is a long-term on-going process, and that English learning in Thailand involves little or no natural exposure to English outside the classroom, ESAC might be the only available potential resource where learners can seek opportunity to experience real English. Therefore, ESAC must be seriously introduced to all learners.

In addition, according to the responses for open-ended questions, ESAC should improve the physical condition. If possible, it should be situated at an obtrusive but quiet location.

Also, it needs substantially more sound guidance so that the users feel encouraged to undertake self-learning and pursue the self-learning efficiently. In other words, ESAC needs counselors who are not simply audio-visual technicians or librarians. Rather, ESL teachers or native speakers should be available in the ESAC. Some students said they did not know where to begin, meaning they were not able to make assessment on their proficiency. They did not know what kind of learning material they should use and which skill needed to be strengthened, for example.

Equally important, it was suggested that the university's ESAC counselors should be willing to provide assistance to the users. They also needed to be friendly and have a thorough understand about the learning mode and the resources in the center.

Moreover, service time should be prolonged. At the time of the data collection it was closed at 7.30 p.m.; it was requested that the center service time be extended to 10 p.m. or later.

One more crucial thing is the learning material in the center. A larger sum of budget is needed for the purchase of both printed and non-printed material. It was criticized that the resources in the university's ESAC were not up-to-date, which was

opposing one of the merits of SI as reviewed in the literature. The variety and quantity of each type of learning material was insufficient either.

One final conclusion might be drawn here is that a prudent scrutiny on every aspect of SI is needed to be done before adopting the full form of SI to students of Prince of Songkla University. Incorporation of SI to regular classes, however, is highly recommended for numerous reasons elaborated above.