EXPLORING THE USE OF LEARNING CONTRACTS FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

Normah Ismail[1] & Masdinah Alauyah Md Yusof [2]

1.   *Academy of Language Studies, UiTM Kampus Bandaraya Johor Bahru*
2.   *Department of Modern Languages, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia*

ABSTRACT

Although the concept of learning contracts is not new, it is only recently that the potential of this strategy has been recognized at the tertiary level education. It has gained some interest among language educators to use it as a way to encourage learners to be more involved in their learning. The rationale for using learning contracts in this study is based on the view that the learning contract allows the students to structure their own learning and become active participants in the educational process. Positive outcomes from recent studies reaffirmed that the learning contract is worth investigating as a strategy for promoting autonomy in language learning. This paper will explore the viability of using learning contracts among undergraduate language learners. First, it will examine the relationship between learning contracts, the attributes of resourcefulness and independent learning in developing autonomous language learners. Next, it describes the pilot study that was undertaken at a City Campus. Lastly, it will discuss the implications if language learning contracts are implemented at tertiary level.

1.0   Introduction

Although the concept of learning contracts is not new, it is only recently that the potential of this strategy has been recognized at the tertiary level education. It has gained some interest among language educators as a way to encourage learners to be more involved in their learning. What is a learning contract? It is a tool to personalize any learning experience. It is a written agreement between a learner and a teacher, lecturer or adviser that a particular activity will carried out in order to achieve a specific learning goal (Anderson, Boud & Sampson, 1996). The rationale for using learning contracts in this study is based on the view that the learning contract allows the student to structure their own learning and become an active participant in the education process (Codde, 2006). Furthermore, positive outcomes from recent studies reaffirmed that the learning contract was worth investigating as a strategy for promoting autonomy in language learning (see Boyer, 2003; Williams & Williams, 1999; Chan et al, 2003; Sysoyev, 2000; Albon, 2003; Carter, 2005). The paper will examine the relationship between learning contracts, attributes of resourcefulness and independent learning in developing autonomous language learners. Next, it describes the pilot study undertaken at a City Campus and finally, discusses the implications of implementing language learning contracts at tertiary level.

2.0   Context of The Study

To better understand the situation, a description of the context is first given. In the City Campus where the pilot study took place, the medium of instruction is English. The students listen to lectures and seminars, hold discussions and prepare presentations in English. They are required to take Proficiency English for 6 hours a week (for first and second year students). Apart from that, they are strongly

encouraged to continue mastering the language through extensive reading, extra exercises and language arts activities like public speaking or drama. However, despite fervent encouragement from their lecturers to look for language learning opportunities outside the classroom, students are not taking on a more significant role in their learning. This is especially disturbing in this university that provides a rich environment for learning English. It seems that while a majority of the undergraduates at this campus acknowledged the benefits of taking more responsibility in their learning, most of them still relied heavily on their lecturers for notes and language practices as they are unsure how to handle learning English when left on their own. How can students be guided to be more open and flexible in the way they learn English? In what way can the students' capacity to be more resourceful in their learning be increased? To answer these questions, this study will explore the method of using language learning contracts as a way to guide learners to become resourceful, independent learners. The contract emphasizes the facilitating of learning autonomy through greater learner involvement in self-monitoring and self-assessment. Because of this, it offers language educators and learners an alternative platform for teaching and learning in a learner-centered environment.

3.0 Review of Current Literature

3.1 Autonomy in language learning

In this study, the learning contract is explored as a method which learners use to facilitate the process of learner autonomy or independent learning. Knowles (1986) defined independent learning 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. In the context of formal language learning, Little (2007) specifies independent learning as a process of language learning involving deliberate effort and conscious reflection because formal learning itself can happen only on the basis of explicit plans and intentions. Sliogerine (2006) further elaborates that it is a process of learning which the learners have primary responsibility for planning, implementing and even evaluating the effort they make in language learning. In other words, language learners decide on their learning goals, make plans of what to learn, decide on the learning resources, assess their own learning, and plan what to learn next. In summary, an important aim of independent language learning is to give learners more control over the resources they have to learn languages.

3.2 Resourcefulness in autonomous language learning

To operationalize the term "autonomous language learning", this study proposes to focus on resourcefulness, an attribute of learning autonomy. Rosenbaum (1989) first used the term "resourceful" to describe a person who is capable of dealing with problematic situations in learning such as when the learner has to grasp what is being learnt and make decisions concerning which activities to pursue. In other words, a learner who is able to handle these situations in his stride is described as resourceful. Confessore (1992) gave a similar explanation. He says resourcefulness in independent learning as assessing the ability to reason, read and cipher, and assess the availability of human and material resources that is useful to the effort of learning.

Carr (1999) described resourcefulness in independent learning as gathering the internal and external resources required for learning. He extended the concept of resourcefulness in autonomous learning by proposing that learner resourcefulness consists of four behaviours: *anticipating the future rewards of learning, prioritizing learning over other activities, delaying immediate gratification,* and *solving problems in one's learning.* The degree to which a learner is deemed resourceful in autonomous learning is related to the degree to which these four behaviors are significant in enabling the learner to actively pursue his/her learning goals.

To explain further, the learner is said to be engaged in a resourceful behaviour when he *anticipates future rewards (of learning).* Because of this, the student will then *prioritize learning over other activities* even if it involves *delaying the immediate gratification* that may come from participating in non-learning activities. In addition, the development of learning and planning skills is essential if a student is expected to be actively involved in his/her learning activities because such skills are needed for the students to *solve the problems* they face when they try to complete a learning activity. To extend this in the context of language learning, it can be said that a resourceful language learner has the ability to assess the availability of internal and external resources necessary to accomplish language learning. This means that if learners placed importance on increasing their English Language proficiency, they would seek out for themselves more opportunities to learn English and consciously make well-informed decisions about their language learning. Therefore, resourcefulness would be a critical factor that can lead to successful language learning.

Some of the attributes of resourcefulness are mentioned in other studies relating to autonomy in language learning. The process syllabus (Breen & Candlin, 1987) and the learner-centered approach (Nunan, 1988) are some examples where the idea of learner resourcefulness takes a central place in the language learning. Some suggestions of resourcefulness are also found in Holec's theoretical framework on learner autonomy (Holec, 1981). He defines learner autonomy as the ability to take charge of one's own learning, showing that learner autonomy is an ability, not an action. This ability refers to the autonomous learner, after assessing the resources available to him, would have capacity to act in a given situation (learning). Little (2000) also mentions a certain amount of awareness or critical reflection involved in the learning. He goes on to say that autonomous learners, apart from detachment and critical reflection, are resourceful through their capacity for decision-making and independent action in their learning. Nunan (2001) gives a similar description of a autonomous language learner as having resourceful behaviours. He said that these learners have reached a point where they are able to define their own goals and create their own learning opportunities. Finally, for Huttunen (1986), resourcefulness plays a role in the act of learning. He explains that a fully autonomous learner, whether he is working individually or in a group, takes responsibility for the planning, monitoring and evaluating of his studies.

3.3   Learning contract as a strategy for learning autonomy

A good language learner is aware of his learning and the resources available to him. In being resourceful, he is ready to use his capabilities to the fullest and learn language in the most efficient way. One such strategy to help him exercise his potential to become an independent learner is the learning contract.

3.4 Learning contracts in language learning

The use of learning contracts for language learning has gained some ground during the past decade. Schwarzer, Kahn & Smart (2000) used learning contracts as a way to encourage self-directed learning and individual autonomy, while still balancing individual and group learning styles in a university ESL class of grammar and writing. They concluded that students saw their need for English proficiency because they wanted to reach a specific goal outside of the class itself, and English became the means to reach a desired end, rather than the end in itself. Little (2000) in his studies found that when carefully planned, the learning contract can have a transformative effect on learners as it provides a firm framework within which learners can plan, monitor and evaluate learning. In addition, it provides teachers as well as learners with a continuously moving reference point against which to plot the progress of learning. Lewis (2004) used learning contracts to study reading motivation among college students in a reading program. He found that the reading scores of students using the independent learning contracts were significantly higher than those of non contracts students. There was also a significant improvement in motivation level between the two groups. Among Asian learners, Masdinah and Abdul Halim (2004a, 2004b) used contracts to promote autonomous learning among undergraduates through self-access language centers. They found that apart from an improvement in the students' overall language proficiency, the students' perceptions towards autonomous learning language also improved. They concluded, given enough guidance and resources, students can plan to learn on their own. In a four-year study using learning contracts for an English for Special Purposes course, Lai (2007) found that learners' awareness of language strategies were raised and their use of these strategies were improved. Apart from that, learners are better able to set their own goals as well as evaluate their progress. This in turn enabled them to experience greater overall autonomy in their language learning.

3.5 Limitations of learning contracts

While the learning contracts have reported worthwhile results in promoting learner autonomy, they are not without problems. First, creating and executing the contract requires learner training. This, some educators say, defeats the contract's original purpose that is to promote learner autonomy. Second, the contracts require long term commitment from the learners. Some learners might find the task tedious or uninteresting and thus, abandon it. Third, the contracts require the learners to write explicit details of their plans in English. For some learners, they may not have mastered the language to express themselves clearly. Finally, the contracts require learners to have some understanding of their own language ability and capacity to learn. This may be difficult for some learners who do not have enough knowledge to do self-evaluation and may not be in the position to judge what they need to learn. These limitations show that developing learner autonomy is not a smooth process. It involves fundamental changes in the learner's role and learning process. Such development is unlikely to be successful unless it is adequately and effectively supported (Benson, 2006). Therefore, a way to overcome some of the problems in implementing the learning contract is to ensure that it is backed up by language counselling or student conferencing where learners have the opportunity to discuss and refine their goals and plans. The steps involved in student conferencing is explained in greater detail later in this paper.

4.0   Methodology

4.1   Objective

The objective of the investigation is to explore the viability of using the learning contracts to help learners become more resourceful language learners. The pilot study serves to test the design of investigation and provide proof of its potential to succeed.

4.2   Research questions

The study will be guided by the following questions:
1. What was the language learners' experience in using learning contracts?
2. Is there evidence of learners' resourcefulness with the use of learning contracts?

4.3   Participants of the study

A total of 38 students participated in the pilot study. All were enrolled in their first year at UiTM Johor Bahru City Campus. 20 out of the 38 students or 52.6 % were from the Faculty of Accountancy. From this number 8 or 40% were males and 12 or 60% were females. The remaining 18 students or 47.3% of the total number of participants were from the Faculty of Business and Management. Out of the 18, 7 or 38.8% were males and 11 or 61.1 % were females. After obtaining score of 7 and below in the UiTM Placement test, they were placed in the BEL 120, Language Consolidation course which is designed to raise the level of English proficiency of students at the lower intermediate level. During the course of the study, the students participated in the student conferences, completed the questionnaires and learning contracts as fully informed, consenting volunteers.

4.4   Limitations of the study

This was a preliminary study which investigated a small group of students. Bearing in mind the size and the purposive, rather than random, nature of the sample, the results of the study may not be generalized to other situations. Thus, the findings here should be treated with caution. For the purpose of this paper, only data from the questionnaires and learning contracts were used and analyzed.

4.5   Questionnaire

To answer the research questions, a three-part questionnaire was developed for this study. The first part collected some background information from the students concerning their gender, program of study, frequency of learning contract use, as well as, to determine a self-assessment of their English Language ability. The second part of the questionnaire asked the students to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with fourteen statements about using the contracts for language learning. The statements were adapted from Masdinah (2005). The third part intended to obtain information concerning the students' ability to be resourceful language learners with the use of learning contracts. The statements were based on Carr's Inventory of Learner Resourcefulness (1999). Students were asked to give their answers based on a four-point scale ranging from 4 (strongly agree), 3 (agree), 2 (disagree) and 1 (strongly disagree). In order to assist the students in answering the questions, all the instructions and statements in the questionnaire were

presented in both English and Bahasa Melayu (BM). The BM translation was back translated to ensure consistency in meaning. The responses were tabulated and analyzed using SPSS 14.0 and presented in descriptive statistics.

4.6   Contracts

The class meetings during the first week were used to brief the students on the course syllabus. They were asked to think about their needs for learning English and their expectations from that course. Then they were given an explanation on language learning contracts and how these contracts can be used in conjunction with their syllabus to fulfil their learning needs. The researchers together with the students discussed the different resources available for language learning like novels in the library, websites on the Internet, newspapers in the reading room and even their friends to engage in a simple conversation in English. To assist the students in completing it, a form, based on Knowles' contract (1986), was used and given out to each student. (Table 1).

Table 1 Components of the students' learning contract

Specific language learning objectives What am I going to learn?	*Resources and strategies* How am I going to learn it?	*Materials used*	*Comments*

To help the students write out their contracts, the researcher drew guidance from Dam's work on self-directed learning (Dam, 1995; 2004). The students were guided by the researcher in creating one language learning objective of their own based on the sample given. To start, the students were asked to complete the first three sections of the contracts: learning objectives, learning strategies and resources and materials used. Dam (1995) advocates that learners set their own goals and choose their own activities. Thus to assist the students in writing their learning goals, the following questions were used to prompt them: "What am I going to learn? How am I going to learn? What am I going to use?" The contracts were written in English, following another principle advocated by Dam (1995) that asked students and teachers to keep communication in the target language. The contracts were submitted during the second week of class meeting. The completed contracts then were read thoroughly and analyzed.

4.7   Student conference

In this study, student conferencing is conducted in conjunction with the use of the learning contracts. Student conferencing is where the student meets the teacher to get language learning advice or consultation. The rationale of having the student conference is to build a rapport between the teacher and the learner so that they can communicate better in discussing how learner can use the contracts to improve language learning. Research into language advising consistently showed that increasing the involvement of learners' interactions with teachers when carrying out learning activities enhanced not only student academic achievement, but also developed better long-term learning *attitudes* towards language learning (Mozzon-McPherson, 2007; Karlsson et al, 2007; Carter, 2005). These serve as powerful evidences for employing the idea of student conferencing in language learning in this study.

5.0   Procedure

Student conferences were conducted throughout the semester. Each conference lasted between fifteen minutes to one hour. Each student attended at least one conference. Notes were taken during each conference. Students' written objectives planned learning strategies and resources from their learning contracts as well as a transcription of the conferences would be scrutinized and analyzed for recurring themes. The students were called for a conference each time they submitted the contracts. The conferences were conducted in an informal atmosphere, so students were comfortable to talk about themselves. They were asked to bring along with them evidence of their completed work based on what they had planned in their contracts. During the conference, they were asked to share what they had done, the problems they faced in completing their work and their evaluation of their learning progress.   During the ninth week, the students completed the questionnaires, administered during class time by the researcher. 38 questionnaires were given out. All 38 were returned to the researcher.

6.0   Findings and Discussion

6.1   Self-rate of English Language ability

To learn about the learners' self-perception of their language ability, the students were asked what they thought about own their English Language skills. Questions 4 to 7 in the questionnaire asked them to self-rate their ability as excellent, good, average or poor in the following language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. Table 2 summarizes their responses.

Table 2 Self assessment of English Language proficiency

Language skills	Self-rating	N	%	Min*	Max*	Mean	SD*
Reading	Excellent	1	2.6	2		2.74	.554
	Good	24	63.4		4		
	Average	13	34.0				
	Poor	0	0.0				
Writing	Excellent	0	0.0	1	3	2.11	.559
	Good	8	21.1				
	Average	26	68.4				
	Poor	4	13.3				
Listening	Excellent	2	5.0	2	4	2.63	.589
	Good	20	52.6				
	Average	16	42.1				
	Poor	0	0.0				
Speaking	Excellent	0	0.0	1	3	1.89	.606
	Good	3	7.9				
	Average	27	71.0				
	Poor	8	21.1				
Overall ability	-	38	-	1.50	3.25	2.34	.391

*min – minimum   * max – maximum   * SD – standard deviation

From the results of the self-rate ability in English, many students were confident about their abilities in *reading* and *listening skills* but perceived that their weaknesses lay in the areas of *writing* and s*peaking skills.* This is not surprising because writing and speaking require them to do constant practice. Furthermore, these skills offer results which the students see as tangible and measurable, unlike reading and listening, which students perceive to be less attributable to their success in language learning. The results of the self-rate ability will be referred to again later in the paper when the discussion turns to what the students' contracts reveal.

6.2 Experience in using the language learning contracts

To answer the research question: What was the learners' experience in using the contracts for language learning; the following questions were formulated and incorporated in the survey. Question 8 asked the students how frequently they used the learning contracts. The frequency ranged from one to two times, three to four times, five to six times and more than six times. 71% of the students answered "once to two times" and 29% answered "three to four times". 66.7% of males said they used it once or twice while 91.4% of females said they used it once or twice.

Questions 9 to 22 are statements referring to the students' experience in using learning contracts for language learning. The students' responses are shown in Table 3. The results showed an overall mean of 3.16. The students' responses indicated that overall they had a positive encounter using the contracts to learn English. Many of them saw the contracts as a potentially useful tool for organizing their learning as well as monitoring and measuring their progress in language learning. Apart from that, their responses also revealed that they felt the contracts helped them in getting consistent feedback relating to their learning. On the other hand, about a third of the students did not feel that the learning contracts pressured them in achieving their learning goals. Neither do they feel that the contracts helped them work better in groups.

Table 3 Responses to statements associated with the use of language learning contracts (Statements 9 to 22)

	Statements	*SA	*A	*DA	*SDA	Mean	**SD
	Using the language learning contract…	%	%	%	%		
9	enables me to meet my individual language needs	10.5	89.5	0	0	3.11	.311
10	makes me feel accepted	18.4	68.4	13.2	0	3.05	.567
11	makes me feel respected	18.4	71.1	7.9	0	3.11	.516
12	gives me consistent feedback	39.5	60.5	0	0	3.39	.495
13	makes my learning more organized	44.7	50	5.3	0	3.39	.595
14	makes me more positive	23.7	71.1	5.3	0	3.18	.512
15	makes my lecturer interested to help me	34.2	65.8	0	0	3.34	.481
16	lets me select appealing topics	47.4	50	2.6	0	3.45	.555
17	makes me motivated to learn	39.5	52.6	7.9	0	3.32	.620
18	helps me learn in groups better	21.1	63.2	15.8	0	3.05	.613
19	makes me feel successful	28.9	71.1	0	0	3.29	.460
20	helps me monitor and measure progress	42.1	57.9	0	0	3.42	.500
21	gives me the chance for self-directed learning	31.6	63.2	5.3	0	3.26	.554
22	makes me feel pressured to achieve goals	2.6	10.5	63.2	23.7	1.92	.673

*(SA – strongly agree   A- Agree   DA – Disagree   SDA – Strongly disagree)   ** Standard deviation*

6.3   Ability to be resourceful language learners

To answer the research question, "Is there evidence of learner resourcefulness with the use of learner contracts?", the following statements were formulated. Questions 23 to 56 are statements concerning the students' ability to be resourceful language learners through the use of learning contracts. Based on Carr's (1999) description of resourcefulness behaviour, language learners who are resourceful would give priority to independent language learning, show preference to learn language over other activities, look forward to benefits of learning language, prepare ahead when they start language learning, have a set of alternatives for language learning problems they face and set language learning goals.

Table 4 Responses to statements associated with students' ability to be resourceful

	N	Min*	Max*	Mean	SD*
Priority	38	1.8	4.00	2.70	.464
Preference	38	2.20	3.80	2.93	.337
Planning	38	2.50	4.00	3.17	.476
Anticipating benefits	38	2.43	3.43	2.83	.303
Alternatives	38	2.67	4.00	3.29	.359
Goals	38	2.71	4.00	3.16	.335

*min – minimum   * max – maximum   * SD – standard deviation

Table 4 summarizes the responses given by the students regarding their ability to be resourceful in learning English. Student responses to statements about *priority* yielded a mean of 2.70 (SD .464). For *preference*, the mean response was 2.93. (SD .337). In response to statements that are associated with *anticipating the benefits* the mean was 2.83. (SD .303). Next, the mean for *planning* was 3.17 (SD .476) while the mean for *goals* was 3.16 (SD .335). The highest mean of these categories was *alternatives*, 3.29 (SD .359). Kennet (1994) has argued that high achievers are very academically resourceful. The analysis of the responses revealed a group of students with potential abilities to be resourceful language learners but do not yet have the belief that such learning endeavours would lead them to success in language learning.

6.4   What the contents of the contracts revealed

To examine evidence of resourcefulness, the contents of the contracts were thoroughly read and compared to the attributes of resourcefulness, as mentioned by Carr (1999). The following summarizes the contents of the contracts: Many of the students included plans to learn writing, vocabulary and speaking. These were among the activities that were frequently mentioned in the contracts. The students' plans reflected their efforts to overcome weaknesses in their language skills, which they had identified earlier in the self-rated assessment. Therefore, in general, they appeared to be able to plan and focus on priority areas in their language learning. The most popular learning resources seemed to be their text books or work books for learning grammar. In addition newspaper and magazine articles were mentioned as resources for learning vocabulary or reading. As for learning strategies, many of the students wrote that reading and understanding as the important methods to learn English. They were especially concerned with vocabulary and thus, included plans to check meanings of words to help them in their activities. Other learning strategies included collaboration with friends. They specified that they planned to work with their

friends to complete the activity together, to check answers or to understand the meanings of words. A few mentioned they would refer to their lecturers or family members for help in their activities. As for learning materials, the students planned to use a range of things from newspapers, song lyrics and text books. The learning material that was mentioned in all the contracts was the dictionary. Many also mentioned the use of the Malay-English Dictonary 'Kamus Dwibahasa'. Overall the entries in the contracts showed that the students, given enough support and training, were able to plan activities for themselves. However, the analysis also revealed some shortcomings. Some contracts were incomplete or written with contradictory objectives and resources. Some contracts were also copied from another contract. Other contracts had many interesting but ambitious activities which were not executed because of time management. In many ways this proves what Little (2005) had pointed out before, that learners do not become self-directed learners by simply being told that they were now in charge of learning.

7.0   Implications

This pilot study was conducted to find out more about the viability of using learning contracts for language learning. It also aimed to find out if the students' ability to develop themselves as resourceful learners is reflected through the use of the contracts. Since the results of the study are based wholly on self-reports, the findings and interpretations should be treated as suggestive rather than conclusive. In comparing the student profiles in this study with some studies mentioned earlier, there appeared to be some similarities in the students' responses regarding their experience in carrying out learner-directed activities. Two similarities emerged from the findings. First, the students in the present study felt positive about carrying out more learner-directed activities with the contracts. Similarly, other studies have shown that students generally supported the idea of taking more responsibility in their language learning (see Thang, 2004; Carter, 2005; Lai, 2007). Another finding from this study is that the students did not appear to be quite ready for autonomous learning. To put it simply, their beliefs and resulting actions with the contracts do not generate resourceful learning behaviours that are exhibited with learning autonomy. While many of the students in the present study acknowledged that learning English with the contracts benefited them in some ways, they appeared to be less willing to make learning decisions themselves. There were indications in the study that the contract enabled the students to make certain language task-related choices on their own but they generally held the lecturer to be more responsible for most of their areas of learning. This suggested a strong preference for a dominant lecturer role and a less autonomous student role. The results of other studies echoed this finding. (see Littlewood, 2001; Thang, 2001; Thang & Azarina, 2006; Chan et al, 2002; Sert, 2006; Seung, 2007; Junaidah, 2007). It appears that even though there was indication of learners' positive perceptions about the effectiveness of the contracts for successful language learning, this did not translate into the expected behaviour of resourceful language learners. Therefore, no conclusive claims could be made about their capability to accept full responsibility for their language learning. There are some reasons for this behaviour. The first is that the students seemed motivated to adopt the learning contract for the ultimate purpose of passing their English course only. This may explain why some of them appeared less interested to carry on with the contracts to the next stage. Second, their heavy academic load of 20 hours a week demanded much of their time. This precluded any form of proactive language activities that the learning contract planned for. Despite the complexity of the findings, learning contracts remain as a useful method for language learning. In fact, the results of the study serve to raise awareness of the myriad of perceptions that learners bring to the classroom that could affect the learners' ability to develop their

full potential as autonomous language learners. In studies mentioned earlier, learning contracts have been shown to increase students' awareness about their language learning while in the classroom or beyond the classroom. This is part of the training that educators stressed as an important step in preparing students to become independent learners.

8.0   Recommendations

The preliminary findings from the pilot study suggest that the learning contract has potential use in the language classroom to develop language learners who are resourceful and independent. The outcomes were based on the responses of first year students. More needs to be learnt about the effects of the contracts among students in their later years of study. Equally important is that these results cannot be attributed only to the learning contract alone. The lecturers or teacher in charge had a role in how effective the contract would be. It is worthy to find out how their motivation and perseverance throughout the implementation influenced the students towards the contracts and language learning. Lastly, further research is needed to learn how learning contracts can be integrated seamlessly in a university language learning programme where its suitability to Asian language learners, who are used to teacher-led activities, remains little known.

References

Albon, R. (2003) Contract-based learning : Is it effective? In Partners in Learning. *Proceeding of the 12th Annual Teaching Learning Forum 11-12 February 2003 Perth Edith Cowan University* Retrieved at http://lsn.curtin.edu.au on 27 January 2008

Anderson G., Boud D., & Sampson J. (1996) *Learning Contracts.* London:

Kogan Page, Benson, P. (2006) Autonomy in language teaching and learning . *Language Teaching.* 40, 21-40

Breen, M. P. and C. N. Candlin (1987). Which materials? A consumer's and designer's guide*.* In *ELT textbook and materials: Problems in evaluation and development,* ed. L. E. Sheldon. London: British Council. ELT Document 126.

Boyer, N. R. (2003). The learning contract process, scaffolds for building socials, self-directed learning. *The Quarterly Review of Distance Education.* 4 (4) 369-383

Carr, P.B. (1999). *The measurement of resourcefulness intentions in the adult autonomous learner.* Doctoral Dissertation submitted to The George Washington University. Washington, D.C.

Carter, B. (2005) Reconceptualizing roles and responsibilities in language learning in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education.* 10(4) 461-473

Chan, V., Spratt, M., Humphreys, G. (2002) Autonomous language learning : Hong Kong tertiary students attitudes and behaviours. *Evaluation and Research Education.* 16 (1) 1-18

Confessore, G.J. (1992). An introduction to the study of self-directed learning. In G.J. Confessore & S.J. Confessore (Eds.), *Guideposts to self-directed learning: Expert commentary on essential concepts* (pp. 1-6). King of Prussia, PA: Organization Design and Development, Inc.

Dam, L. (1995) *Learner autonomy : From theory to classroom practice.* Dublin : Authentik

Holec, H. (1981). *Autonomy in Foreign Language Learning.* Oxford: Pergamon.

Huttunen, I (1986) *Towards learner autonomy in foreign language learning in Senior*

Secondary School. Department of Teacher Education, University of Oulu, Finland.

Junaidah, J.(2007) Exploring readiness for language learning autonomy among distance learners in Sabah Malaysia. *The Asian Society of Open and Distance Education.* 5(1). pp16-26

Johnstone, J.W.C. & Rivera, R.J. (1965). *Volunteers for learning.* Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.

Karlsson, L., Kjisik F., Nordlund, J. (2007) Language counselling : A critical and integral component in promoting an autonomous community of learning. *System* 35, pp46-65

Kennet, D. (1994) Academic self-management counselling : preliminary evidence foe the importance of learned resourcefulness. *Studies in Higher Education* .19, 3, 295 - 307

Knowles, M. S. (1986). *Using learning contracts. Practical approaches to individualizing and structuring learning.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lai, C. (2007*).* The Influence of Learner Motivation on Developing Autonomous Learning in an English-for-Specific-Purposes Course. *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching, 8*

Lewis, J (2004) The independent learning contract system : motivating students enrolled in college reading courses. *Reading Improvement,* 4, (3) pp188

Little, D. (1991). *Learner autonomy 1: definition, issues and problems.* Dublin: Authentik.

Little, D. (2005) The Common European Framework and the European Language Portfolio: Involving learners and their judgements in the assessment process. *Language Testing* 22 (3),pp 321-336

Little, D. (2000). Learner autonomy and human interdependence: some theoretical and practical consequences of a social-interactive view of cognition, learning and language. In B. Sinclair & I. McGrath & T. Lamb (Eds.), *Learner Autonomy, Teacher Autonomy: Future Directions* (pp. 15-23). Harlow: Longman

Little, D. (2000). Learner autonomy: why foreign languages should occupy a central role in the curriculum. In S. Green (ed.), *New Perspectives on Teaching and Learning Modern Languages*, 24-45. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Little, D.(2007) *Language learner autonomy and the European Language Portfolio: two ESL case studies "Learner autonomy in language learning: widening the circle"*, IATEFL Learner Autonomy SIG, CELTE,University of Warwick retrieved at *www.warwick.ac.uk/go/circal/12mayevent/david_little*

Littlewood, W. (2001). Students' attitudes to classroom English learning: a cross-cultural study*. Language Teaching Research* 5(1),pp 3-28.

Masdinah A. M. Y. & Abdul Halim A. R. (2004a) Autonomous Learning : Some Considerations. *Paper presentation at Autonomy and Language Learning Maintainng Control 2004* HKUST & Zhejiang University

Masdinah A. M. Y. & Abdul Halim A. R. (2004b) Training students to be autonomous learners *Paper presentation at the 1ˢᵗ International Language Learning Conference* Universiti Sains Malaysia *16-18 December 2004*

Masdinah A.M.Y (2005) The viability of learning contract in promoting independent learning *Paper presentation at the Second Conference of Independent Learning Association of Oceania, Auckland, New Zealand, September 9-12, 2005*

Merriam, S.B. and Cafarella, R.S. (1991). *Learning in adulthood.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey- Bass Publishers.

Mozzon-Mcpherson, M.(2007). Supporting independent learning environments : An analysis of structures and roles of language learning advisers. *System* 35, pp 66-92

Nunan, D. (1988). Learner-centered curriculum design. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rosenbaum, M. (1989). Self-control under stress: The role of learned resourcefulness. *Adverse Behavioral Therapy*, 11, pp 249-258.

Schwarzer D., Kahn, R.E., & Smart K., (2000) Learning Contracts and Team Teaching in a University ESL Writing Class. *The Internet TESL Journal. 6(10*)

Seung, Y. C. (2007) Invisible motivation of online adult learners during contract learning *The Journal of Educators Online* .4(1)

Sert, N. (2006) EFL student teachers' learning autonomy. *Asian EFL Journal.* 8(2)

Šliogerienė, J. (2006). Learning contracts in Second Language Acquistion *Santalka. Filologija. Edukologija.* 14, (2).

Sysoyev, P.V. (2000) Developing an English for specific purposes using learner centered approach: a Russian experience. *The Internet TESL Journal* VI (3) Retrieved at http : iteslj.org/techniques/sysoyev-esp.html on 22 august 2008

Thang, S.M. & Alias, A. (2006) Investigating readiness for autonomy : a comparison of Malaysian ESL undergraduates of three public universities. *Reflections on English Language Teaching*, 6 (1), pp. 1-18

Thang, S.M. (2001). *Malaysian learners' conceptions of their learning processes and their perceptions of their English as a Second Language courses in a tertiary distance learning context*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, Nottingham.

Williams, A. & Williams, P. J. (1999) The effects of the use of learning contracts on student performance in technology teacher training. *Research in Science & Technological Education.* 17 (20), pp193-201