

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

#### **Introduction**

This study is an investigation into the English language needs of the engineers, through an analysis of a survey which was conducted for the engineers and engineering managers currently working in a multi-national company, Samsung Electronics Display Malaysia (SDMA). Malaysia has undergone rapid economic growth since the 1970s. In order to continue this growth, there must be an adequate supply of professional, technical, skilled managerial and research manpower. There is a strong need for engineers and engineering managers with good command of English since global production and global operation of services is going to become widespread in future. And the crucial role of English in the Engineering sector has been emphasized in many ways. So it was felt necessary to look at the role of English for the engineers and engineering managers in terms of English for Specific Purposes.

#### **The Role of English in Malaysia and The Emergence of ESP**

The role and status of the English language have undergone significant changes since Malaysia achieved independence. And English was the main medium of instruction in all government and government-aided schools until Bahasa Malaysia replaced English as the national language of the country in 1957. It stood as the symbol of Malaysia's sovereignty and it was through the national language that the leaders hoped to unify the people, and to give a sense of identity to itself as a nation state in 1967, it was recognised as the

official language. However, in the words of Asmah Haji Omar, (1992) "the end of the colonial period did not spell the end of the history of the English language in the country." In 1970, in an effort to elevate the educational and economic status of its people and to participate in the affairs of the world, Malaysia needed a language other than the national language to see the nation through. It was only natural that the English language assumed the role of a second language. This, according to Khairi Izwan et al (1993) had a great impact on the overall English language proficiency of Malaysians in general. Since the implementation of Bahasa Malaysia as the main medium of instruction in all national schools, the majority of the students became very proficient in it. Less importance was given to English by many students, especially those who intended to join the public sector, as it was not considered a necessary qualification then. It was felt that they could very well manage with little or no knowledge of the English language in the government sector. Although students were not required to pass it, there was still some demand for English by both employers and employees in the commercial and educational sectors and special effort was made by them to acquire English through various courses.

The introduction of vocational and technical schools and polytechnics in Malaysia, in the 1960's and 1970's, helped the growth of ESP-English for Specific Purposes. This was skills-oriented English different from English programmes in the other academically-oriented schools. The polytechnics responded to the needs of the commercial sector by designing ESP-biased English language programmes under the labels, 'English for Technical students' and 'English for Commerce students' depending on the type of students taught (Khari Izwan et al 1993). At the tertiary level, conditions were favourable for the establishment of ESP. A marked drop in the standard of English was noticed in the English used in the mass media and by students, particularly university students. The need to equip undergraduates with the necessary reading skills to access literature in their subject areas was urgently felt when Bahasa Malaysia educated school-leaders joined the universities. The first

concerted effort at developing ESP was undertaken by University of Malaya. The 'UMESPP' (University of Malaya English for Specific Purposes Project) in 1975 was aimed at developing materials and methodologies to equip students with the necessary reading skills to access Science and Technology texts (Tan and Chitravelu, 1980) which catered for the oral needs of the students in the economic and law faculties in the University of Malaya. The rapid development of commerce, manufacturing industries, and services in banks, multi-national companies, and hospitals in the private sector where English is still an important medium of communication has made an impact on the teaching of ESP in Malaysia. With a workforce increasingly fed by Bahasa Malaysia educated graduates from schools and institutions of higher learning, many commercial firms, manufacturing industries, and services find that their employees do not possess sufficient communication skills in dealing with English-speaking clients.

Especially in multi-national companies, there is an urgent need for all engineering staffs to be proficient in English, because most of communication has been being done in English among all subsidiaries including headquarters. It is very common that those who work in multi-national companies prefer to use English as a means of communication. In addition, much of the engineering terminology and other engineering literature is in English. Many engineering staff of multi-national companies have received their professional training overseas in English and are more adapt at using English in their day-to-day work. Private organizations, as well as the government, have begun to make requests to train their personnel in various ESP courses. John J. Hagedon, Corporate Communication Services Sdn. Bhd. Director and a participant in the first international ESP seminar at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia at Johor Baru said that more Malaysian companies are engaging communication specialists to conduct ESP courses for their staff and this is expected to grow rapidly in the coming years because of Malaysia's growing role in the Asia-Pacific region and as the centre for the Multimedia Super Corridor Project. He added that

although English is being widely spoken in Malaysia, the level of proficiency in the language in the workplace was still relatively low. He emphasized the advantage of an ESP course in an in-house training programme as follows:

"Being specific to the learner's need, the ESP course can save time and motivate the learners as they are exposed to specific on-the-job language skills which can be practised inside and outside the class, that is, results can be seen faster and would prove to be a satisfying experience for the learners." (NST Nov. 15. 1995)

Lately it is very obvious that English will become more important and the demand for ESP from engineering sector will grow continuously due to rapid globalization. Khairi Izwan et al (NST Nov. 16. 1995) mentioned that an ESP course should go beyond the linguistic skills and that attributes such as confidence, independence and initiative should also be emphasised. He felt that ESP trainers should view language training within the educational context of human resource training incorporating the above three traits. To have meaning or value, language training, he says, should be a part of the learner's overall training. A language trainer, he added, should never dominate the class but rather play the role of being a facilitator creating conditions necessary for learning to take place. Learners should be allowed to learn at their own pace and at a level appropriate to their level of proficiency. Lately it is very obvious that English will become more important and the demand for ESP from engineering sector will grow continuously due to rapid globalization. Furthermore, internet helps facilitate this trend.

### Purpose of The Study

The purpose of this study is to know what English language skills the engineers and engineering managers require and to study on how to well design ESP for the engineering

students. This study is to conduct an English language needs analysis of the engineers/ engineering managers who are currently employed in Samsung Electronics Display(M) Sdn. Bhd.. Also this study hopes to identify the English language present and future needs of the engineering students. Their present needs would be what they require to get by in their coursework while their future needs would be based on their experiences encountered during practical training. This study also identifies the English language needs that prospective employers expect from engineering students when they graduate.

The study hopes to recommend to the relevant authorities that the data of the needs analyses be made use of when designing an English language syllabus for engineering students so as to adequately prepare them to deal with situations where their English language skills are required. So this study attempts to seek answers to the following research questions:

- (1) What language skills are very important in doing their engineering job? (And compare engineers and engineering managers)
- (2) Which language sub-skills are more important in doing their engineering job? (And compare engineers and engineering managers)
- (3) What kind of ESP program do teachers need to introduce or apply to effectively help the engineering students improve English language skills used in workplace?

#### Significance of The Study

It is hoped that this study will provide a model for English language needs analysis to be carried out among engineering students and prospective employers of all the schools in Malaysia. It is hoped that this would in turn enable more effective and relevant planning of English courses for engineering students.

## Definition of Terms

The following terms which be used in this study need to be defined for proper understanding of this study.

### Language Skills

The language skills refered to in this study are Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.

### Language Subskills

The term language subskills is used in this study to refer to language activities which may be considered as possible components of a syllabus. For example, listening subskills may refer to 'listening telephone, meetings and training', while speaking subskills may refer to 'presentation, discussing technical problem, instruction and negotiation'. Similarly, reading subskills may refer to 'in-house correspondence, business letters, manuals, handbooks, charts and business documents'. Writing subskills may refer to 'E-mail, form-filling, business letters, technical reports and drafting manuals'.