



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**INCORPORATING LEARNING HOW TO LEARN IN A MALAYSIAN
LOWER SECONDARY SMART CLASSROOM**

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**INCORPORATING LEARNING HOW TO LEARN IN A MALAYSIAN
LOWER SECONDARY SMART CLASSROOM**

By
LAU BEE YIAN

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia
in Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

October 2004



**In memory of my parents for their love, faith and confidence in me but who did
not live to see me complete my doctoral study**

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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October 2004

Chairman : Associate Professor Chan Swee Heng, Ph.D.

Faculty : Modern Languages and Communication

This study was shaped by two major phases of investigation. In the first phase, a control and experimental group was used. The experimental group was only exposed to lessons which were based on Learning How To Learn. They were not trained in learning strategies. SILL was administered to this experimental group at the beginning and end of Phase One. The findings revealed that there is a slight improvement in the mean scores of all the strategies at the end of Phase One except for metacognitive strategies.

A pilot study had revealed that many teachers teaching Form One English Language Smart Classes did not know how to implement learning strategies and learning styles into their English lessons. Hence, in the second phase of the study, both teachers and students following the English Language classes in the Form One Smart classes were given training in Learning How To Learn. A Training Module for Teachers was designed to make Form One teachers in the English Language Smart classroom aware of the key concepts of Learning How To Learn which included learning strategies, learning styles, learning contracts and learner autonomy. Knowledge of

learning styles and being able to identify the types of learners in a class would help teachers plan their lessons better. Teachers were also trained to write Learning How To Learn lesson plans as well as to know the criteria for material selection. The findings showed that this training sensitized the teachers to teach using Learning How To Learn.

On the other hand, the Training Module for Learners is, in particular, awareness training in Oxford's six classes of learning strategies. Learners also discovered their own learning styles when they were answered the questionnaire on Willing's Learning Styles Tasksheets. The findings indicated that with training, students could become better language learners as they have a knowledge of their own learning styles and preferred learning strategies. Students could also be given autonomy to decide on what is to be learnt, why it is to be learnt, when and where it is to be learnt and how it is to be learnt.

The Training Module for Teachers was evaluated by the English Panel of Sekolah Menengah Sains Kuching whereas the Training Module for Learners was evaluated by four educators and the learners themselves. On the whole, the findings revealed that the two modules were workable and in line with the principles of Learning How To Learn.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**BELAJAR CARA PEMBELAJARAN DALAM BILIK DARJAH BESTARI
MENENGAH RENDAH DI MALAYSIA**

Oleh

LAU BEE YIAN

Oktober 2004

Pengerusi : Profesor Madya Chan Swee Heng, Ph.D.

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Kajian ini terbentuk hasil daripada dua fasa penyelidikan utama yang telah dijalankan. Di fasa pertama, dua kumpulan digunakan. Mereka terdiri daripada kumpulan *control* dan *experimental*. Kumpulan *experimental* didedahkan kepada pengajaran yang mengandungi unsur-unsur *Belajar Cara Pembelajaran*. Mereka juga diberikan soal selidik yang bertajuk *SILL*. Hasil kajian mendapati bahawa pencapaian pelajar-pelajar ada menunjukkan kemajuan dalam penggunaan strategi kecuali strategi metacognitif.

Hasil dari kajian *pilot* menunjukkan bahawa ramai guru yang mengajar Bahasa Inggeris dalam kelas-kelas Bestari di Tingkatan Satu tidak tahu bagaimana untuk mengendalikannya strategi belajar dan stail belajar dalam proses pengajaran mereka. Jadi, dalam fasa kedua, kedua-dua pihak, ia itu, guru dan pelajar, dilatih dengan teknik pengajaran *Belajar Cara Pembelajaran*. Maka untuk fasa ini, pengkaji telah menghasilkan dua modul latihan, satu untuk guru dan satu lagi untuk pelajar-pelajar.

Fokus utama Modul Latihan untuk guru adalah untuk menyedarkan guru-guru Tingkatan Satu kelas Bestari Bahasa Inggeris tentang konsep-konsep penting yang merangkumi strategi-strategi pembelajaran, stail pembelajaran, kontrak pembelajaran dan autonomi pelajar. Pengetahuan tentang stail pembelajaran dan kemampuan untuk mengenalpasti jenis pelajar dalam kelas akan tolong guru tulis rancangan pengajaran mereka dengan lebih baik. Guru-guru turut dilatih untuk menulis rancangan pengajaran *Belajar Cara Pembelajaran* termasuklah mengetahui kriteria untuk pemilihan bahan-bahan pengajaran. Modul Latihan untuk guru membantu guru sedar akan stail pembelajaran sendiri serta strategi-strategi pembelajaran sekali gus membantu mereka menghasilkan rancangan pengajaran berdasarkan konsep *Belajar Cara Pembelajaran*.

Sebaliknya, Modul Latihan untuk pelajar bertujuan untuk melatih pelajar-pelajar Tingkatan Satu dalam kelas Bestari Bahasa Inggeris tentang konsep-konsep utama *Belajar Cara Pembelajaran*, khususnya tentang strategi-strategi pembelajaran. Enam kelas strategi Oxford telah digunakan untuk tujuan ini. Para pelajar turut dapat mengenal pasti stail pembelajaran sendiri apabila mereka menjawab soal selidik tentang stail pembelajaran *Willing*. Dengan adanya latihan, pelajar-pelajar menunjukkan bahawa mereka berupaya belajar bahasa ini dengan lebih berkesan. Hal ketara ialah mereka mempunyai pengetahuan tentang stail pembelajaran sendiri berserta strategi pembelajaran yang diminati. Semua perkara ini membantu mereka menjadi pelajar yang lebih berwibawa.

Modul Latihan untuk Guru telah dinilai oleh guru-guru Bahasa Inggeris di Sekolah Menengah Sains Kuching manakala Modul Latihan untuk Pelajar dinilai oleh empat

orang pendidik dan juga pelajar sendiri. Pada keseluruhannya, dapatan-dapatan menunjukkan bahawa kedua-dua modul adalah memenuhi prinsip-prinsip *Belajar Cara Pembelajaran*.



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|-------|
| DEDICATION | ii |
| ABSTRACT | iii |
| ABSTRAK | v |
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS | vii |
| APPROVAL | ix |
| DECLARATION | xi |
| LIST OF TABLES | xvi |
| LIST OF FIGURES | xviii |
| LIST OF APPENDICES | xix |
| | |
| CHAPTER | |
| ONE | |
| INTRODUCTION | |
| 1.1 Issues in English Language Teaching and Learning | 1 |
| 1.2 Background to the Study | 1 |
| 1.3 Statement of the Problem | 7 |
| 1.4 Aims of the Study | 12 |
| 1.5 Research Objectives | 16 |
| 1.6 Limitations and Scope of the Study | 16 |
| 1.6.1 Limitations of the Study | 17 |
| 1.6.2 Scope of the Study | 17 |
| 1.7 Significance of the Study | 19 |
| 1.8 Framework for Investigation | 21 |
| 1.8.1 Conceptual Framework | 23 |
| 1.9 Definitions of Key Terms | 28 |
| 1.9.1 Learning Strategies | 30 |
| 1.9.2 Learning Styles | 30 |
| 1.9.3 Autonomous Learning | 31 |
| 1,10 Conclusion | 32 |
| | 33 |
| TWO | |
| REVIEW OF LITERATURE | |
| 2.1 Introduction | |
| 2.2 Research on Language Learning Strategies | 35 |
| 2.3 Language Learning Strategies in the Second Language Classroom | 35 |
| 2.3.1 Theoretical Foundations of Language Learning Strategies | 40 |
| 2.3.2 Oxford's Taxonomy of Language Learning Strategies | 42 |
| 2.4 Models of Learning How To Learn | 44 |
| 2.4.1 Studies Related to Learning How To Learn | 46 |
| 2.4.2 Goals of Learning How To Learn | 49 |
| 2.4.3 Roles of the Teacher and Learner in Learning How To Learn | 51 |
| 2.4.4 A Cross-Disciplinary Look at Learning How | 52 |



| | | |
|--------------|--|------------|
| | To Learn | 57 |
| 2.4.5 | Trends and Theories Affecting Learning How To Learn | 61 |
| 2.4.6 | Learning How To Learn in the Malaysian Context | 69 |
| 2.5 | The Smart School Concept | 75 |
| 2.5.1 | Historical Background of Smart Schools | 75 |
| 2.5.2 | Rationale for Smart Schools in Malaysia | 77 |
| 2.5.3 | Characteristics of the Malaysian Smart Schools | 77 |
| 2.5.4 | Roles of the Teachers and Students in the Smart School Concept | 82 |
| 2.6 | The Second Language Learner | 85 |
| 2.6.1 | Motivation | 87 |
| 2.6.2 | Cognitive or Learning Style | 88 |
| 2.6.3 | Age | 91 |
| 2.7 | Designing and Adapting Instructional Materials | 93 |
| 2.7.1 | Principles, Criteria and Guidelines for Material Selection | 96 |
| 2.7.2 | Evaluation of Materials | 98 |
| 2.8 | Conclusion | 99 |
| THREE | METHODOLOGY | 101 |
| 3.1 | Introduction | 101 |
| 3.2 | Related Studies and their Research Design | 101 |
| 3.3 | Design of the Present Study | 103 |
| 3.3.1 | Description and Implementation of the Design | 104 |
| 3.4 | The Subjects | 105 |
| 3.4.1 | Rationale for the Selection of Subjects | 108 |
| 3.5 | Data Collection Procedure | 108 |
| 3.5.1 | Quantitative Instruments | 111 |
| 3.5.2 | Qualitative Instruments | 118 |
| 3.6 | Training Module for the Teachers | 131 |
| 3.7 | Training Module for the Learners | 135 |
| 3.8 | Data Collection and Analysis | 145 |
| 3.8.1 | Data Collection and Analysis Carried Out in the Present Study | 147 |
| 3.8.2 | Data Analysis in the Learners' Domain | 149 |
| 3.8.3 | Data Analysis in the Teachers' Domain | 154 |
| 3.8.4 | Data Analysis in Instructional Materials Domain | 154 |
| 3.9 | Conclusion | 155 |
| FOUR | FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION - Part 1: Learners' and Instructional Materials Domains | 156 |
| 4.1 | Introduction | 156 |
| 4.2 | Learners' Domain | 156 |
| 4.2.1 | Proficiency Tests | 156 |
| 4.2.2 | Learners' Language Needs | 162 |
| 4.2.3 | Learners' Styles and Strategies | 167 |
| 4.3 | Training Module for Learners | 183 |

| | | | |
|-------------|-------|--|-----|
| | 4.3.1 | Questionnaires | 185 |
| | 4.3.2 | Learning Contracts | 198 |
| | 4.3.3 | Language Learning Histories | 202 |
| | 4.3.4 | Educational Forms | 209 |
| | 4.3.5 | Instructional Materials and Written Assignments | 215 |
| | 4.4 | Evaluation of the Training Module for Learners | 219 |
| | 4.4.1 | Oral Reports | 219 |
| | 4.4.2 | Evaluation Forms | 220 |
| | 4.4.3 | Learner Diaries | 246 |
| | 4.5 | Raters' Evaluation of the Instructional Materials Used | 261 |
| | 4.5.1 | The Findings for the Instructional Materials Domain | 262 |
| | 4.5.2 | The Reliability Test for the Instructional Materials | 264 |
| | 4.5.3 | The Overall Views of the Four Raters | 265 |
| | 4.6 | An Overall View of the Training Module for Learners | 266 |
| | 4.7 | Conclusion | 269 |
| FIVE | | FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION - Part 2 : Teachers' Domain | 271 |
| | 5.1 | Introduction | 271 |
| | 5.2 | Teachers | 271 |
| | 5.3 | Training Module for Teachers | 282 |
| | 5.3.1 | The Training Module | 283 |
| | 5.4 | Post Observation of Teachers | 297 |
| | 5.4.1 | The Lesson Observed | 298 |
| | 5.5 | Evaluation of the Training | 300 |
| | 5.6 | Conclusion | 301 |
| SIX | | CONCLUSION | 302 |
| | 6.1 | A Synthesis of Findings of Teachers', Learners' and Instructional Materials Domains | 302 |
| | 6.2 | Implications for Teaching and Learning | 305 |
| | 6.3 | Recommendations for Further Research | 311 |
| | 6.4 | Reflections on the Study | 313 |
| | 6.5 | Conclusion | 315 |
| | | REFERENCES | 317 |
| | | APPENDICES | 337 |
| | | BIODATA OF THE AUTHOR | 477 |

LIST OF TABLES

| Table | | Page |
|--------------|--|-------------|
| 2.1 | A Summary of Studies Reviewed on Learning How To Learn | 49 |
| 2.2 | Main Steps in the Learning How To Learn Process | 73 |
| 2.3 | An Integrated Set of Strategies for Teaching | 79 |
| 2.4 | Some Learning Strategies for Use in the Smart Classroom | 80 |
| 3.1 | Data Collection Procedure | 109 |
| 3.2 | A Structured Diary Entry | 123 |
| 3.3 | The Working Schedule for the Students Involved in the Training Programme | 136 |
| 3.4 | Research Objectives, Data Collection and Data Analysis | 147 |
| 4.1 | Paired Samples T-test for Experimental Class Based on the Scores of the Proficiency Tests | 158 |
| 4.2 | Paired Samples Correlation for Experimental Class Based on the Scores of the Proficiency Tests | 158 |
| 4.3 | Paired Samples T-test for the Control Class Based on the Scores of the Proficiency Tests | 159 |
| 4.4 | Paired Samples Correlation for Control Class Based on the Scores of the Proficiency Tests | 159 |
| 4.5 | Learners' Language Needs | 162 |
| 4.6 | Students' Learning Style Preferences | 167 |
| 4.7 | Respondents' Scores on the Mean Overall SILL in the First Phase of the Study | 173 |
| 4.7a | Case Summaries of Respondents' Score on SILL in the Second Phase Of The Study | 174 |
| 4.8 | Comparisons of the Means and Rank Order of Usage of the Six Categories of Strategies | 177 |
| 4.9 | Preferred Strategy Category by Types of Students | 179 |

| | | |
|------|--|-----|
| 4.10 | Cronbach's Alpha for SILL Used in the Study | 181 |
| 4.11 | Procedural Mapping of the Training Module for Learners | 184 |
| 4.12 | The Characteristics of Respondents in Terms of Gender, Age and Race | 186 |
| 4.13 | Languages Spoken by Gender | 187 |
| 4.14 | Reasons for Wanting to be Proficient in English | 188 |
| 4.15 | Strategies of the Good Language Learner Used By the 12 Students | 193 |
| 4.16 | Learning Strategies Chosen by the 12 Samples | 210 |
| 4.17 | Strategies, Instructional Materials and Written Assignments | 216 |
| 4.18 | Rating for Each of the Following Grammatical Points/Functions | 224 |
| 4.19 | Ratings in Skill Areas | 225 |
| 4.20 | Rating of Behaviour in Class | 226 |
| 4.21 | Tudor's Guided Diary Entries | 248 |
| 4.22 | The Rating of the Instructional Materials and the Mean Scores Awarded by the Four Raters | 262 |
| 5.1 | Procedural Mapping of the Training Module for Teachers | 283 |
| 5.2 | Preferred Strategy Category of Teachers | 291 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| Figure | | Page |
|---------------|---|-------------|
| 1.1 | The Good Language Learner Model | 24 |
| 1.2 | The Theoretical Framework Used in This Study | 26 |
| 1.3 | Conceptual Framework | 29 |
| 2.1 | An Overview of the Strategy System | 44 |
| 2.2 | Diagram of the Strategy System Showing Two Classes, Six Groups and Nineteen Sets | 45 |
| 2.3 | A Simple Version of the Vee Diagram | 60 |
| 2.4 | A Simplified Form of the Typical Stages of Planning an English Language Programme | 93 |
| 3.1 | A Summary of the Students' Background | 107 |
| 3.2 | Components of Data Analysis | 146 |
| 4.1 | Mean Score For Each Strategy for Pre and Post SILL | 160 |
| 4.2 | Boxplot Graph to Show the Means of the Three Categories of Samples | 196 |
| 4.3 | Cronbach's Alpha for the Instructional Materials Used | 264 |
| 5.1 | Cronbach's Alpha for Teachers' Scores on SILL | 292 |

LIST OF APPENDICES

| Appendix | | Page |
|----------|--|------|
| 1 | List of Smart Schools for Implementation in 1999 | 337 |
| 2 | Questionnaire - Teacher | 339 |
| 2a | Questionnaire - Trainer | 342 |
| 3 | Proficiency Test | 344 |
| 4 | Training Module for Teachers | 352 |
| 4a | Lesson Plans of the Three Teachers of Sekolah Menengah Sains Kuching | 369 |
| 4b | A Lesson Plan from Phase One | 381 |
| 4c | The Observed Lesson | 383 |
| 4d | Mapping of Teaching and Learning Strategies (PP5) | 387 |
| 4e | PP6 [A5-1 (T1)] | 388 |
| 5 | Training Module for Learners | 389 |
| 5a | Stage Two - Training | 407 |
| 5b | Stage Three - Post-training | 421 |
| 5c | Instructional Materials | 425 |

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Issues in English Language Teaching and Learning

In 1999, the SMART School Pilot Project was implemented in 87 schools. The Ministry of Education had planned the SMART School Concept based on critical and creative teaching and learning (The Sunday Star, 2002, June 23). The goals of the SMART School programme were to give students a lifelong enthusiasm for learning. Evidence suggests that students who are given more control over their education are more likely to have continued interest. What is required to achieve these goals is a more learner-centred environment.

In recent years, there has been this kind of progressive shift towards individualised instruction (Altman and James, 1980, Ellis and Sinclair, 1989b) or a more learner-centred curriculum (Nunan, 1988, 1989, 1995, 1996; Brindley, 1990; Tudor, 1996; Boud, 1988, 2000; Rooke, 2000) as suggested by the SMART School Concept. As mentioned earlier, this trend has come about because of a desire to give the learner greater responsibility for his own learning. It is only 'when learners make the language their own that it is acquired in any generative fashion' (Grenfell and Harris, 1992:2). To make this possible, Grenfell and Harris state that a whole set of techniques is required to help students move into this new direction of autonomy and independence in language learning and also to encourage confidence and creativity in making the language their own. Students should be allowed to become aware of their own progress and how to improve learning.

Autonomy is not something that can come about by letting students do work on their own. The teacher-learner relationship is vital in attempts to foster learner autonomy.

Boud (1988) emphasizes this when he says:

What is important ... is the attitude of teachers towards their students. It is not any technique or teaching methodology which is primarily needed, but an attitude of acceptance and appreciation of the views, desires and frames of reference of learners. Perhaps the single central quality which fosters autonomy is the quality of the relationship between teachers and learners which develops through this acceptance.

(Boud, 1988:39)

Rather, the teacher-learner relationship does not operate in a vacuum. It is affected by the variables in the learning context which directly influence the roles that learners and teachers have to adopt. Holec (1981) suggested that deconditioning is needed for both teachers and students before learners can become autonomous. The deconditioning is needed to move learners away from prejudices about their roles in learning language and acquire the know-how through learner training. First, the learner has to 'free himself from the notion that there is one ideal method,' and second, 'that teachers possess that method' (Holec, 1981:22). In the context of this study, this means that not only teachers but also students should be aware of their own learning styles and learning strategies. Third, the learner should be deconditioned from the idea 'that his mother tongue is of no use to him for learning a second language.' Therefore, prediction strategies would be taught and the use of a bilingual dictionary allowed. Fourth, the learner should get rid of the idea 'that his experience as a learner of other subjects, other know-how, cannot be transferred, even partially.' To arrest this notion that there can be no transfer of information across the curriculum, learners were asked to keep records in their diaries of the

strategies taught. Fifth, the learner should break away from the idea that he is 'incapable of making any valid assessment of his performance.' Students were given the opportunity in this study to self-assess themselves and the lessons taught through the use of weekly and self-evaluation forms (weekly forms were distributed at the end of every week together with the self-evaluation forms).

The prime aim of the language classroom should then be to help learners 'let learn' (Grenfell and Harris, 1992:4). In other words, learners should be provided with the basic strategies and situations for them to generate sense and meaning, thus improving the effective use of the English Language. This scenario should be no different for our Malaysian English Language learners. The issues discussed should also be taken into account in our Malaysian English Language teaching-learning context.

In Malaysia, English is the second language. It is not compulsory to pass English in the Form Three Examination (*Penilaian Menengah Rendah* or Lower Secondary Evaluation) or even at Form Five level (*Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* or Malaysian Certificate of Education). However, in recent years, students are required to attend the English oral examination in order to qualify for a SPM certificate. English is only a compulsory subject in the Malaysian curriculum and thus all students in schools have to learn it.

Such a situation has given rise to many problems in the school for the English teachers as some learners are resistant to the learning of the English Language. Allwright's (1984) lament, 'Why don't learners learn what teachers teach?' is thus

valid. Allwright's research on this particular question and recent work on second language acquisition have supported the presupposition that learners do not in fact learn what teachers teach. To Allwright (1984:4), 'there is a real problem in the relationship between language learning and language teaching.' At this juncture, it can be said that the failure to learn is the fault of both teachers and learners. Stevick (1976) poses a riddle to find out what has gone wrong:

In the field of language teaching, Method A is the logical contradiction of Method B: if the assumptions from which A claims to be derived are correct, then B cannot work, and vice versa. Yet one colleague is getting excellent results with A, and another is getting comparable results with B. How is this possible?

(Stevick 1976:104)

The riddle is a clear indication that where methods are concerned, no method can be considered a failure as in the hands of different teachers, different results are obtained. The relationship between teaching and learning is indeed complex for both teachers and students. A perplexing situation has thus arisen. Teachers must discover for themselves which method suits them best. Learners, on the other hand, appear to take different things from the sum total of learning opportunities that each lesson offers. In a later article Allwright (1988) argued that the obvious clue to the teaching-learning problem lies in the idiosyncrasy of classroom language learning as

each lesson is a different lesson for each learner, and as teachers know very well already, different learners take away quite different things from the same lesson...

(Allwright, 1988:36)

Wenden (1991) believes that educating the teachers is the main ingredient in the management of educational change. This is because in the promotion of any methods and materials, 'the teacher is the main change agent - not the materials or techniques in which innovations are packaged. Their acceptance or success will depend on the teacher' (Wenden, 1991:7). It was assumed too that given learners with the appropriate attitudes and the requisite amount of intelligence, and teachers with the appropriate skills, teaching would result in learning. However, over the last fifteen years or so, studies in second language acquisition, research on learning styles and on discourse development, and work on socio-cultural and affective aspects of language development have shown such assumptions to be rather naïve.

This brings us back to Allwright's question, 'Why don't learners learn what teachers teach?' Let us now focus on the learners and the learning process in an attempt to answer the question. To Stern (1975:310), a student learning a new language faces three major problems. First is the discrepancy between first and second languages. This refers to the problem of the dominance of the first language as a definite system as opposed to the new underdeveloped reference system. The question that the learner faces is to what extent he should relate the new language to the available reference system in the familiar tongue and to what extent he should suppress this tendency. Second is the code-communication dilemma. This is the problem of having to pay attention simultaneously to linguistic forms and communication which to the new learner is a psychological impossibility. Third is the problem of having to choose between rational and intuitive learning. The student's ability to handle each of these problems will determine success or failure, and the way he copes with these dilemmas distinguishes the good from the poor learner. Learners then and now still