Learner Autonomy: A case study on People’s Republic of China (PRC) scholars studying in a university in Singapore

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Education (Applied Linguistics and TESOL)

by

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ABSTRACT

This empirical study focuses on developing learner autonomy amongst PRC scholars who were enrolled in an English bridge course in an institution in Singapore. As PRC students come from a predominantly teacher-centred learning environment, encouraging them to be autonomous learners may be met with resistance. The effectiveness of self access learning (SAL) is considered by examining the Chinese culture of learning, the kinds of activities these students engage in at the Self Access Centre and their views on whether SAL is effective in helping them improve their language.

An interpretative case study approach is adopted as this study focuses on a specific phenomenon. Attention is drawn specifically to explaining why students have different viewpoints and experiences despite being put in a similar learning context. Interviewing was selected as the main instrument for data collection as it provided opportunities to develop insights regarding how the participants interpret and make meaning of the world. Besides interviews, questionnaires and journals were also employed to obtain snapshots of the students' views and for triangulation purposes.

It was found that the forty PRC scholars who participated in this study generally display traits that show conformance to the Chinese culture of learning. This however did not in general discourage them from developing autonomy as the students welcomed the idea of making decisions concerning and taking charge of their learning. Despite this, they believe that a teacher still plays an important role in their learning. Although SAL is generally perceived to be moderately effective in helping the students improve their English, most students reported marked improvements in their listening skills.

The thesis concludes with a discussion of the general contributions of the study while noting its limitations. Recommendations as to how learner autonomy can be better fostered with PRC students through SAL are also provided.
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• To Almighty God, for providing me strength and good health, and for seeing me through every stage of the Doctorate of Education degree programme.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1 Genesis of the Study

In the last twenty years, significant changes and developments in the field of language education have taken place. For one, there has been a shift in focus from teaching to learning where language education is more concerned with the learning process rather than with the mere transmission of knowledge. There has also been a lesser preoccupation with finding the best or most effective teaching method as it is now recognized that there is no single ‘best’ method. As a result of this move, greater emphasis is being placed on learners by taking into account their learning needs and differences, as well as the differences that exist with learning conditions and processes.

Traditional roles of the teacher and the student in class are also being challenged. Previously, teachers were simply expected to transmit knowledge to learners, while learners passively received knowledge and demonstrated the extent of their learning through passing examinations.

This conventional function of the teacher and learner no longer holds true. According to Benson and Voller (1997: 1), “Over the last two decades autonomy and independence have taken on a growing importance in the field of language education.” Moreover, Little (1991: 2 cited in Benson and Voller, 1997:1) has
declared autonomy a 'buzz-word' of the 1990s as the degree of control a learner has in his learning has gradually been on the rise.

This move has also found its way into the Singapore education system where the context of this study is situated. Gradual but definite greater emphasis is now being placed on the learner and the learning process. According to The Straits Times report dated 23 March 2004, a new approach to teaching, which emphasizes how students learn rather than what they are taught, is being tried out in schools in Singapore. Known as The Strategies for Active and Independent Learning (SAIL) method, it endeavours to promote creative thinking and independent learning amongst students in Singapore.

Compared to Singapore, class sizes in China are relatively large with the student number averaging between 30 and 70. Consequently, a teacher-centred classroom approach is usually the norm. Much emphasis is also placed on end-of-year examinations. Having been used to such a system in China, it is anticipated that Chinese scholars who come to study in Singapore may experience difficulty in adjusting to the system here. At a local institution where this research study takes place, students are strongly encouraged to take an active role in their learning. The courses are very much learner-centred, with students engaging in collaborative activities and tasks such as discussions and oral presentations. Marks obtained in pair or group projects also constitute part of the final grade. In order to encourage students to be less dependent on their
teachers, all Chinese scholars regardless of their English proficiency, are expected to engage in learning activities at the Self Access Centre (SAC).

While most teachers agree with the importance of helping learners take more responsibility and move towards greater independence in their learning, in reality, some teachers or learners may be uncomfortable with the new roles that they are expected to play. Cultural variations within the learning process may give rise to resistance associated with the notion and practicalities of independent learning (Fitzgerald, Morrall and Morrison, 1996). Hence this thesis is concerned with finding out if PRC scholars are receptive to the idea of becoming more autonomous in their learning since they are used to a more teacher-led and examination oriented system.

Having briefly introduced the theme of this research study, some background information on the context of the study is provided below. The rationale of the study, its aims and research questions are also explained. A description of the thesis structure is given at the end of the chapter.

1.2 Background Information

Beginning from the year December 1993, some five hundred students from the People's Republic of China arrive in Singapore every year to study at National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) under a scholarship scheme offered by the governments of China and
Singapore. These students have a choice of engineering, computer-related or bio-medical courses: key disciplines identified by the Singapore government to be lacking in skilled manpower. Upon completion of their degree, the students are bonded and are expected to work in Singapore in any field or sector for a minimum of six years.

Unlike universities in the UK, USA, Australia or New Zealand, NUS and NTU do not insist on a minimum IELTS or TOEFL score. Instead, these Chinese scholars are admitted purely on the grounds of their academic excellence.

In order to raise their language proficiency, both universities run a six-month intensive English Language programme specially tailored for these Chinese scholars before they begin their degree course. This course is important to them because a good command of the English Language is vital in order for them to succeed in their education in Singapore. Unlike the Singapore education system where English is used as the medium of instruction, English is taught only as a foreign language in the People’s Republic of China.

The English bridge course for NUS and NTU is conducted separately and both institutions run their programmes differently. As a result of this, there is a need to make explicit that this research study takes place at the National Institute of Education (NIE), which runs the English bridge course for NTU. Making known
the institution where this study takes place does not pose any ethical issues as the students' identities are still kept anonymous and confidential.

Known as the Communication Skills Programme (CSP), the English bridge course offered at NIE aims to help students:

1. Communicate more confidently and effectively in all skill areas for everyday purposes.
2. Develop communication and learning skills needed in academic contexts.

In order to meet the above stated aims, students take the following courses and have Self Access Learning (SAL) built into their curriculum.

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With the exception of SAL, the other classes are skill-based and the content includes both general and academic English. All modules make use of a
continual assessment scheme and project work. The students are also formally assessed once in the mid-term and again at the end of the course.

The weekly one hour SAL session is conducted at the Self Access Centre where students engage in learning activities of their choice in order to improve their English proficiency. In order to help students become familiarized with the SAC and the available resources, they undergo an orientation in the first two sessions of SAL. During this time, students are given suggestions regarding the kinds of activities that they can engage in at the centre. Moreover, with the help of their SAL facilitator, the students identify areas of weakness and map out their learning goals. It is also mandatory for them to keep a learning log so as to ensure that students spend their time constructively during SAL sessions. A detailed account of the orientation as well as how the SAC at NIE is run is provided in Chia (2005).

This section has been devoted to providing background information where the research context is situated. In the following section, the rationale for the study is explained.

### 1.3 Rationale for the Study

Since joining NIE as a lecturer in the Communication Skills Programme in November 2001, I have been a facilitator for SAL. I was appointed the co-ordinator for this module beginning in October 2003. Since then, I have been
eager to find out what actions could be taken in order to improve the running of
the module as well as to make the learning experience at SAC more useful and
valuable to PRC students. An initial step in this direction took the form of
administering a questionnaire survey at the end of the course in June 2003 to
obtain the students' views on self access learning in the SAC.

Most students liked the SAL sessions as they were regarded to be welcome
breaks from their regular classes. The students mostly watched movies and cited
that they made significant gains in their listening ability.

A considerable number (more than 60 per cent) preferred to be left alone to
decide on the kinds of activities they wished to engage in to improve their English
during SAL sessions. However, most students generally still preferred their
teachers to direct them in their learning of English. SAL sessions were also not
regarded as particularly useful in helping them raise their language proficiency. A
fuller discussion of PRC students' views on SAL is provided in Chia and Ellis
(2003).

The findings of this initial study motivated me to probe further. First, I was eager
to uncover the reasons why self access learning sessions were not highly valued
as a means in helping these Chinese students raise their language proficiency.
Second, it seemed somewhat paradoxical to me that while most of them wished
to be left alone and did not want to be told what to do during SAL sessions, a
significant majority indicated that they still preferred teacher-directed learning in class.

On this issue, several explanations occurred to me. One of these is that this could be related to the Chinese culture of learning language. According to Jin and Cortazzi (1998: 102), the Chinese equate learning a language with the mastery of grammar and vocabulary. The teacher, who is regarded to be an authoritative source, is expected to deliver this knowledge. If this is indeed the case, then successful implementation of self access learning with the PRC scholars may be difficult since they expect their teacher to retain the traditional role of transmitting knowledge to learners.

It is this issue and the desire to obtain feedback from students who have been involved in self access learning that provided the impetus for the study. The following section provides further details of the aims and research questions of this study.

1.4 Aims and Research Questions

The primary aim of this study is to find out how receptive PRC students are with regard to self access learning and whether they value this mode of learning. In particular, the study focuses on providing answers to the following research questions:
1. Do the PRC students who participate in the study report that SAL sessions are beneficial in helping them improve their English? If so, in which area(s)?

2. Do the students report that becoming an autonomous learner is valuable to them?

3. Is the Chinese culture of learning a barrier in encouraging them to become more autonomous in their learning of English?

1.5 Underlying Assumption

In undertaking this research study, the following assumption is made regarding PRC students. All PRC scholars who arrive in Singapore for their study are highly motivated in wanting to master the English language. The reasons for making this assumption are as follows:

1. English is the medium of instruction in Singapore. A good command of the English language is vital in order for these scholars to succeed in their study.

2. English is one of the four official languages in Singapore and is used as the main language of communication at work.

3. English is the language of business and commerce and plays a significant role in today's technological age.

1.6 Significance of the study

This study is of importance from a number of perspectives.
First, it provides valuable feedback regarding self access learning. Any improvement to the module is only attainable if it is informed by empirical research. Other than the questionnaire survey that was administered in 2003 to obtain feedback from PRC students regarding self access learning, no other research study has been conducted on this subject matter, despite the fact that the English bridge course has been running for a decade.

Second, there is a dearth of research study on Asian students regarding autonomous learning. This study hopes to add to the limited body of research and to act as a motivation for further research in this area. Also, focusing only on Mainland Chinese students reduces the number of variables, compared to a mixed ethnic and cross-cultural study of Asian students.

Lastly, having a heightened awareness of how PRC students view self access learning can provide further insights into the ways Chinese students prefer to learn English as a foreign language. This is perhaps the most significant reason since the number of Chinese students learning English is increasing at an extremely rapid rate.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is organized into eight chapters, followed by references and appendices.
Chapter One is an introductory chapter which offers an overview of the study.

Chapter Two provides a macro overview on some recent developments on ELT in China. This information is crucial in order to achieve a better understanding of Chinese students' views on issues related to the teaching and learning of English.

Chapter Three aims to provide readers with a better understanding of the Chinese culture of learning. Confucian and Taoist as well as socio-economic influences are used to explain how the Chinese learn a language.

Chapter Four critically evaluates the literature where efforts have been taken to foster learner autonomy with Asian or Chinese students. Definitions of various terms which are commonly used in the field are also included.

Chapter Five presents the methods and procedures used in collecting data for this study. Details of participants, research paradigm and study design, as well as processes involved in data collection and analysis are explained. A description of pilot studies and ethical considerations is also provided.

Chapter Six presents the findings and discussion of PRC scholars' perception of self access learning at the start of the English bridge course while Chapter Seven discusses their views of self access learning towards the end of the programme. How the data are triangulated will also be reported in these two chapters.
Chapter Eight summarizes the major findings by highlighting the contributions of the study. The limitations of the study are noted while suggestions for further research are proposed.
The aim of this study is to find out the possibility of fostering learner autonomy amongst PRC students and whether these students consider autonomous learning to be effective in helping them improve their English. It is therefore necessary to provide some background information on the place of the English Language in the education system as well as English Language Teaching (ELT) in China as this overview facilitates the understanding of the research context as well as the responses of participants regarding the teaching and learning of English. Due to the relative dearth of information on ELT in China, much of the discussion in this chapter draws on Hu’s (2002a) study in order to provide an up-to-date comprehensive summary of the important developments in ELT in China.

2.1 The role of English in China

The ‘frenzy’ to learn English in China can be regarded as quite a recent phenomenon since all broadcasts in foreign languages were banned and all imported foreign books were forbidden during the Cultural Revolution in the 60s (Ross, 1992; Hu, 2002a). It was only after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 that a transformation in ELT began. China then embarked on the national
programme of 'Four Modernizations' which was aimed at making advancement in the areas of agriculture, national defence, as well as science and technology. Since English is often regarded as an international language and the language of science and technology, the Chinese government recognized the importance in raising the English language proficiency in the country. In so doing, it is hoped that this would open doors towards international trade, leading to economic growth as well as access to worldwide information and know-how (Hu, 2002a).

2.2 Reasons for learning English

As English was recognized as pivotal in helping the country develop and modernize, it was made a core subject in the secondary school curriculum. English is also a compulsory subject that students have to sit for at the secondary school leaving examinations. In addition, the National Matriculation English Test (NMET) is one of the seven subjects in the National College Entrance Examinations (NCCE). At tertiary level, English is also a compulsory subject. At the end of their second year, students must sit for the College English Test Band IV examination. Failure to pass this examination may result in a delay in the conferment of the degree. As for those who aspire to continue with their postgraduate studies, they must pass the College English Test at Band VI.

Apart from the reasons listed above, it is mandatory for job applicants to submit their College English Test results to their prospective employers. Securing higher
English test scores translates to wider job opportunities as well as potentially greater financial rewards.

TOEFL and IELTS examinations are currently the two internationally most recognized English examinations. Learners who continue to better their command of English after their tertiary education prepare for these examinations. In many cases, securing a good score in these examinations serves as a springboard to venturing overseas, either for work, study or migration purposes.

Based on the discussion above, it is thus not surprising that the number of Chinese learning English is astounding. It is estimated that there are more than 67 million students learning English in junior secondary and senior high schools (Hu, 2001) and some two million university students enrolled in tertiary institutions, the majority of whom are learners of English (Wu, 2001). Events such as China becoming a member of the World Trade Organization in 2000 and the announcement that Beijing will host the 2008 Olympic Games have further intensified the fever to master English.

2.3 ELT methodology in China

As discussed above, one impetus for students to want to master the English Language in China is to excel in examinations as obtaining this paper qualification often opens doors. It is therefore not surprising that the way the English Language is taught in China is closely geared towards helping students
be successful in passing English examinations. The reinstatement of the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) in 1977 further intensifies this phenomenon. Securing a high score in this examination is the main access route to university for a large population of secondary school graduates in China, since only some 5% make it to the next level. The main task of senior secondary schools has been that of helping students secure a good score in NCEE. In Hu's (2002a: 40) words, "examination-oriented teaching has been prevalent." For many years up to 1988, "the NCEE encouraged narrowness and dependency by testing mainly rigid textbook knowledge and largely ignoring abilities and creative use of knowledge" (Ross 1992, cited in Hu, 2002a: 41). The National Matriculation English Test (NMET), being part of the NCEE, "was perhaps more plagued by these problems than tests for other subjects" (Hu, 2002a: 41). Up to 1988, an overwhelming majority (at least 85%) of the items on the NMET were multiple-choice and gap-fill type items (Lewin and Wang, 1991 cited in Hu, 2002a: 41). Researchers such as Li (1984), Lin (2000) and Wu (2001), all of whom were cited in Hu (2002a), have attributed this to be the key factor concerning why many English teachers have resisted innovations in their teaching of the English Language.

In 1978, a trial English syllabus for secondary schools to be implemented nationwide was issued by the Ministry of Education. The suggested approach to ELT was made up of a combination of the grammar-translation method and audiolingualism which Jin and Cortazzi (2002: 54) termed a "Chinese eclectic
approach." This is because although functional and situational approaches were more frequently used, these approaches were often combined with more traditional grammar-translation approaches. Hu (2002a: 32) described it as "an approach that attempted to graft audiolingualism onto the grammar-translation method." Emphasis was placed on pronunciation/intonation training and oral practice which was achieved through pattern drilling in the early stages. This was to ensure that good verbal habits were developed. However, this was later replaced with a "systematic and detailed study of sentence-level grammar, extensive use of translation, rote learning of vocabulary, an emphasis on intensive reading skills and a focus on written language" (Hu, 2002a: 32).

2.4 ELT in schools in China

One remarkable change resulting from China's aspiration to become a modern and developed country was the astronomical pace at which English Language instruction has permeated the schools. In Shanghai, ELT was to commence at primary three in 1988. However, by 2000, English classes were offered at primary one in 85% of primary schools in Shanghai. This eminent success experienced in Shanghai prompted the Ministry of Education to recommend that English be offered in primary three at municipal and county levels in the autumn semester of 2001 (Hu, 2002a: 34).

Another important milestone was the launch of content-based English instruction (CBEI) in several key primary and secondary schools. In these schools, English
is used to teach subjects such as Mathematics, Science, Biology and Computer Science. As for subjects that are not taught in English, technical terms, formulas, laws and definitions are given in both English and Chinese. According to Hu (2002a: 34), CBEI initiatives have attained impressive results which prompted the Shanghai Education Commission to expand the scope of CBEI experiments (Teaching Research Institute, 2000 cited in Hu, 2002a: 34). Consequently, CBEI was introduced in municipality-level key schools in 2001 and in district- and country-level key schools in 2002.

Unfortunately, due to constraints such as the shortage of qualified CBEI teachers, the lack of locally produced CBEI texts, and the fact that Mandarin can fulfill its role as a medium of instruction in basic education, large-scale implementation of CBEI was deemed unfeasible. The example of Hong Kong was cited to substantiate this view.

Even with its 150-year history of being a British colony, much greater internal use of English, and more favourable conditions for learning English, Hong Kong’s much-invested immersion English programmes have not achieved the expected results.

Hu (2002a: 35)

This led to the conclusion that CBEI is best limited to a small number of elite schools where graduates have greater prospects of taking up jobs that require a higher level of English proficiency. Perhaps this holds true for the present situation. As long as English remains the dominant language for trade and commerce, and science and technology, and provided that China continues to make economic advancement and is still enthusiastic in raising the English
proficiency of the Chinese people, there may come a day where it will no longer be necessary to limit CBEI to only a handful of schools. But the issue of implementing CBEI is more complex than the mere lack of resources. It has political undertones and one which involves language planning and policy. Undoubtedly, there will be concerns with the impact of using English as a medium of instruction as this can threaten the survival or have negative impact on the proficiency of Mandarin for Mainland Chinese.

2.5 Syllabus Development
As China embarked on a national drive to modernization since the 80s, the secondary English syllabus was updated with the sole intention of helping the country achieve economic and technological progress. Emphasis was placed on developing communicative competence and the four key skills of listening, reading, writing and speaking (Hu, 2002a: 35). Priority was given to helping students attain “basic linguistic knowledge and basic language skills so as to acquire an initial ability to use English to obtain information and lay a foundation for genuine communication” (Hu, 2002a: 36). More specifically, the goals of primary and secondary ELT are to help students

1. acquire an essential knowledge of English and develop basic communicative competence through training in listening, speaking, reading, and writing;

2. develop good study habits and master basic language learning methods so as to lay a solid foundation for further study and use of English;
3. foster interest in learning English by inculcating the right purposes for learning English and
4. develop their abilities to memorize, observe, think and imagine.

In order to achieve these goals, drills are to be used only in contextualized situations. In addition, attempts are made to achieve a balance between single-skill and comprehensive training, integration of oral and written work, pair and group work so as to enable students to use English in authentic situations for communication and interaction (Hu 2002a, 37).

From the above, it is clear that pragmatic considerations have taken precedence in modifying the ELT syllabus in China. There has also been much interest in incorporating updated theoretical assumptions of language teaching and learning into the classroom. Hoi man (1992: 77 cited in Hu 2002a: 38) termed these recent developments in the ELT syllabus in the PRC “education for modernity”. Indeed, ELT has been identified as a valuable resource that can help China to modernize, which eventually translates to a rise in the standard of living of the Chinese.

2.6 English Textbooks

English textbooks often form the core resource for many students in China. According to Maley (1983: 98) Chinese students usually “treat the books with reverence, assign them great value and wish to learn by heart what they contain.” Two series, ‘Junior English for China’ and ‘Senior English for China’ have made a
strong impact on secondary ELT in the PRC as they are used in about 70% of secondary schools in China. Instead of being based solely on the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, these texts make use of an eclectic approach which tries to synthesize CLT principles with existing practices in China (Adamson, 2001). Much of classroom instruction focuses on the presentation and practice of target language features. Communicative activities are only included at the production stage to facilitate spontaneous interaction amongst students. The use of the mother tongue language in class is also permitted (Adamson and Morris, 1997: 23 cited in Hu 2002a: 39). Rather than using linguistic structures as the basis for the organization of textbooks, a thematic approach is adopted where topics such as cultural, scientific and ethical issues are covered.

The latest development with regard to the production of textbooks is the collaboration between SCRMRC and Oxford University Press which began in 1996. These publications are adapted from the ‘Oxford English’ series. In order to enable students to acquire communicative competence, a learner-centred approach which takes into account learner differences and needs is adopted. Students can engage in purposeful communication in meaningful contexts using these texts. Furthermore, they are encouraged to react, reflect on and make use of the information provided in the text creatively. A thematic approach with a strong cultural component is adopted in these texts. The lessons are structured into pre-task, actual-task and post-task sections so as to make available the necessary language that students need in order to complete a task, use the
language while performing the task and to follow up the task with subsequent activities that further stimulate the communicative use of language in and outside the classroom (Hu 2002a: 40).

2.7 Assessment

Undoubtedly, there is some relation between assessments and pedagogy. The way language is tested and the extent that examinations count towards shaping a student's academic path, impact on how teachers conduct their lessons since teachers are largely responsible for their students' performance.

As noted earlier, the National College Entrance Examinations (NCEE) was reintroduced in 1977. Admission to a university requires that students excel in the NCEE. It is not surprising then that teachers spend most of their time and effort to ensure that their students excel in the NCEE. The English matriculation test was however frowned upon as students were able to learn, memorize and regurgitate language items in order to excel in this assessment. To illustrate, until 1988, an overwhelming majority (at least 85%) of the items on the National Matriculation English Test were multiple-choice and gap-fill type items (Lewin and Wang, 1991 cited in Hu, 2002a: 41). Criticisms of the NCEE were noted by the Ministry of Education, which called for a reformation on the NCEE. While the several initiatives implemented did not change the structure of the NCEE instantaneously, modifications to the Matriculation English Test were made. This included a "gradual decrease of discrete-point grammar items, a transformed reading sub-
test, the inclusion of a writing component and a listening and speaking sub-test” (Li and Wang 2000 cited in Hu, 2002a: 41).

2.8 Chapter Summary

A summary of the recent developments of ELT in China is provided in this chapter. The information provided is crucial as it puts into perspective PRC students’ motivation for learning English, the method in which English is taught, the textbooks that are used and the way the students are assessed. Achieving an understanding of this can help Singaporean teachers who are entrusted to assist PRC students raise their English proficiency and to better tailor their lessons to meet the needs of these students.

To recapitulate, factors such as the Chinese government’s recognition that English is a bridge to trade and commerce, as well as China becoming a member of the World Trade Organization have sparked a ‘frenzy’ in the learning of the English language in Mainland China. In addition, the learning of English is further stimulated as proficiency in the language has proven to open up a host of opportunities in terms of employment, further studies and migration. Consequently, much effort in the teaching and learning of English has been geared towards helping students excel in examinations.

In the next chapter, the Chinese culture of learning which explains the kinds of expectations and beliefs that PRC students bring into the classroom is discussed.
CHAPTER THREE

REVIEW OF LITERATURE I –

CHINESE CULTURE OF LEARNING

It is inevitable that in any discussion pertaining to some culture of learning, generalizations of behaviour or belief shared by a group of people are made. While it is noted that individual differences and exceptions exist within a community, nonetheless there are some common noticeable traits or viewpoints which are shared by this group. It is the aim of this chapter to present a review of the Chinese culture of learning. This information is vital because teachers and students bring their expectations and beliefs into the classroom. It is crucial to achieve a good understanding of this, since a mismatch between the teacher’s and students’ expectations can lead to frustration in the classroom that may impede learning.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section provides a discussion of the Chinese culture while the second sheds light on how this impacts or influences teaching and learning, which is commonly known as the culture of learning. This knowledge is essential as students from Mainland China make up a major group (estimated to be 25%) of the world’s learners of English. Moreover, it is relevant to this research study since the investigation involves PRC students who are used to an education system which is relatively different.
from that of Singapore's. In the third section, a description of how the Chinese perceive their own culture of learning to be different from others is provided. This chapter makes up part of the essential background information needed in order to achieve an understanding of the rationale of the research study as well as the responses of the participants. It also links the previous chapter to the present as the former provides information on the place of the English Language in the education system and English Language Teaching (ELT) in China while the present chapter discusses the Chinese culture of learning language.

3.1 The Chinese Culture

Hofstede (2001: 9) defines culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or a category of people from another.” The group's systems of values are known to form the core element of culture (Hofstede, 2001: 10). Culture can also be understood in terms of a body of knowledge that one has to be familiar with in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members (Goodenough, 1957: 167 cited in Wardhaugh, 1992: 217). This is because conformity to group norms is expected and any deviation from this is generally frowned upon.

In cultures which are considered 'individualist', the focus is on the 'I' and 'self' where people are essentially concerned with looking after themselves and their immediate family. On the other hand, in collectivist cultures, the focus is on the 'we' where people from birth are integrated into strong cohesive in-groups who
protect them throughout their lifetime in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (Hofstede, 1991 cited in Kagitcibasi, 1997: 10).

There is a tendency towards individualism in the West in countries such as America, Australia and Canada. Similarly, the reverse is true in the East in countries such as Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia, where there is a tendency towards collectivism (Hofstede, 2001: 215). The Chinese culture is generally regarded to be collective as Hsu (1971 cited in Hofstede, 2001: 210) argues that in the Chinese tradition, there is no equivalent for the Western concept of personality; a concept that separates a person from society and culture. Instead, the concept of ‘self’ is seen in terms of an “individual’s transactions with his/her fellow human beings” (King and Bond, 1985 cited in Ho, 1997: 105). However, collectivism does not mean a denial of an individual’s well being. Rather, it is simply assumed that maintaining the group’s well being is equivalent to safeguarding one’s own interests (Ho, 1979: 144). In line with the collectivist tradition, the Chinese are well-known to be situation-centred (Salili, 1996: 86). That is, people are seen in terms of relationships, conformity and mutual dependence according to the situation.

Collectively-oriented cultures are termed ‘high synergy societies’ because the emphasis is on group consciousness, cooperation and mutual reciprocity (Moran and Harris, 1991: 313). This can also be explained in terms of the political system of the country. Being a communist country, the focus in China is thus not on the
individual but the nation as a whole. People who belong to collectivist cultures tend to make sharper distinctions between in-groups and out-groups where the former is considered to be more intimate and important. It is thus not surprising that PRC students often relate to their home country or to the Chinese student community as a whole. There is a tendency for them to see themselves as homogenous and different from others.

In addition, for PRC students who come from a collective perspective, social dimensions and relationships are key features. The relationship between the teacher and student is seen in a paternalistic light. According to Pratt (1999), Chinese students are said to have very high academic expectations of their teachers. Not only do the students perceive their teachers to be experts in their field, they also expect their teachers to be capable of planning their learning and adjusting the pace according to their needs. Students seek guidance from their teachers who they consider to be moral and social leaders as well. In short, a teacher is expected to impart knowledge to students, show them the way to progress in their studies, be sensitive to any problems as well as take care of both their academic and social needs.

Having briefly dealt with the Chinese culture which is considered to be collectivist in nature, the next section is devoted to achieving an understanding of how PRC students arrive at forming these expectations of their teachers.
3.2 Rationale for understanding Culture Of Learning

The kinds of expectations and beliefs students bring into the classroom can no longer be ignored as the importance of the learner's perspective is recognized in virtually all modern approaches to the language learning process (Tarone and Yule, 1989). In Cortazzi and Jin's (1996b: 170) view, having a detailed knowledge of the perspectives of particular groups of learners is essential in order to make an impact on classroom practice. This is because cross-cultural situations are common nowadays where the teacher comes from one cultural background while the students originate from another. If the cultural disparity between the teacher and students is too great, passive resistance or non-learning in the classroom may result (Jarvis, 1987). Moreover, students from different cultural backgrounds have disparate beliefs about causes of success and failure, resulting in the use of varied approaches to learning and achievement (Ho, et al. 1995 cited in Salili, 1996). As such, a mutual understanding of learning cultures is not only crucial but is a route to implementing practical changes in teaching and learning approaches. Yet, there is little discussion on cultural factors in learning strategies or of gaps between teachers' and students' perception of the kinds of strategies that are appropriate to learning (Cortazzi and Jin's, 1996b: 170).

Having outlined the reasons for recognizing learners' perspectives in the form of expectations and beliefs, the following section presents an overview of the Chinese culture of learning. Again, it is acknowledged that China is an enormous
country with a huge population with distinctions between the north and the south, as well as urban and rural regions. While this is true, there are still some common characteristics shared by the Chinese as China has for a long time, adopted a highly centralized education system. In addition, Mandarin has been taught as the unifying form of speech and Chinese orthography is largely the same for any spoken dialect. The Chinese themselves have also acknowledged that they conform to some culture of learning (Jin and Cortazzi, 1998: 102). Since China is now undergoing a rapid stage of modernization and change, the following exposition is at best a generalization and exceptions are expected.

3.3 Chinese Culture Of Learning

The term ‘culture of learning’ is defined by Cortazzi and Jin (1996b: 169) as

behaviour in language classrooms that is set within taken-for-granted frameworks of expectations, attitudes, values and beliefs about what constitutes good learning, about how to teach or learn, whether and how to ask questions, what textbooks are for, and how language teaching relates to broader issues of the nature and purpose of education.

Cortazzi and Jin (1996b: 169) are of the view that any particular culture of learning evolves from the educational and cultural traditions of that community. It is also very much influenced by the socio-economic conditions of that society. Other than these, it is acknowledged that factors such as age, ability, gender, the learning context, texts and examinations all play a part in shaping student behaviour.
Children in China are socialized into a particularly longstanding culture of learning at an early age when they learn to read and write Chinese in kindergartens and primary schools (Cortazzi and Jin, 1996b: 173; Ho, 1997). They arrive in school before eight in the morning and do not return home until five in the evening. The students are grouped into different classes and they remain in that group doing most activities together.

Much teaching in the Chinese classroom is teacher-centred. This is basically a result of large class size, the pressures of the curriculum and examinations (Pratt, 1999; Glenwright, 1996). Knowledge is transmitted to the students through imitation, guided practice and repetition. This knowledge is in turn internalized through memorization which is said to lead to comprehension. The pedagogy is based on the importance of instilling discipline and giving students the necessary knowledge. In the Chinese classroom, the following values are inculcated into the students. Each student is to be part of a group or community. Learning is expected to take place through interdependency, co-operation and social awareness. Individual interests are suppressed in that a person is expected to express viewpoints that are socially shared rather than individually felt (Cortazzi and Jin, 1996b: 178).

The above values can be understood in terms of the collectivist nature of the Chinese culture. The Chinese culture of learning is also known to be shaped by
traditional cultural influences from Confucianism and Taoism, which will be discussed next.

### 3.3.1 Influences Of Confucianism and Taoism

According to Jin (1992 cited in Jin and Cortazzi, 1998: 108), Confucianism and Taoism are considered to be the two main influences on Chinese intellectuals. Confucius's teaching has had a significant bearing on Chinese civilization, since continual reference has been made to his writings in areas of education and culture. His teaching emphasizes

the Three Bonds or Hierarchies (san gang), i.e. the relationships between the monarch and his subjects, between the father and the son and between the husband and the wife; and the Five Principles (wu chang), i.e. ‘Ren’, Righteousness, Rites, Intelligence and Trust.  

Jin and Cortazzi, 1998: 108

In Confucianism, the concepts of ‘Zhou Rites’ and ‘Ren’ are regarded as core elements. The former refers to sets of ceremonies, institutions, regulations and social systems in the Zhou Dynasty. As for ‘Ren’, it refers to the highest principle of human actions that encompasses virtues such as ‘compassion’, ‘perfect virtue’, ‘love’, benevolence’, ‘human-heartedness’, ‘moral character’ (Mei, 1967: 152 cited in Jin and Cortazzi, 1998). These concepts have infiltrated people’s thoughts, behaviour, habits, customs, beliefs, their ways of thinking and emotional status which guide them when they deal with things, relations and everyday life (Li, 1986: 34 cited in Jin and Cortazzi, 1998: 110).
In the same manner, Taoism has exerted much influence on the Chinese people, especially the intellectuals. The major characteristics of Taoism include "Wu-wei (which means not doing anything), the use of paradox, establishing harmony with nature and relationships and maintaining a balance between two extremes" (Jin and Cortazzi, 1998:110). The concept of 'Wu-wei' can be explained in two ways. One is that there is a general concern for the whole but not in any part specifically. The other is the belief that by being passive and not taking part in any activity is the essence of 'Wu-wei'. Paradox, which indicates that everything is relative, is another major feature of Taoism. Concepts such as 'right' and 'wrong', 'hard' and 'soft' are pairs of words which may in fact refer to the same thing, depending on the viewpoint that is adopted (Creel, 1970 cited in Jin and Cortazzi, 1998: 111). As for harmony in relationships, it is realized through adopting a non-interference stance and following the course of nature. Life is perceived to exist in a circular and continuous way. A balance between the five elements of metal, wood, water, fire and earth is achieved by keeping each element in its respective and appropriate place. (A more detailed discussion on Confucianism and Taoism is provided by Jin and Cortazzi, 1998).

Having briefly discussed the concepts of Confucianism and Taoism, the following section explains how these values impact on the Chinese culture of learning.

Figure 1 and 2 below show how the teachings of Confucius and Taoism impact on Chinese students which in turn influence the way they learn. Coming from a
collective cultural orientation, Chinese students are said to exhibit the following traits and behaviour:

1. Expecting help to be offered without being asked, and offering help;
2. Tolerance and the caring for face;
3. Passive participation;
4. Single solutions;
5. Uncritical acceptance;
6. Dependence and
7. Listener's and reader's responsibility in achieving understanding

![Figure 1 Individual and Collective Cultural Orientation](source: Jin and Cortazzi, 1998: 109)

With regard to Figure 1, a point worth noting is that in an individualist culture, it is crucial, especially in academic writing to cite the source when making reference
to other people's ideas or writing. However, plagiarism either seems to be an unappreciated concept to most Chinese students or they are unaware of the conventions regarding citation (Reid 1989 cited in Jones, 1999; Volet and Renshaw, 1996: 206). What appears to be plagiarism is often the result of writing in a second language (Biggs and Watkins, 1996). Chinese students, who want to make a point particularly clear, consider it illogical to have to paraphrase what has already been elegantly expressed. They also believe that there is no way they could reword the idea better than the original, since English is their second language which they have yet to master. This leads to direct copying. As a result, when studying in an institution outside of their country, it is common to find Chinese students vulnerable to plagiarism. Until they fully appreciate the need to adhere to the conventions of academic writing, this will still remain a problem.

Referring to Figure 2 on the following page, Chinese students generally prefer a vertical over a horizontal relationship with their teachers in class, during discussions, debates or when expressing opinions. They show respect and avoid potential conflicts with their teachers by following and obeying their instructions. As a result, Chinese students prefer to remain silent as challenging the teacher's view may be perceived as rude and disrespectful. In other academic cultures, this is often interpreted as lacking a personal voice or being uncritical. However, once outside of class, Chinese students expect their teacher to have an open-door policy and be able to hold open discussions with them on varied topics, just like members of an extended family (Pratt, 1999).
Figure 2 Influences of Confucianism and Taoism on Chinese culture of learning (Modified from Jin and Cortazzi, 1998: 108)
Chinese students' acceptance that the past is older and better stems from their reverence for the past. To them, following what has been proven to work is a guarantee of success. As a result, they tend to rely on history, tradition and religion (Jones, 1999; Connor, 1996). Again, in academic settings outside China, this is frowned upon and regarded as adopting an uncritical stance towards past works.

Another point to note is that Chinese students are preoccupied with the end product rather than with the process. This view is also supported by Biggs (1996: 55) who argues that the Chinese believe in developing skills first through repetition which eventually leads to the creation of the product. "The end is the product, not a process" (Biggs, 1996: 55). To them, the process is unimportant as long as the final product is correct. Consequently, Chinese students consider it both unnecessary and a waste of time to preface a piece of written work with a lengthy literature review. Coming from the Confucian tradition of a collective society, they are also inclined to propose a single solution rather than multiple alternatives. This is because the recommended option is one that is evaluated in the light of the entire group rather than from an individual's perspective.

Under the influence of Taoism, Chinese students' "academic presentation and discourse patterns are influenced by the belief that ambiguity is perhaps able to include everything unsaid" (Jin and Cortazzi, 1998: 112). Additional explanations only serve to limit the context. It is thought that readers are best left to make their
own interpretations. However, lack of clarity in written or oral discourse is often regarded as undesirable in other academic contexts. Similarly, the value of non-interference may disadvantage Chinese students as they refrain from asking 'intelligent' questions. This is to prevent others from thinking that they are showing off, which is regarded as uncouth. To them, asking questions, interrupting or disagreeing with the teacher shows signs of disrespect and a challenge to the teacher's authority. An effective teacher is expected to be sensitive enough to anticipate questions and answer them unasked.

Traditionally, the Chinese have held a high regard for education (Cleverley 1991, p. xii cited in Lee, 1996: 27). Confucius's presupposition is that everyone is educable (Lee, 1996: 28; Pratt: 1999: 251) and he saw education as a means of transforming an ordinary person into a person of use and a weak country into a strong one (Hu, 2002b: 33). In his view, differences in intelligence do not impede one's educability, but incentive and attitude to learn are crucial for learning. The environment is thus considered to be of primary significance which pushed Confucius to support the nurture side in the nature-nurture debate (Lee, 1996: 29). Consequently, those who subscribe to Confucius's teaching believe that successful learning is always a result of hard work and effort, in which self-determination or will power is the driving force of efforts. Thus, failure to learn is not attributed to a lack of ability but effort and will power (Lee, 1996: 39; Biggs, 1996: 59).
Memorization is another vital part of learning in the Confucian tradition but it should not be equated with rote learning (Lee, 1996: 36; Biggs, 1996: 54). Memorization precedes understanding, and is necessary for deeper understanding. It should not be regarded as an end in itself as explained by Chu (1990: 138 cited in Lee, 1996: 36).

Learning is reciting. If we recite it then think it over, think it over then recite it, naturally it’ll become meaningful to us. If we recite it but don’t think it over, we still won’t appreciate its meaning. If we think it over but don’t recite it, even though we might understand it, our understanding will be precarious.

Marton, et al. (1996) support the above view as well. This is because “when a text is memorized, it can be repeated in a way that deepens understanding; different aspects of the text are focused on with each repetition.” The notion of achieving deeper understanding through repetition is not new. Studies conducted by Gruber, (1976), Marton and Wenestam, (1987) and Marton et al., (1992) which were cited in Marton et al., (1996) show that repeated readings of a passage of text do lead to an improved understanding.

Based on the collectivist nature of the Chinese culture as well as influences from Confucianism and Taoism, Jin and Cortazzi (1998: 113) summarized the key features of the Chinese culture of learning, which is provided on the following page.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Features</th>
<th>Implications on learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Learning is valued</td>
<td>Students should love learning, be curious and expect to learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Learning is respect</td>
<td>Filial piety is extended to teachers. They are regarded as respected experts, parents or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>friends. Teachers give care, concern and help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Learning involves reciprocal</td>
<td>Teachers and students have duties and responsibilities to each other, both are expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationships</td>
<td>to learn academically and morally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Learning is social</td>
<td>Self-development occurs in a collective setting. Key relationships should achieve harmony,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>not disagreement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Learning means thinking and doing</td>
<td>Learning is incomplete without reflection and practical application. Therefore the focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>is on products and results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Learning is an apprenticeship</td>
<td>Learning involves long-term strategies of hard work for the present and rewards, later.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It involves following a 'master' in word and deed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Learning is enlightenment</td>
<td>Learning involves memorization and accumulation of knowledge. What is now memorized is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>understood later for further development and used for creation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Learning is memorizing</td>
<td>Memorizing (even by rote) is a concession to the collected experience and authority of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>others. Memorizing is part of progress.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3* Key features of Chinese culture of learning (Adapted from Jin and Cortazzi, 1998: 113)

A point to note is that some modifications to the original diagrams have been made by the thesis author. Jin and Cortazzi (1998: 108) originally listed ten factors that are supposed to have influenced the Chinese culture of learning. However, their explanation on how the following factors, namely:
- contextual judgment versus objective assessment;
- circular versus linear view and
- enlightenment versus rational processes

might have impacted on the Chinese culture of learning was either unclear or inadequately explained. Similarly, it is again vague as to how the teachings of Confucianism and Taoism influenced the students' research processes and methods. As such, these factors have been omitted in the diagram in Figure 2 on page 35.

The above section explains the influences of Confucianism and Taoism on the Chinese culture of learning. The following section moves on to present the socio-economic factors that influence the Chinese culture of learning.

3.3.2 Influences of Socio-economic factors

In order to check population growth, China implemented a one child policy on urban families in 1979. As a result of this, many teachers have to deal with children who are not used to playing or interacting with others. In order to discipline them, teachers instill into students values such as obedience, self-control, conformity to the group and awareness of others. This is a result of Confucius's teachings, where collective awareness and recognition of teacher authority have always been a significant feature of Chinese learning. These values are still relevant in the Chinese society and are "far from being eroded by
contemporary trends." Instead, they are "reinforced by the effects of the one child policy" (Cortazzi and Jin, 1996b: 179).

Likewise, achieving good grades through diligence is another value that is instilled upon Chinese children from the time they are young. The fear that their only child would not work hard and be deprived of opportunities drives parents to pressure the child by giving her extra homework. This anxiety experienced by parents is comprehensible since many of them were deprived of a good education themselves during the Cultural Revolution.

Similarly, recent economic developments in China have also influenced the way Chinese students learn. Since the 1990s, China has been singled out as the country with the fastest developing economy. As noted in the previous chapter, English was identified as a catalyst that could spur the country to modernization. As a result of this, the Chinese people are highly motivated to learn English largely for economic reasons. Firstly, they recognize that the country needs a great number of people with good English proficiency. Secondly, they are aware that ample work opportunities are available to them once they are skilled in the language.

The effects of such a recent phenomenon remain to be seen. But in Cortazzi and Jin's (1996b, 181) view, what is more definite is that the Chinese culture of learning is more resistant to change. This is because in China, children are
socialized into a culture of learning from an early age when they start learning to read and write Mandarin. Major aspects of this culture of learning are transferred to the foreign language classrooms. Repetition and memorization are two learning strategies that feature prominently in the Chinese culture of learning. It has been suggested that repetition is a route to achieving understanding (Biggs, 1996: 271). Through hard work, the Chinese believe that anyone can be successful in learning a language, be it Mandarin or English.

The above section explains how Confucianism and Taoism as well as socio-economic factors exert influence on the Chinese culture of learning. In the next section, a comparison between 'Western' cultures of learning and that of the Chinese is made.

3.4 Contrastive cultures of learning

As noted in the opening paragraph, to speak of a culture of learning is to make generalizations. Indeed, vast differences existing between various core English-speaking countries and cultures are to be expected. Similarly, China is a large country with a huge population with different dialects being spoken in the rural and urban regions. Despite this, the Chinese still hold the belief that 'Western' cultures of learning share a different set of norms, perceptions and ideals (Jin and Cortazzi, 1998: 102).
The Chinese culture of learning a language can be conceived to be basically concerned with the mastery of knowledge. The verb ‘teach’ in Mandarin Chinese is ‘jiao shu’ which means ‘teach (from) the book’. The teacher and textbook are considered to be authoritative sources of knowledge in terms of grammar rules and explanation of meaning. Great respect is accorded to teachers as they are expected to be not only experts in the field but also to possess the best method of teaching including an awareness of what their students need to learn. Similarly, texts are considered to be extremely valuable as very often, they are the only other resource that students have. Figure 4 depicts the Chinese culture of learning a language diagrammatically.

![Diagram of the Chinese culture of learning a language](Image)

*Figure 4 Chinese culture of learning a language (Source: Jin and Cortazzi, 1998: 102)*

For Chinese students, learning is expected to take place through sheer hard work and effort. This stems from Confucius's teachings which continues to exert its
influence (Louie, 1984). Much attention is also directed at textbooks and the memorization of vocabulary.

On the other hand, for Western cultures of learning, the social and pedagogic relationships are conceived differently. The focus is on the learning contexts, meeting students' needs and helping them develop communication skills. Student participation, classroom interaction and cooperative learning are strategies often employed to help learners develop skills related to the functions and uses of languages.

The two contrastive cultures of learning often give rise to different perceptions and expectations regarding the role of the teacher and that of the student. An extensive case study on this subject matter was carried out between 1993 and 1995 in China. As reported by Jin and Cortazzi (1998), Chinese tertiary students were often perceived by their Western teachers (from countries such as Britain, North America, Australia, New Zealand) as hardworking, persistent and highly motivated to learn English. However, when communicative approaches were used with Chinese students, they were considered to be weak at oral communication, unwilling to work in groups and preferred whole class work or individual work. From the Chinese students' perspective, they perceived themselves as diligent and were willing to learn from and with other classmates. They accorded great respect to their teachers and considered themselves 'active'
in class, since they were mentally engaging with the teaching and cooperated with their teachers.

With regard to Western teachers, PRC students were of the view that their strength lies in the area of pronunciation. As they are ‘native’ speakers of English, they were considered to be good models in helping them improve their speaking skill. However, Chinese teachers were valued as they gave much more knowledge and paid more attention to the area of grammar. Western teachers seemed to neglect this area and appeared not to know grammar rules well.

Similarly, what is valued in ‘Western’ classrooms is not necessarily appreciated in Chinese classrooms. In the Communicative Language Teaching approach, discussion is considered to be a useful approach in developing fluency. However, Chinese students regarded discussions to be a waste of time as they risked learning errors from their peers. Since the teacher is the model, (s)he should practice with them in class. Rather than engaging in discussions with their peers, Chinese students preferred that class time be capitalized and used to the fullest with the teacher. Language practice with classmates should therefore only take place after class. This dependency on teachers also implies that PRC students could be resistant to taking charge of their learning and fostering learner autonomy.
Coming from an individualist culture, 'Western' teachers expected the students to request help or clarification when needed. Unfortunately, seeking help was considered to be embarrassing since it could be regarded as a burden to others. Instead, these PRC students expected their teachers and students to be sensitive enough to offer help unasked. Asking questions in class was also regarded as 'taboo'. These Chinese students chose to remain silent in class as they were shy and were afraid of making mistakes. It was embarrassing to lose 'face' by asking seemingly foolish questions, or on the other extreme, to sound smug by asking 'smart' or difficult questions. What was even more unacceptable was that the questions proved too difficult for the teacher to answer. This would cause both the teacher and the student to lose face. To sum up, the Chinese students considered a good teacher as one who is not only knowledgeable but also sensitive in anticipating questions and answering them unasked.

3.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter provides an explanation of how the Chinese culture has influenced the Chinese way of learning, which in turn impacts on the way a language is learnt.

Coming from a collective society, the emphasis of the Chinese community is on relationships and mutual dependency. This is one factor which impacts on the Chinese culture of learning. Other influences stem from the teachings of Confucianism and Taoism, as well as socio-economic factors.
Education is highly prized in the Chinese society which stems from Confucius's presupposition that everyone is educable. Failure to learn is not equated to a deficiency of ability but a lack of motivation and hard work. As a result, much stress is placed on diligence. There is also great reverence for teachers and textbooks as they are considered to be authoritative sources of knowledge. Therefore Chinese students strive to maintain harmonious relationships and to avoid conflicts with their teachers.

As a result of large class size, the Chinese classroom is typically teacher-centred. Teaching methods are essentially expository which is described as the transmission of knowledge through imitation, repetition and memorization. This has however been mistaken for rote-learning. Chinese students are taught to memorize through reflection in order to achieve understanding.

In conclusion, the kinds of expectations and beliefs teachers and students bring into the classroom will undoubtedly impact on the students' progress. Cross-cultural classroom situations are becoming ever more common as a result of globalization. Students will be taught by teachers who do not share a common background with them. As increasing numbers of Chinese students venture outside of their country for further studies, and as more 'native' speaker teachers seek employment in China, it is important for both teachers and students to at least seek a mutual understanding of learning cultures in order for effective teaching and learning to take place. Failure to understand other cultures of
learning has led to much ignorance and misunderstanding. For one, Chinese or Asian students who studied overseas have at times, been portrayed in a negative light. The most common criticisms are that they are passive, uncritical and willingly follow their teachers' instructions.

Having completed the discussion on the Chinese culture of learning, the following chapter reviews studies that have been conducted on Asian or Chinese learners in helping them develop learner autonomy.
CHAPTER FOUR

REVIEW OF LITERATURE II –

LEARNER AUTONOMY

This study is concerned with exploring the possibility of fostering learner autonomy amongst students from the People's Republic of China to establish if autonomous learning is effective in helping these students improve their English. In Chapter 2, some background information on the place of the English Language in the Chinese education system as well as English Language Teaching in China was provided. In Chapter 3, an account of how the Chinese culture influences teaching and learning, which is commonly known as the Chinese culture of learning was presented. In this chapter, a review of research studies that have been conducted to develop learner autonomy is presented. As strategies used with L1 learners in fostering autonomy are often considered inappropriate in ESL/EFL contexts as a result of cultural differences, the review here only focuses on studies which have been conducted on ESL/EFL students.

There are three main sections in the chapter. The first provides a definition of the terms 'learner autonomy' and 'self access learning'. The second section outlines the reasons for promoting learner autonomy. Following this, a link between the previous chapters to the current chapter is provided by discussing the intricate association between culture and autonomy. Discussions on studies which have
been conducted on Asian or Chinese students in order to promote learner autonomy are also presented here in the third section. In doing so, the theoretical foundation on which the present study rests on, is established. The final section provides a discussion of how the literature review on learner autonomy informs the investigation and research process.

4.1 Learner Autonomy

Various terms such as 'learner independence', 'learner centredness', 'self-direction', 'autonomous learning' and 'independent learning' have been used to describe learner autonomy in language learning. According to Palfreyman (2003: 3), the use of diverse terms reflects different interpretations.

As noted in the previous paragraph, the term 'independent learning' has been used interchangeably with 'autonomous learning'. One problem with this is that 'independent learning' can be interpreted to mean individual learning. Isolated learning does not necessarily lead to the development of autonomy (Benson, 2001: 13). Tasks involving pair or group work can also be used to foster autonomy. Ho and Crookall (1995) and Chan (2000) provide a number of group tasks to help learners develop autonomy. Since the term, 'independent learning' can be misconstrued as learning in isolation, the term 'autonomy' is preferred and is used in this study.
'Autonomy' is a term which is difficult to define as it is not only multidimensional but can also take on different forms in different learning situations. Furthermore, it is made more complicated as discussions on autonomy are often characterized by misunderstandings of the concept as well as its implementation. For simplicity, Benson (2001: 2) defines autonomy “as the capacity to take control over one’s learning” while Holec (1981:3) defines it as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning”. This entails having and holding “the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning” including:

- determining the objectives;
- defining the content and progressions;
- selecting the methods and techniques to be used;
- defining the place, time and pace of learning;
- evaluating what has been acquired.

Autonomous learners are deemed to be capable of making all the above decisions concerning the learning which they wish to engage.

Although Holec’s definition sufficiently covers the main areas of the learning process that an autonomous learner is expected to take control of, Benson (2001: 49) argues that this definition is problematic as the “cognitive capabilities underlying effective self-management of learning” in autonomous learning is not made explicit in Holec’s definition. Instead, in Benson’s view, Little’s definition complements that of Holec’s as it “adds a vital psychological dimension” (Benson, 2001: 49).
As for Little (1991: 3), he does not regard autonomy as "exclusively or even primarily a matter of how learning is organized." Instead, autonomy is fundamentally a capacity — for detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action. It presupposes, but also entails that the learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of his learning. The capacity for autonomy will be displayed both in the way the learner learns and in the way he or she transfers what has been learned to wider contexts.

Little (1991: 4)

In Little's definition "the capacity to take responsibility for one's own learning is described more in terms of control over the cognitive processes involved in effective self-management of learning" (Benson, 2001: 49).

In short, Benson (2001: 50; 1997:19) advocates that an adequate description of autonomy must recognize three important levels at which learner control may be exercised. They are:

1. Learning situation which refers to the act of learning a language outside an institution and without the supervision of the teacher;
2. Cognitive processes which refers to the attitudes and abilities that enables learners to take responsibility for their learning;
3. Learning management which refers to the control over the processes and content of learning in individual learning and the institutional context.

All three levels of learner autonomy as defined above are relevant, to a greater or lesser extent, to the research purpose of this study. First, the learning takes place
at a self access centre which is different from that of a classroom. Second, the extent to which the learners are capable of planning their activities and making constructive use of their time during self access sessions is also important in this investigation, since working in SAC is supposed to help students become more autonomous. However, for the purpose of this research study, it is the cognitive processes which are most relevant. This is because the attitudes, beliefs and abilities of learners govern their learning behaviour. What learners think and believe about autonomous learning, about themselves as language learners, about the role a teacher plays and their ability to learn autonomously, influence the decisions students make regarding their learning.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the students' learning takes place at the self access centre in the National Institute of Education. According to Dickinson (1981: 8), the organization of materials in a self access centre facilitates self directed learning and that self access learning goes hand in hand with the development of autonomy. A self access centre (SAC) can be defined as follows: “A SAC consists of a number of resources ...usually located in one place, designed to accommodate learners of different levels, styles, goals and interests. It aims to develop learner autonomy amongst its users” (Cotterall and Reinders, 2000: 25). Self access learning (SAL) takes place in a SAC and promotes learner autonomy by providing facilities which allow learners to pursue their own goals and interests where students set goals and monitor their own progress. SAL can act as a bridge between the classroom and the real world.
An alternative definition of self access learning comes from Gardner and Miller (1997: xvii). "Self-access language learning (SALL) is learning in which students take more responsibility for their learning than in teacher directed settings". What is salient here is that when students engage in autonomous language learning, both the teacher and the students take on roles which are different from those of conventional classrooms. This could be problematic especially if students hold traditional views regarding classroom teaching. That is, students might expect their teacher to provide knowledge while they regard themselves as passive receivers of knowledge.

Having explained the reasons why the term ‘learner autonomy’ over ‘independent learning’ is preferred, the concepts of ‘learner autonomy’ as well as how the three levels of learner autonomy are relevant to the research purpose of this study, the following section presents the reasons for promoting learner autonomy.

4.2 Reasons for Advancing Learner Autonomy

There are various reasons for wanting to promote learner autonomy. First, the fundamental reason for wanting to help learners develop autonomy is that individual differences and needs such as ability, personality, learning styles and motivation are catered for when learners make decisions concerning their own learning. Second, autonomy is recognized as an important educational goal as there is an intimate connection between learner autonomy and effective learning (Chan, 2000: 75). Fernandes et al. (1990: 101 cited in Ho and Crookall, 1995:
provide another compelling reason for promoting learner autonomy, that is, learners are often conditioned into becoming reliant on their teachers in their learning.

In their everyday lives adults are required to ... make choices and decisions regarding their lives, accept responsibility and learn to do things for themselves. However, language learners in the classroom often tend to revert to the traditional role of pupil, who expects to be told what to do.... As a result, some learners have become teacher-dependent and often feel that it is the teacher alone who is responsible for any learning and progress that takes place.

As such, students should be given opportunities to develop into autonomous learners. Fourth, contrary to popular belief that learners do not have the capacity to make decisions concerning their learning, Dam and Gabrielsen (1988) found that learners, irrespective of their aptitude or ability, were positive and could be actively involved in selecting their own content and learning procedures. In addition, these learners readily accepted responsibility for their own learning. Similarly, Widdows and Voller (1991) found that learners have definite views on what they want to learn as well as the way they want to learn. Fifth, Cotterall (1995: 219) considers the attainment of autonomy desirable for three reasons: philosophical, pedagogical and practical reasons. Those citing philosophical arguments see autonomy as a basic right that learners have in making choices related to their learning. In terms of pedagogy, Candy (1988: 75 cited in Cotterall, 1995: 219) supports the view that when learners are consulted about the pace, sequence, mode of instruction and content of what they are studying, learning becomes more effective. This is to be expected since learners are involved in the decision making regarding their learning. Lastly, the practical reason for
advancing learner autonomy is that the teacher may not always be around to help learners. Furthermore, learners cannot remain indefinitely in an institution or always have access to instruction. If learners can take a more proactive approach in their learning, they can become more efficient in their learning rather than wait for their teachers to point them in the right direction.

In addition to the above reasons, it is also essential to prepare learners for this rapidly changing world that we live in. Autonomus learning is fundamental as a result of globalization. This is because we are constantly bombarded by new information and technology which makes it necessary to update and upgrade our skills, very often through self learning in order to remain employable. Through technological advancement such as the computer, Internet and electronic mail, distance learning as a mode of learning is also becoming extremely popular nowadays. The reasons mapped out above clearly put forth a case for fostering learner autonomy which cannot be over-emphasized.

This section reviews the reasons for promoting learner autonomy. The next section examines the association between autonomy and culture.

4.3 Autonomy and Culture

Cotterall (1998: 66) asserts that it is important to investigate the interaction of cultural beliefs in terms of roles within a classroom "since much language learning involves learners in cultural settings other than their own ... or learners
whose teacher is from a cultural background other than their own.” Fostering autonomy in learners necessitates that learners take on roles which are different from those that they are used to in a conventional classroom since learners have to take charge and make decisions concerning their own learning. Taking on a new role may be disturbing to some learners and this can be attributed to culture since “cultural identity is made up (in part) of a set of valued beliefs about education” (Cotterall, 1998: 66). Negative reactions to autonomy have been observed by Henner-Stanchina and Riley (1978).

The angry reaction by many people of any suggestion of autonomy shows clearly that we are not dealing with just another new methodology of language teaching. Autonomy clearly implies a challenge to social roles, starting with that of the teacher-expert. So deeply-ingrained is this role in our culture that any change in it is difficult to contemplate.

Henner-Stanchina and Riley (1978: 78)

Furthermore, attempts to develop autonomy in learners in cross cultural learning situations can be challenging. Kirkpatrick (1994) attributes this to learners who still cling to traditional beliefs about teaching and learning that run contrary to notions of autonomy.

...many students come from cultures where the role of the teacher is to transmit ‘correct’ knowledge and information while the role of students is simply to absorb it .... Different behavioural expectations can often lead to misunderstanding. In some cultures, to question a lecturer is not only not expected, it is a type of behaviour that is regarded as extremely rude.

Kirkpatrick (1994: 33)

As noted in the previous chapter, what Kirkpatrick (1994) observes is known to be a distinct feature in collectivist societies as well as for those societies which
observe power distance. In collectivist societies, there is much positive connection with whatever is rooted in tradition. Individuals in such societies also tend to only feel comfortable to speak up when in small groups (Hofstede, 1986: 303). In high power distance societies, people accept that differences in power and authority exist between members of society (Littlewood, 1999: 80). Teachers in such societies command respect from their students. The students in turn expect their teachers to outline paths for them to follow. Moreover, the "effectiveness of learning is related to excellence of the teacher" (Hofstede, 1986: 313). It is not surprising for learners who are brought up in such societies to experience conflict or discomfort in making decisions concerning their learning since it appears to encroach on the teacher's field of expertise (Cotterall, 1998: 68). "Most cultures which rate high in collectivism also rate high in power distance" (Littlewood, 1999:80). Hence, it is common for learners who come from such backgrounds to hold disparate views regarding appropriate classroom roles and behaviour from that of a teacher who is committed to promoting learner autonomy.

Similarly, Ho and Crookall (1995: 237) propose that it can be both emotionally and intellectually challenging for PRC students when they are encouraged to work autonomously, given “the hierarchy of human relations in Chinese culture, and the respected position of the teacher.” As noted in Chapter 3, the Chinese culture of learning a language can be thought of as being fundamentally concerned with the mastery of knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, and the
source of learning comes mainly from the teacher and textbook (Jin and Cortazzi, 1998: 102). The Chinese culture of learning is much influenced by Confucianism and Taoism, which continues to exert their influence (Louie, 1984). The teacher and textbook are regarded as authoritative sources of knowledge (Jin and Cortazzi 1998: 102). Since Chinese students have been used to teacher-directed learning, it may thus be a challenge to foster learner autonomy amongst them. This is because the idea of individuals having the rights to author and control their own lives — may be one that has greater resonance in western than in non-western cultures. Similarly, narrower definitions of autonomy and the practices associated with it that have grown up in European educational institutions may be entirely inappropriate elsewhere in the world.

(Benson 2001, 55)

Several authors have raised concerns on the issue of cultural appropriateness in fostering autonomy in language learning (Riley 1988; Jones, 1995; Ho and Crookall, 1995; Aoki and Smith, 1999). According to Littlewood (1999), reservations regarding cultural appropriateness in fostering learner autonomy amongst Asian students have largely centred on the collectivist Asian culture which accepts relations of power and authority. In the next section, a review of research studies and papers which have been conducted and written on the subject of promoting autonomy among Asian students is presented.

4.3.1 Fostering autonomy among Asian students — A review

With the assistance of local and expatriate colleagues, Jones (1995) was assigned the task of establishing a self access centre at Phnom Penh University.
From the outset, Jones (1995: 229) argued for the need of a sound, culturally sensitive foundation in establishing the self access centre. His reason is that "to make autonomy an undiluted educational objective in a culture where it has no traditional place is to be guilty at least of cultural insensitivity." This is because "concepts of autonomy and individual responsibility and freedom ... come laden with Western values" (Jones 1995: 229). Although independence and individual integrity may be valued in many western societies, the same is not applicable in Cambodia as Cambodian learners are usually characterized as "dependent and authority-oriented" where conformity is more highly prized than freedom of expression (Jones, 1995: 229). In his view, an ideal self access system must cater to differing learning styles, permitting learners to take as much or as little control as well as offering guidance to those who do not desire or have an aptitude for independence. Jones concluded by reiterating the point that the design of facilities and services of self access centres must take into account its users and their culture and educational background (Jones, 1995: 233).

A learning situation similar to that of Cambodia exists in Japan as well. Not only are Japanese students characterized as passive learners, much emphasis is also placed on the hierarchical relationship between teachers and students in Japanese classrooms. Teachers are accorded a great deal of respect which is still prevalent today (Usuki, 2002).
In her study of 46 first year Japanese EFL students who were involved in self-access learning, Usuki’s (2002: 12) students held the view that “the student’s role should be that of active learner and the teacher’s role that of facilitator or advisor”. This runs contrary to popular belief that Japanese students are passive learners. She also found that the way students behave is “affected by the atmosphere, which may be influenced by how the teacher relates to the students and also by how the students relate to one another” (Usuki 2002: 13).

Usuki (2002: 13) also pointed out that the teacher’s attitude towards students can be a self-fulfilling prophesy which can limit the development of student autonomy. In the past, I too had a stereotypical view of Japanese students’ classroom behaviour. I believed that students had grown accustomed to teacher authority and spoon-fed education, and that therefore they preferred to be told what to do by their teacher and to accept everything. However, after conducting the focus group interviews, I realized that I was unconsciously expecting them to be dependent students. I saw them in negative light because I assumed that they were not aware of their responsibility for their own learning.

Thomson (1996) believes that people are born self-directed learners, but are influenced by their cultural, educational and developmental background. Sinclair (1997), on the other hand, argues that different cultures and learning contexts require different approaches in promoting learner autonomy. Perhaps the issue between culture and autonomy is best summed up by Aoki and Smith (1996 cited in Usuki, 2002: 5):

The important issue with regard to learner autonomy is not whether autonomy itself is appropriate in cultural context – but how negotiated versions of autonomy can be best enabled in all contexts, in varying ways....
From the above, it can be seen that the learners' cultural and educational background as well as teacher attitudes, could impact on the development of learner autonomy. Instead of arguing for a self access system to be run in a way which allows learners to decide on the amount of autonomy they wish to manage, Jones could perhaps have let his students take complete control of their own learning over a period of time. After this time, feedback can be obtained from his learners as to whether they are capable of handling the autonomy accorded to them, and whether taking control of their learning is useful in helping them progress in language learning. Like Usuki, Jones is perhaps guilty of a self fulfilling prophesy. Consequently, he denied his students the potential of developing complete autonomy when he let them decide on the degree of autonomy they wished to control based on what they were used to or comfortable with.

While the above studies were conducted to encourage autonomy among Asian students, other writers have endeavored to debunk the myth that learner autonomy is only relevant in Western cultural contexts.

Littlewood (1999) proposes that cultures are differentiated on three main bases. The first distinction is whether they are oriented towards 'individualism' or 'collectivism'. There is a tendency for people who come from East Asian countries to show a much stronger collectivist orientation than those from

A second aspect is the 'power distance' dimension. People who are low on this dimension are of the view that differences in power and authority between members of society should be minimized. In addition, any disparity in terms of privilege and status should be reduced and communication patterns should reflect participants' equal rights to speak. Conversely, those who are high on the 'power distance' dimension accept the existence of these differences. However, acceptance does not necessarily mean that these people regard these differences as desirable but merely unavoidable facts of life (Littlewood, 1999: 80). In a study involving employees from 53 countries, Hofstede (1991) found that there is a tendency for collective cultures to also rate high in power distance.

According to many writers such as Bond and Hwang (1986) and Lee (1996) who were cited in Littlewood (1999: 82), a third dimension relates to that of Confucius's teachings, which bear much influence on many aspects of East Asian life. The first aspect is the importance of relationships, that is, how people interact with one another as well as the acceptance of hierarchies. A second aspect relates to individual responsibility and striving; success in education is not dependent on innate ability but on hard work and self discipline. Every person has the ability to be successful and failure to succeed is attributed to the lack of effort (Lee, 1996 cited in Littlewood, 1999: 82).
In short, students from East Asia are often stereotyped as passive recipients of knowledge who expect the teacher and texts to be the source of learning. Success in learning is often achieved through motivation and diligence. Littlewood (1999: 89) cautions against overemphasizing the differences between groups of students, such as the ‘East Asian learner’ or the ‘Western learner’, while neglecting and understating the differing needs of individual students.

He further claims that it may be more sensible to pay attention to the powerful role of the learning context. With specific groups in specific contexts, we may find more commonality between two groups from cultures with different learning traditions than between two specific groups of learning within the same culture. As we focus on individual learners within these groups, the likelihood of finding commonality across cultural boundaries and differences within them becomes even more likely. Any generalizations and predictions we may wish to make can therefore never provide us with the truth in particular instances. They can offer us, at most, possible clues to understanding why students react in particular ways and as a result, serve as a base from which to move towards an understanding that is more complete.

Littlewood, 1999: 83

However, as noted in Chapter Three, to discuss the topic of culture or cultures of learning is to make generalizations since there are bound to be exceptions. Based on the quote above, Littlewood himself observed that generalizations can never provide the truth in specific instances. Therefore, it would be unrealistic for him to expect generalizations to be able to provide accurate descriptions of a specific case or situation.
Similarly, Littlewood (1999: 83) reduces the usefulness of generalizations to that of providing possible clues to understanding why students react in particular ways and merely serving as a base towards a more complete understanding of student behaviour. However, insights provided by generalization should not be undermined. This is because generalizations not only provide information that helps in achieving an understanding of student behaviour, but more importantly, they reveal students' beliefs and views about how learning should take place. This issue itself warrants much attention, as a mismatch in expectations and beliefs often leads to frustration which can impede learning (Bergman, 1984; Haughton and Dickinson, 1988 and Kumaravadivelu, 1991).

Teachers should also be cautious in that generalizations of students should not lead to a self-fulfilling prophesy as noted earlier in Usuki (2002). Rather, generalizations should serve to guide teachers in making informed decisions should they wish to negotiate with their students, regarding the role of the teacher and that of the students, as well as how teaching and learning should take place in the classroom.

As noted above, Littlewood (1999: 83) argues that “with specific groups in specific contexts, we may find more commonality between two groups from cultures with different learning traditions than between two specific groups of learning within the same culture.” However, in the above claim, Littlewood has failed to provide a clear definition of what he means by the term “specific
contexts." Furthermore, what Littlewood proposed above is obviously not backed by any empirical evidence as the presence of words such as 'may' and 'likelihood' in the quotation suggests. Therefore, his argument that "the likelihood of finding commonality across cultural boundaries and differences within them (i.e. individual learners) becomes even more likely", remains mere speculation.

Another paper which deals with the issue of learner autonomy and culture is that of Little's (1999). He began the paper by stating that it has sometimes been suggested that learner autonomy is a Western cultural construct which is inappropriate in non-Western societies (Little, 1999: 12). He attempts to refute this belief in the following three ways.

First, while it may be true that the idea of learner autonomy surfaces regularly in European philosophies of education, Little (1999: 12) suggests that in practice, however, learner autonomy remains a minority pursuit. Clearly, it does not flow naturally and inevitably from whatever the cultural basis of Western educational systems may turn out to be.

Contrary to Little's claim, fostering learner autonomy has been given much prominence. First, according to Pemberton (1996:1) "... developing learner autonomy in language learning has been incorporated to greater or lesser degrees, into many countries' national curricula." Second, there has been considerable shift from a focus on teaching methods to learners, paying attention to learner needs and differences. Developing learner autonomy is a step in this direction. Third, it is also recognized that no matter how much help is given to
learners, ultimately, it is learners themselves who must do the learning. In other words, "learners need to take a pro-active role in the learning process – generating ideas and learning opportunities rather than simply reacting to the stimulus of the teacher" (Knowles 1975 cited in Fitzgearld, Morrall and Morrison, 1996). Consequently, much effort has been devoted to developing tasks and activities to help learners take charge and responsibility for their own learning (Ho and Crookall, 1995; Chan, 2000; Cotterall, 2000). Thus, Little's (1999: 12) claim that "learner autonomy remains a minority pursuit" and therefore cannot originate from Western educational systems, is questionable.

Second, Little (1999: 12) argues that "ideals of self-knowledge, self-reliance and self-determination figure with equal importance in the Wisdom literatures of very different cultural and religious traditions." To substantiate his view that human beings in different cultures are more alike than is often supposed, Little compares the Christian humanist's notion of a learner to that of Chu Hsi's. The former regards learners as "individuals with intentions who take responsibility for the effects of their acts" (Riley 1999: 36 cited in Little, 1999: 12), while Chu Hsi, a 12th century Sung Dynasty scholar, envisages learners to be independent and self-reliant.

If you are in doubt, think it out by yourself. Do not depend on others for explanations. Suppose there was no one you could ask, should you stop learning? If you could get rid of the habit of being dependent on others, you will make your advancement in your study.

(Pierson 1996: 56 cited in Little, 1999:12)
With regard to Little's argument above, it holds little weight as Confucianism and Taoism bear a much greater influence on the Chinese culture of learning (Jin, 1992 cited in Jin and Cortazzi, 1998: 108) compared to Chu Hsi, who is relatively less well-known and respected. As noted in Chapter 3, the Chinese culture of learning a language can be conceived to be basically concerned with the mastery of knowledge. When acquiring knowledge, Chinese learners look to their teacher to impart knowledge to them as the teacher and the text are regarded as authority sources of learning.

The third argument Little (1999) puts forth in response to suggestions that learner autonomy is a Western cultural construct, was to cite Strawson (1996: 21) who claims that the

sense of the self (which is) the sense that people have of themselves as being, specifically, a mental presence, a mental someone, a conscious subject that has a certain character or personality, and is distinct from all its particular experiences, thought, hopes, wishes, feelings and so on.

(Strawson 1996: 21 cited in Little 1999: 13)

As noted in Chapter 3, in the Chinese tradition, there is no equivalent for the Western concept of personality; a concept that separates a person from society and culture (Hsu, 1971 cited in Hofstede, 2001: 210). The concept of ‘self’ is instead seen in terms of an “individual's transactions with his/her fellow human beings” (King and Bond, 1985 cited in Ho, 1997: 105). This distinctive quality which exists in collective cultures therefore casts doubt on Little's argument.
Little (1999: 13) also postulates that "human cultural diversity, though great, cannot be infinite because it is always constrained by our common biological endowment." Therefore, learner autonomy cannot be limited to the West. The thrust of the argument is not whether infinite human cultural diversity exists. Based on various studies on culture by Hofstede (2001), Cortazzi and Jin (1996b) and Salili (1996) which were discussed in Chapter 3, it is obvious that Chinese learners believe their learning culture is different from that of Western counterparts. As such, it follows that cultural variations do not have to be infinite in order to significantly impact on the learning styles of people from different parts of the globe.

After attempting to demonstrate that autonomy is not a Western construct, Little (1999: 13) moves on to argue that autonomy is a universal human capacity.

In formal educational contexts the most successful learners are autonomous ... they accept responsibility for their learning; they constantly reflect on what they are learning; why they are learning, how they are learning, and with what degree of success ... all successful scholars and researchers fit into my working definition of learner autonomy.

First, the above learner qualities are desirable and there is no question that they should be the goal of every learner. However, the concept of accepting responsibility for one's learning differs. Very often, for Chinese students, accepting responsibility for one's learning entails paying attention to the teacher in class and putting in effort in reviewing and committing to memory what was taught to them.
Second, how Little (1999) defines the notion of “successful learners” is also not clearly spelt out in his paper. There are abundant learners who are extremely ‘successful’ in their study yet they do not reflect on why or how they are learning. These ‘examination-smart’ students obtain excellent examination grades through mundane hard work by mechanically working out answers of examination questions from previous years.

Again, Little (1999: 13) continues his argument that autonomy is not a Western construct according to his definition of the term ‘autonomy’. “Put (in) a different way, all successful scholars and researchers fit into my working definition of learner autonomy” (Little, 1999:13). In Little’s term, autonomous learners accept responsibility for their learning, continually reflect on what, why and how they are learning which are “goals of critical thinking and independence of mind” (Little, 1999:14). Unfortunately, Little’s definition of ‘autonomy’ does not include nor provide any insight as to how knowledge is acquired in the first instance, but only describes the kinds of behaviour successful learners engage in after knowledge has been acquired. This is an important point as it is still unclear with regard to the extent to which learners are willing or have the ability to acquire knowledge on their own, especially in the area of language learning, which is different from content subjects. Many Chinese students that I have taught stressed the importance of learning language from teachers as teachers not only serve as models of pronunciation but they also know what their students need to learn and
possess the 'best' method in helping them learn. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 6 and 7.

Little (1999: 15) also draws an analogy between autonomy development and language acquisition and regards them as "a process by which implicit knowledge gradually becomes explicit." Like language acquisition, autonomy development varies greatly from individual to individual and this is attributed to both "genetic endowment and environment differences" (Little, 1999:15).

Although learner autonomy is considered to be an appropriate pedagogical goal in all cultural settings, Little (1999:15) cautions that

we must pay careful attention to the cultural setting in which learning takes place. Learner autonomy cannot be externally imposed as a form of behaviour modification; it must grow, quasi-organically, out of the ongoing encounter between the critical goals of the educational enterprise and the particularities of cultural context.

This, according to Little (1999: 16) is to "remove the barriers that so easily erect themselves between formal learning and the wider environment in which the learner lives."

Although some arguments put forth in Little's paper are questionable, I support his view that learner autonomy cannot and must not be externally imposed. Before students can be encouraged to develop learner autonomy, there must first be an understanding of the kinds of barriers that exist within particular learning contexts as well as the kinds of beliefs that students bring into the classroom that may impede the development of learner autonomy. Once an understanding of
the following obstacles is achieved, students can then be given opportunities to develop this capacity (Little, 1999: 16).

Somewhat mirroring what Little (1999) advocated, this study began by investigating possible barriers in fostering learner autonomy with PRC students. The kinds of beliefs, in particular, the role of the teacher and the role of learners that PRC students bring into the classroom were investigated as the Chinese culture of learning posed a possible obstacle to developing autonomy.

In order to encourage PRC students to assume more responsibility in their learning, an hour each week is set aside for them to engage in learning activities at the self access centre. This provided them with opportunities to not only develop learner autonomy but also to engage in their favourite activities in order to improve their language proficiency. In addition to self learning, keeping a learning journal is another attempt in fostering autonomy as it provided them an avenue to reflect on their learning.

In addition to what Little (1999) has advocated, PRC students were interviewed at the beginning and the end of the course so that feedback regarding self learning could be obtained from them in order to achieve a better understanding of how autonomy can be fostered amongst them. A more detailed discussion on the data collection process is given in Chapter 5, while the findings are provided in the subsequent chapters.
4.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a definition of various terms such as 'learner autonomy' and 'self access learning'. The rationale for adopting the term 'learner autonomy' rather than 'independent learning' is that the latter can be misconstrued to mean learning in isolation, which does not necessarily lead to the development of autonomy. It has been suggested that interdependence is necessary in the development of autonomy.

The fundamental reason for promoting learner autonomy is that individual differences and needs can be met when learners make decisions regarding their learning. A link between autonomy and effective learning has also been established. Moreover, globalization necessitates that employees upgrade their skills in order to stay relevant in the work force and this is often done through self learning. Distance learning as a mode of learning is also becoming extremely popular nowadays. The above reasons justify the grounds for advancing autonomy.

In the third section, various projects and studies which were devoted to promoting autonomy amongst Asian students were discussed. From this review, it is evident that an intricate association between culture and autonomy exists. It is believed that autonomy must not be externally imposed and that the development of autonomy must start with an understanding of the kinds of barriers that exist within particular learning contexts. Students should be given
opportunities to develop this capacity only after an understanding of these obstacles has been achieved.

This chapter establishes the link between the earlier chapters and provides the theoretical foundation on which the present study is based. The underlying principles on which the methodology of this research study rests as well as the process of data collection for this study is presented in the following chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

This chapter describes how the present study was conducted and how data were collected and analyzed. It also explains the underlying principles which the methodology of this research study rests on. More specifically, in the first section, the basis for selecting an interpretive paradigm and a case study approach is presented. The second section discusses the specifications of the research design, provides justification for the research instruments selected for data collection purposes and presents an account of the data collection process and analysis. In the third section, a description of the context in which this study takes place is given. The final section explains the rationale for adopting an insider perspective. Ethical issues pertaining to research will also be discussed here.

5.1 An Interpretive Case Study Approach

A case study can be defined as a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or a particular event (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1994). Although case studies are extremely common in qualitative research, they are not necessarily restricted to qualitative studies. On the contrary, both quantitative and qualitative methodologies can be employed for data collection purposes in a case study. According to Stake (2000: 435), case study is not a methodology, since a case can be studied by employing different methods or by mixing methods. Echoing this view is Merriam (1988: 2), who
postulates that a case study "is a basic design that can accommodate a variety of
disciplinary perspectives, as well as philosophical perspectives on the nature of
research itself". In short, a case study is able to accommodate an eclectic
approach that allows for different philosophical perspectives and different
methods of data collection, analysis and presentation (Nunan, 1992).

The decision to adopt a case study approach in this research study was
motivated by the fact that this study focuses on a specific phenomenon, that is,
on PRC students and the Chinese culture of learning. More specifically, it
investigates two groups of Chinese scholars who have come to Singapore to
attend the English bridge course at NIE before embarking on a degree course.
(More information on the research participants and the context of study will be
given later in the chapter.) Since these students share a number of common
characteristics, they make up a bounded system, that is, a specific phenomenon.
By focusing on a single phenomenon, it is felt that the interaction of significant
factors characteristic of the phenomenon can be better uncovered using a case
study approach (Merriam, 1988: 10).

Another reason for adopting the case study approach is that a case study can be
both enlightening and activating because

Our scientific understandings of social life have all too frequently
fragmented it into "manageable" bits which conceal from us the
context-embeddedness of social phenomena, their dynamical
coherence, their reflexive effects and their true significance which is in
action rather than theoretical discourse. Case study, because it is
naturalistic, is especially well-placed to make an assault on that
fragmentation and its associated obstacles to our understanding. Authentic insights reached through case study have the capacity to work reflexively to change the situation studied. The action-possibilities created by case study are grounded in the situation itself, not imposed from outside it.


Furthermore, cases can help teacher practitioners develop key understandings about teaching and learning, by enabling them to apply theory and practical knowledge to specific school contexts and to further evolve that knowledge in relation to practice (Darling-Hammond and Hammerness, 2002; Barnett, 1991). They can also help support teachers' metacognitive growth about their teaching and help teachers examine their personal beliefs and appreciate social, ethical and epistemological growth (Lundeberg, 1999 cited in Darling-Hammond and Hammerness, 2002).

Case study research is also relevant to pedagogy in numerous ways (Stenhouse, 1984: 267-268). First, case study is a source of documentary reference for the discussion of classroom practice, that is, it provides valuable workshop materials for teachers as well as teacher trainers. Unique personal experience is often referred to when problems of educational practice are discussed. These personal encounters need to be situated in tabled cases in order to make them publicly available for individuals to refer to. Case studies are thus important as sources of evidence. Second, case study also facilitates reflective practice in that it can be used in comparison with the teacher's own experience or case, which could open up new perspectives. Third, case study offers a systematic body of critical
standards that allows teachers to interpret and evaluate their own practices. It serves as a rich resource for teachers to draw on in order to improve the critique of classrooms and schools.

Bearing in mind the numerous benefits that can be derived from adopting a case study approach, it is not surprising that case study is gaining popularity especially in teacher education. Colbert, et al (1996, cited in Darling-Hammond and Hammerness, 2002: 125) attribute this to “context. Cases add context to theory.... [C]ases allow the exploration of precepts, principles, theories and perennial issues as they actually occur in the real world.” In addition, cases can “help teachers deal with the contextualized nature of teaching” (Darling-Hammond and Hammerness, 2002: 126). An important aim of this study is to add to the database of cases in the area of learner autonomy in order to improve pre- and in-service courses where there is a lack of empirical research in this area in Singapore.

The above section justifies the use of a case study approach in this study. Since meaning is obtained through interpretation within a context in a case study (Cronbach, 1975: 123 cited in Merriam, 1988: 10), the case study approach is thus complementary to the interpretive research design. This is because interpretive research is basically concerned with meaning and seeks to understand social members' definition of a situation (Schwandt, 1994: 118). In
the following section, the use of interpretive research design in this study is explained.

The interpretive research design is one that "strives for understanding (Verstehen) in terms of a reconstruction of how the informant relates facts to each other by means of his own assumptions of regularity" (Groeben and Scheele, 1977: 116 cited in Grotjahn, 1987). As this study aims to understand the learning behaviour of PRC students, it falls into the realm of social sciences, where knowledge and meaning are considered to be acts of interpretation. In other words, under this research paradigm, "the subjective reality of the experiences of those people who constitute and construct the social world" is recognized (Pole and Morrison, 2003: 5). This implies that there is regard for subjective meanings. However, the term, 'subjective' here does not refer to or reduce the investigation to mere opinion, dogma or journalism (Pole and Morrison, 2003: 5). Similarly, the purpose of this study is not to gather data to ascertain and measure how often certain patterns emerge, but more importantly, it is to appreciate and to account for different constructions and meanings PRC students place on their learning experience. More specifically, the objective is to understand and explain why students have different viewpoints and experiences even though they are put in a similar learning context.

Through the use of a naturalistic research design, this study focuses on the meaning of particular events in an attempt to generate rather than to verify theory
Another reason for selecting the interpretive framework is that interpretivists acknowledge the personally constructed nature of all knowledge rather than see it as an objective reality which the researcher can describe scientifically (Bassey, 1991). The study could also be regarded as an endeavour to interpret human actions by seeking to understand the reasons why people behave in the way they do (Borg, 1998: 11).

As this is a qualitative study where interviews form the primary method used in the collection of data, an interpretive perspective is justified since it strives for an interpretation of meaning within the social and cultural context of the natural setting (Cantrell, 1993: 84). Here, the learning context takes place in a natural setting, that is, at the self access centre in NIE, which makes up part of their curriculum. Regardless of their language proficiency, all PRC scholars visit the centre for an hour a week throughout their six-month course to engage in autonomous learning.

Having discussed how the case study approach complements the interpretive research design, an interpretive case study approach is hence deemed to be the most suitable methodology for this study. This is because one of the main purposes of this study is to understand the learning experiences of PRC students and to account for different constructions and meanings these students place in their learning expedition as they become more autonomous in their learning. In the following section, issues of validity and reliability are addressed.
5.1.1 Validity And Reliability

As in any research, including qualitative case study research, validity and reliability are major concerns (Merriam, 1988: 163). The question of internal validity can be addressed by using triangulation, checking interpretations with individuals who were interviewed or observed, staying on-site over a period of time, asking peers to comment on emerging findings, involving participants in all phases of the research and clarifying research biases and assumptions (Merriam, 1988: 183).

Similarly, reliability can be enhanced through the explanation of assumptions and theory underlying the study, by triangulating data and by describing how the study was conducted and how the findings were derived from the data (audit trail) (Merriam, 1988: 183).

As to the issue of ‘external validity’ which is concerned with the extent to which the findings of a case study can be generalized to other situations, Merriam (1988: 173) argues that the case study approach is selected "because one wishes to understand the particular in depth, not because one wants to know what is generally true of the many."

The above section discusses validity and reliability issues in an interpretive case study approach. It is acknowledged that one weakness of this approach is its subjectivity, since the findings are largely based on the interpretation of the researcher. Hence, the need to triangulate data becomes extremely important.
In the next section, a description of the research design and data collection process of this study is presented.

5.2 Research Design

A description of the research design is provided in two parts. The first part describes the instruments used in collecting data while the second describes the data collection process.

5.2.1 Instruments used in data collection

To reiterate, the aims of this study are to find out the following:

1. Do the PRC students who participate in the study find SAL sessions beneficial in helping them improve their English? If so, in which area(s)?
2. Do they report that becoming an autonomous learner is valuable to them?
3. Is the Chinese culture of learning a barrier in encouraging them to become more autonomous in their learning of English?

In order to provide answers to the above questions, this study employs a mixed-method design, involving both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Interviews and journal writing make up the qualitative aspect while questionnaire surveys form the quantitative component. Although three main types of research instruments are used in this study, the core data originates from two series of interviews, one conducted at the start of the English bridge course and the other, towards the end. A discussion of the use of these instruments is given below.
Interviewing was selected as the main method of data collection because it offers several strengths. First, the purpose of interviewing is to gather descriptive data from the participants so that the researcher can develop insights regarding how they interpret and make meaning of the world (Cantrell, 1993: 96). This is in line with the interpretive paradigm that is adopted for this study. Second, interviews also allow the researcher to move back and forth in time to construct the past, the present and predict the future. The researcher can also check observational information, reflections and emerging theories with members of the setting, gather information systematically and gain new insights and perceptions (Cantrell, 1993: 97). Despite its strengths, it is acknowledged that the ability to obtain responses relies predominantly on the participants' willingness to cooperate, their ability to recall events and to give frank honest responses. Furthermore, the responses obtained are, to a large extent, dependent on the interviewing skills of the researcher (Patton, 1990 cited in Cantrell, 1993: 97).

Semi-structured interviews rather than structured interviews are considered to be most appropriate in this study as they offer the flexibility of allowing students to bring up issues that the researcher had not thought of initially. Valuable information, insights and perspectives could be obtained from students who initiated the topic for discussion during the interview sessions.

Another research instrument which was used in this study is the questionnaire survey. There are several advantages it offers. For one, it saves time and
expense since a questionnaire survey can provide a snap shot of the participants' views. Secondly, surveys are also flexible in that many questions can be asked on a given topic, which gives the researcher considerable flexibility in the final analysis of the data (Babbie, 1989: 254). A survey is also relatively easy to administer and its data are uniformly organized, making it accessible for statistical analysis. Despite its numerous advantages, the questionnaire survey is not without weaknesses. One common criticism is that questionnaires often reveal 'publicly acceptable' beliefs rather than true beliefs or actual behaviour. However, the same problem is faced regardless of the choice of instrument since participants are at liberty to respond with 'acceptable' answers, whether it is a survey or interview or to behave in an 'acceptable' manner when observed.

Journal writing was the third research instrument which was used in this study. The students had to keep a weekly journal (Appendix 5) for accountability purposes, to reflect on their learning and to make the link between the activities they were involved in at the SAC and to their other courses. This was expected to last over the entire period of the English bridge course. Getting the students to keep a reflection log offered the opportunity to delve into that which was not directly observable. In addition, diary entries could reveal the students' actual actions and preferences rather than what they believed, since there could be a discrepancy between beliefs and practice. According to Nunan (1994 cited in Nunan 1996), through the use of journals, learners have the opportunity to reflect on their learning process which helps them become more sensitive to the
learning process. Moreover, it acts as a catalyst in helping learners make the connections between the English they learn and other content subjects. Despite the advantages that journal writing offers, it was anticipated that the students' interest could wane over time. This is because not only were they required to keep this reflection journal over a period of six months, but for those who were less proficient in English, they might lack the motivation to write.

5.2.2 Data Collection and Analysis process

As noted above, three main types of research instruments were used in this study. At the start of their course, the students took part in a questionnaire survey and a series of interviews. Another survey and a second series of interviews took place towards the end of the course. The students also kept a reflection journal throughout the entire course. For triangulation purposes, two instruments were used. The first was a questionnaire survey which was administered after data obtained from the first series of interviews were analyzed. The second was that the students submitted a 100-word text in English to provide their feedback on SAL at the end of their bridge course. The data collection process is summarized in Table 1 and further elaborated below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Time when data were collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Questionnaire Survey 1</td>
<td>After the students completed their SAC orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 First set of interviews</td>
<td>Between weeks 4 and 6 at the start of the English bridge course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Questionnaire Survey 2 (for triangulation purpose)</td>
<td>After results of first set of interviews were collated and analysed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Reflective Journal</td>
<td>Throughout the English bridge course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Second set of interviews</td>
<td>A month before the course ends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 End of course feedback survey</td>
<td>At the end of the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 100 word text on feedback on SAL (for triangulation purpose)</td>
<td>At the end of the course</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. The data collection schedule
As Tarone (1980, 385) emphasizes, students have paid to be taught not researched. Therefore, data collection only took place outside of class time.

The first questionnaire survey was administered at the start of the semester to all forty students after they completed their orientation at the Self Access Centre. The aim of this survey is not to directly answer the research questions of this study per se, but to verify the extent these Chinese scholars display traits relating to that of the Chinese culture of learning, to obtain their perspectives regarding autonomous learning and the role of the teacher, as well as to support or refute interview data that would be obtained later.

The questionnaire (Appendix 3) is made up of three pages. The first page is a cover letter which states the objectives of the questionnaire. The second and third pages are made up of thirty statements where the students were asked to indicate whether they ‘strongly agreed’, ‘agreed’, were ‘neutral’, ‘disagreed’ or ‘strongly disagreed’ with each statement. On the last page, the students could include additional comments they had on the role of the teacher, learning English and autonomous learning. The content of this questionnaire had been trialed previously since it was extracted from a survey (Chia, 2002) that was administered to the 2002 cohort of PRC scholars. (More information on how the questionnaire was trialed is given on the next page.)
Another questionnaire (Appendix 4) was administered at the end of the course to gather student feedback and comments regarding self access learning. Similarly, this questionnaire was modified from a previous questionnaire that was administered to the previous batch of PRC scholars in 2003 (Chia and Ellis, 2003).

For both these surveys, the questionnaires were written in English. After much deliberation, a decision was taken against translating them into Mandarin despite being aware that some students might experience difficulty in understanding the statements in the questionnaires. This is because the original meaning of the statements may be lost or distorted through translation. As a result, much effort was taken to ensure that the lexis used in the questionnaires was simple. In addition, for each of these surveys, a pilot run was held with twenty students. On both occasions, the students were instructed to circle or underline words, phrases or sentences in which the meanings were vague or unclear. When all the students had completed the questionnaire, they were asked to elaborate on the reason(s) why the highlighted portions were problematic. Alternative words and paraphrases were suggested and these students were consulted as to whether the alternatives were clearer and less ambiguous. Both questionnaires were amended before they were administered to the participants on two different sittings.

Other than participating in questionnaire surveys, the students were interviewed twice, once at the start and the other at the end of the course.
The first series of semi-structured interview sessions (Appendix 6) took place during the initial period of the course. The aim of the first set of interviews is to obtain the students’ initial reactions to self access learning. It was also an avenue for them to provide feedback regarding their learning at the initial stage or to voice any further apprehensions they might have.

Preparation for the interview included a set of predefined questions and some prompts that might enable the researcher to begin to address the research questions. Again, not wanting to distort or lose the original meaning of the interview questions through translation, it was felt that the questions were best left in English. Should the students fail to understand the essence of the questions during the interview, some key phrases of the questions could be translated into Mandarin as a last resort. Being mindful of the students’ English proficiency level, the best possible way to communicate these questions to them in a simple, clear and unambiguous manner was therefore thought of beforehand. Although questions had been prepared for the interview, it was felt that the format of a semi-structured interview was most suitable. This is because it opened up the possibility of venturing into areas that the researcher had not thought of initially. Valuable information, insights and perspectives could be obtained from students who take the initiative to bring up some topic for discussion during the interview.
As mentioned earlier, a total of forty students from two classes participated in the study. Each class of students was divided into groups of four based on the alphabetical order of their surname, making a total of ten groups. One reason for deciding to conduct group interviews is that it was felt that PRC students might be inhibited or shy to speak out if they were interviewed individually. Another reason is that according to Glesne and Peshkin (1992), interviewing more than one person at a time can be very useful. This is because some people need company in order to voice their opinions. Furthermore, certain topics are better discussed in a small group of people who know each other. Despite this, one shortcoming is that the responses offered by some students may influence the views and responses of other students.

The interviews took two weeks to complete since the students were only interviewed after class. Each session lasted between thirty minutes and an hour, with the average lasting forty minutes.

One distinctive characteristic of qualitative research is the unpredictable nature of the kind of data that will be collected. Therefore, it is difficult to specify exactly the way in which the analysis of data would take place. However, what is definite in a qualitative study is that, analysis should be carried out simultaneously or immediately after the data is collected even though the researcher does not know what will be discovered, what to concentrate on, or what the final analysis will be like (Merriam, 1998: 162). This is because “without ongoing analysis, the data
can be unfocussed, repetitious and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed. Data that have been analyzed while being collected are both parsimonious and illuminating” (Merriam, 1998: 162). Taking the above into consideration, transcription of data and analysis took place as soon as possible after each interview session. This facilitated recall should any unusual events have occurred during the interview or when the responses proved to be inaudible or unclear when recording is played back.

Following this, the data were organized thematically according to the interview questions. After the interview data were analyzed, the next step was to triangulate the findings in order to ensure internal validity. Triangulation of data took the form of administering another questionnaire survey (Appendix 7) which was made up of the main findings of the interview data. The function of this is to confirm if the views aired during the interviews were a shared belief or were limited to only a few students. After the questionnaire was drawn up, a colleague who is also a SAL facilitator was consulted. Minor amendments were made to the questionnaire before it was administered to the students.

Towards the end of the course when the students had experienced self access learning for some five months, they were interviewed for a second time. The preparation process was similar to the first series of interviews. A set of questions (provided in Appendix 8) was prepared beforehand after taking into account the
responses given in the first interview and the aim of this end of course interview was to find out

1. the students' reaction to self access learning after having gone through some five months of autonomous learning and

2. if there were differences in their views towards self access learning at the start and the end of the course with regard to the role of the teacher in helping students learn, as well as the benefits of self access learning.

Similarly, the best possible way to communicate the questions to the students in a clear and unambiguous way was carefully considered beforehand. The format of a semi-structured interview was again adopted for the reasons stated earlier.

The second set of interviews took place between weeks nine and ten of term two. Again it took about two weeks for all ten groups to be interviewed. The interviews were, however, slightly shorter compared to the first round, with each session lasting between thirty minutes and forty-five minutes. This was possibly due to the students' perception that the questions were similar to the first interview or that they had discussed most issues in the first interview and thus had little more to offer. The transcription and data analysis process were similar to that of the first series of interviews. Similarly, triangulation took the form of administering an end of course survey (Appendix 4) and getting students to write a text on their perceptions of SAL.
Bogdan and Biklen (1992) cited in Merriam (1998) offer some guidelines in analyzing data which were to a large extent adhered to. The first is to narrow the scope of study and to make decisions concerning the type of study to be conducted so as to prevent ending up with data that are overly diffused and unsuitable. Next is to pursue specific leads in subsequent data collection sessions based on what was found previously and to write comments in order to stimulate thinking regarding what was obtained and to document any insights gained from previous findings. Therefore, the findings obtained from the first series of interview were used to provide input in terms of coming up with questions for the second series of interviews.

Having described the research design and the data collection process, the next section provides information on the participants and the context in which the study took place.

5.3 Participants
A total of 160 PRC students made up the 2003/04 year cohort and they were divided into eight tutorial groups. All of them had completed Senior Middle 3 School in China and had been admitted to a university. Some even completed a term of study before they arrived in Singapore. These students began studying English in junior middle school and had an average exposure of five hours per week of English lessons over six years.
Forty students from two tutorial groups participated in this study. I was their facilitator for Self Access Learning (SAL). In addition, I taught one group ‘Academic Reading Comprehension’ and the other, ‘Introduction to Computer Skills’. Self access sessions for students from the other tutorial groups were facilitated by five other colleagues. Being NIE students, these students operated in a similar environment which limited the number of variables that are extraneous to the research study, thereby enhancing and strengthening the validity of the findings.

5.4 The Context Of Study – Self Access Centre, NIE

The study took place at the Self Access Centre at NIE. Since the inception of the English bridge course programme in 1993, SAL has been made available to PRC students. The rationale for implementing self access learning at NIE is to promote learner autonomy, for students to assume responsibility so that they will not rely solely on the teacher for their learning. The students decide on the kinds of activities they want to work on, set goals and assess their own progress in conjunction with classroom learning. By engaging in SAL, different student needs in terms of ability, personality and learning styles are catered for.

At the centre, a personal computer is made available to every student so that they can make use of Internet resources as well as other software programmes. Other than this, tape recorders, listening tapes, music CDs, VCDs and CD-Roms
are available. The students are also allowed to bring in their own materials to the centre.

The above section provides information on the participants and context of study. In the next section, arguments for involving students whom I facilitate for SAL in this study are presented.

5.5 Justifications for an ‘Insider’ perspective

A study which is funded by a company or an education institution is potentially more complicated. This is because sponsors may have their hidden agendas and may attempt to dictate the way the research is conducted (Alreck and Settle, 2001).

As this research study that I conducted did not involve any sponsor, my role as a researcher was relatively simpler since no other party was involved. I could therefore concentrate my efforts on data collection, and to make decisions and take appropriate actions where necessary. However, my role as a researcher is also made more complicated as the participants were students whom I facilitated for SAL. Despite this, there were compelling reasons to adopt an ‘insider’ perspective.

First, starting from the academic year December 2003, I was appointed coordinator for SAL. Since then, I decided to make several changes to the way
the module is run. However, instead of implementing the changes straight away to the entire cohort, the coordinator of the English bridge course believed that changes should first be tried out in my classes. Only after feedback had been obtained should the module be fine-tuned and implemented in the following year.

Second, I believe I was more in control if the changes were trialed with the students I taught. This is because I was at liberty to make decisions or implement changes since I was working with my own students. Moreover, I felt more comfortable executing changes on my own rather than dictating colleagues or having to consult them before any changes could be made, if the data collection were to take place in their classes. Furthermore, disagreements could arise as well especially if we differed in the way SAL sessions should be run. In short, by involving my students in the study, I could conduct self access sessions in a manner which I consider to be most appropriate.

Third, as the data collection period spanned some six months, my colleagues might not be totally at ease with me intruding into their classes periodically for the entire period. Furthermore, working with my own students put me in a better position to advise them on their progress. My students would also be more comfortable speaking with me regarding their learning as I was their facilitator who was appointed to help them. This might not have been the case had I worked with my colleagues' students as it was highly probable that I would be regarded as an outsider.
Fourth, in terms of administration, it would definitely be easier to make arrangements to administer questionnaires and conduct interviews with my own students.

Fifth, Middlewood et al (1999: 89) are of the opinion that many valuable insights can be gained from an insider perspective. In their view, research studies without student input will probably end up as remotely theoretical “unless the students concerned are asked for their views or perceptions. Students who kept records of use of private study or homework can and did provide valuable primary data for teacher researchers.” Based on their study involving their students, Middlewood et al. (1999: 90) revealed that their students were extremely perceptive and had a lot to share when asked for their views. Involving one’s students in a study can lead to a development of an effective learning relationship between the teacher and the students.

Despite the potential advantages of adopting an ‘insider’ perspective, I was mindful of the following issues. First, there may be occasions where there isn’t a clear distinction between that of a researcher and teacher. Hence, the students may be unaware of those times that the teacher has stepped outside his role as ‘educator’.

This delicate interpretation of roles remains a key aspect of the balancing act between observation that precludes ‘interference’ in the action being observed, and the maintenance of relations that requires both ethically informed consent and the need to maintain distance from informants.

Pole and Morrison, 2003: 25
As noted in the quote above, it may be challenging to keep a distance from the participants who are at the same time one's students. However, this is necessary in order to ensure that ethical principles are adhered to. In addition, Pole and Morrison (2003: 25) consider it crucial to make the very familiar or 'normal' setting unfamiliar so that a more 'objective' viewpoint could be obtained.

Since this research study involved students whom I was teaching then, I was aware of the disparity in terms of power relations between us in that they might feel obliged to participate in the study for fear of negative consequences such as being discriminated against or obtaining a lower grade. As such, time was spent conveying to them the objectives of the research study, their commitment if they were to take part in the study and the possible benefits that the findings could offer to both researchers and participants. The students were assured repeatedly that regardless whether they participated in the study or not, they would not be in any way discriminated and that they would undergo the same study programme in self access learning. Efforts were made to ensure that the self access activities that my students participated were similar to the rest of the cohort. The tasks that my students had to complete for data collection purpose, such as keeping a reflection journal also constituted part of their learning which they were required to fulfill.
Although there are benefits that could be reaped from adopting an 'insider' perspective, involving one's students in a study may possibly complicate matters, including issues related to ethics in research which are discussed next.

5.6 Ethical Considerations

According to the TESOL Research Committee reported by Tarone (1980: 384), ethical considerations are crucial in studies that focus on 'captive population' where a power differential is felt between the participants and the researcher. 'Captive population' includes minority groups, students or children.

In the previous section, justifications for taking an 'insider' perspective as well as the complexities involving a 'captive population' are provided. I am aware of the ethical obligations that researchers owe to their participants, which are discussed below.

The term 'ethics' can be defined as:

> a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others. Being ethical limits the choices we can make in the pursuit of truth. Ethics say that while truth is good, respect for human dignity is better, even if, in the extreme case, the respect of human nature leaves one ignorant of human nature.


As reported by Tarone (1980), the Guidelines for Ethical Research in ESL drawn up by the TESOL Research Committee specify six areas with regard to ethical
concerns. They are: informed consent; confidentiality and anonymity; privacy; deception; consequences or risks involved; and applications of research.

Informed consent is defined by Diener and Crandall (1978 cited in Cohen and Manion 1994: 350) as "the procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decisions." In Cohen and Manion's perspective (1994: 350), this definition involves four elements: competence, voluntarism, full information and comprehension. The following paragraphs outline the steps that I took in order to obtain informed consent from my respondents.

Permission from the Head of Department, English Language and Literature Academic Group and the coordinator of the PRC programme at NIE was obtained before the study proceeded. The general purpose of the study, the expected time needed to complete the study and the various instruments used in collecting data were made clear to them. The benefits of this study were also highlighted. Similarly, this information was also disseminated to my students when they were approached to participate in the study. Before they gave their consent, the students were given the opportunity to raise any queries they had. They were assured repeatedly that they would not be in any way discriminated should they decide to abstain. In addition, their views would be kept confidential and their identity anonymous. A copy of the consent form (Appendix 1) was given to the students to read. In it, the purpose of the study, the period of commitment
and their right to withdraw from the study before the data were transcribed or analyzed were stated. In addition, it was highlighted to them that agreeing to participate in the study would also allow the researcher access to their pre-test and post course test results. Furthermore, they would need to participate in questionnaire surveys, interviews as well as keep a weekly reflection journal of their self access learning.

As my study involved students aged eighteen and above, they were considered to be mature individuals who are capable of making informed decisions when given the relevant information. This information was read and explained to them and the students were given the opportunity to clear any doubts they had. By writing their name and signing on the consent form, the students were deemed to have understood what they had read, and to have agreed to participate in the study voluntarily.

Other than obtaining informed consent, it is also the researcher's responsibility to protect the respondent's right to privacy. In other words, the researcher is obliged to keep the research data confidential and maintain the anonymity of participants (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1992). The essence of confidentiality implies that even though researchers are able to identify participants from the information given, they will not make the connection known publicly. As for anonymity, it means that information provided by participants should in no way reveal their identity (Cohen and Manion, 1994: 367).
In order to observe both confidentiality and anonymity in the study, the collected data are kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office. Letters and numbers rather than names were used to identify the students.

Respecting the subjects' privacy also means that they should not be made to disclose any more about themselves and their lives than they wish to. Tarone (1980: 386) highlights the point that in the case where the subjects' viewpoint differs from the researcher's as to what constitutes privacy, it is the subjects' viewpoint that should prevail. In my study, care was taken to only probe into issues that were relevant to my student's learning and not into their private lives. However, it was necessary to ask the students the kinds of self learning activities they engaged in outside of class, particularly when they were in the library or hostel.

It is also the researcher's role to monitor the subjects' well being as a consequence of participating in the study. Any risks to subjects such as anxiety must be minimized. As such, it was stated in the consent form that students have the option to withdraw from the study should they feel uneasy or for any other reason, despite having consented to participate in the study. Furthermore, contact details of the researcher were made available to the students and they were free to speak with the researcher regarding any issue concerning the study.
For ethical reasons, deception is undesirable and should be avoided. In this study, it is believed that there is no need to deceive the participants in any manner. Efforts were made to ensure that as much information was made available to students without disclosing the main purpose of the study as this may affect their responses.

The last guideline as set down by the TESOL Research Committee is related to the researcher. It is advised that there should not be pressure to suggest any immediate application at the end of a study. Instead, it is "better to simply recommend further research possibilities than to give premature conclusions for applications which may later prove to be unfounded and perhaps damaging to students" (Tarone, 1980: 386). This point was borne in mind when drawing conclusions as well as making recommendations. However, once the study is completed, the participants would be presented with a document which provides a summary of the findings.

A sizable proportion of this chapter has been devoted to the discussion and observation of ethical principals. The guidelines drawn up by the TESOL Research Committee Report are in general similar to those laid out by the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice of NIE (Appendix 2). It is the duty of researchers to at all times keep in mind the welfare of participants and never lose sight of the obligations they owe to those who are helping them in their study (Cohen and Manion, 1994: 361).
Having discussed the ethic issues involved in this study, the next section provides a summary of the entire chapter.

5.7 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the rationale for adopting an interpretative case study approach was first given. To briefly reiterate, a case study approach was adopted because this study focuses on a specific phenomenon, that is, PRC students and the Chinese culture of learning. Also, the investigation centres on two groups of scholars who came to Singapore to attend the English bridge course. Since the students share a number of common characteristics, they are regarded to be a single phenomenon. The interaction of significant factors characteristic of a phenomenon is better uncovered using a case study approach where meaning is obtained through interpretation within a context. This complements the interpretive research design where the investigation is basically concerned with meaning and seeks to understand social members’ definition of a situation.

In any empirical study, validity and reliability are major concerns. Triangulation of data took the form of getting the participants to comment on the credibility of the findings. With regard to external validity, it is not emphasized in this study. This is because the purpose of a case study is to obtain an in depth understanding of a case in terms of its idiosyncrasy and complexity, rather than be concerned with the extent to which the findings can be generalized.
In order to ensure reliability, the assumptions and theories behind the study, the context from which the data were collected and a description of the participants were provided. In addition, both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were used to enhance reliability.

The research design, data collection process as well as data analysis were also discussed. Interviewing was used as the main mode of data collection since it provided opportunities in developing insights regarding how the participants interpret and make meaning of the world, which compliments the interpretive paradigm adopted in this study. Besides interviews, questionnaires and reflective journals were also employed to obtain a snapshot of the students’ views, for triangulation purposes and to support or refute the interview data collected.

As the participants in this research study were the investigator’s students, justifications for adopting an insider’s perspective were provided. Issues related to ethics in research were also discussed.

Having explained the research design and the underlying principles in which the methodology of this research study is based upon, an analysis and discussion of the findings are provided in the following two chapters.
CHAPTER SIX
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS OF PRC STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF SELF ACCESS LEARNING AT THE START OF ENGLISH BRIDGE COURSE

As stated in Chapter 5, the aim of this study is twofold. The first is to find out if the Chinese culture of learning is a barrier to fostering learner autonomy. The second seeks to account for the different meanings PRC students place on their learning experience and to understand and explain why students have different viewpoints and experiences even though they are put in a similar learning context at the Self Access Centre. The students' responses were obtained twice, once at the start and the other at the end of the course. The former is presented in this chapter while the latter is presented in the next chapter.

More specifically, this chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section discusses the results of the first questionnaire survey which was used to find out the participants' beliefs regarding the Chinese culture of learning. The second section presents the data of the first series of interviews and discusses the findings. The aim of this first series of interviews is to find out students' initial perceptions of self access learning. Using the findings obtained from this first set of interviews, a questionnaire was produced and subsequently administered to
the participants so as to triangulate the findings of the first set of interview data. This discussion is provided in the final section of this chapter.

6.1 Questionnaire Survey

In order to find out PRC students' beliefs regarding the Chinese culture of learning, a questionnaire survey (Appendix 3) was administered at the beginning of the semester. In particular, I was interested in the students' perception of the role of the teacher and their role as students. The findings obtained could also establish if PRC scholars who were involved in the study show traits relating to that of the Chinese culture of learning as described by Jin and Cortazzi (1998) in Chapter 3. If students indeed expect their teachers to be the source of knowledge, this belief could hinder the development of learner autonomy.

The survey was administered after the students completed their orientation at the Self Access Centre but before they began engaging in self access learning. It was conducted at this stage in order to capture their initial perspective on the role of teacher and their role as students.

The findings of this questionnaire survey are presented below.
Table 1. Teacher as an authority figure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1. In class, I see the teacher as someone in charge.</th>
<th>2. In class, I usually obey my teacher's instructions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>1 (2.5%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>7 (17.5%)</td>
<td>3 (7.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>8 (20%)</td>
<td>3 (7.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>19 (47.5%)</td>
<td>26 (65%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>5 (12.5%)</td>
<td>8 (20%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows that most students regard the teacher as an authoritative figure and are also willing to obey their teacher's instructions in the classroom. However, in comparison, a considerably higher number (85% compared to 60%) of the students claimed that they will comply with their teacher’s instruction than regard her as someone in charge.

Table 2a. Role of the Teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>3. I believe that the teacher is responsible for imparting knowledge to me rather than having to discover it myself.</th>
<th>5. I expect my English teacher (rather than myself) to be responsible for assessing how much I learnt.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>4 (10%)</td>
<td>8 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>24 (60%)</td>
<td>16 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>12 (30%)</td>
<td>8 (20%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard to the teacher's role which is depicted in Table 2a, 90% of the students expect their teacher to impart knowledge to them, rather than see it as their responsibility to discover knowledge on their own. The results support those which were obtained by Liu (1998) and Forestier (1998) where Asian students expect their teacher to be the source of knowledge.
60% of the students also believe that it is the teacher's responsibility to assess their progress. Only a handful (20%) of PRC students see it as their responsibility to be involved in self assessment. This finding is similar to that of Littlewood's (2000) study where it was found that Asian students have a slightly stronger preference for the teacher to play a greater role in evaluating their learning.

Table 2b. Role of SAL Teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>9. I believe that my SAL teacher is responsible for imparting knowledge to me.</th>
<th>10. I believe that my SAL teacher should only be guiding me in my language learning.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>3 (7.5%)</td>
<td>3 (7.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>3 (7.5%)</td>
<td>5 (12.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>9 (22.5%)</td>
<td>8 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>22 (55%)</td>
<td>19 (47.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>3 (7.5%)</td>
<td>5 (12.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As noted in Table 2a, 90% of the students expect their English teacher to impart knowledge to them. Table 2b above shows that this is in contrast with the considerably lower number of students (62.5%) who expect their SAL teacher to do likewise. The data also correspond with the next set of figures which shows that 60% of the students expect their SAL teacher to be only guiding them in their learning.

On one hand, the data in Table 2b seem to suggest that more students recognise that they have to take on a relatively more active role in order to improve their English language proficiency during self access learning sessions. Yet over half the respondents (60%) still expect their SAL teacher to impart knowledge. Only a
few students (20%) are truly convinced that it is not the SAL teacher's responsibility to impart knowledge to students.

These figures suggest a number of possibilities. First, other than guiding them in their learning at SAC, the students also expect their SAL teacher to instruct them. Second, the students may still not have an accurate and complete view of what self access learning entails and that of the role of a SAL teacher, since this survey was administered before students had engaged in self access learning. Lastly, it is possible that the students still held on to the traditional view that a teacher's role is to impart knowledge, regardless of the content area or subject that the teacher is in charged of.

Table 3. Feedback from teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>4. I prefer to get feedback on my work from my English teacher than from my group members.</th>
<th>8. I believe that my teacher's feedback on my language learning is most helpful.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>1 (2.5%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>3 (7.5%)</td>
<td>4 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>14 (35%)</td>
<td>8 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>13 (32.5%)</td>
<td>23 (57.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>9 (22.5%)</td>
<td>5 (12.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows that slightly more than half of the students (55%) prefer to obtain feedback from their teacher than from their group members. Similarly, almost three-quarters (70%) of them believe that feedback obtained from the teacher regarding their language learning is most helpful. The above findings could be explained by the following reasons. First, these students may regard the teacher
to be the authoritative source of learning. Moreover, the students may be under
the impression that the feedback obtained from their classmates may not be
accurate or useful to them and that they risked learning errors or incorrect
information from their peers (Jin and Cortazzi, 1998).

The findings here support Ho and Crookall's (1995) view which is that difficulty in
implementing collaborative learning in a Chinese setting is due to the students' preference in getting feedback from their teacher. However, the findings differ
slightly from the results obtained from Roskams's investigation. In his study on
Chinese EFL students' attitudes towards peer feedback and assessment, Roskams (1999: 92) found that although most Chinese students preferred
teacher to peer feedback, this does not imply that the students did not value peer feedback completely.

Table 4. Person Responsible for students' progress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>6. I believe that the amount of progress I make in my English depends on me.</th>
<th>7. I believe that the amount of progress I make in my English depends on my teacher.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19 (47.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>10 (25%)</td>
<td>15 (37.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>20 (50%)</td>
<td>4 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>10 (25%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data in Table 4 suggests that most students (75%) are of the view that the amount of progress they make in their English learning depends on them, that is, the amount of effort they put in. It is perhaps that these students subscribe to
Confucian's teaching where successful learning is always a result of hard work and effort (Lee, 1996: 39; Biggs, 1996: 59).

Only a minority of 10% regard their progress to be dependent on the teacher. However, it is also interesting to note that for Statement 7, more than a third (37.5%) of the students turned in a neutral response. Perhaps for this group of students, they are of the view that the amount of progress they make in their English language learning is dependent on both the teacher and on them, or they are unsure of their response regarding this statement.

According to White, (1999: 452) the factors underpinning success in learning can be linked to the construct of locus of control, which originated from social learning theory.

Locus of control is the orientation of an individual towards what determines their success or failure: a belief in one's ability to shape events is referred to as internal locus of control, while a belief that outside forces control performance is referred to as external locus of control.

In White's (1999: 452) study which involved university students studying a foreign language, 'motivation' was ranked as the most important internal factor in order to succeed in self-directed learning. This suggests that there is a high possibility for the majority of PRC students involved in this study, to experience success in self access learning. This is because three-quarters of the students see themselves in direct control for the progress they make in self access learning since they support the view that the amount of progress they make in their
English learning is dependent on their effort. (This figure is shown in Table 4 above).

**Table 5. Students' Own Responsibility for learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>11. I believe that I have to be responsible for my own learning during SAL sessions.</th>
<th>12. I am willing to take responsibility for my own learning during SAL sessions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>5 (12.5%)</td>
<td>5 (12.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>22 (55%)</td>
<td>25 (62.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>13 (32.5%)</td>
<td>10 (25%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 shows that an overwhelming majority of students (87.5%) consider it their responsibility to take charge of their learning during self access. Similarly, the same number (87.5%) of students is willing to be responsible for their learning during SAL sessions.

At first, the results obtained in Table 5 may seem incompatible with those presented in Table 2b. On one hand, most students see it as their responsibility and are willing to take responsibility for their learning during self access sessions. Nonetheless, more than half expect their SAL teachers to impart knowledge to them. As such, these two sets of results seem to contradict each other. However, this is not necessarily the case. One possible explanation is that while the students are willing to take responsibility to engage in self learning during SAL, when faced with difficulties or problems during SAL, they still expect their
teachers to guide, share knowledge and point them in the right direction. As such, the results are not contrary.

Table 6. Students' Responsibility for and Ability to evaluate learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>13. I believe that I have to take responsibility in assessing my progress for self access learning.</th>
<th>14. I am willing to take responsibility in assessing my progress for self access learning.</th>
<th>15. I am confident that I have the ability to assess my progress.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (2.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>1 (2.5%)</td>
<td>1 (2.5%)</td>
<td>4 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>15 (37.5%)</td>
<td>11 (27.5%)</td>
<td>11 (27.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>20 (50%)</td>
<td>22 (55%)</td>
<td>17 (42.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>4 (10%)</td>
<td>6 (15%)</td>
<td>6 (15%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While 70% are willing to take the responsibility of assessing their progress for SAL, a smaller number, 60% believe it is their responsibility to do so. This can be attributed to the fact that a relatively small number of students (57.5%) are confident that they have the ability to assess their own learning.

Table 7. Benefits of SAL in making students more autonomous

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>16. I believe that working independently during SAL sessions helps me decide on how I can improve my English when I study on my own.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>1 (2.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>10 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>22 (55%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>7 (17.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Slightly more than 70% of students believe that participating in self access learning enables them to develop autonomy in English Language learning. The
ability to improve their English through self study is important as these students have only six months of English lessons. The end of this course by no means signals that they have attained the proficiency necessary for their university study and for their stay in Singapore. Developing autonomy in language learning ensures that the students can continue to improve their English without the presence of a teacher.

6.1.1 Summary of Survey Findings

A summary of the findings of the questionnaire survey which was administered to find out the participants' beliefs regarding the role of the teacher and their role as students is presented below.

First, many students regard the teacher as an authoritative figure and they are also willing to follow their teacher's instructions in the classroom. Second, 90% of the students expect their teacher to impart knowledge to them while 60% also consider it the teacher's responsibility to assess students' progress. Third, more than half the respondents also expect their SAL teacher to impart knowledge. Lastly, the students prefer to obtain feedback from their teacher over their peers.

With regard to their role as students, 75% are of the view that the amount of progress they make in their English learning is dependent on the amount of effort they put in. In addition, an overwhelming majority are willing to take responsibility
for their self learning which requires a high level of motivation in order for them to succeed.

The students also regard self access learning as valuable as this can help them foster autonomy so that they can engage in self learning to continue improving their English after their English bridge course has ended.

Having presented the findings of the survey, the next section presents and discusses the first set of interview data.

6.2 Results and Discussion of First Interview

The first series of interviews conducted with the students took place sometime between weeks four and six of their English bridge course. It was decided that the format of a semi-structured interview was most appropriate as it offered the flexibility of allowing students to bring up issues that the researcher had not thought of initially. Valuable information, insights and perspectives could be obtained from students who initiated the topic for discussion during the interview. The list of questions for the first semi-structured interview is found in Appendix 6. A sample transcript is also included in Appendix 9. Due to word constraints, it is not possible to provide transcripts for all the interviews in this study.

The aim of the first set of interviews is to obtain the students' initial reactions towards self access learning. It is also an avenue for them to provide feedback
on their learning or to voice any further apprehensions they may have at this initial stage since none of them have engaged in autonomous language learning in a self access centre.

6.2.1 Experience using a Self Access Centre in China

It would be interesting to find out if the students had any pre-conceived views regarding self access learning if they had engaged in some learning activities at a self access centre in China. However, none of them had. According to the students, the only similar experience they had in China was that they had engaged in self study that took place in the afternoon in some classrooms. Their usual activities included completion of homework, a review of what they had learnt and engaging in silent reading. They often worked under the supervision of a teacher who would tell them what to do. At other times, they would be left alone. Resources such as personal computers, CDs, magazines, story or reference books were not available. The students did not set goals nor plan ahead for their self study sessions. The activities they engaged in were usually decided on the spot.

Goal setting which is missing from the students' self study sessions in China is deemed to be an important element in learning.

However vague a learner's initial interpretation [of the demands of the target repertoire and its underlying competence] may be, he is not going to learn anything unless he has an idea of what he is trying to achieve.

Breen and Candlin (1980: 95)
As noted in the above quotation, it is crucial for students to set goals so that they know what they are trying to accomplish during each self access session. As such, at the beginning of term before students engage in self access learning, they are to draw up a general learning plan. This is accomplished by having students think of their areas of weakness and focus on those areas which they want to improve. In addition, each week before they begin their self access learning session, the students have to complete their learning journal (Appendix 5) where they specifically spell out their goals. This also compels the students to be accountable for the time they spend at SAC.

Having a purpose in mind not only helps the students become aware of what they are trying to achieve, it also helps them stay focussed.

6.2.2 Students' initial views towards SAL

When asked what their initial views towards SAL were, the ability to control their own time and the freedom to decide on the kind of activities they wished to engage in during self access learning, such as the ones below, were frequently mentioned by students.

Extract 1

G5/S12: Very pleased because you can control your own time to study what you want.

Extract 2

G5/S3: Very free, SAL [is] free. I can do anything I want. I can read a magazine, read newspaper and I can also watch a movie, which is my favourite. I can do interesting activities.
However, one common problem students faced was the lack of time. Most found an hour per week for self access learning inadequate. As a result, some felt lost or believed that they did not do much work since they had difficulty managing their time.

Extract 3

G6/S8: I like it but I think the time is too short for us to watch a movie so I can only listen to some songs. If I watch a movie I think I can’t watch it completely.

Extract 4

G6/S11: I felt that I don’t know what to do. Because one hour is not enough to see a film or something, I just read something on the web or do some exercises, just read a book or something.

Extract 5

G5/S7: If the time is longer, it will be better. The time is too short and we can’t finish [what] we want to do and we can’t arrange our time very appropriately. Maybe when the time is up, we don’t have a general idea about what I did in this class and [it seems I] didn’t accomplish in the class.

The solution to this as suggested by some students is to schedule two hour fortnightly SAL sessions.

The availability of computers and Internet as well as the great variety of resources such as VCDs and CDs are other commonly cited reasons as to why students enjoy SAL.
6.2.3 Benefits of SAL

One purpose of setting up a self access centre is to enable students of differing abilities to work on their problem areas. A self access centre is set up as a result of recognizing the differences and fulfilling the needs of learners as individuals (Jones, 1995: 228). This is appreciated by a student who gave the following response when asked for the benefits of SAL.

Extract 6

G5/S3: Different people have different weak points [and] can improve their weak points by themselves according to their ability.

Another student cited the importance of being resourceful and regarded the SAL activities that he participated in as helping to train him in this area.

Extract 7

G6/S19: I think the purpose of study is not just to collect [get] knowledge. The most important is to let students know how to get knowledge. I think the purpose of SAL is to let us get [knowledge], how to study by ourselves.

Helping students become autonomous is strongly supported by Cotterall (1995) who regards this as an essential and indisputable goal of all learning. This is because no students will have their teachers throughout their life in order to become proficient in their language. Furthermore, learners become more efficient in their learning if they do not solely rely on their teacher to provide them with resources or solve their problems.

Besides the benefits mentioned above, the students cited that by watching videos or listening to songs, they become better in understanding conversations.
This could perhaps be a result of them becoming more familiar with the way Westerners speak. Similar findings were obtained in a questionnaire administered to the previous cohort of students. Listening skill was ranked top when the students were asked which skill area they had improved most when they worked in SAC (Chia and Ellis, 2003).

Besides this, watching videos also help boost the students’ motivation in mastering English.

**Extract 8**

G5/S11 ... for example after watching the movie the first time, you can’t understand it very well. After you watch it the second time, you can know [understand] more than the first so I know I have improved so I will like to learn English.

**Extract 9**

G6/S3: When watching a movie though I can’t understand it completely. Because just, I can’t understand it completely so I try my best to understand the movie. So I think it’s very useful and effective in improving my English.

As noted earlier in this chapter, motivation is considered to be the most important factor in order to be successful in self-learning (White, 1999: 452). As seen by the above responses, students can be spurred on to work harder in their learning of English when they are not able to fully comprehend a movie.

Easy access to suitable learning materials and resources is also cited as a strength of SAC.
G5/S16: SAC class provide us more variety of medium and materials because for ourselves we don't have so many books, so many CDs, so many movies. So someone who now haven't own a computer they can do nothing. So it provides a chance, more materials to learn.

It is extremely important to put learners in direct contact with the target language through a sufficiently wide range of authentic materials and resources. This enables them to choose those which match their interests and proficiency (Holec, 1981; Littlewood, 1996 cited in Murray, 1999).

Despite the positive feedback, some students are of the view that whether they can improve their language proficiency is dependent on the amount of effort they put in and whether they take self access learning seriously, rather than the available resources.

G5/S3: We must do SAL class properly [seriously], only through [this] we can improve ourselves. If we just go to SAL class and only watch movie and just watch it, don't do anything (else) for example, to make some notes and some summary, I think it's no use.... I think if you make a proper plan ... and if we do properly, you can improve English.

Yet, there are others who are skeptical about the benefits of self access learning to help them improve their language skills, despite the availability of varied resources.

G6/S20: ... When I watching movie I miss my aim to learn English. When I go to SAL, I only have some aim about entertainment and with little purpose to learn English.
Extract 13

G6/S6: I think to improve English is not by just going to SAL class. The SAL class plays a small part to improve our English because during SAL class ... we watch to movie and listen to the CD. But if we only watch movie and listen to CD, we don't improve our English much.

6.2.4 Views on ability to learn autonomously

Students mentioned that the autonomy accorded to them is a perk they enjoy at SAC, since they can engage in some activity which they find interesting. These activities include: reading magazines/newspaper, watching movies and surfing the Internet.

In addition, being given the opportunity to develop autonomy in learning is a skill which students find very useful, as exemplified by the following responses:

Extract 14

G6/S3: In China ... teachers told us what to do and what not to do. Here I can teach myself.

Extract 15

G6/S1: I think I feel more independent (now) because in China [we have] so few choices [chances] to learn by ourselves. Teacher[s] teach us all things. In SAL class sometimes I feel that it's the first time I can learn by myself.

The importance of providing learners with opportunities to learn on their own cannot be overemphasized. Holec (1980: 31) supports the idea of training learners how to learn since learners themselves play an important role in the learning process.
To teach the learner to learn, that is to enable him to carry out the various steps which make up the learning process, is considered as the best way of insuring that learning takes place. This 'autonomy' of the learner enables appropriate solutions to be found to the problems of difference in the needs, conditions and processes ... once he has acquired a satisfactory competence in learning, the learner can construct his own programme by intervening directly at the various stages, thus narrowing considerably or even closing completely the gap between what the learner wants to learn and what he does in fact learn.

Some students also believe that the ability to learn autonomously is a skill which is essential for them when they are studying for their degree.

Extract 16

G5/S14: In NTU, no one will force you to study. If you don't study you will fail or have low score. So you must study, know how to manage your time well and know how to study on your own.

Extract 17

G5/S17: Most of time in university, you have to study on your own because class time is limited. You have to do your homework and study independently.... So this skill is very essential for people.

In addition, learning is regarded as a life long process and that learners have to depend on themselves and not others for their own development.

Extract 18

G6/S16: Study [Learning] is a long process. Even when you are old you must study.... So I think it's very important for us to learn how to study by myself and even after university we can study by ourselves and advance.

Extract 19

G5/S20: Nobody will help you always so you need to help yourself. Whether it is in NTU or in your job, you need a study method which is suitable for you. That is very [more] helpful, than [learning from] a teacher.
Extract 20

G6/S15: I think independent study is very important. When we go enter NTU I heard in NTU all of us do not study English [have classes just to help us improve our English] just lecture. During that time we have to study English independently because our English isn’t very good even we study six months in NIE.

In a classroom setting, it is also impossible for a teacher to meet every student’s needs. As such, the ability to learn autonomously enables students to make decisions concerning their own learning and to focus on areas to work on.

Extract 21

G5/S7: The teacher can’t care for the whole class and will make a balance [cater to] just the general standard so when we learn by ourselves we could study according to ourselves [our needs] and decide on what we should learn.

There is also a limit regarding the amount of knowledge a teacher can transmit.

Extract 22

G6/S11: I think we must learn most of the things ourselves. [What] the teacher can tell us is not enough so you must learn how to learn by yourself.

Based on the above responses from the students, it is obvious that the ability to learn autonomously is highly valued by PRC students. Besides this, engaging in self access learning gave students a break from regular mundane activities.

Extract 23

G6/S5: I think studying English by watching movies and listen[ing] to some songs is interesting. If [we learn] by reading books and doing some exercise, to learn English [this way] is very dull.
Since many students have acknowledged that they value the opportunity given to them to learn English on their own and have affirmed the benefits of SAL in helping them improve their language skill, they were asked if a teacher is still needed for them to learn English and if so, the role the teacher should play in their language learning. The following is a summary of the responses obtained.

6.2.5 The Role of the Teacher

Based on frequently obtained responses, the students are of the view that a teacher should be a guide or facilitator who provides direction for their learning.

Extract 24

G5/S7: *I think the teacher can guide us but not give us every detail or homework or [tell us] what we should do. [He should] only show the way, the direction.*

Besides this, the teacher should be able to meet the needs of individual students as well as provide a good method to learn English.

Extract 25

G5/S14: *Now it seems that all twenty people is the same to the teacher because teacher does not tell us what our weakness is and how to improve it, just [treats] everyone like the same but actually different.*

G5/S15: *I think the teacher should give us some method, more practical. If we study many new words in one class, I write it down and remember and then I will forget.*

Several students also mentioned that the teacher should teach them how to be more resourceful in obtaining knowledge, rather than just transmitting knowledge.
Extract 26

G5/S5: The teacher should teach us how to get knowledge rather than just give knowledge.

Extract 27

G6/S16: The teacher should teach us how to learn but not just what. Not the knowledge, I mean the knowledge is not enough. The most important is method.

G6/S13: Yah, the teacher can't tell all the knowledge but we need teacher to tell us how to.

G6/S14: I don't think I will be able to learn by myself now at this level. So I expect during the six months, the teacher can tell me a lot of good method for self study and some good basic [foundation].

Obtaining feedback from teachers and offering them advice as to how to carry on in their study are what students expect from their teachers as well.

Extract 28

G5/12: Maybe sometimes they [teachers] can evaluate your improvement up to the present and [let you know] what your next goal should be....

G5/S9: I think the teacher should tell us our goals, for example maybe the teacher should tell me which part I should improve ... and pay more attention to.

Extract 29

G6/S18: Teacher can check on our improvement. Sometimes we don't know if we improve or not. The teacher can tell you and point out the way to study, [which is] with more plan. If you study yourself, sometimes with no plans.

Teachers should also be able to direct students to suitable resources.
Extract 30

G5/S10: I think maybe the teacher can recommend us some useful resources such as very good websites to study English, very good books [which are] suitable for us to read and so on.

A student also mentioned that he likes the teacher to participate in discussions. Furthermore, other students pointed out that the teacher should not restrict the content of their discussion.

Extract 31

G5/S11: I think maybe the teacher can also take part in our discussion. He can take part and express his opinion so we can be more interaction [interactive].

Extract 32

G5/S11: If the teacher asks us to discuss a topic, he shouldn't tell us one point and not [to] discuss others. For our speaking, he should just listen to us and correct our pronunciation, grammar, the way to speak, organisation.

G5/S12: I just want the teacher to give us the aim and give us some advice and let us carry it [the discussion] out ourselves.

A student commented that the teacher should leave their students alone at most times and tell them what to do only when necessary.

Extract 33

G6/S11: When it is necessary I think. When you [are] in trouble or you can't find the solution and you don't know what to do. I think the teacher will tell us. Most of the time, the teacher shouldn't tell the students what they should do because different students have different problems.
6.2.6 Necessity to learn from a teacher

Despite perceiving the teacher's role as that of a facilitator and not a direct provider of knowledge as well as providing guidance only when necessary, most students still acknowledged the importance of learning English from teachers. One reason is that teachers are expected to be more knowledgeable. This is similar to Liu's (1998) findings in which the teacher is expected to be a fount of knowledge.

Extract 34

G5/S20: [We need teachers] because the teacher knows more than you.... Also the teacher has learned the language for many years. They know the more suitable way to learn. Just follow his instruction, it's good for you....I think even you have developed a lot, you can consider the teacher as a friend of yours. You can discuss together, it will make development [helps to facilitate the development of English].

The presence of a teacher also encourages students to use English.

Extract 35

G5/S4: Yeah I think [it's important for a teacher to guide me] as I [am] more familiar reading [in] Chinese. If [there is] no teacher, I won't like to see English and use English.

Moreover, teachers are expected to be models of Standard English as well as managers of students' learning.

Extract 36

G5/S8: Yes. For one thing, we are Chinese speakers not English speakers. Maybe sometimes our pronunciation is not standard. If the teachers speak in the class, we can follow what they say and we can improve our pronunciation and some other things in English.
Extract 37

G5/S6: I think it’s necessary because many students can’t control their time and make a plan for their study.

G5/S5: I agree. Sometimes the mistakes in your pronunciation and writing can’t be discovered by the person himself so we need more professional people to help us to find it and make it correct.

Other responsibilities of a teacher include that of being aware of his students’ proficiency and streaming them according to their ability, as well as that of a provider of solutions to language problems.

Extract 38

G5/S3: We don’t know the language well and we don’t know how to study well, how to [make] study interesting. Teacher should test us to know which level we are in and [put us] according to our ability, to the level/class in order to improve our English. We must have the system, we must know clearly our ability and then choose the proper classes which is suitable.

Extract 39

G5/S1: When you have something wrong ... cannot solve the problem, cannot work out some questions so teacher can help us.

However, the students have differing views regarding whether the teacher should provide the solutions or merely point out their mistakes and leave it to the students to correct them.

Extract 40

G6/S2: If we learn English by ourselves we can’t learn completely....Yes we need a teacher to teach us a system. For example in the writing course, the teacher teach[es] us to write many kinds of essays. So if we learn by ourselves we can’t.... So we need a teacher to teach us.

G6/S1: It is important to have the teacher tell you whether you are right or wrong. Maybe we can get the right answer from the Internet or some other
way. But we may be puzzled with our mistakes. Teacher can explain it to us. To know why we did this mistake is more important to know than where our mistake was.

G6/S3: ... I think the teacher should teach us how to correct the mistake by ourselves. The teacher just needs to point it out. We should correct it by ourselves.

G6/S1: Most times we should do it by ourselves but in my experience sometimes I could tell by myself or sometimes [with the help of] my classmates. But when we can't understand it or work it out, the teacher will know it better. I think we sometimes spend too much time on it, so teacher can help us....Correcting mistakes by ourselves is important but sometimes we can ask the teacher to teach us.

G6/S2: What I mean is that you shouldn't depend on teacher just like me. Yes if teacher helps us will be faster but you can learn to find the answers by yourself.... I think we should practise it.

Extract 41

G6/S6: Learning English we need a teacher because we will meet problems we can't solve ourselves so we need a teacher to help, give some suggestions.

G6/S5: We should be more active [in our learning]. But if we always study by ourselves we may go the wrong way.... The teacher should check the students' work .... If he finds the student going the wrong way he should tell the student what is right.

In short, the PRC students believe that the role of a teacher should be that of a guide or facilitator who provides them with a clear direction and feedback for their learning, as well as a good method to learn English. Numerous students also mentioned the teacher should not be just providing them with knowledge but more importantly, teaching them how to be more resourceful in obtaining knowledge. Students also appreciate freedom from their teacher and are of the view that they should only be told what to do when necessary.
Despite their generally positive experience in self learning, the students still felt it was important and necessary to learn English from teachers. They are of the view that the teacher is more knowledgeable, knows what the students need to learn and is able to help them learn English in a systematic manner. When faced with problems that students cannot work out, the teacher is expected to help, not necessarily in providing the solutions but in showing the students where their mistakes lie and leave them to work out the answer.

The teacher is also perceived to be a manager of students' learning in the sense that a teacher helps students to control their time and to plan their study. A teacher is also expected to be a good model of English.

From the above, it appears that the findings seem, to a large extent, to confirm Jin and Cortazzi's (1998:102) findings. The teacher is considered to be an authoritative source of knowledge. Great respect is accorded to teachers as they are expected not only to be experts in the subject matter but also possess the best method of learning and are aware of what their students need to learn.

However, in addition to the above, what stands out in the responses is that students appreciate more freedom from their teachers. Rather than be given all the knowledge, the students value the ability in knowing how to be resourceful in obtaining knowledge. In addition, they do not like to be told or given the answers all the time. In fact, all that is necessary is for teachers to point out students'
mistakes and that they are left to work out the solutions to their problems. As such, the PRC students are not as dependent on their teachers for their learning, or mere passive recipients of knowledge, as some literature (Samuelowicz, 1987; Ginsberg, 1992; Forestier, 1998) on Chinese learners seem to suggest.

Having portrayed the role these PRC students expect their teacher to assume, the following section describes the difficulties that some students experienced with SAL.

6.2.7 Difficulties with SAL

Although many students gave positive feedback regarding their self access learning and seemed to enjoy the autonomy given to them, a small number experienced some difficulty. In particular, a student felt lost during SAL sessions.

Extract 42

G6/S1: At the beginning I didn’t know what to do. Until now, I haven’t found any advantages [in engaging in activities at SAC].

Extract 43

G6/S11: I haven’t been used to it. I don’t know what to do because one hour is not long enough to watch a movie. I just read something on the web or do some exercises, read a book or something.

Extract 44

G6/S2: Yes it’s useful but we haven’t had it in China so we can’t use it properly [engage in self learning activities in a productive manner] at the beginning. It takes time to get used to it.
As mentioned, the first few self access sessions were devoted to orientating the students to the centre and to prepare them for self access learning. It is obvious that some students needed more help in getting used to self learning, a concept which is relatively new. In addition, for some, they may also be overwhelmed by the variety of resources available to them. As such, it is pertinent that facilitators pay careful attention to them especially at the initial stage of self access learning and provide them assistance as and when necessary. These students may need more guidance during the initial weeks before they can start developing autonomy in their learning.

6.2.8 Assessment as an added motivation

When the interview questions were scripted, the issue as to whether assessment provided motivation was not originally included. Since the interview took the form of a semi-structured format, the students were given the liberty to discuss issues they wanted. The issue of assessment was brought up in the first interview session. As this is considered to be a relevant subject, it was included in all subsequent interviews.

From the following responses, it is apparent that an assessment for self access learning administered at the end of a course can provide the added incentive for some students to work harder.

Extract 45

G5/S3: I don't like exam but through examination you can gradually improve yourself.
Extract 46

G5/S4: *If there is nothing to pressure you, some students may not put in all their effort.*

Extract 47


G6/S16: *(We will) work harder [because we feel] stressed…. We don't want examinations but without them, I think we will not work hard.*

The above responses clearly indicate that for some students, examinations or assessments provide the impetus for them to work harder. Assessment is also valued as it acts as a form of feedback for the students concerning the progress of their learning.

However, for others, assessment is unnecessary as they are already intrinsically motivated to learn English.

Extract 48

G5/S5: *I think if we need a test I think daily life is a test because we are learning English, our purpose is to improve English and use it in daily life so daily life is the test.*

Extract 49

G5/S11: *We learn English in China just for exams, just to score high marks. I don't like it because I think learning English should be fun. We don't have many chances to use English when we learn it in China so I think learning English was just for exams and I don't like it. Now I have a roommate from Vietnam so I talk to him in English. At first I can't talk much to him now I can talk more easily.*
Extract 50

G6/S2: Whether or not there is exam, I will still work hard to learn English because we will stay in Singapore for many years. If I can't speak English it will be difficult.

Extract 51

G6/S8: I like [working in SAC] because it can increase our ability to communicate, not just prepare for exams.

For these students, the real litmus test lies in their ability to use English to communicate with others in their daily life. This is because not only is English the medium of instruction in Singapore, these students will have to remain here to work for six years after graduation, making their minimum period of stay in Singapore ten years.

Yet for another group of students, they do not need to be spurred on by extrinsic motivation. For them, they believe they are old enough to take responsibility for their learning which is their source of motivation.

Extract 52

G5/S19: We aren't primary school students. We can do a lot of things on our own.

Extract 53

G5/18: The pressure should come from yourself and not from the teacher. You must have more responsibility and know that you come to class not just for fun. You must learn something.
According to Knowles (1975, 14)

... there is convincing evidence that people who take the initiative in learning (pro-active learners) learn more things and learn better than do people who sit at the feet of teachers, passively waiting to be taught.... They enter into learning more purposefully and with greater motivation.

Students who need examinations to provide them the motivation will, according to Knowles (1975:14) not learn as effectively as those who are intrinsically motivated.

A student had requested that some examination be included at the end of the course for self access learning as she felt that this would motivate her to attend self access sessions.

Initially, this request was astonishing since there must be sufficient reasons for one to want to master English, other than for the sake of passing examinations. However, upon reflection, it may not be difficult to fathom why such a request was made, as examination plays an important role in the Chinese education system. Further probing reveals that in China, students can focus on particular grammar items and ‘study’ them in order to excel in English examinations. For this group of students, learning English is akin to learning other content subjects.

Extract 54

G5/S1: [The exam is] systematic. [The following sections are tested]: Listening, Vocabulary, Reading, Writing and Cloze task.

G5/S3: From the exam you can know clearly what is the subject [being tested]. If you don't pass or have low score, you can improve, can improve a bit and then the third/final exam, you can improve a lot.
A student also claimed that examination is an effective method in providing feedback to her learning which allows her to improve on her areas of weakness.

Extract 55

G5/S3: I think examination is a better method to improve yourself.

Bearing in mind that the interview took place at a fairly initial stage of the course, perhaps some students were still not used to the relatively less exam-oriented system at NIE. Although there are two formal assessments over the six month course, students are also graded for their tutorial participation and group presentations/assignments. Providing these students who come from a highly structured examination system the opportunity to learn in the SAC could therefore be highly beneficial to them if they are able to become less reliant on examination to spur them on and thereby becoming intrinsically motivated in their learning.

...the promotion of more effective learning is achieved both through learners being intrinsically motivated and through the learners operating in “autonomy supporting and informational conditions”, and that these conditions will enhance intrinsic motivation ....Informational structures are those that facilitate independence in learning, offering the learner opportunities for choice and decision making in general promoting his self-determining status.

Dickinson (1995, 169)

An end of course assessment is not recommended for self access learning since some students are already intrinsically motivated to learn English. Research shows that “offering rewards to learners who were previously intrinsically motivated can have the effect of reducing intrinsic motivation (and thereby

6.2.9 Summary of Interview Findings

To sum up, interviews with the students show that many students are receptive to engaging in autonomous learning at SAC, despite not having any similar experience in China. Several reasons are cited for their openness. First, the students enjoyed the freedom accorded to them which enabled them to engage in activities which they find interesting or alternatively, focus on their area of weakness. Easy access to suitable learning materials and the variety resources also proved alluring as these resources were specially selected according to their language needs. Second, self access learning is a welcome break from the student's mundane classroom activities. But more importantly, the students believe that the ability to learn independently is a skill that is essential for them when they are studying in the university which they believe can be developed when they are engaged in self access learning. Most students cited that they made the most improvements in their listening ability.

Although the students enjoyed their activities in SAC and were able to learn independently, this has not undermined the role of teachers. Many believe that their teachers should guide or facilitate their language learning and provide a good method for them to learn. Teachers should also not only be sharing knowledge but more importantly, teaching them how to be more resourceful in
getting knowledge. It is also crucial for teachers to provide feedback to students on their learning and point them in the right direction.

In order to provide them with the added motivation to work harder during self access learning, a handful of students mentioned that an assessment be administered at the end of a course. However, this view is not shared by the majority who are already intrinsically motivated to learn English. It is felt that assessment should not be introduced as it will have detrimental effects on those who are already intrinsically motivated. Instead, the focus should be on helping students develop into autonomous learners when they learn in SAC.

Despite the various benefits cited above, a few students were uncertain regarding the gains that can be obtained in self access learning, as they felt overwhelmed with having to plan, and to carry out their plans.

Since some students may take a longer time to get used to working on their own, during the initial period, the facilitator must provide as much guidance as possible. It may also be necessary to get these students to voice their apprehensions and to anticipate problems that may arise from not being used to the idea of autonomous learning. The teacher could at the initial period, suggest activities for the students to engage in, and gradually let them plan their learning activities as they get used to the concept of self learning.
6.3 Triangulation of Data

After the interview data were analysed, the next step was to triangulate the findings in order to ensure internal validity. This was done by using a questionnaire survey which was made up of the main findings of the interview data. The main function of this is to confirm if the views aired during the interviews were a shared belief or they were only limited to a few students. The section below discusses the findings of this questionnaire survey.

Table 1. The importance of planning

<table>
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<th>Statement</th>
<th>In order to benefit from SAL sessions, I need to plan my activities beforehand.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>1 (2.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>9 (23.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>23 (59%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>6 (15.4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to fully utilise their time in SAC in the learning of English, some students mentioned the importance of planning their activities beforehand. As shown in the Table 1 above, close to 75% of the students see the necessity to plan their learning activities in order to benefit from self access learning.

In fact during SAL orientation, these students were informed of the need to complete a learning plan at the beginning of each term and to focus on a few skill areas which they wanted to improve upon. This is because students need to be aware of what they are trying to achieve in order to work towards that goal. Similarly, at the end of each SAL session, the students were to complete their
reflection page as well as to write down the activities they planned to engage in at SAC the following week. However, based on the interview responses as well as my observations, some students either failed to plan their activities for the following week or they had forgotten to bring their plan during their SAL sessions. This resulted in them engaging in learning activities without a pre-determined goal in mind. Very often, they would just select a movie to watch or surf the Internet.

Table 2. Freedom to choose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>I like the freedom to choose what I can do during SAL sessions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>2 (5.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>17 (43.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>20 (51.3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One primary reason cited by many students as to why they enjoy self access learning is that they have the freedom to choose the kind of activities they wish to engage in to improve their English. This finding is confirmed by the overwhelming response as shown in Table 2, as some 95% of the cohort agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. As noted previously, the students were often told by their teachers what they should do during their self study sessions in China. The autonomy accorded to these students proved to be a welcome change and is highly valued by them. This could be that students liked the confidence which their teachers showed in them, in that they could be fully trusted to maximise
their time during self learning sessions as well as having the ability to take charge of their learning.

Table 3. Benefits of self learning in SAC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>The activities that I do during SAL sessions help me improve my English.</th>
<th>SAL sessions make me interested in studying English.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>6 (15.4%)</td>
<td>15 (38.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>27 (69.2%)</td>
<td>14 (35.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>5 (12.8%)</td>
<td>9 (23.1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numerous benefits have been cited by students when engaging in self learning. However, the primary goal of self access learning is to help students improve their English proficiency. As shown in the table above, more than 80% of the students believe that the activities they engaged in during SAL helped them to achieve a better level of English. In addition, almost 60% of the students claimed that their interest in learning English is raised when they attend SAL sessions.

The ability to become autonomous in learning English is extremely important as students themselves realise that they have to continue improving their language proficiency after their six-month English bridge course. Furthermore, students are expected to be less dependent on their lecturers/tutors at tertiary level. As such, the necessity to help students develop autonomy in learning cannot be understated and is discussed next.
Table 4a. Views on ability to learn autonomously

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>SAL sessions prepare me for my study at NTU/NUS.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>14 (35.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>20 (51.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>5 (12.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As noted above, almost two-thirds of the students believe that the autonomy they developed through SAL sessions prepare them for their undergraduate study. Moreover, none of the students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. This could possibly be explained by the fact that students no longer expect their lecturers to spoon feed them and they will have to be somewhat independent in their learning at the university.

Table 4b. Views on ability to learn autonomously

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>By going for SAL sessions, I can learn to study English on my own.</th>
<th>By going for SAL sessions, I can learn to study on my own.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>10 (25.6%)</td>
<td>14 (35.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>23 (59%)</td>
<td>20 (51.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>5 (12.8%)</td>
<td>5 (12.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, as shown in Table 4b above, more than 70% of the students believe that SAL sessions helped them learn English on their own. A lesser but considerable number of 64.1% of the students are also able to appreciate that the autonomy they developed through self learning of English is a relevant skill.
which could be utilized when they are studying other content subjects on their own.

Table 5. The Role of the Teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning how (the method) to get knowledge from the teacher is more important than just getting knowledge.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>5 (12.8%)</td>
<td>15 (38.5%)</td>
<td>19 (48.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I need my teacher to give me feedback (comments on my progress) regularly so that I will know if I have improved in my English.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>10 (25.6%)</td>
<td>21 (53.8%)</td>
<td>8 (20.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard to the role of teachers, the students cited two important viewpoints. First, the ability to become resourceful in gaining knowledge is more important than gaining knowledge itself. Second, by obtaining feedback from teachers regularly helps them gauge if they have progressed in their language proficiency.

As noted in Chapter 4, no student will have access to instruction throughout their life. Hence, it is extremely crucial for students to know how to obtain knowledge on their own. Research has also shown that students become better learners if they are more proactive in seeking solutions to their problems and do not exclusively rely on their teachers to provide them with resources (Cotterall, 1995: 220). Being resourceful is highly regarded since almost 90% of the students agreed that this is an essential skill.
Close to 75% of the students believe that it is necessary for them to obtain feedback from teachers as this serves as a platform for them to be made aware if their learning has improved.

Table 6a. Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>I need to be tested regularly so that I will know if I improved in my English.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>5 (12.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>8 (20.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>13 (33.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>11 (28.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>2 (5.1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A student proposed that a test or examination for SAL be administered at the end of the bridge course. One reason for this is that assessment can act as a source of feedback.

The issue of assessment turned out to be extremely interesting. As shown from the table above, the students are divided regarding this issue. As it turned out, an equal number of the students (33.3%) disagreed (including those who strongly disagreed), were neutral or agreed (including those who strongly agreed) with the statement. However, there were more students who strongly disagreed than strongly agreed with the statement. The above phenomenon can be explained by the following reasons.

First, some students are already intrinsically motivated to learn English and perhaps do not see the value of examinations/tests in providing them with
feedback on their learning. In fact, during their SAL orientation, the students were already made aware that various strategies could be used for them to gauge if their English proficiency has improved. Some examples are illustrated below:

- If people could better understand them in oral communication and vice versa;
- If they made fewer grammar errors and others could better understand them in their written communication and
- If they could better understand what they read and hear.

Chia (2005)

Those who turned in a neutral response were probably in a dilemma. Perhaps they believe that assessment is a good source of feedback but dislike it as they experience much pressure when tested.

As for those who disagreed with the issue, they possibly find assessments a useful source of feedback to gauge their learning and level of proficiency. Another reason could be that these students treat learning English as similar to learning another content subject.

**Table 6b. Assessment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>I do not like examinations (those that take place in lecture theatres [LTs]).</th>
<th>I do not like tests (those that take place in class).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (2.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>5 (12.8%)</td>
<td>7 (17.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>14 (35.9%)</td>
<td>16 (41%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>10 (25.6%)</td>
<td>9 (23.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>10 (25.6%)</td>
<td>6 (15.4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in the table in the previous page, more than half of the students expressed their dislike for examinations. Views such as that of examinations
taking away the joy of learning and that students are sick and tired of examinations are quite widespread. Furthermore, the ability to excel in examinations does not necessarily translate to the ability of using the language competently and confidently, for examinations seldom mirror real life situations. The students are however more receptive to tests as they probably regard it as less stressful compared to examinations, since they make up a small percentage of the final grade. Periodic tests also serve well as a source of feedback for their learning.

As for those who turned in a neutral response, they may recognise the necessity of examinations to spur them on in their learning. Yet they dislike examinations for reasons discussed above. As such, they are in a dilemma with regard to the issue of assessment.

6.3.1 Summary of Questionnaire survey

By triangulating the interview data using a questionnaire survey, it becomes clearer as to whether the students' views expressed during the interviews were a commonly held belief or that these beliefs were restricted to that of a few students. From the above, the following conclusions can be drawn. First, most students emphasized the need to plan their learning activities in order to benefit from self access learning. This provides a blueprint which enables students to stay focused and to work towards achieving their learning goals. Second, the freedom to choose the kind of activities they wish to engage in at SAC is a perk
most students enjoyed. One reason for this could be that this is a welcome change compared to the time when they were studying in China as their teachers often told them what to do. Third, most students shared the perception that the activities they engaged in during SAL helped them improve their English. Moreover, a sizeable number also claimed that they became more interested in learning English when they attend SAL sessions.

The autonomy that the students develop through SAL sessions is perceived as relevant in helping them prepare for their undergraduate study, as the students believe that they will have to be less dependent on their teachers for their learning. As such, developing autonomy in learning is a skill which is much valued by them. This skill not only helped them in the learning of English but in their other content subjects as well.

The consensus among students with regard to the role of the teacher is that it is more important for them to be trained in becoming resourceful in gaining knowledge rather than merely be provided with knowledge. Moreover, providing feedback to students regarding their learning progress is another crucial role of the teacher.

The only issue in which the students hold differing points of view is that of assessment. As to whether assessment serves as a source of feedback with regard to students' learning, is unclear. However, what is apparent is that
students favour tests over examinations. One reason for this is that they feel less pressurized during tests.

6.4 Chapter Summary

The three main sections in this chapter showcase three different set of instruments used for data collection purpose. The first section discusses the findings of a questionnaire survey which was used to determine if this group of PRC students who participated in the study, hold similar views regarding the Chinese culture of learning as Jin and Cortazzi (1998) claim. In the second section, students' initial perceptions of self access learning are discussed. The data were collected through a series of interviews. In order to ensure internal validity, a questionnaire survey was used as a means to triangulate the findings of these interviews. A discussion of the results and findings of this survey is presented in the final section.

The results of this survey as presented in the first section of this chapter generally reaffirm that the PRC students who participated in this study hold similar views relating to the Chinese culture of learning.

First, the teacher is respected as an authoritative figure and her instructions are often heeded. Second, the teacher is expected to impart knowledge and to assess student. This responsibility extents to SAL facilitators as well. Lastly, feedback from their teacher over peers is preferred.
The students also believed that the amount of progress they make in their English learning is directly related to the amount of effort they put in. This possibly explains the reason why a great number of students are willing to take responsibility for their self access learning.

In the second section, interview responses of the students' initial perceptions of self access learning were presented. Despite not having any similar learning experience in China pertaining to self access learning, many students are open to autonomous learning. While at SAC, the students have the liberty to choose activities which they find interesting or to focus on their area of weakness. Easy access to suitable learning materials and the variety resources also proved captivating. Moreover, the ability to learn independently is regarded as a relevant and valued skill especially when the students are studying at university.

Teachers still play an important role in the students' learning although the students are able to learn English on their own. The students want their teachers to guide them in their language learning, provide a good method for them to learn, provide feedback as well as teach them how to get knowledge.

As some students may take a longer time to get used to working on their own, SAL facilitators could suggest activities that students may engage in and guide these students in planning their learning activities as they get gradually used to the concept of self learning.
The insights drawn from the discussion could be used for fine-tuning SAL as well as adjusting teacher expectation of PRC students when helping them to foster autonomy in learning.

In the next chapter, the findings of the second set of interviews conducted towards the end of the English bridge course and the students' end of course feedback on SAL are presented.
In the previous chapter, PRC students' initial perception of self access learning was discussed. To recapitulate, a questionnaire survey was first administered to find out their beliefs regarding the Chinese culture of learning at the beginning of the course. Following this, the students were interviewed to find out their preliminary perceptions of self access learning. Lastly, in order to triangulate the findings of the interview, a second questionnaire survey was administered.

In this chapter, the discussion is provided in two parts. The first section presents the results and discusses the findings of the second series of interviews. In the second section, the students' end of course feedback on SAL is discussed. Data were collected through a questionnaire survey as well as in the form of a text, where students were free to offer their overall impression on SAL as well as to bring up issues not covered in the survey. This survey also serves as a means to triangulate the findings of the second set of interviews.
7.1 Results and Discussion of Second Interview

The second series of interviews with the students took place towards the end of the English bridge course. More specifically, it was some four months after the students were first interviewed and a month before the end of the English bridge course. Again, it was decided that the format of a semi-structured interview was the most appropriate as it allows students to discuss issues that concern their learning as well as those not originally thought of by the investigator. The list of questions of the second semi-structured interview can be found in Appendix 8.

The primary aim of this second set of interviews is to find out if the students' views towards self access learning have changed over their course of study. In addition, despite reminding students of the importance of reflecting upon their learning and to complete their reflection cum log sheet as soon as their self access learning has ended, their interest in keeping this learning journal seemed to wane over time. Therefore, part of this interview is to investigate the possible reasons for this.

7.1.1 PRC Students' views towards SAL at the end of course

Regarding the issue as to whether the students' views towards SAL have changed over the duration of their English bridge course, their responses can be categorised under three headings: 'Positive Change', 'No Change or Neutral' and 'Negative Change'.
7.1.1.1 Positive Change

Being confined to a learning environment such as the SAC as well as being restricted to selected resources helps students cultivate discipline in their learning. For one student, watching English movies without Chinese subtitles forced her to pay attention to the dialogue, thereby improving her listening ability as she gradually became accustomed to how 'native' speakers express themselves. This in turn improved her speaking skill. For other students, the activities they engaged in at SAL spurred them on to find out more about English history and culture.

Extract 1

G5/S1: ... I realise this is the only period of time that I can watch movie without Chinese characters at the bottom of the screen. Because all the movies I can find from other resources, I can find all the [Chinese] characters at the bottom of the screen so I cannot totally improve my English because when I listen to English voices I look at the Chinese character so I can understand the meaning. Even though I cannot totally understand the movie without Chinese characters but I can improve my listening so I take it more and more seriously. I think it is a good chance for us to get closer to the sentence they speak in the daily life and we can get familiar with how they express themselves and how they speak something. Their sentences are quite different from what we would say.

G5/S4: I think at the beginning SAL class I just can watch movie and listen to songs but later I find there are many good movies in SAL and I try to find some movies about English about British history. After I watch the movie I search for information and then I find it's quite interesting after you see the movie and turn to the history and saw what other people say about the period I think it's quite useful. I really enjoy it. Sometimes I just read some magazines in there. I think it's also interesting SAL.
Extract 2

G5/S3: At first I take it as very serious class for me. So I just do the listening practice or something which has close relationship with the English study. But now I find I should learn more about the English culture and other things, not only English itself. So sometimes I just watch the movie and feel [pay attention to] the accent or other things, not only English and get comfortable with their way to speak. I feel more and more like this, more relaxed.

Compared to when they first started SAL sessions at the beginning of the English bridge course, the students seemed to have a clearer purpose and took their self access learning more seriously.

Extract 3

G5/S7: ... I still like to watch movie very much, but now I emphasize whether the dialogue is clear for listening, not just watch movie for enjoyment but to improve English.

G5/S8: ... And now I watch movie in SAL class is for study purpose to improve my listening ability. I think learning English the most very important part is the listening part. Because when you talk with a foreigner you don't understand what they are talking about you are frustrated.

Extract 4

G5/S16: At first we consider SAL class just for fun, just watch movie or go to Internet or do something just for fun. Now we know how to do things follow our plans and on purpose to improve certain parts of our skill.

G5/S15: And also we didn't see so many movies as we used to and we listen to some online learning like BBC and so on.

G5/S14: Now I use the course documents [Suggested SAL activities] in NIE, I use it more than before the last time I came here....

G5/S13: After mid-term test I listen to BBC more because I didn't do well in my mid-term test, listening part.
Extract 5

G5/S19: At the last interview, I thought the SAL class is not so useful, but now I think it is useful, for my listening.

G5/S18: I think there are some differences between the last time when I was interviewed. I think my ideas have changed. Because the last time I thought that many students want to go to SAL just for fun and for leisure time. These weeks I found that many students will do something most useful to them. I think most of us have noticed that they do something useful to themselves.

G5/S17: I think the purpose was now clearer in that we should study something to enrich ourselves in English. So I think when I in those first few months I go to SAL to study something without clear purpose in general....

Some students have also engaged in activities that were suggested to them. They worked in pairs and took turns to watch one part of a movie. Following this, they related one part of the plot to each other and found this activity effective in helping them improve their listening and speaking skills.

Extract 6

G6/S16: At first I just watch movies, individual. Now we share. You suggested. We discuss the movies. [It is] effective on the speed of watching movies. After several weeks I can say I finished watching these movies. I trust her and she trusts me. I told her the other part....

G6/S15: I think so [that this is a better way to improve your speaking or listening]. Because when we share I pay more attention to what the actor says. Before I just watch the screen and what happened and pay no attention to what they are speaking.

7.1.1.2 Neutral/ No Change

While the extracts above illustrate the positive change that some students experienced compared to when they first started SAL, others claimed there were
no change or their perceptions about SAL remained neutral. These students still believe that SAL sessions are a fun way to learning English. In addition, they claimed that their listening skill seemed to have improved. However, the students were unsure if movie watching was the main attribute that led to their improved listening skill.

Extract 7

G5/S9: No. My view is almost the same [as before]. I think useful in the SAL class and I enjoy myself and I can improve my English, especially listening.

Extract 8

G6/S6: I think what I do in SAL is almost the same...If we are really very busy for example when we have so much homework to do, some people will do homework. But most of the time we're enjoying our movies.

G6/S5: Most of the time I watch movie and sometimes do homework.

G6/S7&S8: The same [for us too].

Extract 9

G6/S16: No change.

G6/S14: Now I still think SAL is for fun [interesting way of learning]. But I think now when I watch a movie I can understand more than before. But I don’t know if it is the result of watching a lot of movies.

7.1.1.3 Negative Change

Very few students' perception of SAL has actually changed for the worse. The following two extracts outline some minor negative perceptions of SAL. They are: having to maintain a silent learning environment at SAC and the short duration of each SAL session.
Extract 10

G5/S10: At first in January, I think SAL is interesting but now I find it has many limitations such as when you listen to songs you will try to imitate. But in SAL room you can't sing but just listen, that is not very good. If you listen songs at home you can just follow it and sing and improve. The movie, the time is too short so cannot see the movie in one SAL class. Two or three weeks to watch a movie is not good as you often forget the front part.

Extract 11

G6/S11: I think I change a little. At the beginning I thought can do many things but I realise I can't do that much. Time is too short. I can't do many things. In fact recently I use two or three weeks time to finish a movie or sometimes do your homework. Sometimes time is limited to finish homework. I do homework often, usually a task must be finished.

Like in a library, students have to observe silence and are not allowed to speak up at SAC so that they will not disturb others. Since the beginning of the semester, a table was made available at one corner of the room to facilitate student discussion. However, a computer is unavailable there.

As a result of staffing and budget constraint, it is only possible to offer a weekly one hour SAL session. Many students mentioned that this is insufficient for them to complete their activities. In fact, a lack of time was a common problem students faced. This issue was first brought up when they were interviewed at the beginning of the course. However, as the timetabling and staffing resources had already been planned for the semester, the number of hours offered per week could only be reviewed in the following semester.
7.1.2 The Necessity and Role of a Teacher

Despite having gotten used to learning on their own and experiencing success in self learning, most students believe that a teacher is necessary in order to learn language remains unchanged from the time they started SAL. One responsibility of teachers is to provide feedback to students. As most students also respect the authority of teachers, the presence of a teacher ensures that students come for SAL sessions as well as behave themselves in SAC.

Extract 24

G5/S3: Yes it’s necessary [to have a teacher] but we can also learn English by ourselves.

G5/S1: If the teacher is not there, maybe I will not attend SAL. [It’s because] I cannot get up so early....

G5/SS: Still necessary.

G5/S3: Always necessary.

G5/S2: The teacher can tell you which word you used wrongly and sometimes we have misunderstanding and culture.

G5/S1: The function of teacher is not only teach you something but also many other functions. You are there, you are teacher so I will be afraid of you. And I will do everything the nice way.

G5/S4: I think teacher is necessary. The teacher is not like other people. Other people if you make a mistake in your language they won’t tell you they want to be polite. But the teacher will just tell you and tell you what you should do and how to improve. This is important for the learner as we have described.

Extract 25

G6/S20: I think if we have a teacher will be better for my study because he will give me some pressure because I am not that good at self control.
The student below believes that teachers are still needed as they can advise students regarding the method of learning and correct their mistakes.

Extract 26

G5/S5: Although I can still learn by my own, I still think teacher in some way can help us. For example, give us some advice on the methods of learning. Sometimes can correct our mistakes.

With regard to the teacher's role, their perception also largely remained the same. A teacher is a guide, a friend, can speed up the process of learning as well as provide feedback on mistakes.

Extract 27

G5/S6&8: [Teacher should be] A guide....
G5/S8: Yes. Maybe the teacher can be our friend too.... [It is necessary to have a teacher] Because when you have a teacher you will learn more.
G5/S5: Can accelerate the speed of learning.
G5:S6: Agree with number 5's opinion.
G5:S7: The teacher is more important, and you don't have to waste time and will correct your mistake.

A teacher is indispensable to the following students for several reasons. First, teachers provide a systematic way of learning as well as offer feedback. To one student, learning a language is different from other subjects as it is related to culture, and the teacher can share this knowledge. Furthermore, when a teacher poses questions to students, this forces them to think of an answer. The teacher's body language and gesture also provide contextual clues that help
students infer the meaning of some phrase which would otherwise be incomprehensible to them.

**Extract 28**

G5/S10: *Because some programme you cannot serve [learn] by yourself and teacher always give us a system of learning. You can know the steps by steps.*

G5/S11: *Maybe because some subjects we can do well by ourselves. But on language we can't do well only by ourselves because language is related to the culture or other things. Maybe we should know more about the background or other things so teacher is necessary.*

G5/S12: *When teacher speaks to you I think it's the most effective to teach English because when you study online, you listen to the radio there is no response. You just listen, listen and listen you won't try to response. For example when a teacher asks you a question you will force you to think about how to answer. Sometimes you don't understand some part of the speech but by his or her gesture and body language you can understand you can guess it is more easy to help you.*

As there is a wide range of study material as well as skills to acquire when learning a language, one role of teachers is to select appropriate resources and skills to impart to students. A student also commented that it is impossible to learn all these skills through self study which makes a teacher necessary.

**Extract 29**

G5/S16: *Yes of course. Without the teacher's instruction we don't know what to learn even though we can learn ourselves, we can have many materials but we don't know which is right which is good and we don't know which method is good for us.*

G5/S15: *I think because many skills and many we still don't know how to study it by ourselves. We can learn some but not all.*

G5/S14: *I think we can't because we trust out teacher and I think what teacher teaches us is most useful for us. Because if you study yourself when you study online there is too much materials for you, you don't know*
which is most useful for you. But what teacher teach you I can trust our teacher.

Without the teacher's help, students claimed that they will still be writing in their 'Chinese' way. What this means is that they will be translating from Chinese which could result in odd or ungrammatical sentences when expressed in English. One student also mentioned that the teacher can give suggestions to help them improve their writing. Furthermore, referencing and citation are new to the students. Hence, they need to be exposed to the conventions of academic writing such as proper referencing and citation techniques to avoid being accused of plagiarism.

Extract 30

G5/S13: We do need a teacher to select which material is better, which is not good, tell us how to use our time and energy to learn it. Like writing course, our teacher taught us how to write right and other new method. If we don’t have a teacher we will write in our using Chinese way not British way.

Extract 31

G6/S14: Yes I think so especially for writing where there is a lot of special format. I think we need the teacher to check the format or special points for us that my friends cannot find them.

G6/S13: At least when we finish the essay the teacher can help us improve.

Extract 32

G6/S18: Yes we need teacher. When we do the writing, there are many styles of writing. When we doing the writing project we have to follow the APA style but we know nothing of this style. Of course we can learn from
the book, but it's better if teacher can you some advice can tell you if it's right or wrong. She can explain to you and can give you some examples.

A teacher is necessary especially at the beginner's level is the opinion of another student. Moreover, he echoes the sentiments of another student, in that cultural knowledge, which teachers can impart, helps deepen the understanding of a language. In addition, teachers can introduce slang and other colloquial expressions to students. These students also believe that teachers can guide their students and provide them with some 'best' method to learn the language.

**Extract 33**

G5/S18: I think so because we are still beginning learners, and our knowledge of English is very limited. We need some people who is a master of English to tell us more about English and the culture.... I think culture is very important and teacher can provide us with some information and also some orientation you must go along [through]. This is what a teacher must do.

G5/S19: I agree with number 18.... For example, birthday suit, before teacher explains to us I didn't know it means naked.

G5/S17: Anyhow, teacher is important for study. Just like 18 and 19 mentioned, teacher can give us guidance and make the road of studying more smoothly rather than let us to search light ourselves.

G5/S20: I think a teacher is very necessary because you are a new learner of language. When you read a book or do some other things you must know which part is more crucial which is not so important. That's the teacher[s] job, let the teacher tell you which is the best method to learn.
7.1.3 The Role of SAL Facilitator

One particular student prefers that the SAL facilitator be more involved in her learning by providing her with advice regarding how she can solve the problems she encountered while working on her own.

Extract 34

G5/S3: For SAL, I like the teacher to be more involved. For example in the reflection log sheet we write down some problems we faced so I think the teacher maybe can provide us some advice to solve the problem not only by our own ways.

Another student appreciates some feedback periodically regarding the progress of her learning.

Extract 35

G5/S19: I think about every one month or one and a half months, to discuss the progress and to give students some suggestions about the progress.

Other students require the facilitator's help in organising their learning and setting goals while another wants to be assigned group discussions or tasks.

Extract 36

G6/S7: Sometime we need the teachers' advice in organisation. Maybe during the process, several months you can one month choose a certain class organise the students to do the same thing to improve English or test the ability, what they do during SAL.

G6/S8: Yes I think so.... Maybe sometime for a long time, the teacher gives us an aim and let ourselves work for the aim.

Extract 37

G6/S12: I think the teacher can divide the group members into several small groups and maybe give each group an assignment once a month so the whole group can discuss.
Checking on students to ensure that they are not distracted from their SAL is perceived to be one role of the SAL facilitator.

**Extract 38**

G5/S10: *I think this [for SAL facilitator to check on us] is good because sometimes we always do something else.*

The following responses were obtained when the students were asked if it were necessary for the SAL facilitator to organise activities for students.

**Extract 39**

G5/S20: *No, that defeats the purpose of SAL which is for self learning because SAL is for your self learning.*

G5/S19: *That kind of discussion we have done a lot in other classes.*

G5/S17: *Leave it to ourselves.*

G5/S18: *For this topic [Regarding this issue] I don't have ideas actually. On one hand, SAL we should study ourselves. On the other hand, sometimes our class is very disorganised and we all don’t know what to do. If we have some activities to do together the atmosphere around the class will be better.*

**Extract 40**

G5/S13: *I prefer [to be] left alone because if the teacher organises you it will be like other lessons like AOC [Academic Oral Communication]. I want something different for SAL.*

G5/S14: *Up to now, there aren’t some activities the whole class does together for SAL so I don’t know whether it is effective or not.*

G5/S15: *Actually I still enjoy if sometimes you could give us something to discuss together ....*

G5/S16: *I think sometimes we do things together will be better. For example if we discuss one thing per month. This will remind us every time when that time comes, this will remind us to study.*
The students were divided over whether the SAL facilitator should organise some class activity. In addition, it seems that some of them were still not used to being completely left alone and preferred to have some structured organised activity during SAL. The extract below reinforces this view.

**Extract 41**

G6/S2: I think SAL class is lack of something. I think it should add some activities or let the students discuss something together.... For example one month in one class let the students talk about topic about some news, let students discuss or do some other things, not only let students do by themselves. Not all the time let students do all their own things. I think for some students if every SAL class they do the things by themselves some students will make a habit most of the time they can’t do some useful things or maybe sometimes maybe waste time. Every some class we use the class do the same thing discuss or do some other things can make us realise it is a class. If the topic or activity is useful I think can also improve us.

Besides this, some students believe that SAL facilitators should be proactive in approaching students to discuss their learning. This feedback is considered to be valuable.

**Extract 42**

G5/S19: Sometimes students are shy so if you don’t plan it, won’t force them, they won’t come. Although they are willing to come but they are [shy?].

G5/S20: I think it's a good method to reflect what you have done in SAL and all that.

G5/S19: I think there should be more contact between the teacher and the student.

G5/S17: I agree with 19.

G5/S18: I think it's not so useful for teacher and student because this is a self learning class. All the assessment on reflection we can do ourselves. If you are not so serious about this class you will not be so serious about
the interview with your teacher. If you want to study something you can reflect yourself. But sometimes interview with teacher will drive us to be aware of problems.

For other students, they would like to be left alone completely to engage in their self learning. This is because if they are not interested in the assignment given by the SAL facilitator, they would either not complete it or do it half-heartedly.

Extract 43

G6/S16: Of course [prefer to be] left alone.

G6/SS: Left alone.

G6/S14: If you leave me alone I can do everything I want.... Yes if your assignment is interesting maybe I will do it. If it not interesting I will not do it. But if it is an assignment I will do it.

G6/S16: But you can't satisfy twenty people.

G6/S13: If in SAL, the teacher asks us to read something then discuss there is no difference with the reading class.

G6/S14: Yes.

7.1.4 The Effectiveness of SAL for learning English

The general perception is that SAL is effective in helping students achieve a significant improvement in their listening skill as well as give them the courage to speak out despite making errors.

Extract 44

G6/S2: I think it's effective because all the other class[es like] oral, reading or writing, most of the time we learn from the teacher. Only oral class sometimes we discuss something. But in SAL though we didn't discuss with each other, but when I watch the movie or listen to English songs, I learn [from] the people in the movie how to speak and I think this is progress. We can't speak it clearly but [I see] difference [between] the first interview and this interview I can. In the first interview, I dare not to say
more say much but now I can, though I will make some mistake. I dare not to make mistake [in the first interview]. I think it's progress. Through SAL, through the movie and other things I think we practice how to speak how to express our view.... I think it's effective. It has many freedom for us so we can practise whatever I want to practise.

G6/S3: The progress I think is not very obvious. I think listening ability is increased but others I didn't feel.

G6/S4: I think my idea has changed a lot. I also think SAL is effective. Just like number 3 said the SAL has improved our listening a lot because most of us just watching movies on SAL or others do their homework. It has improved our listening a lot not others [skill areas] very obvious.

Others find improvement in their reading.

Extract 45

G5/S17: It improves our reading because sometimes we search the paper online and I always borrow the books from SAL class to read after class so I think my reading improved during SAL.

For another student, engaging in SAL helped him find out more about the English culture, which in his opinion is linked to language.

Extract 46

G5/S6: Of course [helps me learn more] about the culture. The language [is] always relevant to the culture.

For the following group of students, SAL is perceived to be only moderately effective in helping them improve their English. One reason for this is the limited time. However, they regard it as an interesting way of learning English.

Extract 47

G5/S3: I don't think it is quite effective way. It just can bring you some interest in English and make you interested in learning English. Not help you improve English a lot but a little effective.
G5/S1: It can help you develop a new way to learn English.

G5/S4: Every week when I enter SAL I remember I can watch movie and to improve my English. It reminds you to learn English by other ways not just learn words [and] remember this remember that.

G5/S3: It can make learning English more interesting.

G5/S2: I think we cannot say because there is a class called SAL and our English improve a lot.

**Extract 48**

G5/S8: The time longer will be more effective. I can finish the movie. For example a week, just fifty minutes is not enough. If a week I mean the time is so limited, you just cannot learn much through SAL.

**Extract 49**

G5/S12: SAL is a good way to sustain your interest in learning English because if you just understand in the tutorial room and have so many projects to do you will feel tiring and your interest in English will go down. But in SAL, you find another way to learn English it will keep you interested.

As for the following students, they believe that SAL is an effective way to learn English on their own, especially if they think they have not learned much in class for a particular day. Furthermore, SAL also acts as a bridge between senior middle school and university. Similar to the comments above, the general perception is that one hour at SAC is insufficient.

**Extract 50**

G6/S8: I think the most effective way is for you to teach yourself something. I think the SAL class gives us a chance but the time is too limited I don't think it's very useful. Two hours a week will be better.

G6/S6: I think so. According to name, SAL means study yourself, you teach yourself. Self learning should play the most important in learning English.... The teacher wants you to learn through games but sometimes you don't. So if you want to learn more you must study yourself.
G6/S7: Because for the Chinese students they always follow the teacher's advice. In the university, the teacher can't always give you advice, you must listen to lecture and learn almost the whole thing you do by yourself. I think SAL is a bridge between senior middle school to university. For Chinese students this is very important.

One reason why most students spend their time at SAC watching movies and listening to music CDs or online programmes is that they want to engage in activities that they cannot undertake outside of SAC. This is because neither the music nor video discs can be taken out of the centre. As a result of this, most experienced a significant improvement in their listening ability.

Extract 51

G5/S9: I don't think I will visit BBC [website] during SAL class because I always do it after class when I'm in my room. Because I think the most useful resource in the SAL is the movie and music so I don't. What I can do on my computer, I won't waste my time to do it in the SAL class.

The above extract also testifies that the autonomy students develop through SAL is carried over to their self learning outside of class.

Besides watching movies or listening to music, other students also make use of online resources to improve their English by searching for subjects that appeal to them or by reading the news.

Extract 52


G5/S6: Also other things. For a long time I just do something about the grammar, prefix or suffix.
Extract 53

G5/S11: Sometimes. I always try to find the articles I am interested in, about computer, about sports. So I can both improve English and other knowledge.

One reason why students engage in activities that improve their listening ability at SAC is that there seemed to be a lack of opportunity to converse with or listen to people who speak Standard English.

Extract 54

G5S8: That time when I set my goals, I think the writing, the reading, the listening the same importance. But now my mind is changing. I think listening is more important than the two.... Because now most of our papers our works are in English. We are forced to use English. Reading and writing are easy to improve. But listening, you have not many chance to listen to a Standard English speaking person.

7.1.5 Other Benefits of SAL

Other than helping students improve their language proficiency, the autonomy they developed in SAL helps them draw up a plan to improve on their areas of weakness as well as better manage their time.

Extract 55

G5/S7: Maybe help me to know more about myself or to make an appropriate plan. Because though you can do the things you like in SAL you must know your weak points are and do the proper actions to improve this.

Extract 56

G5/S20: Self time management because the SAL is very short time we need to do things very effectively. We need to make a plan. It will help us to manage our time.
Some students become more accustomed to the English language. As a result of this, they watch more English movies and access Chinese websites less often.

Extract 57

G6/S17: Be more used to watching movies in English. Before I just want to watch Chinese movies, when English movies it's hard to follow the words and then maybe feel boring but now I don't.

Extract 58

G6/S12: When we go to the room [hostel] we don't go to Chinese websites as often as before....

G6/S9: Yes maybe because of SAL, I am used to the English environment.

G6/S12: Most of us watch movies and the movies also show some English culture. Just like me and 9, we now are more interested in English movies and learn more about English and English culture.

G6/S11: Yes, more interested in the culture ....

G6/S10: Yes [more interested in learning English] and now I am used to English movies. When I watch Chinese movies I feel uncomfortable.

G6/S9: Yes I will get more interested in learning about English culture.

It was also suggested to the students that they could either work in pairs or groups during SAL. However, few actually did so. This particular student carried out her activity with another classmate and realised the benefit of pair work. This was first discussed in Extract 6.

Extract 59

G6/S16: Maybe the way of sharing, some method of learning.
7.1.6 Students’ view on keeping SAL journal

As mentioned in chapters one and five, the students were asked to keep a weekly journal (Appendix 5) for accountability purposes, to reflect on their learning by stating their language problems as well as actions taken by them to resolve these problems. Getting the students to keep a journal offered the researcher the opportunity to delve into that which was not directly observable. In addition, there is some evidence to suggest that reflecting on one’s learning could lead to finding solutions to learning problems (Farrell, 1998: 5).

The students’ interest in keeping their journal seemed to wane over time. Also, from the start, very little was written about their learning experience at SAC. Their descriptions were limited to short phrases and similar problems experienced in their self learning were documented. In addition, the students were not regular in submitting their log sheets or did not hand them in at all. Towndrow (2004) also met with a similar encounter when he asked his students, who were also learners of English, to keep reflective journals. “Although the tutor’s records show that some students were appreciative of the benefits afforded by reflecting on their learning experiences, most others did not favour the approach” (Towndrow, 2004: 177). As such, this issue of keeping a reflective journal was included as one of the questions in the second interview.

When asked for the reasons why the students did not write much in their reflective journal, some claimed that they did not meet with any problems or they
encountered similar problems weekly. Alternatively, the problems faced were considered too huge to be solved.

**Extract 60**

G5/S2: Because we cannot make up problems, we cannot find problems. If we cannot find problems we should leave it blank.

G5/S1: When we write the log sheet we already forget [the problems we encountered].... I always write it just before I hand it in to you.

G5/S3: I think for learning English I always have the same problem.

G5/S1, S2 & S4: Yes

G5/S3: Every time I listen to BBC or something I always come across the same problem. Every time I must write down the same thing....

G5/S1: I think it’s a very hard problem that no one can help us.... It’s suffering.... I usually write two days or three days and I give up.

**Extract 61**

G5/S20: Sometimes we find there is no problem or the problem is so huge to describe.

G5/S19: ... I think this problem is just our problem you cannot describe it. It’s just our problem I think it’s just the lack of culture because you didn’t live in English speaking culture so cannot get used of it immediately. So you must improve step by step that needs a long time. Sometimes you cannot feel the improvement so I think it’s hard to write what’s the problem.

G5/S18: Actually I agree with 19. The problem is that we cannot identify the problem [students are aware that they have a problem but hard to pen them down]. It’s a long term problem to be solved.

As noted above, one reason for not keeping their reflective journal is that students thought that their problems were very difficult to solve. Writing them down does not in any way contribute in helping them solve these problems. Therefore, the students saw little value in documenting their problems.
Extract 62

G6/S19: Even if I wrote down it's useless for me to solve the problem, just fill in this form. Whether I write down all the problems, little influence to solve the problems (Even if I write them down, it will not help me to solve these problems).

As for the following student, she wanted to focus on only one problem at a time which was why she only wrote down one problem each time.

Extract 63

G6/S20: Because we want to solve the problem one by one. I don't want solve several problems at the same time so I just write down one. After solve this one, yah [I met with more than just one problem]. I can't solve all the problems. [No, I didn't ask teacher or friends to help]. If you solve many problems at the same time, the rate for you to solve is very low and will take a long time.

From the above, it is clear that for some students keeping a journal was an exercise that was not valued or taken seriously. Some considered it a repetitive process as the students wrote the same problems they encountered weekly. Besides this, there are some who are of the view that there is only one solution to their language problems, that is, to read or practise their language skills more often.

Extract 64

G5/S11: Sometimes we don't take it seriously....

G5/S10: Sometimes you just do the same things such as watch movies or reading online articles. Just repeating and repeating. The problem is you can't understand all such as the vocabulary or listening and how to solve the problem is just the same, read more and practise more.

G5/S12: Because we only have one SAL session per week every week there is not so much improvement. Maybe compared to before, the first
SAL and now, we will find some improvement but every week we cannot see the improvement.

Extract 65

G6/S19: Sometimes [we meet with] the same problems [and use] the same methods, the same way [to solve them].

When asked if they attempted using different strategies to solve similar problems they encountered weekly, one student mentioned that solving problems was difficult and it would take time for improvements to show up.

Extract 66

G5/S8: It's hard for us because language accumulation [learning and improvement does not occur overnight] and you need time for us to improve.

Others claimed that they were not aware that different ways can be used to solve similar language problems.

Extract 67

G5/S11: No, [I] don't know what other ways to follow [in order to solve the problem].

Extract 68

G6/S6: If I watch a movie and can't understand it. Besides watching it over and over again, what other ways can I do to solve it?

The lack of time was cited by another student for not using different approaches in solving similar problems. Other reasons such as each student being involved in different activities or having varied interests were also used to justify why some students did not approach their peers for help.
Extract 69

G5/S15: The time is limited, so don't have the time to ask people.

G5/S16: I don't think it's helpful to discuss with friends. If you cannot hear [understand], you cannot hear. Your friends can't tell you what happened if they cannot understand.

G5/S14: Your friend don't like [and is not doing] the same work as you. So we were not the same.

G5/S15: Maybe you are interested they are not.

G5/S14: And if you want to talk about the movie with your friend, if you[r] friend look at the movie this time, you will look at it next week. Maybe there is a time [lag] between this to happen. After that, maybe we lose the passion to talk about the movie.

G5/S13: Some problems have not so much solutions for it. Maybe the new method is not better than the old.

Another reason why students were not forthcoming in keeping their reflective journal is that completing the journal was not a priority. While a few may be diligent in keeping their journal, many students either forgot to complete it immediately after their SAL session or finished it hurriedly before handing it in.

Extract 70

G6/S19: For me it's different. If I remember it I will finish it on weekend if I forgot because on Monday after oral class there is lunch time during lunch time I finish it.

G6/S17: Most times I finish it just before handing it in....

G6/S18: I think maybe because I finish it in a hurry. Yah maybe [I forget the problems faced].

G6/S17: Same problem.
Having to keep their reflective journal once a week was perceived to be excessively demanding for some students.

**Extract 71**

G6/S2: *Maybe you gave this sheet too frequently. Maybe some period you give one we can do it very well....*

G6/S3: *Once every two weeks is reasonable.*

The various reasons stated by the students as to why they were lacking in enthusiasm in writing their journal were also cited by Towndrow’s (2004, 177) students. In his study, Towndrow (2004, 179) also worked with PRC learners of English. Several reasons were mentioned; the shortage of time or journal writing was regarded as a complex practice. Others were unsure how keeping their journals could help them in their learning. There were also some who were explicitly negative towards the concept of reflective practice and questioned the necessity to do so (Towndrow, 2004: 178).

From the above, it seemed that PRC scholars involved in this study also lacked the passion to reflect upon their learning. However, does this necessarily imply that the students saw little value in reflecting on their learning? The following section discusses the students’ views regarding this.

**7.1.7 Students’ views on reflecting on their learning**

Although some students may appreciate the significance of reflecting on their learning, they were of the view that they have not formed the habit of reflecting
and that this practice took too much effort and. Another student was brutally honest in that reflecting on her learning was boring and she would only do this occasionally. Similarly, one student said she had other issues to ponder over, than to reflect on her learning.

Extract 72

G5/S1: I do not have the habit to always look back to what I’ve learned.... Usually when I encounter very serious problems then I will seriously look back to what I have done then I think about it.

G5/S4: No, it’s troublesome. I don’t like to write diaries. It’s totally uninteresting for me. Every time I pick up my ball pen if I want to write my diary, my heart shakes.

G5S3: [I don’t like writing diaries] Because always write the same thing so I think it’s boring.... Yes because when I come across some problems I just use the same way [to solve them].

G5/S2: Thinking about, have a review of what we have learnt is quite important. But if always try to find out the reason is meaningless.... I mean each time you think what I’ve done, why I didn’t do so well, always try to find the reason from yourself, the environment, from others, it’s meaningless.... Put energy into finding the reason....Overdoing this is meaningless.... I will think about it, maybe only once or twice. [I will] Try to avoid the [problems, not overcome them]. I don’t put too so much to thinking about it. There are lots of things to think of.

While the following group of students see the importance of reflecting on their learning, they believe it should be carried out less frequently. One reason is that it takes time to recognise language gains. Another student was of the view that he was not a good language learner and felt that there was very little he understood from his weekly self learning. Therefore, he could not appreciate the value of reflecting on his learning.
Extract 73

G5/S11: I don't think this worksheet is very useful. Because it's [SAL's] only one hour you can't improve so much maybe you just watch a movie or listen and understand some parts. So maybe not so good.... Yes I think it's important [to reflect on your learning]. But I'm not good at learning language I don't understand much. But in other subject, when you finish doing something, then you think about it then you can improve more....

G5/S12: Maybe because if you want to learn a language you should put a lot of time in it and you cannot do it in a short time.

G5/S11: You can't feel any improvement immediately. You can't feel the excitement. After a long time you can feel you have made a bit of improvement. So I feel it is not so easy to learn language.

G5/S12: Maybe one month one log sheet may be better.

G5/S11: Then you feel your improvement.

G5/S12: Now if we compare to when we just came here, we feel that our spoken English is much better than before. Because when we first came here, we nearly cannot speak out. Now we think about before and compared to now we feel we have improved.

G5/S9: I agree with them.

G5/S10: Once a month, maybe you can finish one of your learning aims. Learning goals for the month – listening. Then after one month you can really feel a bit of improvement then you can, [with the] many activities you have engaged in and you also feel your problem and really solve it. This is more effective.

Similarly for this group of students, they claimed to only reflect on their learning after improvements have been detected or only when learning has taken place after a relatively long period of time. This is because more time should be devoted to practising the language rather than engaging in reflection to solve problems.
Extract 74

G5/S17: I only reflect on my learning when I feel I have made improvement.

G5/19: I think most of the time I just do, not think too much. Since we have learnt this language for so many years, our teacher has told us so many methods, it's also just like that [doesn't make much difference]. You should pay more time to practise not just think about skill to solve the problem.

The responses that the following group of students gave seemed to show that they have fully grasped the significance of reflecting on their learning. It appears that they were aware of various gains that could be reaped from this exercise.

Extract 75

G5/S16: I will [think about my learning of English]. If I find the reason I will improve in daily life.

G5/S15: Maybe sometimes when the teacher points out your mistake, after class I will remember it. I will think about it.

G5/S13: Only after important exams....

G5/S14: Yes I think about it. For example reading whether it is because the vocabulary I don't understand or because the organisation or.... I think everybody will think about this learning.

G5/S13: [It is it important to reflect on your learning in order] To show where you are and what you have to do after, maybe in the next few days or weeks or you will lose the direction or the signal.

G5/S14: To make sure whether you have done enough for certain part or whether the way you study is suitable or not.

G5/S15: Maybe you will learn something more deeply when you think about it.

G5/S16: When you think about it, you can review on the knowledge you have learnt and you can discover your problems and find the solutions sometimes. If you find the solution you will get greater improvement.
Reflecting on one's learning enables students to evaluate if the method they use to learn English is suitable or effective, which is considered to be important.

Extract 76

G6/S11: Yes I think so. Maybe the method you use before is not suitable and you have to change it. Then you have to think about it....

G6/S12: You must try many ways. After you have tried, you must think about it and then choose the best way. Also think about what we have done in the past.

G6/S9: I agree with number 12.

One student thought that it was impossible to engage in self learning without reflection while others believe that they can progress further by reflecting on their learning as this raised their awareness of their goals. Reflection could also possibly act as a catalyst to solving learning problems.

Extract 77

G6/S20: Yes. If we don't think about it there is no way for us to learn by ourselves.

G6/S19: Yes sometimes. If you don't think you can progress very little.

G6/S18: If you think about your learning you will know yourself better, know what you learn. Maybe in your further study you'll do better and know what's the purpose.

G6/S17: When we think of the problem, last time we also face the problem, we also manage it and if the problem comes many times, you will have to do solve it.

Although some students believe that reflecting on one's learning is necessary, they didn't document their thoughts as this required greater effort than mere reflection.
Extract 78

G6/S6: I think this is more important because in China our teacher always tells us what to do…. No I don’t write this down. We just think about it.

TR: Why not?

G6/S7: Maybe thinking is much easier than writing. If you write down something you must first organise the words and the sentences. But when you think, you think of some words and sentence and know what you have done.

G6/S8: I think it’s because she thinks in Chinese so it’s much easier to think than to write.

Extract 79

G6/S16: Necessary [to reflect] but I don’t think have to write on the sheet…. [as] this kind of sheet I always treat it like assignment…. No sometimes I’m a little lazy so I don’t like to think. But after a period I will go back and think back, not so frequently like every week, I think it’s a little tough.

G6/S14: I think one week a time is too frequent.


The above section discusses and analyses the second set of interview data. A summary of this discussion is given below.

7.1.8 Summary of Interview Findings

Compared to the time when they first began their English bridge course, many students seemed to have a more positive perception of SAL. The students appeared to have a clearer picture of the purpose of SAL and took it more seriously. Moreover, SAL sessions were regarded as a fun way to learning
English. Two limitations of SAL are that each SAL session was too short and that students could not practise their speaking skill at SAC.

The students' perception that a teacher is necessary to learn a language remains unchanged from the time they started SAL. As there are many skills to be acquired, this is only achievable with the aid of a teacher. Furthermore, teachers can advise students regarding the method of learning and give them feedback on their mistakes.

With regard to the role of a SAL facilitator, students expressed that they would like to get help in organising their learning as well as setting goals, be given advice regarding how they could solve learning problems as well as getting feedback on the progress of their learning. An important point to note is that SAL facilitators need to be proactive in approaching the students to discuss their learning needs as the students were often shy to ask for help. The students were also divided if the SAL facilitator should organise some class activity. From their responses, it seems that some students have yet to get used to the idea of self learning.

The consensus appears to be that SAL is only moderately effective in helping the students improve their English. One reason for this is the limited period of each SAL session. Despite this, most students claimed they detected a significant improvement in their listening skill. For some students, they continued to engage
in self learning activities after class. Having students engage in learning activities at SAC could be directly attributed to this.

As for recording their learning problems and reflecting on their learning, the students lacked enthusiasm as this was perceived to be taking too much effort. Some students claimed they have not developed this habit while others would rather spend time practising language skills than engage in reflection. Another group felt that it was unnecessary to document their thoughts.

Having discussed the students' views on SAL nearing the end of their English bridge course, the next section presents their end of course feedback on SAL.

7.2 End of course feedback on SAL

Data for the end of course evaluation for SAL were obtained using two different instruments. The students were first asked to complete a SAL End of Course questionnaire survey (Appendix 4). This was followed with a request for them to submit a 100-word text in English on their views on SAL. The second exercise was assigned as this allows students to comment on issues related to SAL which are not covered in the questionnaire.

Only 37 students completed the questionnaire while 30 students submitted their written feedback on SAL.
7.2.1 Questionnaire Feedback

Table 1. Improvement in English Language skill

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1. Self Access Learning (SAL) sessions help me to improve my English reading skill.</th>
<th>2. Self Access Learning (SAL) sessions help me to improve my English writing skill.</th>
<th>3. Self Access Learning (SAL) sessions help me to improve my English listening skill.</th>
<th>4. Self Access Learning (SAL) sessions help me to improve my English speaking skill.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2 (5.4%)</td>
<td>7 (18.9%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5 (13.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>13 (35.1%)</td>
<td>17 (45.9%)</td>
<td>1 (2.7%)</td>
<td>8 (21.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>18 (48.6%)</td>
<td>13 (35.1%)</td>
<td>11 (29.7%)</td>
<td>20 (54.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>4 (10.8%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25 (67.6%)</td>
<td>4 (10.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 above shows that students considered Self Access Learning (SAL) sessions to be most beneficial in helping them improve their listening as an overwhelming 97.3% of the students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement when asked if SAL sessions helped them improve their listening skill. As for the other skill areas, speaking was ranked second, while reading third. SAL is considered to be least effective in helping them make progress in their writing.

When interviewed, movie watching was cited as one activity that many students were fond of. As a result of this, they gradually got accustomed to 'native' speakers' accent and this helped them improve their listening ability. Regarding improvement in their speaking skills, a number of students mentioned that their vocabulary expanded as a result of watching movies. This is because they learned new words and expressions that could be used during conversations,
which was probably the reason why they ranked improvement in speaking ability, second. However, it is less clear as to why the students did not find SAL useful with regard to helping them improve their writing skill. Books on grammar exercises are available in the centre and additional grammar exercises can also be accessed on the institute’s website, which the students were informed of during their SAL orientation.

Table 2. Preference for SAL sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>8. I like SAL sessions because they give me a break from the regular classes.</th>
<th>10. I dislike SAL sessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16 (43.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>5 (13.5%)</td>
<td>17 (45.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>7 (18.9%)</td>
<td>2 (5.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>14 (37.8%)</td>
<td>1 (2.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>11 (29.7%)</td>
<td>1 (2.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost 70% of the students like SAL sessions because these sessions were considered to give them a break from their regular classes. Similarly, close to 90% of the students mentioned that they did not dislike SAL sessions. Possible reasons for these favourable responses are that students find SAL sessions interesting and that they are free to choose their favourite activities to engage in to improve their language skills.
Table 3a. Use of facilities at Self Access Centre

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>13. Most of the time, I use the tape recorder to listen to cassettes during SAL sessions.</th>
<th>14. Most of the time, I watch videos during SAL sessions.</th>
<th>15. Most of the time, I listen to music CDs during SAL sessions.</th>
<th>21. I use the time to complete my homework during SAL sessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>17 (45.9%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5 (13.5%)</td>
<td>1 (2.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>14 (37.8%)</td>
<td>4 (10.8%)</td>
<td>19 (51.4%)</td>
<td>16 (43.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>3 (8.1%)</td>
<td>6 (16.2%)</td>
<td>8 (21.6%)</td>
<td>11 (29.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>1 (2.7%)</td>
<td>19 (51.4%)</td>
<td>5 (13.5%)</td>
<td>6 (16.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>2 (5.4%)</td>
<td>8 (21.6%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 (8.1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As expected, the activity that students mostly engaged in at SAC was watching movies. One reason for this is that these video CDs can only be used at SAC. As for online resources, those with a computer can always access them after class.

Other listening materials such as cassettes tapes and music CDs do not seem to appeal much to the students. On the surface, this finding seemed to differ from that of Cotterall and Reinders's (2000, 30), who found that listening materials were most popular with their students. However, it is in fact similar since PRC students made use of video programmes to improve their listening. Only about a quarter of the students used their SAL session to complete their homework, since this can be completed when they are back in their hostel.
Table 3b. Use of facilities at Self Access Centre

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>16. Most of the time, I read the books from the Self-Access Centre during SAL sessions.</th>
<th>17. I read the books I borrowed from the Self-Access Centre outside of SAL sessions.</th>
<th>18. I borrow books from the Self Access Centre.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>7 (18.9%)</td>
<td>5 (13.5%)</td>
<td>3 (8.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>22 (59.5%)</td>
<td>6 (16.2%)</td>
<td>10 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>7 (18.9%)</td>
<td>8 (21.6%)</td>
<td>5 (13.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>1 (2.7%)</td>
<td>15 (40.5%)</td>
<td>15 (40.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>0 (1%)</td>
<td>3 (8.1%)</td>
<td>4 (10.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 3b, students prefer to take the books out of SAC to read. One reason is the limited time for them to complete reading the book in one SAL session. The other is that students have expressed that they preferred to engage in activities which they cannot take on outside of SAC. In addition, rather than borrowing books from other libraries, the students prefer to do so at SAC as these books are specially selected to meet their learning needs.

Table 3c. Use of facilities at Self Access Centre

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>12. Most of the time, I use the computer during SAL sessions.</th>
<th>19. I access (go to) different websites to improve my English during SAL sessions.</th>
<th>20. I access (go to) different websites to read the news during SAL sessions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6 (16.2%)</td>
<td>10 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>1 (2.7%)</td>
<td>11 (29.7%)</td>
<td>8 (21.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>18 (48.6%)</td>
<td>14 (37.8%)</td>
<td>15 (40.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>18 (48.6%)</td>
<td>6 (16.2%)</td>
<td>4 (10.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is not at all surprising to note that students claimed to use the computer most of the time during SAL sessions since they need to utilise it to watch videos, listen...
to CDs, use CD-Roms as well as to surf the Internet. Slightly more than half the students claimed they use the computer to access the Internet as well as to read the news during SAL sessions.

Table 4. Taking Responsibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>5. SAL sessions make me take responsibility in learning English.</th>
<th>7. I make full use of my time to improve my English during the SAL sessions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>5 (13.5%)</td>
<td>16 (43.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>25 (67.6%)</td>
<td>20 (54.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>7 (18.9%)</td>
<td>1 (2.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students had to set learning goals at the beginning of each term and were encouraged to evaluate their own learning periodically which could be the reason why close to 90% of the students indicated that SAL sessions made them take responsibility in the learning of English, which is shown in Table 4 above. Taking responsibility in their learning could be a factor that prompted 60% of the students to claim that they make full use of their time to improve their language skills during the SAL session. Another reason why students did not waste their time during SAL sessions is that they had to account for their time spent by providing details on their weekly log sheets regarding the kind of learning activities they had engaged in while at the SAC.
Table 5a. Autonomy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>9. I like SAL sessions because the teacher gives me the freedom to decide what to do to improve my English.</th>
<th>11. I prefer the teacher to tell me what to do during SAL sessions.</th>
<th>23. I generally prefer my teachers to tell me what to do in order to improve my English.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (5.4%)</td>
<td>2 (5.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15 (40.5%)</td>
<td>5 (13.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>6 (16.2%)</td>
<td>13 (35.1%)</td>
<td>17 (45.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>17 (45.9%)</td>
<td>6 (16.2%)</td>
<td>12 (32.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>14 (37.8%)</td>
<td>1 (2.7%)</td>
<td>1 (2.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5a above shows that the majority (83.7%) of students value the freedom given to them to decide on the activities that they should engage in during SAL sessions. Still, teacher instruction is fairly valued. Although less than 20% indicated that they would like their teacher to tell them what to do during SAL, more than a third (35.1%) generally prefer their teachers to direct their learning. This could be the result of the kind of teacher directed learning they were used to when they studied in China, as according to Table 5b below, less than half the students agreed or strongly agreed that their teachers sometimes gave them the freedom to decide on what to study during their English lessons.

Table 5b. Autonomy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>6. Working independently during the SAL sessions help me decide how I can improve my English.</th>
<th>22. When I studied in China, my teachers sometimes gave me the freedom to decide on what I would like to study during English lessons.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>1 (2.7%)</td>
<td>11 (29.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>7 (18.9%)</td>
<td>8 (21.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>22 (59.5%)</td>
<td>13 (35.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>7 (18.9%)</td>
<td>5 (13.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Despite some one third of the students showing a preference for teacher directed learning, Table 5b shows that close to 80% of the students believe that autonomous learning is beneficial in helping them make decisions regarding how they could improve their English.

The above section presents the students' end of course evaluation of SAL obtained through a questionnaire survey. In the following section, the students' written feedback on SAL is discussed.

7.2.2 Written Feedback

Many of the written comments received were first mentioned during the interview sessions. A common theme that runs through these comments is that most students detected an improvement in their listening. The other common feedback is that each SAL session was too short. Despite this, one student stated that he was extremely pleased with his SAL experience.

Extract 80

G5/S17: I think SAL was useful in helping me improve my language. Though the immediate improvement was limited due to the time, the help was directive. It taught us how to use immense resources in improving us in terms of language. If we have the clear propose, a strong will and good use of resources, we can develop our language levels anywhere.... [Even] without the help of teachers in SAL, we had clearer objectives that [is] how to arrange the time.

One benefit of SAL that was mentioned is that the video CDs available in SAC are without Chinese subtitles. As such, students were forced to pay attention to
the dialogue rather than rely on the subtitles. This, according to the student, helped her improve her conversational skills.

**Extract 81**

G5/S1: *Only in SAC, I could enjoy the American or British movies without Chinese subtitles. It is really good. Thus we had chances to hear the daily conversation of American people or British people. That is important. It can also improve our ability for communication in daily life.*

Compared to regular classes, students take more responsibility and are to a large extent, in control of making decisions concerning their own learning.

**Extract 82**

G5/S2: *From the full name of SAL - Self Access Learning, we can see the difference, compared to regular classes. No teacher asks you to do a certain thing; we find out weak points of our learning by ourselves, conduct the course by ourselves and make adjustment by ourselves. For me, in regular class, I will follow the teacher. However, in SAL, I will judge what is more important and right now what I should do.*

**Extract 83**

G5/S6: *Compared with the regular classes, the most different is who controls what we should do and the pace of the classes.*

**Extract 84**

G6/S11: *The SAL classes are a little different from the regular ones. In other classes, most of the time, the teacher will let you know what you should do, and the students would do the same thing. But in SAL classes, you should decide the aims of your study and think of how to achieve it.*

Furthermore, students feel that there is a wide range of activities to engage in when at SAC compared to being in a classroom situation.
G5/S5: Compared to the regular classes, there is one very distinguished feature of SAL class. That is variety. Unlike the restricted single learning activity in the regular classes, we can do variety of learning activities on SAL class. This is the way SAL class takes [helps me] to improve my English.

G6/S13: Besides, compared with our regular classes, we can do things that we cannot usually do in other class, for example, watch movies, read books, listen to the radio and other things we would like to do.

Being able to focus on an individual's area of weakness is another strength of SAL.

G6/S7: SAL is a useful way in helping me improve my language. It provides a new angle to learn English. At the Self Access Centre, I can ... choose the materials fitting for myself. And I can control the learning speed according to my own condition.

G5/S3: First, because I can focus on something I myself am weak at, so I can use this chance to improve the ability which teachers can not emphasize too much in class .... Compared to my regular classes, this course is more emphasizing the improvement of individuals.

The above student believes that the ability to progress according to an individual's ability is one need which is not possible for teachers to meet in a classroom situation.
Being able to focus on an individual's area of weakness is, according to another student, more effective.

Extract 89

G5/S20: In SAL I can learn by myself. Since all the students are in different level, so learning by myself sometimes is more effective.

Students must exercise self discipline in order to ensure that their time at SAC is not wasted. Some struggled with this area while others were more successful.

Extract 90

G5/S5: Self study requires great ability of self-control. I myself still could not deal with it well....

Extract 91

G6/S6: The least successful learning experience in SAL class is that sometimes I can't control myself. Maybe the movies are too good, and I don't want to lose the chance to see the movie, so I always put movies first and do what I should do such as reading and doing the word journal later.

Extract 92

G5/S8: During these six months, I have learned how to control myself to study, how to behave after classes, I think these are what I (am) most satisfied in NIE.

Extract 93

G5/S10: In SAL course, the most successful thing I did is I know how to learn by myself. In the past, I always could not control myself when no teacher asks me to do work. In this course, I find when I am in SAL class, I will ask myself to learn instead of doing other things which are not related to my study. After several months, I find even in my own room, I can control myself. This ability is very important when study in NTU....
The student in the above extract mentioned that he is capable of transferring the autonomy he developed during SAL sessions to self learning situations outside of SAC. As for the following student, he believed that his positive experience with SAL will spur him on to learn on his own.

**Extract 94**

G5/S15: *Overall, I am very glad that I have such kind of lesson in my life. I enjoy this lesson, because I really learn by myself, and this is the first time, and also it will encourage me to continue self study.*

The above section highlights the positive encounters that students have with SAL. In the following section, the limitations or problems faced by students are discussed.

One limitation of SAL sessions is that students have little opportunities to practise speaking. This shortcoming was also brought up when the students were interviewed.

**Extract 95**

G5/S5: *In contrast, the thing I benefit least from SAL class is speaking. In SAL class, everybody is doing his own work. It requires silence in order to get everybody concentrate, so it is impossible for me to practice speaking. When I read some instruction on speaking, if I cannot carry them out, these instructions are simply no use, for I cannot restrict [force?] myself after class to practice.*

**Extract 96**

G5/S6: *In my experience, [when watching movies] I often felt easy to get the words of them speaking, but missed the meaning. And even when I got the meanings, I would just understand them, but very rarely to use them when I speak. Anyway, watching movies is just an input, but not a*
communication. It is a pity that we have not talking in SAL classes, and we have not many people beside our Chinese students to talk with.

As many students spent their time working on their listening ability through watching videos, they did not have time to work on other skill areas.

**Extract 97**

G5/S2: *Because I spent most of time in SAL practicing listening, so the learning on reading and vocabulary were not so successful.*

**Extract 98**

G6/S7: *Because in most of the class time I just watch movies but ignore the valuable books, I miss much important information given by books.*

A small number of students seemed to face problems in making progress in their writing skill during SAL.

**Extract 99**

G5/S9: *But the least successful experience is my writing. It seems that I cannot improve my writing during the SAL.*

**Extract 100**

G5/S13: *I found that I didn't improve much on writing because I didn't know how to improve my writing in this course.*

Another problem faced by students hinged on the issue of evaluating their own progress.

**Extract 101**

G5/S14: *I do not know whether the activities I take are effective or not. It also because I study by myself, there is no comparison with other classmate.*
Extract 102

G5/S16: And the least successful about my learning experience is testing myself, as I don't see exactly how much I have improved.

The importance of reflection as well as planning each SAL session cannot be overemphasized as the following student testifies.

Extract 103

G6/S8: I didn't think too much before each class. As a result, I wasted some time in class to find out what I should do now and later. In fact, I think plans for the classes are needed and should be well considered. We need aims for our study. After class, we can ask ourselves, which goals I achieved in the last class, I got what [what I achieved] and how I can improve our study in the next class. We shouldn't be blind in our study.

The above section covers the students’ end of course feedback on SAL. The findings and discussion of their comments is summarised below.

7.2.3 Summary of End of course feedback

Self Access Learning is regarded as most beneficial in helping students improve their listening. This could perhaps be a result of most students spending their time on watching movies.

Most students liked SAL sessions because they were free to choose their favourite activities to engage in. In particular, students had a tendency to participate in activities that they could not undertake outside of SAC. One such activity is watching movies since video CDs can only be borrowed at SAC. As a
result of this, few students used their SAL session to complete their homework or work on other skill areas.

Almost all the students indicated that SAL sessions made them take responsibility in the learning of English. They also valued the freedom given to them to decide on the activities that they can engage in. The autonomy that the students developed from SAL is beneficial in helping them make decisions as to how they could improve their English. Despite this, there are still a relatively large number who value teacher instruction, including those who would like their SAL facilitator to guide them. More than a third generally prefer their teachers to direct their learning despite having met with reasonable success with SAL. This could be the result of the teacher-oriented learning they were used to when studying in China. Students must also exercise self discipline in order to ensure that their time at SAC is not wasted.

Two limitations of SAL are that each SAL session is too short and that students have little opportunities to practise speaking.

7.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter showcases three sets of instruments for data collection purposes. The first half of this chapter discusses the students' views of SAL towards the end of course where data were collected through a series of interviews. In order to ensure internal validity, an end of course questionnaire survey was
administered to gather feedback from students as well as a means to triangulate the findings of these interviews. The students were also invited to offer their views on SAL in the form of a written text. A discussion of the results and findings of the end of course questionnaire survey and written feedback is presented in the second half of the chapter.

Compared to the time when they first started SAL, the students generally had a more positive view, appeared to take SAL more seriously and had clearer objectives. Most students like SAL sessions because they are allowed to engage in their favourite activities. The students also tend to participate in activities that they cannot undertake outside of SAC. One such activity is watching movies since video CDs can only be watched at the SAC. As a result of this, few students used their SAL sessions to complete their homework or to work on other skill areas.

SAL is perceived to be fairly effective in helping the students improve their English. Most students claimed they detected a significant improvement in their listening skill. This could perhaps be a result of them spending most of their time on watching movies. For some students, they continued to engage in self learning activities even after class. This could be attributed to the autonomy they developed from SAL.
The students were keen to get help from the SAL facilitator in the areas of goal setting and organisation of their learning. In addition, advice regarding how they could solve learning problems and feedback on their progress are valued. However, SAL facilitators need to be proactive in approaching students to discuss their learning needs as they were often shy to ask for help.

Regarding documenting their learning problems and reflecting on their learning, the students did not favour this as it took too much time. Some students also claimed they have not developed this habit while others would rather spend time practising language skills than engage in reflection. Another group felt that it was unnecessary to pen their thoughts.

Despite their positive experience with SAL, a teacher is still considered necessary as the many skills to be acquired can only be accomplished with the help of a teacher. Furthermore, teachers are expected to provide feedback and advise them on the most appropriate way of learning. This could be the result of the teacher-oriented setting in China that these students are used to.

The drawbacks of SAL include the short duration of each session and that of students have few opportunities to better their speaking skill.

This concludes the discussion and analysis of PRC students’ perception of SAL at the beginning and towards the end of the English bridge course. The next
chapter sums up the entire study by providing valuable insights obtained from this enquiry. Recommendations regarding how to better foster learner autonomy with PRC students will be presented. Suggestions for future research studies will also be discussed.
CHAPTER EIGHT

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH STUDY

This chapter consolidates the entire research study by providing the following information. It begins with a brief review of the purpose and design of the methodology used in this study. This is followed by a summary of the findings, a discussion of the general contributions as well as the limitations of the study. The chapter concludes by recommending how learner autonomy can be better fostered with PRC students through self access learning, followed by suggestions for future research.

8.1 Purpose and Design of study

My interest in promoting learner autonomy was heightened when I was appointed the co-ordinator of Self Access Learning. I became keen to make self access learning a more meaningful and enriching experience for PRC students. An understanding of the Chinese culture of learning reveals that the Chinese equate learning a language with the mastery of grammar and vocabulary. The teacher and text are regarded to be two authoritative sources on which students rely extensively for their learning. If PRC students' orientation towards learning were indeed so, then the development of learner autonomy amongst them could be hindered since they are used to teacher directed learning.
The aim of this study was to find out the extent of receptivity PRC students have towards self access learning and if the development of learner autonomy is valued. It also investigated whether engaging in SAL helped students improve their English and attempted to determine the skill area in which it is most effective in helping students make progress.

As for the research design, an interpretative case study approach was adopted for the following reasons. First, a case study approach was considered to be the most appropriate because this study focuses on a specific phenomenon, that is, PRC students and the Chinese culture of learning. The interaction of significant factors characteristic of a phenomenon is better uncovered using a case study approach where meaning is obtained through interpretation within a context. This complements the interpretive research design where the investigation is basically concerned with meaning and seeks to understand social members' definition of a situation.

Three main types of research instruments were employed for data collection purposes. They were: questionnaire surveys, interviews and reflection log. In order to find out whether students' perception of SAL have changed over the duration of their English bridge course, questionnaire surveys and interviews took place at the start and towards the end of the course, while student kept their reflection log throughout the entire course. Questionnaire surveys were also used for triangulation purpose.
A questionnaire survey enabled the study to obtain straightforward responses on numerous occasions. The first survey, which was administered at the start of the course, was to find out if the students who participated in this study generally display traits relating to that of the Chinese culture of learning as portrayed by Jin and Cortazzi (1998). Following this, the students were interviewed for their initial impression on SAL. The findings of the first set of interviews were triangulated using another questionnaire survey.

While participating in SAL activities over some five months, the students kept a log for accountability purpose as well as to reflect on their learning. Towards the end of the course, the students were interviewed again to see if their views towards SAL have changed over the course of study. An end of course feedback was conducted through the use of a questionnaire as well as getting the students to write a 100-word text. These two instruments also served to triangulate the second set of interview data.

8.2 Summary of findings

It was found that the PRC students who participated in this study generally exhibit traits relating to that of the Chinese culture of learning as portrayed by Jin and Cortazzi (1998).

First, the teacher is respected as an authoritative figure and their instructions are often followed. Second, the teacher is expected to impart knowledge and to
assess as well as provide feedback to students. SAL facilitators are expected to perform these roles as well. Lastly, feedback from teachers over peers is preferred.

As for their role as students, the majority believe that the amount of progress they make in their English learning is dependent on the amount of effort they put in. This resonates with Confucius's teaching that everyone is educable. Success in learning is attributed to hard work and effort. The students are also willing to take responsibility for their self learning. This trait is crucial in order to succeed in self learning.

The students' initial perception of self access learning was generally positive. Despite not having any similar SAL experience in China, many are open to autonomous learning. A strength of SAL is that it allows students with different areas of weaknesses to work according to their ability and pace. Besides this, students claimed to have made improvement in their listening skill through watching videos or listening to songs. This could perhaps be a result of them being exposed to and getting used to 'native' speaker accent in such media.

When at SAC, the students value the liberty they have in engaging in their favourite activities and to focus on their area of weakness. Easy access to suitable learning materials and the variety of resources provided also proved captivating. Moreover, the ability to develop autonomy in learning is regarded as
a relevant and valued skill especially when the students proceed to their undergraduate study.

The students believe that teachers have an important role to play even though they may be able to learn on their own. Teachers are expected to guide students in their learning, provide a good method for them to learn, provide feedback as well as teach them how to obtain knowledge. Teachers are also indispensable since they are more knowledgeable, know what the students need to learn and are able to help them learn English in a systematic manner. When faced with problems, teachers are expected to help their students, not necessarily providing them with solutions but by pointing out their mistakes and having them work out the solutions.

In order to motivate them to work harder during SAL, a handful of students requested that an assessment for self access learning be administered at the end of the course. However, this view is not shared by the majority who are already intrinsically motivated to learn English. Therefore, it is decided that assessment should not be introduced.

Although many students appreciate the autonomy accorded to them during SAL, a few felt lost. As these students may take a longer time to get used to working on their own, it may be necessary for SAL facilitators to suggest activities that they can engage in. They may also need help in setting goals and in the planning
of their learning activities. Another commonly cited problem is that the weekly one hour SAL session is inadequate.

The above summarises the students' initial views of SAL. When they were interviewed again towards the end of their English bridge course, the students claimed that their outlook has generally improved and that they took SAL more seriously compared to the time when they first started SAL at the beginning of the course. Furthermore, SAL sessions were considered a fun way to learn English. Two limitations of SAL are that each SAL session was too short and that students could not practise their speaking at SAC.

The students' views regarding teachers generally remained unchanged. Teachers are necessary to guide students in their language learning. A reason for this is that there are many skills to be acquired and students would not be able to master these skills through self learning. Another reason is that teachers can advise students on the 'best' method to learn and provide feedback on their learning.

As for their SAL facilitator, the students would like to receive help in organising their learning as well as setting goals. Advice on how they could solve learning problems and their progress are also appreciated. SAL facilitators need to be proactive in approaching the students to discuss their learning needs since students claimed that they were often too shy to ask for help. The students were
also divided over whether the SAL facilitator should organize some class activity. From their responses, it appears that some have yet to get used to the idea of self learning.

In general, SAL is perceived as moderately effective in helping the students improve their English. One reason is the limited time of each SAL session. Despite this, most students claimed they detected a significant improvement in their listening skill. For some students, they continued to engage in self learning activities after class.

The students lacked enthusiasm in documenting their learning problems and reflecting on their learning. Some claimed not to have developed this habit while others would rather spend time practising language skills as journal writing required too much effort. Another group felt that it was unnecessary to pen their thoughts, while some felt that reflection alone does not in any way help them solve their learning problems.

8.2.1 Answers to Research Questions

This section provides responses to the research questions that were raised at the beginning of the study. To reiterate the research questions are:

1. Do the PRC students who participate in the study find SAL sessions beneficial in helping them improve their English? If so, in which area(s)?

2. Do they report that becoming an autonomous learner is valuable to them?
3. Is the Chinese culture of learning a barrier in encouraging them to become more autonomous in their learning of English?

Almost all the PRC scholars who participated in the study reported that SAL sessions helped them improve their listening skills. This is because many students spent their time during SAL watching movies. Close to two-thirds of the students believed that their speaking and reading skills improved as a result of SAL sessions while only one-third attributed SAL sessions in helping them improve their writing skills.

Becoming an autonomous learner is a skill that students value as the learning context in China is very much teacher-directed. The ability to learn autonomously is a skill which is perceived to be essential for students when they are studying for their degree. Learning is also regarded as a life long process where learners have to depend on themselves for their own development. These students also believe that by becoming autonomous learners, they were empowered to make decisions about their learning and to improve on their areas of weakness.

Based on the findings, the Chinese culture of learning does not seem to hinder efforts devoted in encouraging PRC students to become more autonomous in their learning of English. The students are generally receptive to the idea and many welcome SAL sessions as they were in direct control of their own learning. Furthermore, SAL sessions gave students a break from the routine of classroom
teaching. Although a few students felt lost initially, others claimed they took SAL sessions more seriously and became more focused in their own learning as they got used to the concept of self learning when they were interviewed again towards the end of the English bridge course.

The main findings and responses to the research questions of this study were summarized and provided above. In the next section, the general contributions of this research study are discussed.

8.3 General Contributions of the Study

The field of learner autonomy is a relatively new and uncharted territory in Singapore. Consequently, few research studies in this area have been completed. Even rarer is a systematic study which spans a period of some six months. More specifically, this case study approach has enabled me to evaluate my own practice and fine tune the manner in which SAL is run. It also serves as a resource which my colleagues can draw upon in order to improve their own practice. More importantly, this study adds on to the database of cases which can serve to improve pre- and in-service courses in the area of learner autonomy as more emphasis is placed on promoting independent learning in Singapore schools.

At this juncture, it is appropriate to reiterate that the results of this study relate to this specific group of PRC scholars who participated in the study. Despite
displaying learner traits relating to that of the Chinese culture of learning, these students are generally receptive to SAL and value the opportunities offered to help them foster learner autonomy. This suggests that cultures of learning exert much less influence on the way students learn than is often believed. In reality, the students did not seem to have much difficulty adapting to a novel way of learning language. Gieve and Clark (2005) also came to a similar conclusion in their study, which required Chinese undergraduates studying English language in the UK to engage in self-directed learning.

... we suggest that ...an ethnically based notion of culture may be less powerful than commonly assumed compared to local, situationally based cultures of learning, which may, given the right conditions, be created or adopted relatively quickly.

Gieve and Clark (2005: 274)

This underscores the point that it is perhaps of greater consequence to understand individual learner needs and provide diverse instruction to meet the needs of these individuals, rather than stereotyping them based on their learning culture or the culture that they originate from.

This case study also exemplifies that students tend to engage in their favourite activity rather than participate in those that would help them improve their language problems. As a result of this, students mostly watched movies during SAL sessions and neglected working on other skill areas such as reading, speaking and writing.
Although students recognize the importance of reflecting on their learning, few were intrinsically motivated to note their learning problems and attempt solving them. As such, some form of rewards must be in place in order to help them form a habit of reflection on their self learning.

This study has also to some extent, uncovered students' perceptions and beliefs about language learning, particularly in the area of learner autonomy. Providing learners with opportunities to examine, evaluate and articulate their beliefs helps expand their metacognitive knowledge. This enables them to trial different strategies in language learning in their attempt towards becoming autonomous learners.

8.4 Limitations of the study
One acknowledged limitation of the present study is the small sample size. As such, no claims are made in that the findings could be generalized and therefore relevant to all PRC students. Limitations also existed in the triangulation of data. Although the data collected were triangulated through both quantitative and qualitative means, they originate from the students themselves. It would perhaps enhance the validity of the study if data for triangulation were derived from other sources such as from other SAL facilitators. The next limitation is that the students were given fully autonomy in deciding on the kinds of activities to engage in during SAL. While that may be the true spirit of SAL, it may be
necessary to advise students not to only engage in their favourite activities but more importantly, in those that could help them improve their language problems.

8.5 Recommendations

Based on the findings and the discussion of the limitations of this study, the following recommendations are suggested to improve the way SAL sessions are conducted.

➢ As SAL is a relatively new concept to students, the orientation that students undergo in preparation for SAL may be inadequate for a few. As such, students must be encouraged to voice their apprehensions regarding SAL. Facilitators must be sensitive and observant, and be ready to provide as much assistance to students.

➢ At the initial stage of SAL, students should not be given complete autonomy in their selection of activities to engage in during SAL sessions. Until such time when students prove that they are responsible in taking charge of their learning that they be allowed to choose the kinds of activities to participate in.

➢ Some form of structured class or group activity could be organized occasionally for those who prefer this mode of learning.

➢ Subject to availability of staff and funding, each SAL session would be increased to two hours per week. If this were not possible, then two hour biweekly SAL sessions would be offered to students.
Formal discussion and feedback regarding SAL ought to be organized periodically outside of SAL sessions so as to allow students to articulate any concerns or ideas they have for improving the way SAL is run.

Time has to be set aside to allow students to receive feedback on their learning, based on their journal entries which document their learning problems. This should provide students with sufficient motivation to reflect on their learning. In addition, the students could also be graded for their effort in keeping their learning journal so as to further spur them on to faithfully reflect on their learning.

Opportunities for student sharing could be organized so as to enable those who find particular useful strategies in their SAL to communicate these ideas to their peers.

8.6 Further Research

1. The interpretative case study approach adopted resulted in a small sample size used in the study. The same study could be replicated with a larger sample involving the entire cohort of SM3 scholars.

2. Unlike most Self Access centres where students are referred by their teachers, all PRC scholars at NIE are expected to attend the weekly SAL session. A potentially interesting piece of research is that of studying whether students of various proficiency levels differ in the way they view and handle autonomous learning.
3. The study could also be replicated by involving PRC students studying in China and in other parts of the world. This is because it is not known if factors such as the setting and country in which the instruction takes place affect students' perception of SAL and their willingness to foster autonomy. A comparison could then be made to find out if the learning context bears influence on the development of learner autonomy.

4. As noted in the Introduction, attempts are being made to promote creative thinking and independent learning amongst students in Singapore. As such, the study could also be conducted with Singapore students, at various levels: primary, secondary and pre-university. Similarly, a comparison could be made with students from different streams, for example, between Express and Normal streams students at the secondary level, to see if SAL is more beneficial to a particular group in terms of improving their language proficiency.

8.7 Closing Remarks

The study originated with issues pertaining to fostering learner autonomy among PRC scholars studying in Singapore. The data collected were insightful in that they provided an overview on their beliefs, preferences and idiosyncrasies when attempts were made to help PRC students develop learner autonomy. Overall, the aim of the study has been achieved and the findings have provided further understanding regarding how SAL can be better run to help students foster learner autonomy.
Dear Student

I am conducting a research study and will like to invite you to participate in the study.

I interested to find out your views about learning English, especially on the role of the teacher and self access learning. This feedback is important as it will enable NIE staff to fine tune the courses in order to better meet the needs of PRC students. As students, you will also benefit from participating in this research study as you will be able to make the best use of your time when you engage in independent learning.

The period of study will be the entire duration of your English bridging course. During this time, you will be required to answer two questionnaires. In addition, you will have to keep a weekly Self Access Learning (SAL) log. These documents help you to monitor and reflect on your participation in SAL sessions. You will also be interviewed twice; at the beginning and at the end of the course. I will also need your pre- and post-test scores as well as your test/examination grades. You are welcome to discuss with me any of these issues during the course of your study.

Your views and test/examination scores will be kept confidential and your identity anonymous. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, up to the point before the data is transcribed or analysed.

If you agree to participate in this study, please write your full name, date and sign below. Thank you.

Christian Chia
Lecturer
NIE
English Language & Literature Academic Group
Tel: 6790 3482

Name: ___________________________________ Date: __________

Signature: ___________________________________
Appendix 2

CRPP ethics clearance

Basic principles

Respect for persons, that persons should be treated as autonomous individuals, and that persons of diminished autonomy are entitled to protection;

Beneficence, that is, that there is an over-riding obligation to maximise possible benefits and minimise possible harms. Researchers exercise beneficence in assessing the risks of harm and potential benefits to participants, in being sensitive to the rights and interests of people involved in their research, and in reflecting on the social and cultural implications of their work; and

Justice, that is, that the question of who ought to receive the benefit of research and bear its burdens should be explicitly addressed.

Considerations in data collection

1. Participants cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects
2. Responses will not place the participants at risk of professional liability or be damaging to the participants’ financial standing, employability or reputation
3. No confidential data will be used for personal advantage or that of a third party

Informed consent

4. Consent to participate in the research has been given freely and without coercion
5. Subjects have the capacity to understand the research project
6. Subjects have been given information sheets that are understandable
7. Likely benefits of the research project itself have been explained to potential subjects
8. Risks and benefits of the research project have been explained to potential subjects
9. Consent of the research subject has not been influenced by financial inducement, improper pressure or any form of misrepresentation
10. Research subject has been assured s/he may withdraw at any time from the research without loss of benefit or penalty
11. Special care has been taken if subjects are unable to consent for themselves

Responsibilities to participants

12. Participants will not be subject to any procedure which is reasonably likely to cause physical harm, psychological harm, or enduring educational disadvantage
13. Participants will be fully informed of the results at the conclusion of the study
14. The full benefits of the intervention will be made available to all participants as part of the outcome of the comparison of programs
Appendix 3

Dear Student

I am interested to find out about your views in learning English. In particular, I would like to know your views on the role of the teacher. This feedback is important as it will enable your teachers to plan lessons to better suit your needs.

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Your answer depends on your point of view and I am interested in what you think.

The questionnaire consists of two parts. Please read the instructions at the beginning of each part and concentrate on answering each question as truthfully as you can.

You do not need to write your name on the questionnaire when completing it. Your views will be kept confidential and your identity anonymous. You are welcome to discuss any of these issues after you have completed it.

If you agree to participate in this survey, please write your full name, date and sign below. Thank you.

Christian Chia
Tel: 790 3482

Name: ____________________________ Date: __________

Signature: __________________________
Instructions: After each statement, please tick only one option that best describes you.

The options are:

SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; N=Neutral; D=Disagree; SD= Strongly Disagree

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. In class, I see the teacher as someone in charge.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. In class, I usually obey my teacher’s instructions.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I believe that the teacher is responsible for imparting knowledge to me rather than having to discover it myself.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I prefer to get feedback (comments) on my work from my English teacher than from my group members.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I expect my English teacher (rather than myself) to be responsible for assessing how much I have learnt.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I believe that the amount of progress I make in my English depends on me.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I believe that the amount of progress I make in my English depends on my teacher.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I believe that my English teacher’s feedback (comments) on my language learning is most helpful.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I believe that my SAL teacher is responsible for imparting knowledge to me.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I believe that my SAL teacher should only be guiding me in my language learning.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I believe that I <strong>have</strong> to be responsible for my own learning during SAL sessions.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I am willing to take responsibility for my own learning during SAL sessions.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I believe that I <strong>have</strong> to take responsibility in assessing my progress for self access learning.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I am willing to take responsibility in assessing my progress for self access learning.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
15. I am confident that I have the **ability** to assess my progress.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

16. I believe that working independently during SAL sessions helps me decide on how I can improve my English when I study on my own.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Please write any additional comments on the role of the teacher in general:

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

Please write any additional comments on the role of the SAL teacher:

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

Thank you for your participation
Appendix 4

SAL End of course feedback

Instructions: *After each statement, please bold the option that best describes you.*

For eg. If you think that the option for the following statement is Strongly Agree, then bold SA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SAL sessions help me to improve my English <strong>pronunciation.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; N=Neutral; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Self Access Learning (SAL) sessions help me to improve my English <strong>reading</strong> skill.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Self Access Learning (SAL) sessions help me to improve my English <strong>writing</strong> skill.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Self Access Learning (SAL) sessions help me to improve my English <strong>listening</strong> skill.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Self Access Learning (SAL) sessions help me to improve my English <strong>speaking</strong> skill.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. SAL sessions make me take responsibility in learning English.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Working independently during SAL sessions help me decide how I can improve my English when I study on my own.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I make full use of my time to improve my English during SAL sessions.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I like SAL sessions because they give me a break from the regular classes.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I like SAL sessions because the teacher gives me the freedom to decide what to do to improve my English.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I dislike SAL sessions.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. I prefer the teacher to tell me what do during SAL sessions.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Most of the time, I use the computer during SAL sessions.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Most of the time, I use the tape recorder to listen to cassettes during SAL sessions.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
14. Most of the time, I watch videos during SAL sessions.  
SA  A  N  D  SD

15. Most of the time, I listen to music CDs during SAL sessions.  
SA  A  N  D  SD

16. Most of the time, I read the books from the Self Access Centre during SAL sessions.  
SA  A  N  D  SD

17. I read the books I borrowed from the Self Access Centre outside of SAL sessions.  
SA  A  N  D  SD

18. I borrow books from the Self Access Centre.  
SA  A  N  D  SD

19. I access (go to) different websites to improve my English SAL sessions.  
SA  A  N  D  SD

20. I access (go to) different websites to read the news during SAL sessions.  
SA  A  N  D  SD

21. I use the time to complete my homework during SAL sessions.  
SA  A  N  D  SD

22. When I studied in China, my teachers sometimes gave me the freedom to decide on what I would like to study during English lessons.  
SA  A  N  D  SD

23. I generally prefer my teachers to tell me what to do in order to improve my English.  
SA  A  N  D  SD

Please write any additional comments here:

Thank you for your participation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Group</th>
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**Learning Goal(s) for the week**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities Engaged In</th>
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**Problems Faced**

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<tr>
<td>Action Taken To Remedy Problems</td>
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<td>Evaluation of learning and materials</td>
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<td>Learning Goal(s) for the following week</td>
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Semi structured Interview Session 1:

1. Have you used a self access centre for language learning before? If yes, where and how long ago?

2. How did you feel when you first began working in the SAC?

3. Why do you think you are asked to work in the SAC? Or What do you think is the purpose for you to work in the SAC?

4. Do you think it is necessary to have a teacher to guide you in order for you to learn language? Why? Why not?

5. Do you think that working in the self access centre will help you improve your language? If so, which areas do you think it will be most beneficial? If not, why?

6. Having worked in the SAC for a few weeks, do you feel motivated when you have to work in the SAC? Why? Why not?

7. Were you able to use the activities that you worked on in SAC in your other classes and outside of class?

8. Do you think you will become a more independent learner as a result of working in the SAC?

9. Are you satisfied with your own progress at the SAC so far? If so, why? If not, what areas will you want to improve upon?

10. If SAL sessions were not made compulsory, would you still come to the SAC? Why, why not?

11. During SAL sessions, you have to decide on what activities to work on. How do you feel about this? Was it difficult to decide? How did you go about deciding what to activities to engage in?

12. What are your views on learning by yourself rather than from a teacher?

13. Is there anything you want to ask me concerning your work in the SAC?
Dear Student

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study.

I have completed the analysis of our first interview and will very much appreciate your feedback on my findings. This feedback is important as it will enable me to reflect your views more accurately.

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Your answer depends on your point of view and I am interested in what you think.

Please read the instructions at the beginning and concentrate on answering each question as truthfully as you can.

You do not need to write your name on the questionnaire when completing it. Your views will be kept confidential and your identity anonymous. You are welcome to discuss any of these issues after you have completed it.

Christian Chia
Tel: 790 3482
The following statements are views expressed by you when you were interviewed.

Instructions: After each statement, please circle only one option that best describes you.

The options are: **SA=**Strongly Agree; **A=**Agree; **N=**Neutral; **D=**Disagree; **SD=**Strongly Disagree

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<tr>
<td>1. In China, my teacher used to tell me what to do during self study sessions.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. I like the freedom to choose what I can do during SAL sessions.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>3. In order to benefit from SAL sessions, I need to plan my activities beforehand.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
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<td>4. Watching movies or listening to music during SAL sessions for relaxation is not an effective way of improving English.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
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<td>5. Learning how (the method) to get knowledge from the teacher is more important than just getting knowledge.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
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<td>6. I can practise different skills (for example: reading, writing, listening etc) during SAL sessions.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>7. SAL sessions make me interested in studying English.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. SAL sessions make me confident in studying English.</td>
<td>SA</td>
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<td>9. SAL sessions prepare me for my study at NTU/NUS.</td>
<td>SA</td>
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<td>10. By going for SAL sessions, I can learn to study on my own.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. By going for SAL sessions, I can learn to study English on my own.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. The activities that I do during SAL sessions help me improve my English.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>13. I need to be tested regularly so that I will know if I have improved in my English.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>14. I need my teacher to give me feedback (comments on my progress) regularly so that I will know if I have improved in my English.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. I do not like examinations (those that take place in lecture theatres [LTs]).</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. I do not like tests (those that take place in class).</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>N</td>
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Is SAL an effective way of learning English? Yes/No? Why?

Please write any additional comments here:

Thank you for your participation
Appendix 8

Semi structured Interview Session 2:

1. You have SAL sessions for about 5 months now. What are your views about SAL now compared to the time when you first started?

2. Have your views on the role of the teacher changed as a result of SAL sessions? Do you believe it is still necessary to have a teacher for you to learn language?

3. How relevant/effective do you think the SAC is in helping you improve your language learning? Which areas do you find it to be most beneficial? If not, why?

4. On the whole, were you motivated when you worked in the SAC? Why? Why not?

5. What are the activities you worked on most during SAL? Why? Did you try other resources such as Renata's corner?

6. Have you become a more independent learner as a result of working in the SAC?

7. What do you do when you meet with problems when engaging in self access learning? For eg, when you read something that you don't understand or when you have difficulty with some grammar item?

8. I noticed that you have not written much in your reflection log especially in the area where I asked you to note down the problems you faced and the actions you took to try to solve the problems. Why?

9. How much guidance or help would you like your teacher to provide you during self access sessions/regular classes? Why?

10. Did you gauge your own learning? Why/why not?

11. How much feedback would you like your teacher to give you in SAL/regular classes? Why?

12. Have SAL sessions benefited you in other ways? Why/why not?

13. Is there anything you want to ask me concerning your work in the SAC?
Appendix 9

Grp5/1/17-20 Interview  Interview Date: 18/2/04

TR: Has anyone of you used a SAC before you came to Singapore? Do you have a similar class like SAL in China?

SS: No.

TR: So how do you feel about your initial sessions of SAL sessions, after having four to five weeks of SAL classes?

S18: The time is not enough and we can't learn much from the class.

TR: Why?

S18: Because most of us just went to the class on purpose of get relaxed and

S20: Some us lar but some of us taking the SAL as self study, study by ourselves.

S19: Sometimes I want to learn something but I find the time is too short. If I read an article then when time is over I haven't finish it. Time is too short.

TR: You can continue after class and read it in your hostel?

S19: I want to improve my spoken English but there is no method in that class to speak.

TR: You can only do pronunciation exercise in SAL not speak.

S17: I feel the resources are not enough, only have VCDs and books and websites. I think we can go to websites after SAL too.

Teacher clarifies point with student.

TR: What additional resources should we have?

S17: Some pronunciation books.

TR: But that you have it in your AOC class isn't it?

S17: Oh

TR: And they are also in BB there is a pronunciation chart.
S19: I think we should add some short TV plays because the VCDs and CD are too long and time is too short so some short plays, English jokes or something else.

TR: Maybe some short programmes like Friends. Maybe you can watch movies over two sessions. What do you think is the purpose of asking you to work in SAC?

S19: Purpose is to improve our English.

S20: Find your own way to study English.

S18: Give you specific time to improve your weakness.

S17: Develop the ability to find the results to study.

TR: Do you think that working in the SAC is an effective way to help you improve your English?

S19: Yes but I think that I should prepare before the class. If I don’t prepare before I go into class in a hurry I will nearly do nothing.

S18: I don’t think it’s very effective because for a language study you must use a large piece of time, much time to indulge in it and the effects can be very obvious. If the time is very little you will forget what you have studied.

S20: Also it is once a week so it won’t make more development.

S17: I think the time is limited. We can’t much progress.

TR: But maybe this is the only beginning. You may see some improvement at the end of the course. You also need to spend some time outside class. Remember I suggested some activities?

S18: I think we should think about how we can use this class to improve our English.

TR: Maybe in this class you can watch a certain part of the video and the discussion can take place after the class. Do you feel motivated to go to SAL session?

S20: You mean whether you like it.

S19: I like it but sometimes I always wonder what should I do in the class, maybe because I didn’t prepare it enough. I think I should.

S18: I think I look forward because I feel not very tense. Because in other courses such as oral, writing, read, I feel that I have something I must do and in SAL I always find I can do what I want to do. You can enlarge your eyesight in this class.
S17: I think I like this class more than others. Because it's more relaxed but I think this class can give us less progress than other class.

S20: I think I like SAL because during a week's study I can make it more clear on the Internet or do some and join the work you have done the whole week together and make you much more clear and do some preparation or make some aim for next week.

TR: So far have you been in your best when you go for SAL?

S18: 90%; S19/20: 80%; S17: 75%

S18: Sometimes they, you just want to do something for relax purpose. For me I always I can I have a strong discipline I can I have always in mind that I should do something to improve my English from all aspect. I think this is benefit good because it can enlarge my eyesight and give me more knowledge about English.

S20: I think before class I am determined to do more work in SAL but while I am in class I find I can't control myself watching movie. I think I (should) improve.

S19: I think I should prepare more before the class and ?

S17: Sometimes before class I don't know what I will do exactly in the class and in this instance I push for the Internet, VCD or the books. I think the lack of purpose make me not make me pay 100%.

TR: You said you have a lack of purpose but I've given you this learning plan. Do you think it's helpful to plan your activities?

S18: I think so because it's just like a road sign it's what you will do the direction of the study.

S19: I think I should plan it more clearly. When I write something on this plan, I do it roughly. I wouldn't know what to do exactly.

S20: I think it lists our goals all the skills we need to improve. We just select which we need so it's helpful for us to think and if we don't have this kind of paper we may be puzzled and can't find the way.

S17: I think it indicates a general direction of your English learning. The seven class you can see, which is your weakest. Whether it can tell exactly you can interest in just can tell you the general direction of which class you should do well.

TR: Was it difficult to just concentrate on three or four areas?

S19: Yes because I think every part is (important).
TR: So how did you select?

S19: (Based on) which is the weakest one.

SS: Not difficult to select.

TR: Why?

S18: First you know which is your weakest point. Second you might evaluate the seven ability point you want to improve in SAL according to the possibility you can achieve it. For example such as speaking. This possibility for example I think it's very hard to achieve in SAL class so some of it is very easy to achieve such as listening reading and vocabulary. I choose the three because it's very easy for you to realise it.

S17: I think in fact our weak point we also I think that which part is most important when we enter NTU to study. I think listening and reading and speaking are the most important so I chose them.

TR: Anything to add? I have also given you this weekly log for you think about what you want to do in SAL.

S19: Sometimes I didn’t think it careful so I just write down some words and in the next class I will do something else not according to the goals. So I think I should prepare enough.

TR: Is this helpful in terms of listing the problems and how you went about solving the problems. It doesn't mean that you have to be successful in solving the problems. What I am more interested in is how you went about trying to solve them.

S19: List all the action taken in class?

TR: No can be outside of class. The action taken to try to solve the problem. Is this list helpful?

S19: If you think about it carefully. You must treated practically, more seriously, not just relax your mind but improve your English so if you treat it more seriously it's useful.

S18: Not look (regard) it as homework some task you must complete.

S19: Because I heard some students say they went to class just for fun. After the class they write it carelessly.

TR: Since we make you go for SAL, do you think this will make you become more independent in your learning of English?

S17: I think it can be. Because in the SAL, there are many videos or audio resources I can learn and some materials that I know from the SAL class I can
use them outside class. Many I didn't know before so I think it can enlarge your eyesight enrich your English experience.

S20: I think it's part of. You know generally our class is taught by teachers and this SAL we taught by ourselves. Just as I said before it's just to form your own way to study. It will also help you in your further study in the university.

S19: Compared to the other classes I think this is more independent. You can choose the degree can study not just listen to teacher not just what the teacher asks you to do. You can do what you like and plan what by yourself.

S18: For me I think independent study is a very essential ability for students to study everything in every discipline. It's not obvious to for more independent study in this class actually because I always want to study independently. So maybe for me it's not.

TR: So you have been quite an independently learner.

S18: Maybe it's my own feeling.

TR: Do you think this is an important skill; the ability to study on your own?

S18: Because you shouldn't be always get by someone. You should find something by yourself it's a initial (initiative) you have your own thinking and initiate it from your mind and creative thinking can make you find many findings. This is very important for people to know more about knowledge.

S19: Most times I'm alone. So the ability to study independently is very important. Because most time, the time out of class is very enough very much time (a lot of time) to do things by yourself. So this ability is very important.

S20: I think in your own life you should find your own way to study because you must study for all your life so. Nobody will help you always so you need to help yourself. Whether it is in your NTU study or in your job you need to find a study method which is very suitable for you. That is very helpful more than the teacher.

S17: In most time of the university, you have to study by yourself because the class time is limited. You have to do your homework and do your own studying independently. So this skill is very essential for people.

TR: Such you can study independently, do you think you can learn language on your own?

S17: I think you can because when people learn language the most important thing is use. We must use it as long as in every day of our life. It means that we must communicate with other people. If it's just you one people listening to radio and speaking to yourself it's no use. You must improve your language level in communicating with other people.
S19: I think class is necessary because without the class for me I can't find a place where so many people like to speak English with me. Outside the classroom I nearly have no chance to speak English so I think mostly for spoken and listening it (class) is very important.

S18: I think for the beginner junior English learner you should get under some instruction from the native speaker or other people who mastered English. When you become when your level is escalated to certain height you must learn to study by yourself and the most important thing as 17 says is to communicate with others not instead of studying grammar or something.

S20: I think the independence we mean is not just simple learn by yourself. We mean that under the teacher's help or the teacher's help and other's help we can learn something by ourselves also learn something by ourselves. This is just a skill and sometimes means learn more actively.

TR: What kind of role do you see the teacher play in helping you learn English?

S17: Instructor. He told you what skill you should master and told you the way master this skill and I think the most important thing is that under the teacher's instruction the student thought about it, thought about the instruction and do it with his heart and soul.

S20: I think the teacher is a guide for us and sometimes you go to the wrong of study and the teacher just us the direction and so they make us come back to the right way.

S18: I agree with 20.

S19: I think the teacher should give us less homework.

TR: I'm asking you about the role of teacher, not more or less homework.

S19: Then I have nothing to add.

TR: Do you think a teacher is necessary?

S20: Yah/ 19: Of course.

TR: Because now you are still basic learner but like number 18 says if you reach a high level then you can learn independently. You think so? Number 18 thinks so what about the rest?

S20: If your level is higher than teacher.

TR: Not higher than the teacher but maybe you are no longer at the beginner's level, maybe at intermediate or advanced level.

S20: Because the teacher knows more than you.
TR: You think so?

S20: I think sometimes always it the teacher has learnt the language for many years, they know the more suitable way to learn. Just follow his instruction it's good for you.

S19: I think after we have reached a certain level teacher is not necessary. Because for example like Chinese, when you have mastered enough words you can learn it by yourself.

S17: I think it depends on the purpose of your learning English. If you just want to communicate and want to understand (what are views says)? understanding lecture is enough if you are advanced learner. But if you want to do some special things which is language the teacher is very important.

S20: I think if even you have developed a lot you can consider the teacher as a friend of you and you can discuss together it will make development.

TR: If SAL becomes optional will you still come?

S19: I will come because after that we have another class. If it is the last class I will want to go back.

S20: Because the materials in the SAL is suitable for us. If you go to the library you need to find which is fit for you. I think it's a waste of time.

S17: I think you can’t learn much if you stay in hostel than in SAL class so I will come.

S18: I will come because there are many resources you can’t get from elsewhere as well such as DVDs and VCDs. If you don’t have many money you can’t get it. You can have the opportunity to see some classic movie or listen to some beautiful songs and at the same time improve your English. It's very good

TR: How do you feel when you go for SAL class? Relaxing?
SS: Yes.

TR: Enjoyable?
SS: Yes

TR: Is it a waste of time?
SS: No.

S18: At first actually I thought it's just relax and I don't have any purpose. After one or two times I found that especially you asked us to fill in the log I found that I should do something to improve my English because my English is still
very poor, I just can't waste time. If you go back to your hostel, you just sleep and do something useful (useless) I think it's a waste of time.

TR: Any further comments about SAL, learning plan or log sheet?

S20: I think this page (page 2 of reflection log) is not very useful for us. It just gives us some choices it didn't give us detail of our work. I think if we can write some weakness ourselves but we don't need?

Teacher explains the rationale for the design of page 2 of the reflection sheet.

S20: Sometimes it's hard to choose.

S19: I am not sure this one or this one.

TR: You have to decide.

S17: I think if teacher can give us some instruction before the class. Divide the students into so some groups and they do the same thing and after class we can have a discussion or a review and then our time can make more use.

S17: I think just give instructions.

S18: Just advise.

Teacher explains rationale why students are given freedom in SAL.

TR: If there is a test/exam for SAL, will that make you work harder?

S17: Yes. SS18-20: No.

S17: I feel that with exam we must work harder than before.

TR: So you need exams to make you work harder.

S17: We already have exam in the mid and final terms. So don't need to add an exam just to remind us that in the mid term or final there will be exam.

S19: No because we aren't primary school students. We can do a lot of things on ourselves.

S19: If you add a test after SAL we will get bored. When we get bored our class we won't want study it carefully. And put in less effort into it.

S20: Because we have studied exams in China for almost twelve years I think we need a change in our mind. If you test will make us more bored I think the SAL will not work.

S18: In fact I believe that no matter what the class is interesting or not if it's related to examination I will hate it because from when we went into primary
school until we pass through the college entrance examination we have thousands of examination and we all hate it. Maybe it’s examination phobia.

TR: Even though you hate exams, do you think it is necessary to make you study harder? Or you don’t need exams to push you? Do you need the pressure from exams?

S20: We need it but please don’t give to us too much. If you give us too many tests it makes us bored and we don’t have the interesting in study. The class will not be so active, ? less and less?

S19: I think we need pressure but not the pressure of exams?

TR: So how to push you how to give you pressure?

S19: I think there are many pressures. When I speak outside with a Singaporean I can’t understand them and they can’t understand me. So I think just like this there are so many other problems so I think I always think about it then the pressure will come. Because I will enter NTU to study engineering I afraid of the misunderstanding of the teacher and me so I think I should study it ?.

S18: I think proper pressure is necessary. I think the pressure should be given by yourself not teacher and you must have more responsibility to yourself and you must know that you come to a class not just for fun. You must learn something. I think the teacher should tell the students to be responsible to themselves.

S17: I agree with 19. We need pressure but not come from test. We need more dignity and motive to study or from outside.

TR: Not just studying for exams but you want to improve your English.

S18: Actually I saw examples of successful English learner who study English by themselves without a teacher. And I always also heard that some students have very good teacher or they live in English speaking country and their English is no not good. It’s up to yourself.
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