

II. Review of related literature

Learner autonomy and independence seem to be the utmost goal that language educators wish to establish in second language learners. Attempts have been made to promote and create this qualification by initiating a wide variety of activities in implementing self-access learning (SA) or self-instruction (SI) (Chan, 2000; Dantas-Whitney & Larson, 2000; Ely & Pedase-Alarez, 1996; Scharle & Szabó, 2000; Sheerin, 1991).

An aspect relating to SI mode having been investigated pervasively was its merits (Aston, 1993; Little Wood, 1996). The learning mode had vigorous potential to encourage the learners to become more enthusiastic to better learn English because it contains the following advantages over traditional classroom learning.

First, it provides students with interesting and up-to-date learning material and media. The learning material at self-access centers (SAC), both printed and non-printed, was more attractive and lively, compared to traditional course books in regular classroom. Such qualities of the learning material could enhance motivation and the use of the language.

This was witnessed in an implementation of modified versions of SI in Hong Kong and Japan where students were believed to be receptive. Researchers observed student motivation and enthusiasm in the learners (Aoki & Smith, 1996; Ho & Crookall, 1995).

Second, learning is a personal activity; naturally people read alone. Moreover, speed, efficiency, effectiveness of each individual learners varies. The SI learning mode enabled learners to work on ones own pace and plan their own study scheme. The learners have independence in the selection of what to learn. This characteristic of SI was confirmed by Littlewood (1996), in a study on self-learning aimed at

encouraging the learners' skills and ability. He found that the learners were satisfied with the independence they possessed in setting their own goal of study.

In other words, SI promotes learner autonomy. Learners have an opportunity to choose a learning alternative they preferred. Also, they are allowed to make decisions on all aspects of their learning—content, method, level and speed. (Klassen, et al, 1998; Lee, 1998; Benson & Voller, 1997; Gardner & Miller, 1991).

Furthermore, it was discovered that after the project, Littlewood's subjects had gained more self-confidence; they offered to help classmates in activities carried out in regular classes. Thus, the learners would were believed to be able to improve the language skills through SI without a teacher or with a teacher who merely provided guidance for self-learning or facilitated the learning progress.

Klassen et al (1998) was another group of researchers who confirmed the benefits the learners got from SI. They found the learners who took SI did better in reading, listening and learning skills as a whole, when compared to those learning through teacher-fronted mode.

In addition, Dantas-Whitney & Larson, (2000) elaborated on a number of SI merits based on a decade-long implementation, (described below). The researchers contended that the following advantages were observed.

- a. Student awareness of their learning needs and preferred strategies were raised.
- b. Student motivation was promoted.
- c. Student anxiety level was lowered.
- d. Fast and slow learners were matched to pursue the learning task harmoniously.
- e. Students' self-esteem was raised.

The phenomenon led to a wide acceptance of this learning mode. Besides, it has been broadly believed that self-learning is crucial and necessary to the learners' language learning of every level. Especially during this era where the growing role of technology in education is unceasing. English teachers have realized its significance and continually conducted research on this learning paradigm.

Besides the merits of this learning mode, other aspects of self-access learning have also been proposed. In particular, procedures of how to conduct a self-access learning course were presented by several second language educators. Numerous books on self-access learning have been published during the past 20 years (Gardner & Miller, 1991; Sheerin, 1989; for example). Chapters in books were also devoted to the presentation of the concept of SI, how to conduct such course as well as how to establish efficient self-access centers (Benson, & Voller, 1997; Gardner & Miller, 1999).

An example of the SI implementation was the experiment of Dantas-Whitney & Larson, (2000). The researchers implemented the learning mode, called *Individualized Directed Learning* class, at the English Language Institute at Oregon State University, USA. The full 3-hour per week course of a quarter (two and a half months) was conducted successfully for nine years at the institute's learning center, where an extensive collection of audio-visual materials, including books, language learning computer software, were provided.

They divided the implementation into 3 stages. A period on the day of the beginning of the course was devoted for orientation on the self-access center (SAC) and the learning model. Then the researchers placed the students into two groups. The first comprised those who knew at the first place their learning objectives. These students proceeded right to the activities they believed would help them learn what

they wanted to. Some concentrated on practicing TOEFL; many did grammar drills; and yet others practiced speaking, for instance. In so doing, they made their own decision on the types of learning material they would use from the available resources in the center.

The rest of the students were those who were not yet clear about the learning scheme despite the orientation. These learners would have one-to-one counselor-learner conference in order to locate what they wanted to learn and seek guidance on how to pursue what they decided to. During the conference the learner would be offered suggestions on types of, and how to use learning media.

No obstacle was reported in Dantas-Whitney & Larson's SI implementation. However, the researchers pointed out that there were three types of learners. The first type were those who closely adhered to traditional type of learning—especially teacher-fronted one. These students consciously thought that in SA learning teachers put the teaching responsibility to the learners. They, therefore, rather often sought one-to-one teacher-student conference. The second type were those who seemed to be very independent. These students hardly sought help from the teacher all through the program. Between the two extremes were the majority of the students who seemed to be moderately independent. They occasionally needed teacher-learner conference. Thus, as a whole it could be stated that the implementation of SI at Oregon State University has been successful.

Another example of SI implementation was carried out at Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Lee (1998) has tried to implement this learning mode to her traditional classroom teaching. She incorporated SI learning program to a group of first year students who were taking language and communication skills with the aim at creating greater autonomy in English language learning. The learning mode was

optional. Fifteen students volunteered to participate in SI program. The rest chose to follow the traditional mode.

Similar to the earlier mentioned implementation, the 15 participant students were to make decision on their learning objectives, and manage their pace of learning in carrying the self-learning assignments. Unlike Dantas-Whitney & Larson, Lee prepared a list of activities and materials for the students. The students were free to select what they wanted to do. They were also allowed to drop or add any activity they liked. Evaluations were carried out both by the researcher and the learners themselves.

Differences among learners were found; more enthusiastic learners benefited more from the self-access learning supplemented than their counterparts.

Again, whereas Dantas-Whitney & Larson did not find any difficulties in their SI implementation, Lee found two problems in her SI experiment. First, while the majority of the students in Dantas-Whitney & Larson's study were from moderately to highly motivated and enthusiastic, Lee's subjects were not ready for the learning. Nor were they eager to learn. Further, they had no understanding of the roles of either the teacher or their own. Besides, the learning facility at the SAC involved in Lee's experiment was far from perfect.

Another study related to SI was conducted by Klassen et al (1998). Using a pre-post test approach, the researchers compared the students' achievement in learning English in the *Remedial English Foundation Program*. The 2-hour-per-week program lasted 14 weeks. Students were allowed to sign up for either the traditional teacher-fronted or SA mode. One hundred and twenty-nine students at the Language Institute, City University of Hong Kong participating in the study were assigned to two separate groups on the volunteer basis—78 were chosen to learn through SI and

51 were adhered to traditional learning model. Both groups, however, were students who got a D or below at the state's standardized test. In other words, all the subjects were assumed to have almost the same level of English proficiency. Totally they were required to attend 28 hours of either learning mode and take the same test at the end of the program.

The 28-period program was divided into 3 stages named 'directed stage', 'semi-directed', and 'self-directed stage'. During the first two stages each learner had to submit his or her learning log for the teacher's feed back. Upon finishing stage 2, they needed to have a student-teacher conference.

The post-test showed that subjects learning through traditional classroom mode did better progress in writing. SI students, on the other hand, were better in reading, listening, and overall proficiency.

The researchers also surveyed the subjects' opinion on this learning mode using a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire and interviews. They found that several aspects were supported by more than 50 % of the respondents. In particular, 62.9 % said the consultation was useful; 57.3% said they would prefer a combination of classroom and SI modes of learning; 50.6 % said they wanted to continue to use the SAC to improve their English upon completing the course, and 54.6 % said the course was useful.

In addition, feedback from interviews of 46 learners corresponded with the findings from the questionnaire.

Although various merits have been pointed out, and recommendations on how to implement the learning mode to the classroom were offered, the course of this learning mode virtually was a Western style where students or learners tend to be

more autonomous and less receptive. Full course SI learning might not be ideally matched the learning styles of oriental learners, as reported in Lee's article.

In Thailand the implementation of this learning mode has also been adopted by some institutions, such as King Monkut University, and Khon Kean University. At Khon Kean university, for example, the Department of Foreign Languages had students learn general English course making use of the SAC as a "part of their regular course" (Rujiketgumjorn, 2000, p. 79)

The SI implementation at Khon Kean University, the researcher found some constraints, as briefly quoted below.

- a. Only a small number of students used the self-access facilities provided, i.e., the SAC was not worthily utilized.
- b. There was no link between the SI learning and classroom learning.
- c. No training on how to undertake SI learning was provided to students prior to the implementation.
- d. Students did not recognize the importance of English proficiency improving.
- e. Publicity has not sufficiently made.
- f. Faculty members themselves had limited experience in the learning mode whereas they had heavy teaching load.
- g. Other faculty members were rather skeptical about this learning mode.

Therefore, it is rational to conduct more studies prior to implementation of this learning mode to any class, especially those different from the ones reported in literature. Thus, the present study was aimed to discover more information related to this learning mode in the scenario of Prince of Songkla University.