Introduction

Over the past several years in Taiwan, the field of English as a foreign language has grown dramatically at all levels of education: primary and secondary schools, universities and colleges, and in private kindergartens and cram schools for all levels of students. Along with the escalating demand for increased proficiency in English have come new ways to achieve it. One growing trend in foreign language learning has to do with greater emphasis on autonomous learning through self-access. Educators and learners recognize the limitations of classroom contact time and the need for more effective ways to help students learn. One solution to these problems is to empower students by giving them choices and allowing them to make more decisions about what and how they will study. In the language learning literature, learnersø capacity to take charge of their own learning is usually referred to as autonomy (Benson, 2001). Researchers in second language acquisition and teachers of foreign languages believe that by interacting with a large collection of learning materials students will have the best chance to develop the capacity to direct their own learning (Benson, 2001). This notion has motivated the establishment of local self-access language learning centers, especially at universities, to provide such learning opportunities. The goal of these centers is to enhance learnersø language ability and at the same time foster studentsø interest in and commitment to independent learning.

To achieve the goal of promoting learner independence, major universities in Taiwan have begun to explore whether autonomous learning, often viewed as a Western concept, is culturally feasible and desirable for Taiwanese students. Within the past few years, at least a dozen local tertiary-level institutions have actively involved themselves in such an undertaking. They have secured funding to set up dedicated language centers with self-access opportunities. At the same time they have begun to take advantage of web-based resources that are already in place to enrich the offerings of their centers. For example, National Chiao Tung University, Soochow University, and National Kaohsiung First University of Science and Technology (NKFUST hereafter) set up the first self-access language

learning centers on the island with resources available onsite and websites to advertise their services and provide links to extensive online resources.　Some smaller schools, with limited funding, have also been able to experiment with self-access by converting traditional language laboratories or sections of libraries into learning sites with independent learning opportunities

Autonomy and Self-Access

Previous studies on autonomy show that learners who initiate learning by themselves usually learn better than those who passively wait for the teacher's instruction.　A recent study conducted by Shu (2004) in southern Taiwan investigated the relationship between learner autonomy and English achievement with a group of 260 senior high school students and found a significant correlation. That is to say, autonomous learners appear to be more successful in language learning than those who demonstrate a lower degree of independence.　In addition to better achievement in school, M. S. Knowles claims that autonomous learners are found to engage in learning with clearer purposes and greater motivation, which are prerequisites to success (cited in Dickinson, 1995, p. 165).　As autonomy is such a desirable attribute of successful learners, how to foster it has become a key issue in education.　Scharle and Szabo (2000) suggest that to nurture learner autonomy we need to devise ways that encourage students to evaluate and make decisions about their own learning situations, needs, and goals and to accept responsibility for their own progress.

Though fostering a sense of personal responsibility may not be an easy task, the prospect of learners achieving greater success in their learning through autonomy has attracted much attention from educators.　Language program providers throughout the world have been eager to experiment with various types of learning to promote learner independence.　Among those attempts, providing self-directed learning through self-access centers is a prominent approach favored by advocates of autonomy (Benson, 2001, p. 8).　For example, the University of

Cambridge set up their Language Centre as an academic service in 1990. It supports the university's language courses, research and development, as well as self-access opportunities. One division, the John Trim Centre, caters to independent learning by providing learners with excellent resources for exercising choice over learning tasks and materials to meet their personal goals. Learners can select instructional materials, set personal goals, record their progress, and assess their learning outcomes. Further, the centre offers a wide selection of computer-assisted language learning software, multimedia lessons, and video and audio resources for over 150 languages for the needs of L2 learners from beginning to advanced levels (see References for website). Other centers such as the Language Resource Centre at Hong Kong University and the Language Learning Centre at Victoria University of Wellington (see References for websites), to name just two additional examples, also offer learning opportunities through self-access to develop autonomy over the long term.

The Multimedia English Learning Center at NKFUST

Self-access language learning centers have been growing rapidly in the past two decades and this development has reached Asia recently, including Hong Kong, Japan and Taiwan. Though some scholars consider autonomy as having little relevance to the learning contexts in Asia, the demands of an ever-changing world will require learners of all cultures to learn more independently with little or no teacher supervision (Littlewood, 1999). To experiment with the idea of learner independence through self-access, National Kaohsiung First University of Science and Technology was fortunate to receive grants from the Ministry of Education and the University in 2003 to set up the Multimedia English Learning Center (MELC). The mandate of the MELC is to provide self-directed learning opportunities for all students regardless of their majors. In November, 2003, we held a national conference at NKFUST to officially announce the debut of the Center. More than 100 school representatives from all over the island attended the conference, toured the Center, and took part in discussions about planning, implementation, and pedagogical issues. During the conference, participants raised a number of

questions relevant to their schools setting up similar learning centers in the future. Some of the questions raised related to the pedagogical rationale underlying self-access; others concerned the difficulties involved in motivating students to try self-directed learning.　As the MELC has now been operating for over two years, we have experienced many of the diverse problems that might face any self-access program provider.　In this paper we will address four major issues most frequently raised by teachers and administrators.　Firstly, we discuss the circumstances leading to the setting up of the MELC.　Secondly, we will provide a brief description of the self-access program currently in operation at NKFUST.　Third, we state the pedagogical assumptions underlying the design of such a center. Finally, we review some factors that might make autonomous learning difficult to achieve in our current educational setting and ways to resolve these problems.

General Education Context for the MELC

The birth of the Multimedia English Learning Center at NKFUST was by no means a spontaneous event.　Its establishment was an outgrowth of the development of our General English (GE) Program.　As a university of science and technology with three colleges, engineering, business, and foreign languages, our mission is to prepare students for their next step in life: finding suitable employment and facing fierce competition in the national and global marketplace. English, as the most widely used world language, has become an almost indispensable skill for anyone who intends to work in business or industry. Therefore, the University, from the beginning, organized the GE Program with a goal of providing effective English courses to all students regardless of their majors. Inasmuch as the University accentuates the linkage between academics and industry, the GE Program aims to teach practical language and communication skills to all students.　We also work to nurture our students in a learning environment in which they will build their confidence in learning English.　Our goal is to train our students to use English effectively as a tool to carry out a wide range of tasks as they enter the workplace.

To achieve this goal, we have worked systematically to expose our students to sound teaching methods and four-level individualized learning materials that match their diverse linguistic abilities and personal needs (陳英輝、李美玲，1999).　We envisage that our students will improve most effectively if they can proceed at their own pace with level-appropriate materials carefully selected by teachers.　With the establishment of the MELC, we also had the means to ensure that self-access would be a significant component of the GE curriculum.　The emphasis on self-access is a natural outgrowth of the desire to offer opportunities for learners to spread their learners' wings and take responsibility for their own learning outside of class.　Cotterall (1996), studying the English Language Institute at Victoria University of Wellington, suggests the first important issue in successful self-access is to persuade learners to try and test independent learning.　Secondly, it may be necessary to change some students' attitudes toward such an approach to learning.　Finally, it is important to build up students' confidence in working on their own without a teacher's help.　To encourage learners to try self-access and further develop our GE curriculum, we set up and equipped the MELC with various learning resources and modern technologies to provide such opportunities.　Before turning to the pedagogical assumptions underlying the design of the MELC, we will introduce briefly the facilities of the Center, the self-access program currently in operation, and the self-directed learning resources.

Facilities of the Multimedia English Learning Center

Learning through interaction with technology and ready access to the vast resources of the Internet are the common experience of all university students in Taiwan, and language learning is an important part of this.　However, purpose-specific language learning facilities equipped with the latest computer technology that go beyond the traditional language laboratory or even computer lab are still relatively new on the island.　NKFUST's Multimedia English Learning Center is housed on the second floor of a circular-shaped building attached to the Foreign Languages College building.　It was designed and constructed for this specific purpose.　The Center is equipped with 60 multimedia stations, two

service desks, two counseling rooms, and a waiting and discussion area with comfortable couches and tables.　Additional facilities include personal computers with flat-screen monitors, headphones, a dedicated server, high-speed hub, and KOD (Knowledge on Demand).　The multimedia stations are arranged in two concentric circles following the lines of the building.

The Self-Access Program

As mentioned, the MELC is responsible for providing the self-access program for students to practice self-directed learning.　To encourage greater participation and involvement from teachers and students, we have integrated the self-access learning component into our current General English curriculum.　At NKFUST, all students are required to take General English courses and are placed into four ability groups from Level 1, the lowest, to Level 4, the highest, based on scores students obtain on the English Placement Test developed by the University of Michigan (Corrigan *et al.*, 1978).　According to the current policy, students at all four levels are required to take two hours of GE per week in the classroom. Students of Levels 1 and 2, the lower-level students, must also take an extra 18 hours of self-access learning in the MELC (i.e. one hour per week), while students of Levels 3 and 4, with better speaking and listening abilities, are strongly encouraged to participate but not required.　In addition to the self-access courses, the MELC makes English counseling services available to all students on common learning problems such as pronunciation, vocabulary, speaking, listening, and cross-cultural communication.　As far as grading is concerned, for students of Levels 1 and 2, 80% of their GE class final grades is based on classroom performance including tests and 20% on participation in self-access learning in the MELC.

Self-Directed Learning Resources

The MELC currently provides six major learning resources that can be accessed in the Center or are available online from remote locations.　Each of

these is designed to meet individual learnersø needs to manage and support their learning outside the classroom.   The Chinese designations for these features appear on the Centerøs website and are included here for the convenience of the reader (The Multimedia English Learning Center, National Kaohsiung First University of Science and Technology, 2005; see References for website).

The featured options include the

◆ Multimedia Online Learning Passport   （ 預約系統 ）

◆ Online Catalog of Graded Learning Materials   （ 課外教材 ）

◆ Individualized Multimedia Learning Software   (available only at the Center)

◆ Localized Custom-made Multimedia Dialogs   （ 英語教材 ）

◆ Recommended Websites for English Learning   （ 學習網站 ）

◆ Three-Minute English Radio Broadcasts （ 打狗英語通 ）

After a brief description of the self-access program and the learning resources (see Lee, Good, & Chen, 2004 for more detail), in the following section we will discuss why the University set up such a multimedia learning center and the potential impact of this Center on studentsøEnglish learning beyond the classroom.

Pedagogical Assumptions Underlying Self-Access

As stated above, equipped with modern and convenient high-tech facilities, the Center provides easy access to supplementary English-learning materials on site as well as via the Internet from remote locations.   It also offers various means for students to either complete GE course requirements or improve language skills on their own.   We expect that students taking part in the self-access program will have further opportunities to train their speaking and listening skills beyond what is obtainable in the traditional classroom; and most importantly, students will gradually develop confidence in making important decisions about their own learning.   Therefore, the pedagogical goals underpinning such a self-access center are essentially threefold:

1. Provide specific support for General Education English classes

Before self-access was incorporated into the curriculum, all of the formal English teaching and learning activities took place in the classroom. To make self-directed learning an official component, the GE curriculum board revised the syllabus and designated a portion of class time, presently one hour per week, for students to spend time in the MELC for independent learning. As a result, with the inauguration of the MELC in 2003, the Center became responsible for providing independent learning materials and activities for students in the university. Though technology-based self-access language learning can play a vital role in studentsøacademic life, we do not anticipate that it ever will, or ever could, replace our teachers. Teacher-student contact with its live interaction is indispensable, and so all students take two hours of English instruction a week in the classroom.

2. Compensate for limited time to train listening and speaking in large-sized classes

Ideally, because of the need for teacher-student and student-student interaction, language courses are most effectively taught in small classes. However, because of cost-effectiveness, most GE classes may consist of as many as 50 to 55 students. With so many students in a class, the opportunity for learners to practice speaking and listening skills individually is meager. The Center thus incorporates multimedia lessons into the General English curriculum through interaction between individual students and the computer. We recognize that this is not a completely satisfactory solution; nevertheless, modern CALL materials do offer better opportunities than ever before for learners to engage in various training tasks that simulate real-life situations. For instance, learners can role-play an interesting dialogue as many times as they wish and receive useful feedback from the computer. With proper guidance in using multimedia software, the computer can compensate, at least in part, for the limited training opportunities typically available in most large-sized classes. At the same time, the students are free to select the materials they think will be most beneficial to them.

3. Foster autonomy and cultivate in the students the habit of and a positive attitude toward regular self-directed learning

Language teachers may dream of the miraculous day when all of their students will suddenly become motivated to work their hardest to improve their inadequate English skills for real communication and do this on their own. What we see, in fact, however, is a large number of students who have not developed the habit of self-actuated learning outside the classroom. Hung (2003) studied Taiwanese EFL studentsø pleasure reading habits. She found that the university-level non-English-majors she studied (that is, engineering and business students) spent less than one hour a month reading English materials that were not part of their assigned school work. Her finding, though limited to the area of reading, suggests that students seldom initiate self-learning for enrichment outside their English classes. Such additional contact with the language is essential to eventually mastering it. Clearly, this small amount of time spent on voluntary reading by students is woefully inadequate if proficient reading ability is the goal. To account for this finding, we should consider such inhibiting factors as studentsø over-reliance on class instruction and teacher-directed learningô a practice inculcated through twelve years of primary and secondary education and beyond. Other obvious contributing factors are the heavy course loads and demands of homework in their majors that might prevent students from being actively involved in self-activated language-learning tasks.

In order to help students cultivate independent learning habits and attitudes, schools and curriculum designers need to create a favorable environment for students to practice becoming autonomous learners. With persistent effort on their part, learners can gradually develop a sense of responsibility leading to a sense of achievement deriving from their growing capacity to take charge of their learning and to benefit from it.

Challenges in Implementing Self-Access

As described above, we set up the MELC based on our pedagogical goals and a well-grounded commitment to autonomy. However, our good intentions and planning cannot guarantee our students will automatically develop independence and a sense of responsibility just because opportunities for self-access are made available to them. Over the past few years, through our experimentation with self-directed learning, we have been gaining a deeper understanding of the challenges involved in fostering autonomy. Specifically, promoting personal control over learning involves much more than equipping a lab with modern technology and online resources. Benson (2001) found there is no evidence showing that there is a direct relationship between the amount of funding of a self-access center and its success in developing autonomy. The key to success, we believe, lies chiefly in the attitudes of learners and their teachers toward independent learning.

The key objective of autonomy pertains to the development of learnersø capacity and willingness to take charge of their own learning. Achieving this goal demands support from both teachers and students. In other words, to foster autonomy through self-access, teachers should learn to refrain from seeking to direct every aspect of their studentsø learning. Traditionally, Chinese teachers are used to playing the role of authority figure and dispenser of knowledge in the learning process and they may not be aware of such ingrained behaviors, which, if exercised to the extreme, may rob students of the ability and motivation to direct any part of their learning. Cortazzi and Jin (1997) carried out a long-term study investigating aspects of Chinese culture that might influence teaching and learning. Their research is based on a wide rage of data, including interviews, questionnaires, classroom observations, video recordings, and student essays. Cortazzi and Jin found that Confucian traditions are still exerting a great influence on education in contemporary China. They found that in general, Chinese students regard their teachers as authorities and experts. They expect teachers to have a comprehensive understanding of the subjects they are teaching. They also see themselves as

dependent on the teacher for knowledge, care, and concern. The analogy of a parent-child relationship can be applied to the interaction between teacher and student. In their research, they also discovered that Chinese students approach learning in a collective manner and that the social goal in the classroom is to achieve group harmony as best as they can and not to disagree with peers, and certainly not to express opinions contrary to those of a respected teacher. This probably helps explain why many Western teachers view Chinese students as passive since they see most students quietly listening to the lectures without expressing their own thoughts on the subject being taught. Western teachers might not understand or appreciate Chinese studentsø effort to maintain a harmonious social atmosphere in the classroom that lacks the dynamism often found in Western classes.

In considering the traditional teacher-student relationship, it might be fair to say that many, if not most, Chinese learners consider such authoritative training as beneficial and nurturing rather than as an encroachment on their personal freedom, and that competent, experienced, sensitive teachers can guide their students to great educational success. Some students we have talked to believe so strongly in the notion of the teacher being exclusively responsible for all learning in a classroom that they expect teachers to answer all questions, provide detailed guidance, and tell them what to do in every instance. The idea that they could learn in spite of a õbadö teacher is inconceivable to them. Such total reliance on teachers can limit studentsøchances for growth and achievement especially where individual learning styles may conflict with the teacher's best intentions or when students leave the protective environment of the school and go out into the world where there may be no mentor to guide and nurture them. Therefore, to start developing independence, learners should stop relying exclusively on the teacher to tell them everything they should know and to make every decision for them. They can learn to do this by taking responsibility for planning and evaluating at least some of their own learning. In a word, students should be encouraged to test their own potential to manage the learning process while working in the self-access center.

Unless students actively cultivate such habits and attitudes, they may simply view self-access tasks as a mere extension of classroom instruction or something that teachers want them to complete and give no thought to how learning to be self-reliant can benefit them.

In their 1995 study, Ho and Crookall investigated learner autonomy at the City University of Hong Kong and found similar attitudes within the Chinese cultural context there.　They observed that Chinese learners often waited passively for the teacher to tell them what to do.　Students also felt it was the teacher alone who should be credited for any positive learning progress that took place and held accountable for failures of students to learn (p. 236).　If Ho and Crookall's study and our own informal observations are at all typical, it might appear that the very idea of autonomy runs against traditional Chinese cultural beliefs and educational practices.　However, the situation is much more complex than this: Though certain cultural traits such as over-reliance on teachers may make autonomy hard to achieve, other cultural attributes may actually facilitate it.　Ho and Crookall also offer an alternative, thought-provoking perspective that Chinese learnersøpressure to achieve educationally may contribute to the carrying out of actions and tasks that are designed to move them toward autonomy and success (p. 241).　Moreover, Littlewood (1999), studying autonomy extensively within Asian contexts, observed that Asian students will be strongly motivated to complete learning tasks if they can perceive the practical value of such an undertaking.　This suggests that if we can help students see the connection between autonomous learning and their pursuit of educational achievement, students will identify themselves more closely with these new learning tasks.

In conclusion, we would like to point out that the most challenging part in successfully implementing self-access is to harmonize the idea of autonomous learning with longstanding cultural beliefs where possible and to encourage evolution in educational practices where that would benefit our students.　In the

following section, we turn to a brief description of the initial attempts we have made to resolve this particular problem.

First Steps toward Learner Autonomy

As we just discussed, because Chinese students are often dependent on teachers they regard the teacher∅s control over the learning process as not only legitimate but indispensable. This may be especially noticeable in the language classroom, where most students may feel the need for teachers to provide shelter and support for their linguistic insufficiencies. However, if we view language learning as a long-term process that will not end at graduation, or if autonomy is viewed as desirable even in short-term language learning, certain measures have to be taken to develop a new set of habits and attitudes. The GE Program at NKFUST has taken the following steps.

1. Integrate self-access into the General English curriculum.

Most students appear to value classroom instruction more than after-school enrichment activities. They also have busy schedules so that important tasks must be planned into their schedule. So, finding ways to help students take the first steps towards independent learning is a major concern. Our experience in promoting learning activities outside the classroom has revealed an important lesson. If students are not strongly encouraged (which at first must take the form of a requirement) to participate, they are not likely to take advantage of outside resources and opportunities. Our expectation is that once they develop a habit of making self-directed choices, they may come to value it.

Being autonomous means learners should choose to engage in learning of their own free will. However, to persuade students to try self-directed learning, creating a semi-autonomous environment looks like a more practical first step. By semi-autonomous, we mean that while self-access is integrated into the

curriculum so students must regularly come to the Center as part of course requirements, they still have many options to choose from. So, at the same time they are being offered learning programs, they are also getting free choices to train them in independence. In his research on autonomy, Benson (2001, p. 123) points out õif self-access is tightly integrated into the curriculum, the opportunities for teacher and learner involvement are likely to be greater.ö As we mentioned above, all students at Levels 1 and 2 are required to go to the MELC one hour per week; Levels 3 and 4 students are encouraged to use the Center as they desire, though they may be given specific assignments from time to time. Students know their use of the MELC as reflected in their attendance is tracked by the computer and will be forwarded to their teacher and be counted towards their final gradeô a strong motivation to go to the Center on a regular basis. Students cannot expect to gain a sense of personal achievement through their self-directed study unless they actually can control some aspect of their own learning, which in this case is the content of what they study while at the Center. Required participation is the first step in helping them see the benefit of regular self-regulated learning.

2. Involve teachers in providing support and promoting autonomy.

One of the most challenging tasks in implementing the self-access program has been to inform thousands of students of the resources and learning activities available in the Center. The best approach, in our experience, is to involve the teachers in promoting self-access. Each semester we have more than 30 part-time instructors teaching in our GE program. In the semester we inaugurated services in the MELC, we held a one-day training workshop to inform all of our GE teachers of the goals of self-access and their roles in fostering autonomy before the Center was officially launched as well as to introduce our facilities and offerings. In addition, we also asked teachers to introduce the diverse uses of the Center to their students during the first few class periods of the semester and distribute professional-looking packaged promotional documents to the students.

In the third year of the MELC's full operation, Cheng (2006) conducted a thorough program evaluation from the perspective of students at NKFUST, including students' attitudes toward self-directed learning, satisfaction with the management of the MELC, evaluation of the self-access program, their familiarity with the online resources, and the likelihood of them continuing their self-directed learning after graduation. In her study, Cheng asked a group of 217 students who used the Center regularly, to rank the most efficient ways to help students find out about the Center's learning resources. Their top three responses were through the teacher's introduction (59.4%), by looking at the official website of the MELC (40.1%), and by taking advantage of freshman orientation programs (38.7%). They clearly recognized that involving teachers in promoting autonomy would be vital in maximizing student involvement in self-access. Researching the learning center at Eurocentre Cambridge, O'Dell suggested a close relationship between teacher support and student use of self-access opportunities. She observed that students who made the most use of the center's resources were those whose teachers were well informed about the center's offerings and displayed confidence that students could benefit from making use of them (cited in Benson, 2001, p. 121). The findings for the study as a whole concerning the MELC and students' attitudes towards it and their satisfaction with its facilities and offerings are discussed at length in Cheng (2006).

3. Offer innovative learning activities to increase learner motivation.

To motivate our young-adult learners to try self-instruction, the self-directed activities in the Center include several forward-looking innovations that make interacting with modern learning technologies easier. As is apparent to all observers, today's young adults are well versed in using a wide range of technological devices from cell phones and MP3 players to computers; they enjoy surfing the Internet looking for information, shopping, or just chatting with friends. We might expect that they would also readily accept working on multimedia lessons at their own pace and tracking their progress using an electronic learning log. These innovative technologies not only promote choice but also increase

learner motivation in a visible manner as they allow users to meet their own needs. As Tamburini (1999) suggests, the self-access site should provide an environment where students can freely use extensive resources to form personalized learning programs.　In addition, some of the latest technological innovations combine authentic videos and computer-assisted instruction and provide more realistic means than ever before for developing listening and reading skills, and even some speaking skills (Rubin and Thompson, 1994).

To take advantage of the full range of modern technologies, the development team for the MELC has implemented several innovative management and learning features to encourage student involvement.　For instance, students at our school can conveniently make online reservations to visit the Center by accessing the Multimedia Online Learning Passport developed by NKFUST application programmers.　If students have trouble finding a suitable dictionary, reference book, practice exercises, videos, or other materials, they can make use of our recommended English-learning websites to locate relevant information.　To provide local content, we have developed student-centered dialogs at the University tailored to our target audience that students can listen to and participate in. Faculty and students in the English Department at NKFUST have also written and produced lively three-minute English programs that have been broadcast daily on the radio for more than two years that are also available on our Center website. These innovations are seen as keys to providing interesting and relevant content as well as the support students need most when experimenting with self-directed learning.　Moreover, we hope these innovations will create a new learning experience for our students and empower them by giving them freer and better-informed choices of materials and activities.

Conclusion

One question underlying many educators' interest in NKFUST's Multimedia English Learning Center is whether what we have done is applicable to their

situation.   To make the implementation of our program as transparent as possible, we have described the pedagogical assumptions underlying learner autonomy and provided a rationale for incorporating self-access into the GE curriculum.   In addition, we have also pointed out some challenges involved in promoting educational autonomy within our traditional education context.   To overcome these difficulties, a three-step solution has been put into place that obliges our learners to try self-directed learning so that they can experience it firsthand and begin to see the benefits that come from it and at the same time perhaps develop positive attitudes towards it that will extend into their future lives.   In Cheng's 2006 study evaluating the MELC mentioned earlier, 72.5% of the students surveyed recognize that self-directed learning is an important ability for successful learning; moreover, 53.9% like the overall learning environment of the MELC, and 53.7% think it is helpful to develop independent learning skills by taking multimedia English learning courses and using Internet resources.   Though Cheng's study also revealed certain weaknesses in the management of the MELC, such as the need to extend the operating hours of the Center and to improve the overall services provided by the staff, her findings are encouraging to us as our initial steps have helped attract students to start practicing self-directed learning beyond the classroom.   We hope that the steps we have taken in planning and implementing greater self-access at NKFUST can help inform other schools' decisions as they consider setting up or expanding similar learning centers in the future.

    In conclusion, fostering the ability to work independently is crucial.   This is especially so in language learning since it is usually a long-term undertaking with necessarily limited classroom exposure.   Put differently, modern language learners cannot afford to rely exclusively on teachers' instruction to ensure their learning success.   Furthermore, the world is changing rapidly, and language learners are constantly being offered new learning resources.   The most successful language learners will be those who take advantage of useful innovations and who take charge of their own learning.   As Benson (2001) says, "the successful learner is

increasingly seen as a person who is able to construct knowledge directly from experience of the world, rather than one who responds well to instructionö (p. 19). As educators charged with the responsibility of preparing our students for the future, we feel the need to help our students go beyond the boundaries of classroom instruction and become autonomous learners. We believe that if our students acquire the skill, habit, and confidence to govern their own learning by practicing principles of learner autonomy in our Center, they can continue to benefit from this training not only during their school years but also throughout their lives.

Acknowledgements

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