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A reconceptualisation of self-directed learning in a Malaysian context

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ABSTRACT

The concept of self-directed learning (SDL) has been extensively studied; however, the majority of studies have explored learners' perspectives on SDL, with less attention paid to investigating SDL from educators' perspectives. Surprisingly, while assessment and feedback have long been recognized as powerful elements which influence how learners approach their learning, and key research studies have examined how both assessment and feedback can encourage and enhance the development of SDL, this nevertheless remains an area that would benefit from increased attention. Moreover, although there is a growing body of literature investigating the cultural dimension of SDL, most of these studies are limited to examining the formation of SDL among individuals influenced by Western or Confucian cultures, ignoring the existence of other cultural groups. This study, which investigates Malaysian teacher educators' conceptualisations of SDL, begins to address these gaps.

The key research questions which guided the study are:
1) How do teacher educators in Malaysia conceptualise learning?
2) How do teacher educators in Malaysia conceptualise SDL?
3) To what extent do teacher educators in Malaysia perceive themselves as self-directed learners?
4) What kind of learning opportunities do teacher educators in Malaysia create for their learners to foster the development of SDL, and what is the particular role of assessment and feedback in SDL?

Twenty Malaysian teacher educators were interviewed to obtain their views on SDL and to identify their pedagogical practices which may foster or hinder the development of SDL approaches among their learners. A constructivist grounded theory approach was used to inform the methodological framework of this study, whilst a hybrid inductive and deductive analysis approach was used to analyse the interview data.

The findings of the current study suggest that most assessment and feedback practices are heavily focused on assessments designed by educators and on educator-generated feedback, in which learners are passive recipients. It is argued that these practices have significantly contradicted the primary principle of SDL, which characterises the learner as the key agent of his or her own learning. The findings of this study suggest that a more comprehensive conceptualisation of SDL is required that recognises the fundamental role of both the self and of educators in SDL, and acknowledges the impact of the socio-cultural context on SDL.

Informed by the existing SDL literature, and derived from fine-grained analysis of the interview data, the proposed definition of SDL and reconceptualised SDL framework foreground SDL as socially constructed learning where the learner takes control of his or her own learning processes within complex socio cultural contexts. The thesis concludes by recommending that future research (i) explores the central role of assessment and feedback in the context of SDL and (ii) investigates the impact of various cultures on learning, in order to develop a broader and more nuanced understanding of SDL.

DECLARATION

I declare that the work presented in this document is the original work of the author and that it has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

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Nurfaradilla Mohamad Nasri   Date:

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER THREE
METHODS AND METHODOLOGICAL
CONSIDERATIONS

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

List of Tables

List of Figures

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Study rationale

Self-directed learning (SDL) has attracted a significant amount of attention from educationists and researchers. Although there has been a great deal of research carried out to investigate SDL and propose different ways of helping us to understand and promote effective SDL, it remains very much a contested educational concept. As I began to read widely for this thesis, my review of the research literature revealed that most previous research has focused on examining learners' perceptions and readiness for SDL and there has been little research to explore educators' understanding of and practice in SDL, especially in higher education. Moreover, while previous research has highlighted the cultural dimensions of SDL as one of the most important factors influencing society's views and practices in SDL, this influential factor remains less well researched, especially among ethnic groups other than Western and East Asian Chinese communities. While most of the existing research literature concentrates on exploring the dimensions of SDL, less attention has been paid to how to guide higher education educators to employ SDL in their own pedagogical practices, particularly with regard to assessment and feedback, which many researchers have agreed are powerful educational tools that influence learners' approaches to learning. More importantly, my critical examination of the literature on assessment and feedback literature and SDL literature revealed that these two bodies of literature rarely intersect with one another. It would therefore be reasonable to suggest that this disjointed discussion of assessment, feedback and SDL has led to less attention being given to maximising the potential of assessment and feedback in promoting SDL. These gaps in the previous research literature

informed my decision to investigate Malaysian teacher educators' conceptualisations of SDL with a particular emphasis on assessment and feedback.

1.2 My personal experience and interests

My interest in SDL stems from both my learning experience as a student and my working experience as a lecturer at a Malaysian higher education institution. First, I will share my experience as a student encountering and adapting to SDL approaches before I describe my experience as a lecturer practising and implementing SDL approaches in my classes. These dual perspectives have served to reinforce my view on the challenges that SDL poses for both parties.

I must admit that my undergraduate and master's learning experiences were very challenging. Every day, I struggled with assignments, attending lectures and seminars, preparing for class presentations, participating in co-curricular activities and many other related tasks which placed a great deal of stress on me. However, the most challenging part of being a student at a highly authoritarian higher education institution was the need to comply with lecturers' instructions. Although this helped me to plan my learning to a certain extent, and in that sense was helpful, the instructions usually conflicted with my personal views and interest, which were simply not taken into account. As a learner, I therefore had little opportunity to develop my skills in SDL.

One unforgettable, if not unbearable, learning experience was when my friend and I were informed in advance by the lecturer that the course we were registered for used SDL and problem-based learning. Without explaining exactly what SDL and problem-based learning were, and, most importantly, without being given any introductory explanatory lectures, we were required to complete a group task. This was completely different to our previous learning experience which had relied mostly on educators' input or, in other words, 'spoon-feeding'. This practice continued until the end of the semester. I quite often heard from my classmates about their

frustrations and struggles in adapting to this new way of learning. Ultimately, the struggle to know how best to learn when faced with these unfamiliar pedagogical approaches – SDL and problem-based learning – combined with a lack of guidance and feedback from the lecturer and a single summative assessment, led to resistance from our group towards the implementation of active, student-centred learning.

This discouraging learning experience had a great impact on me and caused me to hold a negative view of student-centred learning, particularly SDL, for a relatively long period of time. However, my perception changed when I embarked on my master's study on *Curriculum and Pedagogy*, and I came to realise that active learning directed by learners is a powerful tool for equipping learners to become effective lifelong self-directed learners. However, reflecting on my miserable experience of SDL, and from my reading of the SDL research literature, I came to realise that the failure of SDL approaches was not the result of these approaches, but was due to many factors, for example, a breakdown which usually occurs during the implementation process, an overloaded curriculum with a considerable amount of subject matter to be learned, as well as inconsistency between teaching practices and assessment strategies.

Moving on to my working experience as a lecturer at a private higher education institution, I would like to highlight that in achieving the goal of producing self-directed learners, Malaysian universities are driven to enhance the quality of teaching by adopting a Western model of higher education to ensure success. However, despite being shaped by the British university system (this will be explored in detail in section *2.2.1 The origins and development of Malaysian higher education institutions*, on page 12), Malaysian university working practices are influenced and moulded by the diverse culture of Malaysian society. Hence, a failure to acknowledge Malaysian culture and context has led to a deterioration in the process of introducing SDL approaches in the Malaysian education system. Based on my experience as a junior lecturer, the implementation of SDL approaches and pedagogies has proved to be difficult, if not impossible, as a direct consequence of ignoring the impact of a diverse Malaysian culture on learning.

This is because, within Malaysia's current context and culture, power and authority are prime considerations. The issues of power and authority are evident not only in educator–learners relationships, where educators are considered respected role models with responsibilities for transmitting knowledge to learners, while learners are seen as knowledge receivers required to listen attentively to the lecture, but also among academic colleagues with different posts and professional experiences. This type of relationship may hinder interactive and supportive interaction between all parties.

In terms of my relationships with my colleagues, despite the fact that my intention may have been to offer constructive opinions, to question or criticise, the reality is that such behaviour is not viewed as being culturally acceptable, especially with those colleagues who are more senior to me, such as the head of department or professors. Therefore, junior lecturers are left to follow instructions given by 'seniors' to ensure social harmony. This misalignment of the Malaysian government's aspirations to encourage and engender SDL, along with Malaysian educational belief systems, triggered my interest in studying the cultural impact of SDL.

Moving on to my teaching practices, I was greatly inspired by the potential of SDL for promoting active learner-centred learning. I am also confident that the ability to engage in effective SDL can make a huge difference between success and failure at both the learning and working phases. Due to these factors, I firmly believe that it is crucial for educators to develop learners' capacities for SDL in order to equip them with relevant and useful skills to meet the challenges of a highly demanding world. Therefore, I aimed to rigorously apply SDL approaches in all of my classes. However, as I expected, the learners rejected my teaching approach because, in my opinion, they were more comfortable with their previous experiences of spoon-fed learning.

Eager to explore this matter further, I asked my students to provide their anonymous feedback and views on my teaching styles and on their expectations of me.

Surprisingly, although they reported that they were struggling to meet the demands of this new kind of learning, most of them were extremely positive about SDL approaches.

An important point made by most of my students, which I would like to share here, was their concern about how – and indeed whether and to what extent – SDL would prepare them for examinations. I too experienced similar concerns when I was a student, when I was so anxious about preparing for examinations and my study plans were carefully designed to make sure that I covered all topics to be tested. But now, from a significantly different viewpoint – an educator at a higher education institution – I realise that their concerns and anxiety stemmed from a poorly designed assessment which awarded the largest percentage and placed greatest emphasis on one-shot summative assessments. This type of assessment practice completely disregarded the essential principles of SDL, where the learner should be the assessor of their own learning.

However, it is important to note that, although I am a strong supporter of SDL, I am to some extent comfortable when being told what to do and how to do it. One reason for this may be due to the way I was brought up, and particularly the prevailing culture, where I was always being directed by others. I believe other educators in Malaysia may share the same difficulty, as obeying authority figures has always been the norm in Malaysian society. I remember, after enduring a long staff meeting, a colleague of mine said:

> I'm just not sure what I should be doing to implement the student-centred approach. I wish someone would tell me what to do. I'm worried that I will fail my students. I think that proper instruction from our head of department is the best option.

This desire for instruction may stem from a culture which acknowledges authority figures and can lead to a feeling of being deskilled, especially for the novice educator. Again, a mismatch occurs, where Malaysian educators themselves are likely to prefer traditional ways of learning, yet they are responsible for encouraging SDL. Moreover, adopting SDL approaches means that the role of the educator is

expanding. This is because educators are responsible not only for delivering content and knowledge using specified pedagogical strategies, but also for encouraging self-direction among their learners through modelling the practice of self-direction. As a result, educators seem to have to work against their personal interests, beliefs and values. Hence, this situation sparked my interest in investigating educators' beliefs about and experiences of their own SDL. I therefore chose educators as my research participants as I was keen to investigate their perceptions of themselves as self-directed learners and the kinds of learning opportunities they create for their students.

Both my learning and working experiences aroused my personal interest and led to my decision to investigate SDL in a small-scale research project for my PhD thesis. As I began to read extensively around the research literature on SDL, I found that although SDL is an area which has been intensively studied, its cultural aspects, despite receiving increasing attention from researchers, have tended to be oversimplified and have failed to capture the complexity and variations of culture that exist in the world.

In addition, having critically analysed previous literature, I found that most researchers tended to simply categorise learners into two distinct groups: Western learners influenced by Western educational values, and Asian learners influenced by Confucian educational values. Ignoring the existence of other ethnic groups is unacceptable, especially with the increasing enrollment of students from a multitude of ethnic groups at higher education institutions around the world.

My attention therefore shifted to Malaysian cultural contexts, in particular, Malay-Islamic values and Malaysian-Chinese-Confucian values, and how these perspectives impact on the understanding of and practices of SDL within the Malaysian context.

Finally, my review of the research literature revealed that research focusing on investigating the role of assessment in SDL other than self-assessment has been limited. Being aware of the importance of assessment in shaping learners' learning approaches is essential. The findings of the current study have led me to argue for

greater emphasis to be accorded to assessment and feedback to encourage and accelerate the development of learners' skills in SDL.

My understanding of the existing body of literature and how this has shaped my thinking is explored in more detail in the *Critical Review of the Literature* chapter. The *Critical Review of the Literature* chapter argues that the concept of SDL needs to be reconceptualised by taking into account the gaps which have been identified in the existing literature. Taking this idea further, I then develop my analytical framework to analyse and interpret the interview data in the *Findings* chapter. It is hoped that this study will provide a better understanding of and insight into how SDL manifests itself in the Malaysian context.

1.3 Summary of the study

The current study reports on a qualitative investigation which examined Malaysian teacher educators' perceptions and understandings of SDL. In addition, it also focuses on how Malaysian teacher educators perceive themselves as self-directed learners and the kinds of learning opportunities that they create for their learners.

Four research questions were formulated, which guided investigation within the current study:

1) How do teacher educators in Malaysia conceptualise learning?
2) How do teacher educators in Malaysia conceptualise SDL?
3) To what extent do teacher educators in Malaysia perceive themselves as self-directed learners?
4) What kind of learning opportunities do teacher educators in Malaysia create for their learners to foster the development of SDL, and what is the particular role of assessment and feedback in SDL?

Two main concepts have driven this current study and informed the overall research: first, the impact of the specific cultural context on learning, which led to the

examination of various bodies of research literature with particular attention paid to the Malay-Islamic and Malaysian-Chinese-Confucian perspectives on learning, the major cultural perspectives held by the two largest ethnic groups in Malaysia; and second, how and to what extent assessment and feedback impact on learners' learning approaches, which led to a key focus on research participants' assessment and feedback practices and experiences.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1: Introduction

The first chapter introduces the thesis by providing an account of my personal interest and rationale for conducting the research. This is followed by a summary of the current study, which includes the main scope of the study and the research questions. Finally, a brief account of each subsequent chapter is provided.

Chapter 2: Critical Review of the Literature

In Chapter 2, a review of existing research literature is provided with particular attention paid to addressing the gap identified in the previous research literature. This chapter is divided into two parts; the context of Malaysia where the study was conducted, and the elusive concept of SDL. The first part includes discussion of the Malaysian context, focusing on the Malaysian higher education framework and the cultural values held by the two main ethnic groups in Malaysia that have had a significant impact on learning. This discussion of the cultural values provides an insight into the complexity and diversity that are prevalent within the Malaysian higher education system. The second part presents a detailed account of the history of SDL and various dimensions of SDL are presented with a specific focus on the literature on assessment and feedback which informed and shaped the current study.

Chapter 3: Methods and Methodological Considerations

Chapter 3 presents the research design adopted in this study. It provides a detailed account of the research design used in the current study. It justifies the

methodological decisions made before and during the research process, including the decision to conduct interviews in the Malay language and the decision to translate the interview transcripts. This chapter describes the procedures of data collection and the processes of data analysis. Finally, it ends with a detailed discussion on trustworthiness and the particular ethical issues that were pertinent to this study.

Chapter 4: Findings

In Chapter 4, results of the data analysis are presented. The chapter begins with a brief summary of the five key emerging themes that serve as an initial guide to our exploration of the complex interview data. Two forms of reporting findings are used: (a) vignettes of five key research participants to provide a snapshot of their uniqueness and the reasons for their intriguing views on SDL; and (b) thematic analysis, which allows for in-depth analysis of the interview data within both individual transcripts and across the whole set of transcripts. In order to remain faithful to the research participants' accounts and to ensure the trustworthiness of this current study, direct quotations are used as much as possible following my analysis of the interview data. The final part of Chapter 4 draws the findings discussed in the preceding sections to a conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

Chapter 5 draws the key findings together and discusses my findings of the interview data in relation to the existing literature reviewed in the *Critical Review of the Literature* chapter. This chapter brings the findings into a coherent understanding of SDL by proposing a definition of SDL followed by the presentation of the reconceptualised SDL framework. In discussing the proposed SDL framework, particular attention is paid to highlighting the issues of interrelatedness within, between and across the dimensions of SDL which have been used to construct it. After discussing the proposed SDL framework, the chapter continues by outlining my contribution to knowledge. Next, possible limitations of this current study are provided before this chapter brings the thesis to a conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

Critical Review of the Literature

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this literature review is to inform the reader about the influential groundwork studies and research on SDL in relation to this study. This chapter is divided into two separate but closely linked parts. It begins with a detailed account of the Malaysian context in which the current study was conducted, and particular attention is paid to the Malaysian higher education framework and the impact of the National Philosophy of Education (NPE) (Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013 – 2025, 2013), which not only served as the core component in establishing a culturally responsive Malaysian higher education system, but which also had a significant impact on the learning, teaching and assessment practices in Malaysian higher education institutions. The discussion then turns to the Malaysian cultural context and its impact on teaching and learning practices in general, with a particular focus on Malay-Islamic values and Malaysian-Chinese-Confucian values.

The second part of this chapter focuses on the elusive concept of SDL. It begins with a brief introduction to the history of SDL before key definitions of SDL are presented. Next, three dimensions of SDL – psychological, pedagogical and, socio-cultural – are discussed concurrently with the most influential SDL model related to each dimension. The second part of this chapter then turns to reviewing research on assessment and feedback. Particular attention is paid to the practices of assessment and feedback which promote or hinder SDL, and it suggests that this research on assessment and feedback should be central to and inform any redefinition and reconceptualisation of the concept of SDL. The final section brings together the gaps identified in the preceding discussion and proposes that there is a need to broaden

our understanding of SDL, not only from a socio-cultural perspective, but also with regard to assessment and feedback and from both the educator and learner perspectives.

2.2 The Malaysian context

It is notable that the majority of research into SDL has investigated its use among learners influenced by Western and Confucian cultural values, and research exploring SDL in other cultures has been limited (e.g. Kim, 2008; Van Petegem et al., 2008; Peters, 2015). This study, which highlights the impact of the Malay-Islamic and the Malaysian-Chinese-Confucian perspectives on SDL, aims to provide an insight into the understanding of SDL within the Malaysian context and address the gap in the current literature on the cultural dimension of SDL.

In general, the main purpose of education in Malaysia is to produce a holistic individual who can contribute to national prosperity and national unity. This aspiration was clearly expressed in the statement of the NPE (Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013–2025, 2013), where significant emphasis was given to developing the physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual aspects of an individual. Consistent with the NPE, higher education institutions are also expected to, and are held responsible for, producing well-rounded learners. The following statement on the responsibility of Malaysian higher education institutions from the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (2007) emphasises the importance of developing a holistic and fully rounded individual.

> This transformation plan aims squarely on holistic human capital development, to produce Malaysians who are intellectually active, creative and innovative, ethically and morally upright, adaptable and capable of critical thinking.
>
> (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2007, p. 8)

Because this current study was conducted in Malaysia, it is crucial for readers, especially those who are less familiar with the structure of higher education

institutions in Malaysia, to have some general information about the Malaysian higher education system. Therefore, a brief outline is presented to allow readers to better understand the Malaysian higher education context.

Initially, the Malaysian education system began as Malay-Islamic-based education before it evolved into a culturally diverse education system during the years of British colonisation. This was a direct result of the migration of Chinese and Indian immigrants to meet the demands for labour in tin mining and the agricultural sector (Verma, 2002).

In comparison to other countries that had colonised Malaysia, the British had successfully introduced their own system of education to the Malaysians, and after more than five decades of independence, the British education system continues to be practised in Malaysia. Although various steps have been taken to ensure that the Malaysian education system is responsive and relevant to the needs of the country, some features of the colonial legacy have been retained.

In order to fully examine the complex development of the Malaysian higher education system, this section is divided into three subsections: (a) The origins and development of Malaysian higher education institutions; (b) The structure of the Malaysian higher education system; and (c) The current situation in the Malaysian higher education system.

2.2.1 The origins and development of Malaysian higher education institutions

It is important to discuss the historical aspects of the Malaysian higher education system so that readers are aware of how, and to what extent, Western educational perspectives influence the Malaysia education system. An important point to note is that the history of the Malaysian higher education system is closely related to that of

Singapore, prior to Singapore deciding to establish its own independent state by leaving Malaysia.

In 1905, replicating the British university system, the first tertiary institution – the Straits Settlement and Federal Malay States' Government Medical School – was established in Singapore by the British, aiming to train local people to meet the medical needs of the colonial state. In 1928, with the intention of producing diploma-qualified local teachers to serve in English-medium schools, Raffles College was established. Raffles College offered various courses at diploma level, for example, English, mathematics, physics, chemistry, geography, history and economics. In 1949, Raffles College was upgraded to a university with degree-granting status, and was known as the University of Malaya in Singapore (e.g. Selvaratnam, 1985; Rudner, 1977; Mukherjee & Wong, 2011, who provide general histories about the establishment of Malaysian higher education institutions).

However, in 1959, on the eve of Malaysian independence, the University of Malaya in Singapore was split into two separate autonomous institutions. One of these was established in Malaya (specifically in Kuala Lumpur) and the other was in Singapore. In the following year, the autonomous institution in Malaya was turned into the University of Malaya by the independent government of the Federation of Malaya. The other autonomous institution in Singapore was named the University of Singapore by the Singapore government (Moris & Sh. Attar, 2010; Kaur & Morshidi Sirat, 2010; Mukherjee & Wong, 2011).

Since its formation, the University of Malaya has expanded rapidly in terms of its student numbers, which rose from 1,341 in 1962 to 9,328 in 1982 (Selvaratnam, 1985; Lee, 2004). Responding to this unprecedented demand for higher education places, three national universities were established: the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) in 1969; Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) in 1970; and Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) in 1984 (Abdul Razak & Mohamed, 2008; Salmi, 2009).

Meanwhile, in 1971 and 1972, respectively, two colleges – the Agricultural College, now known as Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) and the Technical College, now known as Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) – were upgraded to full university status (Lee, 2004; Ramli et al., 2013).

In order to counterbalance the westernisation of knowledge, the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) was established in 1983, focusing on producing knowledgeable and skillful individuals who possess and act in accordance with Islamic values and principles (Bakar, Winkel & Amran, 2011; Zakariya & Md Taib, 2013; Wan, Morshidi Sirat & Abdul Razak, 2015).

Having presented the origins and development of Malaysian higher education institutions, the next section will provide an insight into how higher education institutions in Malaysia operate by outlining the key structure of the country's higher education system.

2.2.2 Structure of the Malaysian higher education system

This subsection examines how the Malaysian university system, which was initially established by the British and which has been greatly influenced by the British university system, has transformed itself into a culturally responsive provider of higher education (Baba, 2004; Aihara, 2009; Kasiran, Surif, Ibrahim & Mokhtar, 2012; Tengku Kasim, 2012). In order to provide a background to the Malaysian university system, this subsection begins with a brief review of the administrative structure of the Malaysian higher education system. Then, the NPE (Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013–2025, 2013), which served as the primary educational guide in the formulation of the Malaysian education curriculum and has had a significant impact on the learning, teaching and assessment practices in Malaysia, is presented.

Although the Malaysian university system has been significantly influenced by the British university system, various steps have been taken by the Malaysian government to ensure that the institution of higher learning in Malaysia is culturally and contextually sensitive to Malaysian needs (Selvaratnam, 1985; Sirat, Ahmad & Azman, 2012; Ismail, Silong, Asimiran & Hassan, 2011).

One of the important steps taken by the government in ensuring that Malaysia's higher education institutions are responsive to the country's national needs has been to replace Western expatriate academics with local academics. These Western expatriate academics, who have been profoundly committed to the advancement of their respective disciplines, have less interest in meeting national education aspirations (Sufean, 2004; Lee, 2004; Sirat, Ahmad & Azman, 2012; Ismail, Silong, Asimiran & Hassan, 2011). Although at present, Malaysian universities are mostly staffed by local academics, the majority of these were educated in the West. As a result, there has been a continued dominance of Western education beliefs and value systems (Morshidi, 2005; Tengku Kasim, 2012).

Furthermore, a review of the administrative structures of Malaysian higher education institutions indicates that the Malaysian university system continues to be influenced by the British university system. Four dominant features of the British university system evident in the administrative structure of the Malaysian university system are:

(1) The administration structure of the Malaysian university is divided into academic and non-academic departments;

(2) The main authorities of the Malaysian university include a Council, Senate, Faculties and Institutions, Boards of Studies, Boards of Selection and a Board of Student Welfare;

(3) The Council is responsible for appointing the Vice-Chancellor, who is the chief academic and executive officer; and

(4) The Vice-Chancellor is supported by senior administrators, including the Registrar, Bursar, the Senate and the Council (Selvaratnam, 1985; Sufean, 2004; Lee, 2004; Sirat, Ahmad & Azman, 2012; Ismail, Silong, Asimiran & Hassan, 2011; Tengku Kasim, 2012).

Influenced by the British university system, the Malaysian higher education system is less capable of relating and responding appropriately to the fundamental issues pertaining to multi-ethnic, economic, and social problems (Selvaratnam, 1985; Shakir, 2009; Shafie & Nayan, 2010; Idrus, Ng & Jee, 2014). As a result, on May 13, 1969, Malaysia experienced one of the worst interethnic bloody tragedies which changed Malaysia's political, economic, social and education landscape and policies. Shortly after the tragedy, various educational programmes and campaigns were used to promote a cohesive and harmonious society where different ethnic groups could live and work together by making their diversity their strength (Case, 2005; Gomez, 2004; Lee, 2004; O'Shannassy, 2012).

In relation to the educational aspects, various government documents, reports and policies were passed aimed at moulding a local Malaysian education system which would operate within and reflect Malaysian culture and values. One of the most important government documents relevant to this current study is the NPE. The NPE, which enshrines the Malaysia's vision of education for producing well-rounded and holistic individuals, was created in 1988 and revised in 1996.

> Education in Malaysia is an ongoing effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards, and who are responsible and capable of achieving high levels of personal well-being as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society, and the nation at large.
> (Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, 2013, p. 2-2)

Since its formation, all educational programmes at all levels are geared to promoting a cohesive and harmonious society where different ethnic groups could live and work together (Kader, 2012; Jamil & Abd Razak, 2010; Seman, Ahmad, Aziz & Ayudin, 2011).

A significant impact of the NPE is that Malaysian learners are trained to be aware of the sensitivities of various ethnic groups and to be cautious in their speech to avoid

controversy (Lee, 2004; Shafie & Nayan, 2010). Such learners are encouraged to view the questioning and criticising of other parties as culturally unacceptable. Before discussing the issue of its cultural impact on learning and teaching, this section presents the current situation within the Malaysian higher education system.

2.2.3 The current situation of the Malaysian higher education system

Having discussed the historical aspects and organisational structure of Malaysia's higher education system, it is clear that replication of the British university system began with the establishment of the University of Malaya, and some features of the British university system continue to be practised today. However, various efforts have been made to ensure that the Malaysian higher education system is capable of supporting national aspirations. This subsection discusses the current situation of Malaysian higher education institutions.

The Malaysian government, through its various educational policies, has clearly expressed its desire to transform Malaysia from a production-based into a knowledge-based economy. Thus, Malaysian higher education institutions are held responsible for producing knowledgeable and skilful manpower. Many writers have reported that Malaysian higher education institutions are currently under tremendous pressure to meet an increasing demand for additional places in higher education (Lee, 2004; Ariffin, Daud, Ariffin, Rashid & Badib, 2011; Tengku Kasim, 2012).

As a result, many higher education institutions have been established, and to date there are twenty Malaysian public higher education institutions comprising five Research Universities, four Comprehensive Universities and, eleven Focused Universities. Each category of university has a different role: Research Universities focus on research and commercialisation activities; Focused Universities emphasise specific disciplines such as technical, education, management and defence; and Comprehensive Universities serve as education centres that offer various courses at pre-undergraduate, undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Ministry of Higher

Education, 2007). A point to note is that although many private higher education institutions have been established in Malaysia, this study will not focus on the development and administrative structure of these private higher education institutions, as only higher education educators from Malaysian public higher education institutions have been involved as research participants. In this regard, the term 'Malaysian higher education institutions' refers to public universities in this study.

Influenced by many researchers who reported a significant relationship between a university's underlying philosophy and its aims and aspirations on a lecturer's teaching style and beliefs (e.g. Prosser & Trigwell, 1997; Trigwell, Prosser, Marton & Runesson, 2002; Samuelowicz & Bain, 1992, 2001, 2002; Fanghanel, 2007; Gibbs & Coffey, 2004; Northcote, 2009), I would suggest that my research participants' views on teaching, learning and assessment may have been influenced by the university organisational and working culture which has subsequently shaped their views on SDL. Therefore, it is important to highlight the existence of three categories of university in Malaysia – the Research University, the Comprehensive University, and the Focussed University – as all of my research participants came from the Research University category which focuses heavily on research and innovation (Ramli et al., 2013 reported on the aims, purposes, characteristics and organisational structures of Research Universities).

The preceding sections, which have presented the history of the establishment and development of the Malaysian higher education system, have provided a brief description of how Malaysian higher education institutions operate towards becoming culturally responsive educational organisations. The following section discusses the impact of culture on learning and teaching with a particular focus on the influence of Malay-Islamic values and Malaysian-Chinese-Confucian values on learning and teaching.

2.3 Cultural influences on learning and teaching

Having presented a detailed account of the Malaysian higher education framework, the first part of the *Critical Review of the Literature* chapter now turns to the Malaysian cultural context, with a particular focus on the cultural influence on learning and teaching.

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country comprising three main ethnic groups: the Malays, who account for half of the Malaysian population (50.4 per cent), followed by Chinese (23.7 per cent) and Indians (7.1 per cent), while around 10.6 per cent of the population comprises indigenous groups and 8.2 per cent are non-citizens (Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2010). Based on the diversity of the existing Malaysian ethnic groups, it is reasonable to suggest that the Malaysian educational system operates within a significantly complex cultural context (Lee, 2004; Ibrahim, 2007; Ariffin, Daud, Ariffin, Rashid & Badib, 2011) and it is crucial that it is designed to be a culturally sensitive educational model that fits within its multicultural context.

Therefore, when investigating teacher educators' conceptualisations of SDL, it is important to examine the impact of these diverse ethnic beliefs and values on the Malaysian education system. Furthermore, as my research participants belong to the Malay and Chinese ethnic groups, discussion about the influence of Malay-Islamic values and Malaysian-Chinese-Confucian values, with particular attention being paid to the impact of these two cultural values on learning and teaching, is essential. This study, which explores Malaysian teacher educators' representations of SDL, and includes research participants from the two largest ethnic groups in Malaysia, the Malay and Chinese, has been designed to provide insights into the conceptualisations of SDL from a Malaysian perspective.

This section begins with a general discussion of the similarities and differences between Western and Asian cultural perspectives on teaching and learning, and concludes by reflecting on the Malaysian cultural context. As a result of the diversity

of existing Malaysian ethnic groups, it is reasonable for me to suggest that the Malaysian educational system operates within a significantly complex cultural context (Ariffin, Daud, Ariffin, Rashid & Badib, 2011).

2.3.1 Western and Asian context

A plethora of literature has reported on the differences between West-Asian conceptions of learning and which are attributed to their distinctive cultural characteristics (e.g. Frambach, Driessen & van der Vleuten, 2014; Carless, 2005; Kim, 2002, 2008; Paulhus, Duncan & Yik, 2002; Hau & Ho, 2008). The key differences between West-Asian discussed in the literature, and which are deemed crucial in regard to understanding SDL, are verbalisation (Kim, 2002, 2008), shyness (Paulhus, Duncan & Yik, 2002) and achievement motivation (Hau & Ho, 2008).

The desire and ability of learners to participate actively and critically in class discussion are identified by many SDL researchers as one of the important strategies in creating a lively and engaging learning atmosphere that promotes SDL (e.g. Douglass & Morris, 2014; Kirschner, Sweller & Clark, 2006; Reeve, 2009; Lee, Tsai, Chai & Koh, 2014). Therefore, Kim's (2002, 2008) research on verbalisation would seem relevant to this study. Kim (2002, 2008) helpfully highlights the different levels of importance of verbalisation within Western and Asian education contexts. According to Kim (2002, 2008), in a Western educational context, talking and thinking are interconnected educational dimensions as they portray individual cognitive processes. However, she reports that a state of silence is favoured by Asian learners as it is considered to be more beneficial for higher-order thinking.

Interestingly, Paulhus, Duncan and Yik's (2002) study, which further explored how shyness affects learners' willingness to participate in classroom interaction, seems to be closely linked to Kim's (2002, 2008) verbalisation study. Paulhus, Duncan and Yik's (2002) comparison of Asian and European learners sheds light on the fact that Asian learners exhibit significantly higher levels of shyness compared to their

European counterparts. In addition, shyness is reported by many researchers as one of the prevailing features of Asian learners and that contributes to participation anxiety, failure avoidance and unassertiveness (Liu, 2007; Chu, 2008; Juhana, 2012) – a point highlighted by most of my research participants when describing their learners' passive behaviour in class (see the *Findings* chapter for further details). In a similar vein, Charnock (2010), who reports on the inadequacies of the Anglo-Western assumptions on the role of learners' voices and perspectives in constructing knowledge, especially among learners influenced by Confucian culture, suggests that a collaborative educator–learner partnership and respect for learners' reticence could possibly lead to better understanding of each other's culture.

It would appear that the shyness factor proposed by Paulhus, Duncan and Yik (2002) leads most Asian learners to be less communicative, an observation that has also been made by Kim (2002, 2008). A review of literature on verbalisation and shyness is important, particularly in this thesis, as these factors are closely associated with 'face–saving', which is one of the important aspects of SDL as it has a substantial power to influence learners' preference for SDL, or for submission to an authority figure – (the 'face' concept will be discussed in *The influence of the Malaysian-Chinese-Confucian values in learning and teaching* section).

Hau and Ho's (2008) analysis of seven empirical studies focusing on achievement motivation reveals an increasing focus on the social achievement motivation dimension which is considered to be an important feature of Asian learners' motivation. According to these researchers, Asian learners' motivation to learn is closely related to peer affiliation and social approval in comparison to their Western counterparts. Their views echo with Bernardo's (2003, 2004, 2005, 2008) consecutive studies reporting that Asian learners' achievement motivation is associated with the social dimension.

Many researchers highlight that this correlation between Asian learners' achievement motivation and the social dimension is related to Asian cultural values, beliefs and practices (e.g. Kember & Gow, 1991; Kember, 2000; Chow & Chu, 2007; King &

McInerney, 2012; Asif, 2011; Bernardo & Ismail, 2010; Ahmad & Majid, 2014)
Addressing this issue, Asma (2006) suggests that most Asian people are essentially
from a collective society that prioritises the needs of the group over the needs of the
individual. As a result, Asian people consider their actions carefully before taking
any decisions to ensure that those actions will bring honour rather than shame to their
family and country. This is especially true when it comes to learning, as success in
learning would most probably lead to pride, whereas failure is relatively
unacceptable as it would embarrass the family and suggest that the learners are not
putting adequate effort into achieving the goal (e.g. Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Tham
& Tham, 2011; Juhana, 2012; Wu, 2010; Li, 2005). SDL – as we shall discuss in the
second part of this chapter – is directed and driven by individual learners, indicating
that the motivation dimension is inescapable, hence a review of motivation literature
in relation to learning and culture offers an insight into how motivation affects SDL
– a point that will be explored further in some detail in the *Findings* chapter.

A point to note is that, although the cultural dimension has received increasing
attention from researchers, based on my reading most researchers tend to make a
simplistic assumption that most Asian learners possess Confucian values (e.g.
Phuong-Mai, Terlouw & Pilot, 2005; Chiu, 2009; Wang, 2013; Ryan & Louie, 2007;
Mok, 2010; Ho & Hau, 2010). In addition, the overly simplified classification of East
vs West (e.g. Kim, 2002, 2008; Van Petegem et al., 2008) or Socratic *vs* Confucian
(e.g. Knezic, Wubbles, Elbers & Hajer, 2010; Chuah, Singh & Goh, 2014; Tweed &
Lehman, 2002; Peters, 2015) which attempts to explain various features of learners,
in my opinion, has failed to take into account the diverse cultural variations that exist
in the world. I believe that the complexity and variations of cultural differentiations
are, in fact, greater than the oversimplification of a West–East and Socrates–
Confucian ideology. Nevertheless, I would suggest that neither learning orientation is
superior to the other.

This current study, which has investigated Malaysian teacher educators'
conceptualisations of SDL, takes into account - the Malay-Islamic perspective and
Malaysian-Chinese-Confucian values which exist in the Malaysian context and

which are examined in the following section. It is hoped that this study will begin to offer an insight into the significant variations of culture which currently exist in Malaysia.

2.3.2 The influence of Malay-Islamic values in learning and teaching

Having discussed the key similarities and differences between Western and Asian perspectives on learning and teaching which are pertinent to our understanding of SDL, this section explores the influence of Malay-Islamic values on learning and teaching.

Based on my critical review of the literature on Malaysian learners, two noticeable gaps are evident. First, most of the researchers tend to regard Malaysian learners as a homogeneous group of learners. This assumption is erroneous as it ignores the fact that Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country (e.g. Hairuzila & Rohani, 2008; Tengku Kasim, 2012; Manan & Shamsudin, 2012). Second, Malaysian learners are commonly equated with Asian learners, who have inherited Confucian heritage values (e.g. Biggs, 1996, 1998; Chuah, Singh & Goh, 2014). However, I would argue that it is inappropriate to suggest that all Malaysians adhere to and practise Confucianist values. This is because Islam is Malaysia's official religion, and Islamic values may have a greater influence on Malaysian society, mainly among its largest ethnic group, Malays (Mastor, Jin & Cooper, 2000).

Malays form the largest ethnic group in Malaysia, they profess the Islamic religion and their native language is Bahasa Melayu, which is the national language of Malaysia (Noh, 2010). Being an official religion of Malaysia, Islam has had and continues to have a significant influence on the Malaysian education system (Hasan, 2001, 2002; Mohd Nor et al., 2012; Othman & Mohamad, 2011). The infusion of Islamic key values, for example *'belief and devotion to God'*, is evident in the statement of the NPE.

Education in Malaysia is an ongoing effort towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and, physically balanced and harmonious, based on a firm *belief in and devotion to God*. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards, and who are responsible and capable of achieving high levels of personal well-being as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society and, the nation at large.

(Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025, 2013, p. 2-2)

In general, the purpose of education in Islam is to produce a good man, a man of Adab (e.g. Al-Attas, 2005; Alawi, 2010). In relation to this study, Wan's (2013) convincing statement on the purpose of higher education in Islam, which is to produce a universal man who has a comprehensive worldview, is worthy of note. Wan (2013) suggests that an Islamic philosophy of education views knowledge as a universal entity and treats cognitive as well as moral dimensions as an inseparable educational concept, or in simpler words, Islam promotes knowledge unity. He adds that Muslim scholars are strongly advised to be experts in multidisciplinary areas.

Moreover, from an Islamic perspective, education is regarded as a key determinant of a country's advancement and prosperity (e.g. Wan, 2013; Al-Hudawi, Fong, Mush & Tahir, 2014; Burde, Middleton & Wahl, 2015). However, although Islam's stress on childhood education is rooted in the Holy Quran and the practice of the Prophet, greater emphasis is given to higher education. It is supposed that the products of higher education, who may become teachers, policymakers and, curriculum developers, can enhance the quality of education at all levels (Barazangi, 2001; Wan, 2013).

Finally, in Islam, educators are held accountable not only for imparting worldly knowledge, but also for instilling good values by guiding and teaching their learners' religious knowledge (e.g. Haj, 2005; Alam & Muzahid, 2006; Khan, 2014). Furthermore, Alam and Muzahid (2006) emphasise that the Muslim educator should be knowledgeable, resourceful, thoughtful and intellectually competent. With regard to the educator–learner relationship, Islam rejects the autocratic role of educators and suggests that educators should be mentors, facilitators and, to a great extent, parents

to their learners by dealing with them with kindness, tolerance, justice and wisdom (Alawi, 2010). In the same vein, Alam and Muzahid (2006) state:

> The teacher-pupil relationship in Islamic education was raised to such a level that Muslim teachers treated their sons and pupils alike. In most cases they did the fullest measure of justice to the intellect and ability of students and prized talented pupils more than their sons.
>
> (Alam & Muzahid, 2006, p. 86)

Drawing from the literature on Islamic philosophy or Islamic views on education, it is apparent that Islam emphasises the need to continually gain knowledge, upgrade one's educational level and stay current (e.g. Wan, 2013; Shaari & Jamaludin, 2011; Al-Hudawi, Fong, Mush & Tahir, 2014). As this study was conducted in Malaysia, a country that recognises Islam as its official religion, it could be argued that Malaysia should be a very fertile environment for introducing and promoting SDL approaches. Despite the potential of the Malaysian education system for advocating SDL, its potential has received less attention by most researchers. It is hoped that this current study, which provides an overview of Malaysian teacher educators' understandings and practices of SDL, will not only fill the gap identified within the literature, but may also trigger or boost SDL research by offering a different way of conceptualising SDL.

This section has demonstrated the centrality of Islamic values in the Malaysian education system; however, there is a lack of literature on the Malay-Islamic perspective of learning compared to the impact of Confucian values of learning on the Malaysian Chinese. The following sub-section discusses the dominant Confucian values in the Malaysian education context.

2.3.3 The influence of Malaysian-Chinese-Confucian values in learning and teaching

Chinese are second-largest ethnic group in Malaysia and they have preserved their Chinese traditions, cultures and identity by practising their beliefs and customs (Loy,

2010). Loy's (2010) examination of Malaysian entrepreneurs indicates that the values adhered to by the Chinese in Malaysia are identical to Confucian heritage values. In contrast, over the past few years, many researchers have reported that the Confucian values practised by Hong Kong Chinese, Korean Chinese, Vietnamese Chinese, Thai Chinese, Singaporean Chinese, Malaysian Chinese and even Chinese in Western countries may vary slightly due to the influence of their local culture and nationality (e.g. Biggs, 1990, 1991; Smith & Smith, 1999; Li & Thao, 2006; Snider, 2005; Tong, 2008; Azizan, 2010; Tengku Kasim, 2012; Peen & Arshad, 2014; Nordin, Abdul Wahab & Dahlan, 2013). Hence, it is reasonable to suggest that the oversimplified view of Chinese learners as a homogenous group of learners is inaccurate.

Based on my experience and other writers' reports on the Confucian values practised by Chinese learners in Malaysia, the Confucian values held by the Chinese in Malaysia may differ to a certain extent from those of the Chinese in China. This may be because of the need to maintain national unity, something which forces the Malaysian-Chinese to adapt to the Malaysian context and which consequently indirectly influences their actions. For instance, as Po Li (2005) reports in her doctorate thesis, Malaysian-Chinese learners, compared to Malay learners, are less face-conscious, although 'face value' is significantly emphasised by Confucian heritage culture.

Po Li (2005) claims that Confucian values are practised passively by Malaysian-Chinese learners. According to this writer, this passivity is crucial to maintaining social unity, especially in multi-ethnic Malaysia where ethnic groups must work together to preserve national harmony and the country's prosperity. My review of literature on teaching and learning in Malaysia (e.g. Azizan, 2010; Tengku Kasim, 2012; Peen & Arshad, 2014; Nordin, Abdul Wahab & Dahlan, 2013) revealed three dominant Confucian concepts practised by Malaysian learners regardless of their ethnic groups. These include:

    (1) respect for experts and authority;

    (2) the concept of 'face'; and

(3) a belief that all individuals can succeed through perseverance and hard work.

In relation to the concept of 'respect for experts and authority', it is first important to note that the purpose of education in the Confucian heritage is to produce the most genuine and sincere individuals (Sun, 2004, 2008; Li & Wegerif, 2014). In addition, education is also perceived as a means for gaining advancement in terms of both social class and economic status (Hammond & Gao, 2002; Guo & Lamb, 2010; Li & Wegerif, 2014). Hence, the educator within a Confucian heritage culture is responsible for transmitting the truth and for being a good moral example (Shim, 2008; Li & Wegerif, 2014). Although Confucius' teaching is often characterised by its one-way teaching approaches, where the educator is regarded as a knowledge transmitter, his teaching never supported passive learning and mindless memorisation (e.g. Biggs, 1994; Shi, 2006; Watkins & Biggs, 2001). Wu (2008) outlines three main reasons for the practice of one-way communication in Confucius' teaching:

(a) learners are usually taught in large classes;

(b) the education system is dominated by high-stakes examination; and

(c) the values of hierarchy and authority are emphasised.

These characteristics are very similar to those of the Malaysian educational system. My findings have revealed that, although most Malaysian teacher educators adopt a mix of conservative and contemporary pedagogical approaches, there are nevertheless a number of reasons as to why they are reluctant to discard the authoritative image of the educator.

Another important aspect in Confucianism is the concept of 'face'. There are many definitions of 'face' offered by researchers. For instance, according to Cardon and Scott (2003), 'face relates to a person's image and status within a social structure' (p.10), whereas Leung and Chan (2001) define face in terms of the social respect which one attains due to his or her significant contribution to social advancement and the individual pride that one has due to his or her social achievement. However, I would like to suggest that Ho's (1976) definition effectively captures the complexity

of Confucius' concept of 'face'. Ho (1976) defines 'face' as 'the respectability and/or deference that a person can claim for himself or herself from others, by virtue of the relative position he occupies in the social network and the degree to which he is judged to have functioned adequately in the position as well as acceptably in his social conduct' (p. 883).

Reflecting on the concept of 'face', questioning of an educator is seen as rude, unacceptable and disrespectful and may cause a loss of 'face'. Therefore, to avoid losing 'face', learners are not encouraged to question or criticise their educators or their friends in order to maintain a harmonious atmosphere and to avoid confrontation (Wu, 2008). In an ethnographic study conducted by Holmes (2002), adherence to Confucian values, particularly the 'face' concept, explains Chinese learners' feelings of discomfort when their native New Zealand counterparts deliberately questioned their educators in class. Similarly, Malaysians have been taught to be concerned with 'face' or 'shame' in order to maintain social harmony. Zamri and Lim (2011), who investigated learners' questioning in language learning at school level, reported a low rate of Malaysian learners' questions, and suggested that this was because the students did not want to interrupt the teacher's teaching. Similarly, Peen and Arshad (2014) also reported learners' passiveness in the science classroom. Their study revealed that Malaysian learners prefer to listen attentively and avoid questioning their educators, as this may lead to them being judged as intellectually incompetent by both their peers and educator.

Finally, the most important feature of Confucian teaching practised in Malaysia is the belief that everyone can succeed if they work hard (Lee, 1996). According to Li and Wegerif (2014), the Confucian idea that an individual's success depends on the effort made rather than an individual's fixed intelligence and capability is inherently more positive and motivating. My review of the literature on Confucian heritage culture has revealed that learners influenced by Confucian values are often seen to persevere more and are more hardworking (e.g. Sun, 2004, 2008; Biggs, 1994; Shi, 2006; Watkins & Biggs, 2001; Wu, 2008; Li & Wegerif, 2014). Po Li (2005) reported similar findings within a Malaysian context. According to her, hard work,

perseverance, dedication and an ability to endure hardship are highly valued virtues. She added that most Malaysian learners are willing to put enormous effort into achieving their goal. In this regard, it would seem that the motivational aspect plays an important role in sustaining learning – an important aspect which drives learners' direction in learning and which is highlighted in the *Findings* chapter.

Although Chinese are the second-largest ethnic group in Malaysia, Confucian values are practised by most Malaysians regardless of their ethnic group. This shows that the influence of cultural aspects in learning and teaching should be considered carefully, especially when seeking to expand and develop further understanding of SDL.

2.4 Conclusion to the Malaysian context and the cultural influences on learning and teaching sections

In conclusion, in developing a culturally responsive higher education institution, the sociocultural context should be taken into account. Although the preceding discussion on Islamic and Confucian values on education was separated into two distinctive parts, this is not to suggest that both perspectives are different; in fact, they share many similar features. For example, producing morally good individuals is regarded as the ultimate goal of education from both the Islamic and Confucian perspectives.

An important point emphasised by the preceding section is the urgency in revising the tendency of many researchers to simply regard Asian learners, or Malaysian learners in particular, as a homogeneous group of learners regardless of their nationality. In line with this thinking, recent literature has indicated a notable variation of values being practised within the same ethnic group (e.g. Biggs, 1990, 1991; Smith & Smith, 1999; Li & Thao, 2006; Snider, 2005; Tong, 2008; Azizan, 2010; Tengku Kasim, 2012; Nordin, Abdul Wahab & Dahlan, 2013; Peen & Arshad, 2014).

My careful analysis of the literature suggests that both Islamic and Confucian perspectives on education support SDL. Both of these perspectives acknowledge the educator as the facilitator of learning who is responsible for assisting learners' learning. Furthermore, the preceding analysis of Islamic and Confucian values accepted and practised by Malaysian learners points to the need to explore the current and prevailing conceptualisation of SDL within the Malaysian context, with its own beliefs and traditions.

This study, considering the diversity of Malaysian culture, has investigated Malaysian teacher educators' views of SDL, which is essential to my desire to provide an alternative way of understanding SDL. The second part of this chapter comprises a brief account of SDL approaches and the practices of teaching, learning and assessment in relation to SDL.

2.5 Self-Directed Learning (SDL)

Having discussed the Malaysian higher education framework and the influences of Malay-Islamic and Malaysian-Chinese-Confucian values on teaching and learning, the second part of this chapter focuses on the elusive concept of SDL, which is one of the core thrusts of this study. It begins by presenting a review of the historical development of SDL, which is useful as it provides an insight into the beginnings of SDL; the underlying ideas on SDL suggested by earlier SDL researchers; and how SDL has developed into a key educational research area which has captured the attention of many researchers. This is followed by a review of some of the definitions of SDL that have been offered by researchers. However, a discussion of the key definitions of SDL in isolation is not sufficient to understand SDL. In order to understand SDL in an appropriately comprehensive way, an examination of influential models of SDL is carefully and deliberately woven into a review of three key dimensions of SDL (psychological, pedagogical and sociocultural) proposed by researchers. This section ends with a summary of the concept of SDL, where particular attention is paid to the role of assessment and feedback within SDL. A

discussion on assessment and feedback would appear to be essential for this current study which has suggested that any attempt to reconceptualise SDL should acknowledge and thoroughly explore the underlying potential of assessment and feedback. This is because my critical review of literature revealed that, despite wide recognition of the potential of assessment and feedback to support SDL, the role played by assessment and feedback has been the subject of relatively less attention in most SDL models.

2.5.1 Historical development of SDL

In building an understanding of SDL, influential studies conducted by five of the earliest researchers are presented: Cyril Houle (Houle, 1961); Allen Tough (Tough, 1966, 1968, 1971, 1979, 1982); Malcolm Knowles (Knowles, 1970, 1973, 1975, 1980, 1989); Roger Hiemstra (Hiemstra, 1976, 1982, 1988a, 1988b, 1991, 1992, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2007, 2011); and Lucy M. Guglielmino (Guglielmino, 1978, 1989a, 1989b, 1991, 1992, 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 2013; Guglielmino & Knutson, 2000; Guglielmino, Guglielmino & Choy, 2001; Guglielmino, Guglielmino & Durr, 2000; Guglielmino & Hillard, 2007). Exploring these five researchers' thoughts on SDL is crucial not only because they were the earliest SDL researchers to introduce the idea, but more importantly, most of their views and ideas on SDL remain relevant and have been frequently cited by many contemporary researchers (e.g. Song & Hill, 2007; Kop, Fournier & Mak, 2011; Douglass & Morris, 2014).

One of the earliest pieces of research into SDL was conducted by Cyril Houle (Houle, 1961). Being a founder of the first doctoral programme in adult education at the University of Chicago, United States, Houle was very keen to understand how and why adults continue to learn. Therefore, in 1961, he conducted a qualitative research study among 22 adult learners from widely diverse backgrounds and at various stages of their lives. Based on his in-depth interviews with his research participants, Houle (1961) reported that adult learners could be classified into three categories: (a) goal-oriented learners – those who have a particular purpose for the

learning; (b) activity-oriented learners – those who pursue learning for the sake of the learning activity itself; and (c) learning-oriented learners – those who wish to acquire knowledge for its own sake.

Houle's (1961) definition of the learning-oriented learner was used to characterise and define self-directed learners by subsequent researchers. However, in recent years, there has been a growing body of literature suggesting that the features of self-directed learners proposed by Western researchers are questionable, particularly in the context of Asian cultures (e.g. Biggs, 1996; Chou & Chen, 2008; Wang, 2013). This suggests that there may have been a significant impact of cultural values on SDL and, seizing this agenda, the current study has explored the conceptualisation of SDL among Malaysian teacher educators and as the thesis unfolds, I will address the dominant characteristics of SDL in a Malaysian context.

Allen Tough, a postgraduate student of Cyril Houle at the University of Chicago, prompted many studies on adult self-direction in learning with his doctoral thesis, which investigated the tasks performed by adult learners who teach themselves (Tough, 1966). Hugely influenced by Houle, Tough (1966, 1968, 1971, 1979, 1982) conducted a series of extensive empirical studies focusing on self-learners, learning projects and SDL efforts among 66 adults. Although Tough's (1966, 1968, 1971, 1979, 1982) idea of SDL as a learning project served as a useful platform for later researchers in developing SDL models, his views on the linearity of the SDL process, in which learners follow a series of stages to reach their SDL goals, are not applicable to the present learning situation (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007) as current research has highlighted the complexity of the learning process which is not captured by this linear model. Spear and Mocker (1984) were among the many researchers who questioned Tough's step-by-step linear SDL process (1966, 1968, 1971, 1979, 1982). In their exploratory studies examining the experience of SDL among 78 learners who had less than high school completion, they reported that the pre-planning SDL process, as suggested by Tough (1966, 1968, 1971, 1979, 1982), was improbable. Rather, Spear and Mocker (1984) strongly believed that the SDL process is triggered and further mediated by several factors such as the learner's

prior learning experience, the learner's past or current knowledge and the learner's learning opportunities that he or she finds within his or her surroundings. Nevertheless, Tough's (1966, 1968, 1971, 1979, 1982) distinctive perspective on the linearity of the SDL process, and Spear and Mocker's (1984) prevalent view on the multifaceted factors influencing the SDL process, served as the earliest movements towards categorising SDL models into linear model or interactive models.

Whilst acknowledging the useful insights that Tough (1966, 1968, 1971, 1979, 1982) and Spear and Mocker (1984) offered, this thesis, focusing on the practice of SDL in higher learning, argues that the third category of SDL model, the instructional model which provides a framework to be used by educators, seems more relevant to the focus of this current study. The instructional SDL model is presented in section *2.5.3 Dimensions of SDL*.

In addition to Allen Tough, Malcolm Knowles was another student of Houle who continues to inspire studies on SDL through his influential research projects. A point to note, however, is that although Houle (1961), Tough (1966, 1968, 1971, 1979, 1982) and Knowles (1970, 1973, 1975, 1980, 1989) strongly assert that SDL is an essential educational concept which may boost adult learning, they have a considerably contrasting views on the context in which SDL occurs. For example, Houle's (1961) and Tough's (1966, 1968, 1971, 1979, 1982) ideas about SDL are closely related to the learning projects carried out by adult learners for various purposes other than to gain academic credit. On the other hand, Knowles (1970, 1973, 1975, 1980, 1989) associates SDL with a formal educational setting which serves as a fundamental component in his concept of adult education. In one of his landmark books, *Self-Directed Learning: A Guide for Learners and Teachers*, Knowles (1975) offers a useful and practical guide for both educators and learners on how to pursue SDL. He convincingly claims SDL to be a natural tendency for adult learners who increasingly incline towards self-directedness as they develop through childhood to adulthood (Knowles, 1975). Therefore, in his view, facilitating SDL should be the primary goal of adult education. Taking this idea, the current study investigated the practice of SDL among Malaysian teacher educators, where attention

was paid to the opportunities that they provided for their learners in developing SDL skills.

Beginning his work on SDL in the late 1970s, Roger Hiemstra has continued to research and publish on SDL until the present day. Hiemstra is well known for his co-development, with Ralph Brockett, of the Personal Responsibility Orientation (PRO) model (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991), which has recently been further developed and is now known as the Person-Process-Context (PPC) model (Hiemstra & Brockett, 2012) – a model which has successfully incorporated three significant domains of SDL investigated in this current study: SDL process, learner attributes and the sociocultural aspect. We shall look in detail at the PPC model in the section *2.5.3 Dimensions of SDL* section.

Also in the late 1970s, attempting to identify the central features of SDL, Guglielmino (1978) conducted a three-round Delphi survey of experts on SDL, involving 14 participants. Based on his Delphi survey results, Guglielmino provided a description of the highly self-directed learner and published a well-known quantitative instrument, the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale (SDLRS) (Guglielmino, 1978). While his SDLRS instrument was designed to assess readiness for SDL, it also contributes to the proliferation of SDL research (Long, 1998) and has been extensively used by many researchers as their research instrument (e.g. Chou & Chen, 2008; Abraham et al., 2011; Shokar, Shokar, Romero & Bulik, 2002; Shaikh, 2013; Kan'an & Osman, 2015). According to Brockett (1985), Guglielmino (1978) has made a significant contribution to the field of SDL with the introduction of the SDLRS instrument, which has not only served as a useful diagnostic tool in determining the extent to which learners are self-directed, but which also enhances our understanding of learners' attributes and self-directedness.

In spite of extensive use of the SDLRS instrument (Guglielmino, 1978), questions remain about its appropriateness when applied in different cultural contexts. However, it is not the intention of this thesis to explore in detail the validity of the SDLRS instrument (Guglielmino, 1978) in different contexts. Nevertheless, it

indicates the need for further investigation into the sociocultural impact on SDL among various ethnic groups.

To summarise, Houle, Tough, Knowles, Hiemstra and Guglielmino were among the earliest researchers to introduce and develope the SDL concept. Their work remains the main source of reference for SDL and continues to inspire current researchers. Despite wide acceptance by researchers and educators, SDL has created some confusion and has become synonymous with many related concepts such as self-planned, learning projects, self-regulated learning, autonomous learning, self-teaching, independent learning and metacognitive learning (Hiemstra, 1998).

To further complicate this state of confusion, it could be argued that Knowles' (1975) idea of SDL as a common and universal habit of the adult learner is controversial as his generalisations about SDL are exclusively based on his studies conducted on white, middle-class North Americans. Therefore, the legitimacy and validity of those generalisations is questionable. The findings of this current study, which are discussed in the *Findings* chapter, suggest that SDL manifests itself differently in different cultures which are strongly dependent on educators' direction. In the following section, a review of the key definitions of SDL offered by researchers is presented.

2.5.2 Definitions of SDL

Having reviewed the historical development of SDL, I will now focus on reviewing some of the key definitions of SDL to facilitate our understanding of the elusive concept of SDL.

Knowles' (1975) definition which has been widely cited by later researchers, describes SDL as a process in which learners take charge of and responsibility for their own learning by engaging in an actively cautious act. However, as this thesis suggests, Knowles' (1975) definition captures only certain aspects of SDL.

> In its broadest meaning, self-directed learning [SDL] describes 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.
>
> (Knowles, 1975, p. 18)

Greatly influenced by Knowles' (1975) perception of SDL, Long (1991, p. 15) defines SDL as 'a personally directed purposive mental process usually accompanied and supported by behavioural activities involved in the identification and searching out of information'. Long's (1991) vague view of SDL, which is limited to learners' attributes and behavioural constructs, has to some extent ignored the role of external factors such as educators and the learning environment.

From a relatively different perspective, which integrates instructional perspectives on SDL, Brockett and Hiemstra (1991, p. 24) stated that 'self-direction in learning refers to both the external characteristics of an instructional process and the internal characteristics of the learner, where the individual assumes primary responsibility for a learning experience'. In line with this perspective, Garrison (1997), who reviewed a substantial amount of literature on SDL, points out that existing SDL research literature has focused on the learners' act of exercising 'a great deal of independence in deciding what is worthwhile to learn and how to approach the learning task' (p. 18). Extending his idea of an independent learner, Garrison (1997) then proposes a refined definition of SDL: 'an approach where learners are motivated to assume personal responsibility and collaborative control of the cognitive (self-monitoring) and contextual (self-management) process in constructing and confirming meaningful and worthwhile learning outcomes' (p. 18).

Attempting to incorporate the bigger picture of SDL in his definition, Gibbons (2002) suggests that 'self-directed learning [SDL] is any increase in knowledge, skill, accomplishment, or personal development that an individual selects and brings about by his or her own efforts using any method in any circumstances at any time' (p. 2).

Perhaps the most thorough and comprehensive definition of SDL is given by Candy (1991). Candy's (1991) definition of SDL, which takes into account cognitive, behavioural, social and, psychological constructs has foregrounded the essential elements of SDL. Furthermore, his definition has become one of the main references for this thesis, which aims to broaden our understanding of SDL:

> In self-direction many of the enduring and at times contradictory preoccupations of education converge. Self-direction is at once a social and psychological construct, a philosophical idea, and a literal impossibility; an external manifestation and an internal tendency; both the beginning and the end of lifelong learning; the foundation stone and the keystone of a learning society; a supplement to and a substitute for the formal education system; a vehicle for the mastery of established knowledge and for the transformation of personal understandings; simultaneously a process and a product, a precondition and a purpose.
>
> (Candy, 1991, p. 424)

Although many researchers have offered their definitions of SDL, these definitions do not contribute to a clearer understanding of the concept of SDL. This is mainly because these researchers have not reached consensus on the fundamental constructs of SDL. Owen (2002) suggests that the various definitions of SDL that have caused this 'haphazard nomenclature' (p. 1) has not only precipitated a distortion of the SDL concept, but has also led to numerous synonymous terms for the same concept, such as self-planned, learning projects, self-regulated learning, autonomous learning and metacognitive (Hiemstra, 1998).

Moreover, a review of the SDL research literature indicates that there is little discussion about the social and cultural construct of SDL, which has led to a narrow description of SDL. In this regard, the current study takes this agenda further by taking into consideration the psychological, pedagogical and sociocultural dimensions of SDL in reconceptualising it within the Malaysian context. This chapter continues by analysing the dimensions of SDL as suggested in the literature, with particular attention paid to examining the models of SDL which are related to the instructional dimension.

2.5.3 Dimensions of SDL

The preceding section, in which some of the key definitions of SDL were discussed, indicated that SDL is a multifaceted concept which encompasses several constructs. Although various definitions have been introduced by many researchers to enhance our understanding of SDL, this thesis argues that a comprehensive definition of SDL is urgently needed, incorporating the important constructs related to SDL, and this is what the present study sets out to investigate. This section extends this matter further by reviewing the psychological, pedagogical and sociocultural dimensions of SDL.

a) Psychological dimensions of SDL

In relation to the psychological dimension of SDL, it is useful first to note that a review of the autonomous learning research literature has revealed that there are two distinctive views regarding learner autonomy which are closely linked to SDL. In one school of thought, learner autonomy is defined as individual cognitive dispositions which control 'the capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making and independent action' (Little, 1994, p. 81). In the other school of thought, learner autonomy has moved beyond identifying individual qualities and involves social interaction (e.g. Biggs, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2006; Murray, 2014; Lee, 2011; Benson, 2011, 2013). However, the former perspective of autonomy as lonely individualised learning has recently been challenged and discarded as researchers are now suggesting that autonomous learning is a collective learning rather than a solitary learning process. My findings reaffirm this thinking by suggesting that any forms of learning are unlikely to happen in total isolation (see Chapter 4 for more details).

Taking into account the psychological dimension of SDL, a majority of SDL researchers use the term autonomous learning to describe the characteristics of self-directed learners. According to these writers, self-directed learners are autonomous learners who proactively manage their own learning, have a strong desire for

learning, take responsibility for their own learning, have the capacity to engage in an independent learning environment, are able to self-evaluate their learning performance and control their own strategies for improvement (Knowles, 1975; Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991; Gibbons, 2002; Reinders & Balcikanli, 2011; Bouchard, 2009, 2012; Murray, 2014).

However, this thinking that associates autonomous learning with certain characteristics of the self-directed learner does not actually help in clarifying the link between SDL and autonomous learning. Benson (1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011, 2013), in his extensive work, provides a useful insight on a key distinction between autonomous learning and other types of learning which also support active learning. According to him, any type of learning, for example, self-regulated learning or SDL, uses various means to approach learning by granting different degrees of autonomy to learners to learn by themselves. He suggested that SDL approaches which recognise learners as the key agent of learning by encouraging them to take charge of their own learning have granted greater degrees of autonomy to learners compared to other types of learning approaches.

In line with this thinking, Carré, Moisan and Poisson (2010) note that the capacity of an individual to learn is closely associated with one's self-determination, self-regulation and, self-efficacy. From motivational perspectives, the self-determination theory developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2002, 2012) successfully addressed essential issues of SDL such as autonomy, freedom, choice and decision-making. Furthermore, the self-determination theory also helps us to understand the role of self in SDL by proposing that self-motivation, which can vary in its degree from being fully self-determined to an absence of motivation, has had a significant influence on one's willingness to self-direct.

Self-determination theory postulates that highly self-driven and intrinsically motivated individuals value the freedom in choosing and designing their own learning. Furthermore, this fully motivated individual tends to take control of their learning by becoming and being actively involved in the decision-making process

which describes a fully functioning self-directed learner. On the other hand, self-determination theory asserts that unmotivated individuals, who often defer to external control and become passive learners who wait for direction, are more comfortable with others-directed learning.

Agreeing with Deci and Ryan's (2000, 2002, 2012) view on the role of motivation in SDL, Pink (2011) and Douglass and Morris (2014) reported that intrinsically motivated learners usually achieved higher academic results compared to others. In this regard, Flint and Johnson (2011) point out the essential principle of self-determination theory, which is that although an initially extrinsically motivated learner is motivated by various external rewards, with proper strategies, this learner would be willing to direct their own learning.

However, a discussion of the psychological dimension of SDL is not complete through a review only of Deci and Ryan's (2000, 2002, 2012) self-determination theory focusing on learners' motivation to embark on the learning process. As Carré, Moisan and Poisson (2010) suggest, in exploring the psychological dimension of SDL, it is important and helpful to review the self-regulated learning (SRL) concept which focuses on the learner's actual learning behaviour once the decision to learn has been made.

Although the term SRL has been used interchangeably with other terms in the literature, creating some confusion about the concept of SDL, SRL is fundamental to this current study, the aim of which is to broaden our understanding of SDL. In understanding the link between SDL and SRL, it is most helpful to review Jossberger, Brand-Gruwel, Boshuizen and Wiel's (2010) and Cosnefroy and Carré's (2014) examination of both SDL and SRL terminologies. Jossberger et al. (2010) and Cosnefroy and Carré (2014) convincingly contend that SDL, which has been mainly studied by adult education specialists, has been primarily concerned with adult learners who control and decide upon their own learning. These researchers further note that SRL, which focuses on investigating the effective learning strategies

conducted within a constrained academic-based system, has mainly been analysed by the educational psychologist.

Based on Cosnefroy and Carré's (2014) and Jossberger et al.'s (2010) insightful commentary, it is clear that the significant difference between the concepts of SDL and SRL lies in control and ownership of the learning. In SDL, learners control their whole learning trajectory, determining the learning goals, learning strategies, learning resources and evaluation process, while in SRL, self-regulated learners are controlled externally by educators indicating that self-regulated learners' control is limited only to the learning activity. My findings are in line with this idea of learners' control and ownership of learning, where all of my research participants agree that in the SDL context, learners take full responsibility and control over their learning activities (see the *Findings* chapter for details).

In relation to this study, Loyens, Magda and Rikers's (2008, p. 418) view of learners' control is worthy of further comment:

> Clearly, *both self-directed learning and self-regulated learning carry an element of student control*. However, the degree of control the learner has, specifically at the beginning of the learning process when the learning task is defined, differs in self-directed learning and self-regulated learning. *In self-directed learning, the learning task is always defined by the learner*. A self-directed learner should be able to define what needs to be learned ... *In self-regulated learning, the learning task can be generated by the teacher* ... In this sense, *self-directed learning can encompass self-regulated learning, but the opposite does not hold*.

According to Loyens et al. (2008), self-regulated learners' control and ownership of their learning is restricted only to the proximal learning goals while, in SDL, learners can decide their larger distal goals. Echoing Loyens et al.'s (2008) idea of learners' control, Jossberger et al. (2010) offered a simpler way to understand SDL and SRL. Using the micro- and macro-level concept, Jossberger et al. (2010) suggest that SRL, which concerns the micro level, focuses on the task level or learning activity, while SDL, which places an emphasis on the macro level, moves beyond the task level by emphasising the learning trajectory. Loyens et al.'s (2008) and Jossberger et al.'s

(2010) perspective on the level at which SDL and SRL take place implies varying degrees of learner control in both SDL and SRL, which proves to be a very helpful way to understand the link between both concepts. For instance, self-directed learners possess greater control of their own learning compared to self-regulated learners who are bound by certain restrictions within their learning activity, which has mostly been imposed by an external person. Loyens et al. (2008) and Jossberger et al. (2010) then convincingly conclude that SDL includes SRL but SRL does not necessarily include SDL. Loyens et al.'s (2008) and Jossberger et al.'s (2010) position on SDL and SRL is convincing. Their conclusions have not only led researchers to challenge current views about the relationship between SDL and SRL, but have alerted many researchers to use the terms with some caution.

Having delineated the relationship between SDL and SRL, it is reasonable to suggest that SDL includes SRL, and that to be a capable self-directed learner, one should be able to self-regulate. In the light of this, it is important to note that SRL alone, which focuses on learning activity, is not able to produce high levels of performance; rather, learners should be able to plan their own learning trajectories that involve self-directed processes to achieve their full potential. This discussion of the relationship between SDL and SRL has illuminated some key features of SDL which the current study has sought to highlight.

It has previously been acknowledged that the learner is an important agent in the learning process and that SDL includes SRL. It is now helpful to analyse a central notion of SRL, that of metacognition (e.g. Pintrich, 1995; Kaplan, 2008; Sperling, Howard & Staley, 2004; Isaacson & Fujita, 2006; Schunk, 2008). According to McCarthy (2013), metacognition is defined as the knowledge that the student has to actively and cautiously monitor as well as regulate his or her thinking processes. A number of researchers have suggested that for optimal learning, learners should be able to determine when to learn, what to learn and how to learn (e.g. Wenden, 1998, 2001; Rivers, 2001; Coutinho, 2007; Isaacson & Fujita, 2006; Gul & Shehzad, 2012), which refers to the thinking process or metacognition.

In line with this thinking, O'Malley and Chamot (1990, p. 99) claim that 'students without metacognitive approaches are essentially learners without direction and ability to review their progress, accomplishments and future learning directions'. It has been agreed by many researchers that metacognition is subsumed under SRL, and that metacognition is crucial for SRL task activity. Furthermore, as SDL includes SRL, it is thus undeniable that metacognition should be regarded as a prerequisite component of self-direction. This thinking has significantly influenced the theoretical framework of this study that will be discussed in the *Discussion and Conclusions* chapter.

In relation to the SDL concept, Gibbs (1992, 2010), Victori and Lockhart (1995), Block (2004), Hauck (2005), Hattie (2009) and Zhang and Seepho (2013) assert that the use of metacognitive strategies which require the learners to (i) be aware of their learning needs (self-awareness); (ii) be able to plan their learning strategy (self-planning); (iii) be able to monitor their learning progress (self-monitoring); and (iv) evaluate their learning process (self-evaluation) would help learners to have more control and be in charge of their learning, and this was one of the main characteristics of SDL identified by Long (2002). In this vein, Schraw, Crippen and Hartley (2006), Martinez (2006), Saks and Leijen (2014) and Morrison and Seaton (2014) suggest that metacognition at the very least, can be seen as an important supporting element for SRL that is essential for successful self-direction.

As pointed out by Carré, Moisan and Poisson (2010), the basic concept underlying self-determination and self-regulation is self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) postulates that people's motivation and the effort that they are willing to put into achieving the goals they have set depends heavily on their perceptions and beliefs about whether they are capable of attaining those goals. In relation to the role of self-efficacy in the SDL academic setting, many researchers have reported a positive correlation between self-efficacy and SDL (e.g. Schunk, 1990; Chou, 2012; Hsu & Shiue, 2005; Long, 1991; Dynan, Cate & Rhee, 2008; Lew & Park, 2015). For example, Lew and Park (2015), investigating the relationship between self-efficacy and SDL ability among 127 high school students in Korea, reported that learners' ability to self-direct depends

significantly on learners' self-efficacy. They added that learners with higher levels of self-efficacy are more confident about their ability to succeed and are more willing to work harder to attain their learning goals.

In my opinion, self-efficacy, which has a great influence on one's motivation and self-regulating behaviours, should be regarded as a key determinant of SDL (e.g. Higgins, 2009; Kaplan, 2008). However, by highlighting the role of self in SDL, the intention is not to describe SDL as a form of learning conducted by an independent learner in absolute isolation, or to ignore the role of others in assisting one's self-direction. My understanding of SDL, which has been shaped by my readings of various research literature, incorporates the individual, social and cultural aspects of learning. The following section focuses on the pedagogical dimension of SDL which is fundamental for this current study that sets out to investigate learning opportunities provided by educators to enhance learners' ability to self-direct.

b) Pedagogical dimensions of SDL

As this study takes place in a formal academic setting, it is essential for me to review the pedagogical dimensions of SDL and extend this discussion by looking at one of the most influential instructional models of SDL, Grow's Staged Self-Directed Learning (SSDL) model (Grow, 1991). Grow's SSDL model, which will be examined further later, has greatly influenced the theoretical framing of this study and serves as a key instructional model for SDL, which places an emphasis on the compatibility of instructional and learning strategies.

Although self-directed learners may choose to learn by themselves, many researchers strongly believe that for effective self-direction, self-directed learners should interact and value the contributions of others in their learning (e.g. Vygotsky, 1978; Gibbons, 2002, Griffiths, 2008; Merriam et al., 2007). In these circumstances, the role of the educator is vital, particularly in assisting and guiding learners to be successful self-directed learners (Little, 1991, 1994; Dam, 1995; Thornton, 2010; Karlsson, Kjisik &

Nordlund, 2007). Extending further the idea of the educator as a facilitator of learning, Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) highlight four pertinent pedagogical strategies to promote SDL: (a) having diverse teaching and learning resources; (b) encouraging active learning; (c) maximising peer learning; and (d) fostering supportive and constructive interaction. From this point of view, it is obvious that SDL requires a transformation from the authoritative role of the educator into the educator as a facilitator of learning (Grow, 1991; Kember, 1997, 2000; Biggs, 2003; Hua, Harris & Ollin, 2011; Attard, Di Loio, Geven & Santa, 2010). This is because, according to Hounsell (2007), in order to promote an active learning approach, educators should acknowledge learners as equal learning partners who have the power to make decisions about their learning, which also echoes Hiemstra and Brockett's (2012) suggestion on strategies for effective self-direction.

The shift from teaching to facilitating means that learners, rather than educators, are the central figures in the learning and teaching process. Furthermore, this shift requires educators to abandon their more traditional authoritative roles by empowering learners to take responsibility for and control of their learning (e.g. Trigwell & Prosser, 1991; Townsend, 1990; Spencer & Jordon, 1999; Hewitt-Taylor, 2002; Whitehouse, O'Neill & Dornan, 2002; Reeve, 2009; Herman, 2012; Flint & Johnson, 2011; Douglass & Morris, 2014). Taking this idea forward, Biggs (2003), in his most influential model, the '3P model of teaching and learning', convincingly argues that learning is a process which involves both educators and learners exchanging views. Most importantly, Biggs' (2003) 3P model of teaching and learning posits that a shift in pedagogical approach may change the learners' learning experiences and learning outcomes. In this regard, it is reasonable to state that active learning is essential to promote SDL.

Interestingly, Grow (1991) proposes that in creating effective pedagogical processes, facilitating strategies should be devised according to the learners' levels of self-direction. A point to note, however, is that although Grow's (1991) ideas are rather old, they are nevertheless important and have become a key source of reference for many researchers investigating learning and teaching (e.g. Lee, 1994; Weimer, 2002;

Song & Hill, 2007; Merriam et al., 2007). As will become clear in the *Findings* chapter on page 107, analysis of the research participants' accounts clearly reveals that the majority believed that for successful learning to occur there should be compatibility between educators' instructional and learners' learning strategies.

Grow (1991) proposes his Staged Self-Directed Learning (SSDL) model in which he highlights the importance of matching learning and teaching activities with learners' readiness for and ability in self-direction. Two underlying principles of Grow's (1991) model are: (a) instructional design should be intellectually challenging, but within the learner's zone of proximal development, and (b) the educator is responsible for matching the instructional design with the learner's stage of self-direction while preparing the learner to advance to higher levels of self-direction. Table 2.1 illustrates Grow's (1991) SSDL model.

	Student	**Teacher**	**Examples**
Stage 1	Dependent	Authority, Coach	Coaching with immediate feedback. Drill. Informational lecture. Overcoming deficiencies and resistance.
Stage 2	Interested	Motivator, Guide	Inspiring lecture plus guide discussion. Goal setting and learning strategies.
Stage 3	Involved	Facilitator	Discussion facilitated by teacher who participates as equal. Seminar. Group projects.
Stage 4	Self-directed	Consultant, Delegator	Internship. Dissertation. Individual work on self-directed study group.

Table 2.1 The Staged Self-Directed Learning (SSDL) model
Source: Grow (1991, p. 130)

In relation to this SSDL model, Grow (1991) makes three important assumptions: (a) being a dependent learner is not an offence, but it may limit the learner's full potential; (b) the ability to self-direct is situational, where one may be self-directed in one area, but dependent in another area; and (c) self-directed learners usually work

collaboratively with other learners and experts – a point which forms one of the main features of the theoretical framework for this current study.

Despite being widely acknowledged by many researchers as one of the most helpful models of SDL in assisting the educator, particularly on how to begin implementing SDL, unsurprisingly, it nevertheless has its critics. Responding to Tennant's (1992) critical judgement on the inadequacy of the SSDL model (Grow, 1991) in emphasising the importance of having a mismatch rather than a match of teaching and learning styles to promote effective learning, Grow (1994) further defended his SSDL model. According to Grow (1994), the fundamental concept of the SSDL model (Grow, 1991) is that an educator is responsible for leading learners from their preferred and comfortable learning styles towards greater self-direction styles. He further added that this situation is achievable when educators gradually initiate a challenging and supportive learning context without creating discouragement.

While arguing that the SSDL model is an excellent framework for educators to use to promote SDL, Grow (1994) advocates that, ideally, educators should begin the instructional process by matching instructional strategies to the learners' learning styles. However, it could be argued that this is questionable, particularly if the educator adopts a mismatched instructional style to ensure the advancement of self-direction. Moreover, a significant question with regard to Grow's (1991) SSDL model, and which is related to this study, is how educators should handle learners in large classes with varying degrees of readiness for self-direction, an issue which will be returned to in some detail in the *Findings* chapter.

While offering a comprehensive view on the role of educators in facilitating learners' self-direction, Grow's (1991, 1994) account of SDL also discussed the impact of the learning context on SDL. As this thesis unfolds, it is obvious that the sociocultural dimension, which has received increasing attention from researchers and was greatly emphasised by my research participants, should be taken into account in order to fully understand, define and conceptualise the SDL concept.

c) Sociocultural dimensions of SDL

While many Western researchers have agreed that effective facilitation leads to positive and meaningful learning experiences (e.g. Gilmartin, 2001; Barraket, 2005; Cornelius-White, 2007; Gibbs, 1995, 2010; Scott, 2008; Coe, 2009; Schmidt, Dickerson & Kisling, 2010; Posner, 2009; Douglass & Morris, 2014), my review of Malaysian educational research literature suggests that not all Malaysian higher education educators have accepted their new roles as facilitators, but instead remain in their traditional roles as knowledge experts. However, some choose to combine both roles in their teaching practice and act as an authority for learning and a facilitator of learning (e.g. Long, Musa, Ismail, Abdullah & Mohamed, 1999; Sidin, 1999; Phern & Zainol Abidin, 2012; Haron, Sheikh Ahmad, Mamat & Ahmed Mohamed, 2012).

For example, the research findings of Long, Musa, Ismail, Abdullah and Mohamed (1999) and Sidin (1999) found that the Malaysian teacher educators employed various teaching methodologies in their teaching, including teacher-centred and student-centred approaches such as direct lectures, discussions and tutorials. These findings were similar to the research findings of Mahamood, Lasan, Nik Yusuff and Embi (2009), who investigated the perceptions of 218 students at Malaysian private higher learning institutions in Sarawak. Mahamood et al. (2009) reported that the majority of the students reported that their lecturers adopted both traditional teacher-centred and student-centred approaches. Presumably, the Malaysian culture, which regards educators as 'noble persons' may have had an influence on how educators perceive their roles in the learning process. In Malaysia, the 'respect for wiser individuals' is nurtured among Malaysians from a young age (e.g. Azizan, 2010; Tengku Kasim, 2012; Peen & Arshad, 2014; Nordin, Abdul Wahab & Dahlan, 2013), causing this value to be robustly practised. In this regard, my findings also revealed that almost all of the research participants seem reluctant to discard the authoritative image of the educator.

This section, which discusses the sociocultural dimension of SDL, suggests that Brockett and Hiemstra's (1991) PRO model, recently been upgraded to the Person-Process-Context (PPC) model, appears to be the most comprehensive model for understanding the SDL concept as it incorporates three primary dimensions of SDL: (a) the psychological dimension, known as learners' attributes; (b) the pedagogical dimension, known as SDL process; and (c) the sociocultural dimension, known as the sociocultural context and learning environment.

Before discussing the revised version of the PRO model (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991), the PPC model (Hiemstra & Brockett, 2012), it is important to describe the underlying principle of the PRO model as it acts as the basis of the PPC model. As Hiemstra and Brockett (2012) indicate:

> Using the original PRO model as a basis, the updated model [PPC model] is not a 'revision' per se, as it still retains the essence of our initial thinking. However, the updated model [PPC model] incorporates new understanding of self-directed learning and reconfigures relationships among the original model's key elements.
>
> (Hiemstra & Brockett, 2012, p. 155)

In order to develop an understanding of SDL, I believe it is most useful to review Brockett and Hiemstra's (1991) understanding of SDL that forms the foundation of their PRO model. According to Brockett and Hiemstra (1991), SDL can be regarded as both a process and a goal. With the former, SDL is viewed as a process in which learners take responsibility for, and control of, their learning, while with the latter, SDL is viewed as a goal which focuses on learners' desire and tendency for self-direction. Bringing together both process and goal perspectives in the PRO model, Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) emphasise that their model focuses extensively on SDL in relation to the instructional process and a learner's characteristics. The PRO model is illustrated in Figure 2.1.
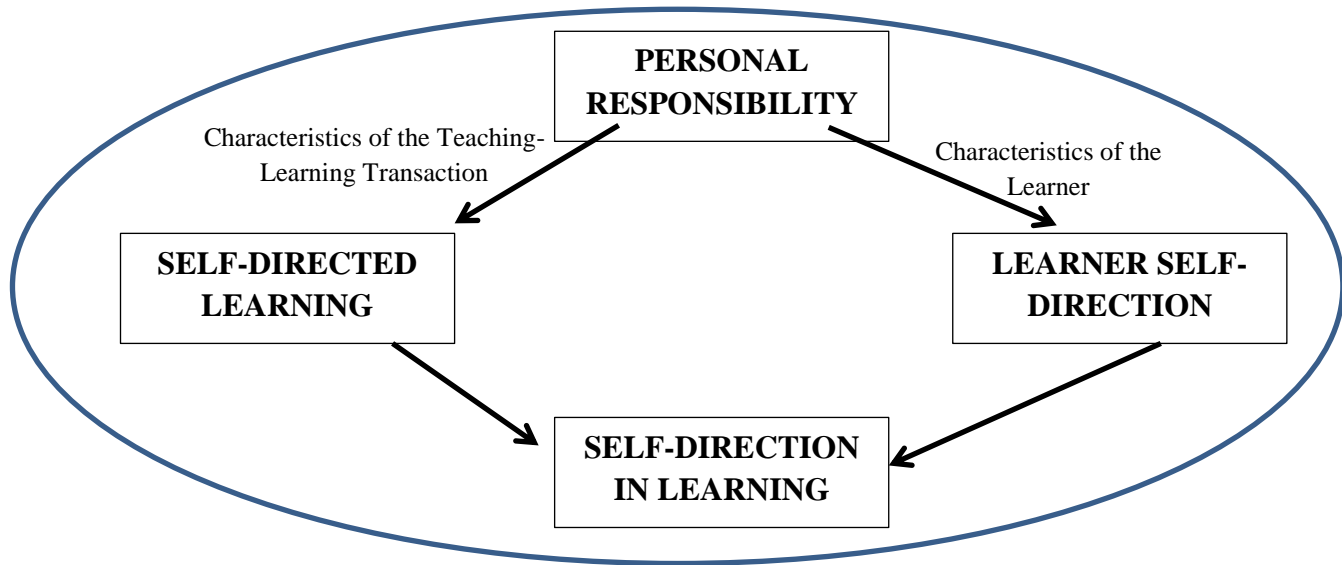
Figure 2.1 The Personal Responsibility Orientation (PRO) model
Source: Hiemstra and Brockett (2012, p. 156)

Describing their PRO model, Brockett and Hiesmtra (1991) stress that personal responsibility is a key element which guides the learner self-direction and SDL process, while the oval shape encompassing the elements signifies that self-direction in learning takes place within a social context. However, Hiemstra and Brockett (2012) state that the social aspect of SDL stressed by the PRO model is overshadowed by the 'Personal Responsibility' aspect, leading many researchers to misinterpret and misuse the PRO model (e.g. Flannery, 1991; Andruske, 2009; Garrison 1997, 2003). Hiemstra and Brockett (2012) concur that the term 'Personal Responsibility' is misleading and ambiguous, as it falls far from their initial intended use of the term, which was to highlight the need for learners to take full responsibility for their learning.

Responding to the criticism and combined with their expanding experience and knowledge about SDL, Hiemstra and Brockett (2012) further developed and updated the PRO model, and named it the PPC model. The most important characteristics of the PPC model are the inclusion of the PRO's three basic elements: 'the person or learner, the teaching-learning transaction or process, and the social-context' (p. 157),

with particular attention being paid to highlighting the importance of the sociocultural context in SDL. The PPC model is depicted in Figure 2.2.
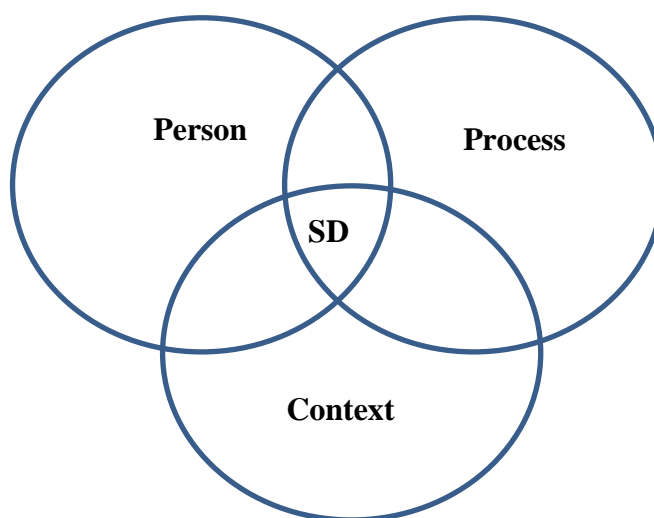
Figure 2.2 The Person-Process-Context (PPC) model
Source: Hiemstra and Brockett (2012, p. 158)

The PPC model postulates that SDL will be most effective when: (a) the learner is highly self-directed; (b) the instructional process encourages learners to take responsibility and control of their own learning; and (c) the sociocultural context as well as the learning environment offer a conducive atmosphere for SDL. My findings, which will be outlined in the *Findings* chapter, are in line with Hiemstra and Brockett's (2012) thinking and accord closely with the PPC model, but with an emphasis on the Malaysian context.

The PPC model, which has further clarified and expanded on the earlier conceptualisation of SDL by acknowledging the influence of the sociocultural context in SDL, suggests that educators can and do play an important role in both promoting and hindering SDL. Incorporating the psychological, pedagogical and sociocultural dimensions of SDL, the PPC model has become the key reference for this study exploring learners' attributes, pedagogical strategies and the impact of the sociocultural context in relation to SDL.

2.6 Conclusion to the SDL section

In the first part of the second section of this *Critical Review of the Literature* chapter, I have drawn on literature on SDL and suggested that our picture of the 'self-directed learner' and our understanding of SDL have tended to focus mainly on the responsibility of the 'self', that is, on the ability of the individual learner to drive his or her own SDL processes.

While acknowledging that this conventional viewpoint of SDL has provided important insights for our developing understanding of SDL, my review of the SDL research literature in relation to the sociocultural context suggests that in addition to these important learner attributes, an additional significant factor influencing SDL process is the sociocultural dimension.

Although a number of researchers have investigated the impact of the sociocultural dimensions of SDL, only a few have highlighted the variations in culture within a nation which may influence the practice of SDL. Besides this, my critical review of the SDL models, the SSDL model (Grow, 1991) and the PPC model (Hiemstra & Brockett, 2012) has considerably shaped my understanding of SDL as a constructively advanced learning act, where learners gradually master the skills of SDL as they are given an opportunity to practise, a point made by the majority of my research participants in their accounts, but which, surprisingly, has not been extensively discussed in previous literature.

Guided by the socio-constructivist and sociocultural perspectives on SDL, this thesis conceptualises SDL as a process situated in the social world and mediated by the interaction between learner and learning environment, and proposes that there is a need to investigate, refine and reconceptualise SDL, with a particular focus on the sociocultural dimension. Moreover, this thesis suggests that educators play an important role in SDL by leading learners towards higher self-direction activity.

In the next section, attention turns to how the educator can facilitate the development of SDL skills through assessment and feedback practices, another area that has received little attention from researchers.

2.7 Assessment and feedback practices in higher education

Having provided an overview of the issues concerning the definitions of, dimensions of and, models of SDL, this section of the *Critical Review of the Literature* chapter focuses on assessment and feedback practices which support the development of SDL. Particular attention is given to exploring the notion of sustainable assessment and feedback (Boud, 2000; Hounsell, 2007; Carless et al., 2011), which focuses on developing learners' capacity for self-judgement (Boud, 2014) by recognising the learner as a capable and active learning agent who is able to direct his or her learning.

This section is divided into four subsections. First, in order to highlight the role of assessment in the learning process, a discussion is provided on the purposes of assessment. However, a general discussion on the purpose of assessment is not sufficient to embrace the aims of this current study: to highlight the potential of assessment and feedback as effective tools for promoting SDL. Therefore, a discussion on sustainable assessment is provided. This is followed by a review of the concept of sustainable feedback. Both concepts – sustainable assessment and sustainable feedback – place learners at the heart of the learning process by acknowledging them as active learning agents who are responsible for designing, managing and controlling their own learning. Finally, this section ends with a conclusion.

2.7.1 Purpose of assessment in learning

This section, which provides a description of the most common purposes for assessment, highlights the need for a new comprehensive view on the role of assessment to support and sustain the learner's learning, particularly in the SDL context.

In promoting SDL, particularly in this current study, an immediate concern arises about whether summative and formative assessment practices are sufficient to support the learner's direction for future learning. In this regard, Boud and Falchikov (2007) suggest that the common purpose of assessment, which aims to provide a certification of attainment and report the learner's learning achievement to interested parties, is insufficiently future-oriented. According to Boud and Falchikov (2007), the second widely recognised purpose of assessment, which focuses on recognising the gap between the learner's current learning performance and the desired performance, falls short of supporting the learner's direction of their future learning.

Similarly, Torrance (2012) asserts that when assessment is restricted to closing the learner's learning gap by emphasising the role of the educator role in providing feedback in order to improve the learner's achievements, this may result in minimising learner autonomy. In this regard, the execution of SDL may be restricted, something which is a key concern for this current thesis, which sets out to highlight the underlying potential and the centrality of assessment and feedback in supporting learners' self-direction.

Furthermore, the literature reviewed indicates that much of the research on learning, assessment and feedback is limited to developing the learner's ability to assess the completion of a short-term learning activity, for instance, completion of a course assignment. This is much more closely aligned with SRL than SDL, which focuses on evaluating long-term learning performance or learning trajectories (Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Biggs, 2003; Wiggins & McTighe, 2011; Torrance & Pryor, 2001; Moss & Brookhart, 2009, 2012, 2013; McDowell & Sambell, 2014; Nicol, 2014).

Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that most of the assessment practices used by educators are mainly restricted to assisting current learning and falls short of preparing the learner to be an effective assessor of his or her own learning (Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Evans, 2013; Nicol, 2014).

Although developing the learner's capacity for self-judgement is one of the crucial elements for becoming an effective self-directed learner, since it allows the learner to monitor and evaluate their learning performance, less emphasis has been placed in the literature on preparing learners to become an assessor of their own learning (Boud, 2014). This suggests that the potential of assessment and feedback in promoting SDL has not been recognised by many researchers in this field, and it could therefore be argued that this is a significant gap in the research literature, and one which this current study begins to address. It is helpful, therefore, to review what current research has explored with regard to assessment in support of learning, particularly SDL, and the following sections turn to this literature.

Responding to the issue of the inadequacies of assessment practices for supporting the development of learners' self-direction, Boud and Falchikov (2006) propose a third purpose of assessment, which concerns supporting learners' learning. In their own words,

> [The] third purpose of assessment – assessment to foster learning throughout life – [should] be given equal attention alongside the well-established purposes of assessment for certification and assessment to aid current learning.
>
> (Boud & Falchikov, 2006, p. 400)

Extending this thinking further, Boud (2014), in his recent writing, suggests that educators should focus on developing the learner's capacity for self-judgement to enable the learner to become an effective assessor who can self-monitor and self-assess not only their current learning performance, but also prepare themselves to direct their future learning. Taking this idea further, this thesis is concerned with focusing on the potential of assessment and feedback to enhance SDL. In light of this

thinking, the notion of sustainable assessment and feedback (Boud, 2000; Hounsell, 2007; Carless et al., 2011) is presented in the following section.

2.7.2 Sustainable assessment

It is important to explore the notion of sustainable assessment and feedback because my critical review of literature shows that the idea of sustainable assessment and feedback supports the development of learners' capacity for self-judgement, which is one of the key features of SDL approaches. Furthermore, in line with the primary principle of sustainable assessment that places the learner as an active assessor of his or her own learning, this section continues to provide a discussion on the self-assessment and peer assessment which provide opportunities for learners to practise and develop their capacity for self-judgement.

A detailed review of Boud's (2000), Boud and Soler's (2015), Hounsell's (2007) and Carless et al.'s (2011) concept of sustainable assessment and feedback suggests that their idea of sustainability in learning not only supports learners' self-direction within a formal learning environment, but also prepares learners to be effective assessors of their lifelong learning processes.

Sustainable assessment is not a new assessment concept; it is not significantly different from formative assessment (Boud & Falchikov, 2007; Boud & Soler, 2015), but what distinguishes sustainable assessment from formative assessment is that sustainable assessment takes into account important features of formative assessment and extends it further to include developing the learner's capacity to self-judge beyond current learning episodes, preparing them to eventually become efficient lifelong assessors (Boud & Soler, 2015). Boud (2000, p. 151) defines sustainable assessment as assessment 'that meets the needs of the present and [also] prepares students to meet their own future learning needs'.

The core of sustainable assessment is that assessment practices should equip the learner to be a successful individual who can not only evaluate their current learning activities, but also be able to assess their learning progress beyond formal education structures. More recently, Boud (2014) has asserted that developing the learner's capacity for self-judgement is central to his concept of sustainable assessment. This act, as described by Boud and Falchikov (2007), involves self-regulation, which this current thesis argues is one of the key skills in successful SDL. Moreover, Boud and Falchikov (2007) noted that sustainable assessment helps to shift conventional assessment practices away from those that impose certain behaviours on learners, to assessment practices that appreciate a collaborative partnership between educators and learners in designing assessment strategies.

In recognising the potential of assessment and feedback to enhance SDL, it is important to note that this current study strongly supports one of the essential components of SDL – learner autonomy – where learners are given the opportunity to control and manage their learning process in order to encourage development of their SDL skills (e.g. Nicol, 2014). Most importantly, this current study takes into account many researchers' recommendations for an inclusive assessment approach which encourages an educator learner partnership in designing assessment procedures (e.g. Evans, 2013; Bates & Martin, 2013; Bourke, Mentis & Todd, 2011; Woolner & Clark, 2015; Carless et al., 2011).

In the same vein, Hounsell (2003) calls for active learner involvement in assessment and feedback by proposing two strategies for enhancing the ability of both assessment and feedback to support learners with their learning; these are 'student involvement in the generation of feedback, and a more open and collaborative approach to assignments' (p. 78). Similarly, McArthur and Huxham (2013) argue that educators should act as an usher for learning, rather than a master of learning, and it will become clear in this thesis that this view has strongly influenced my reconceptualisation of SDL to suggest that educators should be mediators of learning, with learners acting as the key learning agents. In this respect, it is evident

that a positive and collaborative educator learner partnership is crucial to ensuring successful in SDL.

In addition to recognising the importance of active learner involvement in designing assessment procedures, and the need to establish a collaborative partnership between the learner and educator to develop learners' capacity for self-judgement through sustainable assessment, self-assessment is given particular attention. Cassidy (2007), who argued that self-assessment is a key element of sustainable assessment, further explains how self-assessment helps to produce self-directed and independent learners.

> What defines self-assessment for students is the acceptance of responsibility for their own learning and performance. Before students will – or can be expected to do this – they must be offered the opportunity to develop self-assessment skills and be made aware of the value and effectiveness of these skills. The introduction of planned and structured self-assessment activities allows for the development of skills associated with self-assessment capabilities. While these activities may well focus on the delivery of content, the aim should be to develop skills which contribute to the students' ability to judge their own progress and performance.
>
> (Cassidy, 2007, p. 315)

Peckham and Sutherland (2000), Gibbs and Simpson (2004), Cassidy (2007) and Nicol (2009) are strong supporters of self-assessment which invites the learner to become actively involved in devising and using the assessment standards to critically judge their own learning and delineate what they consider to be the seven pedagogical benefits of self-assessment:

(1) learners are provided with an insight into assessment procedures;

(2) learners have the opportunity to have ownership of assessment criteria and standards;

(3) learners are encouraged to take increasing responsibility for their own learning;

(4) learners' levels of self-motivation are enhanced as they are in control of their learning;

(5) learners have the opportunity to become autonomous learners;

(6) learners are empowered by valuing their judgements of their own work; and

(7) learners are encouraged to evaluate critically and reflect on their learning.

Interestingly, besides self-assessment, but in relation to SDL, McMahon (2010) proposes the use of peers in the assessment process, which he suggests can enhance the learner's capacity for self-judgement. He suggests that:

> Combining peer-assessment with self-directed learning via peer-group supported action-planning, prompted the development of autonomous learning skill sets and improved the ability of students to judge their own and their peers' work to the extent that the perspectives of the students on their own abilities and potentials were changed for the better.
>
> (McMahon, 2010, p. 278)

Echoing McMahon's (2010) view on peer assessment and Boud's (2007) advocacy for a stronger role of peers in supporting the development of the learner's evaluative skills, Nicol (2014) further outlines four key advantages of practising peer assessment, or, as he terms it, peer-review:

i. learners have the opportunity to evaluate a range of works produced by their peers, which invariably allows them to practise their evaluative skills;

ii. learners continually reflect on their own work and consider improvement strategies when reviewing the work of their peers;

iii. learners' understanding of the topic that they assess is enhanced as they revisit the topic several times when reviewing the work of their peers; and

iv. learners are trained not only to understand and interpret the assessment criteria, but also to formulate and justify their judgement.

However, a review of literature on assessment reveals that the practice of self-assessment and peer assessment in higher education is not mandatory and educators do not appear to value learners' judgement of their own work since most educators tend to regard learners as incompetent assessors (e.g. Cassidy, 2007; Peckham & Sutherland, 2000; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004; Nicol, 2009, 2014). Furthermore, the majority of the research on self-assessment is restricted to (a) examining the differences between learners' self-assessment marks and educators' marks (e.g. Gibbs, 1995, 2010, 2012; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004); (b) examining the tendency for

learners to overrate or underrate their marks compared with educators' marks (e.g. Boud & Falchikov, 1989; Orsmond, Merry & Reiling, 1997, 2002; Ross, 2006; Cassidy, 2007); and (c) examining the effect of cognitive ability and course level on learners' ability to assess their own learning (e.g. Orsmond et al., 1997, 2002; Boud & Falchikov, 1989; Brown, 2004; Lew & Schmidt, 2011).

Nonetheless, an important point to make is that whilst cognitive ability, academic experience and educational levels are crucial in determining learners' self-assessment ability, all learners, as argued by Gibbs (1995) and Cassidy (2007), possess basic self-assessment skills which should allow an integration of self-assessment at an early stage in higher education. In line with this view, Sadler (2010, 2013) reports that educators' exposure to and experience of assessing a number of learners' assignments allows them to develop their ability to make an accurate judgement. Echoing Higgins, Hartley and Skelton's (2001), Nicol's (2009, 2014) and Rust, O'Donovan and Price's (2005) call for active learner involvement in assessment procedures, Sadler (2010) suggests that learners should be given the opportunity to make judgements, which Sadler (2010) believes is achievable through self-assessment and peer assessment. This thesis, as it unfolds, argues that the element of self-assessment and peer assessment raised by these writers should be acknowledged as an essential element of effective self-direction.

To fully embrace the potential of Boud's (2000), Hounsell's (2007) and Carless et al.'s (2011) idea of sustainability in learning, particularly to develop learners' capacity for self-judgement, this discussion now turns to explore the notion of sustainable feedback, a fundamental concept that is inseparable from the learning and assessment constructs.

2.7.3 Sustainable feedback

It is worth noting that feedback aimed at improving the learner's learning is crucial to enhancing learning (Black & William, 1998), and proper utilisation of feedback should lead to better learning (Biggs, 1998). However, from a slightly different perspective, Hattie and Jaegar (1998) and Hattie and Timperley (2007) contend that feedback also carries a negative effect, especially when it deviates from a focus on task attainment to more personal attributes. Therefore, Dweck (2006, 2012) highlights the need for feedback to acknowledge the effort being put into achieving a task rather than simply focusing on cognitive ability or personality. In a similar vein, McDowell and Sambell (2014) propose that assessment and feedback should be treated as an integrated component of the learning process and should be employed concurrently rather than being recognised as a final procedure of learning or as a precaution stage to prompt improvements to the learner's learning performance.

However, a critical review of the literature reveals that the current practice of feedback places great emphasis on the educator as a primary source of feedback and neglects the learner's role, which lead to over-reliance on educators' feedback. This act 'appears to weaken rather than strengthen the development of learner autonomy' (Torrance, 2007, p. 291), which has been identified as one of the core aspects of SDL approaches. For example, although Price, Handley, Millar and O'Donovan (2010) recognise the role of the learner in the learning process and assert that particular attention needs to be paid to developing learners' capacity to interpret feedback, this concept of the learner is limited to the learner acting upon educators' feedback. In relation to developing learners' capacity for self-judgement, which is pertinent to this current study, Orsmond and Merry (2009) investigated third-year biology students' perception of educator feedback across four universities and proposed that feedback strategies should be designed to move learners from high dependence on educator feedback towards generating their own feedback.

Despite receiving increasing attention from many researchers as one of the ways to improve learners' learning, Hounsell (2003) notes his concerns on the decline of

feedback provision, which he suspects stems from an increasing student–staff ratio that has reduced personal contact time, and from the modularisation of courses that leads to a reliance on summative assessment, with less opportunity for formative feedback (e.g. Nicol, 2009, 2014; Boud & Molloy, 2013; Price et al., 2010; Carless et al. 2011).

There are many descriptions of what comprises effective feedback put forward by researchers, for example:

i.   a feedback sandwich, where negative feedback is sandwiched between two positive comments (Molloy, 2010);

ii.   the practice of timely feedback (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004);

iii.   the idea of feed-forward and feed-up, which aims to close the feedback loop (Hounsell, McCune, Hounsell & Litjens, 2008); and

iv.   Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick's (2006) seven principles of good feedback.

Nevertheless, none of these strategies would perfectly fit all learning situations (Shute, 2008). In order to enhance learners' SDL skills, this current study proposes that a more fundamental rethinking of the role of feedback is needed in regard to SDL.

In relation to the SDL context, this thesis suggests that feedback practices should focus on improving the learning process by encouraging learners to generate their own feedback, rather than to focus heavily on improving educators' capacities to provide good feedback. In the light of this, Hounsell's (2007) notion of sustainable feedback, which has the potential to shift the current focus on educator feedback towards prioritising learners generating their own feedback (Boud & Molloy, 2013), is worthy of note.

Inspired by Boud's (2000) notion of sustainable assessment, Hounsell (2007) introduces the notion of sustainable feedback. Hounsell (2007) addresses three important elements in his account of sustainable feedback: (1) the provision of 'high-value' feedback which relates to the task beyond current learning episodes; (2)

repositioning the learner's role as a co-partner in generating, interpreting and engaging with feedback; and (3) enhancing the congruence between guidance and feedback by encouraging constructive dialogue. Although Hounsell (2007) introduces the idea of sustainable feedback, he does not explicitly define sustainable feedback. A definition offered by Carless et al. (2010) helps to clarify the underlying concepts of sustainable feedback:

> Dialogic processes and activities which can support and inform the student on the current task, whilst also developing the ability to self-regulate performance on future tasks.
>
> (Carless et al., 2010, p. 3)

The basic principle governing the concept of sustainable feedback is the need to acknowledge learners as active learning agents with responsibility for constructing or designing their own learning, by recognising feedback as a process to facilitate their learning and not an external control mechanism imposed by educators. The definition by Carless et al. (2010) of SDL as a dialogic process to support both learners' current and future learning is supported by many researchers (e.g. Caruana & Spurling, 2007; Hounsell, 2007; Bloxham & Campbell, 2010), who believe that active and meaningful dialogue between learners and educators helps learners to understand the assessment standards, become familiar with academic expectations and plan measures to take to improve their learning.

Furthermore, a review of Hounsell's (2007) and Carless et al.'s (2011) concept of sustainable feedback reveals that sustainable feedback stresses the learners' act of seeking and generating feedback in collaboration with educators. Most importantly, their idea of sustainable feedback highlights the fact that a positive partnership relationship between learners and educators is only achievable when feedback is regarded as a dialogic process (Carless et al., 2011).

With a perspective of feedback as 'all dialogue to support learning in both formal and informal situations', Askew and Lodge (2000, p. 1), who examine the pedagogical practices of excellent university teachers, suggest four characteristics of sustainable feedback: (i) learners are actively involved through dialogue in

determining the desirable learning performance; (ii) learners are supported throughout the feedback process towards developing their capacities in monitoring and evaluating their learning; (iii) learners are supported in designing their own learning trajectories; and (iv) emphasis is on the generation of generic feedback which can be used across disciplines.

Having extensively reviewed how the concept of sustainable assessment and feedback supports the development of learners' capacity for self-judgement – a fundamental element in becoming an effective self-directed learner – this section suggests that two key issues arise; the importance of establishing a collaborative partnership between educators and learners to enhance SDL, and the need to recognise learners as active learning agents by empowering them to autonomously direct their own learning.

2.8 Conclusion to the assessment and feedback section

The second part of this *Critical Review of the Literature* chapter has indicated that although the desire for an active learning environment has been promoted and studied by many researchers, less emphasis has been placed on ensuring that assessment and feedback are better positioned to assist the direction of learners' future learning. A review of literature on sustainable assessment and feedback indicates that the idea of sustainability in learning highlighted by this concept stresses the learner's active participation in learning, rather than of them being a passive recipient of other parties' acts, an important feature of the SDL concept which has been embraced by this current study. Most importantly, the notion of sustainable assessment and feedback is compatible with an aim of this current study, which is to highlight assessment and feedback as important tools in SDL.

2.9 Towards a comprehensive understanding of SDL

In this chapter, I have brought together a diverse range of literature and have suggested that our understanding of SDL is neither sufficiently comprehensive nor culturally sensitive to enable us to fully and effectively maximise the promising potential of SDL. While acknowledging the contribution made by many SDL researchers in an effort to promote SDL, my critical review of literature indicates that there are three significant gaps identified in the existing literature:

(1) Most of the SDL research has explored learners' perceptions and practices of SDL, ignoring to some extent educators' perspectives and understandings of SDL (e.g. Ryan, 1993; Greyling, Geyser & Fourie, 2002; Du, 2013; Lee et al., 2014). Based on the literature reviewed, educators play a significant role in assisting the development of learners' skills of self-direction. However, research investigating educators' perceptions and practices of SDL has been limited. Taking this matter further, this study has investigated Malaysian teacher educators' conceptualisations of SDL.

(2) The main focus of SDL research has been on Western and Asian cultures (e.g. Kim, 2002, 2008; Van Petegem, Aelterman, Van Keer & Rosseel, 2008; Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Peters, 2015), especially Confucian culture, and, research into other cultures has been limited. Moreover, many researchers have challenged the simplistic assumption that most Asian learners hold Confucian values, an erroneous assumption which ignores the existence of rich and diverse ethnic groups, particularly within a multicultural nation (e.g. Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Ho & Hau, 2010; Mok, 2010; Chuah, Singh & Goh, 2014). Taking this into account, this current study highlights the impact of the two biggest ethnic groups in Malaysia, namely Malays and Chinese, on teacher educators' understandings and accounts of SDL, and draws on the cultural dimension when analysing and reporting on their interviews.

(3) Less attention has been paid to the role of assessment and feedback in enhancing, promoting and accelerating the development of SDL skills. This is clear from the in-

depth analysis of key SDL models, where assessment and feedback account for only a small part of the overall SDL framework. Although some research studies have suggested that the practice of self-assessment strategies in SDL is beneficial (e.g. Cassidy, 2007; Peckham & Sutherland, 2000; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004; Nicol, 2009, 2014), the focus has been largely on determining the reliability and validity of learner self-assessment in comparison to educator-led assessment (e.g. Cassidy, 2007; Orsmond, et al. 1997; Ross, 2006; Gibbs, 1995; Kim, 2008). However, this focus has been neither thorough nor helpful, because learners are learning to be self-assessors, and their judgement skills are still developing as they are given more opportunities to practise self-assessment. Most importantly, this current study suggests that in order to promote SDL, learners' capacity for self-judgement and their ability to generate their own feedback should be prioritised, since by becoming effective assessors of their own learning, learners will be free from educators' control, a basic principle for successful self-direction.

Based on these arguments, this study argues for a reconceptualisation of the concept of SDL within which greater emphasis is placed on the cultural dimension and on the importance of focusing on the assessment and feedback that are central to the development of self-directed learners who take control of and are responsible for their own learning. Having identified these gaps in the existing literature, this current study has set out to add to the existing literature and begins to close the gaps by investigating Malaysian teacher educators' understandings of and beliefs about SDL, and their practices that promote and hinder SDL.

The following chapter provides a detailed account of the research design, which was constructed to allow me to answer my research questions, and also of the key methods and methodological decisions. After presenting my research findings in the *Findings* chapter, I will then outline my reconceptualisation of SDL in the *Discussion and Conclusions* chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods and Methodological Considerations

3.1 Introduction

The *Critical Review of the Literature* chapter foregrounded the relevant research studies which are expected to provide a broader way of understanding and practising SDL. This chapter, *Methods and Methodological Considerations*, sets out clearly and in some detail how Malaysian teacher educators' conceptualisations of SDL were investigated. Four research questions were formulated:

1) How do teacher educators in Malaysia conceptualise learning?
2) How do teacher educators in Malaysia conceptualise SDL?
3) To what extent do teacher educators in Malaysia perceive themselves as self-directed learners?
4) What kind of learning opportunities do teacher educators in Malaysia create for their learners to foster the development of SDL, and what is the particular role of assessment and feedback in SDL?

To answer these research questions, a total of twenty research participants, who voluntarily offered to be my research participants, were interviewed. The key aim of the semi-structured interviews was to explore their understandings of and practices in SDL.

This chapter describes and provides a rationale and justification for the research design and data-gathering approaches that were adopted for this study. This chapter consists of four main sections. First, it begins by introducing and explaining issues related to the research paradigm adopted for the study. Second, the chapter continues by describing and justifying the research method and methodology involved in the data-gathering approaches adopted; the processes involved in analysing and reporting

the findings, and how the interviews were crafted and organised; and the transcription and translation issues which emerged. Third, an examination of important ethical issues related to this current study, such as anonymity, confidentiality and participants' freedom to withdraw at any stage of the research, are presented. Finally, important issues pertinent to this current study are examined, and the chapter ends with a conclusion before the findings are presented in the following chapter.

Before discussing the methodology adopted for this study, I will first clarify the study's paradigm, which acts not only to inform important decisions concerning the research methodology, but which is also important for determining the most appropriate validation processes for this study (e.g. Long & Johnson, 2000; Bergen, 1999; Rolfe, 2006).

3.2 Constructivist research paradigm

This section discusses my understanding of different research paradigms and provides a rationale for adopting a constructivist paradigm which later helps to justify my choices regarding the overall research design. This section focuses on justifying the most appropriate research paradigm for this current study – a constructivist research paradigm.

It is notable that researchers have different viewpoints in regard to the importance of linking methodological selections to research paradigms. The viewpoints range from Patton's (2002) opponent position that suggests that research paradigms are superfluous and possibly handicapping as they may sometimes impose unnecessary restrictions on designing a flexible and purposeful research design, to Schwandt's (2012) proponent position that research paradigms are inescapable and their role in determining the research design should not be underestimated.

Echoing Schwandt's (2012) position, Tuli (2010) stresses that research paradigms are one of the essential research components which justify every decision made by researchers in the planning of their research design. In line with this thinking, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) suggest that it is crucial for a researcher to examine their research paradigm prior to embarking on a research project, as the links formed between research paradigms and methodological choices serve not only to rationalise the researcher's decisions, but also help to clarify the theoretical frameworks of the research.

Taking into account the various viewpoints held by researchers regarding the importance of research paradigms in determining an appropriate research design, it is my position as researcher of this study to propose that a researcher's research paradigm has significant implications for every decision made by the researcher throughout the research process. Therefore, it is essential for researchers to understand the prevailing research paradigms and their underlying philosophical assumptions, as this helps to guide researchers in the process of planning and conducting their research appropriately (Schwandt, 2012; Tuli, 2010; Cohen et al., 2000). In identifying the research paradigm most closely related to this study, Guba and Lincoln's (2005) four basic questions focusing on the aspects of ontology, epistemology, axiology and, methodology were considered.

In terms of an ontological assumption, this study leans very much towards a constructivist paradigm, as the concept of a SDL approach is based on the responses of research participants rather than on my own conceptualisation of the approach. Furthermore, this study does not attempt to make any generalisations, but rather provides an insight into the conceptualisation of SDL held by Malaysian teacher educators and their commitment to SDL strategies. A constructivist paradigm is also evident in my epistemological position, where I opt for a more personal and interactive mode of data collection and data analysis. For example, I shared my transcriptions with the research participants which provided them with an opportunity to judge and comment on the accuracy of my transcription. In addition, a salient feature of a constructivist paradigm is evident in my holding of multiple roles

throughout the research process, such as those of an interviewer, transcriber and translator.

As I play an important part in the research as a result of having multiple roles in the data collection and data analysis stages of the research, validity issues come into question. To support the validity of this study, the constructivist claim about objective reality counts. Constructivist researchers hold that there is no objective reality and the role of a constructivist researcher is to interpret reality constructed by research participants rather than capturing the reality (Kamil, Mosenthal, Pearson & Barr, 2000; Creswell, 2013; Lichtman, 2010). Therefore, my multiple roles during the data collection and analysis phases are not intended to capture an objective reality but rather to interpret reality as it is represented by the research participants. Issues concerning validity are treated differently within a constructivist paradigm, and as this study falls within a qualitative research paradigm, it is more appropriate to consider carefully the overall trustworthiness of the research rather than to focus on issues of validity which are more relevant to quantitative positivist research (Schrag, 1992; Shenton, 2004). We shall look in detail at issues of trustworthiness in the *Trustworthiness of this study* section on page 100.

In summary, having answered Guba and Lincoln's (2005) questions, it is clear that this current study adopts a constructivist paradigm as it proposes a reconceptualised SDL framework based on my interpretations of the accounts of research participants. In this regard, the key element indicating the adoption of a constructivist research paradigm refers to the notion that reality is socially constructed and the research findings are the result of the co-construction of meaning between researcher and research participants.

3.3 Grounded theory as a qualitative research approach

Having outlined the research paradigm adopted for this study, I now extend the discussion further by looking at the research method used – a grounded theory

approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In general, although grounded theory informed my data collection procedures and my approaches to analysing the interview data, I am not referring to the original conceptualisation of grounded theory used widely by previous researchers, but to Charmaz's reconceptualisation of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2014). This section focuses on my justification for using Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory, and I will provide a brief description of my understanding of it and how it helped to inform my thinking.

3.3.1 Charmaz's version of constructivist grounded theory

Grounded theory was introduced by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 when they conducted a sociological study to examine the experience of dying in hospitals (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 2000, 2007). Although research at that time was dominated by a positivist research paradigm, Glaser and Strauss allowed their study to be influenced by both Glaser's preference for a quantitative approach and Strauss's perspective on symbolic interactionism where researchers should actively engage with research participants and intensively immerse themselves with the data in order to generate rich and meaningful data (Charmaz, 2008; Flick & Charmaz, 2014).

Consequently, they introduced an inductive research method which allowed the development of a theory without being directed by a preconceived theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In relation to Glaser's preference for a quantitative approach, their inductive research method emphasised systematic and iterative coding and categorising processes. An interactionism viewpoint was also evident as human behaviour and complex meaning-making processes were acknowledged (Charmaz, 2008). Their discovery of this inductive research method led to the 1967 publication of their landmark publication, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*.

Eventually, by the early 1990s, Glaser and Strauss, the co-founders of grounded theory, had each developed sharply contrasting schools of thought. As a result, what

started as a collaborative effort between Glaser and Strauss, ended with two distinctively contrasting versions of grounded theory, namely the Glaserian and the Straussian models of grounded theory (Stern, 1994; Oktay, 2012).

Glaser's conceptualisation of grounded theory leaned towards a postpositivist objectivity, whereas Strauss's viewpoint aligned more closely with pragmatism (Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006). It is notable that through Glaser's subsequent publications (e.g. Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1998, 2001, 2002, 2007; Glaser & Kaplan, 1998; Glaser & Holton, 2007), Glaser remained faithful to the original version of grounded theory by extending the discussion of the fundamental concepts of grounded theory such as theoretical sampling, theoretical coding and theoretical memos (Walker & Myrick, 2006).

On the other hand, Strauss, in collaboration with Corbin (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), was accused by Glaser (Glaser, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995) of straying from the initial principles governing the original grounded theory. Strauss and Corbin's publication of a user-friendly book in 1990, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, which provides detailed analytic techniques for use by researchers, marked the fundamental differences between Glaser's and Strauss's perspectives on grounded theory. According to Glaser (1992, 1993, 1994, 1995), Strauss and Corbin's (1990) meticulous guidelines may place a certain degree of restriction on researchers in selecting the most appropriate research methods for their investigation. Moreover, Glaser (1992, 1993, 1994, 1995) convincingly argues that Strauss and Corbin's actions deviated from the initial intention of the original grounded theory method, which was to provide flexibility to a researcher. In defending their position, Strauss and Corbin (Strauss & Corbin, 1991, 1997) insist that it was not their intention for researchers to follow their proposed guidelines unquestioningly; rather, they pointed out that their guidelines were only to assist novice researchers gain an overview of the grounded theory approach.

Adding to these accounts of grounded theory, Charmaz (2000) introduced her approach to grounded theory, an approach which has been adopted to guide the data

collection procedures and analysis of the interview data for this current study. Despite being heavily influenced by Strauss and Corbin's ideas on grounded theory, Charmaz has her own unique ways of understanding and interpreting grounded theory. Using a constructivist methodological lens, Charmaz (2000) convincingly explains her viewpoints regarding grounded theory. According to Charmaz (2000), rather than imposing a list of strict methodological prescriptions to be followed, grounded theory strategies should provide flexibility to researchers in answering their research questions.

Although Charmaz's (2000) version of grounded theory reflected Strauss and Corbin's views that research findings are the product of the interaction between researcher and research participants, she rejected Glaser and Strauss's (1967) perspectives that emphasised the need for the researcher to be a distanced observer in order to minimise their influence on the research outcome.

In line with this view, Charmaz, throughout her subsequent writing (e.g. Charmaz, 1990, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2014), stresses a symbolic interactionist perspective where she emphasises that research findings are the co-construction of meaning between researcher and research participants. In her own words, she argues: 'We are part of the world we study and the data we collect' (Charmaz, 2000, p. 10). Reiterating this position in a later publication, she states: 'We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives and research practices' (Charmaz, 2006, p. 10).

In addition, Charmaz's constructivist version of grounded theory holds that absolute reality does not exist, rather that reality is constructed through human interpretation of the social world (Charmaz, 2000, 2002, 2003). As Charmaz (2000, p. 524) states: 'Data do not provide a window on reality. Rather, the discovered reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural and, structural contexts.'

Based on my review of Charmaz's version of grounded theory, it is clear that the flexibility of the grounded theory method, and the recognition of a collective creation

of knowledge by researcher and research participants, served as the fundamental features of Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory. Taking into account the underlying principles governing Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory, I will now provide my justifications for using it.

(1) Exploratory form of qualitative research method

Since its initial development, grounded theory has aimed to construct a theory through the process of exploration and understanding of the observed world. Charmaz (2000) emphasises the importance of interpreting research participants' narratives from their perspective rather than from a researcher's viewpoint. This suggests that a constructivist grounded theory approach values research participants' responses, while at the same time it allows flexibility for a researcher in making sense of social phenomenon. As the goal of this current study is to explore Malaysian teacher educators' conceptualisations of SDL, it is essential for me to preserve the original comments of research participants and make them clear to the reader. This transparency helps to ensure that when reporting the outcomes of this current study, the research participants' conceptualisations of SDL are based on their perspectives rather than my own conception of SDL. Therefore, a constructivist grounded theory is indeed the most appropriate qualitative research approach for this current study.

(2) Flexibility to gather and analyse the data

Taking into account Charmaz's (2000) recommendation concerning the importance of being flexible in using her constructivist grounded theory approach, this current study adopted a hybrid approach, using both inductive and deductive analysis of the interview data. This hybrid approach allowed me to use the existing theories from the literature to shape interview schedules and to link the data to the predetermined themes (deductive approach), while at the same time allowing for themes to emerge which were grounded in the data through the adoption of an inductive approach.

(3) Sensitivity and awareness of context and culture

When adopting a constructivist grounded theory approach, although researchers are held responsible for understanding the observed world by interpreting research participants' stories, they are also granted a degree of control and ownership when gathering and analysing their data (Charmaz, 2000). Researchers are given the opportunity to select the most appropriate research methods to assist them in the process of answering their research question; this acknowledges their role in the research process. To strengthen this point even further, Charmaz (2014) convincingly suggests that her constructivist grounded theory approach, which takes into account research participants' specific contexts and culture, is a potential research method for use in research where close attention is paid to culture. This fundamental element of a constructivist grounded theory, which acknowledges the impact of context and culture in understanding research participants' stories, is desirable, particularly for this study with its concern for the influence of culture on Malaysian teacher educators' understandings of SDL. This therefore, serves as one of the main reasons for the adoption of a constructivist grounded theory approach in this current study and guided my procedures of data collection and analysis.

(4) Commitment to scholarly rigour

Finally, in comparison to other qualitative research approaches, Charmaz (2014) emphasises that the utilisation of a 'backward-and-forward' approach to data analysis enhances the methodological rigour of constructivist grounded theory. As previously mentioned, I chose to use a hybrid inductive and deductive approach that reflected important features of Charmaz's backward-and-forward approach, as this allowed me to use both inductive and deductive approaches at any time, as and when necessary and appropriate. As will become clear in the presentation of the findings of this study, the complementary features of inductive and deductive approaches highlighted lead to a compelling interpretation of research participants' interviews (e.g. Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). A point to note however, is that although a constructivist grounded theory approach appears to be particularly useful when conducting qualitative research because of its flexibility when analysing data, this flexibility may

lead to errors resulting from the researcher's misinterpretation of data (e.g. Crotty, 1998; Bowen, 2009; Dunne, 2011; Markey, Tilki & Taylor, 2014). To overcome this potential problem, Charmaz (2014) stresses the need to constantly check the researcher's interpretation of data through a constant comparative approach.

3.4 Research design

As this study falls into a constructivist research paradigm, this discussion will now focus on clarifying the research design that was devised as the most appropriate way to find answers to the research questions. This section starts with a discussion of the phases involved in this current study, and this is followed by an account of the data-gathering approaches, sampling techniques used, approaches to analysis methods and issues of trustworthiness.

3.4.1 Phases involved in this study

In designing an appropriate research method, Connell, Lynch and Waring (2001), Oliver, Serovich and Mason (2005) and Creswell (2013) suggest that researchers take into account the constraints of the study, such as time, costs and access to participants and that they should compare their 'ideal' research plan with the possible and workable research plan. Therefore, after considering the opportunities and constraints which could influence how research activities would be conducted for this current study, nine phases were devised:

- *Phase 1: Reviewing the existing literature;*
- *Phase 2: Identifying a gap in the existing literature;*
- *Phase 3: Developing research questions;*
- *Phase 4: Formulating questions for interview guides;*
- *Phase 5: Conducting semi-structured interviews;*
- *Phase 6: Transcribing the interviews;*

- *Phase 7: Translating the interviews;*

- *Phase 8: Analysing the interviews; and*

- *Phase 9: Reporting research findings.*

− Further discussion of all nine phases is presented later.

This nine phases are illustrated in Figure 3.1. A point to be made here, with regard to the constructivist grounded theory approach adopted, is that *Phase 1: Reviewing the existing literature* serves as a backbone for this study as it had a significant influence throughout each phase of the research. I decided to continue reviewing and updating the literature related to this current study as an ongoing process because: (1) this would keep the study as current as possible, and (2) it is more convincing to persuade the reader through a well-supported argument based on current research literature than presenting an argument that is built solely on the researcher's individual assumptions. However, I am aware that there had to be a 'cut-off point' to this process, especially at the stage of writing up the results of the research because, having decided that the cut-off point had been reached, very recent literature may have had to be omitted.
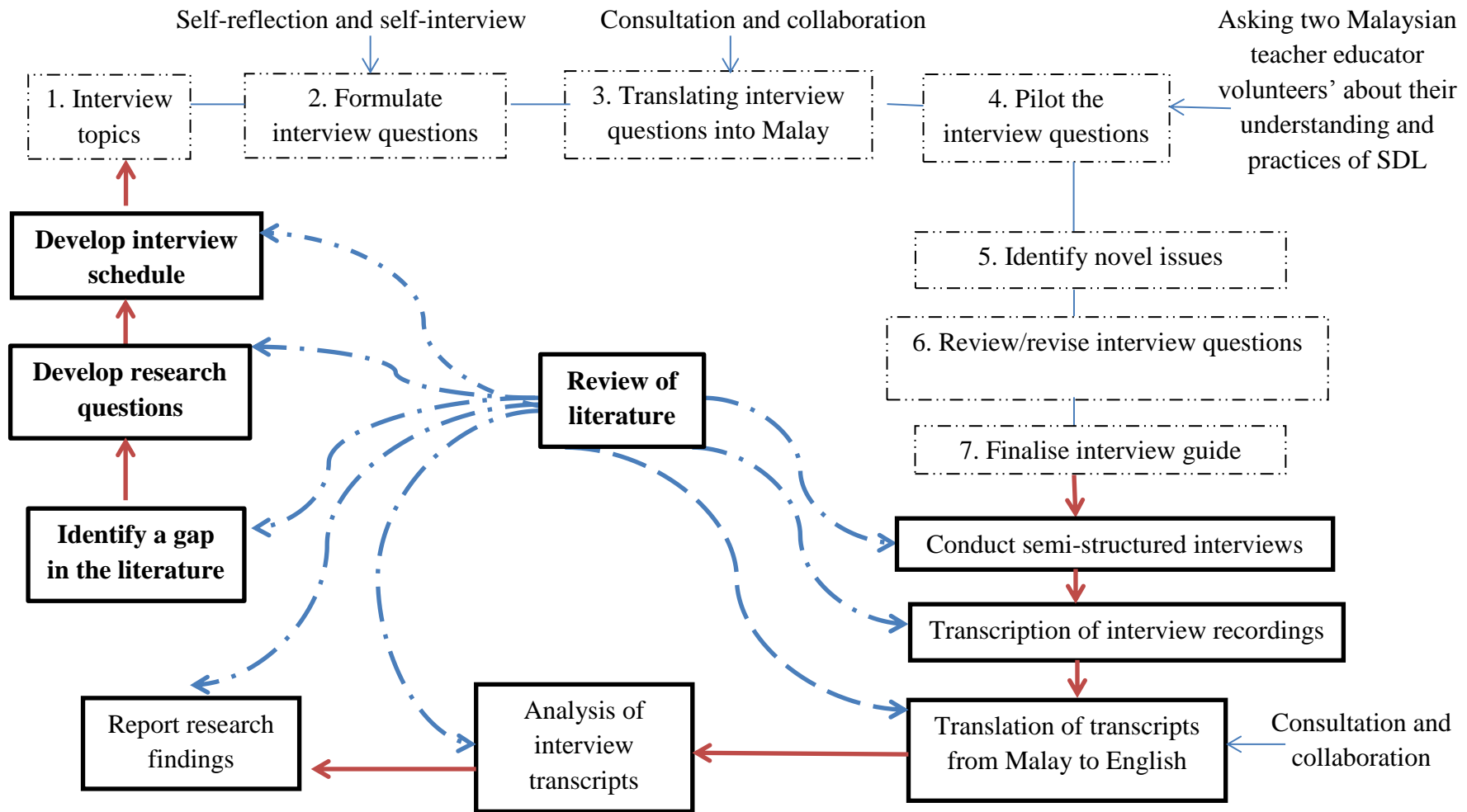
Figure 3.1 The nine phases involved in the research process

3.4.2 Data–gathering approach: Semi-structured interviews

Adopting a constructivist grounded theory position, which places great value on research participants' stories and stresses the importance of a collaborative and mutual relationship between the researcher and research participants in co-constructing the knowledge, it was decided that the interview would serve as the best approach to gathering data for this current study. This is because, through the format of an interview, research participants would have more space, opportunity and flexibility to express their views without being constrained by predetermined questions in a survey questionnaire. In addition, an interview also provides an opportunity for me as a researcher to gain insights into the Malaysian teacher educators' conceptualisations of SDL because it is possible in an interview to provide follow-up questions to help research participants develop their ideas more fully, to 'gently dig beneath the surface' and help them to engage in meaningful oral transactions.

Brinkmann (2007) suggests that, for an effective interview, the interview process should involve an interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee in a dialogical rather than a monological manner. Building on this understanding, Tanggaard (2008) suggests that an active dialogical interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee facilitates co-construction of the knowledge. Influenced by this understanding, I viewed the interview as an active conversational and interactional process between the researcher and the research participants.

Based on my review of the methods literature, interviews can be categorised into unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews and structured interviews (e.g. Boutain & Hitti, 2006; Holloway & Jefferson, 2000; Doody & Noonan, 2013). Each type of interview has its own distinctive features, advantages and disadvantages. The semi-structured interview was chosen for this current study because it provides a focused yet flexible approach for gathering data. It guides me in covering the important areas pertinent to this current study, while at the same time allowing space and opportunity for me as a researcher to seek further explanation in understanding

vague responses (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Moreover, the semi-structured interview also allows me to develop a positive relationship with my research participants through an informal and conversational interaction, which will indirectly lighten the atmosphere and ease my anxiety (Doody & Noonan, 2013).

The preceding paragraphs have provided reasons for adopting a semi-structured approach to gathering data in the current study. The following section outlines the strategies used to construct the interview questions, before justifying my decision to adopt an active interview approach during the interviews with research participants. Finally, this section ends by describing the process involved in piloting the interview schedule.

a) Interview topics

As previously stated, this current study set out to investigate Malaysian teacher educators' conceptualisations of SDL. Therefore, the interview questions were specifically designed to help me find answers to the key research questions. Taking into consideration Arksey and Knight's (1999) and Pathak and Intratat's (2012) suggestions for having broad and general interview topics to guide rather than constrain the interview session, five interview topics were developed. The interview topics were as follows:

   i. Demographic information including gender, educational qualification, where research participants were educated and their teaching experience;
   ii. Teacher educators' conceptualisations of learning;
   iii. Teacher educators' conceptualisations and understandings of SDL;
   iv. Teacher educators' perceptions of themselves as learners and self-directed learners; and
   v. The opportunities they provide for their students to foster their skills in SDL.

First, demographic information about the research participants was gathered, allowing me to begin to build up a detailed picture of them, which would help me during the data analysis stages of the research in understanding why they may hold particular views and opinions. Second, a series of questions was carefully designed to allow me to explore research participants' conceptualisations of learning and of how learners learn, in order to determine the extent to which they viewed learning and SDL as similar, synonymous or different. Third, questions were devised to allow me to gain insights into each research participant's perceptions of SDL and of how they understood and defined SDL. Fourth, the section on the teacher educators' perceptions of themselves as learners and self-directed learners investigated the research participants' perceptions and understandings of the concepts of 'learner' and 'educator'. In addition, this interview topic was considered to be a useful way of probing how research participants viewed themselves and their students in the educational environment. Fifth, the set of questions under the heading *Pedagogical and professional practices* was devised to allow me to explore in some detail: (i) the research participants' teaching, assessment and feedback practices, and (ii) how research participants' approaches had developed throughout their career.

b) Interview schedule

Having outlined the interview topics to be covered, this section now turns to describing my interview schedule in detail and provides justification for the selection of an active interview approach.

The interview schedule, which served as one of the fundamental features of a semi-structured interview, included a series of predetermined interview questions, informal interview scripts, and various probes and prompts (e.g. Turner, 2010; Prescott, 2011; Mann, 2011, see Appendix 4 for my interview schedule). An important point to be emphasised for this current study is that an active rather than a standard interview schedule was devised.

According to Holstein and Gubrium (1995, 2004, 2005, 2008), when using an active interview schedule, an interviewer is required to be in an active position by actively engaging and building a rapport with the interviewee. The interviewer's active position indirectly encourages an active interaction and communication between interviewer and interviewee, which assists them in seeking and probing to gather insightful information. Holstein and Gubrium (1995, 2004, 2005, 2008) note that an active interview schedule, with its prepared probes and prompts, enhances the researcher's confidence level in encouraging the research participants to share their views and willingly continue the conversation. Moreover, by adopting an active interview approach, the interviewer retains greater control over the interview process (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, 2004, 2005, 2008). This feature of an active interview schedule was particularly important when I noticed some of the research participants' responses straying from the aim of the current study. With an active interview schedule, an appropriate interview strategy was used, such as pausing the conversation and politely bringing the conversation back to the main themes.

Given that this current study investigated Malaysian teacher educators' conceptualisations of SDL, it was important to ensure that the interview questions would successfully explore the important areas pertinent to SDL, before embarking on the actual interview session. Therefore, the next section describes the process involved in piloting the interview schedule.

c) Piloting the interview schedule

The piloting of my interview schedule allowed me to determine the length of the interview session, to test the suitability of the interview topics devised and gain valuable feedback from the pilot research participants regarding the clarity of my interview questions. Moreover, piloting indirectly allowed me to identify areas where further amendments were required to ensure that questions were clear and unambiguous, and that they allowed research participants to explore their ideas in some detail and depth.

Two Malaysian teacher educators who volunteered to participate in piloting my interview schedule were not involved as my main research study. Based on careful consideration of the pilot research participants' feedback, I will now provide a summary of these amendments.

My pilot research participants commented favourably on how helpful they found the interview questions in engaging them and helping them to reflect on and share their understanding of SDL. However, it was clear from the responses of the pilot research participants that they were less comfortable with sharing their perceived failures in teaching. To be specific, they were reluctant to describe a situation in which their instructional processes had not gone well. Informed by their feedback, the interview question was amended to appear more positive by: (1) focusing on exploring those teaching practices that research participants believed would be beneficial to their learners; (2) exploring their opinions about the characteristics of good instructional process; and (3) investigating their thoughts on factors contributing to successful learning. Finally, rather than investigating research participants' beliefs and attitudes towards SDL in general, my pilot research participants suggested that the interview questions could be refined to elicit research participants' understandings and perceptions of, and practices in, SDL. This was because, according to them, concise interview questions may prevent research participants from straying too far from the main objective of this study. Hence, the interview questions were thoroughly revised to ensure that they were positive, precise and easy to understand.

In general, as a result of the piloting of the interview schedule, I gradually gained confidence in conducting the interview sessions. Most importantly, the piloting of the interview schedule provided an opportunity for me to test the interview questions, which further helped me to reflect on and refine them. When conducting the interviews I was fully aware of the challenges which I would face having been both a former student and a former junior lecturer at one of the Higher Education Institutions involved in this research. Inevitably, in my role on this occasion as the interviewer, I would have to negotiate and remain alert to issues of power; authority; respect for these more senior, experienced colleagues who are perceived to be 'wiser';

and face-saving behaviours which would indirectly influence and impact on my interactions with the research participants. I will return to this issue in the *Limitation* section on page 210.

3.4.3 Sampling approaches

This section begins by outlining the sampling approaches and strategies used in recruiting the research participants. This is followed by a detailed description of the research participants. As was delineated earlier, this current study aimed to investigate Malaysian teacher educators' conceptualisations of SDL. Therefore, my final selection of the research participants was informed by the main research questions.

Before turning to discuss the sampling strategies adopted, it should be noted that a majority of the Malaysian teacher educators work at the Institute of Teacher Education, while there are also teacher educators who work at universities' schools of education. Using snowball sampling, it is important to note that the twenty teacher educators who volunteered for this current study were mainly from the schools of education at the Research Universities.

Snowball sampling was chosen for this study for several reasons. Although snowball sampling is a simple sampling technique, it is very efficient and economical (Patton, 2002; Cohen & Arieli, 2011). Most importantly, snowball sampling allowed me to get in touch with 'hard-to-reach' research participants by asking current research participants to nominate potential research participants from their academic and social networks (e.g. Thomson, 1997; Patton, 2002; Sadler, Lee, Lim & Fullerton, 2010; Cohen & Arieli, 2011; Goodman, 2011; Gao, Ding, Pan & Li, 2014).

Despite these clear advantages, snowball sampling has a number of limitations. The most significant problem with this sampling approach is the potential for bias (e.g. Faugier & Sargeant, 1997; Sadler et al., 2010; Johnston & Sabin, 2010). By asking

the initial research participants to suggest additional research participants, there is a risk of including only individuals connected to this interrelated circle, while excluding others. However, although the majority of the final group of interviewees were teacher educators in universities, their backgrounds and experiences were sufficiently diverse to suggest that a range of opinions would be gathered during interview, and this was indeed the case, as becomes clear in the *Findings* chapter. It is also important to note that while this is a small-scale qualitative study, and no claims are made for generalisation to the wider population of teacher educators, important insights with generality have emerged during the analysis stages of the study.

Regardless of this key limitation, snowball sampling was identified as the best sampling approach for use in this study, as it is a practical and effective way of contacting potential research participants.

Having decided on the sampling approaches and the strategies to be used in recruiting the research participants, the next section provides a description of the research participants' profiles.

a) Research participants' profiles

A total of twenty teacher educators (five males and fifteen females) were recruited from the schools of education at three Malaysian Research Universities. One out of the twenty research participants was Chinese, and the remainder were Malays. The significant difference in terms of the number of Chinese and Malay research participants was because the majority of teacher educators at the Malaysian universities were Malays, as Malays make up half of the Malaysian population (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010). The research participants were informed that their identities would remain confidential and would not be disclosed to any parties, and that a pseudonym would be assigned to each research participant to maintain their anonymity (see Appendix 6, *Label of the Research Participants*). It

would therefore not be possible for either the interviewee or the university to be identified in the reporting of the findings.

The table below outlines each research participant's pseudonym, gender, ethnic group, highest education qualification, teaching experience and, educational background.

Name	Gender	Ethnic group	Highest education qualification	Teaching experience							Educational background					
				School level				University level			Local			Overseas		
				Primary		Secondary										
				≤ 5 years	≥ 6 years	≤ 5 years	≥ 6 years	5-10 years	11-16 years	≥17 years	1st deg	Master deg	PhD	1st deg	Master deg	PhD
1. Dr Affandi	M	M	PhD			X			X		X	X				X
2. Dr Jamal	M	M	PhD						X		X	X				X
3. Dr Khairiah	F	M	PhD					X			X	X	X			
4. Dr Rahim	F	M	PhD				X		X		X		X		X	
5. Dr Amalina	F	M	PhD							X	X	X	X			
6. Dr Zaki	M	M	PhD						X		X	X	X			
7. Dr Azlina	F	M	PhD			X			X			X	X	X		
8. Dr Hidayah	F	M	PhD						X		X	X				X
9. Dr Nabilah	F	M	PhD			X				X	X	X	X			
10. Dr Raihan	F	M	PhD					X			X	X	X			
11. Dr Siti	F	M	PhD		X		X		X				X	X	X	
12. Dr Salima	F	M	PhD			X			X					X	X	X
13. Dr Rokiah	F	M	PhD		X	X				X	X	X				X
14. Dr Mazlan	M	M	PhD	X					X		X	X				X
15. Dr Chew	F	C	PhD						X		X	X	X			
16. Dr Asma	F	M	PhD				X			X	X	X	X			
17. Dr Rosnah	F	M	PhD				X			X	X	X	X			
18. Dr Liyana	F	M	PhD	X			X			X	X	X	X			
19. Dr Farahin	F	M	PhD			X				X	X	X	X			
20. Dr Asri	M	M	PhD	X			X	X						X	X	X

Table 3.1 Research participants' pseudonym, gender, ethnic group, highest educational qualification, teaching experience and educational background.

3.4.4 Process of organising the interviews

Having outlined the sampling approaches used in this current study, this section describes in detail the processes involved in organising the interview session.

To gather contact information for the potential research participants, the Institute of Teacher Education's and universities' websites were explored. Next, the potential research participants were contacted via email (see Appendix 1 for *Invitation Email*) to obtain their agreement to participate in this study. Basic information about this study was provided briefly in the *Information Sheet* (see Appendix 2 for details). This information included my name, my contact details, research participants' requirements, the data-gathering procedures, duration of the interview sessions and a brief description of the research project.

Basic information about the study was provided to ensure that in the interview sessions, research participants were supplied with sufficient information regarding my study to assist them in making an informed decision about their participation. The use of the *Information Sheet* and the means of contacting research participants via email were effective. Only a few days after commencing the process of recruiting research participants, a good number of research participants had expressed their interest in taking part in the study. In the end, twenty research participants were recruited within a week.

Having obtained their agreement to participate in the study, an appointment was arranged to conduct the interviews. Although research participants were given the option of either a face-to-face or virtual interview via Skype, all research participants opted for 'face-to-face' interviews at their respective offices. Most interview sessions were about one to one-and-a-half hours in duration, and were recorded using two recording devices: the main recording device was an iPhone and the backup was a laptop. My reason for using two recording devices was primarily in case the main recording device – the iPhone – was faulty, I had a backup.

Prior to the interview session, I asked the research participants to sign the *Informed Consent Form* (see Appendix 3), indicating their willingness to voluntarily participate in the study. I also reminded all research participants that their identities would remain anonymous and that they could withdraw from the research process at any stage if they felt uncomfortable.

In order to make the research participants feel relaxed, an informal tone and conversational style of interaction were adopted during the interview. Most importantly, the Malay language was used during the semi-structured interview as a means of language communication. This is because the Malay language is the primary language used in Malaysia and most people are comfortable using it. Thus, it helped the research participants to provide their opinions throughout the interview session. However, I did not restrict use of the English language, or indeed switching between the two languages. On occasions where research participants did not fully understand the research questions, I provided help, for example, by paraphrasing or providing synonymous examples.

A full discussion of the language issues which emerged and were considered as a result of this decision will be provided in the *Transcription and translation issues* section on page 95. Following discussion on the Malay-English issues, a detailed discussion on the trustworthiness of the Malay–English translation is presented.

In the preceding sections, I have outlined my approaches to gathering data, including a description of sampling strategies, the process of organising the interview and the profiles of the research participants in this current study. The next section discusses the approaches to data analysis pertinent to this study.

3.4.5 Approaches to data analysis

The preceding sections have discussed the data-gathering approaches adopted for this study. This section outlines the development of my analytical framework informed by constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000).

a) Thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive approaches

Agreeing with Holloway and Todres (2003) on the importance of selecting the best research method to assist the researcher in answering the research questions, my approaches to both data-gathering and data analysis in this study were driven mainly by the research questions. Thematic analysis was adopted to analyse data gained from the semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was chosen for several reasons. First, it is a flexible and useful approach to analysing qualitative data (Percy, Kostere & Kostere, 2015). Second, thematic analysis has the potential to provide insightful, rich and detailed data by capturing the complexity that exists in the data (Boyatzis, 1998; Crowe, Inder & Porter, 2015). Third, thematic analysis is simple to use as an approach to qualitative analysis, particularly for beginners, such as myself, as it does not require advanced theoretical and technological knowledge (Roulston, 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Despite the advantages of thematic analysis, it is not immune from criticism. For instance, the researcher's personal values and beliefs may influence the interpretation process, resulting in a lack of rigour (e.g. Tobin & Begley, 2004; Vaismoradi, Bondas & Turunen, 2013). Tackling this issue, Weurlander, Söderberg, Scheja, Hult and Wernerson (2012) and Braun and Clarke (2006) assert that the interpretation process within thematic analysis can never be free from the researcher's personal subjective understanding and perspective. In a similar vein, Attride-Stirling (2001) convincingly suggests that issues of misinterpretation are preventable if the researcher knows the aim of their research, has clear research questions to guide their

procedure of data gathering and analysis and knows an appropriate way to collect and analyse data. Taking into account Attride-Stirling's (2001) suggestions, the research questions in this study were clearly and explicitly formulated, which guided the adoption of a clear research design and appropriate approaches to data analysis.

Having reviewed the literature on the rigour of qualitative research (e.g. Braun & Clarke, 2006; Atkins, Wallace & British Education Research Association, 2012; Schostak, 2002; Lichtman, 2010; Lane, 2011; Babey, 2013), it is notable that many authors suggest that the rigour of thematic analysis can be enhanced by using both inductive and deductive approaches. Braun and Clarke (2006) advocate that the process of data analysis in thematic analysis occurs in two distinctive ways; inductive or deductive approaches. In an inductive approach, also known as a data-driven approach, emerging themes are grounded and are strongly linked to the data (Patton, 1990, 2002; Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid & Redwood, 2013). Meanwhile, with a deductive approach, also known as a theory-driven approach, analysis of the data is underpinned by a preconceived theory (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Despite having the option of adopting either an inductive or deductive thematic analysis approach or deductive thematic, I believe that the process of data analysis moves beyond either of these approaches on their own (e.g. Frith & Gleeson, 2004; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Charmaz, 2014).

In this study, Fereday and Muir-Cochrane's (2006) hybrid approach using both inductive and deductive analysis was used. Their hybrid approach to analysis allows for an integrated use of both deductive analysis, which concentrates on recognising data within predetermined themes, and inductive analysis, which focuses on establishing themes grounded in the data. Both the inductive and deductive approaches in Fereday and Muir-Cochrane's hybrid approach (2006) act not only to complement each other but they also prevented me from missing important data. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that the 'hybrid approach of inductive and deductive thematic analysis' (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006 p. 4) improved the rigour of the thematic analysis and offered a better standpoint for analysing complex data.

Recognising the advantages of thematic analysis primarily in terms of its flexibility, I am also aware of the potential pitfalls of undertaking a thematic analysis. First, there is the risk of me becoming anxious and overwhelmed by the intensity and complexity of the research participants' comments, which could lead to a failure to actually analyse the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gale et al., 2013). Second, as this study was not conducted in my native language, there is a risk of me failing to precisely and accurately identify the themes that are emerging, a risk which has led many researchers to use the interview questions as the 'themes' that are reported, with no specific analytic work undertaken, thereby resulting in ambiguity and greater problems (e.g. Squires, 2009; Liamputtong, 2008; Santos, Black & Sandelowski, 2015). The third risk refers to a weak or unconvincing analysis where there is no significant difference between themes identified because there is significant overlap between them (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Fourth, a pitfall might be a mismatch between the themes and the claims or meaning associated to them; put simply, the claims or meanings are not supported by data (Creswell, 2009, 2013).

However, despite these potential problems, I decided that thematic analysis was the most appropriate approach to analyse the semi-structured interview data as it is a flexible, effective and cost-efficient method and most of the disadvantages are avoidable. Therefore, data gained from the semi-structured interviews were analysed using a hybrid approach to thematic analysis incorporating both inductive and deductive approaches.

This section will now turn to explicitly discussing the process involved in analysing the interview data.

b) Process of analysing interview data

Having discussed and justified selection of the thematic analysis approach as the best approach for analysing the interview data, particularly for this study, this section outlines in detail the strategies taken when I engaged in fine-grained analysis of the interview transcripts. Interview data were analysed using a four-step process.

Step 1: Familiarising myself with the data, transcribing and translating the interview recordings

To become familiar with the entire interview set, I opted to listen and re-listen to all interview recordings before manually transcribing and translating the twenty interview recordings in full. Research participants were anonymised with the allocation of pseudonyms to ensure the confidentiality of their identities. This is important as I decided to present verbatim the research participants' responses to make sure that their actual translated voices were heard by the reader (Charmaz, 2014; Chandler, Anstey & Ross, 2015), reflecting one of the most important features of Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory. Most importantly, research participants' actual translated responses act to support the emerging themes identified. Having decided to conduct the interview in the Malay language before translating the interview transcripts into English, several strategies were adopted to minimise the negative influence of inaccurate translation either from Malay to English or from English to Malay Language.

1) I worked closely with a bilingual TESOL graduate to check my translated interview questions from English to Malay;

2) we (the same bilingual TESOL graduate and myself) collaboratively checked the consistency and accuracy of my translated transcripts; and

3) to ensure that I accurately captured research participants' responses, an interviewee verification strategy was adopted where research participants were invited to check the accuracy of the transcripts (e.g. Morse, Barret, Mayan, Olson & Spier, 2002; Trainor, Leko & Graue, 2014).

Although the Malay language was used during the semi-structured interviews for the sake of ease and efficiency, I did not restrict the use of English or a mix of both languages if this aided in capturing research participants' meaning. A discussion on the language issues will be presented in the following *Transcription and translation* section.

Step 2: Organising the data

Informed by the initially determined interview topics and themes explored in the *Critical Review of the Literature* chapter, and following on from *Step 1: Familiarising myself with the data, transcribing and translating the interview recordings*, all transcripts were reread, open-coded and organised into clusters of potential themes. Prior to coding and categorising procedures, the defining and re-defining of codes and categories were constantly and systematically conducted (definitions of the codes and categories used are discussed in the *Findings* chapter). The process of coding and categorising was conducted manually (using a paper and pen strategy) within individual transcripts and across the whole data set in order to capture the interrelatedness and complexities that existed within the interview data set. At an early stage of the coding process, I decided to analyse thoroughly within individual transcripts by laying the transcripts on the floor, page by page, to make it easier for me to see all the individual research participants' responses at the same time. Then, using a coloured highlighter pen to highlight important parts of the transcripts, I cut and glued the highlighted research participants' responses in a specified category. This process was repeated with all individual transcripts prior to being used across the whole data set.

Step 3: Reducing and integrating the coding sheet

In this step, the initial coding sheet obtained from *Step 2: Organising the data* was refined into several main themes and subthemes. In order to build interrelationships between themes, the consistency between each code was carefully reviewed, re-selected and reorganised. Ambiguous codes and codes unsupported by the data were

removed, while codes carrying similar meanings were placed under the same category. This procedure helped to reduce the number of codes and focused the process of coding and categorising.

Step 4: Constant comparison and identifying emerging themes

In accordance with the tradition of constructivist grounded theory, the data-driven themes were constantly compared in terms of their consistency within individual interviews and across the entire data set. New and unexpected data were constantly compared with the findings from previous studies reported in the *Critical Review of the Literature* chapter in order to find similarities and differences.

3.4.6 Transcription and translation issues

I have noted that in qualitative research, it is crucial for a researcher to be truthful by ensuring the accuracy of research participants' views. However, this proved to be a challenging task as the interview session was conducted in the Malay language, yet it was analysed, synthesised and reported in English.

Realising that transcription is a notoriously time-consuming process, the transcription and translation strategies were planned carefully. This section provides my justification for translating the interview schedule from the English language to the Malay language before discussing the translation strategies of the interview transcripts.

a) The decision to translate

My justification for translating the interview schedule from English to Malay is primarily due to my decision to use the Malay language as a means of language communication during the interview (see Appendix 5 for *Translated Interview*

Schedule). I decided to interview research participants in the Malay language because the Malay language is the first language (native or mother tongue) in Malaysia and everybody is capable of understanding and using it proficiently. Hence, this strategy helped research participants to feel relaxed and encouraged them to respond freely and willingly.

A point to be made, however, is that although I decided to conduct the interview session in the Malay language, I did not prevent my research participants from using English or a combination of both languages. This is because some of the educational terms, such as SDL, student-centred learning, teacher-centred learning, formative assessment and summative assessment, were used extensively by the Malaysian teacher educators, even though they were communicating in the Malay language.

After I had translated the interview schedule from English language to Malay, the draft was peer-checked by a bilingual TESOL graduate (whose involvement was voluntary) to determine the accuracy of my translation. The revised interview schedule in the Malay language was tested with two volunteer Malaysian teacher educators (not included as main research participants). Their recommendations and suggestions were taken into consideration in the formulation of the final version of the Malay interview schedule.

Finally, all interview recordings were transcribed in the Malay language before they were translated into English. A discussion on the strategies employed for transcription and translation of the interview transcripts is provided in the following section.

b) Strategies for transcribing interviews

The Malay language was chosen as the language of transcription because it was the primary interview language, thus, transcribing in the Malay language enhanced the trustworthiness of the research participants' original accounts.

Operating within a constructivist paradigm, my understanding of transcription as a process of interpretation and transformation of research participants' accounts made me aware of the fact that I would never be able to guarantee that my transcripts would reproduce the research participants' actual words (e.g. Hervey & Higgins, 1992; Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2014). This concern was also highlighted long ago by Mishler (1986, 1990, 2000), who noted that transcripts are not a reproduction of reality, but are a partial representation of the interview event, hence transcripts should be treated as typical products of an interview.

Similarly, Kvale and Brinkman (2009) suggest that transcripts refer to decontextualised conversations which involve an interpretive process in capturing interviewees' responses. In their own words, Kvale and Brinkman (2009, p. 163) state that '[t]he transcripts are…not the rock-bottom data of interview research, they are artificial constructions from an oral to a written mode of communication'. Taking these views into account, I treated the transcripts carefully by listening attentively to the recordings and documenting the recorded conversations as fully and as accurately as possible to the best of my ability.

In relation to transcribing from recordings to texts in the Malay language, four key decisions were made:

(1) Formulation of a standardised transcript format

A consistent standardised format of the transcript was devised. Research participants' personal information, such as individual teaching experience and educational background, was included and each line was given a number (see Appendix 7 *Sample of the Interview Transcripts*). This strategy reduced the time spent locating the data and eased the analysis process.

(2) Full transcriptions of interview recordings

Influenced by Maclellan's (2008) suggestion for a whole and thorough transcription process to maintain the trustworthiness of the study, and to allow in-depth data

analysis, full transcripts of the recordings were completed for this current study in order to capture the complexity of research participants' accounts.

(3) A two-round transcription process

A two-round transcription process was adopted, where, in the first round, I did the transcription while listening to the recording. To ensure the accuracy of the transcription, in the second round, I checked the transcripts for a second time by listening to the recording and at the same time reading the transcription and making corrections where errors were detected. This strategy was important for thorough accuracy checking of transcriptions, particularly in terms of detecting mistaken words. As a result, the trustworthiness of the transcripts was enhanced (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

(4) Considering the importance of mono- or bisyllabic sounds

Based on MacLean, Meyer and Estable's (2004) recommendation that it is important for researchers to determine the importance of mono- or bisyllabic sounds before removing them as they might carry significant meanings which can influence the conversation, I decided to include intentional sounds like 'hmm', 'okay', 'umm', and 'yeah' as they convey an expression of agreement between myself and the research participants (e.g. Gardner, 2001; Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005).

Having discussed in full my transcription strategies, this discussion will now focus on my translation strategies – translating the Malay language transcripts into English language transcripts. It was important for me to make sure that the translation of the interview transcripts was as accurate as possible as the translated transcripts were used to analyse and report my research findings.

c) Strategies for translating transcripts from Malay into English

When translating interview transcripts from Malay into English, four strategies were employed. First, a line-by-line translation approach was used. This strategy helped me to avoid missing potential emerging themes. Second, a whole-sentence translation approach was employed to ensure that certain expressions in the Malay language sounded more English. Third, in order to ensure the accuracy of my translation of the interview transcripts, I worked closely with a bilingual TESOL graduate (the same individual involved in translating my interview schedule). During this process, I gave her the interview transcripts to be checked. If she had different views about the words to be used in the transcripts, we discussed them (in a face-to-face discussion) until we reached a consensus. Finally, opting for a strategy of verification by the research participants to further check the accuracy of my translated transcripts (e.g. Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2002; Marschan-Piekkari & Reis, 2004; Shenton, 2004), I emailed a copy of the amended translated transcript (amended by the bilingual TESOL graduate) to each corresponding research participant.

However, Marschan-Piekkari and Reis (2004) report a drawback in the research participant verification strategy, particularly for translated transcripts where some research participants may not recognize their own translated scripts due to their poor proficiency in the English language. Taking into account my research participants' profiles, I was convinced that my research participants, who were all teacher educators, would be sufficiently competent and proficient in the English language to verify the interview transcript. Besides checking the accuracy of the translated transcripts, the purpose of emailing the amended translated transcript to research participants was to check whether they were happy with it.

3.5 Trustworthiness of this study

Trustworthiness is considered by many qualitative researchers to be the safety net and quality checkpoint for qualitative research (e.g. Bradley, 1993; Shenton, 2004; Harrison, MacGibbon & Morton, 2001; Whiting & Sines, 2012; Kornbluh, 2015). Trustworthiness is established when findings reflect as closely as possible the meanings described by the research participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Harrison et al., 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Loh, 2013). This section provides a detailed description of how trustworthiness was established within the current study and a justification for adopting particular approaches to data gathering and data analysis.

First, the piloting of my interview schedule, which involved two volunteering Malaysia teacher educators (these two pilot research participants were not involved in the main study) allowed me to test the suitability of my interview topics and the clarity of my interview questions. At the end of each interview session, research participants' feedback was sought on how the interview schedule could be refined and improved. Based on the feedback given, the interview schedule was revised thoroughly to ensure that the interview questions were concise and easily understood.

Second, trustworthiness within the study was also achieved by establishing a relationship with research participants based on trust prior to conducting an interview (Shenton, 2004; Morrow, 2005; Whiting & Sines, 2012). This was important for making research participants aware that the purpose of the interview was to capture their perceptions of SDL, not to assess their knowledge on SDL, thereby allowing them to feel free to share their views and pedagogical practices in relation to SDL. In addition, research participants were informed that their identities would remain confidential and that pseudonyms would be used to ensure anonymity. It was hoped that these approaches would help research participants to feel more comfortable and confident in sharing their views.

Third, a hybrid approach of inductive and deductive thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) was adopted to enhance the trustworthiness of this study.

Deductive thematic analysis, which is a top-down approach to analysis was used to identify and relate data to the existing literature, while inductive thematic analysis, which is a bottom-up approach to analysis, provides rich and insightful descriptions of themes grounded in the data. This combination of deductive and inductive thematic analysis allows for a comprehensive and thorough analysis of interview data. Most importantly, it helps the researcher to avoid missing important themes and leads to enhancement of the rigour and trustworthiness of this study. Theoretical triangulation, where many theoretical orientations are used in interpreting data is used extensively in this current study, where results are exhaustively compared to various existing SDL literature. The findings of the current study not only complement the previous SDL literature, but also begin to address the identified gaps, particularly in the assessment and cultural aspects of SDL. In addition, this critical comparison assists in the drawing of data into a comprehensive conclusion. Furthermore, my constant comparative procedure to analysing the interview data has helped me not only to identify significant trends grounded in the interview data, but has also acted as one of the triangulation procedures used in refining my overall conceptual framework of SDL (Boeije, 2002; Fram, 2013; Charmaz, 2014).

Fourth, trustworthiness was also sought by presenting direct quotations from the research participants' accounts as much as possible. This is the main reason I decided to translate the transcripts from Malay to English. Direct quotations are important as they retain the originality of research participants' responses compared to paraphrases, which may inaccurately capture the original perceptions of research participants (e.g. Harrison et al., 2001; Schwandt, 2007; Tracy, 2010).

Fifth, it is important to note that although this study was reported in English, the interviews were conducted in Malay for the purpose of ease and comfort of the research participants. Therefore, to ensure trustworthiness in the Malay–English translation, research participants were permitted to use Malay, English or a mixture of both Malay and English. Moreover, a peer-checking strategy (a volunteer bilingual TESOL graduate) was adopted to determine the accuracy of my translation.

Sixth, to enhance the trustworthiness of this study, research participants were asked to read and check the transcripts to determine whether their words had been captured accurately and to gauge the extent to which my analysis and interpretations of their accounts were appropriate and defensible (Whiting & Sines, 2012). It is important to note that the triangulation procedure used aims to capture the research participants' actual meaning of SDL and develop a comprehensive view of Malaysian teacher educators' conceptualisations of SDL. Hence, to enhance the trustworthiness of this study, interview transcripts were triangulated by returning the transcripts to their respective research participants for accuracy checking.

Seventh, in order to enhance the trustworthiness of this current study, a two-round transcription process was adopted. For thorough accuracy checking of transcriptions, I listened and re–listened to the interview recordings to look for mistaken words and typographical mistakes resulting in misspelt words. This strategy was important to efficiently produce truthful transcriptions.

Eighth, the trustworthiness of this current study was maintained by being aware of the research participants' personal and professional history, which could influence their views on SDL, particularly during the process of analysing and reporting the data. By remaining alert to the research participants' unique features and contrasting backgrounds, this strategy helped me to understand the underlying reasons for their distinctive views and ensure that the research participants' accounts were effectively captured. Failure to do this could possibly lead to limited insight on research participants' diverse views and perceptions on learning and SDL.

Finally, trustworthiness within the study was enhanced through *Journal writing*. As I play an important part in both the data collection and data analysis stages, reflexivity was deemed essential (Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Russell & Kelly, 2002; Watt, 2007; Rolfe & Freshwater, 2001; Savin-Baden, 2004; Schön, 1988; Smith, 2008; Lambert, Jomeen & McSherry, 2010) because it allowed me to be cautious and aware of the reason for each decision that I made. Therefore, I decided to keep a research journal containing not only a record of the issues and concerns which arose

at each stage of this current study, but also of how I dealt with these matters. For example:

Research purpose stage – Given my experience both as a student experiencing SDL and as a higher educator implementing SDL, the first reflective exercise I engaged in was to use my research journal to carefully consider my primary purpose for conducting this current study. This strategy allowed me to explicitly identify the personal assumptions and biases which may have affected the direction and management of this study.

Research design stage – Research design requires thorough reflection on the most appropriate and practical investigation strategies, and journaling has assisted the entire aspects of determining the most efficient research methodology for this study. A careful examination of my own research journal allowed me to make meaningful connections and links between the literature on methodology and the decisions taken during the study. This strategy allowed me to be aware of the strengths and possible limitations of this current study (Russell & Kelly, 2002; Creswell, 2009, 2013). Moreover, by constantly returning to this research journal, I could critically reflect on my own assumptions which may have had an impact on the research design.

Data analysis stage – A number of researchers (e.g. Maxwell, 2005; Ortlipp, 2008; Creswell, 2009, 2013) contend that the process of analysis begins through a reflective journal. Whenever I had an idea for the emerging theme, I wrote it down in the journal, which led to a more refined understanding of not only the research participants' accounts, but of all aspects involved in the data analysis. In addition to this, I also noted my reasons for merging and dropping themes from my initial analysis, which served to increase my confidence in my method of analysis.

In summary, journaling facilitates making all aspects of the entire research open to public inspection and is crucial to enhancing the trustworthiness of this study. Through extensive reading on the articles about strategies for establishing

trustworthiness and continuous writing of the reflective journal, I gradually understood how my personal experiences and beliefs affected my thinking, which led to a more sophisticated understanding of the complexities existing within a qualitative research. Moreover, journal writing enabled me to establish meaningful links between how I carried out my study and what has been discussed in the literature on qualitative research. This reflective practice not only permitted me to holistically consider my research, but also strengthened my confidence in my ability to negotiate the complex nature of qualitative methodology. The reflection drawn upon in my journal has made me more cognisant of the struggles and difficulties which I faced at each stage of my study. Furthermore, journal writing served as a very powerful learning experience that led to a deeper appreciation of the essential role of reflexivity both in accomplishing this current study and in assisting my continuous development as a researcher (Ortlipp, 2008). More importantly, through the use of the research journal, the trustworthiness of this current study was enhanced and I now see myself as a better researcher compared to when I initially embarked on this study.

3.6 Ethical research considerations

Having outlined the key issues related to the trustworthiness of this current study, this section describes the strategies adopted to address the ethical concerns at different stages of this study.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) convincingly suggest that it is crucial for researchers to have a knowledge of any ethical issues which might arise during the research process as this enables researchers to consider carefully the available alternatives at various stages of the research process. Expanding this thinking even further, Macfarlane (2009) introduces the notion of 'virtue' ethics, which recommends that researchers focus on using personal judgements in deciding whether or not a certain action is ethical. In line with this thinking, I considered my research ethics as an ongoing process. I will now present my ethical concerns for this current study.

First, *before the interview*, the ethical issues that were pertinent to this current study concerned issues of informed consent procedures, invasion of privacy, confidentiality and anonymity, protection of the research participants from harm, and data protection. I read about these ethical issues and discussed with my supervisors the particular ethical issues to be considered for this study. Next, I submitted the Moray House School of Education Ethics Committee Application Form to gain approval to carry out this research. Finally, a research participant consent form was prepared and is attached as Appendix 3. The consent form includes: (a) Information about the aims and nature of the current study; (b) The researcher's identity and contact details; (c) A statement that research participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any point; (d) Guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity throughout; and (e) The opportunity for participants to receive a summary report of the key findings and conclusions of the study if they so wish.

Secondly, *during the interview*, research participants were asked to sign the consent form and were informed of their right to withdraw at any point. In addition, in order to protect the research participants from whatever harm might befall them, such as physical discomfort, emotional stress, humiliation, embarrassment or any other situation that might place the research participants at a disadvantage, sensitive questions were not used during the interviews. The research participants were informed that the interviews would be conducted under conditions of anonymity, where all research participants were given pseudonyms. The issues of anonymity and confidentiality are important as research participants will be more willing to express their views and opinions if they know that their information is to be treated in a confidential manner.

Thirdly, *after the interview*, the recordings were secured in a safe place and the data obtained for this research were handled appropriately. Furthermore, sensitive information such as research participants' personal information, which might lead to their identification in the future, was removed. Finally, the research participants' accounts were reported in an honest and accurate manner.

Fourthly, for the *writing-up process*, Macfarlane (2009) stresses that research findings and methods should be open to scrutiny by others and he further emphasises the importance of citing other articles appropriately rather than taking credit for the work of others. Taking into account his recommendations, I ensured that details of the research design and approaches used for data gathering and analysis used in this study were provided. Finally, all articles cited in this study are included in the reference list, and the ideas of others are fully acknowledged throughout.

In this section, I have discussed important ethical issues related to my study. The next section draws this chapter to a conclusion.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the methodological framework and justified my decision for the selection of the research design. This carefully devised research design places significant attention on: (1) the complexity that exists in interpreting human social interaction, (2) research outcomes as a co-construction of meaning between the researcher and research participants, and (3) the impact of the cultural context on the findings of the research. As a result, this awareness led to the development of an appropriate research design which allowed me to investigate the Malaysian teacher educators' conceptualisations of SDL. It is important to note that the approaches to both data gathering and data analysis were driven not only by the constructivist grounded theory paradigm, but also by my theoretical framework which I developed in the *Critical Review of the Literature* chapter. The following chapter − *Findings* − will report the findings of my study and the *Discussion and Conclusions* chapter outlines my reconceptualisation of SDL within the Malaysian context.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter, *Methods and Methodological Considerations*, discussed the methodological and analytical framework which helped me to systematically gather and carefully analyse interview data to answer the research questions outlined in the *Introduction* chapter. This chapter, *Findings*, presents key findings from analysis of the interviews. It is important to note that my analysis of the interviews was driven by the methodological and the analytical approaches outlined in detail and justified in the *Methods and Methodological Considerations* chapter. In addition to remaining alert to the findings that emerged from the data themselves, the research findings were also analysed and interpreted by my understanding of the existing theoretical perspective governing SDL, as discussed in the *Critical Review of the Literature* chapter. Based on analysis of the interview data, the findings presented a complex, and indeed, at times, challenging picture of SDL as perceived by the Malaysian teacher educators. Therefore, to avoid oversimplifying this rich and complex data, and to be transparent and share with the reader the nuanced accounts that the research participants provided, it was decided that it would be useful and appropriate to present the findings in two forms: vignettes of key research participants which capture their uniqueness and which allow me to reflect on what might be some of the reasons for their interesting and contrasting views on SDL; and careful and in-depth thematic analysis both within individual transcripts and across the whole set of interview transcripts. A detailed account of the approach taken to analyse the data was provided in the *Methods and Methodological Considerations* chapter. Key themes identified in the literature, and which emerged in the research participants' accounts, together with themes that emerged from the data set, are reported in the current chapter. After careful consideration, to ensure that the significance of

unexpected findings was foregrounded, it was decided that, in the presentation of findings, those which were unexpected and, which made an important contribution to the existing literature, would be presented first. Thereafter, findings that added to current conceptualisations of SDL, or which appeared to contradict what had been reported in earlier studies, are reported. In this way, a careful and detailed analysis and interpretation of these research participants' accounts demonstrates that, while current literature provides useful conceptualisations of SDL, there is a need to reconceptualise SDL in such a way as to reflect their more nuanced understandings.

Having decided upon how to report the findings, this chapter is divided into four sections. It firstly, begins with a brief summary of the significant emerging themes, which serves to inform and guide the reader before proceeding to an in-depth discussion of the main findings in a later section. At the same time, my main contribution to the current research literature and expansion of knowledge is explicitly presented. Second, five key vignettes are presented. This section begins with a brief introduction and provides a justification for selection of the vignettes. This is followed by a detailed account of each key research participant for whom a vignette has been provided, in which information about their background – school and higher education teaching experience, undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications and where these qualifications were gained, etc. – is provided. Third, thematic analysis of the complex interview data is presented and themes and subthemes are identified and exemplified using extracts from the interviews. In order to ensure the trustworthiness in this current study and to remain faithful to the research participants' accounts, direct quotations are used as much as possible. Fourth, this chapter ends with a summary of the findings discussed in the preceding section by flagging important – and unexpected – findings to be considered in the *Discussion and Conclusions* chapter. These findings, I suggest, offer new insights into how SDL can be conceptualised.

4.2 A brief summary of the significant themes and subthemes

Table 4.1 summarises the key themes and subthemes which emerged following analysis of the data. Detailed discussion and interpretation of these themes and subthemes are presented in the vignettes and thematic analysis section.

	Theme	Subtheme	
1.	Assessment and feedback in SDL	Assessment and feedback practices which inhibit/ facilitate SDL	Diversifying assessment approaches
			Harmonising summative and formative assessment strategies
			Timeliness of feedback
			Mode of feedback delivery
		A curriculum which inhibits/ facilitates SDL	Content of the curriculum
			Ways of teaching
2.	Prevailing culture which inhibits/ facilitates SDL	Respecting wiser individuals	
		The value of face	
3.	SDL as a balance in learning	Freedom	Taking responsibility
			Having choices
		Being in control	Decision-making
			Sharing power
4.	SDL as a social, interdependent process	SDL as learning for your 'self'	
		SDL as learning on your own	
		SDL as learning with others: the concept of a learning project	
		The need for a guide from the educator (Ta'lim)	
5.	SDL as a dynamic developmental process	SDL as the 'wanting' to learn phenomenon	

Table 4.1 Summary of the findings of the interview analysis

From analysis of the research participants' transcripts, five central, overarching themes and a number subthemes was identified. The key themes are:

i. Assessment and feedback in SDL;

ii. Prevailing culture which inhibits/facilitates SDL;

iii. SDL as a balance in learning;

iv. SDL as a social, interdependent process; and

v. SDL as a dynamic developmental process.

One of the most important contributions of this study addresses the gap which exists in the literature relating to assessment and feedback. Therefore, findings reported in the *Assessment and feedback in SDL* section are regarded as key findings in this current study. The first subtheme for *Assessment and feedback in SDL* is *Assessment and feedback practices which inhibit/facilitate SDL* and it comprises four components: *Diversifying assessment approaches*; *Harmonising summative and formative assessment strategies*; *Timeliness of feedback*; and *Mode of feedback delivery*. The second subtheme *A curriculum which inhibits/ facilitates SDL* includes *Content of the curriculum* and *Ways of teaching*. Interestingly, although the assessment method was identified by a majority of the research participants as a single key factor which influences both the way educators teach and the way learners approach their learning, their assessment and feedback practices were limited to employing and integrating the summative and formative assessment strategies.

Furthermore, this issue of inconsistency between the educators' beliefs and practices in assessment and feedback has brought into sharp focus the existing gap in assessment and feedback within the research literature, where, despite wide recognition of the potential of assessment and feedback to support SDL, less attention has been paid to maximising the use of assessment and feedback in SDL.

Therefore, this current study begins to fill the gap identified in the current SDL literature on assessment and feedback and suggests future research, not only to explore the underlying potential of assessment and feedback to promote SDL but

also to offer educators a comprehensive proposal for how to employ assessment and feedback strategies within the context of SDL.

A point to note, however, is that although *Assessment and feedback in SDL* are categorised into two subthemes, these subthemes are closely related. The interrelationship between the subthemes of *Assessment and feedback practices which inhibit/ facilitate SDL* and *A curriculum which inhibits/facilitates SDL* is explored in detail in the *Thematic Analysis* section.

The second main theme, *Prevailing culture which inhibits/facilitates SDL*, recognises the cultural context and its impact on learning. This theme consists of the *Respecting wiser individuals* and *The value of face* subthemes. In contrast with the first theme, *Assessment and feedback in SDL*, which addresses the assessment and feedback gaps in previous literature and suggests further investigation in the assessment and feedback areas of research, this theme, *Prevailing culture which inhibits/facilitates SDL*, highlights the impact of the Malay-Islamic perspectives and the Malaysian-Chinese-Confucian perspectives on learning that have significantly contributed to broadening and expanding current knowledge concerning the cultural dimension of SDL.

Although many studies have been carried out by Malaysian researchers to investigate the formation and practices of SDL within the Malaysian context, almost all of these studies have been limited to exploring learners' perspectives on SDL (e.g. Ibrahim, 2002; Abdullah, Koren, Muniapan, Parasuraman & Rathakrishnan, 2008; Ahmad & Majid, 2014; Annuar & Shaari, 2014) and none have investigated educators' perspectives. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that this current study offers new insights into and understanding concerning SDL from the educator's point of view.

The third main theme, *SDL as a balance in learning*, comprises two subthemes, *Freedom* and *Being in control*. This theme highlights the need to blend SDL and conventional learning approaches to provide the best learning experience for learners. As was stated by the majority of the research participants, both

contemporary and conventional approaches to learning are important and should exist in tandem, especially in Malaysia. Two reasons were identified for this: the requirement to meet the needs of stakeholders, such as society, parents and even learners who are still confined to an exam-oriented system; and equipping learners with essential skills such as decision-making, time-management skills, and taking responsibility for updating existing skills which is essential for survival.

The first subtheme for *SDL as a balance in learning* is *Freedom*, and includes *Taking responsibility* and *Having choices*, while the second subtheme, *Being in Control*, comprises two components, namely *Decision-making* and *Sharing power*. Although *Freedom* and *Being in control* emerged as two distinct subthemes, they are interconnected. For example, research participants believed that to be in control, learners should be given the freedom to decide their learning approaches. To complicate this situation even further, research participants emphasised that enabling learners to take control, and be in control of their learning by granting freedom in learning, is only achievable through a learner-oriented curriculum, which is related to the first theme of *Assessment and feedback in SDL*, particularly the *A curriculum which inhibits/facilitates SDL* subtheme. A more detailed discussion about the interplay of issues between *Freedom* and *Being in control* is presented in the *Thematic Analysis* section.

Next, the fourth central theme which emerged from the analysis, *SDL as a social, interdependent process*, recognises learning as a social process which does not happen in isolation. The *SDL as a social, interdependent process* theme has four subthemes: (i) *SDL as learning for your 'self'*, (ii) *SDL as learning by your 'self'/on your own*, (iii) *SDL as learning with others* and (iv) *The need for a guide from the educator*. A point to note, the first two subthemes recognise the importance of individual learning. In addition, individual learning was not characterised by these research participants as isolated learning, but rather as self-determined and self-planned learning, which is similar to how previous literature has described it. The third and fourth subthemes describe social interaction with capable people as an effective way of developing effective SDL skills and strategies. The importance of

the role of others in learning echoes Vygotskys' account of what he calls the Zone of Proximal Development (1978), where Vygotsky (1978) believes that appropriate support given at the right time will assist learners in achieving a learning task which would otherwise be unattainable.

The fifth theme, *SDL as a dynamic developmental process*, as emphasised by most research participants, focusses on the learning process rather than on the content of learning. Three essential features of the learning process highlighted by this theme were: (a) learning skills will gradually improve with practice, (b) the learning process should be in accordance with the learner's ability and (c) the learning process should be determined and driven by both the learner's interest and needs. This theme also recognises learners as learning partners and not as subordinates in learning. Most importantly, *SDL as a dynamic developmental process* emphasises having a responsive learning environment to support learners' learning. In relation to the content of learning, the *SDL as a dynamic developmental process* theme acknowledges that a predetermined syllabus is essentially designed to guide educators and learners by disclosing the learning goals to be attained. Nevertheless, my research participants emphasised that a predetermined syllabus may potentially inhibit effective learning and create a mechanistic learning approach which focuses on the outcomes of learning rather than the learning process.

The main subtheme for *SDL as a dynamic developmental process* is *SDL as the 'wanting' to learn phenomenon*. This subtheme stresses the importance for the learners themselves to have the desire to learn and to proceed in a self-directed approach to learning. The 'wanting' to learn can equally be defined as self-motivation, which has been discussed in the *Critical Review of the Literature* chapter. As has been stated by a number of researchers (e.g. Van Deur, 2003; Jones, 2013; Winstead, 2013; Douglass & Morris, 2014), self-motivation is one of the most important elements for successful self-directed learners.

Besides presenting a summary of the themes and subthemes which have emerged from analysis of the interview transcripts, this section also provides a brief

description and definition of the themes and subthemes which will be outlined further in the analysis of vignettes section – *4.3 A background summary of, and an insight into, the selected research participants' accounts as well as personal and professional history* and in the *4.4 Thematic analysis* section. Furthermore, this section has presented my key contributions to knowledge advancement, particularly in the area of SDL. This section, which explicitly addresses the lack of attention given to the assessment and feedback aspect evident in both current literature and from research participants' pedagogical practices, has also highlighted the need for thorough investigation on the cultural dimension of SDL for a comprehensive reconceptualisation of SDL. The following sections present the five key vignettes.

4.3 A background summary of, and an insight into, the selected research participants' accounts as well as personal and professional history

This section provides an insight into five key research participants who were selected not only because of their unique features and contrasting backgrounds, but also because of their well-informed views on learning and SDL approaches. In order to capture the richness of the perspectives provided by these research participants, this section is divided into five subsections, where each subsection thoroughly discusses the five selected vignettes. It begins by introducing and justifying selection of the key research participants by presenting their personal and professional backgrounds, including details of their gender, ethnic group, highest educational qualification, educational history and teaching experience. Nevertheless, to prevent this report from sounding too mechanical, I flag only information worthy of note.

The vignettes of selected research participants serve not only to highlight the distinctive nature of each of the selected research participants in terms of their thinking styles as well as their instructional practices, it also aims to present the research participants as unique individuals. Most importantly, apart from being an alternative way of sharing the findings from the interview data, the vignettes of these

selected research participants also help with my analysis and interpretation of the data set by providing an insight into why these research participants have such diverse and, in some cases, quite contrasting views to those expressed by other research participants.

4.3.1 Vignette of Dr Affandi

Introduction to Dr Affandi

Having gained his bachelor's degree in TESOL (Hons) from a local university, Dr Affandi then started his teaching career as a secondary school teacher at a semi-private school, originally founded by the British during the British colonial period to educate local citizens who would go on to serve as low-level employees. The semi-private schools were also known as missionary schools in the olden days as they were funded by missionaries or preachers. This type of school closely followed the British school curriculum, and strong emphasis was placed on mastery of the English language. Although after independence the missionary schools were gradually emerged into the Malaysian national school system and are now known as semi-private schools, they have more autonomy in comparison to other national schools. These schools operate flexibly and arrange their learning activities to meet the demands of parents and other parties because, apart from receiving financial aid from the Malaysian government, the schools are also partially funded by individual parties. While serving as a teacher, Dr Affandi studied part time for his master's degree in Extension Education at a local Malaysian university. After completing his master's degree, he was appointed a university tutor for a period of two years prior to being sent to do his PhD. Having completed his doctoral studies in Continuing Education from a United Kingdom (UK) university, he returned to Malaysia and served as a lecturer, specifically as a teacher educator.

What is noteworthy is that his academic qualifications focusing on adult learning may have impacted his beliefs on learning and teaching, as well as on SDL. More

importantly, his significant number of research publications in areas such as continuing education, extension education, leadership, youth development and human resource development led me to choose Dr Affandi as my key vignette. Based on his academic qualifications and the diversity as well as breadth of his research experience, I felt that Dr Affandi would be an expert who would be well informed about lifelong learning in general, if not SDL in particular.

Interestingly, analysis of his interview transcript revealed wide-ranging perceptions and views, all of which provided answers to the research questions but also moved well beyond their scope. For these reasons, he was chosen as one of my key research participants.

Insight into Dr Affandi's responses

Distinctively, Dr Affandi's ideas about learning and teaching were influenced both by Islamic and Western perspectives on education. As a Malay Muslim who grew up with the teachings and practices of Islamic principles, it is not surprising that his beliefs about learning and teaching are greatly dominated by Islamic views on education. However, the influence of Western perspectives on Dr Affandi's ideas about learning and teaching were also evident. It is most likely that the influence of the Western educational conventions on Dr Affandi's beliefs about learning and teaching started when he became a teacher at a semi-private school in Malaysia, institutions which have been heavily shaped by British values compared to mainstream schools. Ultimately, his Western perspective on education may also have been further broadened when he pursued his doctoral studies in the UK.

Three interesting responses presented by Dr Affandi include: (1) the purpose of learning is to be a better person; (2) the idea of having a balance in learning; and (3) the role of the educator within Islamic perspectives.

Although Dr Affandi's views sometimes reflected British educational values, it was noticeable that his Islamic perspective dominated and greatly influenced his beliefs and pedagogical practices. For instance, driven by an Islamic view on education, Dr Affandi emphasised that the main purpose of learning is to be a better individual, both physically and spiritually, a view which was echoed by Al-Attas' (2005), Alawi's (2010) and Wan's (2013) statements on the goal of education in Islam, which is to produce a holistic individual. In Dr Affandi's words:

> So for me, <u>learning is about improving yourself</u>, it's about changing for the better, it's about developing yourself <u>to be a better person in terms of knowledge, skills and attitude</u> …(A8–A11)

Again, influenced by Islamic perspectives on education, Dr Affandi suggested that modesty was the best way to approach teaching and learning. Dr Affandi added, in the extracts below, that despite the fact that Malaysian teacher educators are driven by the compelling 'student-directed' approaches, it is important to recognise the role of educators in the learning process. This is emphasised by Islamic teaching, which suggests that in the pursuit of knowledge, it is important for a learner to seek a guide from a highly qualified educator, as this may prevent the learner from deviating from the actual learning (Khan, 2014).

> Sometime, <u>when we self-directedly try to understand religion,</u> this is when <u>sometime we sometimes get distracted</u>. We <u>tend to digress from the true teaching</u> and <u>this is when you need a 'guru' or educator to come and guide you</u>. (A379–A382)

In relation to Dr Affandi's idea of acknowledging the educator's role within student-oriented learning, one of his crucial views, which is particularly worthy of note, is the importance of having a balance of both worlds. By this he means while celebrating 'learner self-direction' we must not challenge the importance of an educator to guide the learning. Dr Affandi returns repeatedly to comment on the significance of being balanced and not radical in teaching and learning. In his own words:

> A good system should have the best of both worlds, you have technology, you have your self-directed learning, but you also need to have an educator or a teacher … So that you can eventually have a comprehensive and a more holistic learning and teaching process …(A373-A391)

Dr Affandi's idea of balanced learning was evident through his instructional practices, where he conducted an interactive lecture, which promoted project work, group presentations and individual presentations and not simply a traditional and passive mode of lecture. These key issues will be explored further in the *Thematic Analysis* section beginning on page 136.

4.3.2 Vignette of Dr Jamal

Dr Jamal was selected as one of my key research participants because, based on his interview analysis, he seemed to be very optimistic about the implementation of SDL within the Malaysian education system. Another point that distinguished Dr Jamal from the other key research participants was the fact that Dr Jamal's own early educational experience had been in a missionary school (now known as a semi-private school), originally founded by a British preacher. This school, which embraces Western pedagogical practices, appeared to have significantly broadened Dr Jamal's way of thinking. For example, despite his Islamic faith, Dr Jamal's thinking was not bound by Islamic perspectives on education. He suggested that 'strict' Islamic teaching, where learners are prohibited from questioning the educator's act may have inhibited interaction between educators and learners. Dr Jamal's image of Islamic teaching contrasts sharply with Dr Affandi's view on Islamic education (a point which will be explored fully in the *Thematic Analysis* section, on page 136). It is reasonable to suggest that Dr Jamal's schooling and university learning experiences may have greatly impacted on his views on learning in general, and on SDL in particular.

Dr Jamal added that, during his schooling years, the curriculum implemented at the semi-private school was very different from that found in national or mainstream

schools. He pointed up one of the paramount differences between semi-private school and national schools as students in a semi-private school being more exposed to various out-of-class activities than those at national schools. He further admitted that he had enjoyed his own schooling years because of the extracurricular activities, which ranged from wide subject-based clubs, such as art club and science club, to interest-based clubs including film and debating clubs. Therefore, it is clear that the extracurricular activities shaped not only Dr Jamal's views of SDL, but the activities themselves were considered by Dr Jamal to have the potential for developing facets of SDL outside of the confines of a very prescribed curriculum. In his extracts below, he highlights the potential of extracurricular activities in complementing in-class learning.

> …there are <u>many activities that could lead to learning</u>. For instance, like, when you become active in co-curricular activities or in leadership activities, in school or even in projects. That would take them [the learners] to a <u>different dimension of learning</u>. That would <u>give them [the learner] a different interpretation of learning</u>. (B67–B72)

However, the reason that I chose Dr Jamal as one of my key research participants was not only because of his previous educational background and distinctive ideas on SDL and pedagogical orientations, but the fact that he was the only research participant with responsibility at a university for promoting SDL approaches among lecturers. Dr Jamal reported that he had been very active in organising workshops, symposiums, as well as online forums for lecturers which he hoped would serve as a platform for lecturers to share their pedagogical practices and opinions on SDL approaches. Therefore, I believed Dr Jamal would be an expert who would be well informed about active learning or the learner-centred curriculum, if not about SDL in particular.

Insight into Dr Jamal's responses

Some of Dr Jamal's responses that I would like to highlight include making learning interesting, assuming that learners are equal partners in learning and promoting group project work to enhance learners' SDL skills.

I would suggest that his schooling experience, where he was actively involved in outdoor activities, greatly impacted his views on learning. He strongly emphasises the importance of making learning interesting. According to Dr Jamal, 'A good education is important', he explained, 'but what seems even more vital is that students are able to enjoy their school days and grow up as individuals who are beneficial to society rather than being products of education that fail to respond accordingly to the current needs of the nation'. Holding this perspective about learning, he then concluded SDL to be a perfect tool for making learning interesting. Most importantly, he stressed, mastering SDL skills is necessary for survival. In his own words:

> that is why I believed <u>self-directed learning is geared to make learning more interesting</u>. But the bigger picture is to <u>prepare them for the real world</u>. So that means when they go out, they will be motivated … (B496–B499)

Referring to his students' class attendance, he pointed out that his students enjoyed his classes, which promotes active learner engagement by granting a measure of freedom and space for them to determine their own learning activities. Most importantly, he noted that his students were more than willing to engage in SDL activities. What is noteworthy is that Dr Jamal stressed that SDL is achievable only if educators are willing to give up their authoritative positions by acknowledging that learners are equal co-partners in learning, a view which is in line with Evans' (2013), Bates and Martin's (2013), Bourke, Mentis and Todd's (2011), Woolner and Clark's (2015) and Carless et al.'s (2011) calls for a collaborative partnership between learner and educator. Nevertheless, Dr Jamal's view that learners are the ones who should be held responsible for ensuring successful learning, and not the educators, very much contrasts with the views of other research participants. According to Dr

Jamal, educators are only responsible for guiding and facilitating the learning process. In his own words:

> …the <u>educators</u> will <u>guide but</u> the <u>students are the ones responsible</u>. Teachers will facilitate but you will decide … For instance, you are doing your PhD, you yourselves will think about everything. You should not blame your supervisors. <u>Students are responsible, but teachers should guide them</u>. You must not say that the teacher is responsible … (B386–B396)

It is most likely that the learning experiences he gained when he was a student at a UK university significantly shaped his perceptions of SDL as a 'student-directed' project. The influence of Western educational values was evident in Dr Jamal's pedagogical practices, where he admitted that he would replicate some of the relevant learning activities he had experienced as a student in his classes. For instance,

> There was even a case where a group of students, this <u>I learned</u> when I was <u>in the university</u> actually. There I attended a seminar, there was a<u> group of students, they went to Bath</u>, in the south of England and t<u>hey recorded, they imagined themselves as disabled and travelled in the city of Bath and took pictures</u>. How does the city help disabled people? <u>And they presented it in the seminar</u>. It was a very good report and after that even the city decided to change in order to make it more accessible to disabled people. So what I did, okay <u>I told my students</u>, why don't <u>you take a bus from A to B?</u> At that time we did not have the Rapid Bus. We only had the old bus system. You <u>record your journey</u>. And then <u>ask people</u>. And they did that … (B227–B238)

Dr Jamal holds his idea of SDL as project work firmly, for instance:

> On saying that, I would like to add, when I started working in the university, I tried some of this <u>self-directed learning or</u> at that time I called it <u>project work</u> (B119–B122)

> I taught English courses and in my courses you decide what to do. So it is a <u>kind of project thing</u> … (B213-B214)

His idea of SDL as a 'student-directed' project reflects Tough's (1971) earliest views of SDL as self-initiated and self-managed project work, a view which has recently been reiterated by Douglass and Morris (2014). Expanding upon his idea even

further, Dr Jamal suggested that self-motivation and self-determination, or perseverance, are the basic ingredients to ensure sustainable SDL efforts, something echoed within the literature provided in the *Critical Review of the Literature* chapter (e.g. Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2002, 2012; Pink, 2011; Douglass & Morris, 2014). These key points highlighted by Dr Jamal will be explored fully in the *Thematic Analysis* section.

4.3.3 Vignette of Dr Rahim

Introduction to Dr Rahim

Dr Rahim gained a Certificate in Education from one of Malaysia' Teacher Education Institutes before beginning an eight-year teaching career as a secondary school teacher. Dr Rahim was the only one of the research participants who started his higher education at Certificate level, compared to other research participants who began their higher education at bachelor's degree level. A point to note, the Malaysian Teacher Education Institute was one of the higher education institutions under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. This institution was specifically built to train prospective primary and secondary school teachers. Teacher candidates at the Teacher Education Institution were assured a job as a teacher after graduation (Goh, 2013). As this institution was established to train prospective teachers, the curriculum employed was devoted to ensuring that prospective teachers were able to translate effectively the national goal of education enshrined in the Malaysian NPE. In contrast, student teachers at university are not guaranteed employment as a teacher once they graduate (Goh, 2013). Therefore, to prepare their graduates for working life, the teacher curriculum at university is comprehensively designed to cover various aspects such as entrepreneurship, journalism and project management. What is noteworthy is that Dr Rahim's learning exposure to both types of teacher curriculum may have broadened and enhanced his views about learning and teaching.

After receiving his bachelor's degree in Science Education from a Malaysian local university, Dr Rahim then joined one of the Malaysian universities as a lecturer in the Faculty of Education. Having worked as a university educator for two years, he was then sent to do his master's studies in Science Education (Counselling and Guidance) at a UK university. He received a PhD in Counselling and Guidance from the local Malaysian university. A distinctive feature of Dr Rahim in comparison to other selected key research participants is that Dr Rahim has the least overseas learning experience as he completed only a 12-month master's degree programme at the UK university.

I chose Dr Rahim as one of my key research participants because he was actively involved in various studies related to learner empowerment, autonomous learning and active learning at both a national and university level. For instance, at national level, Dr Rahim was one of the main researchers, a consultant and trainer for the Sekolah Bestari (Smart School) pilot project, rolled out between 1999 and 2002 and which aimed to introduce SDL approaches in 89 selected schools by integrating educational technology with teaching and learning activities. At university level, Dr Rahim was actively involved in the development of the Self-Development Inventory, Personal Inventory and Vocational Preference Inventory which integrated SDL elements such as self-evaluation, self-awareness, self-management and self-planning. Through these inventories, learners are guided step by step to evaluate their own learning performances, decide their learning needs and to plan their learning trajectories, all of which are important elements of SDL approaches. Based on his extensive research experience, I believed Dr Rahim would be an expert who would be well informed about SDL approaches. Remarkably, analysis of his interview revealed a wide variety of views and realities of the implementation process of SDL approaches at both school and university level.

Currently, he is investigating lecturers' perceptions on the involvement of students in the assessment process and learners' readiness to be involved in developing examination questions, one of the key areas which this current study has set out to explore. Sharing his initial findings, he reported that lecturers were not comfortable

involving students in constructing assessment criteria as they believed that students were not capable of critically reflecting on important areas to be tested. He made an initial assumption that the Malaysian cultural context may act as a barrier to the implementation of learner-oriented learning. As a consequence of Dr Rahim's involvement in these research projects, his views, when compared to those of other participants, were more exhaustive and comprehensive. Furthermore, it is obvious that he had taken into consideration both theoretical and practical aspects before giving any of his responses or comments that offered a wide range of views on SDL.

In conclusion, the main reason for choosing Dr Rahim as one of my key research participants was due to his active involvement in numerous studies related to and relevant to SDL. His participation in this current study allows me to gain an insight into important issues pertaining to SDL approaches within the Malaysia context. The influence of the cultural context in learning, or SDL in particular, raised by Dr Rahim will be elaborated upon further in the *Thematic Analysis* section before it is returned to and discussed in the *Discussion and Conclusions* chapter.

Insight into Dr Rahim's responses

Four key responses provided by Dr Rahim included: (1) learning as a social activity, (2) that culture has a great impact on learning and teaching practices, (3) the exclusivity of SDL – it is only appropriate for intelligent and bright students and (4) the impact of learning experiences on the learner's readiness for SDL.

According to Dr Rahim, learning is a process of getting information either formally or informally. Despite offering this relatively limited definition of learning, Dr Rahim's pedagogical practices suggested otherwise, as he actively engaged his students in classroom learning activities through class discussion, role-play and peer teaching.

To him, social interactions are fundamental to successful learning. He convincingly asserted that learning is unlikely to happen in absence of human interaction. He added that each individual requires a little input to start his or her learning process. In his own words:

> I believe that, <u>for learning to occur</u>, <u>there should be at least a little input,</u> <u>information and skills</u> such as communication skills. Because I think when we learn, <u>we will interact with others</u> and this involves communication skills. (D15–D18)

In relation to his characterisation of learning as a social activity, Dr Rahim suggests that culture is the single most powerful factor which has a significant impact on learning orientation and learning approaches, a view which has been expressed by many researchers in relation to the influence of the cultural context on SDL (e.g. Biggs, 1990, 1994, 1996; Grow, 1991; Tong, 2008; Wang, 2013; Hiemstra & Brockett, 2012). One possible reason for Dr Rahim to repeatedly return to and elaborate on the cultural impact on learning throughout his interview session could stem from his diverse research experiences on the implementation of SDL approaches at both school and university levels in Malaysia.

Reflecting on his informal observation of nursery school children in the UK, who are allowed to learn through play and who to a certain degree decide their daily learning activities based on their own interests, Dr Rahim suggested that this type of pedagogical approach was not possible in the current Malaysia education system. He added that learning in Malaysia is viewed as a serious business and that hard work is essential for success. He then suggested that Malaysian culture could be a restricting factor for the successful implementation of SDL.

> It is <u>due to our culture</u>. We <u>do not encourage creative thinking</u>. When I was in the UK, their classroom, in their nursery or kindergarten, they have something like station A where they used computers and station B where students play in the sand. But look at our kindergarten. We teach them mathematics. Emm ... Multiplication at a very young age. So when our students score [well] in mathematics, it is not surprising because <u>we train them for that</u>. (D129–D144)

> But Malays, we are weak in our English, but then when our friend is trying to learn English, when he is practising English, we look down at him. We say to him why are you talking like an idiot. Just talk in Malay. So this is our culture. <u>We do not support others</u>. (D181–D186)

Although Dr Rahim expressed some reservations about the possibility of the successful implementation of SDL in Malaysia, he nevertheless concluded that 'nothing is impossible'. According to him, if all stakeholders shared the same educational aspirations and worked together in tandem, successful implementation of SDL could be achievable. His doubts about Malaysia's readiness for SDL approaches most probably stem from his research experience, especially the failure of the Sekolah Bestari (Smart School) pilot project, which was the result of conflicting educational goals among stakeholders (Kamaruddin, Hamilton & Park, 2008, who also suggested that a potential reason for the failure of the Sekolah Bestari (Smart School) may have been the different goals held by various educational stakeholders).

Interestingly, analysis of Dr Rahim's interview transcript revealed that Dr Rahim had repeatedly commented on the exclusivity of SDL approaches, which he claimed to be appropriate only for intelligent students. Greatly influenced by his Sekolah Bestari (Smart School) pilot project, where SDL approaches thrived in boarding schools populated by selected, smart and bright students, yet failed in the mainstream or national schools populated by average students, Dr Rahim concluded that SDL approaches were only appropriate for intelligent students.

In this regard, Dr Rahim added that boarding school students, compared to their counterparts in other types of schools, are intellectually superior, highly motivated, know how to self-manage, have a strong will to learn, embrace challenges positively and, most importantly, are comfortable with independent learning. These characteristics of boarding school students, described by Dr Rahim, are very similar to the features of successful self-directed learners highlighted by many writers (e.g. Gibbons, 2008, 2009; Manning, 2013; Douglass & Morris, 2014). It is reasonable therefore to conclude that Dr Rahim was suggesting that the preceding characteristics of 'intelligent students' are essential ingredients for successful self-direction, which

also reflects a number of researchers' views on the positive relationships between learners' cognitive ability and the success of SDL. However, it is important to note that besides cognitive ability, learners' traits and various metacognitive skills have a significant role in ensuring effective self-direction (e.g. Sperling, Howard & Staley, 2004; Isaacson & Fujita, 2006; Schunk, 2008; Loyens, Magda & Rikers, 2008; Jossberger et al., 2010).

> … maybe <u>self-directed learning can be introduced to</u> MARA [a type of Malaysian boarding school] students because they are <u>bright students</u>. They do research. They have to do research if they want to graduate. What I am trying to say is that, hrmmm … we should start with small groups of students. Select students that <u>lean towards independent learning</u>, ask them to do research. Introduce a research-based school. I believe that only at this type of school can you have self-directed learning, so that is my suggestion. (D203–D210)

Finally, some important observations made by Dr Rahim, which reinforce what has been widely discussed by educationists, are his views on how learners' schooling experiences affect their expectations of university learning, and of the role of the lecturer in particular (Dr Rahim's opinions match with those reported by Hansen, 2000; Trigwell & Ashwin, 2003; and Trigwell, Ashwin & Millan, 2013).

Dr Rahim reported that despite various efforts by the Malaysian government to promote learner-directed learning at every level in the Malaysian education system, current learning and teaching practices in Malaysian education institutions do not equip learners to be independent and self-initiated learners, let alone to be involved in lifelong learning.

Elucidating this issue even further, Dr Rahim suggested that within a centralised educational system, Malaysian school teachers are restricted by the rigid and overloaded curriculum, coupled with a high-stakes assessment system, which causes Malaysian school teachers to adopt teacher-oriented approaches. He added such pedagogical approaches nurture reliance on a teacher, resulting in the production of dependent, incompetent and less capable learners. According to Dr Rahim, learners who are used to relying on educators to lead their learning are less willing to take responsibility for their own learning and are less prepared for higher learning. In this

regard, Dr Rahim convincingly argues for the importance of a strong educational base which equips learners with essential learning skills to support later learning.

The ideas expressed by Dr Rahim not only provided answers to the research questions but also moved well beyond them to capture the reality and challenges that exist within the Malaysian education system which need to be considered if there is to be successful implementation of any educational changes.

4.3.4 Vignette of Dr Siti

Introduction to Dr Siti

Dr Siti received both her bachelor's degree and master's in Curriculum and Instruction from universities in the United States of America. In 2008, she completed her doctoral studies in Curriculum and Instruction from the Malaysian university. Before moving to the university as a lecturer, she worked for 24 years as an English language teacher at primary, secondary and matriculation levels. At the same time, she was also involved for two-and-a-half-years in the selection and training of student teacher candidates. At university level, Dr Siti teaches several curriculum courses for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Besides teaching, she also supervises undergraduate and postgraduate research projects focusing on the areas of curriculum and pedagogy, communication and debating and the 16 habits of mind as founded by Costa and Kallick (2000), which align closely with the basic features of SDL approaches, for instance, persisting, thinking about thinking and remaining open to continuous learning.

Apart from her broad and extensive experience as an educator who has taught across all educational levels within the Malaysian education system, what is particularly worthy of note is her involvement in the process of selecting student teacher candidates. It would be reasonable to assume that this experience would put her in

the best position for describing the ideal and desirable characteristics of a Malaysian educator who would be valued by the Ministry of Education in Malaysia.

Furthermore, Dr Siti is currently assisting the Ministry of Education in Malaysia in developing and evaluating the teacher education curriculum as well as assessing the implementation of the Malaysian school curriculum. Therefore, I believed Dr Siti would be well informed about the essential features of SDL approaches embedded in the Malaysian education curriculum. For these reasons, Dr Siti was chosen as one of my key research participants.

Insight into Dr Siti's responses

Interestingly, analysis of Dr Siti's interview transcript revealed that her ideas about learning, teaching and SDL were greatly influenced by her teaching and research experiences. It is most likely that her extensive teaching experiences and her wide range of research experiences have provided Dr Siti with an opportunity to examine the appropriateness of certain educational theories within the actual context of the classroom. Two interesting responses presented by Dr Siti include: (i) learning together – learners as co-partners in learning, and (ii) education as a way of life.

Similar to Dr Rahim (see *Vignette of Dr Rahim* section on page 121), who views learning as a social process, Dr Siti defined learning as a process which should involve conversation or communication between at least two individuals. In her own words:

> I would like to define education because <u>basically education is a conversation between two generations and if there is no conversation, there is no learning.</u> So, for learning to happen, there must be a person who teaches it and a student to receive what is to be learned. (K6–K10)

Although Dr Siti emphasised the importance and the need for an expert to guide the learning process, she absolutely rejected the need for an authoritarian expert. Being faithful to her principle, Dr Siti did not feel hesitant or awkward about seeking her

learners' opinions. In other words, Dr Siti is willing to learn from her learners. Elucidating her idea of the role of the educator in learning, Dr Siti stressed that educators are not experts who should know everything and that they are not responsible for teaching and providing the information needed by learners all of the time, something which echoes Gallimore, Gilbert and Nater's (2014) and Goodyear, Casey and Kirk's (2013) image of the educator as a coach. She admitted her learners are sometimes more informed than her about certain issues and she was not reluctant to accept their ideas and views; instead, she felt proud of the learners.

Dr Siti's 'learning together' concept, which emphasises the recognition of learners as co-partners in learning who share equal responsibilities in ensuring successful learning, was promoted through peer teaching and class discussion. According to Dr Siti, these sorts of active dual interactions encourage a lively and engaging learning atmosphere which indirectly places the learner in the position of driving his or her own learning activity.

Her beliefs, as well as her instructional practices, indicate that she is willing to give more freedom and autonomy to her learners, which many writers suggest is one of the most important elements for promoting SDL (e.g. McGrath, 2000; Ausburn, 2002; Benson, 2005, 2007, 2011, 2013). Furthermore, analysis of research participants' interview transcripts acts to reinforce existing views on the importance of freedom and autonomy in ensuring effective implementation of SDL activities – these issues will be fully explored in the *Thematic Analysis* section on page 136.

> So normally in a class, normally in my class, I would share with the students what I expect of them, and then they would know what is expected from me. So, at the end of the day, they are able to work something out and I find tremendous work done by my students which is sometimes beyond my knowledge, because I consider myself, <u>I don't see myself as a perfect lecturer</u> that knows everything and I tell them this. Some of my master's students work, are working, as well as doing their master's, and we share the knowledge and during the course, students are able to work on certain assignments and then, that itself gives me additional knowledge in order for me to teach curriculum and instruction. So, it has been <u>a two-way thing. It is not just me teaching them, but it is also them teaching me</u>. (K132–K145)

Based on her long, diverse and extensive teaching experiences, together with her active involvement in the student teacher candidate selection process, it is reasonable to suggest that Dr Siti is well placed to offer an opinion on what are the most important characteristics of effective educators. According to Dr Siti, being passionate about educating others is crucial for those who choose to be in the teaching profession, a view which is in line with Walker's (2008) list of twelve characteristics of an effective teacher. Therefore, it is highly likely that Dr Siti's participation in this current study could bring a new dimension and useful insights to investigating Malaysian teacher educators' perceptions of SDL approaches.

Sharing her experiences of selecting student teacher candidates, Dr Siti reported that most of the prospective teachers are not passionate and do not possess the right attitude to become an effective educator. She suggested that this issue is most likely related to the mentality of most Malaysians, who tend to perceive teaching as a second-option profession for individuals who fail to succeed in other professional professions such as medicine, law, and engineering. Ultimately, this less passionate and less dedicated group of teachers may teach from a position of relative ignorance, resulting in a failure to achieve the national educational aspiration.

To overcome this situation, Dr Siti recommended that it is important to recruit only individuals who are interested in educating others. Most importantly, she highlighted the need to change the Malaysian mindset by cultivating education as a part of Malaysian culture rather than as a phase to go through as part of the process of securing a job. According to Dr Siti, when education is considered as a culture and a way of life, any changes made by educational authorities aimed at improving the quality of education will undoubtedly be accepted and hence be successfully implemented. In her own words:

> I just hope that people will take education as something very important and be able to see it as a culture. When it becomes a culture, only then will the interest be there and will things happen more smoothly. (K366–K369)

4.3.5 Vignette of Dr Mazlan

Introduction to Dr Mazlan

Dr Mazlan holds a bachelor's degree in Science Education and a master's degree in Education Management and Leadership from a Malaysian university. In 2001, he graduated with a doctoral degree in Educational Management and Administration from a UK university. He has been a lecturer since August 2002 and is now a senior lecturer at the Department of Educational Management, Planning and Policy.

His areas of expertise include educational policy, educational management, administration and educational management from Islamic perspectives. Dr Mazlan has published several books, chapters in book, journals and proceedings focusing on educational management and school effectiveness with a particular focus on Islamic views on education. In addition, he has been actively involved as a reviewer and guest editor of a few local journals and journal articles.

The main reason I chose Dr Mazlan as one of my key research participants is because he is an expert on Islamic perspectives on education. He has been actively involved in evaluating the effectiveness of the administration and management of Islamic schools throughout Malaysia. For example, from 2012 to 2014, Dr Mazlan was appointed as one of the consultants to the Ministry of Education Malaysia responsible for advising and assisting the development of the Islamic Education curriculum. Based on his diverse research experiences, I believed that Dr Mazlan would be an expert who would be well-informed about Islamic views on SDL approaches.

Insight into Dr Mazlan's responses

Three interesting issues discussed by Dr Mazlan are: (a) the interconnection between university philosophy and lecturer philosophy, (b) the unity of knowledge and (c) wide-ranging views on SDL approaches and its context appropriateness.

According to Dr Mazlan, a university's philosophy is the most important policy pillar within a university system as it forms the basis for developing a course structure and curriculum, by informing the desirable characteristics of its graduates. Furthermore, he added that a university's philosophy may also influence a lecturer's philosophy, which may in turn shape the lecturer's educational beliefs and instructional practices. His views reaffirm Entwistle and Walker's (2002), Hativa and Goodyear's (2002) and Fanghanel's (2007) insights into the impact of university structures and policies on educators' pedagogical practices.

It is most likely that his dual position both as a senior administrator directly involved in the process of formulating a university policy, and as a lecturer who implemented and was bound by the policy, has made him aware of the impacts of the university's philosophy on lecturer educational beliefs and pedagogical strategies employed, or in other words, the lecturer philosophy. For instance, he added, if the goal of the university is to create meaningful learning experiences for its learners by placing them as active individuals who are responsible for the success of their own learning, eventually educators may need to ensure that their pedagogical approaches are in line with the aspirations of the university. Meanwhile, if the university's primary concern is the number of students graduating over the quality of the graduates that it produces, educators will ultimately strive to ensure that their learners graduate within the specified period and less attention will be given to providing a quality learning experience. Dr Mazlan's perspectives on the impact of the university's philosophy on lecturers' educational beliefs are closely aligned with those of many researchers (e.g. Fanghanel, 2007; Kahn, 2009; Jiao, 2010) who reported a significant relationship between university working context and lecturers' pedagogical practices. Reflecting on SDL approaches, Dr Mazlan stated that if the university promotes SDL or active

learning, educators are forced to create such learning environments and opportunities for their learners, which will indirectly influence their views of SDL. He explained:

> When we want to discuss <u>what it is that we</u> actually <u>want to teach the students, it depends on the philosophy of the university</u>. For instance, we can see university as a place to train workers or we can produce graduates that are emm ..very passionate towards self-improvement and knowledge. For the second part, we are not targeting employment alone, but are more into emm...developing students' knowledge so that when they graduated, they will be well prepared for all kinds of profession and will be able to survive. In that context, the lecturer aims to produce only teachers that work in schools. So the lecturer may tailor his teaching technique to align with his target. He may list what is needed to be a good teacher and he will teach only that. Not more. However, <u>if</u> the <u>lecturer</u>, emm…his <u>philosophy is to produce a multiskilled graduate, the lecturer may not focus on transmitting knowledge alone, but infuse problem-based learning in his classes</u> because that is a reality in the workplace. (N69 –N84)

Furthermore, Dr Mazlan's idea of university philosophy may also stem from the reality that Malaysia has a wide range of universities: Research Universities, which are responsible for driving research and innovation; Focus Universities, which focus on a specific field such as technical and defence; and Comprehensive Universities, which offer various courses at pre-graduate, undergraduate and postgraduate level (Ramli et al. (2013) reported on the aims, purposes, characteristics and organisational structures of Research Universities). Hence, these universities should have different roles and responsibilities and, of course, the philosophies held by these universities are different. Ultimately, to achieve the university's aspirations, it is essential for lecturers to hold similar ideas towards learning and teaching.

Even though this current study was not aiming to test and judge research participants' knowledge of SDL, Dr Mazlan's elaborative and convincing descriptions of SDL approaches compared to those of other research participants reaffirmed my belief that he is an expert in the area of SDL. Interestingly, despite a detailed explanation about the features of SDL approaches, Dr Mazlan emphasised that SDL is only relevant to certain fields. For example, despite positing SDL as an effective learning and teaching strategy to stimulate active learning, Dr Mazlan asserted that his area of educational management and administration has nothing to

do with SDL. As a result, his views on SDL as a tool to teach led him to suggest that SDL is only relevant to education rather than, for example, in the field of engineering.

Furthermore, Dr Mazlan's view of SDL acts to broaden Dr Rahim's idea of the exclusivity of SDL to intelligent learners to the exclusivity of SDL in terms of subject area or discipline. In his own words,

> Because <u>every lecturer</u>, they <u>have their own target</u>. For instance, emm…<u>lecturers in the engineering faculty</u>, they <u>might not need these self-directed learning skills</u>, for example. Emm…I am not sure. But for me, <u>lecturers in the education faculty</u>, they <u>should know what is self-directed learning</u> because to be an educator, they <u>must know the latest information in their field only</u>. If our knowledge is too limited, how can we produce a comprehensive and competent teacher. So, <u>if the lecturer believes that self-directed learning is important to develop good teachers, then he will read more about self-directed learning and apply it in his teaching. Teaching by example</u>. You know… But <u>it depends on the faculty and the area actually</u>. Because <u>I am more into administration, but self-directed learning is more for the curriculum and psychology departments</u>. So other departments may have conducted seminars on self-directed learning, but <u>not in my department</u>. Because <u>we are more into self-managing</u>. <u>We are not teaching, actually, and self-directed learning is more to do with the teaching and learning aspect</u>. It is not for my department. (N205 –N225)

Finally, influenced by an Islamic view on education, particularly on the aspect of the unity of knowledge, Dr Mazlan opposed the practice of teaching only specific knowledge to learners. From Dr Mazlan's point of view, the current practice of separating knowledge into modularised disciplines produces incompetent learners who fail to link and integrate their academic studies with other related fields. Echoing Ismail et al.'s (2011), Al-Attas' (2005), Alawi's (2010) and Wan's (2013) views on the purpose of education in Islam, Dr Mazlan emphasised that the goals of education in Islam are to produce a holistic individual who specialises in various disciplines. Furthermore, he added, Islam rejects a separation of knowledge into distinctive disciplines as this could lead to an ignorance of other disciplines, resulting in a limited and narrow perspective.

> If I have an Islamic Studies degree, it does not mean that I can only be an Ustaz. I can also be emm…a fashion designer if I can relate my Islamic Study to fashion trends. So if the lecturer teaches him specific knowledge, then he might not be able to think outside of the box. He will be focusing on that specific knowledge and unable to relate to other areas. But, if we are able to provide a generic kind of knowledge to them, then they can be a caterer, they can be a fashion designer... (N99 –N106)

These key issues raised by Dr Mazlan will be explored further in the *Thematic Analysis* section.

The preceding five sections have explored the complex interconnectedness between these research participants' educational histories and professional experiences with their beliefs and instructional practices of SDL. The vignettes of key research participants have not only helped me in reflecting on the possible reasons for their distinctive views on SDL but will also assist me in my analysis and interpretation of the interview data. The next section will present the *Thematic Analysis* findings.

4.4 Thematic Analysis

It has been acknowledged in the *Critical Review of the Literature* chapter that existing literature has greatly shaped our understanding of SDL. However, my extensive review of literature indicated that relatively little attention has been paid to the areas of: (i) establishing the link between assessment and feedback in relation to SDL; (ii) examining the Malay-Islamic and the Malaysian-Chinese-Confucian perspectives on learning as most SDL studies conducted by Malaysian researchers have tended to view Malaysian learners as a homogenous group of learners practising and influenced by similar cultural values; and (iii) exploring SDL from the point of view of educators, as research in this area is relatively scarce.

Therefore, this study addresses these three identified gaps by investigating Malaysian teacher educators' conceptualisations of SDL, with particular attention being paid to assessment and feedback. Apart from focusing on exploring the perceived

fundamental elements of SDL approaches held by the research participants, my analysis of interview data also gives prominence to the wide range of views and perspectives which supported or even contradicted the existing theoretical framework discussed in the *Critical Review of the Literature* chapter. Due to the complexity and interconnectedness of research participants' perceptions of SDL, I have therefore decided to provide answers to my four research questions in an integrated way as I present my analysis and interpretation of the findings of this current study.

Moreover, the findings are also reported in order of importance, and the *Thematic Analysis* section therefore begins with what, in my opinion, is the most important finding and the one that will make the most significant original contribution. The reason for opting to report my findings in this way is to ensure that the intention of this study, which is to address the above-mentioned gaps, is achieved.

This section − *Thematic Analysis* − provides a detailed discussion on the thematic analysis of the interview data. It is divided into five separate but interlinked subsections, each focusing on a key theme which emerged from the analysis of the data. First, this section begins by discussing one of the key findings − *Assessment and feedback in SDL* − which reflected my primary concern about the lack of attention given to the area of assessment and feedback and its role in an SDL context. Second, the cultural dimension of SDL is explored − the *Prevailing culture which inhibits/facilitates SDL* theme − which offers insights into the influence of the Malay-Islamic and the Malaysian-Chinese-Confucian perspectives on SDL. Third, the theme of *SDL as a dynamic developmental process* is discussed. Fourth, a close examination of *SDL as a balance in learning* is presented, where greater emphasis is placed on describing the issues of interconnectedness between the subthemes *Freedom* and *Being in control*. Fifth, the theme of *SDL as a social, interdependent process*, which highlights two distinctive sides of SDL as suggested by the research participants, is presented. This dual view of SDL approaches, which recognises both the individual learning process whilst also acknowledging the importance of social interaction in supporting SDL, emphasises the impact of others on the learning process.

It should be emphasised that, in order to ensure transparency within this current study, the themes and subthemes identified have been illustrated as much as possible using extracts from the interview transcripts. In this way, the voices of the research participants are heard, and my approaches to the analysis of their accounts and my interpretations of what they have said are made transparent to the reader.

Theme 1: Assessment and feedback in SDL

This section addresses the assessment, feedback and pedagogical strategies employed by the research participants in promoting SDL among their learners. *Assessment and feedback in SDL*, which is regarded as one of the major contributions of this study to knowledge advancement in general, and to the SDL field in particular, consists of two sub-themes, *Assessment and feedback practices which inhibit/facilitate SDL* and *A curriculum which inhibits/ facilitates SDL.* Although *Assessment and feedback in SDL* is categorised into two distinctive subthemes, these subthemes are closely related. The interrelatedness between these subthemes will be explored in detail in a later section.

Subtheme: (i) Assessment and feedback practices which inhibit/facilitate SDL

The *Assessment and feedback practices which inhibit/facilitate SDL* subtheme focuses on exploring the assessment and feedback practices of the research participants and comprises four components: *Diversifying assessment approaches*, *Harmonising summative and formative assessment strategies*, *Timeliness of feedback* and, *Mode of feedback delivery*. The components will be presented in an integrated way in order to capture the complexity and interconnectedness of each component.

The majority of research participants' views on the important role of assessment in ensuring successful implementation of SDL approaches reflect what was reported by

many previous research studies (e.g. Boud & Falchikov, 2007; Carless et al., 2011; Boud, 2014). However, Dr Jamal believes that the current Malaysian university assessment practices, which directly assess what has been taught as opposed to what learners have actually learnt on their own, has restricted SDL approaches.

> This <u>system not only restricted the learners to focus on what was going to be tested, but they</u> rather enjoyed the process of learning itself. (B79–B81)

> But you know… <u>assessment in university is very rigid</u>…having said this, it does not mean that <u>we</u> are not <u>moving towards a more flexible way of assessing, but</u> the university is like…you know…a big tanker…<u>to change, it takes time,</u> but <u>with</u> the <u>rigid assessment method, students are tested on how they could reproduce what they had been taught, rather than what they had learned</u> throughout their journey towards completing their course assignment or project work. This may <u>hinder self-directed learning</u>, with self-directed learning…I think, <u>the assessment should be driven to be more flexible focusing on generic things</u>. (B374–B383)

Dr Ramli adds that by heavily prescribing what learners learn, and testing only the prescribed content, learners may focus their studying on what they think will be in the test. Dr Ramli's concern about these rigid and high-stakes assessment practices echoed Torrance's (2012) assertions, where it was stressed that assessment focusing on short-term learning activity and is limited to closing learners' learning gap, may inhibit the development of SDL skills as the learners are too anxious about preparing for the test.

Adding to this point, Dr Siti, in the extracts below, suggests that increased anxiety reduces meaningful learning experiences because learners are relying more on their memorisation than on understanding the lesson. This situation, as suggested by Dr Amalina, leads to surface learning, which she believes may inhibit SDL. Dr Siti and Dr Amalina's views reflected Prosser and Trigwell's (1999) and Boud and Prosser's (2002) ideas on the importance of the learners being cognitively involved in the learning process to ensure effective learning.

> If we [the educators] <u>aim to get As in the exams</u>, so…<u>the students tend to adopt the easiest way which is just to memorise</u>, so if their goal is just to get As, so <u>they will direct their learning to use a surface</u>-learning

approach….emmm…..I believe, <u>if the focus is to get good results in an examination which tests pre-assigned reading materials only</u>… in this case the <u>students might memorise the facts</u>…I mean… they tend to <u>memorise the potential answer without understanding it</u>. This is memorising…very different from understanding and it actually strays from promoting self-directed learning nature. (K23–K32)

Dr Siti believes that a first step for fostering SDL is to have a take-home examination because learners are assessed based on their knowledge acquisition and their ability to search for information on their own, rather than on their ability to memorise the assigned learning material.

I am more <u>in favour of giving a take-home examination</u> where <u>students are able to work further</u>, to search further for what their possible answers are going to be. With an open-ended question at tertiary level, there is no set scheme of answers, so it depends on what theoretical aspect you have learned and what they are able to reproduce during the final examination, which is why I normally do a take-home examination. So, <u>I will expect for the students to have references, to show that they have read other articles apart from what I have taught them. And they have to be able to synthesise and be able to apply according to their subject matter.</u> (K60–K70)

This discussion now turns to highlight the *Diversifying assessment approaches* component. Dr Rahim suggests that open-ended questions, which test beyond the learners' ability to memorise and regurgitate information by encouraging analysis, synthesis and explanation, would promote SDL.

Actually, I believe that there are pros and cons if you have such a rigid assessment method, for instance, you have this final exam. However, within that rigid system, you [the educator] can <u>have an open-ended question which tests broad aspects</u>…that open-ended question you know…can actually <u>test whether the students actually understand</u> <u>the topic</u>, can she [the learner] <u>explain in her [the learner's] own words</u>, can she [the learner] <u>apply it to other situations</u>, or <u>can she [the learner] solve problems</u>…<u>when the student masters this ability, then they [the learners] are in a better position to be able to direct their [the learners'] learning</u>. (D65–D73)

Based on my analysis and interpretation of the interview data, a majority of the research participants reported that they employed a variety of assessment approaches to assess their learners' (i) understanding of the learning content, (ii) ability to think

creatively and critically and (iii) ability to solve problems, which leads this discussion to the second component, *Harmonising summative and formative assessment strategies*.

Although the majority of the research participants agree that formative assessment encourages critical thinking, deep learning and, SDL, they did not suggest that summative assessment should be set aside. They believed that summative assessment was crucial for meeting the learners' and society's demands for academic grading and ranking and, most importantly, for formal accreditation purposes, which echoed Boud's (2014) recent writings on the widely accepted purpose of assessment – to provide certification of achievement.

In this regard, Dr Affandi, who emphasises the importance of having a balance in learning, suggests that the assessment methods in most Malaysian universities have shifted from relying on summative assessment to integrating formative assessment. Dr Affandi believes that a mixture of summative and formative assessment would serve as the best platform for supporting both learners' learning and the development of SDL skills.

> That is why in the context of our university, we want to have the best of both worlds. We want to have, if you talk about evaluation, we have formative evaluation and summative evaluation. Before this, we [the universities] were relying too much on summative evaluation, the so-called final examination. So, last time we [the universities] had assignments but the bigger portion would normally be in the examination. Emm...but then we [the universities] moved, eventually we [the universities] moved to an understanding that the performance of the students can be evaluated not only through summative evaluation but also formative evaluation, the ongoing evaluation…I think the more you [the educator] have, the better, you [the educator] have them[the learner] to do it individually, you [the educator] have them [the learners] do it in a group and you [the educator] have them [the learners] sit for the final exam. So a combination of all this will, sort of like, I think, provide the students with a more comprehensive way of learning and undertaking the course. It is important to balance traditional and contemporary modes of assessment, to harmonise the conventional way of learning with self-directed learning. (A194–A217)

Interestingly, from Dr Azlina's point of view, neither summative nor formative assessment is superior. From her perspective, each plays a different role and each should serve to complement the other. Dr Azlina, in her extracts below, stresses that rather than determining which approach to assessment is best for supporting learning, attention should be focused on the effectiveness of the assessment method in question and how it is conducted:

> I think both types of assessment are necessary. One is to determine how much they have progressed. One is to see how far they have gone. But it is more on how you conduct it. It is not the fault of the evaluation or assessment per se. It is how you [the educator] conduct the assessments…They [the assessments] both play different parts in our assessment system. But as I say, it is not the assessment which is important, it is how you [the educator] conduct the assessment that is more important. How do you [the educator] make sure that these assessments are valid, for example? How do you [the educator] make sure that these assessments are reliable? How do you [the educator] make sure that these assessments actually test what they are supposed to test? So that is more important. (G74–G98)

In the same vein, Dr Rahim discusses the importance of ensuring that those setting questions should take into account Bloom's Taxonomy when structuring exam questions.

> For me, examination is good because then we [the educator] can know whether he [the learner] understands or not. But the questions for examination are set by the teachers or the lecturers. Okay…Some [the educator] may follow Bloom's Taxonomy where we have a mixture of difficult and easy questions. But in our system, they [the education system] are focusing more on the comprehension level, causing the students to become good memorisers. Especially the Chinese students. So when this happens…emm…if you ask higher-level questions, when students are trained to memorize, they [the learners] will memorize everything, including the steps to problem solving. So there is no point in having a variety of questions if they just memorise the answer, you see…(D81–D92)

When reviewing the research participants' comments on the role of assessment in promoting SDL, it is interesting to note that most commented that careful planning for assessment is limited to the assessment developed by the educator, which

contradicted the primary principle of the SDL approach that recognises the learner as the key agent of learning who should be actively involved in designing their learning and assessment strategies. These findings reflect the striking gap identified in the literature, where less attention is given to assessment in supporting SDL. Therefore, findings from this study suggest that in understanding SDL, the implementation of any assessment approaches should receive particular attention because such approaches greatly influence the learners' decisions concerning the adoption of particular learning approaches.

Having discussed the assessment dimension, this discussion now turns to presenting the findings related to the feedback. Although a significant number of previous research studies have reported on the important role of feedback in engaging learners to reflect on their learning for the purposes of progression (e.g. Hattie & Timperly, 2007; Quinton & Smallbone, 2010, 2011; Parr & Timperley, 2010; Matthews, Janicki, He & Patterson, 2012), less attention was paid by research participants to the issue of feedback, and what comprises helpful and appropriate feedback which supports learning and encourages SDL. Two main issues related to feedback were presented by the research participants: (i) *Timeliness of feedback*; and (ii) *Mode of feedback delivery*.

A majority of the research participants agreed that quality and timely feedback are central to learning; however, they reported that providing individual feedback is challenging and time-consuming because of increasing demands on educators' time, reflecting what appeared in the existing literature (e.g. Carless et al., 2011; McDowell & Sambell, 2014; Boud & Soler, 2015). Nevertheless, all research participants reported that they work hard to ensure that learners receive appropriate feedback. Furthermore, despite admitting that individualised feedback is time-consuming, the majority of the research participants remain favourably disposed to providing learners with written feedback.

My analysis of the interview data shows that written feedback is the main medium of feedback delivery employed by most of the research participants. Echoing Hattie and

Timperley's (2007) perspective that receiving feedback is an emotional business for most learners, Dr Khairiah proposes that written feedback is a safer mode of feedback delivery as educators will have the opportunity to reread and restructure their feedback to avoid causing learners to experience shame, a crisis of confidence or, anxiety.

> I believe that I must give feedback to them. But I am a counsellor… <u>I believe receiving any comments about your work involves a certain degree of emotions.</u> If you <u>get positive feedback, then you are happy</u>. But <u>if it is a criticism,</u> how do you react? <u>You must be very down, frustrated</u> and so on… (C89–C93)

> I think <u>written feedback is</u> the most…emm…<u>the best way of giving feedback,</u> because you know, the <u>lecturer can actually revise their feedback</u> to <u>make sure that their comments do not carry any harmful effect to the learner emotionally.</u> (C110–C113)

Dr Khairiah described how she minimises the potentially negative emotional responses to receiving feedback. She tends to first highlight learners' strengths before inviting them, or even their peers, to reflect on the work submitted and to suggest an area for improvement. This is followed with her opinion on how to make that particular task better. Dr Khairiah's strategies reflect Molloy's (2010) idea of the feedback sandwich, whereby the negative feedback is sandwiched between two positive comments.

> At first, <u>I will praise them</u>, and only then will I let them know what they can work on, what they can improve. Or, <u>I might ask the students, if you are given a second chance to conduct the session, what do you want to improve or add</u>? Usually, we will watch a video on how this student conducted her counselling session. <u>I will ask other students about the strengths of this particular student.</u> Then I will ask that student what she would do differently if she was given a second chance. I believe that, <u>we [educators] need to</u> look for or <u>point to her [the learner] strengths before commenting on her [the learner's] weaknesses.</u> That is how I provide feedback. If they do something wrong, I will give my opinion on what some alternatives might be, so that they can work on them. (C93–C104)

Dr Liyana discussed this matter by providing an example of where a learner had misunderstood the assessment criteria and produced work deemed by the educator to

be poor. The subsequent feedback was perceived by the learner as a negative criticism or even as a rejection of their work. She added that the learner might have viewed himself as inadequate. As a result, the learner would probably have felt embarrassed, humiliated and even guilty. Following this experience, Dr Liyana suggested that the learner may be less willing to engage with the educator and may withdraw from the learning process in an attempt to avoid any possible repeated negative emotional experiences. This reaffirms Paulhus, Duncan and Yik's (2002) study which reported a significant link between face-saving values and Asian learners' willingness to participate in classroom interaction.

> But <u>feedback</u> can <u>sometimes</u> also <u>carry negative impacts</u>. For example, if the students do not understand what you want them to do, they might come up with something totally different which, of course, will be evaluated as inappropriate or wrong by the lecturer… even though that student may be deemed to have provided the best possible answer, but are not actually answering the question, then they will get criticism. <u>If you do not try to channel your feedback appropriately, the students might withdraw from the learning process, they even may avoid you because they might feel ashamed.</u> (R38–R46)

Dr Rahim believes that all of these reactions are related to shyness, a dominant cultural value affecting most Malaysians (e.g. Paulhus, Duncan & Yik, 2002; Liu, 2007; Chu, 2008; Juhana, 2012). In his interview, Dr Rahim repeatedly alluded to the fact that Malaysian learners are extremely shy about asking a question and being criticised, because criticism causes them to be seen as incompetent by their peers. Most importantly, Dr Rahim added that failure in learning among Asian learners in particular is seen as unacceptable as it brings embarrassment to the family and suggests that the learners are not working hard to achieve their goals, views which are echoed in Wu's (2010), Tham and Tham's (2011) and Juhana's (2012) reports on the relationship between Asian learners' motivation to learn and social approval.

> But Malays, we are weak in our English, but then when our friend is trying to learn English, when he is practising English, we look down at him. We say to him why are you talking like an idiot. Just talk in Malay. So <u>this is our culture. We do not support others. We are avoiding making mistakes, we do not want others to see or know our weaknesses. We are very shy. Shyness</u>

leads to not wanting to speak and avoiding being publicly criticised. (D181–D188)

Research participants justified their preferences for the mode of feedback by arguing that it depended to a great extent on the type of learning task and that they provide written feedback for a written assignment, while verbal feedback is given for an oral presentation.

> Usually, written feedback is provided only for a written assignment. If the activity is more of an hands-on activity, then I will provide oral feedback. (C113–C116)

From a slightly different perspective, Dr Azlina believes that feedback can actually work in both directions, with educators providing feedback to learners, and learners giving comments on educators' teaching approaches – an interesting viewpoint which merits future investigation in the context of SDL. From her point of view, educators' feedback shows that educators do appreciate the learners' work while learners' feedback on educators' pedagogical practices may assist educators to improve themselves. She suggests that it is not only about learners receiving feedback, but also about educators receiving comments about their pedagogical approaches:

> Yes, because when you give them feedback, you need to give feedback to students because students will actually, they will be very grateful. It means that you [the educator] are actually paying attention to what they [the learner] are doing, you see them as a human being so I think you need to reflect that. Okay, the feedback is actually to show the students that the lecturers care about them, pay attention to them and also the feedback. To me, feedback is also one way of assessing yourself [the educator], not just the student, but yourself as a teacher, as an instructor. From the feedback, from your students, reflections from your student, you can actually see how good or how bad you are, how effective your teaching is to them. So it is a two-way process. The feedback plays a very big part in both the teaching and learning. (G314–G326)

In this vein, Dr Affandi suggests that educators are not the only source of feedback, and that feedback from peers can also be used by the learner to improve their work, a

view which is echoed in Liu and Carless's (2006) and Nicol's (2009) call for the integration of peer feedback to enhance learners' learning. Furthermore, Dr Affandi's idea is closely related to the notion of *SDL as a social, interdependent process* which emphasises the role of others in SDL.

A conclusion that can be drawn from this section is that the curriculum, assessment and, feedback must all be well aligned in order to support SDL. As noted by most SDL literature, SDL is an approach which recognises the learner as the key agent of learning, therefore, for effective implementation of SDL, learners' roles in determining their learning goals, designing their learning activities and evaluating their learning progress should be a primary concern for all educators who aim to promote SDL. In order to establish a comprehensive understanding of SDL, the findings of this current study, which has highlighted gaps within the current literature, highlight the need for further research on the aspect of assessment and feedback within SDL context.

Subtheme: (ii) A curriculum which inhibits/facilitates SDL

Taking the issue of assessment and feedback further, discussion now turns to curriculum and pedagogical approaches employed by the research participants in promoting SDL among their learners. This section presents the subtheme of *A curriculum which inhibits/facilitates SDL* and comprises two components: *Content of the curriculum* and *Ways of teaching*.

A common problem raised by all research participants is the issue of an overloaded school curriculum which, as suggested by Peen and Arshad (2014), who investigated the practice of instructional strategies among secondary school teachers in one Malaysian school, has forced some teachers to spoon-feed their learners in order to cover the content of the curriculum. This situation, which was highlighted by a majority of the research participants, produces dependent learners who lack fundamental learning skills as a result, particularly skills in SDL skills. According to

Dr Rahim, most of these dependent learners then struggle with the more autonomous learning required at university, which demands more responsibility and effort on the part of learners. For that reason, Dr Rahim believes that many outstanding learners at school level have failed to thrive at university.

> Our system is a top-down system that focuses on spoon-feeding. Based on my experience, if the lecturer does not provide lecture notes, then students will say that the lecturer is not a good lecturer. Even at master's level, they [the learners] expect lecturers to provide notes. This is the culture here. When he [the learner] is at his primary, secondary, even at matriculation, he [the learner] is being spoon-fed, so he [the learner] expects the same at university level. So, what happens? Even if he [the learner] is a top scorer, he [the learner] comes in with 12As, but he [the learner] scores a 2.0 in his [the learner] first semester at university. This is a prestigious university. We are given the privilege to select our students, so we take only the cream. But these students, they [the learners] do not do well at university. Why? Because of our system. The overloaded curriculum, the centralised national examination and many more [reasons]. (D99–D112)

In relation to the issue of the overloaded school curriculum raised by most of the research participants, Dr Siti believes that with a huge amount of subject matter to be learned, not only do learners tend to memorise what they think they should learn, but educators themselves are inclined to teach and cover the entire contents of the curriculum. As a consequence, she suggests that excessive curriculum content could potentially inhibit SDL:

> To me, the key to implementing self-directed learning is for the curriculum to be flexible enough to allow the teacher to creatively design their teaching. The curriculum should not be crammed [full] with many subjects, because this forces teachers to use a straight-forward lecturing mode with passive students memorising what has been taught. This passive method of learning is not conducive to promoting self-directed learning. (K357–K364)

Furthermore, Dr Rahim believes that with dense content, learning time is usually geared more towards covering the content, thereby reducing the time available to learners to practise their skills of SDL. In tackling the issue of an overloaded curriculum, Dr Jamal suggests that educators should innovatively and creatively design their pedagogical approaches to take into account active learning and creating meaningful learning experiences which may promote SDL (Conradie, 2014).

Interestingly, Dr Rahim proposes that educators could regard curriculum content and the teaching and learning process as complementary, rather than as one dominating or controlling the other. Within this thinking, Dr Jamal suggests that teaching learning strategies (i.e. 'how' to learn) could encourage the development of learners' SDL skills.

> Teachers should… I think…don't treat the curriculum as one part, teaching and learning as the other part, assessment as one more part, actually these relate very closely to each other and greatly impact one another. Treat them as one big thing that should be aligned appropriately. Teacher can never teach everything to the students, so it is better to teach them how to learn, so that they can learn on their own. They have the tools…I mean the skills to learn. Instead, teaching the content, teach how to learn, the self-directing skills. (B365–B374)

Having reviewed the research participants' comments on the pedagogical as well as the assessment and feedback dimensions which support SDL, it is interesting to note that most of the research participants argued for a constructive alignment between instructional strategies and the nature of SDL approaches, reflecting Biggs' (2003) constructive alignment idea. The next section presents the theme of *Prevailing culture which inhibits/facilitates SDL*, highlighting the impact of the Malay-Islamic and Malaysian-Chinese-Confucian perspectives on SDL.

Theme 2: Prevailing culture which inhibits/facilitates SDL

This section will discuss the issues regarding Malaysian culture which may inhibit or facilitate SDL. Based on analysis of the interview transcripts, two main issues related to the Malaysian culture emerged: (i) the culture of *respecting wiser people or an expert* – referring to the educator in the context of this research; and (ii) *the value of face* – provocative questions are avoided in order to respect other's pride and one's self-pride.

Subtheme: (i) Respecting wiser individuals

Most research participants noted that respecting wiser individuals has become a culture in Malaysia. Similarly, in relation to the educators' status, Dr Affandi deduces that Islam strongly values educators, especially in guiding learners throughout their learning processes, which is in line with Haj's (2005), Alam and Muzahid's (2006) and Khan's (2014) contention that Muslim educators should be respected because of their comprehensive experience and extensive knowledge.

Dr Rahim, in his extracts below, reports that the feeling of respect towards wiser persons, especially educators, is shown by obeying their instructions and not questioning their actions. Dr Rahim further adds that this value is nurtured among Malaysians from a young age, causing the culture of respecting an expert to be robustly practised in Malaysia. The effect of such a culture can be seen in learners not daring to question educators' actions or disagreeing with educators because they worry that they might be labelled disrespectful. In this regard, Pham and Renshaw (2013) reported that not only are Asian learners less likely to question educators, but Asian educators, who are greatly influenced by the value of respecting wiser individuals, also tend to view themselves as authority figures to be respected and followed by learners.

> You remember…when somebody comes to your house, let's say your uncle…your parents will ask you to go to your room as they want to talk…or maybe when they are talking you are <u>not allowed to ask questions</u>…your mother will stare at you if you show <u>any reaction of disagreement</u> with your uncle. This is how we are trained…we are <u>brought up to think that any argument with older people or those superior should be avoided</u>…what happens if you argue? People will label you as <u>being rude</u>. (D130–D138)

Commenting on this culture of respecting a wiser person, Dr Amalina believes that in SDL contexts, learners should be treated as equal learning partners and should not be perceived as being inferior to anybody. She adds that if the superior-inferior relationship coexists, learners will most probably never engage in SDL because they

will feel that decisions regarding their learning are in the hands of educators who are superior to them. This ultimately hinders the development of learners' SDL skills:

> I believe, <u>with students, you [the educator] should present yourself [the educator] as their [the learner's] friend</u>, <u>not</u> as an <u>authority figure to give them [learners] instructions</u>…<u>treat them [learners] as partners</u>…<u>invite them [learners] to give their [learners'] opinion about what to do to improve their [learners'] learning</u>. I think <u>if you [the educator] position yourself as somebody who has the power to control their [the learner's] learning, they [the learner] would most probably give up their [the learner] role</u> and just <u>wait for your [the educator's] instruction</u>…this is <u>not healthy if you want to promote self-directed learning</u>…how can you have a self-directed learner if they refuse to play their part? (E345–E353)

Subtheme: (ii) The value of face

Aside from respecting the educator, the act of not questioning the educators' actions is closely associated with maintaining and protecting the learners' self-pride, that is, the value of face. According to Dr Khairiah, most Malaysian learners refuse to be actively involved in class discussion because they want to protect their self-pride as well as their peers' self-pride (e.g. Wu, 2008; Zamri & Lim, 2011; Ahmad & Majid, 2014). Dr Khairiah suggests that the act of asking for explanations shows that learners do not understand the topic, which indirectly reflects adversely on their intellectual capabilities. Furthermore, Dr Khairiah also argues that learners do not question their peers because they worry that it will be embarrassing if their peers are not able to answer the questions and, most importantly, they want to maintain a harmonious classroom atmosphere by avoiding any potential confrontation (Wu, 2008). In line with this, Holmes (2002), who conducted an ethnographic study, suggests that in Asia, the act of questioning educators is culturally unacceptable as it may cause a loss of face, which he further proposed could be one of the possible reasons for his Chinese research participants' feelings of discomfort when their native New Zealand counterparts deliberately questioned their educators in class.

I think, <u>our students</u>, they <u>rarely take part in class activity</u>…if you do not point at them, they will not stand up and give their opinion…if you ask is there any question, everybody keeps quite…our students, <u>they [the learners] are so afraid</u> if <u>they [the learners] make mistakes</u>, you know why…because <u>our culture</u>…<u>when you make mistake, it shows that you do not know</u>…<u>it shows that you are not intelligent</u>…<u>people will look down at you</u>…<u>this is our culture</u>…in the presentation session, I have to give marks for those asking questions to the presenter because I want to encourage a lively learning atmosphere…if I do not do that, they keep quiet…when I ask why, they say <u>they [the learners] do not want to be seen as betrayers</u>…<u>they [the learners] are afraid that their friends might feel embarrassed if they cannot answer the question</u>. (C216–C228)

Dr Jamal believes that the development of SDL skills can be supported through interactive and collaborative learning which requires active participation on the part of learners. Nevertheless, he adds, the act of not questioning educators or peers should be eliminated because it hinders the advancement of SDL. According to Dr Jamal, this is where educators should play their roles by promoting active and interactive discussion sessions in a safe and supportive learning environment – a point that will be picked up later in *The need for a guide from the educator (Ta'lim)* section:

I believe maybe like what you said with the culture thing, how to <u>make self-directed learning a part of the culture</u>, when you talk about Japanese, Korea, they have a different culture. They really work hard for it. The Malaysian culture is different, we are hardworking people, but maybe from, a different aspect. I think to promote self-directed learning, the <u>students should engage actively in class activity</u>…but <u>our culture</u> here <u>needs to change</u> first, <u>we [the educators] must encourage and welcome students' questions</u>…this is not easy to do, but I believe if you can <u>offer a safe and supportive learning atmosphere</u>, the students are <u>more willing to take part</u>. (B522–B532)

Reflecting on the literature reviewed, it is striking that the main focus of SDL research has been on exploring the formation of SDL among learners who are influenced by Western and Confucian cultures, but not other cultures, where research has been limited (Kim, 2008; Van Petegem et al., 2008; Peters, 2015). The *Prevailing culture which inhibits/facilitates SDL* section, which highlights the impact of the Malay-Islamic and Malaysian-Chinese-Confucian perspectives on SDL, has begun to address the gap that exists in the current literature on the cultural dimension

of SDL. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that this section, the *Prevailing culture which inhibits/facilitates SDL*, is one of the major contributions of this study as it provides an insight into the representation of SDL within a multicultural nation like Malaysia.

Theme 3: SDL as a balance in learning

Based on analysis of the interview transcripts, this section – *SDL as a balance in learning* – presents the perceived important notion of integrating the conventional mode of learning and teaching, which focuses on the traditional transmission of knowledge from educators to learners, with contemporary approaches which emphasise a collaborative relationship between educators and learners to establish an active learning environment.

My extensive and critical review of various SDL models indicates that most of the models suggest an active and independent learning approach to support SDL and which, to some extent, ignores the role of the educator in SDL context. Although some SDL models, such as Grow's (1991) SSDL, have emphasised the role of the educator at the earlier stage of self-direction, the educator's role for advanced or proficient self-directed learners is barely discussed. This situation is very different to the views expressed by the majority of the research participants in this study. According to the research participants, a combination of traditional and current learning and teaching practices is crucial not only to complement each other, but also to ensure a successful exploitation of both approaches and which ultimately offers meaningful learning experiences to the learners.

The common thread shared by most of the research participants is their concern about the current Malaysian education system producing overly dependent learners. Dr Rahim, in his extract below, reported that this type of conventional education system produces 'over-reliant' and dependent learners rather than resilient and holistic individuals.

> Our system is a top-down system that focuses on spoon-feeding. Based on my experience, if the lecturer does not provide lecture notes then students will say that the lecturer is not a good lecturer. Even at master's level, they are expecting lecturers to provide notes. This is the culture here. When he [the learner] is at his primary, secondary, even at matriculation, he [the learner] is being spoon-fed so he [the learner] is expecting the same at university level. So what happens? He is a top scorer, he comes in with 12As but scores 2.0 in his first semester at university. This is a prestigious university. We are given the privilege to select our students, so we take only the cream. But these students, they do not do well at university. Why? Because of our system. (D99–D111)

Both Dr Jamal and Dr Rahim suggest that the root cause of this unhealthy learning environment is the overloaded curriculum, with a variety of subjects to be learned, and a centralised examination system. They further add that this learning environment which projects an image of the learning process as a serious matter that requires learners to work hard in order to succeed is not conducive to learning as it removes the element of fun. According to Dr Jamal, the conventional education system acts to stifle the intellectual and creative potential of learners by placing them in a competitive and coercive learning environment.

> On the current education issue in Malaysia, it is said that we are very exam-centred, that means in school sometimes, students are taught to pass examinations. And this is true in the examination years, let's say year 6, form 3 and form 5, you always see in school signs that read do not disturb, they are form 5 students, do not disturb them they are form 3 students. At that particular time, we [the educators] teach them [the learners] for the exam… if their [the learners'] idea is just in that kind of learning, to pass the exam. They [the learners] will pass the exam, and at the end of the day, they might become good students, but they [the learners] cannot really then develop in real world. This system restricts learners to focusing on what is going to be tested rather than enjoying the process of learning itself. You know… this would make them anxious almost all of the time; they worry about the test, about homework, about everything. (B61–B83)

Dr Rahim points out that there is only one way to be successful in the Malaysian education system: learners must be able to tailor their learning strategies to meet the requirements of one-off, centralised assessments. Interestingly, Dr Azlina, in her extract below, claims that assessment approaches themselves are not to blame; rather, she argues that the way assessment approaches are conducted should be examined

(e.g. Orsmond et al., 1997; Boud & Falchikov, 2006; Boud, 2000; Carless et al., 2011).

> It is <u>not the fault of the evaluation or assessment</u> per se. It is <u>how you [the educators] conduct the assessments</u>… it is how you conduct the assessment is more important. <u>How do you [the educator] make sure that these assessments are valid</u>, for example? <u>How do you [the educator] make sure that these assessments are reliable? How do you [the educator] make sure that these assessments actually test what they are supposed to test?</u> So that is more important. (G77–G98)

Dr Affandi suggests that what is required is a balance of learning strategies. He argues that having a balance in learning would allow educators to blend SDL approaches within the conventional Malaysian education system and its more traditional views on effective learning:

> So I think it <u>should be a balance in terms of championing students' self-direction and at the same time having an educator, not to control totally but to facilitate and empower the learners</u>. So there should be a 'guru' and a learner at any one time, but how you do it, it depends and you can use creativity, but <u>you cannot do one without the other</u>. So meaning that <u>we cannot be very teacher-centred</u> or we cannot be.. is not or <u>we cannot be very student-centred, we have to have both, balanced.</u> So that <u>you can eventually have a comprehensive and more holistic learning and teaching process.</u> I think <u>this would be one of the ways to implement self-directed learning in Malaysia</u> because I believe <u>for successful changes, gradual changes are important, not drastic changes.</u> (A382–A394)

Echoing Dr Affandi's view, Dr Rahim notes that Malaysian society holds a strong belief that success in life is determined by an officially recognised academic qualification. He continues to explain that those who have degrees are usually looked up to by Malaysian communities, thereby suggesting the significant role that an educational institution has had in shaping the learning process. Therefore, Dr Rahim adds that the educator's role as an authoritative figure is essential to ensuring the smooth and effective implementation of a typical exam-oriented education system.

In line with this thinking, both Dr Rahim and Dr Jamal assert that a radical SDL environment, which they define as a context where learners are given absolute

freedom to determine and design their own learning without interference from educators, is inappropriate within the Malaysian education system. This is because society will only look at how many As the learners has received. Therefore, in the case of the Malaysian education system, almost all of the research participants believed that a certain degree of educator control is crucial to making sure that the learning aligns itself appropriately with what is to be assessed. Interestingly, despite emphasising educator control in learning, most of the research participants believed that developing learners' SDL skills is essential for meeting the demands of employers who favour independent, self-managed, problem-solving employees.

> … going by what industry people are telling us now. They [employers] do not just look at paper qualifications. Even during the interview, when they [employers] ask them [learners] questions, they [learners] cannot even communicate. Sometimes, now even the issues of proficiency in English. It becomes one of the criteria that employers look for. So if they [the learners] cannot communicate, if they [the learners] cannot converse, they [the learners] might have got straight As, but they [the learners] will not be hired, they [the learners] will not be picked for the job. This is not just performance in exams, it is their [learners'] soft skills, whether they [the learners] are able to converse, to communicate effectively. Whether they [the learners] are able to work in a team, personalities, all these also play a part. To me… the self-directed learning thing is very important because when students have these skills they [the learners] will be driven to continuously improve themselves in terms of their knowledge, skills… which make them [the learners] an asset to a company. (E51–E65)

The previously discussed finding indicates that all of the research participants believe that it is crucial for educators to develop their learners' SDL skills. However, when reviewing the research participants' comments, most of the research participants were not comfortable abandoning their roles as authority figures in learning. This finding reaffirms my review of the literature which reported that not all Malaysian educators have accepted their role as facilitators of learning, but they instead remain firmly attached to their traditional roles of knowledge experts (e.g. Long et al., 1999; Sidin, 1999; Mahamood et al., 2009). Therefore, in order to assist educators in empowering their learners, it is suggested that future research should investigate the reason behind Malaysian educators' hesitation in abandoning the role of authority figures despite their acknowledgment of the potential of SDL. This is because

findings from this current study have revealed that, despite being hesitant to abandon their authoritative role in learning, most research participants believed that learners' active involvement in the learning process is beneficial in fostering their SDL skills, which could possibly lead the majority of the research participants to blend active learning approaches within their conservative pedagogical practices.

In this regard, Dr Affandi repeatedly expressed the need for a balance in learning, particularly in the area of freedom and control where some form of educator control is unavoidable, especially for learning in formal educational institutions. Similarly, Dr Jamal, in his account, elaborated on the need to find the right balance between granting learners autonomy in determining their own learning processes, while at the same time providing supported scaffolding to prepare them in becoming self-directed learners. Most of the research participants agreed that having a balance in learning is important because removing external experts or authoritative figures does not guarantee that the newly freed individual is capable of successfully directing his or her own learning (Grow, 1991; 1994; Garrison, 2003; Hiemstra & Brockett, 2012).

> In my opinion, to implement this self-directed learning activity, you [the educator] must give choices and freedom to the students, at the same time you [the educator] must know when to pull the string back, because you know, it is very easy to be demotivated in a self-directed learning project if things are not going according to their [the learners'] expectations, or even when they are facing problems in moving forwards, this is when lecturers should step in…assist them [the learners]...give examples…so that they can move forward. (B433–B441)

This section has discussed *SDL as a balance in learning* and stressed the importance of balancing the fundamental features of both contemporary and conventional educational practices. My analysis of the interview transcripts revealed two emerging subthemes: (i) *Freedom* and (ii) *Being in control*. As previously mentioned in the *A brief summary of the significant themes and subthemes* section on page 109, *Freedom* and *Being in control* are closely interconnected. In order to capture and facilitate a discussion on the interrelatedness of these important issues, *Freedom* and *Being in control* will be presented synchronously in the next section.

Subthemes: (i) Freedom and (ii) Being in control

This section presents the subthemes of *SDL as a balance in learning*; *Freedom*, which includes *Taking responsibility* and *Having choices*; and *Being in control*, which consists of *Decision-making* and *Sharing power*. From the analysis of the interview transcripts, *Freedom* refers to the opportunities that the learner has in choosing his or her own learning preferences, which may encourage the learner to take more responsibility for his or her own learning. *Being in control*, on the other hand, refers to the learner's position as an equal learning partner who is involved in the decision-making process. From the research participants' point of view, enabling learners to be in control of their own learning is only achievable when there is some degree of freedom in the learning process.

Both subthemes – *Freedom* and *Being in control* – are discussed concurrently in this section and, based on analysis of the interview data, I would suggest that both are inseparable from the other as either may affect and impact directly on the other.

Most of the research participants view SDL as a type of learning approach which emphasises the importance of freedom in learning as it allows learners to make decisions that best suit their learning needs and interests. However, Dr Affandi states that it is impossible to have total freedom within a formal education institution. He argues that the prescribed curriculum practised in formal educational institutions acts to impose restrictions to learning by pre-defining the learning processes even when the learning itself has not started. Dr Affandi suggests that educators should be more creative and innovative in incorporating SDL within a rigid educational setting, something that is in line with Guglielmino's (2013) calls for a blended learning environment that systematically infuses active learning strategies to promote SDL at formal educational institutions.

> Because <u>total freedom is not possible</u> if you are talking about the learning <u>at an education institution</u>, so how to work? <u>Lecturers must know how to creatively design learning and teaching activities</u>, not to forget the <u>assessment</u>

method within what has been structured by a curriculum developer if they wish to promote self-directed learning. (A185–A190)

Taking this agenda further, Dr Mazlan, in his extract below, states that SDL approaches are not only about having the freedom to decide how to direct the learning process, but most importantly, in his opinion, SDL approaches draw out the idea of not having to fit others' expectations by focusing on one's own goal (e.g. Song & Hill, 2007; Hiemstra, 2011).

> To me…self-directed learning is very good not only because it promotes freedom but the students who are directing their learning will need to set the learning goals themselves…you know…they are not being trapped to satisfy or to meet anybody's expectation. (N167–N171)

Furthermore, what was uncovered in the analysis of the interview data is that the majority of the research participants emphasised that the ideal situation for promoting SDL is one in which learners assume responsibility for their own learning while sharing control of the learning process with educators – an idea which received less attention in SDL literature. This thinking supports my earlier suggestion on the interconnectedness between the themes of *Freedom* and *Being in control*.

The image of the self-directed learner portrayed by Dr Mazlan as someone who realises and appreciates his or her responsibility towards him or herself matches the characteristics of a self-directed learner propounded by many researchers (e.g. Li, Tancredi, Co & West, 2010; Morrison & Navarro, 2014). Dr Mazlan suggests that if one wishes to become a self-directed learner, then awareness of the responsibility for making decisions about learning should come from oneself. In his own words:

> So for me, emm…self-awareness, learning goal or learning objective, self-directed learning skills and evaluation should proceed concurrently when one pursues his self-directed learning journey. So, I believed that the previous mentioned criteria is reciprocal to each other. Having said this… if the person chooses to pursue a self-directed learning activity, that person should be aware that the responsibility of the learning lies within themselves… [continue]… in the self-directed learning context, at the beginning the person has his own self-awareness. For instance, I am weak in English, I am aware

of my weaknesses. So I aim to improve my English. I search for skills needed to help me learn English and at the end, I will evaluate my learning process. So, I divided learning into two, others-directed and self-directed. (N157–N184)

With regard to the idea of sharing power and responsibility for the learning process between the educator and the learner, research participants believed that educators who encourage SDL are most likely to provide choices for their learners in deciding their learning preferences. In the following extracts, Dr Jamal agrees that having choices in learning encourages freedom and flexibility, but they also create shared responsibility as well as joint ownership of the learning process between learners and educators. The collaborative partnership suggested by most of the research participants echoed Grow's (1991, 1994), Hewitt-Taylor's (2002) and Douglass and Morris' (2014) perspectives, which viewed the facilitator role of educators as essential for monitoring and guiding learners' learning progress.

You guide and help them. But make the work theirs. You must make it look like they are the ones that have initiated the whole thing…(B344–B346)

That will give some pride to students. If you can do that, students will love it. I always use negotiation with my students. The ideas will come from them, but if you think the idea is not right, you must direct them, help them. You will be surprised at what they can actually do with a little bit of help. (B348–B353)

Because. you know… by simply giving freedom, this does not guarantee that the students will be able to proceed effectively with the learning. That is why we have lecturers… to guide the learners, not leaving them alone to solve problems. I think…with choices, teachers are actually encouraging their students to decide what is best for them…by choosing what they want to do, the responsibility of learning is transferred to the students and they can be regarded as co-partners in learning. When this happens, I believe they will take pride in the learning outcome. (B441–B450)

Dr Azlina stresses that the ability to be in control is very important for self-directed learners because when they are in control other parties will not have the opportunity to impose anything on their learning process. In her view, being in control is one of the significant elements that distinguishes other-directed learning from SDL, which

is in line with many researchers' perspectives (Loyens et al., 2008; Jossberger et al., 2010). She adds that when the learner is able to control his or her own learning, the learner is much better positioned to decide what, when and how to learn.

> Actually, I have taught some autonomous learning courses. So I think, something more or less similar to <u>self-directed learning, whereby you [the learner] take control of what you [the learner] want to learn</u>, you [the learner] take control of your [the learner's] learning process to the extent that you [the learner] make your [the learner's] own objectives, <u>you [the learner] make your [the learner's] own learning objectives</u> and then <u>you [the learner] chart your [the learner's] own learning progress.</u> You [the learner] chart your [the learner's] own learning. How do you [the learner] want to go about, <u>you [the learner] choose your [the learner's] method, you [the learner] choose your [the learner's] material, you [the learner] choose your [the learner's] resources, you [the learner] even choose how you [the learner] want to learn.</u> I think that is self-directed learning. The important thing I want to say is, <u>you [the learner] are in control of your [the learner's] learning in self-directed learning, nobody is forcing you [the learner] to do anything.</u> (G217–G228)

This discussion leads to an issue raised by Dr Zaki – the ability to make a decision. According to Dr Zaki, a self-directed learner should be able to make a sensible decision based on a comprehensive consideration of the available learning choices. His notion of the ability to decide as one of the critical skills to be mastered by self-directed learners reflects the views of a number of researchers, which are discussed in the *Critical Review of the Literature* chapter (e.g. Gibbs, 2010; Hattie, 2009; Zhang & Seepho, 2013; Schunk, 2008; McCarthy, 2013).

> <u>Self-directed learning is when you decide what you want to learn</u>…I think, <u>if the</u> undergraduate <u>students are very self-directed, they will decide what textbooks to be used and how to plan their study.</u> So <u>the key here is the ability to make decisions about your learning.</u> <u>If you cannot decide, then you are not in control of your learning, so that is far from being a self-directed learner.</u> (F121–F129)

With regard to *Taking responsibility*, Dr Rahim suggests that those who abdicate responsibility for their own learning by refusing to be self-directed learners are more likely to give up responsibility for the control of other aspects of their lives later. He adds that these individuals will become highly dependent on other people to

continually tell them what is best for them, and what and how they should do things. This may explain why employers are more inclined to employ a self-managing and self-directing employee:

> If the <u>students are not ready for self-directed learning</u>, you <u>cannot force</u> them to pursue such a learning environment… Why? Because <u>they do not want to take the burden of managing their learning</u>…they are <u>not ready to take the responsibility</u>…most of them, they just want an easy way…give lecture notes, they read and memorise them and produce what they have memorised in an examination. Although they might get good results, <u>they cannot survive in later life</u>…they refuse to take responsibility, they never know how to make control, how to make a decision… how do you expect them to be able to do this in later life? I am sure <u>they will</u> again <u>wait for others to lead them</u>. (D115–D125)

Over half of the research participants considered that both learners and educators are responsible for ensuring successful learning. According to the research participants, although educators are responsible for tailoring their pedagogical approaches to meet various learners' needs, the learners themselves should also play their respective roles effectively. The research participants emphasised that learners need to have the initiative and self-motivation to learn – an important element proposed by Deci and Ryan (2000, 2002, 2012) in their self-determination theory, which I interpret as 'wanting' to learn:

> To me, <u>learning is more on the students' part, the teacher is</u> there <u>to</u> actually <u>facilitate</u>… just to facilitate. This is an ideal world. In an ideal world, the students have to determine everything that they want to learn because you are the only person who knows what you need, aren't you? The teacher can say, okay… you need this. But actually, the student is the only person who knows what they actually need. They themselves know what to learn. What do they want to learn first? What do they want to learn last? So I think the success of a learning process is actually more on the student than on the teacher because the teacher should actually just be a facilitator that guides the students to go, meaning <u>that the teacher is</u> just the map, the student is the driver. So <u>the student has to take the helm, the teacher is just to guide the students</u> to go the correct way, that's all. <u>The initiative to learn has to come from the learners themselves.</u> (G174–G188)

Unlike a majority of the research participants, Dr Jamal, in his extracts below, suggests that the responsibility for ensuring successful learning lies more with learners than with educators:

> I would say that again, <u>the educators will guide, but the students are the ones responsible.</u> <u>Teacher</u> will <u>facilitate, but you</u> will <u>decide. In this sense, we are making them in control of themselves.</u> (B386–B389)

> For instance, <u>you are doing your PhD</u>, <u>you yourselves will think about everything. You should not blame your supervisors. Students are responsible, but teachers should guide them. You must not say that the teacher is responsible</u>. (B393–B396)

However, from a distinctly contrasting point of view, Dr Siti claims that educators are the people responsible for successful learning. Although Dr Siti views educators as those responsible for the success of the learning process, she does not perceive the educator to be an expert or authority figure with absolute power in learning. Her thinking is exemplified through her pedagogical practices, where she prefers active learning and promotes interactive discussion. Furthermore, she invites her learners to become involved in peer teaching and she admits that she is comfortable being taught by her learners. She added she is proud when her learners know more than her:

> To me, <u>educators are the ones that should be the safety net of the learning process</u>, if they think the learner is not comfortable or is having trouble with independent learning or, for me, I call it project work, then <u>it is the responsibility of the educator to make sure that the student can progress</u>. So… what is important is <u>the suitability of the teaching approaches and the students' willingness and readiness</u>. The <u>lecturer is responsible for making sure that the learning runs smoothly…they are the pilot, the students are just the co-pilots</u> who are learning how to learn, <u>so responsibility lies with the lecturer</u>. (K117–K127)

> <u>The focus is on student-centred learning and students are supposed to be able to explore, inquire, discuss, have a discussion among their group</u>. So that they will be able to come up with something that is related to what they are teaching and they are able to <u>share the thoughts and the ideas with the group and they learn together with the lecturer also</u>. (K92–K98)

> So normally in a class, normally in my class, <u>I would share with the students, what I expect out of them</u>, and then they would know what is expected from

me. So, at the end of the day, they are able to work something out and I find tremendous <u>work done by</u> my <u>students</u> which <u>is sometimes beyond my knowledge because I consider myself, I don't see myself as a perfect lecturer that knows everything</u> and I tell them this, some of my master's students work, are working as well as doing their master's and we share the knowledge and during the course, students are able to work on certain assignments and then, that itself <u>will give me additional knowledge</u> in order for me to teach curriculum and instruction. So, <u>it has to be a two-way thing. It is not just me teaching them but it is also them teaching me</u>. (K132–K145)

Interestingly, Dr Siti suggests that the role of the educator is not limited to ensuring that their pedagogical approaches are suitable for the creation of a lively and interactive learning environment, but that he or she should be an individual with high morals who is capable of being a good role model for learners to follow. Her thinking confirms the significant influence of Islamic values on education, where, according to Alam and Muzahid (2006), Wan (2013) and Al-Hudawi et al. (2014), besides guiding learners to master worldly knowledge, Muslim educators are held accountable for instilling good values in their learners. Dr Siti's views revealed a strong cultural value towards respecting the educator as a knowledgeable and noble individual, and that the act of questioning an educator's actions and opinion is seen as rude and culturally unacceptable:

I believe that <u>teachers are not only responsible for making sure that they can deliver the curriculum content effectively</u>, but <u>they</u> themselves, <u>should possess good qualities as an individual, morally and ethically</u>. Because you know…students at a very young age will follow and look to their <u>teacher as a role model to be followed, as someone who is respected and looked up to, that teacher should be a well-round individual</u>. (K329–K336)

Echoing Saks and Leijen's (2014) idea of empowering learners in SDL context, Dr Siti suggests that if an educator wants to promote active learning, educators should be willing to accept learners as equal learning partners who are capable of making decisions about their own learning and should empower learners by sharing the power in the learning process. Taking this discussion further, attention will now turn to one of the components of *Being in control*, and that is *Sharing power*.

Dr Jamal, in the extract below, reveals that, traditionally, in a formal Malaysian education setting, most Malaysian educators have used their power to control the learners:

> The thing is I was the one who conducted it [SDL training]. Because my interest is in that line, I have presented in workshops, seminars. It has been done <u>many years ago</u> when <u>Malaysia did not have an interest in it [SDL]. But now we incline towards that [SDL].</u> But we are <u>moving towards this self-directed learning slowly but</u> I believe <u>steadily.</u> I think <u>drastic changes are almost impossible because since long before, teachers have imposed or dictated the learning using their power to take control of the learner. The learner does not have the chance to voice their opinion or make any suggestions</u> about what they would like to do <u>or how</u> they want <u>to learn.</u>
> (B469–B478)

Dr Jamal further highlights that the conventional learning situation which focuses on educators imparting knowledge to learners is very different to the SDL setting, where power and control over the learning process are shared by both learners and educators. His views on shared autonomy and freedom in learning are clearly evident in his pedagogical strategies, where he trusts his learners to direct their own learning by providing freedom and choices to them in deciding how and what to learn. He believes that sharing power with learners demonstrates to them that the educator appreciates and cares about their opinions, which leads to increased learning satisfaction and self-esteem on the part of learners. He commented on how much he enjoyed teaching self-motivated and self-driven learners.

Furthermore, Dr Jamal's tendencies towards SDL approaches are notable when he allows his learners to determine their own learning strategies within his prescribed lessons. He commented that if the learners' ideas are inappropriate, he will give advice and provide alternative ideas whilst still remaining supportive of the learner, rather than by being intimidating or simply dictating, which is similar to the idea of 'educator as a facilitator of learning' recommended by a number of researchers for promoting active and meaningful learning (e.g. Biggs, 2003; Thornton, 2010; Merriam et al., 2007; Griffiths, 2008; Douglass & Morris, 2014). Dr Jamal believes that his pedagogical strategies, which help learners feel they have the control over their learning to the extent that they view the decision to learn as having been made

by themselves, could possibly promote SDL. Dr Jamal elaborates on how he intervenes to support his learners on their path to becoming self-directed learners in the following extracts.

> In a student-centred environment, the <u>teachers are just facilitators</u>. You [the educator] must put yourself [the educator] in their [the learners'] shoes. You [the educator] empathise with them [the learners]. You [the educator] guide and help them. But you <u>make the work as theirs [the learners']</u>. You [the educator] must <u>make it look as if they [the learners] are the ones that initiated the whole thing</u>. <u>Those are</u> actually <u>counselling concepts</u>. In a counselling session, it is not the counsellor that will tell you what to do, but you yourself will make your decision. That will give some pride to students. If you can do that, students will love it. <u>I always use negotiation with my students. The ideas come from them [the learners], but if you [the educator] think that the idea is not right, you [the educator] must direct them, help them [the learners].</u> (B42–B352)

From Dr Jamal's point of view, when learners take pride in the ownership of their own learning processes, this may nurture their 'wanting' to learn desire, which is suggested by the majority of the research participants as one of the essential ingredients required to become a successful self-directed learner. As reported by Dr Jamal, empowering learners to be in control and take charge of their learning is achievable by granting a certain degree of freedom and flexibility:

> I think, this should be the way <u>if you [the educator] want to include the students as active learning partners</u>. <u>You [the educator] must be flexible with your teaching approaches</u>…you must <u>offer various learning alternatives for them to choose from</u>. Then, when they choose, it shows that <u>you [the educator] are</u> actually <u>empowering them [the learners] to take control and responsibility for their [the learners'] learning.</u> (B450–B455)

The sharing of power between the learner and educator reflects an interdependent relationship, a theme which will be explored in a subsequent section, *SDL as a social, interdependent process*.

This section has discussed the importance of having a balance between conventional and SDL approaches to maximise the potential of each approach in supporting meaningful learning experiences for learners. Furthermore, this section has also

highlighted the need to recognise learners as equal learning partners who are capable of making decisions about their own learning, which may lead them to become self-directed learners. The next section presents *SDL as a social, interdependent process* and discusses the interdependent relationship between learners and others in the context of SDL.

Theme 4: SDL as a social, interdependent process

In the previous section, I presented research participants' views on *SDL as a balance in learning*, where they highlighted the needs to integrate both conventional ways of learning and teaching with SDL approaches in order to optimise learners' learning experiences. Taking the idea of enhancing learners' learning experiences further, this section presents *SDL as a social, interdependent process* and emphasises the importance of social support in enhancing learners' academic experiences and development.

Based on analysis of the interview data, most of the research participants believed that isolated learning does not exist, particularly in a formal education context, where interaction and communication with other parties are unavoidable. Their views reflect current literature trends which regard learning as a collective process that involves social interaction (e.g. Biggs, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2006; Lee, 2011; Benson, 2011, 2013; Murray, 2014). The *SDL as a social, interdependent process* section comprises four subsections: (1) *SDL as learning for your 'self'*; (2) *SDL as learning on your own*; (3) *SDL as learning with others: The concept of a learning project*; and (4) *The need for a guide from the educator (Ta'lim)*.

Subtheme: (i) SDL as learning for your 'self'

A majority of the research participants agreed that SDL is a type of learning conducted by an autonomous and independent individual. Taking this idea, Dr Jamal,

in his extracts below, suggests that apart from SDL being a learning approach directed by individual learners, it is also driven by individual learning interests and a desire for personal growth (e.g. Reeve, 2009; Douglass & Morris, 2014; Lee et al., 2014):

> To me, in <u>self-directed learning</u>, the <u>students</u> are doing their part of <u>directing their learning to improve themselves</u>. I believe, as <u>self-directed learning is managed by the students</u> it is very important for the learning to be <u>driven by the students' interests</u>. For example, that student wants to learn how to repair a car so that he can repair the car himself…this motivation, <u>the wanting to learn desire to improve oneself is important in self-directed learning</u>. (B107–B114)

According to Dr Azlina, learners who are driven by their own interests and the desire to be a better person are more likely to take control and determine their own learning processes. In that sense, Dr Azlina suggests that learners should be treated as equal learning partners, something that requires a certain degree of autonomy on their part in order for them to be in charge and in control of their own learning processes:

> I believe that, if the teacher wants <u>to promote self-directed learning</u>, the teacher should <u>allow flexibility</u> which <u>encourages the students to share their ideas and stimulate their interest</u> to pursue in greater depth on that particular topic. <u>When</u> the <u>student is interested and willing to take charge of her [the learner's] learning</u>, then she will be… emmm…<u>she [the learner] will be in control of her [the learner's] learning</u>…but <u>this can only happen if you [the educator] allow flexibility</u>…you <u>trust that your students can learn on their own</u>. (G343–G351)

Similarly, from Dr Jamal's perspectives, learning conducted by a learner on the basis of interest not only creates an enjoyable learning experience, but may also encourage the learner to pursue SDL activity voluntarily. Furthermore, Dr Jamal, in the extracts below, suggests that since SDL is driven by self-motivation, the elements of excitement and enjoyment in the learning process are essential for the learning to be self-sustained, echoing the sustainability concept in learning introduced by Boud (2000, 2007, 2014), Hounsell (2003, 2007) and Carless et al. (2011).

> I am a believer that <u>learning</u> is <u>an enjoyable experience</u> as you <u>discover and explore</u> this exciting <u>world and relate</u> it <u>to your context</u>…<u>making sense of the</u>

information that you have…I think…and even my classes…I mean, if you look at students' attendance, the increasing enrolment to my classes that offer a new avenue for the students to share their ideas proves that <u>if the students enjoy learning, that will boost and sustain the learning process</u>. (B483–B490)

Dr Mazlan suggests that in order to successfully direct one's own learning, the individual should have a specific goal to be achieved and should be aware of why particular learning approaches are more appropriate than others. These skills were identified by many researchers as some of the fundamental elements for successful self-direction (Gibbs, 2010; Hattie, 2009; Morrison & Seaton, 2014). Dr Mazlan emphasises that learners should have knowledge about and skills in SDL in order to effectively pursue SDL activities. According to Dr Mazlan, without a clear learning objective, the learning will lose its focus, particularly SDL driven by the learner himself:

> There are several criteria in self-directed learning. First, self-awareness. Because for me, <u>self-directed learning comes from inside the individual</u>, so <u>it is important that the person is self-aware</u>. Secondly, the goal or objective. <u>To pursue self-directed learning, the person must have specific goals on why he must be self-directed. It will be useless if he is being self-directed, but with no target.</u> He will get nowhere. Third, even though self-directed learning is more to the personal part, <u>he [the individual] still need knowledge in self-directed learning.</u> What are <u>the skills</u> needed <u>to be a self-directed learner</u>? Number four, self-observation. He <u>must know how to self-assess or self-evaluate.</u> Reviewing his learning process is very important so that he knows what he has done and what he needs to do to improve. <u>The reviewing process</u> is <u>important to evaluate or determine whether he has achieved his learning goal or not.</u> So for me, emm…<u>self-awareness, learning goal or learning objective, self-directed learning skills and evaluation should proceed concurrently when one pursues his self-directed learning journey.</u> So, I believed that the previous mentioned criteria are reciprocal to each other. (N143–N161)

This section presents *SDL as learning for your 'self'*, emphasising the importance of learning that is driven by learners' own interests and learning needs instead of being dictated by other parties. Most importantly, based on the interview transcript analysis, most of the research participants believe that self-directed learners learn for them 'selves', thereby reaffirming one of the primary goals of SDL proposed by Hiemstra and Brockett (2012); self-improvement. Having discussed *SDL as learning*

for your 'self', the discussion now turns to reflect on *SDL as learning on your own* as a majority of the research participants viewed self-directed learners as individuals who managed and designed their own learning themselves.

Subtheme: (ii) SDL as learning on your own

Based on analysis of the interview data, the theme of *SDL as learning on your own* portrays SDL as a type of learning determined by the individual learner in their own way. The most important element emphasised by most research participants with regard to *SDL as learning on your own* is the learner's willingness to take responsibility for their own learning, especially in the process of planning their learning strategies.

In discussing this idea, Dr Mazlan states that it is important for learners to be aware that the responsibility for ensuring successful learning depends on them and not on external factors:

> …if the person chooses to pursue a self-directed learning activity, that person should be aware that the responsibility of the learning lies within themselves, not others. (N161–N164)

Similarly, Dr Jamal believes that if learners refuse to accept responsibility for their own learning, they will surely be unable to carry out the SDL activity. In his own words:

> I think… if the <u>students do not see that they are</u> the ones who are <u>responsible for their learning,</u> and not the educator, that type of <u>student will always seek instruction</u> on what to do, how to do it, what is next…so how can they be self-directed if they <u>rely too much on the educator?</u>…you know why…<u>because they think educator is responsible for making sure that they do excellently in their learning</u> by planning the best way to navigate the learning and getting prepared for the examination. (B397–B405)

Despite such circumstances, Dr Affandi stresses that learning on your own does not suggest solitary learning, but is more about the idea of learners teaching themselves,

finding out information themselves and solving their learning problems on their own. Dr Affandi's views echo those of a number of researchers, who suggest that learning is a social process that involves social interaction (e.g. Biggs, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2006; Murray, 2014; Lee, 2011; Benson, 2011, 2013). Dr Affandi also reports that he is more satisfied when learning on his own because he can determine his own learning strategies and set his own time-frame based on his own pace of learning:

> Self-directed learning to me is more like learning that is carried out by the learner following his own designed learning path. You know… I now plan to learn more about Islam, so my plans are…to read more books, go to mosque frequently, listen to Islamic talk and I befriend with a more Islamic type of friend…By planning and doing all the learning myself, I can see that I am more satisfied as I set the goal myself, I am the one that will evaluate my learning so I can adjust my learning to take into account my other life commitment. In that sense, I am very satisfied. (A254–A263)

Similarly, within the context of an individual pre-designed learning course, Dr Amalina does not overlook the influence of other parties in one's learning. She emphasises that the key element which differentiates others-directed learning and learning on your own is the degree of control that the individual has over his or her learning. Dr Amalina suggests that others impose their own thoughts and actions on one's learning; in contrast, with learning on your own, the individual has control in determining to what extent others can affect their learning. Her views on the aspect of learners' control in learning echo those of Loyens et al. (2008) and Jossberger et al. (2010) when they identified the key points of difference between SDL and others-directed learning. Furthermore, this view that – *Being in control* is fundamental for *SDL as learning on your own*, as stated by Dr Amalina, further reinforces the element of interconnectedness which is present among the themes.

> It is a big concept. Because learning can occur in so many different ways. But when you say the learner learns through self-directed learning, then he [the learner] is choosing a particular approach to learn where the main responsibility lies with the learner. I separate learning into others-directed and self-directed. In others-directed learning, students are following others' instructions on how to learn. But in self-directed learning, it is the students that have the control over their learning. (E208–E215)

Taking this point further, Dr Azlina suggests that learners who choose to learn on their own should be aware that SDL is not easy and requires extensive effort from the learners, particularly at the stage of searching for and identifying learning materials. For that reason, Dr Azlina suggests that the learner should develop networking opportunities with others, especially experts, who may provide some guidance based on their own expertise, or with peers who are focusing their learning in the same or similar areas. Dr Azlina believes that under certain conditions and in certain situations, meeting with knowledgeable people or just talking with peers not only enhances the learning, as they might offer different opinions from various perspectives, but the learner will also benefit from the motivational encouragement offered by a support group:

> I think…besides introducing the idea of self-directed learning earlier…I mean, having some sort of self-directed learning activities at nursery level, helping students to broaden their networking also is helpful. Because when you have self-directed learning, I believed the idea is for the learners to be more independent and yet the teacher should always be there if they need your guidance. But in Malaysia, with large classes, this is exhausting…so I think, by having large networking, the students can get their peers' views, opinions and share their problems…they also can support each other and even motivate each other to keep going and pushing a bit harder to succeed … (G466–G476)

This section, which discusses *SDL as learning on your own*, highlights the significance of a learner taking responsibility for and control of their own learning to ensure that the learning succeeds in achieving their learning goals without these being imposed by others. However, the research participants did not view SDL as solitary learning; rather, the involvement of others was viewed as important for enhancing learning (e.g. Biggs, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2006; Murray, 2014; Lee, 2011; Benson, 2011, 2013). This issue will be explored in the next section, *SDL as learning with others: The concept of a learning project*.

Subtheme: (iii) SDL as learning with others: The concept of a learning project

The preceding sections presented SDL as a type of learning in which learners determine their own learning goals, plan their learning, make decisions for their learning and evaluate their learning. One of the main opinions stressed by most of the research participants was that self-directed learners do not allow other people to dictate or impose their learning approaches. From Dr Azlina's point of view, successful self-directed learners take the position that 'I am in charge here':

> Actually, I have taught some autonomous learning courses. So I think, something more or less similar with self-directed learning whereby you [the learner] take control of what you [the learner] want to learn, you [the learner] take control of your [the learner's] learning process to the extent that you [the learner] make your [the learner's] own objectives, you make your own learning objectives and then you [the learner] chart your [the learner's] own learning progress. You chart your own learning. How do you want to go about it, you [the learner] choose your [the learner's] method, you [the learner] choose your [the learner's] material, you [the learner] choose your [the learner's] resources, you even choose how you want to learn. I think that is self-directed learning. The import thing I want to say is, you [the learners] are in control of your [the learners'] learning in self-directed learning, nobody is forcing you [the learner] to do anything. It is like, hey…I [the learner] am in charge here. (G217–G228)

Similarly, Dr Amalina, in her extracts below, also characterises SDL as 'I will go about my learning for myself and by myself'.

> Self-directed, I would say it is the learner who takes the initiative to decide what he [the learner] wants to learn, how he [the learner] wants to learn, and I also think the learner has to reflect on his [the learner's] own learning process to then chart up maybe what else he [the learner] wants to do, the new direction. Rather than just depend on the teacher. So, he [the learner] is at least given the opportunity or some autonomy in doing this, the initiative comes from the learner himself. Emmm… self-directed learning, you know… it is like…Okay, I [the learner] want to learn something…I [the learner] will go about my [the learner's] learning for myself and by myself. (E189–E198)

However, despite having to do the learning by themselves, research participants insisted that at certain points, the self-directed learner might consider working with others, a point that will be discussed in this section.

According to Dr Mazlan, although SDL requires extensive effort from the learner in designing and directing their own learning, he stresses that sometimes the self-directed learner may seek others' advice and guidance to advance their learning. An important point discussed by both Dr Amalina and Dr Azlina is that the decision to include others in one's learning comes from the learner. Dr Mazlan, Dr Amalina and Dr Azlina are convinced that the involvement of other people in one's learning will bring more benefits to the learner, which reflects Vygotsky's (1978), Gibbons' (2002, 2004, 2009), Griffiths' (2008) and Merriam et al.'s (2007) thinking that suggests, for effective self-direction, self-directed learners should interact and value the contributions of others in their learning.

> To me, creating a <u>space for students to</u> actually mix, <u>work with their</u> friends or maybe have an <u>online group discussion</u>…I used a Facebook group…I can see that the students…they make use of that space, that platform…I can see that, sometimes, they <u>ask questions among themselves</u>, they <u>support each other</u>…you know…when you are in your room, when you get stuck with your study, you might think that you are alone…but with this group, the students know that their <u>friends</u> are <u>having</u> the <u>same problem</u> as them…they <u>support each other</u>…they <u>motivate each other</u>. (G162–G171)

> This is when having a <u>support group is important</u>…you know…that is why in this university…I believe in all universities, we have postgraduate groups, where the students, especially those doing research and <u>needing some opinion</u> or maybe just wanting to <u>talk about their [the learner's] research</u> can do so…you think, if you talk about your research with your parents, can they understand? For sure, not…so you must <u>have</u> this <u>same interest group to act like a support system</u>…where you can go and just <u>share your [the learner's] problems</u>. (E314–E322)

Relating to the same point, Dr Zaki rejects the idea of SDL as solitary learning where learners learn in complete isolation from others. Dr Zaki believes that in any type of learning, whether others-directed learning or SDL conducted in formal or informal setting, interactions are involved between two parties – one receives knowledge and another party provides it. Dr Zaki's view is similar to Biggs' (2003), Ryan and

Deci's (2006), Murray's (2014), Lee's (2011), and Benson's (2011, 2013) thinking that regards social interaction as a key component of the learning process. Dr Zaki also believes that in the absence of any actual invitation, other people can still take part or become involved in one's learning. He suggests, for example, that learners are actually involving other people by following the instructions written by others:

> For me, <u>learning is a two-way process</u>, the <u>teacher transmitting the knowledge and the student receiving the knowledge</u>, while <u>self-directed learning is an advanced level in the learning process.</u> Having said this, I believe <u>self-directed learning</u> also <u>proceeds in a two-way process</u>...for example, you are reading a manual on how to operate emmm…a food processor, for example, this act is a self-directed learning act because you are doing it on your own, but you are still <u>getting the instruction from</u> the manual <u>book written by somebody</u>…So you are actually…there is <u>some sort of interaction</u>… following instructions written by somebody… I <u>don't think we can learn if we separate ourselves from our surroundings</u>…you see…when we are young… okay…<u>babies</u>… they <u>learn by imitating</u>… that also <u>involves a certain degree of interaction with other people</u>. (F151–F164)

With regard to SDL as learning with others, it is clear from the interview analysis that research participants perceive group project work as a potential learning strategy for developing learners' capacity to direct their learning. The majority of the research participants view peers as helpful learning resources in supporting the learner towards becoming a successful self-directed learner. Their thinking reaffirms Manning's (2013) investigation which reported a significant improvement in learners' learning through the implementation of a peer-support programme. This suggests that in research participants' thinking, SDL is not a solitary learning experience, but can also be an interactive, collaborative as well as a supportive learning journey.

The majority of the research participants link SDL with group project work and the research participants sometimes even used both terms interchangeably. The idea of SDL as a learning project shared by most of the research participants reflects Houle's (1961) and Tough's (1968, 1971, 1979, 1982) prior view of SDL as project work. Dr Azlina believes that active, cooperative and collaborative SDL activities not only give the learners the opportunity to learn intensely, they also provide opportunities

for learners to practise their skills of communication, negotiation and collaboration with others.

> You know now that they [the learners] are not just learning per se, they [the learners] are also trying to survive. So it is no longer how many As you have, it is how do you [the learner] behave with people around you [the learner], how do you [the learner] manipulate what you [the learner] know and how much can you [the learner] teach other people. So it is not just A. Sometimes the problem with some of our graduates is that, emm…they have got all A's, on paper it is flawless but when they go for interviews, they cannot sell themselves, they cannot say, hey, I am very good at this, you should hire me because this is what I can do. They cannot do that and this is what is lacking. They [the learners] need more than just academic, they [the learners] need to have the survival skill, the will to learn as you know learning does not stop when you finish university or when you get your degree. Learning will always continue until the day they die. So what I am saying is that students cannot just be compliant, once you get your degree that's it. Because there will be people who will come in, who will be better than you, more skilful than you and you [the learner] have to survive. You have to compete, you have to be able to communicate, you have to be a team player, you have to be able to solve a problem and that is one way to get not just academic. (G195–G214)

Dr Jamal believes that directing one's own learning demands greater effort and responsibility from the learners and sometimes even able learners feel the burden of proceeding with SDL activities. Therefore, Dr Jamal suggests that having a group project is most likely to ease the difficulties faced by learners as they can actively share their ideas and opinions with their peers throughout the learning process:

> When I started this project work, I am sure some students found it harder because they were not prepared for this type of learning…what I did was…I put them into a group and asked them to come up with a group project and present their work. Working in this group forces them to work as a team, they share their ideas, they work out what are the limitations, aware of their [the learners'] strength and weakness. (B513–B520)

In addition, Dr Azlina believes that the collaborative group project serves as a peer support system and may defuse learners' anxiety and reinforce their motivation to learn through unfamiliar learning approaches. Her views echo those outlined in Trigwell and Ashwin's (2003) Oxford Learning Context Project, which described the potential of a group project to ease learners' learning transition at university.

This section, *SDL as learning with others: The concept of a learning project*, and the preceding sections, *SDL as learning for your 'self'* and *SDL as learning on your own*, portray the image of a self-directed learner as someone who may decide to learn independently or learn with others. The key idea here is for the learning to be constituted as SDL. The decision on whether to enter into an independent learning context or into a socially supported learning context, is made by the individual learner.

It is of particular interest to note here that the discussion portraying SDL as a kind of social learning has at the same time also highlighted the elements of freedom, control, responsibility and shared power that have already been discussed in the section *SDL as a balance in learning*. This point highlights the complexity of the views presented by the research participants and the fact that it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate one element from the other, because the elements described by research participants are inextricably linked to one another.

In conclusion, based on my interpretation of the interview transcripts, it is clear that from the research participants' perspective, SDL is a complex learning approach offering a variety of potential approaches from which learners can choose. Most importantly, SDL is more than just learning on our own and learning with others, as it may be both learning on our own and learning with others at different times on the same learning task. The next section – *The need for a guide from the educator (Ta'lim)* – emphasises the need for the involvement of experts to guide learners in their efforts to become self-directed learners.

Subtheme: (iv) The need for a guide from the educator (Ta'lim)

Based on the interview data analysis, it is obvious that the research participants' perception of SDL is not limited to independent learning; they also agree that self-directed learners may use other people as resources to gain information, to guide them into a topic and to assist them in finding their way.

Dr Affandi believes that successful self-directed learners usually shape their own thinking in response to others' comments, thoughts, perspectives and experiences. Highlighting the 'Ta'lim' emphasis in Islamic teaching, Dr Affandi explains that in the 'Ta'lim' concept, educators are not there to control, but simply to facilitate learning, and most importantly to help the learners avoid becoming distracted and digressing from true learning. His understanding of 'Ta'lim' suggests a significant influence of the Islamic perspective on his educational beliefs and pedagogical practices – an issue which needs to be addressed in detail by future research. Furthermore, Dr Affandi's views of educators as the most valuable learning resources reflect those of Haj (2005), Alam and Muzahid (2006) and Khan (2014), who explore the status of Muslim educators. Dr Affandi adds that although the level of educator guidance may vary from learner to learner, the central role of the educator remains and must not be abandoned. Dr Affandi, as demonstrated in the extract below, is convinced about the paramount role of the educator in supporting SDL:

> …you also need to have an <u>educator</u> or a teacher <u>to teach you principle</u>, <u>philosophy of learning from teachers</u>, you must make sure 'ta'lim', in Islam we use 'ta'lim', because just like learning religion, you can read from the book, but then sometimes <u>when we self-directedly try to understand religion</u>, this is when <u>sometimes we get distracted</u>, we tend to <u>digress from the true teaching</u> and <u>this is when you need a 'guru' or educator to come and guide</u> ….<u>having educator, not to control</u> totally <u>but to facilitate and empower the learners.</u> So there should be a 'guru' and a learner at one time, but how you do it, it depends and you can use the creativity, but you cannot do without the other one. So meaning that we <u>cannot be very teacher-centred</u> or we cannot be… is not or we <u>cannot be very student-centred</u>, we <u>have to have both</u>, balanced. <u>So that you can eventually have a comprehensive and more holistic learning and teaching process</u>. I think <u>this would be one of the ways to implement self-directed learning in Malaysia</u> because I believe for successful changes, gradual changes are important, not drastic changes. (A375–A394)

Similarly, from Dr Amalina's perspective, although SDL is about learners becoming increasingly independent, the SDL approach does not devalue the role of educators and experts in facilitating the learning process. Echoing Hiemstra's (2011) idea of the roles that should be played by educators in providing a conducive learning environment to nurture learners' SDL skills, the metaphor of the educator as a guide

recurs through the interviews. Other expressions used to convey this sense of guiding were lead, steer, mentor and coach:

> I think it is logical. If you want your students to be self-directed learners, you yourself must be a self-directed learner. Otherwise, how do you <u>mentor and how do you</u> <u>guide a person [the learner] to do self-directed learning</u>? (E219–E222)

> the <u>teacher to provide that guidance or supervision</u>, <u>that mentoring</u> and <u>to guide the student towards the resources</u> that he needs <u>to further his [the learner's] understanding</u>, his knowledge of that particular thing. (E181–E184)

My findings suggest that all of the research participants believe they are self-directed learners. Furthermore, analysis of the interview data also indicates that the research participants perceive their previous learning experience, as well as their involvement in research and teaching activities, to have enhanced their knowledge and skills in SDL. Despite the fact that they do not feel the need to participate in any workshops or seminars regarding SDL to widen their knowledge of SDL, they nevertheless emphasised that to be a good educator, one should possess the essential features of a self-directed learner in order to be a good role model and to better guide learners towards becoming self-directed learners.

> …<u>when you [the educator] do research</u> for example, <u>you [the educator] have to go and find out for yourselves [the educator]</u>, <u>you [the educator] have to read up a lot more about the things you [the educator] are doing</u>, you [the educator] have to do a literature search. That is also self-directed learning, meaning you [the educator] get your [the educator's] own, <u>you [the educator] get extra knowledge from your [the learner's] own way, in your [the educator's] own way</u>, you have to emm…for example, interview people, you [the educator] have to do surveys, you [the educator] have to observe people. So, I think there is some kind of self-direction. But to say there is a formal course, no. Not a formal course of self-directed learning, but <u>throughout the teaching that you [the educator] do, throughout the research that you [the educator] do, throughout consultation that you [the educator] do</u>, there is some kind of <u>self-directed learning</u> that <u>is being infused</u> in them. (G362–G374)

> …you [the educator] have to <u>teach by being a role model</u>. So if you [the educator] want to be a teacher, you [the educator] have to read a lot. How can

you [the educator] ask your student to read a lot because you [the educator] are not actually showing good qualities, <u>good values of a good teacher</u>? So, <u>before your student becomes self-directed, you yourselves [the educator] have to be self-directed</u>. The teacher, the instructor has to be self-directed in some way. (G338–G343)

This section, which emphasises the presence of educators to guide the learners and not to control the learning, does not disregard the role that should be played by the learners. My findings also revealed that learners should be motivated, passionate and have the initiative and desire to learn on their own if they want to venture into SDL. In conclusion, the findings of this study, particularly in relation to the role of self, stand in sharp contrast to the existing SDL models as learners are placed at the heart of my reconceptualised SDL framework because they are regarded as the single most powerful entity to drive ahead SDL.

Theme 5: SDL as a dynamic developmental process

Based on my careful and fine-grained analysis of the interview data, most of the research participants emphasise that the primary focus of *SDL as a dynamic developmental process* is upon the recognition that: (a) learners should be treated as equally qualified learning partners who are capable of making distinctions regarding their learning that are relevant to their needs and interest (e.g. Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2004, 2008), (b) the learning content does not need to be overloaded with a huge amount of subject matter to be learned in order to be relevant and valid, and (c) the responsivity and flexibility of the learning and teaching activities are crucial to meet the ever-changing needs of the learner.

Based on a careful analysis of the interview transcripts, it is clear that almost all of the research participants agreed that developing SDL skills is an ongoing process which takes place beyond the learner's formal educational programmes. In the following extract, Dr Jamal comments that mastering SDL skills is a never ending process.

But what is important is, <u>self-directed learning is not something with an end</u>, you get what I mean? You know… learning should never stop and it is the same as self-directed learning.. <u>your [the learner's] self-directed learning will develop if you [the learner] practise</u>, you [the learner] will be a master of that skill but then, surely there will be other skills that you [the learner] have to learn, so <u>it will never stop, it is like an evolving and developing competence.</u> (B300–B306)

Taking this idea forward, Dr Siti explains that although learners may develop SDL skills gradually and continuously, their individual pace and developmental stages may nevertheless vary. She adds that educators are responsible for examining and identifying learners' readiness for SDL to ensure that their pedagogical approaches are appropriate to the learners' ability to self-direct:

To me, <u>educators are</u> the ones that should be the <u>safety net of the learning process</u>, <u>if</u> they [the educator] think that the <u>learners are not comfortable or are having trouble with independent learning</u> or, for me... I call it project work, then <u>it is the responsibility of the educator to make sure that the student can progress</u>. So… what is important is <u>the suitability of the teaching approaches and the student's willingness and readiness.</u> (K117–K123)

Dr Siti's comment reflects and echoes Grow's (1991) SSDL model elaborated in the *Critical Review of the Literature* chapter, which emphasises the importance of matching the pedagogical approaches to learners' readiness for SDL. Furthermore, based on the view that *SDL is a dynamic developmental process*, the majority of the research participants asserted that it is inappropriate to categorise learners as self-directed learners or non-self-directed learners. Instead, findings from this study suggest that learners' ability to self-direct should be described in a continuum ranging from highly self-directed learner to highly dependent learner, reaffirming most SDL researchers' view on the continuum range of SDL qualities (Merriam et al., 2007; Song & Hill, 2007; Candy, 1991; Mott & Lohr, 2014).

I believe it is wrong to avoid this self-directed learning thing just because you [the educator] think that your student is not ready for self-directed learning… how do you [the educator] know that they [the learner] are not ready? How do you [the educator] know that they [the learner] will reject this kind of learning? <u>If they [the learner] had made it to university, for sure they [the learner] possess the self-directed learning skill. It is wrong to assume that the student is an empty vessel</u>. (B310-B316)

> In terms of self-directed learning... to me… <u>some students</u>, they [the learners] <u>prefer working on their own [the learners]</u>, but <u>some like to be given instruction</u> while <u>others [the learners]</u> may <u>want some guideline with a little freedom</u>. The reason for this variation… I think… is <u>due to the mastery of self-directed learning skills</u>. Some are good self-directed learners, some are starting to develop their skills, some may be in the process of upgrading their [the learner's] skills. So… you see… it is <u>not an absolute category</u>. (A243–A250)

Interestingly, Dr Affandi emphasises that mastery of SDL skills does not suggest that the learner will pursue any SDL activities. He adds that the learner's decision to undertake SDL is dependent upon various factors, such as their level of self-efficacy and self-motivation, echoing Higgins' (2009) and Lew and Park's (2015) thinking. Dr Affandi continues his discussion by reporting that despite being capable of independent learning, many of his students prefer teacher-directed learning.

> Having said this… <u>I am not saying that students with better self-directed learning skills would be directing their learning</u>. Again, I think it <u>depends on their [the learner's] attitude</u>. If they [the learner] are <u>good at self-directed learning, but</u> they [the learner] do <u>not want to be directing their [the learner's] learning</u>, <u>what can we [educators] do</u>? (A250–A254)

Although most of the research participants recognised that SDL skills would develop gradually, they tended to believe that the ability to self-direct depends very much on the learner's stage of learning. By this, they mean that undergraduate learners are less capable of directing their own learning compared to postgraduate learners, which in several instances required the research participants to provide a lecture to guide students and provide an account of a concept relevant to their own courses. This issue as suggested by Saks and Leijen (2014), is related to their opportunities for practising SDL skills.

> How I conduct my class? Okay <u>for postgraduate</u> it is <u>mostly through discussion</u>. I would give them [the learner] some topics, it depends on the course. For the <u>undergraduate, of course I will lecture first</u>, and then when they [the learner] reflect, they [the learner] will look back at what has happened and how they [the learner] would try to assimilate that in the actual teaching session. So I try to get them [the learner] to do that. And at the end of the semester of the undergraduate course, they [the learner] have to design or develop a curriculum which they [the learner] have no experience of

teaching yet. But <u>with the lectures that I have given them [the learner], they [the learner] will be able to synthesise and be able to come up with the curriculum</u>. (K107–K116)

Building further on the idea that the capacity to self-direct depends on the learner's stage of learning, Dr Amalina suggests that most of her mature learners at postgraduate level have wider personal and working experiences which may have assisted in the development of SDL skills. As a result, these mature learners are more competent in taking charge and being in control of their learning compared to undergraduate learners who have only schooling experience, particularly teacher-directed learning experiences.

> …the <u>students that I teach are</u> all <u>mature students</u>, they [the learners] are <u>master's level</u>. So <u>they [the learners] are very active</u>. They [the learners] <u>ask a lot of questions</u> and they [the learners] also <u>argue a lot with each other</u>, you know… The course that I am teaching is about curriculum innovation and to what extent curriculum innovation is sustainable or not, and they [the learners] are all teachers. <u>They [the learners] have personal experiences</u> of implementing curriculum innovation. Emm…<u>they [the learners] have their [the learners'] experiences to pull back on, to discuss</u> why they [the learners] think this one does not work, why they [the learners] think certain things work and if they work, why they work and when it don't work, why it doesn't work. And so, <u>they [the learners] can identify with their [the learners'] own experiences</u>, that is why it is <u>easy for them [the learners] to be very engaged and very active in the discussion</u>. (E153–E165)

Taking this view, Dr Khairiah, in her extract below, goes on to describe the impact of having the experience of working and the impact of learning experiences on learners' ability to self-direct.

> But the <u>students</u> that <u>I am teaching are professionals</u>. They [the learners] <u>know how and where to search for information</u>. I think <u>their [the learners'] working experiences and their [the learners'] learning experiences may have allowed them [the learners] to relate these experiences to the theories discussed in class</u>. (C185–C189)

While holding a view that SDL capabilities may depend on the learners' learning stages, the majority of the research participants emphasised the need for lecturing, especially for a theory-based course, which reflects their view of the significant role

that the educator has in the learners' learning processes, as discussed in detail in *The need for a guide from the educator (Ta'lim)*. Nevertheless, the findings of my study show that despite acknowledging that the lecturing approach is one of the most appropriate ways to deliver course content, the research participants were not practising a traditional, monological kind of lecture; rather, they welcomed learners' questioning, encouraged active dialogue among learners and allowed for interactive communication during their lectures.

> But having said that, <u>even during my lecture</u> I still <u>allow Q and A</u>. Because at this level, it is very <u>theory based</u>. So when it is a theory, it is <u>more one-way traffic for you [the educator] to explain the theory</u>. So it is more lecture style, but having said that, <u>at the end of the lecture, or even in between lectures</u>, if the students do not understand, <u>they [the learners] are allowed to raise their [the learners'] hands</u>. And then once they [the learners] raise their hands and ask questions<u>, I allow some discussion</u>. But of course, all our courses have got lecture classes and tutorials. Tutorials are the time where we [the educators] actually allow more discussion. (E141–E148)

In the case of adult learners or professionals who are continuing their learning, Dr Khairiah suggests that most of these learners continue learning for the sake of the knowledge rather than for a degree. She concludes that as a result, they are more willing to participate in SDL activities. When exploring this issue in interview, Dr Khairiah elaborated further on how her learners approach their learning:

> …many of the <u>postgraduate </u>students have their [the learners'] <u>careers, they [the learners] are professionals</u> and in their [the learners'] comfort zones, but <u>they [the learners] are not learning for the sake of the degree</u> or the cert…<u>they [the learners] continue their [the learners'] studies at a higher level to gain knowledge</u>. So this student, <u>they [the learner] go to Internet</u>, they [the learners] <u>read more</u>, they [the learners] <u>have their [the learner's] group discussion</u> despite their [the learner] hectic life. You [the educator] <u>can see their [the learner's] learning efforts</u> when you [the educator] assess their [the learner] work. (C199–C205)

Emphasising the importance of technology-supported learning, Dr Affandi convincingly suggests that technological advancement has made SDL efforts less troublesome, especially when seeking various learning resources (e.g. Lee et al., 2014; Saks & Leijen, 2014). In the following extract, Dr Affandi concludes that

learners' attitudes are the key element to determining the success of using technology in supporting SDL.

> I think it depends on whether you [the learner] are ready to open yourself up [the learner] to all this technology… There are innovators, there are some early majority, there are some late majority and there is some laggard…. the laggard, who still want to cling themselves [the learner] to the traditional way of learning, they [the learner] don't want to take the opportunity of all technological advances… So I think it depends on your [the learner's] attitude, it depends on your...whether you [the learner] opens yourself [the learner] to technology to assist your [the learner's] learning. (A230–A241)

Based on an extensive review of research literature provided in the *Critical Review of the Literature* chapter, many influential researchers in the area of SDL claimed that every individual possesses even minimal SDL skills (Brookfield, 1986, 1987, 1990, 1991, 1992; Grow, 1991; Hiemstra, 1998, 2000; Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). This was reaffirmed by the research participants when they stated that although some learners may have problems with directing their own learning at the earlier stages of their learning processes, with some guidance, their ability to self-direct improves tremendously.

> You [the educator] must put yourself [the educator] in their [the learner's] shoes. You [the educator] empathise them [the learner]. You [the educator] guide and help them [the learner]. But make the work as theirs [the learner's]. You [the educator] must make it look as if they [the learners] are the ones that initiated the whole thing. Those are actually some counselling concepts. In a counselling session, it is not the counsellor that will tell you what to do, but you yourself will make your decision. That will give some pride to students. If you [the educator] can do that, students will love it. I always use negotiation with my students. The ideas will come from them [the learners], but if you [the educator] think that the idea is not right, you [the educator] must direct them [the learners], help them [the learners]. You [the educator] will be surprised at what they [the learners] can actually do with a little bit of help. (B343–B352)

Dr Jamal added that it is unreasonable to expect learners who have mainly experienced teacher-directed environments focused on spoon-feeding approaches to become instantaneous successful self-directed learners.

Having undertaken a detailed and fine-grained analysis of the interview transcripts, it is clear that research participants who encourage SDL appear to be concerned about having autonomy and responsibility for the educational process between the educator and the learner. These research participants allow their learners to take control of the learning by promoting an active and interactive learning environment, which was suggested by most research participants as an ideal context for SDL that could inspire and motivate learners to embark upon a SDL journey. Nevertheless, SDL approaches described by all research participants did not set aside the long-recognised traditional teaching approaches.

Most importantly, *SDL as a dynamic developmental process* focuses on the need for pedagogical approaches to be flexibly altered to meet learners' learning needs and desire to learn, which bring us to the *SDL as the 'wanting' to learn phenomenon* subtheme.

Subtheme: (i) SDL as the 'wanting' to learn phenomenon

One issue that emerged from the analysis of the interview data was the subtle difference between the phenomena of 'having' to learn and 'wanting' to learn. The majority of the research participants emphasised that SDL is all about self-motivation, which is derived particularly from really 'wanting' to learn something. This thinking echoed Myers' (1996) idea of self-motivation and Deci and Ryan's (2012) self-determination theory, which serves to energise and encourage behaviours which result in the achievement of one's own goal.

> When we look at the term self-directed, it has something to do with the inner part, which may refer to the student's or individual's own motivation. It is something in them, emm…something inside them [the learner]. So, nobody pushes or forces them [the learners] to learn. It is something inside the individual that pushes him or her to study or to work. So that is how I define self-directed. Self-directed learning has to do with one's own motivation, one's own capacity and one's own ability. (M124–M131)

> In self-directed learning, there must be motivation because you [the learner] have to decide what are the resources, emm…where to search for the resources, and then how do people evaluate you, how does your supervisor comment on your [the learner's] work, is it enough or not, so it is different. (L87–L91)

Referring to these research participants' extracts, it is clear that from their point of view that 'having' to learn and 'wanting' to learn impact differently on the learner's motivation. Dr Jamal repeatedly asserted that if learners themselves have the 'wanting' to learn desire, then this type of learner is more likely to willingly pursue an SDL activity by increasing their level of effort and successfully enduring hardship and challenges with positivity and perseverance, compared to those who are forced to learn.

> I taught English courses and in my courses you [the learner] decide what to do. So it is a kind of project thing. For instance, the theme today, let's say Chinese New Year or Hari Raya is coming, so the theme will be festivity. So they [the learner] will discuss what they [the learner] want to do. You will be surprised that the students are very creative. I remember one time the students, they [the learner] came to me. They said we [the learners] want to do something about abortion and we [the learners] have some pictures and it is going to be very gory and do you [the educator] mind? And I said go ahead. And they [the learners] did it. They [the learners] did research on it and they [the learners] presented it. And one group of students would like to do a project where they [the learners] want to look at some fashion shows around the country. So okay, fine. At the end of the day, they [the learners] must show what they [the learners] have done. They [the learners] must produce it, present it, record or save their [the learners'] work on the CD. And even they [the learners] have a catwalk to show to the class what they [the learners] have found out. (B213–B227)

Based on the research participants' perspectives, it could be concluded that the 'having' to learn phenomenon indicates that external factors dictate the learning process while the 'wanting' to learn phenomenon is driven by intrinsic motivation, which may ultimately increase the learner's willingness to learn. While acknowledging the role of intrinsic motivation in fuelling SDL efforts, Dr Salima suggests that external motivation may also lead learners to be more willing to learn and pursue SDL activities.

I believe that <u>self- directed learning needs to have motivation</u>. But sometimes, <u>students, they [the learners] are driven to get As</u>, sometimes they [the learners] <u>learn because they [the learners] want to get good grades</u>, so that their [the learners'] <u>chances of being employed are higher</u>. This <u>leads to self-sustaining motivation and may…with time.. lead them [the learners] to willingly pursue self-directed learning</u>. (L248–L254)

Based on analysis of the interview transcripts, the interview data shows that SDL approaches are viewed as a type of learning where voluntary efforts from learners are crucial and learners' 'wanting' to learn desire, or in other words, intrinsic motivation, will enable the learner to direct his or her own learning effectively and meaningfully. Research participants' views reaffirmed Pink's (2011) and Douglass and Morris's (2014) perspectives, where they asserted that intrinsically motivated learners are usually more willing to direct their learning and ultimately achieve higher academic results compared to learners who are motivated by external rewards.

Having presented five key themes: (i) *Assessment and feedback in SDL*; (ii) *Prevailing culture which inhibits/facilitates SDL*; (iii) *SDL as a balance in learning*; (iv) *SDL as a social, interdependent process*; and (v) *SDL as a dynamic developmental process*, this chapter ends with a summary of the findings, which draws this chapter to a conclusion by highlighting the key issues and interconnectedness issues between themes and subthemes which later form the fundamental components towards developing my reconceptualisation of SDL outlined in the *Discussion and Conclusions* chapter.

4.5 Summary

This chapter has presented research participants' perceptions and understandings of SDL. The *Assessment and feedback in SDL* section, which comprised four components: *Diversifying assessment approaches*; *Harmonising summative and formative assessment strategies*; *Timeliness of feedback*; and *Mode of feedback delivery*, revealed the lack of attention given to the dimension of assessment and feedback within the current literature. When reviewing research participants'

accounts on the role of assessment and feedback in promoting SDL, it is interesting to note that although they admitted that they aim to offer various learning opportunities for their learners to promote SDL, their practices in assessment and feedback often conflicted with the primary principle of SDL that recognises learners as the key agents of learning who should design and assess their own learning. These findings could be regarded as one of the main contributions of this current study to the area of SDL as they address the gap that exists in the literature related to assessment and feedback in the SDL context, and further suggests that any attempt to redefine or reconceptualise SDL should pay particular attention to aligning appropriate assessment and feedback strategies to the SDL context.

The *Prevailing culture which inhibits/facilitates SDL* has significantly broadened our understanding of the cultural dimension of SDL by offering an insight into the impact of the Malay-Islamic and Malaysian-Chinese-Confucian perspectives on SDL which have not previously been given appropriate attention. Based on my fine-grained analysis of the interview data, two main issues related to the Malaysian culture emerged: (i) the culture of *respecting wiser individuals or an expert* and (ii) the *value of face*. These dominant values which greatly influenced the educators' pedagogical approaches and the learners' learning strategies, as well as the relationship between educator and learner, could possibly affect the understanding and practice of SDL. Therefore, further investigation which acknowledges the existence of another cultural group by investigating the impact of various cultures on SDL is crucial for developing a comprehensive understanding of SDL. Furthermore, this current study, which investigates Malaysian teacher educators' conceptualisations of SDL, also offers a new platform for investigating SDL from the educator's point of view.

The findings presented in the *SDL as a balance in learning* section explored the issue of integrating the conventional mode of learning and teaching with SDL approaches. More specifically, attention focused on the aspect of freedom and control in SDL. My findings suggest that most of the research participants believed that ensuring successful learning was a joint responsibility between the learner and the educator.

This foregrounded the notion of the learner as an equal learning partner, something that was also highlighted in the *SDL as a dynamic developmental process* section – a partner who requires a certain degree of autonomy and freedom in order to be in control and take charge of his or her own learning.

The *SDL as a social, interdependent process* section outlined the apparently contradictory image of SDL as both independent and socially supported learning. With the former, SDL approaches were regarded as a type of learning carried out by an individual learner based on his or her own learning interests and needs, while with the latter, SDL approaches were portrayed as an interdependent process involving interaction and communication with others. With regard to the social and cultural dimension of SDL, the findings revealed that in an SDL context, decisions about learning are truly and freely made by the individual learner by considering others' suggestions and opinions.

As illustrated by the theme of *SDL as a dynamic developmental process*, SDL skills advance gradually with practice. One of the predominant issues highlighted by this theme is the importance of recognising learners as capable learning partners who are able to manage their own learning. The findings also suggest that a flexible, responsive and, supportive learning and teaching environment, which promotes shared responsibility and power between learners and educators, will be better able to support the development of SDL skills.

My understanding of the current theoretical perspectives governing SDL discussed in the *Critical Review of the Literature* chapter, and informed by my careful and fine-grained analysis of interview data reported in this chapter, have informed and shaped the final chapter, *Discussion and Conclusions*, which offers a redefinition of SDL and a reconceptualisation of the SDL framework. It is to this that attention now turns.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

The *Critical Review of the Literature* chapter, which presented a wide range of literature related to SDL, established that the existing literature has contributed significantly to our current understanding of SDL. However, my extensive and careful review of this research literature revealed that the majority of these studies (i) paid less attention to recognising the role of assessment and feedback in supporting the development of SDL as my review highlighted that the assessment and feedback literature and the SDL literature rarely come together to jointly establish an explicit link between assessment and feedback practices in an SDL context, (ii) have tended to focus on the formation of SDL among learners who are influenced by Western and Confucian cultural values, and neglected other ethnic groups and (iii) often investigated SDL from the learner's viewpoint and not from the perspective of the educators. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that the existing research literature has failed to comprehensively capture the complexities which exist within SDL and, therefore, is insufficient to broaden our understanding of SDL. Having identified these gaps, this current study sets out to address these important areas that have not been afforded sufficient attention.

Adopting Charmaz's (2000, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2014) constructivist grounded theory to inform my data collection, and Fereday and Muir-Cochrane's (2006) hybrid inductive and deductive approach to guide my analysis procedures, outlined extensively in the *Methods and Methodological Considerations* chapter, the preceding *Findings* chapter reported the results of my fine-grained analysis of the interview data.

Having reviewed and critically analysed the research participants' accounts of their assessment and feedback practices, it is interesting to note that, while the majority of research participants reported that they provide various learning opportunities to support their learners' SDL skills, nonetheless, their assessment and feedback practices have not taken full and appropriate account of one of the key principles of SDL. This is because their assessment and feedback approaches are limited to assessments developed by educators, and feedback for students has been generated by the educators. Few, if any, opportunities were provided for peer and self-assessment in contrast to the existing literature, where the merits of peer and self-assessment are appreciated in developing learners' capacity for self-judgement (Boud & Falchikov, 2007; McMahon, 2010; Carless et al., 2011). The assessment and feedback practices of the majority of research participants have to a significant extent ignored the role of the learner as a key agent of learning who should be actively involved in designing their own learning and assessment strategies. Moreover, these findings have reaffirmed the gap identified in the current literature, where less attention has been paid to establishing an explicit link between the roles of assessment and feedback in SDL.

Reflecting on the literature reviewed, it is worth noting that the majority of SDL research has investigated SDL in Western and East Asian cultural contexts, and research exploring the formation of SDL in other cultures has been limited (Kim, 2008; Van Petegam et al., 2008; Peters, 2015). This study, which investigated Malaysian teacher educators' conceptualisations of SDL and highlighted the impact of the Malay-Islamic and Malaysian-Chinese-Confucian perspectives on SDL, has begun to address the gap concerning the cultural dimension of SDL in the current literature. In this regard, these findings emphasise the need to have a balance in learning which would allow educators to blend SDL approaches within the conventional Malaysian education system and its more traditional views on effective learning.

Finally, although many studies have been carried out to enhance our understanding of SDL, most of these studies have been limited to investigating SDL from the

learners' point of view (e.g. Ibrahim, 2002; Abdullah et al., 2008; Ahmad & Majid, 2014) and none has investigated the Malaysian teacher educators' perception of SDL. This current study thus sets out to explore this important but previously neglected area. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that by: (i) addressing the need for greater attention to be paid to assessment and feedback practices in an SDL context, (ii) calling for further investigation into the formation of SDL approaches among different ethnic cultures and (iii) offering new insights into the understanding of SDL, particularly from the educators' point of view, this study has significantly contributed to the advancement of our understanding of SDL.

This chapter, the *Discussion and Conclusions* chapter, which is closely related to the preceding chapters, provides answers to the research questions by highlighting the findings which emerged from the *Findings* chapter. However, because of the complexities of the findings that emerged, they will not be discussed in a simple, straightforward linear fashion; rather, key issues will be discussed in an integrated way within this chapter. The chapter begins by outlining my definition of SDL. Second, a reconceptualised framework for SDL, developed based on my understanding of current research literature on SDL and my fine-grained analysis of the interview data, is presented, with particular attention being paid to the interrelatedness of findings within and across different dimensions. Third, a discussion on my contribution to knowledge and the implications for future research is presented. Fourth, this chapter continues by reflecting on the possible limitations of this current study and discusses the potential constraints of my reconceptualisation of SDL. Fifth, the thesis is drawn to a conclusion by highlighting the key contributions of the current study. This thesis, which has explored Malaysian teacher educators' perceptions and understandings of SDL, has served not only to expand our understanding of SDL but also contributes to the ongoing discussion of SDL.

5.2 Defining SDL

Before this section turns to discuss my expanded definition of SDL, it is important to note that in relation to research question (i) How do Malaysian teacher educators conceptualise learning?, although the majority of the research participants reported a relatively straightforward definition of learning and characterised it as a process involving interaction and knowledge transmission between two individuals, their pedagogical practices suggest otherwise. Almost all of the research participants reported that besides lecturing, they also encourage various learner-centred activities such as class discussion, group presentation and seminar approaches. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that their understanding of the learning process is far beyond and much more complex than just the transmission of knowledge.

Exploring the research participants' perceptions of the learning process is essential in redefining and reconceptualising my SDL framework as it is apparent that the research participants' complex understanding of the nature of learning as a social, interdependent process has significantly influenced their conceptualisation of SDL. Therefore, as a result of both my critical review of various proposals made by researchers on the key elements of SDL, and having been significantly informed by my fine-grained analysis of the interview data, this current study proposes the following definition of SDL:

> SDL embraces a balance in (i) learner-directed and teacher-directed approaches, and (ii) the power relationship between learner and educator. SDL is a dynamic developmental learning process which is internally driven and at the same time is socially interdependent. Most importantly, SDL places the learner as an active agent of learning who takes control of his or her own learning goals.

In contrast to the views of the majority of the researchers on the ultimate goal of SDL, which is to produce self-reliant learners who can effectively direct their own learning with minimal guidance from others (Garrison, 1997; Gibbons, 2002), my analysis of the research participants' accounts revealed that they were reluctant to step back and allow the learners to take control of their learning, as most of them

strongly believed that educators have a significant role to play in ensuring the learning process does not deviate from the original goal of learning. According to research participants, the role of the educator should not be set aside, something that reflects the remarkable influence of one of the fundamental principles of both Islamic and Confucian perspectives on education. Although all of the research participants stressed the importance of educators' presence in learning, at the same time they stated that learners' active involvement in the learning process is essential for successful and meaningful learning. Their thinking echoed McArthur and Huxham's (2013) view on the role of educators as facilitators of learning rather than as masters of learning.

This view of the learner as an active agent of learning and of the educator as a facilitator of learning suggests that the majority of the research participants valued a balance in SDL, whereby they strive to achieve a harmonious blend of both learner-directed and teacher-directed approaches. They added that this ideal and promising learning situation, which they propose could assist the development of learners' SDL skills, is only achievable if the learner is granted greater autonomy to take control of their learning and if a balanced power relationship between the learner and educator is established.

Therefore, based on my fine-grained analysis of the research participants' accounts, it is reasonable to suggest that for successful implementation of SDL, particularly in Malaysia, it is important to recognise the fundamental role of educators in supporting SDL while at the same time acknowledging the significant mutual interdependence that exist between learner and educator.

Not surprisingly, reaffirming Razawi et al.'s (2011) report that the relative dominance of learning experiences in Malaysian schools that focus on teacher-centred approaches has produced dependent learners who struggle to cope with an independent higher learning environment, most of the research participants agreed that SDL skills can be taught and argue that the learners will become proficient in directing their learning if they are given opportunities to practise their SDL skills in a

safe and supportive learning environment. My findings suggest that by simply recognising the learner as an active agent of learning, educators have taken the first step in fostering SDL.

My findings also suggest that although various SDL activities have been designed by educators to support the development of SDL, the majority of research participants nevertheless emphasised that none of these are of any use if the learners refuse to take control of and direct their learning. My findings suggest that SDL is an internally driven learning process that is largely fuelled by one's own desire and motivation to learn. Having said this, it is apparent that these current findings reaffirm the current understanding of SDL as a social encounter (e.g. Biggs, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2006; Murray, 2014; Lee, 2011; Benson, 2011, 2013). In this regard, my analysis of the interview data revealed that other parties may only engage in an individual's SDL journey if the self-directed learner, who has control over his or her own learning, chooses to seek help and involve other people. These central findings identified in the literature, and which emerged from my analysis of the research participants' accounts, act as the basic foundation for my proposed redefinition of SDL.

Adopting a broader view of SDL, this section has exhaustively discussed my definition of SDL and has interwoven the addressing of research question: (iv) What kind of learning opportunities do Malaysian teacher educators create for their learners to foster the development of SDL, and what is the particular role of assessment and feedback in SDL?. The following section presents the reconceptualised SDL framework and aims to address the following research questions: (ii) How do Malaysian teacher educators conceptualise SDL?, (iii) To what extent do Malaysian teacher educators perceive themselves as self-directed learners?, and (iv) What kind of learning opportunities do teacher educators in Malaysia create for their learners to foster the development of SDL, and what is the particular role of assessment and feedback in SDL?

5.3 The reconceptualised SDL framework

In reconceptualising the SDL framework, five key themes emerged (see the *Findings* chapter for more details) following my understanding of the existing theoretical orientation governing SDL and my fine-grained analysis of the interviews: *Assessment and feedback in SDL*, *Prevailing culture which inhibits/facilitates SDL*, *SDL as a balance in learning*, *SDL as a social, interdependent process* and, *SDL as a dynamic developmental process*. These themes form the basis for the construction of the three key dimensions proposed in my reconceptualised SDL framework. Greatly informed by the five central themes which were thoroughly discussed in the *Findings* chapter, the three dimensions of SDL suggested in this current study are: (i) the *Learner* dimension, (ii) the *Learning process* dimension and (iii) the *Contextual* dimension, which it is hoped, together, will enhance our understanding of SDL beyond its current conceptualisations.

My reconceptualised SDL framework highlights the complexities that exist between the *Learner*, *Learning process* and *Contextual* dimensions by foregrounding their interconnectedness within, between and across these dimensions. Figure 5.1 provides an illustration of the proposed SDL framework.
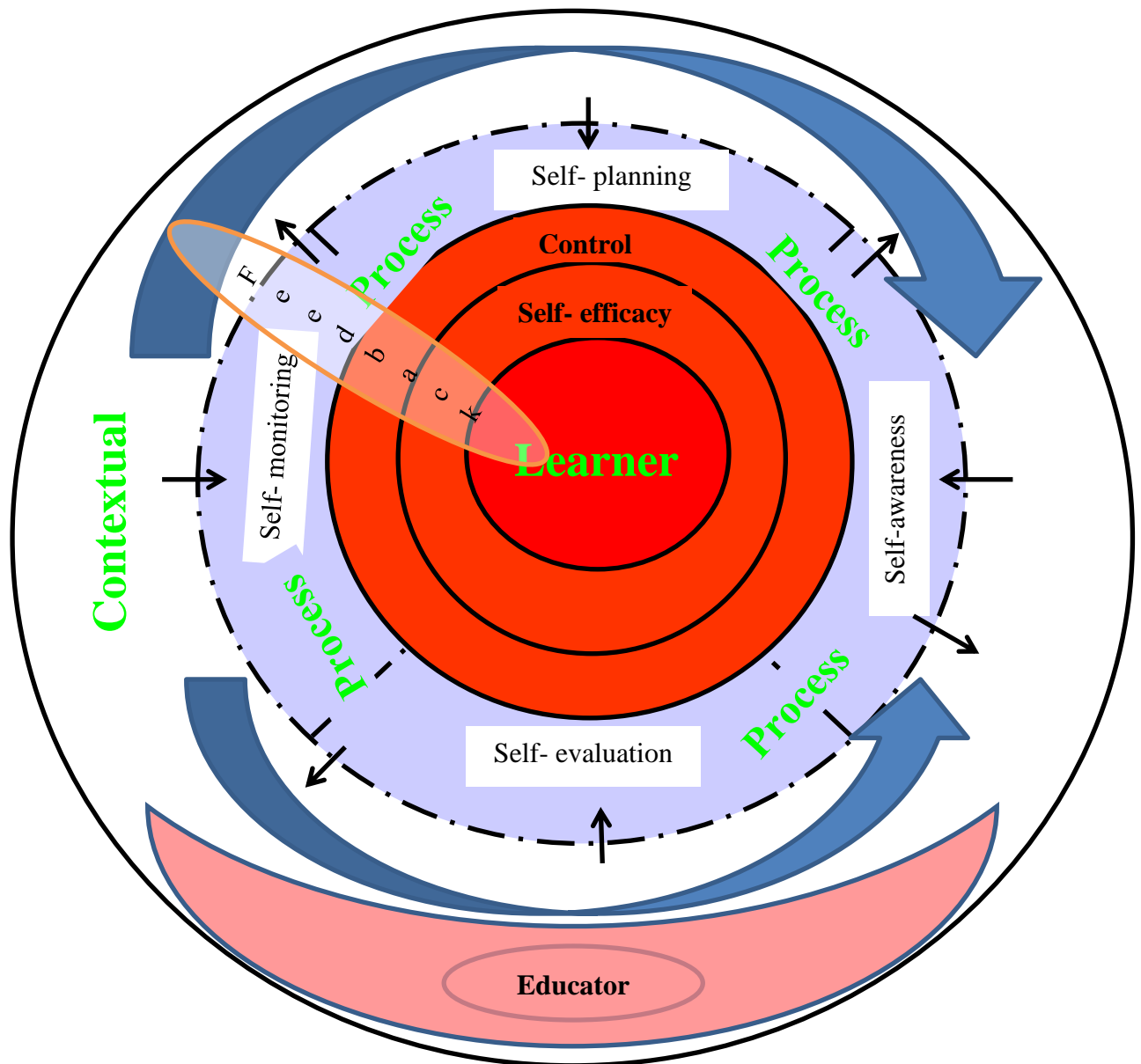
Figure 5.1 The proposed SDL framework

The learner is the core component or key dimension of my SDL framework in which the desire to pursue SDL as proposed by this study must arise from the learners themselves. Considering both the existing literature and my findings on the motivational aspect of SDL, it is apparent that self-efficacy greatly impacts one's desire to learn. In this regard, it is most probable that only learners who truly believe in their ability to achieve the learning objectives will choose to self-direct their own learning. The second most important element emphasised by the *Learner* dimension,

but closely related to the *Learning process* dimension, which will be discussed next, is the learner's control. Confirming the majority of SDL literature on learner control in learning, my findings indicate that learners who choose to direct their learning should be in a position of control in respect of managing their own learning according to their preferred way of learning, and should be free to choose whether or not to involve other parties in their learning (e.g. Loyens et al., 2008; Jossberger et al., 2010).

Next, the *Learning process* dimension suggested by this study, which includes: (a) self-planning, (b) self-awareness, (c) self-assessment and (d) self-monitoring, takes into account both Dr Mazlan's idea of a fundamental SDL process and the essential self-regulation process proposed by Jossberger et al. (2010), Robertson (2011) and Saks and Leijen (2014) for effective self-direction. It is important to note that although the development of my SDL framework has been significantly shaped by my understanding of the literature on self-regulation and heavily influenced by Cosnefroy and Carré's (2014) idea that SDL includes SRL, nonetheless, the self-regulation process in my SDL framework acts only as a means of enabling the learner to become a successful and effective self-directed learner.

Finally, the *Contextual* dimension suggested in my reconceptualised SDL framework stresses the influence of others and the local culture and values placed on SDL. This study, which focuses on exploring the influence of nationality on cultural values and SDL, is in line with the recommendations made by Biggs (1990), Snider (2005) and Tong (2008), who have argued for more research to be conducted in comparing cultural values and practices across different national and international contexts. Moreover, my thinking towards the influence of the cultural context on SDL is greatly influenced by an increasing number of research reports that highlight the variability of Confucian values practised by Hong Kong Chinese, Korean Chinese, Vietnamese Chinese, Thailand Chinese, Singaporean Chinese, Malaysian Chinese and even Chinese in Western countries due to the influence of their adaptation to the local culture and nationality (Biggs, 1990, 1991; Smith & Smith, 1999; Li & Thao, 2006; Snider, 2005; Tong, 2008; Azizan, 2010; Tengku Kasim, 2012; Peen &

Arshad, 2014; Nordin, Abdul Wahab & Dahlan, 2013). This suggests that the oversimplified view of Chinese learners as a homogeneous group of learners who practise identical Confucian values is inaccurate and more research needs to be conducted to investigate and recognise the existence of other ethnic groups. In line with these observations, the proposed SDL framework emphasises that in supporting the development of SDL, it is crucial to acknowledge and recognise the impact of the cultural context by avoiding the occurrence of negative friction between local cultural values and the primary principle of the SDL approaches.

Having outlined these three key dimensions of the proposed SDL framework, the following section provides a detailed discussion on the emergence of the SDL dimension and the interconnectedness of issues between the proposed dimensions.

5.3.1 The development of dimensions for a reconceptualised SDL framework

To assist my discussion of the development of the proposed SDL dimensions which emerged during my analysis of the data, *Table 4.1 Summary of the findings of the interview analysis* outlined in the *Findings* chapter is reproduced here. Table 4.1 presents the five key themes which were identified and their associated sub-themes. It is important to emphasise that in understanding how these five themes are related to the development of the three dimensions used in the proposed SDL framework, readers should refer to both Table 4.1 and Figure 5.1. This section presents the interconnectedness of the themes and dimensions.

	Theme	Subtheme	
1.	Assessment and feedback in SDL	Assessment and feedback practices which inhibit/ facilitate SDL	Diversifying assessment approaches
			Harmonising summative and formative assessment strategies
			Timeliness of feedback
			Mode of feedback delivery
		A curriculum which inhibits/ facilitates SDL	Content of the curriculum
			Ways of teaching
2.	Prevailing culture which inhibits/ facilitates SDL	Respecting wiser individuals	
		The value of face	
3.	SDL as a balance in learning	Freedom	Taking responsibility
			Having choices
		Being in control	Decision-making
			Sharing power
4.	SDL as a social, interdependent process	SDL as learning for your 'self'	
		SDL as learning on your own	
		SDL as learning with others: the concept of a learning project	
		The need for a guide from the educator (Ta'lim)	
5.	SDL as a dynamic developmental process	SDL as the 'wanting' to learn phenomenon	

Reproduced: Table 4.1 Summary of the findings of the interview analysis
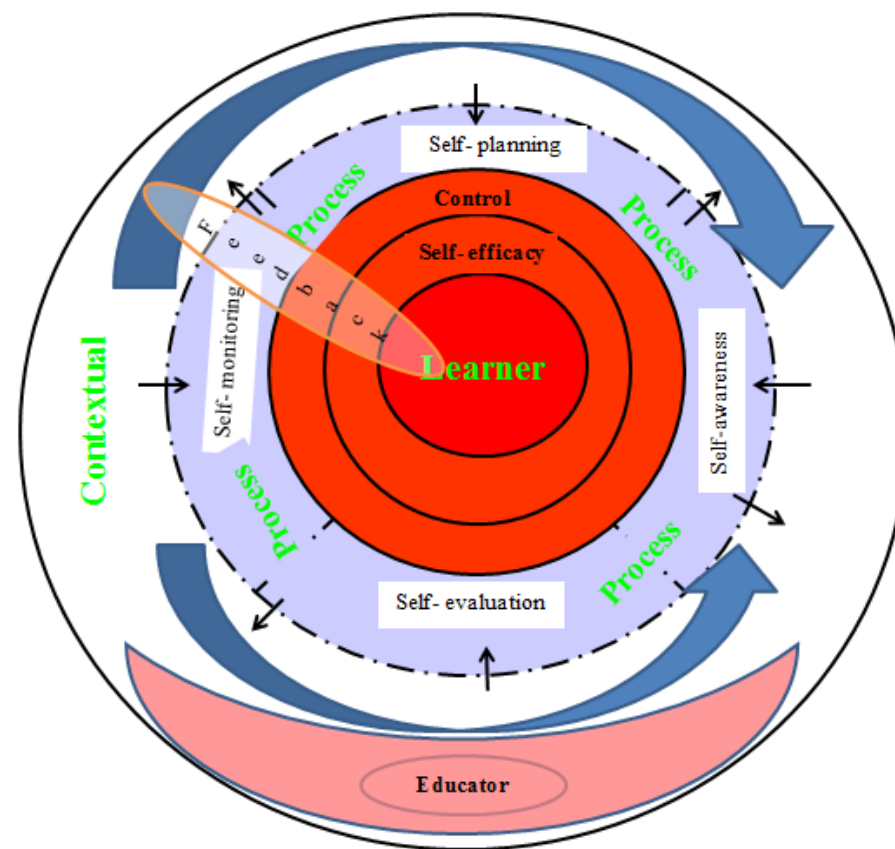
Reproduced: Figure 5.1 The proposed SDL framework

The five key themes discussed in the *Findings* chapter have ultimately positioned the learner at the core of the SDL process where the learner is recognised as the key agent of their own learning who is in charge of, and takes control over, their learning by determining their own learning goals and selecting their preferred learning approaches. Building on this, the self-directed learner in my reconceptualised SDL framework is responsible for assessing their own learning progress to the extent of generating their own feedback which will be used in improving their learning. The *Learner* dimension in my SDL framework, which was constructed as a result of my understanding of these five key themes, is different to the learner dimension proposed in Hiemstra and Brockett's (2012) PPC model and Grow's (1991) SSDL models where equal emphasis is placed on the learner, the learning process and the learning context. My reconceptualised SDL framework, on the other hand, places greater emphasis on the *Learner* dimension and recognises the significant influence of the *Learner* dimension on the *Learning process* and *Contextual* dimensions.

Moreover, my interpretation of *SDL as a dynamic developmental process*, particularly the subtheme of *SDL as the 'wanting' to learn phenomenon*, has led me to suggest that in order to be the key agents of SDL, learners must have the desire to learn which helps to boost their efforts and enhances their willingness to take the next steps towards directing their own learning. This thinking, which echoes Myers' (1996) idea of self-motivation that serves to fuel the learners' learning efforts in achieving their learning goals, has addressed the significant role of a learner in my SDL framework.

In addition to emphasising the significant role of learners in directing their learning, my *Learner* dimension focuses on two main components - self-efficacy and learner control - which serve as the most essential components in linking the *Learner* dimension and the *Learning process* dimension. Considering both my analysis of the literature on the significant roles of self-efficacy in SDL, and my interpretation of the *SDL as a balance in learning* and *SDL as a social, interdependent process* which stressed how one's beliefs influence the learner's learning approaches, self-efficacy

is recognised by this study as one of the key components that has a significance influence on the learner's desire to learn.

The second most important component of the *Learner* dimension which is also closely related to the *Learning process* dimension, is the learner's control of his or her own learning. Significantly informed by the *Being in control* sub-theme, this component suggests that the learner must have control over their learning if their learning is to be viewed as SDL. In this light, the self-efficacy and the learner's control themes are regarded as integral parts of *Learner* dimension.

In discussing the interrelatedness of learner control and self-efficacy, my findings revealed that the learner's act of taking control over his or her own learning is greatly influenced by their self-efficacy. If learners have a high level of self-efficacy, they are more confident in their ability to take control of their learning and successfully achieve the learning objectives. Based on my critical review of the SDL literature, and informed by my analysis of the findings, this current study suggests that effective SDL can only be achieved when the learner has mastered self-regulation skills which include: (a) self-planning, (b) self-awareness, (c) self-assessment, and (d) self-monitoring. These important skills of self-regulation contributed to and informed the *Learning process* dimension for the reconceptualised SDL framework. An important point to be re-emphasised is that self-regulation is viewed as a vehicle, or a means, that drives the learner to become a self-directed learner. The development of the *Learning process* dimension, which consists of self-regulation skills, is also related to *Assessment and feedback in SDL* theme, where findings indicate that in addition to having a flexible and responsive curriculum, diverse assessment approaches are essential in fostering the learner's ability to self-direct.

In order to highlight the sensitivity of this reconceptualised SDL framework to the cultural context a third dimension, the *Contextual* dimension, is proposed. The *Contextual* dimension, which is the outer circumference of the revised SDL framework, has been developed as a result of the themes identified and discussed under the heading: *Prevailing culture which inhibits/ facilitates SDL*. The *Contextual*

dimension suggests that the sociocultural context has a significant influence on the learner and the SDL process. These sociocultural issues are also highlighted in *SDL as a social, interdependent* process theme, specifically *SDL as learning with others: the concept of a learning project* sub-theme, where findings concur with those in the existing literature on learning as a collaborative and interactive process. Referring to Figure 5.1, the small arrow that enters and exits between the *Contextual* dimension, the *Learning process* dimension and *Learner* dimension, demonstrates how the learner who is influenced by the local culture will reflect the cultural values which have been instilled through their preferred learning approaches and strategies.

Referring to *SDL as a balance in learning*, my proposed SDL framework has placed a significant emphasis on *balance* in self-direction, whereby although learners are required to take responsibility for managing their learning, educators should also play their role in ensuring that the learners are able successfully to self-direct. The significant role of educators in assisting the learner's self-direction is highlighted by *The need for a guide from the educator (Ta'lim)* sub-theme. This stands in sharp contrast to the majority of SDL models which focus solely on independent learning and ignore the key roles of educators in learning. Therefore, the role of the educator in the SDL context is deliberately and explicitly illustrated in my reconceptualised SDL framework. This is to draw our attention to the fundamental role played by educators in fostering the development of SDL which, to date, has received less attention in the existing SDL literature. It is hoped that by outlining the essential role of educators in assisting the learners' direction of their learning, this aspect will receive wider and greater attention from educators and researchers who aim to promote SDL.

This section, which has discussed in detail how the five central themes reported in the *Findings* chapter contributed to the construction of three key dimensions, namely the *Learner*, *Learning process* and *Contextual* dimensions, is closely related to Hiemstra and Brockett's (2012) PPC model (see p. 51 for more details). Although there is no additional SDL dimension being introduced by this current study, (i) the centrality of the learner's role in driving their SDL process, (ii) the explicit call for

the need to develop learners' capacity for self-judgement for effective self-direction, and (iii) the prominent description of the role of educators in SDL, serve as the first step in addressing the significant gap identified in the areas of assessment and feedback, the cultural dimension and the educator-learner relationship, all of which have been identified in the literature and the findings. The next section will discuss the contributions of this current study to knowledge expansion and advancement.

5.4 Contributions to knowledge

This section, which presents my contributions to knowledge expansion, summarises discussion that has taken place elsewhere in the thesis on the contributions of this current study.

With regard to my critical and extensive review of the literature on assessment and feedback relevant to SDL, it is clear that although the existing literature has identified the potential of assessment and feedback to accelerate SDL, little research has been carried out to investigate this matter further. Most of the studies on assessment in SDL are limited to investigating the learners' ability to self-assess their learning and to examine the reliability of learners' self-assessed marks compared to educators' marks (e.g. Boud & Falchikov, 1989; Orsmond, Merry & Reiling, 1997, 2002; Ross, 2006; Cassidy, 2007; Gibbs, 1995, 2010, 2012; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004; Lew & Schmidt, 2011) and rarely link to the SDL approaches. Moreover, my fine-grained analysis of the interview data reveals that the Malaysian teacher educators' views and practices of assessment and feedback, which are restricted to summative assessment, formative assessment and timely feedback, confirms that there has been only limited research carried out on assessment and feedback within the existing literature, where most assessment and feedback strategies are heavily focused on educator-designed assessment and educator-generated feedback. This contradicts the primary principle of SDL approaches that view the learner as a key learning agent who plays an active role in designing their learning strategies and evaluating their learning process.

Having identified this gap, this thesis, which calls for greater emphasis to be given to developing the learner's ability to be an effective assessor of their own learning, reflects Boud's (2014) recent writings on learners' capacity for self-judgement. Furthermore, the emphasis given to the assessment and feedback dimension within SDL approaches can be regarded as one of the main contributions of this current study to the field of SDL.

In addition, my review of the previous research literature has demonstrated that despite receiving increasing attention from many researchers, exploration of the cultural impact of SDL has been limited to investigating the practice of SDL among learners who are influenced by Western and Confucian cultural values (e.g. Kim, 2002, 2008; Van Petegem et al., 2008). This current study, which recognises the existence of other ethnic groups, has set out to highlight the influence of the Malay-Islamic and Malaysian-Chinese-Confucian perspectives on SDL, and it is hoped that this will break the domination of Western and Confucian perspectives in discussions of and research into SDL.

Finally, my critical review of the literature revealed that the majority of studies on SDL have been restricted to investigating learners' perspectives on SDL. These existing studies have paid little attention to exploring educators' perspectives of SDL. My study, which involved Malaysian teacher educators, and investigated their conceptualisations of SDL, has therefore contributed to knowledge advancement by offering an insight into educators' understanding concerning of and practices in SDL.

Building on my findings from the interview data analysis, I have provided and justified my proposed definition of SDL in the *Discussion and Conclusions* chapter. My reconceptualisation of the SDL framework, which recognises the learner as the key agent of SDL, also gives prominence to the aspects of learner control, learner regulation of his or her learning, the sociocultural impact on SDL and the educator's role in supporting the learner's direction of learning.

In relation to the lack of investigation into the central role and importance of assessment and feedback in SDL, the findings of this study reveal that one of the major drawbacks of SDL approaches highlighted by the research participants are the vague SDL assessment strategies outlined to guide educators in evaluating learners' learning. Adding to this point, my review of the literature indicates that the majority of studies on learning, assessment and feedback are limited to a narrow investigation of learners' ability to assess the completion of a short-term learning activity, rather than focusing on evaluating the long-term learning performance closely related to SDL (Nicol, 2014; McDowell & Sambell, 2014). Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that most of the current assessment and feedback practices fall short of preparing the learner to become an effective assessor of his or her own learning in particular, and an effective self-directed learner in general. Findings from this current study suggest that current understanding of and practices in SDL need to be reoriented to explicitly address the ideal practice of assessment and feedback in relation to SDL.

In sum, whilst my understanding of SDL has been significantly shaped by the existing SDL models and previous literature on SDL, the development of my reconceptualised SDL framework was also greatly informed by my fine-grained analysis of the interview data. This section, which has discussed the theoretical and methodological contributions of this study to the SDL field, has highlighted the different ways in which the research reported in this thesis has broadened our understanding of SDL and improved our practices in encouraging SDL. The following section discusses the implications of this study and outlines suggestions for future research.

5.5 Implications and future research

This section discusses the implications of the current study and how this study could serve as a guide for future investigations into the SDL field. Although my review of literature on assessment and feedback revealed a positive trend towards integrating

assessment in the learning process to support an active learning experience, the findings of this current study indicate that less attention has been given to utilising the underlying potential of assessment and feedback in promoting SDL. Most importantly, current practices of assessment and feedback have to some extent failed to sufficiently highlight the learner's role in managing their own learning by excluding them from becoming involved in the process of designing assessment approaches for their learning. Realising the potential of assessment and feedback as effective SDL tools to accelerate the development of SDL, future studies may consider conducting assessment and feedback research in a SDL context to further develop the current SDL framework.

Next, as I have repeatedly enunciated in the *Critical Review of the Literature* chapter, the majority of the research on SDL has been particularly concerned with exploring Western and Confucian values in SDL, whereas this current study, which has foregrounded the significant role that culture has on SDL, has highlighted the impact of Malay-Islamic and Malaysian-Chinese-Confucian values on the understanding and practice of SDL in Malaysia. In an effort to comprehensively capture the significant impact of culture on SDL, future studies may consider investigating the cultural aspect among other ethnic groups in various national settings.

Although the SDL framework advanced in this thesis posits that SDL is an interdependent learning process located within the social dimension, with the learner as the key agent of learning and the educator as the mediator of the learning process, direct application of this SDL framework to a classroom environment should nevertheless be deliberately and cautiously considered. Essentially, in order to use this reconceptualised SDL framework effectively, particularly in a formal learning environment, educators should recognise the available learning resources and restrictions existing within the actual learning context as this would allow for a flexible adaptation of the SDL framework. Therefore, it is suggested that with proper use, the proposed SDL framework should inform educators about appropriate pedagogical strategies essential for supporting the development of learners' SDL skills, with greater emphasis being placed on learners' control and autonomy.

Furthermore, appropriate application of the proposed SDL framework can potentially contribute to future debate on SDL and enhance our understanding of SDL.

This study, which has explored Malaysian teacher educators' conceptualisations of SDL, offers a new perspective on SDL by outlining the educators' perspectives and practices with regard to SDL. However, I would argue that although this current study has only involved educators from the educational field, and has not included those from other disciplines, insights gained from this research nevertheless are relevant to other subject areas. Although the research participants in the current study work in the area of education, their own educational backgrounds vary quite significantly and they have undergraduate degrees in such diverse subjects as pure science, economics, administration and languages. As a result of this, it can be argued that the findings of this study have provided useful insights into the effects of their subject specialisms on these educators' conceptualisations of SDL. In addition, having completed this study and investigated further the subject-specialism dimension in the academic literature, I have become more aware of how, and the extent to which, this dimension may to a certain degree have affected how these educators conceptualise SDL. Therefore, better to understand SDL, more research needs to be done to investigate educators' views of SDL from various disciplines and at all educational levels, as this may lead to a more comprehensive understanding of SDL.

Through my proposed SDL framework, the key role of educators in supporting SDL has been clearly recognized. However, the findings have indicated that although the majority of the research participants agreed that SDL approaches empower learners to take responsibility for their learning, their pedagogical and assessment strategies did not reflect one of the core principles of SDL which emphasizes the need for educators to acknowledge the learners as competent and equal learning partners. My analysis of the interviews revealed that almost all research participants were reluctant to abandon their position of authority and the assessments that were designed by these educators ignored the learners' roles in monitoring and assessing their own learning. Therefore, to assist the educators in equipping themselves with the

necessary knowledge, skills and mindsets to promote SDL effectively, this study suggests that the universities should play their part in assisting educators to plan teaching and assessment strategies which facilitate learners' learning directions. These could be achieved by conducting ongoing in-service training programmes, encouraging self-development and supporting educators to work alongside their colleagues.

Furthermore, educators should also be encouraged to be more responsive and willing to adapt flexibly their pedagogical strategies and practices in order to meet their learners' learning needs. Apart from ensuring congruence between educators' teaching techniques and learners' abilities to self-direct in ways that were suggested by Grow (1991), this study recommends that educators should be helped to support and prepare learners to advance their learning to higher levels. This reflects Vygotsky's account of what he calls the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (1978) whereby, with appropriate assistance and encouragement from a more knowledgeable person, learners should be able to advance their own learning. One of the ways to support learners' learning advancement, and to assist learners' self-direction, is to promote the use of collaborative group work with high levels of learner interaction, discussion, and negotiation, which will act as a bridge between teacher dependence and student independence. Through the use of such group work, learners who learn together with their more skilful peers will receive support from these peers.

5.6 Limitations

This current study has investigated Malaysian teacher educators' perceptions and understandings of SDL. Although various methodological and analytical approaches have been critically considered to ensure that the research method chosen was the most appropriate for this study, there are some limitations to be acknowledged. This section outlines the limitations of this current study, which have also been alluded to elsewhere in this thesis.

With regard to sampling issues, my selection of research participants was significantly influenced by the need to find answers to the earlier formulated research questions. With the key aim of investigating Malaysian teacher educators' conceptualisations of SDL, this study involved twenty teacher educators who voluntarily agreed to be interviewed. However, the process of selecting potential research participants was not easy. This is because the population of Malaysian teacher educators is very diverse. Although a majority of the Malaysian teacher educators work at the Institute of Teacher Education, there are also teacher educators working in university schools of education. Furthermore, teacher educators who work at university level are further divided into those who work at the Research Universities that focus on research advancement and those who work at the Focused Universities which offer various educational courses at pre-undergraduate, undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Therefore, it is important for this current study to take into account the diversity that exists among Malaysian teacher educators.

On this basis, both the Institute of Teacher Education's and universities' websites were explored to obtain the email contact details of potential research participants before email invitations were sent to obtain their agreement to participate in this study. The sampling approach adopted was snowball sampling. My main reason for choosing snowball sampling was to get some assistance from research participants who had already agreed to become involved to help with recruiting further potential research participants that were known to them. However, this decision brought with it the risk of excluding others who were not connected within the network. The limitations of snowball sampling are evident as all of my research participants were Malaysian teacher educators from the School of Education at the Research Universities.

Even though I contacted many Malaysian teacher educators working at the Institute of Teacher Education, I did not receive any response from them. Whilst the selected research participants were not representative of the general population of Malaysian teacher educators, the snowball sampling procedure was nevertheless deemed

appropriate and best suited for the purpose of this current study to enhance our understanding of SDL rather than generalising Malaysian teacher educators' conceptualisations of SDL.

Moreover, as my research design aimed to broaden our understanding of SDL, my sampling strategy involving teacher educators significantly distinguished this current study from the majority of the studies on SDL, which, on the whole, are restricted to investigating learners' perceptions and practices of SDL. Furthermore, my research participants who came from the Malay ethnic group, which is greatly influenced by Malay-Islamic cultural values, and the Chinese ethnic group, who adhere to Confucian cultural values, served as an initial step in breaking the domination of the Western and Confucian classification by acknowledging the existence of other cultural groups. Hence, my snowball sampling procedure could be construed as one of the key strengths of this current study.

It has been noted in an earlier section that having been a former student, and then a junior lecturer in one of these Higher Education contexts, as a researcher and interviewer I was now in the position that I inevitably had to negotiate issues of power and authority with some respondents who had previously been my teachers and then more senior collegues when I was employed as a junior lecturer. During my upbringing and throughout my education a significant emphasis has been placed upon respecting the power and authority of older and wiser people and face-saving behaviours characterised interactions with such people. Because of this, I felt that it would not be acceptable to press the research participants to gain further explanation and clarification of sensitive issues, especially when exploring situations where they believed their teaching had been less than successful. This was apparent during the pilot research interviews where some research participants were particularly reluctant to describe those occasions when their teaching had not gone well, and I felt that I had no choice but to focus only the more positive aspects of the research participants' pedagogical strategies. This response was, I believed, a result of my culture which values and promotes face-saving behaviours, since these research participants' reluctance to share their teaching 'failures', particularly with a junior

collegue, may be seen as defensive acts designed to protect their authority status and to avoid being seen as less competent educators. Because I was sensitive and alert to these behaviours, I took multiple steps to minimize this cultural effect from further influencing my research. For example, when developing the interview schedule, I made sure that I had extensively covered the important areas pertinent to this study by asking questions in different ways; and by piloting the interview questions, I ensured that they were culturally sensitive; would not offend in any way; did not challenge the participants' authority; allowed the participants to save face; and could be easily understood. However, despite having taken several important steps to minimise the impact of the power relationship between me and more senior and experienced lecturers, this relationship nevertheless had an impact on how the interview was conducted and on some of the data that were gathered.

Next, I want to turn this discussion to my interview and translation strategies. In order to create a calm and relaxed interview atmosphere, I decided to interview my research participants in the Malay language as Malay is the native language in Malaysia and everybody is capable of understanding and using it proficiently. Hence, this strategy helped them to respond freely and willingly. However, research participants were also allowed to use English and/or a mixture of both languages at any time. Having decided to use Malay as the main medium of communication, I encountered translation issues as this thesis has been reported in English.

First, I needed to translate the English version of the interview schedule into the Malay language before the interview schedule could be used as a guide during the interview session. Then, I needed to translate my interview transcripts into English versions before I could analyse the interview data. Therefore, a peer-checking strategy was adopted whereby the draft of the interview schedule and the translated interview transcripts were checked by a bilingual TESOL graduate (whose involvement was voluntary). The peer-checking strategy helped to improve the accuracy of my translation. Essentially, although it could be argued that my decision to translate interview transcripts may have resulted in me missing potential emerging themes, the use of the Malay language as the medium of communication ensured that

the research participants were comfortable with expressing their views without being limited by language shortcomings. A line-by-line translation strategy was adopted to minimise this risk.

This section has underlined the main limitations that existed in the current study. Although the revised SDL framework proposed by this current study has the potential to broaden and enhance our understanding of SDL, any further adaptation and integration of the suggested SDL framework should be carried out with caution.

5.7 Conclusion

This thesis has presented a comprehensive review of some of the key issues related to SDL. The theoretical framework and philosophical orientation governing this study, which originated from various literature related to SDL, has significantly shaped my understanding of SDL and my interpretation of the interview data.

Through a fine-grained analysis of the interview data, five key themes emerged: (a) *Assessment and feedback in SDL*; (b) *Prevailing culture which facilitates/inhibits SDL*; (c) *SDL as a balance in learning*; (d) *SDL as a social, interdependent process*; and (e) *SDL as a dynamic developmental process*. These five central themes were systematically presented to capture the interrelatedness of issues which existed within, between and across each theme.

The findings of this study have reaffirmed my review of current literature that most of the current practices of assessment and feedback fail to recognise the learner as the key agent of his or her learning. This current study suggests that in fostering SDL, educators should strive to develop their learners' capacity to judge their own learning by establishing a positive and collaborative relationship with the learner. This is because the ability to assess one's own learning is not only one of the most important criteria to becoming a successful and effective self-directed learner, but it can free the learner from being dictated to by other parties.

Moreover, the SDL framework advanced in this thesis has provided new insights into our understanding of SDL, especially from the educator's point of view, and has begun, albeit it in a tentative way, to address some of the gaps in the literature. Whilst this current study supports the existing literature on SDL by confirming the significant role that the self has in directing one's own learning (Knowles, 1975; Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991; Gibbons, 2002; Reinders & Balcikanli, 2011; Bouchard, 2009, 2012; Murray, 2014), it also moves beyond the current focus of Western *vs* Confucian culture categorisation by offering Malay-Islamic and Malaysian-Chinese-Confucian perspectives on SDL. The SDL framework has foregrounded the fact that the learner whose behaviour and ways of thinking are greatly impacted by the local culture is the single most important influence on SDL.

Finally, since this study investigates SDL in the Malaysian context with particular attention paid to highlighting the influence of Malay-Islamic and Malaysian-Chinese-Confucian perspectives on SDL, it can be argued that the reconceptualisation of SDL offered in this study can be of distinct value in helping us to fully understand SDL within diverse ethnic groups. However, rather than being restricted by the proposed SDL framework, it is suggested that educators should creatively and innovatively apply the SDL framework by taking into account existing constraints within their learning environment. It is hoped that the investigation into Malaysian teacher educators' conceptualisations of SDL will serve as an important precursor to future research which explores the potential of assessment and feedback in promoting SDL and the impact of various cultural values on the practice of SDL.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Invitation to participate in the study

Invitation to participate in the study titled: Reconceptualising self-directed learning in a Malaysian context.

I am NURFARADILLA MOHAMAD NASRI, a PhD student of the University of Edinburgh (UoE). I intend to investigate the Malaysian Teacher Educators' conceptualisations of self-directed learning as part of my PhD studies. My reasons for investigating the self-directed learning concept are: (i) there has been little research which explores educators' understanding of, and practice in SDL especially in higher education; (ii) the cultural dimensions of SDL are less well-researched, especially among ethnic groups other than Western and East-Asian Chinese communities; and (iii) less attention has been paid to explore the potential of assessment and feedback in enhancing the development of self-directed learning. This study is hoped to provide insights in the representation of self-directed learning within the Malaysian context and begins to fill the gaps identified in current research literature.

Now I am looking for research participants who are interested in my research to be interviewed. The interview session should take between 45 minutes to one hour. Your help would really important to my study and are very much appreciated.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you are interested in my study.

Nurfaradilla Mohamad Nasri
PhD student
Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh
nurfaradillamohamadnasri@yahoo.com / N.Mohamad-Nasri@sms.ed.ac.uk

Appendix 2. Information Sheet

Information Sheet

Research title: Reconceptualising self-directed learning in a Malaysian context.

I am writing to invite you to participate in research being undertaken as part of my PhD studies. This study is intended to provide a framework for developing a better self-directed learning curriculum in higher educational institutions by reconceptualising self-directed learning approach that fits the Malaysian culture.

Participant information statement:

This research you have been invited to participate is a part of my PhD study at the University of Edinburgh (UoE) in Scotland. It will be conducted by me under the guidance of my UoE supervisors Dr Pauline Sangster and Dr Jan McArthur.

The study aims:

This study aims to discover how Malaysian Teacher Educators' conceptualise self-directed learning. It is expected that the results from this study will:

   i. help educators in developing necessary pedagogical practices to assist learners' self-directed learning;
   ii. provide a comprehensive framework for developing a better self-directed learning curriculum in Malaysia higher education institutions; and
   iii. offer an insight into the conceptualisation of self-directed learning within Malaysian diverse cultural context.

Participant involvement:

You will be interviewed by me and the interview session should take between 45 minutes to one hour. You have the option to be interviewed either face-to-face or virtually through Skype. The interview sessions will be recorded using two recording devices. The main recording device is the smartphone and the backup is the laptop. Evoca application will be used to record the interviews conducted using Skype. After

the interview session, you have the option either to receive and agree on the transcript or to comment on the accuracy of the transcript.

Confidentiality:

All information collected from the interview will be used for research purposes only and will remain in the strictest confidence. The interview recordings and the transcripts will be locked safely and can only be accessed by me and my supervisors. Your name and personal information will never be mentioned or identified in any report of the research – pseudonym will be used to report the findings.

Your participation:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose to refuse to participate, or to withdraw from the study at any time. Please read the **Informed Consent** form and, if you are happy to help me with my study, sign it and return it to me.

At any time if you concerned or have questions regarding your participation in the study, you may contact me or my supervisors. Our contact details are listed below. If there are matters you wish to bring to the attention of the Ethics Committee, you may contact the Research Support Office, Old Moray House, School of Education.

Yours sincerely,

……………………………………..
Nurfaradilla Mohamad Nasri
Chief Investigator: Nurfaradilla Mohamad Nasri
Email: N.Mohamad-Nasri@sms.ed.ac.uk
Address: 82/6 Pleasance, Edinburgh, EH8 9TJ, Scotland

Supervisor: Dr. Pauline Sangster
Email: paulins@staffmail.ed.ac.uk or Pauline.Sangster@ed.ac.uk
Supervisor: Dr. Jan McArthur
Email: j.mcarthur@lancaster.ac.uk

Appendix 3. Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Research Title: Reconceptualising self-directed learning in a Malaysian context.

I …………………………………………………….(**your name**) am willing to participate in this study.

By signing this form I confirm that:
- The purpose of the study has been explained to me;
- I am satisfied that I understand the procedures involved;
- I understand that, during the course of the activity, I have the right to ask further questions about it;
- I understand that my personal information will not be released to any third parties under any circumstances;
- I understand that my participation in the activity is voluntary and I am therefore free to withdraw my involvement at any stage;
- I understand that once the activity has been completed, the information gained as a result of it will be used for the following purposes only: Thesis writing, publication in academic journals or presenting at conferences;
- I agree that the interview can be audiotaped; and
- If I have any questions, I will be able to contact the investigator, Nurfaradilla

	Please tick			
I would like to receive a copy of the transcript.	Yes		No	
I would like to receive a summary of the findings of the study.	Yes		No	
I am happy for you to contact me again in the future to discuss this research further.	Yes		No	

Signature   _____
Name of participant
Date:
Email:
Address:
Contact phone number:

Signature   _____
Chief Investigator: NurfaradillaMohamadNasri
Date:
Email: N.Mohamad-Nasri@sms.ed.ac.uk
Address: 82/6 Pleasance, Edinburgh, EH8 9TJ, Scotland
Contact phone number: +44 7436841019

Appendix 4. Interview Schedule

Introduction key components:	I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. My name is NURFARADILLA BINTI MOHAMAD NASRI. I am carrying out a research on SDL. This research is a part of my PhD study at the University of Edinburgh (UoE) in Scotland. It will be conducted by me under the guidance of my UoE supervisors Dr. Pauline Sangster and Dr. Jan McArthur.
1. Thank you	
2. Your name	
3. Purpose	
4. Confidentiality	
5. Duration	I am very interested in hearing about your views on learning, particularly on SDL and I hope that what I learn from you is beneficial in reconceptualising the SDL approach in a Malaysian context. On top of that, the result from this study is hoped to provide a framework for developing a better SDL curriculum in higher educational institutions that fits the Malaysian culture.
6. How interview will be conducted	
7. Opportunity for questions	
8. Signature of consent	
	The interview should take less than an hour. I am extremely interested in what you have to say and I don't want to miss anything. So, with your permission, I would like to tape the session in order for me to review them the next time. If there's anything that you don't understand throughout the session, please just let me know and I'll do my best to clarify, or reword the question.
	All responses will be used for research purposes only and will remain in the strictest confidence. The audiotape and transcript will be locked safely and will be kept confidential. This means your interview responses will only be shared with my supervisors. You will remain anonymous throughout the study. Your name and personal information will never be mentioned or identified in any report of the study.
	You may choose not to answer and of the questions. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw at any time. If you are happy to proceed can I please ask you to read and sign the **Informed Consent Form**? I will collect back the form at the end of the session.

Questions	Section A: Demographic information

1. Ask factual before opinion
2. Use probes and prompts as needed
 	
Examples of Elaboration probes
- Would you elaborate on that?
- Could you say some more about that?
- That's helpful. I'd appreciate if you could give me more detail.
- I'm beginning to get the picture, but some more examples might help.
 	
Example of prompts:
- You haven't mentioned X: what do you feel about that?
- Did you think there was anything lacking about the xx?
- So did you think there were any special emphasis?
- I know you've already explained that once, but it would help me really understand if you could go over it one more time.
	Gender:_____
	Education qualification:_____
	Teaching experience:_____
	
	There will be four sections in this interview. .
	
	The first section is about the nature of learning and how students learn.
	
	Section B: Teacher educators' conceptualisations of learning
	In this section, I am very interested in hearing about how you think about learning and about how your students learn.
	  1) From your perspective, what is learning? Where can learning take place?
	  2) How do we know that someone has learned something?
	  3) Do you think we all learn the same way? Do you think that *what* we are trying to learn makes a difference to how we learn?
	  4) What do you think makes for successful learning?
	(List of the internal and external factors in advance in case they struggle)
	  - *Self-motivated*
	  - *Self-disciplined*
	  - *Committed in learning*
	  - *Paying attention in class*
	  - *Academic resilience- do not give up, no matter what faces them.*
	  - *Able to seek help when having trouble*
	  5) In your opinion, how do these factors contribute to successful learning?
	  6) What hinders successful learning?
	(List of the internal and external factors in advance in case they struggle)
	  - *Emotional issues*
	  - *Family/ relationship problems*
	  - *Financial difficulty*
	  - *Lack of confidence*
	  - *Poor health*
	  - *Too many commitments*

	- *Unresolved problems* - *Uncertain about career goals* - *Procrastination* 7) In your opinion, how do these factors impact negatively on learning?? 8) What can teachers do to help their students learn successfully? Can we move on now. 9) Can you tell me about what do you do to try to ensure that your students are learning successfully? 10) How do you know you've been successful in your teaching? What did you do? How do you feel about it? 11) Tell me about your teaching techniques. 12) What do you do if you feel your students are not learning? 13) In your opinion, whose responsibility is it to ensure that learning occurs? Students'? Teachers'? and Why? **Section C: Teacher educators' conceptualisations and understandings of SDL** In this next section the focus is on SDL. From the information that I have given, you can definitely realise how strong my interest in SDL and how we as teacher educators can encourage our students to become more successful self-directed learners. 1) First and foremost, can you tell me what do you understand by the term SDL? (*Based on my readings on SDL, this approach focuses on learning activities driven by the students themselves.*) 2) From your perspective, are there any differences between learning and SDL? If yes, what differs learning from SDL? 3) In your opinion, which one do you think is more important than the other? Please explain why and why not?

Section D: Teacher educators' perceptions of themselves as learners and self-directed learners

In this section, the focus is on your own experiences as a self-directed learner.

1) How would you describe yourself as an educator?

(List of the example in advance in case they struggle)

- *The disciplinarian, humorless, unapproachable*
- *The robot - speak monotonously*
- *Friendly*
- *Lenient*
- *Perfectionist*
- *Committed - motivated teacher*

2) Do you consider yourself as a self-directed learner? Why do you say so?

Example:

That's helpful. I'd appreciate if you could explain more on X.

3) Do you think it is important for teachers to be successful self-directed learners? Why/ why not?

4) What do you see as the benefits of being able to direct our own learning?

Example:

Could you say more about X - Both as a student and a teacher.

5) What were some challenges, if any, that you encountered? How did you overcome the barriers?

(List the potential barriers in advance)

- *Heavy workload*
- *Unsupportive colleagues/ authority*
- *Resistance from students*
- *Financial difficulties*
- *Poor working environment*
- *Lack of resources provided by the institution*
- *Poor time management*
- *Lack of time*

I believe that as teacher educators, you are aware of recent researches in your field and continuously improvised your pedagogical knowledge and skills.

6) How do you describe a typical day of your working day? How do you feel about it?

7) Can you tell me how do you stay up-to-date? Why did you seek those learning opportunities?
8) Why do you find these approaches as most useful?
9) Whose responsibility is to ensure you remain up-to-date? Why?
10) Have you ever felt under pressure to develop your skills in this area and in your field? Why?
11) What is the most challenging way of updating your knowledge? Why? Did you continue? Why?
12) Have you attended any staff development sessions on staff-directed learning? Who offered them? If so, were they helpful? Did they have an impact on your practice? If not, do you think such sessions should be provided?

Section E: The opportunities they provided for their students to foster their skills in SDL.
1) How do you encourage your students to become self-directed in their learning?
2) Did you face any resistance from your students?
3) In your opinion, what prevents students from developing as self-directed learners?

(List the potential barriers in advance)
- *Heavy workload-too many classes and assignments*
- *Over reliance on teachers*
- *Previous schooling experience which focuses on teacher-centered approach*
- *Feeling illiterate to take charge of one's own learning*
- *Misalignment between teaching, learning and assessment*
- *Preference for surface learning, easy way to learn*
- *Not supported by teachers*
- *Unclear definition of self-directed learning activities across subjects*
- *Unsure of what is expected from them*
- *Lack of interest in deep and meaningful learning*

This next set of questions is about the role of assessment in learning, including SDL. For many students, assessment requirements literally define the curriculum and usually they study to excel in examinations. Hence, assessment is a

	potent tool to guide students into successful learning. 1) From your perspective, what is assessment? What is the purpose of assessment? Why do we assess students' learning? 2) In your opinion, what are the characteristics of best assessment strategies? What are the characteristics of poorly designed assessment? 3) What kind of assessment that encourage/ inhibit the development of self- directed learner? Why? 4) What kind of assessment do you like to give? Why? 5) What is your intention when assessing? 6) What do you expect from the assessment? 7) Have you been given any guidelines for/support with designing effective and appropriate assessments? Are you bound by government/university policies? How do you feel about this? 8) If there is anything you want to change, what is it? Next would like to explore your perceptions on the role of feedback in learning and SDL. 9) Do you think that the kind of feedback on assignments, assessments, examinations that we give our students has an impact on their ability to be self-directed learners? Why/why not? 10) How do you provide feedback? Why do you choose to do it like this? 11) Do you think what you do here is effective? Why/why not? 12) Can you think of ways to do this that might prove more useful to students and help them to become more effective/confident self-directed learners? 13) If there is anything you want to change, what is it?
Closing key component • Additional comments • Thank you	Is there anything more you would like to add? Thank you for your time.

Appendix 5. Translated Interview Schedule

Komponen utama bahagian pengenalan	Terima kasih kerana sudi untuk ditemubual. Nama saya NURFARADILLA BINTI MOHAMAD NASRI. Saya sedang menjalankan kajian mengenai SDL bagi pengajian PhD saya di Universiti Edinburgh, Scotland. Kajian ini dilakukan oleh saya dibawah penyeliaan Dr Pauline Sangster dan Dr Jan McArthur.
1. Ucapan terima kasih 2. Memperkenalkan diri 3. Memaklumkan tujuan kajian 4. Memaklumkan isu kerahsiaan 5. Menyatakan tempoh masa temubual 6. Memaklumkan prosedur temubual 7. Memaklumkan peluang untuk bertanyakan soalan 8. Memohon tandatangan individu yang ditemubual	Saya amat berminat untuk mendapatkan pandangan anda mengenai pembelajaran dan juga pendekatan SDL. Adalah menjadi harapan saya maklumat yang anda berikan dapat membantu saya untuk merangka semula pendekatan SDL berdasarkan konteks budaya Malaysia. Selain itu, dapatan kajian ini juga diharapkan dapat memberi informasi dan menjadi panduan kepada pihak pengubal kurikulum terutama di peringkat institusi pengajian tinggi bagi merangka kurikulum berorientasikan SDL yang sesuai dengan budaya Malaysia. Sesi temubual akan mengambil masa lebih kurang sejam. Bagi mengelakkan saya terlepas maklumat yang anda berikan, maka saya ingin mendapatkan keizinan anda untuk merakam sesi temubual ini menggunakan perakam audio. Sekiranya soalan yang saya kemukakan adalah tidak jelas dan kurang difahami, sila maklumkan pada saya agar saya dapat memberikan penjelasan yang lebih lanjut. Maklumat yang dikemukan hanya akan digunakan dalam kajian ini sahaja. Rakaman temubual dan juga transkrip temubual akan disimpan dengan rapid dan dijamin kerahsiaannya. Maklumat temubual anda hanya akan dikongsi dengan penyelia PhD saya sahaja. Nama samaran akan digunakan semasa proses melaporkan dapatan kajian. Nama dan maklumat peribadi anda tidak akan didedahkan kepada sesiapa atau dinyatakan dalam laporan kajian. Anda berhak untuk tidak menjawab mana-mana soalan. Penglibatan anda dalam kajian ini adalah secara sukarela. Anda berhak untuk menarik diri pada bila-bila masa.

	Sekiranya anda berpuas hati dengan penerangan yang diberikan, sila baca dan tandatangan **Informed Consent Form.** Saya akan ambil di akhir sesi temubual.
Soalan 1. Tanya soalan berbentuk fakta sebelum bertanyakan pendapat 2. Menggunakan teknik penyiasatan dan arahan *Contoh teknik penyiasatan atau kaedah mendapatkan penjelasan* - Boleh anda jelaskan dengan lebih lanjut? - Maklumat yang sangat menarik. Boleh anda huraikan dengan lebih terperinci? - Menarik, barulah saya faham, boleh anda berikan contoh? *Contoh kaedah untuk memberi soalan berbentuk arahan:* - Anda belum menghuraikan mngenai X: Apakah perasaan anda mengenainya? - Bagi pendapat anda apakah kekurangan X?	**Bahagian A: Maklumat demografi** Jantina:_____ Taraf pendidikan:_____ Pengalaman mengajar:_____ Sesi temubual ini dibahagikan kepada empat bahagian. Bahagian pertama sesi temubual ini adalah mengenai pembelajaran dan bagaimana pelajar belajar. **Bahagian B: Pandangan pensyarah pendidikan mengenai pembelajaran** Dalam bahagian ini, saya amat berminat untuk mengetahui pandangan anda mengenai pembelajaran dan pendapat anda mengenai cara belajar pelajar anda. 1) Dari perspektif anda, bagaimanakah anda mendefinisikan atau mengkonseptualisasikan pembelajaran? Dimanakah pembelajaran berlaku? 2) Bagaimanakah cara anda untuk mengenalpasti samada individu tersebut telah mempelajari sesuatu? 3) Pada pendapat anda, adakah cara pembelajaran kita sama? Pada pandangan anda, adakah tujuan pembelajaran mempengaruhi kaedah atau strategi pembelajaran kita? 4) Pada pendapat anda, apakah faktor yang menyumbang kepada kejayaan dalam proses pembelajaran? *(Senarai faktor individu dan juga faktor persekitaran yang mempengaruhi kejayaan dalam pembelajaran, sekiranya mereka mengalami masalah untuk memberikan respon)* - *Motivasi dalaman* - *Disiplin diri* - *Komitmen dalam pembelajaran* - *Tumpuan atau konsentrasi dalam kelas* - *Cekal – tidak mudah berputus asa* - *Mampu mengenalpasti sumber pertolongan sekiranya berhadapan dengan masalah*

- Bagi anda, adakah sesuatu kaedah lebih mendapat penekanan?
 	
- Anda ada menyentuh mengenai x, adalah sangat membantu sekiranya anda dapat menjelaskannya sekali lagi.
	5) Pada pendapat anda, adakah faktor-faktor yang anda nyatakan tadi menyumbang ke arah kejayaan dalam proses pembelajaran?
	6) Pada pandangan anda apakah penghalang kepada kejayaan dalam pembelajaran?
	(Senarai faktor individu dan juga faktor persekitaran yang menyumbang kepada kegagalan dalam pembelajaran, sekiranya mereka mengalami masalah untuk memberikan respon)
	  - *Isu emosi*
	  - *Masalah keluarga*
	  - *Masalah kewangan*
	  - *Kurang keyakinan diri*
	  - *Masalah kesihatan*
	  - *Komitmen yang terlalu banyak*
	  - *Pelbagai masalah yang belum selesai*
	  - *Tiada matlamat hidup*
	  - *Suka bertangguh-tangguh*
	7) Pada pendapat anda, bagaimanakah faktor-faktor ini memberi impak negatif terhadap pembelajaran?
	8) Apakah yang boleh dilakukan oleh pendidik bagi membantu pelajar mereka untuk berjaya dalam pembelajaran?
	
	Boleh kita beralih kepada topik lain pula.
	9) Boleh anda kongsikan dengan saya mengenai strategi yang anda gunakan bagi memastikan pelajar anda berjaya dalam proses pembelajaran?
	10) Bagaimanakah anda tahu yang anda telah mengajar dengan baik? Apakah yang anda lakukan? Apakah perasaan anda?
	11) Boleh anda kongsikan teknik pengajaran anda?
	12) Apakah tindakan anda sekiranya anda mengetahui bahawa pelajar anda tidak belajar?
	13) Pada pandangan anda, siapakah yang bertanggungjawab bagi memastikan pembelajaran berlaku? Pelajar? Guru? Dan mengapa?

Bahagian C: Pandangan pensyarah pendidikan mengenai SDL

Fokus bahagian ini adalah mengenai SDL. Berdasarkan maklumat yang saya berikan, anda sudah tentu sedar bahawa saya amat berminat untuk mengkaji SDL serta bagaimana pihak pensyarah dapat membantu pelajar untuk menjadi pelajar yang mahir serta berjaya dalam SDL.

1) Pertama sekali, boleh anda kongsikan dengan saya mengenai pemahaman dan definisi anda mengenai SDL?
   (Berdasaran pembacaan saya mengenai SDL, pendekatan SDL memfokuskan kepada akiviti pembelajaran yang dilakukan oleh pelajar)
2) Dari perspektif anda, adakah pembelajaran berbeza daripada SDL? Sekiranya ya, apakah perbezaan tersebut?
3) Pada pendapat anda, adakah pembelajaran atau SDL lebih penting? Sila jelaskan dengan lebih lanjut.

Bahagian D: Pandangan pensyarah pendidikan tentang diri mereka sebagai pelajar dan juga sebagai pelajar yang mengamalkan SDL

Bahagian ini memfokuskan tentang pengalaman anda sebagai pelajar yang menggunakan pendekatan SDL.

1) Bagimanakah anda menggambarkan diri anda sebagai seorang pendidik?

(Senarai contoh gambaran pendidik sekiranya mereka menghadapi masalah untuk memberi respon)

- *Seorang yang tegas, sukar untuk didampingi*
- *Seorang yang bertutur dengan intonasi yang senada*
- *Peramah*
- *Mudah untuk berunding*
- *Seseorang yang mementingkan kesempurnaan*
- *Seorang yang komited dan bermotivasi*

2) Adakah anda merasakan bahawa anda merupakan individu yang mengamalkan SDL? Sila jelaskan.

Contoh:
Informasi yang anda berikan sangat menarik. Boleh anda jelaskan dengan lebih lanjut mengenai X.

3) Pada pandangan anda, adakah penting bagi seorang pendidik untuk menjadi individu yang mengamalkan SDL? Sila jelaskan dengan lebih lanjut.
4) Pada pandangan anda, apakah kelebihan sekiranya individu tersebut mampu belajar dengan sendiri atau berdikari dalam proses pembelajaran?

Contoh: Example:

Boleh anda huraikan dengan lebih lanjut mengenai X – Sebagai orang pelajar dan juga seorang pendidik.

5) Apakah cabaran yang anda hadapi, sekiranya ada? Bagaimanakah anda mengatasi permasalahan tersebut?

(Senarai cabaran yang mungkin dihadapi)

- *Bebanan tugas*
- *Tidak mendapatk sokongan dari rakan sekerja*
- *Penolakan daripada pelajar*
- *Masalah kewangan*
- *Persekitaran kerja yang kurang kondusif*
- *Kekurangan sumber bantuan dari pihak institusi*
- *Pengurusan masa yang kurang efisien*
- *Kekangan masa*

Saya percaya bahawa sebagai seorang pensyarah, anda sudah tentulah peka dengan perkembangan kajian dalam bidang anda dan sentiasa berusaha untuk memperbaiki pengetahuan dan kemahiran pengajaran anda.

6) Boleh anda kongsikan, secara umumnya apakah tugasan anda dalam sehari? Apakah perasaan anda mengenainya?
7) Bagaimanakah cara anda untuk memastikan anda sentiasa peka dengan perkembangan terkini dalam bidang pendidikan? Kenapa anda memilih untuk terus belajar?
8) Apakah cara anda untuk mendapatkan maklumat terkini dalam bidang anda khususnya, dan bidang pendidikan umumnya? Kenapa anda memilih cara tersebut?
9) Siapakah yang bertanggungjawab untuk memastikan anda mendapat maklumat terkini dalam bidang anda? Kenapa?
10) Adakah anda merasa tertekan untuk sentiasa mencari maklumat terkini dalam bidang anda bagi menambah

baik kemahiran pengajaran anda? Kenapa?

11) Apakah kaedah yang paling sukar untuk mendapatkan informasi? Kenapa? Adakah anda meneruskannya? Kenapa?

12) Adakah anda menghadiri sesi latihan bagi SDL untuk kakitangan akademik? Siapakah penganjurnya? Adakah sesi latihan tersebut membantu anda untuk lebih memahami SDL? Adakah sesi latihan tersebut memberi impak kepada amalan pengajaran anda? Pada pendapat anda, haruskah sesi latihan tersebut disediakan bagi kakitangan akademik?

Bahagian E: Peluang yang disediakan oleh pensyarah pendidikan untuk pelajar bagi mengalakkan perkembangan SDL

1) Bagaimanakah anda mengalakkan pelajar untuk lebih berdikari dalam pembelajaran mereka?

2) Adakah anda menghadapi sebarang tentangan dari pelajar?

3) Pada pendapat anda, apakah faktor yang menghalang pelajar untuk lebih berdikari dalam pembelajaran?

(Senaraikan faktor-faktor penghalang kepada SDL)

- *Tugasan kerja yang terlalu banyak*
- *Terlalu bergantung dengan guru*
- *Pengalaman pembelajaran di sekolah yang berpusatkan guru*
- *Kurang keyakinan untuk menguruskan pembelajaran sendiri*
- *Kecelaruan dalam teknik mengajar, belajar dan juga penilaian*
- *Lebih gemar dengan pendekatan pembelajaran berbentuk hafalan kerana mudah dan cepat*
- *Tidak mendapat sokongan dari guru*
- *Tidak memahami tujuan dan pendekatan SDL*
- *Tidak pasti atau kurang jelas mengenai jangkaan guru terhadap mereka*
- *Tidak berminat untuk berdikari atau mengambil tanggungjawab terhadap pembelajaran sendiri*

| | Bahagian seterusnya akan menyentuh soal peranan penilaian dalam pembelajaran, termasuklah dalam SDL.

Bagi ramai pelajar, peperiksaan merupakan faktor terbesar yang mempengaruhi strategi pembelajaran mereka dan yang paling penting, kebanyakkan pelajar akan berusaha untuk mencapai keputusan yang cemerlang dalam peperiksaan. Oleh itu, penilaian boleh dilihat sebagai salah satu alat pembelajaran yang boleh dimanipulasikan bagi mendorong pelajar untuk berjaya dalam pembelajaran.

1) Daripada perspektif anda, apakah itu penilaian? Apakah tujuan penilaian? Kenapakah kita perlu menilai pembelajaran pelajar?
2) Pada pendapat anda, apakah ciri-ciri penilaian yang baik? Apakah ciri-ciri penilaian yang tidak baik?
3) Apakah jenis penilaian yang mengalakkan/ menghaang perkembangan kemairan SDL? Boleh anda jelaskan?
4) Apakah kaedah penilaian yang anda gunakan? Kenapa?
5) Apakah tujuan anda menilai?
6) Apakah yang anda harapkan dari penilaian?
7) Adakah anda diberikan panduan untuk merangka strategi penilaian? Adakah anda terikat dengan sebarang peraturan atau polisi kerajaan/ universiti untuk diikuti bagi merangka penilaian anda? Apakah perasaan anda?
8) Adakah anda mempunyai hasrat untuk membuat perubahan bagi penambahbaikkan, boleh anda jelaskan?

Seterusnya, saya ingin mendapatkan pandangan anda mengenai persepsi anda mengenai 'feeback' dalam pembelajaran dan juga SDL.

9) Pada pendapat anda, adakah jenis atau pendekatan 'feedback' yang anda berikan kepada pelajar terhadap tugasan kelas mereka dan juga peperiksaan mempengaruhi atau memberi kesan kepada pelajar terutamanya dalam meningkatkan kemahiran SDL mereka? Sila jelaskan.
10) Boleh anda kongsikan kaedah anda memberi 'feedback'? Kenapa anda memilih cara tersebut |

	untuk memberi 'feedback'?
	11) Pada pandangan anda, adakah kaedah yang anda gunakan untuk memberi 'feedback' berkesan? Kenapa? Sila jelaskan.
	12) Boleh anda cadangkan kaedah lain yang lebih berkesan untuk memberi 'feedback' bagi membantu pelajar untuk memperbaiki kmahiran SDL mereka?
	13) Sekiranya ada sebarang perubahan yang anda ingini, apakah perubahan tersebut?

Komponen utama bagi mengakhiri sesi temubual
  - Meminta sebarang komen tambahan
  - Mengucap terima kasih
	Ada apa-apa yang anda ingin tambah?
	
	Terima kasih kerana sudi untuk terlibat dalam kajian ini dan ditemubual oleh saya.

Appendix 6. Label for Research Participants

1.   A: Dr Affandi

2.   B: Dr Jamal

3.   C: Dr Khairiah

4.   D: Dr Rahim

5.   E: Dr Amalina

6.   F: Dr Zaki

7.   G: Dr Azlina

8.   H: Dr Hidayah

9.   I: Dr Nabilah

10.   J: Dr Raihan

11.   K: Dr Siti

12.   L: Dr Salima

13.   M: Dr Rokiah

14.   N: Dr Mazlan

15.   O: Dr Chew

16.   P: Dr Asma

17.   Q: Dr Rosnah

18.   R: Dr Liyana

19.   S: Dr Farahin

20.   T: Dr Asri

Appendix 7. Sample of Interview Transcripts

Name: Dr Affandi
Gender: Male
Ethnic group: Malay
Highest education qualification: PhD
Education background:
Local Malaysian university: First degree and Master degree
Overseas university: PhD
Teaching experience:
School level: < 5 years
University level: 11-16 years lecturer (teacher educator)

1	Int:	Hi Dr Affandi. Very nice to meet you. Thank you for
2		participating in my research. Okay, in the first part of this
3		interview session, I would like to get your perspectives on how do
4		you define learning? Em..What is learning?
5	Aff:	What is learning? Okay..for me learning connotes change and
6		development, change in terms of your knowledge, your skills and
7		your attitude. So when you change, it means that we have
8		developed because normally we learn to become better. So for
9		me, learning is about improving yourselves, it's about changing
10		for the better, it's about developing yourselves to be a better
11		person in terms of knowledge, skills and attitude.
12	Int:	Alright..and in your opinion, where learning can be taken place?
13	Aff:	I think learning can take place at anywhere and at anytime
14		because I'm sure mm...learning scholars may have been talking
15		about formal learning, informal learning, incidental learning,
16		informal learning so that's why I believe learning can take place
17		at any time. It can be taught, but sometimes it also can be learned
18		emm.. through the individual experience. So I think that's when
19		this emm.. concept of self-directed learning comes in.
20	Int:	Okay, I see what you mean…in your opinion, what is the
21		difference between self-directed learning and student-centered
22		learning?

23	Aff:	Okay...emm..if you talk about self-directed learning. The self-
24		directed learning is emm..open to anybody, so the concept is
25		much bigger than student-centered because if you talk about self-
26		directed learning it can take place in the formal and also the non
27		formal context. Meaning to say that even at home, you can be
28		involve in self-directed learning, you learn about something, you
29		know by yourselves. Try an error, so on and so forth. But when
30		you introduce the concept of student-centered learning. Emm..this
31		is where the concept of student comes in. When you are a student,
32		emm..that means you are attached to any learning institution be at
33		school, university, college emm..and of course if you're engaged
34		in training, people interchangeably used the word not student-
35		centered but participant-centered. But actually, when you mention
36		participant or student-centered, it means that you have an
37		educator that you hold on to as compared to self-directed. Self-
38		directed emm.. is a bigger concept. So I think when you want to
39		compare between self-directed and student-centered, self-
40		directed, to me connotes a bigger picture about learning whereas,
41		when you mention about student-centered, you're talking about a
42		learning that is done within a certain learning context, whether it
43		is in a learning institution or in a programme.
44	Int:	I see…but..emm..well, so are there any differences between
45		learning and self-directed learning?
46	Aff:	Learning and self-directed learning. I think self-directed learning
47		comes, if you want to solve like categorize. I would start with
48		learning as the bigger concept and then it trickles down to either it
49		is self-directed or whether it is teacher-centered, instructor-based,
50		so on and so forth. So I think learning is a bigger concept, but
51		then, it can be subdivided into various emm.. subcategories.
52	Int:	Okay..how about the learning style, do you think that we all learn
53		in the same way?

54	Aff:	Emm..if you talk about the multiple intelligences, if you emm talk
55		about 8 ways of knowing, emm.. we have discussed about
56		emm..sometimes we learn through the natural, the logical,
57		through mathematics, the visual through watching videos, images,
58		so if you look at the 8 ways of knowing, actually there are a
59		number of ways on how we learn. And then, if you talk about the
60		learning styles, if you look at Honey and Mumford categorization
61		of activist, theorist, reflectors and also a pragmatist. So, these
62		are... because some people say that you can actually have all the
63		four as your learning styles, but according to Honey and
64		Mumford, at the end of the day you have your inclination towards
65		one learning style. You know, that is predominant in the way that
66		you learn. So if you talk about learning styles just now, I would
67		say, yes, there are quite a number of different learning styles
68		emm..but it should be suitable with certain individual personality
69		or character. But of course, if you look at Honey and Mumford
70		and then relate it to Kolb, David Kolb experiential learning
71		model. So, he was saying that, actually what Honey and Mumford
72		did was an explanation of the whole cycle of learning process.
73		You start by having an experience, this is where you become the
74		activist, you're actively involved in the learning, and then from
75		having the experience, you review the experience, so if you look
76		at Honey and Mumford, they associate this reviewing experience
77		to a reflector and then after you have reviewed the experience,
78		then you conclude that experience. So when you conclude that
79		experience, emm..Honey and Mumford said that..this is the
80		theorist. And then you know..you go to improving...or applying it
81		in for the future usage and then if you look at Honey and
82		Mumford, this is when you become a pragmatist. So, even the
83		learning process, the cycle of learning process, you can become
84		emm..an activist, then into a reflector, then into a theorist, and
85		then into a pragmatist and then the cycle goes on and on because

86		that is what we are doing in our daily life, daily activities. So, I
87		tend to accept both, meaning to say that you can become
88		everything from activist, reflector, theorists and pragmatist but I
89		also agree with Honey and Mumford that at the end of the day,
90		we have certain inclination towards something. For example, you
91		know..maybe you learn more by being an activist, I learn more by
92		being a pragmatist. Some people, they learn more when, they can
93		really experience it and they can straightly capture what they're
94		learning. But some people, they want to learn, they learn most
95		when they can connect what is being introduce to what they can
96		apply after the lesson and what not to the daily activities. So I
97		think learning styles exist and we have to appreciate that, there
98		are varieties.
99	Int:	Wauu…great info. Emm..but, do you think our goal or the
100		objectives of learning will affect on how we approach the
101		learning?
102	Aff:	Emm..Yeaahh...I think that is why I mention to you just now. I
103		believe that at the end of the day we have certain inclinations
104		towards something. Some people can only learn emm..you know
105		by sitting in the library, some people cannot learn individually,
106		they need to have a group discussion, they long for the interaction
107		with colleagues. So I think emm..the best that an educator can do
108		is to make sure that you can vary the approaches so that you can
109		really cater to these various learning styles that the learners have.
110	Int:	Alright..and based on your experience, how do you know that
111		someone has learned something?
112	Aff:	Emm..Okay..first, of course, when you can see the change in
113		terms of that person's knowledge. He or she is able of course to
114		answer your questions, to explain back to you what you have
115		taught him or her before, but then, emm..that is in terms of
116		knowledge. In terms of skills, you can see the skills being
117		developed from not so skillful to more skillful. And of course in

118		terms of the attitude, you see a more positive kind of attitudes
119		towards something, you know, evident in that person. So, emm..I
120		think at the end of the day, change is the indicator that you can
121		use to show that somebody has learned something. There's a
122		change in terms of his or her knowledge, skills and attitude.
123	Int:	Well, what about your teaching technique? I mean..how do you
124		conduct your class?
125	Aff:	Emm..of course, like what I said just now. I prefer to vary my
126		approaches. Undertaking the understanding that there are
127		different learning styles posses by the learners, so you have to
128		make sure that your teaching incorporates various approaches and
129		methods so that you can cater to the 8 ways of knowing,
130		emm..meaning to say that you have some logical approach, you
131		have some visual approach, you have some natural approach, to
132		cater to these different needs and not only the 8 ways of knowing
133		but you also cater to the different learning styles that the learners
134		have. So, for example emm.. like if you have activity that requires
135		them to present, I think this is where the activist, they're very
136		excited to do it because they want to have the here and now kind
137		of learning experience. But when it comes to brainstorming
138		session, the thinking session that requires people to reflect, this is
139		when the reflector learns a lot. So, the best is to come out with
140		variety approaches to cater to these various learning styles and
141		various ways of knowing.
142	Int:	Great.. Emm but some of the lecturers claim that undergraduates,
143		especially from School of Education, they are meant to be
144		teachers, so lecturers are supposed to do lectures rather than
145		giving projects and asking them to do research. So what is your
146		opinion about that?
147	Aff:	Emm..I think, gone other days when the lecture is the only way of
148		imparting knowledge because now look at the previous years.
149		Hurm..Of course we only look at lecturers as lecturing in the

150		lecture hall, but we have not barely discussed what happen after
151		the lecture. This student, when they left the lecture room. I don't
152		know, emm…when I was student, after leaving the lecture rooms,
153		then you are out to do your group discussion, brainstorming,
154		trying to undertake the assignments given so on and so forth. So,
155		now I think the universities and the lecturers and required to sort
156		of like bring that extra activity into the classroom setting. So that
157		is why now we have project based learning, we have problem-
158		based learning, you know… Basically to make it more emm…
159		not to said structured emm..but to make it more evident that this
160		thing has to be planned, meaning that you start with a lecture and
161		then you continue reinforcing the learning by giving certain
162		projects. Because I think people now believe in experiential
163		learning, you learn more when you do something. So, gone other
164		days, where you rely, solely, on the one way interaction, the one
165		way address by the lecturer. Now, that's why we encourage to
166		have interactive lecture, class discussion, case discussion, project-
167		based, to make sure that learning is done in a more holistic
168		manner in that you make use all your senses and eventually
169		understand what you learn from various perspectives.
170	Int:	Okay…thank you for sharing your opinion about that. Okay..now
171		as you conduct various types of learning activities in the
172		classroom, how do you assess this learning?
173	Aff:	Of course, with this era of out-come based education, when you
174		have a variety of learning activities, you must have variety
175		approaches to evaluate the achievement or the performance of the
176		students. So, I think this is where we have moved from very
177		exam-oriented kind of learning ecosystem into an ecosystem that
178		appreciates a combination of examination, project-based,
179		assignment, individual assignment, presentation so on and so
180		forth. So… if you ask me, of course when I say that I have a
181		variety of learning approaches, practice in my classroom, I have

182		to make sure that I have a variety in terms of my evaluation and
183		assessment to make sure that all this eventually will be
184		incorporated and contribute to the overall or total performance
185		mark of the students. Because total freedom is not possible if you
186		are talking about the learning at education institution, so how to
187		work… lecturers must know how to creatively design the learning
188		and teaching activities, not to forget the assessment method
189		within what has been structured by curriculum developer if they
190		wish to promote self-directed learning.
191	Int:	I see…hurm good point..emm..but are you free to design your
192		own assessment strategies because curriculum developers tend to
193		provide details about them.
194	Aff:	That is why in the context of our university, we want to have the
195		best of both worlds. We want to have, if you talk about
196		evaluation, we have formative evaluation and summative
197		evaluation. Before this, we are relying too much on summative
198		evaluation the so called final examination. So, last time we had
199		assignment but the bigger portion normally be in the examination.
200		Emm..but then we have moved, eventually we have moved to an
201		understanding that the performance of the students can be
202		evaluated not only through summative evaluation but also
203		formative evaluation, the on-going evaluation. So, at the
204		university, it is stated that you have to have not more than 40% of
205		summative evaluation, that is a final exam and the rest 60% is up
206		to the lecturer, how to do your formative evaluation. This is
207		where you can creatively put how many assignments you want,
208		projects, individual reflections, so on and so forth to make sure
209		that the students can experience variety ways of undertaking the
210		course. So, I think the more you have is the better, you have them
211		to do it individually, you have them to do it in a group and you
212		have them sit for the final exam. So a combination of all this will,
213		sort of like, I think, provide the students with a more

214		comprehensive way of learning and undertaking the course. The
215		balance between traditional and contemporary mode of
216		assessment is important to harmonize the conventional way of
217		learning with the self-directed learning.
218	Int:	So there is a bit of freedom for lecturer…hurm.. well..and, some
219		of the lecturers report that their students, especially their masters
220		and PhD students, they are not able to direct their own learning
221		because they are not IT savvy compared to undergraduate
222		students . Have you experienced this situation?
223	Aff:	I tend to disagree a bit because I believe IT savvy is not age-
224		related, they are also some so-called mature students or senior
225		citizen who is very much IT savvy but of course majority if you
226		talk about the younger one, they are the nettizen, they cannot live
227		without ICT, so of course they are the one who really benefit
228		more from this advance in technology. But I think the
229		postgraduate students, emm..the masters and PhD students is
230		catching up. I think it depends on whether you are ready to open
231		up yourself to all this technology. So I think better for us not to
232		use the age thing, but to use the categories of innovators.
233		Okay..There are innovators, there are some early majority, there
234		are some late majority and there is some laggard. So, the one that
235		you mention just now I think, emm.. I would say, this are the
236		laggard, who still want to cling themselves to the traditional way
237		of learning, they don't want to take opportunity of all
238		technological advance. But I would say that there are some
239		mature students who are catching up with the younger students,
240		younger generation and making full use of technology to assist
241		their learning. So I think it depends on your attitude, it depends
242		on your...whether you open yourselves to technology to assist
243		your learning. In terms of self-directed learning.. to me… some
244		students, they prefer working on their own, but some like to be
245		given instruction while others may be want some guideline with

246		a little freedom. The reason for this variation… I think… is due to
247		the mastery of self-directed learning skills. Some are good self-
248		directed learner, some is starting to develop their skills, some may
249		be in the process of upgrading their skills. So.. you see… it is not
250		an absolute category. Having said this… I am not saying that
251		students with better self-directed learning skills would be
252		directing their learning. Again, I think it depends on their attitude.
253		If they are good at self-directed learning, but they do not want to
254		be directing their learning, so what can we do?. Self-directed
255		learning to me is more like learning that is carried out by the
256		learner following his own designed learning path. You know… I
257		now plan to learn more about Islam, so my plan are…I read more
258		books, I go to mosque frequently to listen to Islamic talk and I
259		befriend with a more Islamic type of friend…By planning and
260		doing all the learning myself, I can see that I am more satisfied as
261		I set the goal myself, I am the one that will evaluate my learning
262		so I can adjust my learning to take into account my other life
263		commitment. In that sense, I am very satisfied.
264	Int:	I see…can you share with me your opinion..emm..Do you think
265		that feedback from the lecturers help to improve students
266		learning?
267	Aff:	Of course. Feedback. Either teacher feedback or peer feedback is
268		very important to sort of like help the students, the learner, to
269		evaluate whether they are on track or not. And then, in fact, this
270		feedback can further enhance their understanding of what they are
271		learning. So, be it through the traditional instruction or online.
272		Emm…I read some articles, which stated that feedback is very
273		important but again, it depends on the ability of the learners to
274		make sure that they are getting the right feedback. You know…
275		feedback can also work negatively, you know because you have
276		to make sure that you are getting the right feedback from the right
277		person, who has the authority, who are knowledgeable in that

278		particular subject. So, the learner has to make sure that they are
279		getting the right feedback, to stay on track.
280	Int:	Alright…How do you provide feedback? Is it verbally or ...(in my
281		class?), yes.
282	Aff:	So, of course, in my class, verbally in class, the here and now, in
283		terms of the here and now context, but besides that you do your
284		writing feedback, gives comments to students, you write emails to
285		them, and then in terms of let say, you are in a real time
286		conversation, you can also give feedback, Facebook, Whatsapp.
287		So, I think, now with technology, you have so many ways of
288		providing feedback to the learners.
289	Int:	And the last question is I've read the report by the world bank,
290		and they said that even though the Malaysian government spend
291		double on education, but the standard is not up compared to
292		Vietnam and they said that it is because the quality of the teacher
293		as those that come into education, that is their last choice and
294		academically they are not good enough, so what is your opinion
295		about this?
296	Aff:	I think, emm..I don't know from where this United Nation got
297		their source. Well..I think this is very dangerous for us to blankly
298		accept comments made by them because I have this experience.
299		Hurm..when I was in the UK, it is undeniable that Asians,
300		including Malaysians are very good and excellent and of course
301		partly thanks to the exam-oriented system. We tend to be
302		successful in tangible subjects, mathematics, accounting,
303		business, economics. But of course.. we slack a bit in the soft
304		subject, the social subject whereby you have to use your creativity
305		you have to, you know like performing arts, literature because
306		here, we are very much into content based. So I back to differ, I
307		tend to disagree with that statement because I think to a certain
308		extent Malaysian students are much much better than the
309		Vietnamese. But of course.. if you look at the whole population,

310   we cannot deny that, of course the bigger portion needs to be

311   helped. I think it is not because of ours, it is not because of the

312   teachers, I think it is because of the system that need to be

313   improved. And I agree that the government has realized this and

314   we have moved from a very exam oriented system into a more

315   school based assessment or the formative evaluation, you know,

316   the process evaluation, to make sure that the way we assess

317   students is done correctly. So I think if you at the education

318   system we don't have only one strain, or one path for the

319   Malaysian student to excel. Now we are also bringing in the

320   alternative education emm.. vocational education. I think

321   basically to appreciate their different learning styles, different

322   strength that our students have. Those who are more inclined

323   towards the hands on, they will go to the alternative education,

324   skill education. Whereas those who are very much into academic,

325   the serious thinking kind of subjects, they can continue with the

326   mainstream that we are having now. But to a certain extent, I

327   would say that, I agree that before this, there was acquisition that

328   the quality of teachers that we are having now are not up to the

329   standard as compared to the olden days because last time

330   becoming a teacher is Nobel profession, and then becoming a

331   teacher means that you are an educated person. So, last time..you

332   know.. you have to look at the development of our country. Last

333   time we were very much into the agriculture kind of system

334   whereby not many people are educated. So those who are

335   educated will go into a professional profession, doctor, lawyer,

336   architect and of course teacher as well. And of course, as we

337   develop there are more job opportunity for Malaysians. So that is

338   why people have more options so, it comes back to perks and

339   recognition. So I think, this is where we feel, actually like some

340   other countries a teaching profession is put very highly, so you

341   are paid as equivalent to a professional because being a teacher

342		means being a professional. But we were in certain period where
343		teaching professions were seen as the last choice by some because
344		they see teaching as associated with challenges in terms of
345		controlling students, getting low pay, not much recognition by the
346		society. So I think in the 90s, people start looking back at on how
347		to uplift the image of the teaching profession. So that is why now
348		you can see that it is very difficult for students to go into teaching
349		professions. They've come up with ways to only accept the good
350		ones into the teacher training institutions. So, I think,
351		emm..hopefully, eventually we are going to improve that because
352		at the end of the day, if we talk about building a nation, you have
353		to make sure that our kids are taught by able teachers. Teachers
354		who are really passionate about the job, teachers who are really
355		serious with what they are doing. They are not only teaching but
356		they are educating our kids. So I think, emm…I agree that the
357		teaching professions who are entrusted with this learning and
358		teaching business should be recruiting only the able ones. We
359		have to sort of like be very selective because this is about
360		developing the future generation, then the future generation are
361		the one who will make sure that the country will be in good hands
362		and will prosper. Because if not, without education, the nation
363		will collapse. Education is a strong medium that a country needs,
364		to make sure that you can maintain the stability in terms of the
365		well being of the people, politically, economically, socially so on
366		and so forth.
367	Int:	Thank you very much Dr Affandi, your response are very helpful.
368		Before we stop, is there anything else you want to add?
369	Aff:	Okay. One thing that I like to highlight is, if you talk about
370		learning and teaching, emm..nowadays, our fascination with all
371		this distance learning, self-directed learning, mobile learning, I
372		always believe that it cannot sideline our traditional teaching in
373		terms of having an educator and a learner. A good system should

374   have the best of both worlds, you have technology, you have your
375   self-directed learning, but you also need to have an educator or a
376   teacher to teach you principle, philosophy of learning from
377   teachers, you must make sure "ta'lim", in Islam we use "ta'lim",
378   because just like learning religion, you can read from the book,
379   but then sometime when we self-directedly try to understand
380   religion this is when sometime we get distracted, we tend to
381   digress from the true teaching and this is when you need a 'guru'
382   or educator to come and guide you. Okay..So I think it should be
383   a balance in terms of championing students' self-directed and at
384   the same time having educator, not to control totally but to
385   facilitate and empower the learners. So there should be a 'guru'
386   and a learner at one time, but how you do it, it depends and you
387   can use the creativity, but you cannot do without the other one. So
388   meaning that we cannot be very teacher-centred or we cannot be..
389   is not or we cannot be very student-centred, we have to have both,
390   balanced. So that you can eventually have a comprehensive and a
391   more holistic learning and teaching process. I think this would be
392   one of the ways to implement self-directed learning in Malaysia
393   because I believe for successful changes, gradual changes are
394   important, not drastic changes.
395 Int: Okay, I think that's all…Thank you very much.