

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

A key distinguishing feature of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is its openness to the insights of other disciplines other than applied linguistics (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 1998). The main concerns of ESP have always been with needs analysis, text analysis, and preparing learners to communicate effectively in the tasks prescribed by their study or work situation. Needs analysis is important to establish the structure and content of an ESP course. It is a complex process, which is usually followed by syllabus design, selection of course materials, teaching/ learning a course, and evaluation.

Realizing the importance of needs analysis in an ESP programme, this study focuses on identifying the needs of learners of an ESP course for Engineering at the Higher National Diploma (HND) level. It examines the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills needed by the HND students who are majoring in Engineering at the British Malaysian Institute (BMI). In order to provide a good understanding of the setting of this study, a description of BMI is presented in this chapter. This includes the background of BMI, the description of the English language modules offered at BMI, as well as the background of the students. This chapter also presents the statement of the problem, research questions, objectives of the research and significance of the study.

1.2 The Role of English

There can be no dispute on the importance of English, more so in the scientific and technologically-related disciplines. English is established as the principal international language of science. It is said in the 1968/69 report by the British Council that English is the language most used for communicating facts, and so is a main factor that contributes towards the progress in the fields of science, technology and economy (Lott, 1976).

Realizing the importance of the English language, the Malaysian government has given it the official status of a second language. In the field of education, English is a compulsory subject taught from the primary to the tertiary level. In 2003, the Ministry of Education made it compulsory for all primary and secondary schools to teach Science and Mathematics in English.

At tertiary level, most universities and colleges offer two types of English courses- the first, general English proficiency courses which offer general proficiency to students, and second, English for Specific Purposes courses that are taught according to the specific language needs of a group of learners based on their fields of study. There are many ESP courses that are tailored to the specific needs of learners at tertiary level, such as English for Business Purposes, English for Science, and English for Engineering. Each course is unique as it differs in terms of learner needs, content, materials, types of assessment and many others. Due to the unique characteristics of an ESP course that must take into account the needs of the learners, this case study

attempts to identify the English language needs of HND students at BMI, a private college that offers various Engineering courses at HND level.

1.3 Background of the British Malaysian Institute (BMI)

BMI is a private Engineering college, and is a subsidiary of Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA), a statutory body under the Ministry of Entrepreneur Development. It is the result of a partnership between the Malaysian and the British governments. Established in 1993 under the name of Tuas Polytech, its permanent campus is in Gombak. The medium of instruction in BMI is English where it is used in teaching, testing, students' assignments and official correspondence. BMI currently offers HND in Engineering to Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia leavers and certificate holders of MARA Vocational Institute and Polytechnics. Upon admission into BMI, these students can opt to major in any of the six courses offered by BMI, namely Electrical Engineering, Electronic Engineering, Medical Electronics Engineering, Telecommunications Engineering, Engineering and Computing, as well as Engineering and Business Information Technology.

The programme at BMI is divided into two levels which run over a period of five semesters, or two and a half years. The first level, which is the Pre- HND level, runs for two semesters, while the second level, the HND level, runs for three semesters. The duration for each semester is about six months. However, it should be noted here that students who come in with a certificate from MARA Vocational

Institute and Polytechnics are exempted from undergoing the first semester of Pre-HND level because they have sat for similar technical modules in those institutions.

1.4 The English Language Programme at BMI.

The English modules at BMI are known as Technical Presentation Skills (TPS) modules. The TPS modules are divided into two levels-the Pre-HND level and the HND level. The TPS modules are offered to all the Pre-HND and HND students majoring in the six courses mentioned in 1.3. The TPS modules at Pre-HND Level consist of two modules known as TPS I and TPS II, while TPS III, TPS IV and TPS V are the TPS modules at the HND level. It is a pre-requisite for the students to pass one module, before moving on to the next. However, students with a certificate from the MARA Vocational Institute are exempted from taking TPS I as they are automatically enrolled in Semester 2 of the Pre-HND level. Table 1.1 illustrates the TPS modules in terms of level, code, name of the module, semester it is offered and the duration per semester.

Table 1.1
TPS Modules

Level	Module Code	Name of the Module	Semester	Duration
Pre-HND	GS 1605	TPS I	Semester 1	20 weeks
Pre-HND	GS 2605	TPS II	Semester 2	20 weeks
HND	GS 3605	TPS III	Semester 1	20 weeks
HND	GS 4605	TPS IV	Semester 2	20 weeks
HND	GS 5605	TPS V	Semester 3	20 weeks

A pass in all the TPS modules is required for the award of the HND. All the TPS modules are calculated in the Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) with 1 credit hour for every semester. The instruction period for the TPS II, IV and V

modules is four hours per week, while for TPS I and III, the instruction period is three hours. At the HND level, students are not grouped according to their proficiency level but according to their majors. All medical electronic Engineering students, for instance, are put in the same class regardless of whether their English proficiency is at the advanced, intermediate or elementary levels.

1.5 Content of the Technical Presentation Skills (TPS) Modules

The content of the TPS modules for HND level is based on a syllabus which is approved and verified by Edexcel, United Kingdom, an awarding body for HND. Students who successfully complete their study at BMI are awarded the Higher National Diploma (HND) by the Edexcel Foundation. This qualification enables graduates to pursue higher education at the degree level with direct entry to the second or final year in various universities in the United Kingdom. Therefore, all the TPS modules at HND level follow the syllabus endorsed by Edexcel.

The syllabus for the TPS module consists of a 'description of unit' that explains the aims and objectives of the module, and a 'summary of outcomes' that explains the four language learning outcomes that students must achieve at the end of every semester for the respective module. The syllabus for Pre-HND and HND levels can be referred to in Appendix A and B respectively. The learning outcomes in the Pre-HND syllabus are to develop students' general English proficiency in listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. As for the HND syllabus, the learning outcomes are to develop the students' ability to use presentation skills required in verbal and non-

verbal reports in the workplace (engineering). The language learning outcomes specify the contents to be covered under each outcome, and the assessment criteria that students must fulfil in order to achieve a particular outcome. Although there is only one syllabus for the TPS modules at HND level (TPS III, TPS IV and TPS V), the forms of assessment, scheme of work and the topics covered differ from one TPS module to another. At Pre-HND level (TPS I and TPS II), there is a separate syllabus each for TPS I and TPS II respectively.

The scheme of work for the TPS modules outlines the topics to be covered, suggested activities and materials for each module every semester. Each scheme of work differs in terms of the topics covered for each module. For example, in the TPS III scheme of work, the topics covered include 'communication process', 'proposal writing' and 'writing letter and memo', while the topics covered in TPS V scheme of work include 'mock-job interview', 'writing resume and application letters' and 'technical presentation'. Samples of the scheme of work for the TPS modules at HND level are in Appendix C, D and E respectively.

Apart from the scheme of work, there is an assessment scheme, which is also based on the syllabus. Samples of the assessment scheme for the TPS modules at HND level can be referred to in Appendix F, G and H respectively. The assessment scheme details the types of assessment to be given out to the students, the week and duration of each assessment, the learning outcomes covered in each assessment and the overall grading scheme. The assessment scheme, therefore, differs from one module to another as each module has different types of assessment.

1.6 Grading System for the Technical Presentation Skills (TPS) Modules

Students are assessed based on the learning outcomes outlined in the syllabus and they have to pass all learning outcomes in order to pass the TPS module. Students' assignments and tests are awarded with either one of these grades: Distinction, Merit, Pass or Fail. In calculating the CGPA, out of the scale of 4, a Distinction is equivalent to 4.0; a Merit, 3.0; a Pass, 2.0 and a Fail is zero. To illustrate, in TPS V, the four learning outcomes in the syllabus cover three different assessments: 'Job Application Letter and Mock Job Interview', 'Technical Report' and 'Technical Presentation' (Refer Appendix H: Assessment Scheme for Technical Presentation Skills V Module). Each assessment covers a different learning outcome, in which the 'Technical Report' covers both learning outcomes 1 and 2, 'Technical Presentation' covers learning outcome 3 and 'Job Application Letter and Mock-Job Interview' covers learning outcome 4. Therefore at the end of the module, the students will have one grade each for each outcome, producing a total of four grades from four learning outcomes. The four grades are then combined to come up with one overall grade- either Distinction, Merit, Pass or Fail- for the module, based on the overall grading scheme stated in the assessment scheme.

For instance, a student who is taking TPS V, obtains a Merit and a Pass for his 'Technical Report', which covers learning outcomes 1 and 2 respectively, a Merit for learning outcome 3 (Technical Presentation) and learning outcome 4 (Job Application Letter and Mock-Job Interview). Therefore at the end of the module, the student has obtained the following grades based on the learning outcomes: Merit, Pass, Merit and

Merit respectively. Referring to the overall grading scheme in the assessment scheme, the student will finally get a Merit grade for the module.

As illustrated above, the TPS III, TPS IV and TPS V have four learning outcomes and students have to pass all four outcomes. At the end of the semester, a student should have a grade for each outcome. A total of four grades will be combined to determine the final grade for a particular module. If the student fails any one of the learning outcomes, he is considered to have failed the whole module.

1.7 Background of the Higher National Diploma (HND) Students

At present, the total number of students studying in BMI is 1284. The HND students are currently majoring in one of these six courses- Electrical Engineering, Electronic Engineering, Medical Electronics Engineering, Telecommunications Engineering, Engineering and Computing, and Engineering and Business Information Technology. Out of these six courses, the Electrical Engineering students form the largest group of HND students with 467 students, which is almost 36.37% of the total HND student population. Out of the 467 students, 90 (19.27%) of them are currently studying in the final semester. Table 1.2 illustrates the number of students enrolled in all the six courses at the HND level.

Table 1.2
Number of Students by Course

Course	Number of Students	Percentage
HND in Electrical Engineering	467	36.37%
HND in Electronic Engineering	221	17.21%
HND in Telecommunications Engineering	181	14.10%
HND in Engineering and Computing	163	12.70%
HND in Engineering and Business Information Technology	136	10.59%
HND in Medical Electronics Engineering	116	9.03%
TOTAL	1284	100.00%

1.8 Statement of the Problem

Thus far, no formal needs analysis study on the TPS modules has been carried out in the college. To date, the input for the content of the syllabus and the scheme of work for each TPS modules have been based on what the instructors have perceived as useful and relevant for learners of each module. The TPS instructors have not had any formal input or data from the students in planning and revising the scheme of work and materials for the modules.

Therefore, the TPS instructors do not really know to what extent have the TPS modules helped students in learning their Engineering subjects. This is because thus far, the TPS instructors have not got any feedback from the students themselves or from the Engineering instructors. The results from this needs analysis study then, can be helpful to the TPS instructors in revising the TPS modules as the data is based on feedback from the students, TPS instructors and Engineering instructors. It is hoped that this needs analysis study will provide a comprehensive input to the TPS instructors

in revising the content, materials, assessments and activities of the TPS modules to cater to the needs of the students.

1.9 Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to identify the English language needs of HND students majoring in Electrical Engineering at BMI. It is hoped that this study will be able to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: Language Ability

What is the perception of the students, English instructors and Engineering instructors regarding the students' ability in the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills and sub-skills?

(Data to answer Research Question 1 is obtained from Part II of the students', TPS instructors' and Engineering instructors' questionnaires)

Research Question 2: Language Needs

What is the perception of the students, English instructors and Engineering instructors regarding the listening, speaking, reading and writing tasks that are important for the students?

(Data to answer Research Question 2 is obtained from Part III of the students', TPS instructors' and Engineering instructors' questionnaires)

Research Question 3: Course Design

What kinds of teaching and learning materials, handouts/ notes, teaching aids, assessments and activities do the students and English instructors perceive as suitable for the TPS modules?

(Data to answer Research Question 3 is obtained from Part IV of the students' and TPS instructors' questionnaires)

Research Question 4: Course Evaluation

What is the perception of the students, English instructors and Engineering instructors regarding the current TPS modules?

(Data to answer Research Question 4 is obtained from Part IV of the Engineering instructors' questionnaires, as well as Part V of the students' and TPS instructors' questionnaires)

1.10 Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to identify the English language needs of the HND students majoring in Electrical Engineering, not only from the English instructors' point of view, but also as identified by the students themselves and the Engineering instructors. Besides that, the researcher aims to find out the problems that the students are facing in the four language skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. Based on the problems identified, this study will propose some suggestions in revising the TPS modules to suit the learners' needs. This study will also identify the language sub-skills that are perceived as important by the students,

TPS instructors and Engineering instructors in facilitating the students to improve their English proficiency and to learn other Engineering subjects. Thus, specifically the objectives of the study are as follows:

- i. To find out the perception of the students, English instructors and Engineering instructors on the students' ability in the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills and sub-skills.
- ii. To find out the perception of the students, English instructors and Engineering instructors on the listening, speaking, reading and writing tasks that are important to the students.
- iii. To find out the perception of the students and English instructors on the kinds of teaching and learning materials, handouts/ notes, teaching aids, assessments and activities that are suitable for the TPS modules.
- iv. To find out the perception of the students, English instructors and Engineering instructors of the current TPS modules.

1.11 Significance of the Study

The importance of this study is that it will provide valid and reliable data for TPS instructors in planning and revising the content of the TPS modules. This is done by identifying the perceived language needs of the HND students based on the perception of the students, TPS instructors and Engineering instructors.

Thus, the TPS instructors will be able to modify the scheme of work for the present TPS modules if the results show that it does not fulfil the language needs of the students. This study is then very useful to the TPS instructors as they are the ones responsible to plan and prepare the scheme of work, teaching contents and assessments of the TPS modules every semester.

Through this study also, the TPS instructors can gain insights on the types of assessments, teaching and learning materials and teaching aids that are suitable to enhance the language learning process of the students. The TPS instructors are also able to identify the activities that are effective in teaching English to the students. This study will enable the TPS instructors to evaluate and modify the existing TPS modules, especially in the selection of topics, selection of materials and modes of assessments. In terms of the relevance of this study to the college, this study is important to BMI as the TPS instructors can apply the findings to revise the TPS modules where deem necessary.

1.12 Conclusion

English is an important language and in Malaysia, it is officially accepted as the second language. It is widely used in education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. At tertiary level, ESP courses are offered to the students such as the Technical Presentation Skills modules offered in British Malaysian Institute, which is the setting of this study. This study is carried out with the purpose of analysing the needs of Higher National Diploma students in Electrical Engineering, based on the perception of the students, Technical Presentation Skills instructors and Engineering instructors. It is hoped that the results obtained from this study will enable the TPS instructors to plan and revise the content of the TPS modules more efficiently.