

3.2 Types of self-access facilities

3.2.1 Adult learners

In this section we review two typologies that are already used to describe self-access systems. This first is taken from the Australian context and the second comes from self-access centres in France and South-East Asia.

In the Adult Migrant Education Program (AMEP 1990), six models of Individual Learning Centres (ILCs) are described. These six models differ in the degree to which they offer learner autonomy, Model 1 being the least autonomous, and Model 6 being the most. To determine where a centre lies along the continuum of lesser or greater autonomy, a series of questions was devised. These questions are as follows:

1. Is the classroom teacher available to help clients?
2. Are the students enrolled in the class?
3. Are the classroom students required to attend during class time?
4. Is the ILC teacher expected to provide intensive one-to-one tuition in language learning?
5. Is the range of learning opportunities/materials narrowly focused?
6. Are induction sessions for new clients considered essential?
7. Is there provision for small group activities?
8. Is it essential for the ILC teacher to be available to help students select materials?
9. Is an ILC teacher expected to monitor the progress of clients?
10. Is an ILC teacher available to help students manage their own learning?
11. Is it essential that the materials are designed for self-instruction?
12. Can the student attend the ILC at any time during opening hours?
13. Does the student require access to a catalogue or a guide to using the ILC?
14. Is the student expected to select/choose the materials from the collection?
15. Does an ESL teacher provide intensive one-to-one tuition in learning strategies?
16. Is the client expected to make a regular appointment with a self-directed learning counsellor?
17. Are clients able to borrow materials?

(AMEP 1990: 20)

In each of the six models described in the report, the ILCs are dedicated facilities for self-access language learning. They are separate rooms with their own furniture, equipment and specially prepared materials. The following brief descriptions are of ILCs found in Australia.

Model 1: Study centre
 Example: Macquarie University, NSW. NCELTR – Individual Learning Centre.

In this type of ILC the main purpose is to complement classroom teaching. The materials are narrowly focused and if learners have any problems in their classroom-based work they can go and work independently in the ILC on that aspect which is causing them difficulty. A teacher is always on hand to help individual learners choose the most appropriate materials. The time learners spend in the ILC is timetable for a certain number of hours each week.

Model 2: Withdrawal centre

Example: Fremantle, WA – Self-Access Centre.

This type of ILC is described as a 'withdrawal centre', that is, learners can be withdrawn from their regular language classes to attend the centre and study there under the direction of an ILC teacher. Its main function is for remedial teaching. Here again the material is narrowly focused and is aimed at the most common problems learners at particular levels face when learning a language. This type of centre provides intensive one-to-one tuition which is deemed essential for learners to progress any further with their language learning.

Model 3: Programmed learning centre

Example: Belmore, NSW – Individual Study Centre.

A programmed learning centre is basically a 'writing centre'. It does not complement any specific classroom-based language course but is established to provide a means for learners to improve their writing skills in their own time. The centre offers a series of pathways from which learners can choose how to develop their writing skills. The materials have been pre-selected and designed in such a way that only a certain number of options are available. The learners work mostly on their own but may consult a teacher if necessary.

Model 4: Drop-in centre

Example: Adelaide, Renaissance House – The Link.

This type of ILC offers a wide range of materials for learners to choose from. After the initial induction into the centre and the organisation of the materials, the learners choose which areas of language development they wish to work on. The learners may attend the ILC at times convenient to themselves. An ILC teacher is available to help learners develop and understand their own learning styles.

Model 5: Self-directed learning centre

Example: RMIT Melbourne. Centre for English Language Learning – Self-Access Centre.

The focus of this type of ILC is on helping learners develop skills in becoming more independent in their language learning. The learners may attend the centre at times convenient to themselves. Following an induction session about the centre, the learners meet with an ILC counsellor to work out appropriate strategies that will enable them to further their language learning on their own while working with the materials in the centre.

Model 6: Learning resource centre

Example: Hobart. Adult Migrant Education Centre – Library.

The primary role of the learning resource centre is to provide learners with as wide a range of materials as possible to assist them develop their language ability within or outside the ILC. The learners are fully autonomous in that they know their preferred learning strategies and how to get resources to aid in their language learning. The centre is staffed by a librarian whose job it is to help learners locate resources, and when necessary to lend them out.

The second typology we report on is taken from Miller and Rogerson-Revell (1993). They describe self-access systems according to the following four categories:

Menu-driven

Example: Nancy, France. University of Nancy – CRAPPEL (Centre de Recherches et d'Application Pédagogiques en Langues).

In this situation the learners need to be sophisticated language learners who can plan and implement their own language learning. In such a system the learner accesses materials by way of a catalogue which they have to be trained to use. They must know their preferred learning strategies and the most appropriate materials which will help them develop their language skills further.

Supermarket

Example: Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur. The Specialist Teacher's Training Institute – Self-Access Centre.

Here the self-access system offers a wide range of materials clearly labelled and accessible to the users. The emphasis is on allowing learners to browse through the materials to see what they want to do. It is similar to AMEP's Model 4 above.

Controlled-access

Example: Thailand, Bangkok. Chulalongkorn University Language Institute – Self-Access Centre.

A controlled access system lies closer to the AMEP's Model 1 than any of the others. However, the focus here is very much on homework-based activities. The materials are all carefully selected by the teacher to complement the learners classroom-based work and it is mandatory for learners to attend sessions in a controlled-access centre.

Open-access

Example: Hong Kong. The British Council – Library.

An open-access system has features in common with the AMEP's Model 6 above. The learners must be sophisticated in their language learning in order to determine what they want to do and then locate the most appropriate materials. This type of system is usually part of a main library with no specialist teacher on duty to help the learners with their language learning decision-making, but a librarian is available to assist in locating materials.

3.2.2 Adolescent learners

Tibbets (1994) implemented a self-access reading programme for her sixth-form students in a secondary school in Hong Kong (King's College). Her reasons for doing this were to give a specific group of students extra practice in preparing for the Advanced Supplementary Examination. Her materials were therefore tailor-made. Because of the lack of space in the school the materials were incorporated into the existing library and students were time-tabled to spend some of their English lessons there. Tibbets' self-access facility resembles a Study-Centre or a Controlled-Access Centre.

Forrester (1994) describes the self-access component of an intensive language-bridging program offered by the British Council to ESL secondary school students preparing for entrance to an English-medium university. Self-access was allocated one sixth of course time. The aim was not to replicate the learning that had already taken place in secondary school classrooms (e.g. grammar and vocabulary development) but instead to focus on the macro skills required for tertiary level study (e.g. extensive listening and reading authentic texts). The self-access system was designed to be temporary so that it could be set-up quickly each summer to meet the specific needs of this group of adolescent learners. This self-access facility is similar to a Study Centre or a Controlled-Access Centre.