Students' Motivation for and Attitudes towards Self-Access Language Learning Centre

Mohamad Jafre Zainol Abidin[1] Majid Pour-Mohammadi[2*] Khanchai Wongchana[1] Khoo Mun Yee[1]

1. School of Educational Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 Gelugor, Penang Island, Malaysia
2. Department of English Translation, Islamic Azad University, Rasht, Iran, PO Box 129, Rasht, Iran
* E-mail of the corresponding author: majid.pourmohammadi@gmail.com

Abstract

Self-Access Language Learning (SALL) is one of the leading aspects in efficiency of learners' self-initiated language learning. How far are the learners motivated to learn the language on their own in a Self-Access Language Learning Centre (SALLC)? Do their attitudes contribute SALL? This study investigated Thai students' motivation level and attitudes towards the use of materials and facilities of the SALLC. A sample of 210 SALLC-members including 200 students, 8 lecturers and staffs together with 2 outsiders were involved. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used to investigate the students' motivation and attitudes towards the SALLC. The results revealed that the SALLC could promote students' attitudes and stimulate their motivation to initiate on coming to the centre. The users also displayed high positive motivation and attitudes towards the SALLC. All materials and facilities in the SALLC were considered as factors that helped promote the SALLC. Additionally, students' attitudes were found to be moderately significant correlated with motivation.

Keywords: SALL, SALLC, attitude, motivation

1. Introduction

Thailand is a country with a distinct language pattern where not many languages are spoken. Though English is a foreign language in Thailand, they have adopted it as a strong foreign language in school. English plays an essential role in their national development and social lives.

The Education system in Thailand is simple but efficient. It is divided into two levels: school level and higher education level. The school level follows a 6-3-3 structure referring to a compulsory six years of schooling at primary school, three years at lower secondary school and another three years at upper secondary level. The higher education is conducted by universities, institutes, colleges and other types of institutions (Ministry of Education 2001). It is divided into three levels: diploma level, degree level and graduate level.

This study has been done at Rajamangala Institute of Technology (RIT) which is an educational and research institute attached to the Office of the Higher Education Commission, under the Ministry of Education. The institute is responsible in various fields for diploma and degree levels. All students enrolled in Southern Campus have to take up basic level English courses. They are required to take English 1 and 2 in order to graduate. The Institute believes that with the implementation of the basic Education Curriculum with the new emphasis on English instruction, a Self-Access Language Learning Centre (SALLC) is needed. Therefore, in the year of 1998, Southern Campus of RIT has established a SALLC to promote the learners autonomy.

They also believed that the students would perform better when they are treated as individuals with unique personalities, learning styles and strategies as well as different needs and motivations. Besides, the students should be provided with appropriate knowledge of the language to enhance their acquisition process. Feedback about their work progress is also one of the factors for the students to learn better. Lastly, students should be given opportunities to manage their own learning in order to improve their self-

confidence to use English in their daily life communication.

According to Zaphiris and Zacharia (2006), students' language learning processes are best facilitated when they a) are more actively involved in their learning process, b) develop the responsibility to learn by themselves, c) can take initiative and control their learning process, and d) when autonomous learning is incorporated rather than class work alone.

1.1 Aims of the Study

This study focuses on the role of the SALLC on the Thai students' motivation and attitudes towards learning English. It probes to what extent their attitudes towards the centre are and whether they are self-motivated to use the SALLC to acquire better English proficiency.

The objectives which this study tries to achieve are:

- To explore how the SALLC promotes learners' attitudes and motivation in using it to learn English.
- To find out how the centre supports learner autonomy.
- To provide feedback on the use of the SALLC.

The research questions are:

- How does the SALLC motivate students and enhance their attitudes to study English?
- What are the various factors promoting the SALL among the users?
- To what extent does SALL promote learner autonomy among the users?
- What are the most preferable materials and facilities perceived by the users in the SALLC?
- What are the feedbacks of the users on the SALLC?

It is hoped this study would help the growing recognition of the SALLC in Thailand by revealing the possible direct and indirect advantages of the centre in developing a positive attitudes and motivation to acquire learner anatomy while providing feedback on how it helps in enhancing the users learning of the four skills in English language. This study also enables the SALLC to update its resources to assist their users' learning goals and promote their roles. It tries to investigate attitudes and motivation of students towards the use of the SALLC within RIT, Southern.

2. Literature Review

The SALLC is generally a spacious room equipped with physical facilities such as computers, reception, tables and chairs, sofas or carpet area. Material wise, it provides mostly language books, DVDs, grammar references, language games, paperbacks, and other self-study materials (Adamson, Brown & Fujimoto 2010). In the centre, students have the freedom to choose the activities they like to carry out with a flexible time, to do the activities related to encouraging self-directed learning and promoting learner autonomy.

Musaw (2000) contended that SALL is usually explained as 'self-directed learning', 'autonomous learning', 'resource-based learning', 'open-learning', 'self-instruction', 'independent-learning', and 'individualization'. SALL is becoming more important in providing language learning facilities in many institutions, with all kinds of learning resources and environments which interact with the process of learning (Gardner & Miller 2010).

Commonly, attitude can be described as the representation of one's mind which is formed through the person's experience that influences one's behaviour. Ajzen (2005) further explained that the responses of attitudes are directed at a given object or target which are evaluative in nature. Although attitudes are relatively stable, their evaluation can change rapidly as the events or information about the issue become available or unfold. Hence, attitudes are always inferred from specific cognitive and affective responses towards the targeted attitude object regardless of how specific assumptions are made and how attitudes should be conceptualized. Gawronski (2007) concluded that the common assumption shared is that evaluative responses play a significant role in the understanding of social behaviour.

Learners' attitudes have an impact on the level of second language proficiency achieved by individual learners and are influenced by this success. According to Malcolm (2011), the SALLC has helped learners to change their attitudes towards learning English as they are able to find useful materials for their English

studies and contributed them to be competent users of English. Therefore, learners with positive attitudes and successful experience will have their positive attitudes reinforced. Similarly, learners' negative attitudes may be strengthened by lack of success.

In this study, attitudes refer to the learner's perceptions toward the use of the SALLC and its resources. Moreover, Beck's (2000) definition of motivation from a theoretical concept accounts why people choose to engage on a particular behaviour at a particular time. Thus, Beck (2000) defines motivation in two ways. Firstly, the extrinsic motivation is a key concept in most human behaviour theories. This type is closely related to arousal, attention, anxiety and reinforcement. Extrinsic motivation plays its role when a person participates in an activity for external reasons such as social approval or materials rewards.

Motivation lets users of the SALLC create intentions and goal seeking behaviour in learning to obtain learner autonomy. It enables the learners to strengthen their soft skills which would allow them to direct their own learning (Reinders & Balcikanli 2011). Through learner autonomy, learners would be prepared to have the attitudes and responsibility towards their learning process. This study refers to the situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all actions and decisions related to learning process including the development of learning all four skills in English language.

3. Methods

This study is quantitative in nature, employing the survey research design. The survey approach was carried out using survey questionnaires to collect data from the respondents. The survey also employed qualitative techniques to answer the research questions. The survey design attempted to find out the Self-Access Learning (SAL) of various respondents using the SALLC into the existing English programme specified in RIT.

The aim of this study is to measure how a SALLC equipped with SALL materials and facilities inside the centre is able to influence its users' attitudes and motivation. Thus, the research variables of this study are attitudes and motivation towards the SALLC.

Overall, 210 respondents including 200 SALLC-member students, 8 lecturers and staffs together with 2 outsiders of the SALLC formed the three-group sample of this study. The data collection was done through providing questionnaires and conducting interviews. The interviews were limited to five respondents only. The questionnaires were adapted from Barnett's Attitudes Questionnaire for self-access (Wenden 1991) consisting of three parts; Part 1: the respondents' demographic profile and most preferable activities at the SALLC; Part 2: information about attitudes, motivations and self-access; Part 3: open-ended questions regarding problems faced on the use of the SALLC to support the conducted interview.

The interview was conducted with two types of the respondents: students together with lecturers and staffs. It was performed in Thai language by using an audio recorder as soon as the respondents visited the SALLC. Then, it was translated into English.

Descriptive statistics were used to describe the data obtained in the study using means, standard deviation, frequency, and percentages. Pearson correlation was used to measure the extent of the SALLC in promoting learner autonomy and to test the relationship between the attitudes and motivation to the learner autonomy. Quantitative content analysis was also used to describe the feedback of users in the SALLC.

4. Results

The quantitative data obtained were examined by using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation. The analysis of data follows the sequence of the research questions.

RQ1: "How does the SALLC motivate students and enhance their attitudes to study English?"

Attitudes towards the facilities and materials in the SALLC were determined. Frequency and percentages were computed from the obtained data. Data analysis revealed that respondents were categorized into two groups according to their attitudes. It was revealed that 76.2% and 23.8% of the respondents were in high and moderate positive attitude groups respectively. Results indicated that the SALLC enhances positive attitudes towards learning English at the SALLC.

Mean and standard deviation of attitudes towards the SALLC was determined to find out the extent of attitudes towards the SALLC among the respondents. The average mean score of attitudes was 3.58 with the standard deviation of .447. Results indicated that the respondents enjoyed high positive attitudes towards the SALLC and were satisfied with using materials and facilities provided by the centre. Hence, the findings showed that the SALLC enhances the attitudes of its users towards learning English at the centre.

Students' motivation concerning the SALLC was also investigated. Frequency and percentages calculated on the obtained data revealed that the respondents were classified into two groups with high motivation 68.10% and moderate motivation 31.90%.

The results indicated that most users of the SALLC were highly motivated in using the centre and willing to come to the centre. Descriptive statistics with mean and standard deviation option was performed on the gathered data. Results showed most respondents had positive motivation towards the SALLC; mean score and standard deviation of 3.58 and .602 were obtained respectively. It can be claimed that on average, the users were motivated to go to the SALLC.

RQ2: "What are the various factors promoting the SALL among the users?"

Respondents were asked to rate on the factors (materials and facilities) which were deemed to be useful. The results revealed that all materials and facilities mostly contained high mean scores, with an average of 47.39 and standard deviation of 7.725. Results suggest that all the materials and facilities are the promoting factors of SALL and acquisition of learning anatomy among the users.

RQ3: "To what extent does SALL promote learner autonomy among the users?"

SALL is one of the emerging technologies that help in promoting learner autonomy (Warschauer & Liaw 2011). Student who possesses high SALL tends to have better learner autonomy. In this study, learner autonomy is defined as learners' motivation. Therefore, relationship between SALL (attitudes) and autonomy (motivation) was identified. Pearson correlation coefficient determines the extent of SALL in promoting learner autonomy among students and other users.

Results showed the respondents' attitudes and motivation were significantly correlated. The extent of relationship between SALL and autonomy contained moderate positive correlation ($r=0.481$, $p<.05$). It indicates that the higher attitudes towards the SALL the respondents have, the more motivated they are to come to the centre. These correlations may be sign of the fact that SALL is a factor in promoting the respondents autonomy. Additionally, it can be said that the respondents' motivation was somewhat influenced by the positive attitudes.

RQ4: "What are the most preferable materials and facilities perceived by the users in the SALLC?"

Descriptive statistics with mode option was carried out to find the most preferable materials and facilities. Results showed that computer and Internet are the first learning tools that the respondents prefer to use. It was found out that the most preferable materials and facilities perceived by the respondents can stimulate them to be better automotive learners. The following table shows the ranking of the most preferable materials and facilities perceived by the respondents.

RQ 5: "What are the feedbacks of the users on the SALLC?"

The last part of the questionnaire included open-ended questions. Firstly, the respondents were asked to mention available materials and facilities which could support their needs. Most of them suggested that the centre should provide both materials and facilities. Computer was rated by 60.63% of the respondents as the most important facility in the centre. It was also found that 51.9% of the users felt neutral when asked how difficult it was for them to find the materials in the SALLC. Besides, 70.5% of the users rated that using the SALLC materials absolutely helped them to learn English by their own in future.

4.1 Interpreting Data of the Interview

This study also used semi-structured interview which let a level of in-depth information gathering. Content analysis and transcription of note-taking were carried out for the qualitative data collected from interviews.

Majority of the respondents knew the existence of the SALLC from their lecturers. The frequency that most of the respondents visited the SALLC was about twice a week. Half of the respondents often used computer and Internet to access their works, some of them preferred VCD and CD, while very few used tape at the SALLC. Many found that the SALLC was very useful in gaining more vocabulary and entertainment. Although the respondents liked to use the centre, they often needed someone to help them. For those who had a goal when they came to the centre, their goal was to improve communication. All of the respondents thought that they could develop and improve language skills after they joined the SALLC. The materials were found interesting in motivating them to go to the SALLC to study and improve their language skills.

However, they did face problems of lacking of materials and facilities in the SALLC and unfamiliarity with the language. Hence, majority of them suggested that the centre could improve in terms of the facilities such as computer and Internet, space, staffs and expert advisors to develop the SALLC.

5. Conclusion

This research was carried out to determine students' attitudes towards the SALLC. First, the data showed that they had positive attitudes towards coming to use the materials and facilities inside the centre. Interestingly, they displayed positive attitudes towards learning by themselves.

These findings indicate that users can be self-access learners by generating SAL towards their learning. While higher education institutions strive to create learning environments that promote SAL, it is equally important to determine the perception and preparedness of those learners for which the environment is created and with which they interact. As the development of SAL is a balance between the learner and the environment, it may not be successful if learners lack the resources. McMurry, Tanner & Anderson (2010) maintain that the majority of the students actually are unaware of the available resources of SAL although some have discovered how to use self-access centres effectively.

The results also indicated that learning at the SALLC enabled them to work on things they were really interested in. It can be assumed that the users are favourably tending to learn by themselves, and that they seem to be satisfied with the SALLC and have positive attitudes towards it. Malcolm (2011) has also concluded that the SALLC has created a comfortable environment that they can enjoy working in, enabling them to generate their own ideas during their learning process.

It was also shown that most of the SALLC's users were highly motivated to go to and use the centre. It was also concluded that their willingness in using the materials and facilities could motivate them. Dornyei (2001) stated that human motivation is at its highest when people are competent, have sufficient autonomy, set worthwhile goals, get feedback and are confirmed by others. Motivation also increases when a learner desires to improve his current self to his ideal language proficiency aim (Gillies 2010).

To sum up, the findings are very interesting as the SALLC could help change the existing views of Thai students who see themselves as passive learners; they have become self-access learners. According to the results of the present study, the centre serves students' needs and can promote SAL. Besides, the SALLC is able to prepare students to improve themselves for lifelong learning in the future.

References

Adamson, J., Brown, H., & Fujimoto-Adamson, N. (2010), "Co-Constructing Understanding of Self-Access through Conversational Narrative", *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal* **1**(3), 173-188.

Ajzen, I. (2005), *Attitudes, Personality and Behavior,* New York: McGraw-Hill International.

Beck, R.C. (2000), *Motivation: Theories and Principle*, N J: Prentice Hall.

Dornyei, Z. (2001), *Teaching and Researching Motivation,* England: Pearson Education Limited.

Gardner, D., & Miller, L. (2010), "Beliefs about Self-Access Learning: Reflections on 15 Years of Change", *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal* **1**(3), 161-172.

Gawronski, B. (2007), "Attitudes can be Measured! But What is an Attitude?", *Social Cognition* **25**(5),

573-581. http://dx.doi.org/10.1521/soco.2007.25.5.573

Gillies, H. (2010), "Listening to the Learner: A Qualitative Investigation of Motivation for Embracing or Avoiding the Use of Self-Access Centres", *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal* **1**(3), 189-211.

Malcolm, D. (2011), "Learner Involvement at Arabian Gulf University Self-Access Centre", *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal* **2**(2), 68-77.

McMurry, B.L., Tanner, M.W., & Anderson, N.J. (2010), "Self-Access Centres: Maximizing Learners' Access to Centre Resources", *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal* **1**(2), 100-114.

Ministry of Education (2001), *Basic Education Curriculum B.E. 2544 (A.D.2001),* Bangkok: The Express Translation of Organization of Thailand.

Reinders, H., & Balcikanli, C. (2011), "Learning to Foster Autonomy: The Role of Teacher Education Materials", *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal* **2**(1), 15-25.

Warschauer, M., & Liaw, M. (2011), "Emerging Technologies for Autonomous Language Learning", *Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal* **2**(3), 107-118.

Wenden, A. (1991), *Learner Strategies for Learner Autonomy: Planning and Implementing Learner Training*, Eaglewood: Prentice Hall International.

Zaphiris, P. & Zacharia, G. (2006), *User-Centred Computer Aided Language Learning*, New York: Idea Group Inc.

Table 1. Extents of Attitudes towards the SALLC

Variable		Range (Score)	Frequency (Respondents)	Percentage
	High (positive)	66-100	160	76.20
Attitudes	Medium	32-65	50	23.80
	Low (negative)	1-35	-	-
Total			210	100.00

Table 2. Extents Motivations towards the SALLC

	Variable	Range (Score)	Frequency (Respondents)	Percentage
High	Motivation	18-25	143	68.1
	Medium	8-17	67	31.9
	Low	1-7	-	-
Total			210	100-00

Table 3. Factors Promoting SAL among Students and other Users

Materials and Facilities	mean	SD
1. Grader reader	3.46	.842
2.Grader reader with cassette	3.43	.972
3.Other reading materials i.e. newspaper, magazine, etc.	3.51	.929
4.Dictionaries	3.78	1.099
5.Grammar books & exercises	3.60	.975
6.Vocabulary books & exercises	3.67	.919
7.Listening materials	3.83	.917
8.Writing materials	3.40	.919
9.SALL guide	3.49	1.036
10.Computer and Internet	4.39	.907
11.Satellite TV	3.47	1.150
12.Tape recorder	3.58	.981
13.CD and DVD	3.80	.995
Overall (total score= 65)	47.39	7.725

Table 4. The Respondents' Rank of the most Preferable Materials and Facilities

Materials and Facilities	Rank
Computer and Internet	1
CD and VCD	2
Tape recorder	3
Dictionaries	4
Listening materials	4
Vocabulary books & exercises	6
Graded reader with cassette	7
Writing materials	7
Grammar books & exercises	9
Graded reader	10
SALLC guide	10
Other reading materials i.e. newspaper, magazine	12
Satellite TV	12