EVALUATION AND DIAGNOSIS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE SELF ACCESS CENTRE IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KUCHING – SAMARAHAN

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SAL  =  Self-Access Learning
SAC  =  Self-Access Centre
CDC  =  Curriculum Development Centre
ABSTRACT

Evaluation and diagnosis of the English Language Self-Access Centre in the primary schools in Kuching-Samarahan

Evelyn Ng Chiew Yew

The study aims to evaluate and diagnose the SAC in the primary schools in the Kuching-Samarahan Division. This study is conducted on 10 primary schools. Two instruments were used. A forty-two items questionnaire was administered to 35 SAC primary school teachers. A semi-structured interview was conducted on 20 SAC primary school teachers from the 10 schools. The findings showed that several SAC in the Kuching-Samarahan Division were dormant due to no proper learner training given to the pupils, lack of teacher training given to the English teachers, inaccessibility of materials and facilities by pupils at their own free time as well as poor management of the SAC. The study also recommends a few suggestions on how the SAC could be carried out and managed so that the centre can be improved.
Abstrak

Evaluation and Diagnosis of the English Language Self-Access Centre in the primary schools in Kuching-Samarahan

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This study focuses on an evaluation and diagnosis of the English Language Self-access Centre (SAC) in the primary schools in Kuching-Samarahan. This chapter will discuss background to the study, statement of problem, purpose of study, research objectives, research questions, significance of research, scope of study, limitations of study and definition of terms.

1.1 Background of study

Malaysia aimed to achieve Vision 2020 and become a developed country. In line with this, the Education Ministry is trying to inculcate the concept of lifelong education based on the National Philosophy of Education. As part of the education Ministry’s effort to encourage students to become autonomous learners, the Self-Access Centre (SAC) programme has been implemented in “153 primary schools in Malaysia since 1990.” (Pusat Perkembangan Kurikulum, Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia 1991, p. 3)

The strategy used in self-access learning aimed to train learners to be autonomous and take responsibility of one’s own learning so that they can become life-long learners. The SAC provides a wide choice of materials for learners of different abilities in the English Language. Learners will benefit from going to the SAC because they get to learn and practice the English language that covers all the four skills of listening, speaking, reading
and writing. They can learn at their own pace in a tension-free learning environment with the assistance of the SAC teachers.

However, initial discussions with teachers-in-charge of the SAC commented that though SAC is carried initially, it has now being dormant for some time.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to find out whether SAC has failed and the reasons behind it being dormant.

1.2 Statement of problem

Sara M. Cotterall, (1996) in a report for the English Language Institute, Victoria University of Wellington on "Towards an effective Self-Access Centre" mentioned that "Self-Access Centres in many institutions in Hong Kong, Singapore, Ireland and France, Self-Access Centres have enjoyed growing popularities due to the fact that these institutions are successful in improving the English language proficiency of the learners and made them Independent learners." However, in Malaysia the issue of to what extent the SAC is being utilised and how successful its implementation in schools to promote the learning of English is not known. Furthermore, the Malaysian Education Department and Curriculum Development Centre (Sarawak) had put in so much effort and fund since its implementation in the primary schools in Sarawak in 1994. Various SAC courses and training and workshops were given to primary school teachers in Sarawak from 1994 till 1998. From the training given, the SAC teachers are to train other English teachers in their schools and implement the SAL programme in their respective schools.
The researcher is interested to find out:

- The implementation of SAC in Kuching-Samarahan primary schools
- If the SAC in Kuching-Samarahan primary schools met Cotterall’s criteria of a good SAC.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study aims to:

- identify the implementation of SAC in Kuching-Samarahan and the problems encountered.
- find out if the criteria of good SAC are being achieved and what they are.
- find out reasons for criteria not being achieved.

1.4 Research questions

With regard to the objectives of the research, 4 questions are formulated to guide the research.

- Are the criteria being met?
- To what extent is it successful in the primary schools in Kuching-Samarahan?
- How is it being implemented?
- What are the problems in its implementation?
1.5 **Significance of the study**

The study is significant in the manner that it provides:

- Documented evidence to Curriculum Development Centre (Kuching), Ministry of Education on the implementation of the SAC among primary schools in Kuching-Samarahan.
- Propose ways to improve the SAC among primary schools in Kuching-Samarahan

1.6 **Limitations of the study**

Due to time constraints, it is not possible to carry out a study to cover more schools in the other divisions. Therefore, this study is not representative of all the SAC in Malaysia.

1.7 **Definition of terms**

The following key terms in this study are identified:

**Evaluation:**

"To find out or form an idea of the value of something."


Evaluation in this context of study serves to find out whether SAC is a success or failure in the primary schools.
Diagnosis:

“To determine the nature of something by observing its cause.”


Diagnosis in this context of study is to investigate what the causes of failure or success of the SAC are.

Self-Access learning:

“Learners using materials in a self-instructed way to facilitate learning.”

(L. Dickinson 1987, p. 11)

In SAC, the pupils take the responsibility to learn on their own by setting their own goals. Pupils are responsible for planning and directing their own learning and manage their own learning performance. They select the appropriate method to adapt in their personal learning situation. They determine for themselves when, where and what materials (authentic, audio-visual, oral or written exercises) to work on at the SAC. Then, they evaluate to see how much progress they have made by matching their progress with the goals/objectives that they have set.

Self-access learning materials

“These are materials appropriate to and available for self instruction.”

(L. Dickinson 1987, p. 11)
"Self-access learning materials are those materials which are designed, written or adapted by the teacher for the pupils to work individually, in pairs or in a group with or without direct supervision. They may be learning materials, practice or test materials and where possible an answer key is provided. The materials are accessible and available to pupils during self-access learning."

(Pusat Perkembangan Kurrikulum 1991, p.19)

Self-Access learning materials are those materials adapted and adopted by the SAC English teachers to suit the different proficiency of the pupils. The materials are self-explanatory with the answer keys provided and pupils can work on the materials without or with little supervision from their teachers.

**Self-access**

"This refers to the organisation of learning materials (and possibly equipment) to make them directly available to the learner"

(L. Dickinson 1987, p. 10)

In Self-access, materials and other facilities are kept at a particular location so that the pupils can use them easily.
Self-Access Centre

"It is also referred to as individual or independent learning centre, among other variants-often provide computers and videos in addition to the standard display of books, journals, kits, worksheets and audio equipment which are made available and easily accessible for the learners."

(J. Jones 1995, p. 228)

The SAC is an English language centre where pupils have the chance to continue their learning in their own preferred way and at their own pace.

The centre provides different kinds of language learning materials and facilities are made available to meet pupils’ individual needs. They work on their own with little or no aid from the teacher and get immediate feedback from all the work done by checking the work with the answer keys provided.

Learner Autonomy:

"The ability to take charge of one’s learning which involves defining one’s learning objectives and determining the necessary means for attaining these objectives and ways of using those means, while determining the means of assessing what had been learnt and acquired."

(H. Holec 1997, p. 25)

"The situation in which learner is totally responsible for all the decisions concerning his learning and the implementation of these decisions."

(L. Dickinson 1987, p. 11)
Learner autonomy means that the pupil is capable of taking charge of learning the English language. He/she will know how to set the objectives/goals, choose the kind of materials to work on, select the appropriate learning strategies, check on his/her own progress and evaluate on how much progress has been made.

**Learner training:**

"Learner training aims to help people become better language learners by giving them the tools to become more independent in their learning. Learners are trained on how to identify and formulate their own learning objectives, select and implement appropriate learning strategies and monitor the effectiveness of their learning."

(L. Dickinson 1992, p. 1)

Learner training aims to train pupils to take more responsibility for their own learning. The pupils will be more aware of their own needs, learning strategies and the usefulness of the SAC and how the centre can help them to improve in their overall learning in the English language.
2.0 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the background of the Self-access Centre programme, the concept, philosophy, aims of self-access learning and the SAC, how SAC is carried out, criteria for the success of the SAC which comprises of learner training, teacher training, accessibilities of materials and facilities as well as the management of the centre. This chapter also touches on how the other SAC work by referring to research done by researchers in the related field.

2.1 Background of the Self-access Centre (SAC) programme

"The English Language Programme for the primary schools is planned in accordance with the National Education Philosophy which has as its core the concept of lifelong education geared towards a balanced and harmonious development of the whole person intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically."

(Huraian Sukatan Pelajaran, Bahasa Inggeris Tahun 6 1998, p.2)
Learners on the other hand decide for themselves and take responsibility for the decisions made which make them lifelong learners. In line with this, SAC that is aimed to produce self-directed and autonomous learners was first introduced and piloted in "SRK Kelana, Selangor Darul Ehsan in 1990. It was introduced in the secondary schools in 1995. Since then, it has been extended to 150 schools in Malaysia. It was initiated by the Curriculum Development Centre, Ministry of Education, Malaysia."

(Pusat Perkembangan Kurikulum, Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia 1991, p. 3)

The SAC programme for the primary schools in Sarawak started in 1994. Samarahan Division was chosen for the trial project headed by the Curriculum Development Centre, Kuching. This project was centered in the schools where the English language performance is low that is from 0% to 20%. Ten schools were identified and chosen as pilot schools for this project. Various courses, training and workshops were organised from 1994 to 1998 to expose English teachers to the concepts of SAC. The Curriculum Development Centre's role is to provide continuity of the SAC programme from the primary level to the secondary level by organizing state level training, monitoring SAC and overseeing related activities to ensure the success of the SAC programme in Sarawak.

Table 2.1 shows the self-access learning programme being carried out at the 10 selected primary schools from 1994 till 1999. (Refer to table 2.1 in Appendix 1)

The SAC programme is carried out for 2 periods per week (1 hour per week) and involved only pupils from primary 4, 5 and 6. Since the implementation of the SAC
programme in Samarahan Division in 1994, various teacher training programme were conducted. From 14-15 November, 1996 SAC course to increase teachers' knowledge to help learners learn English effectively, in a fun and independent way was conducted in Samarahan division. Another course to increase teachers' professionalism in the SAC programme so that they can conduct SAC courses effectively, be committed to carry out this programme in their schools was conducted from 6/4/1997 to 11/4/1997 at Rajah Court, Kuching. By September, 1997 the whole of Samarahan Division primary schools had already started the SAC programme.

The Education Ministry, Curriculum Development Centre, and the teachers in the primary schools involved in this SAC programme had put in a lot of effort to make this SAC programme work. However after 1999, there was no news about the progress of the SAC programme from any of the schools involved in this SAC programme. The cause of it is yet to be determined in the findings in chapter 4.

2.1 SAL and SAC

2.1.1 Definition of Self-access learning (SAL)

Leslie Dickinson (1987: 11) defined SAL as “learners using materials a self-instructed way to facilitate learning”.

Malcolm Knowles (1975: 18) viewed SAL as “a process...in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning,
choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes." He argued that learners learn better than those who sit passively waiting to be taught. A learner who is self directed will gradually learn to take control of his own learning, to set his own realistic goals and select the correct learning strategies to achieve these goals. The learner also knows how to monitor his own progress.

Dickinson (1995: 1) believed that "self-directed learning will indirectly encourage learners to be lifelong learners."

As suggested from the above definitions, as long as the pupils know how to make decisions and take responsibility for their own learning through the use of self-access system, it is self-access/directed/autonomous learning.

2.1.2 Philosophy of self-access learning

- Every learner is capable of assuming responsibility for much of his/her own learning.
- Learners learn in different ways and at varying rate.
- Learners have different interests and needs.
- Teachers need to provide for all these differences.
- Learning environment can be adjusted to the advantage of each child.
- Shift in emphasis from teaching to learning to learn.

(Self-access learning at the primary level 1994. p. 3)
As a whole, the philosophy of SAL believes that all pupils can be trained to learn how to learn though each individual learner has different needs and interests. Teachers can help by catering to the needs of these types of pupils.

2.1.2 **Aims of introducing SAL at the primary school level**

- To provide ample opportunities for the learners to use self-access English Language learning materials.
- To introduce the concept of self-directed learning into the timetable.
- To devise a system which combine teacher directed learning sessions and learners directed learning sessions in an attempt to fulfill the learners’ need

(Self-access learning at the primary level 1994, p. 8)

SAL is introduced into the English lesson timetable in the primary schools to give the pupils opportunity to learn how to learn and be trained to become self-directed/autonomous in their learning.

2.1.4 **Concept of SAL**

- Every learner is an individual with different needs, interests, attitudes and aptitudes.
- Every learner learns in different ways and at varied rates
- Every learner is responsible for his/her own learning.
- Every learner is given the opportunity to learn how to learn.
- The teacher caters for all the individual needs of the learners.
• The teacher creates a conducive, tension free learning environment.

SAL believes in the concept that not every individual is the same. This is due to the pupils’ background, their personal needs and interests on how they want to learn as well as how fast they can learn a particular skill. The SAC English teachers can play a part by training the pupils on how to learn and not directing them on what to learn by creating an environment that is tension-free so that the pupils can learn in a non-threatening environment.

2.1.5 Objectives of SAL

• To provide opportunities for learners to learn how to learn.

• To cater for the learner’s individual needs and learning style.

• To allow learners to evaluate and assess their own learning.

• To complement classroom teaching.

The aim of SAL in the SAC is to give pupils the chance to become self-directed in their learning. The pupils here learn how to set their own goals and assess their own progress. SAC is seen as part of supplementing pupils’ needs in the learning process apart from normal classroom teaching.
2.1.6 Characteristics of SAL programme in the SAC

- Flexible and comfortable learning environment with no tension.
- SAL materials and facilitators are easily accessible.
- A choice of a wide variety of materials.
- Facilities that enable learners to learn on their own or in group.
- Enable learners to follow their own pace of learning.
- Enable learners to evaluate their own achievement.

(Teacher’s guide-Self Access Learning for English Language in Malaysian primary schools: Pusat Perkembangan Kurrikulum, Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia 1991, p. 19)

In the SAC, the kind of learning environment provided is tension-free. Pupils are able to learn according to their own capability. The materials are also easily available. There are varieties in the choices of materials and facilities available to enable pupils to have a choice either to work individually, in pairs or as a group. In other words, SAC caters for the needs and interests of every individual pupil.

Pupils are also given the opportunity to learn assess their own progress and thus will be able to know how much they have progress and make decisions in their language learning.