CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"From each according to his abilities, to each according to his need."

(Karl Marx)

1.1   INTRODUCTION

After the Second World War in 1945, technical, scientific and economic activities had expanded globally. This expansion caused the emergence and domination of two powerful forces; technology and commerce. This situation then generated a demand for an effective international language. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), English language was selected as the medium of communication and it became a major power in the world's economy after the Second World War, (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987).

Since then, the number of people wanting to learn English has increased and their intention was not only for pleasure or prestige of knowing the language, but because English was the key to the international currencies of technology and commerce. Crystal (1997) states that as English became the accepted international language of technology and commerce, it

created a new generation of learners who knew specifically why they were learning the language. These learners needed English and most importantly they knew why they needed it.

English language teaching (ELT) has experienced a revolution as the demand was growing for English courses to be tailored to specific needs. The traditional aim of linguistics which was to describe the rules of English usage has shifted to discovering the ways in which language is actually used in real communication.

According to Grellet (1996), studies have revealed that the language we speak and write varies considerably based on the contexts, genres and settings. This, in a way has given a new view to ELT that there are important differences between English in different occupational settings, for example English for Medical practitioners and that of technicians. Thus, this idea has initiated the proposition that it should be possible to determine the features of specific situations and then make these features the basis of learners' course.

Realizing that the learners knew their specific purposes for learning English, it is timely to design a syllabus which matches with the learners' needs. Not to forget, these needs are initiated by demands which come

from various contexts whether it is educational, occupational or professional settings. As noted by Celce-Murcia (2001), English for Specific Purpose (ESP) is based on the idea that language teaching should be designed to the specific learning and language needs of identified groups of students and also sensitive to socio-cultural contexts in which these students will be using English.

1.2   ESP IN THE MALAYSIAN ARMED FORCES

The Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) which consists of the army, navy and air force is very much dependent on English Language. This is due to the inheritance of defense administration, structures and technologies from the British Army which is one of the effects of British colonization after the Second World War. English plays various fundamental roles in the Malaysian Armed Forces and among the functions are defense administration, defense technology transfer and not to forget its vital roles in the process of exchanging of information in various spoken discourse.

Realizing the importance of English to the organization, the Malaysian Armed Forces has embarked on ELT as early as 1959. The initial stages of ELT were under the responsibilities of the General Service Corps (Education), a corps which has been responsible for the development of

education in the MAF. Small English classes were formed and taught by officers who are qualified English teachers. The students came from both technical and non-technical corps.

The development of English language in MAF which started in the early 90's has always been one of the concerns in the organization. It was during this era, that the organization had put some serious efforts in restructuring, modifying and improving all elements of ELT. One of the obvious efforts was shown through the Malaysian-Australian Joint Defense Programme which was signed in 1991. The programme stated that the Australian Defence Force (ADF) will offer its expertise in ELT to help in improving the standard of English among the MAF personnel. With this agreement MAF English instructors were given a number of places to attend ELT courses in Defence International Training Center in Melbourne, Australia. Apart from this training, the ADF also shared a number of ESP syllabus to be taught in the English classes in the MAF.

Since then, with the exposure to ESP, the MAF later realized that it was one of the practical and effective ways to meet the demands of job specifications and needs in the MAF. This sparked the idea of embarking into ESP in a more organized and serious manner beginning 1991 till to

date. Thus, ESP was included in all MAF-sponsored courses in military higher learning institutions and military training centers.

ESP is largely addressed to adult learners who require English to further their education or to perform a social or working role (Mackay and Mountford, 1981). The required skills are determined to be necessary through needs analysis whereby it focuses on the potential that many students have for attaining self-fulfilling occupations (Eckard, 1983). In brief as stated by Berwick (1989), "ESP movement is crucial and needs to be highlighted as it specializes language programmes and meets the behavioral objectives and accountability of what learners need to attain in their learning process". This is supported by Richards, specifically highlighting writing skill whereby he noted that "writing syllabi will operate successfully when learners' issues and needs are analyzed". He further stated that methods, materials, and the relationship of the writing course to its immediate environment are key factors to a successful language programme (2003).

1.3   STATEMENT OF PROBLEMS

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) once noted that ESP has been defined as an approach to course design which starts by asking why the learners need to

learn English. ESP concerns with the awareness of the needs and that awareness will have an influence on the content of the course and the potential that can be exploited. ESP is very much concerned with needs analysis. It is an awareness of a target situation; a definable needs to communicate in English. Nunan (1999) defines needs analysis as "sets of tools, techniques, and procedures for determining the language content and learning process for specified groups of learners", (p.149). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) noted that the type of need determined by the demands of the target situation is called necessities. This is what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation.

The designs and implementations of ESP syllabus in degree and diploma courses in the MAF have improved the standard of English among the graduates. ESP is made compulsory in most technical degree and diploma programmes in the military training institutions. It cannot be denied that these ESP syllabus have enabled the graduates in technical courses to meet the job requirement in the MAF.

However, writing has always been looked at as a problem to this group of personnel. Due to its characteristics such as permanence, complexity and formality, writing has always been described as the most difficult skills among English as a Second Language (ESL) learners (Swales, 1988).

These factors are important considerations in the teaching of writing at all levels. The ESP which is included in the technical courses in the MAF has not achieved the stated objective that is to prepare the students with the required writing skills to meet the technical job requirements in the MAF. This situation is obvious as more writing tasks such as technical reports, evaluations and appreciations had to be sent to the Education Department of the MAF to be edited and reworked by the officers who are English Language graduates before they could be submitted to the target departments. This is the evidence that the technical departments in the MAF is having problems in the process of completing such writing tasks; and this situation has in a way reflected the ineffectiveness of the writing lessons taught to their personnel during their studies in various MAF military training institutions.

When this problem arises, the basic approach to course design in ESP for writing has to be re-visited. The famous question "Why do these learners need to learn English?" has to be reconsidered. As noted by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), all courses are based on a perceived need of some sort, so the MAF has to determine what are the perceived writing needs of the various technical departments in the MAF. When the perceived writing needs have been identified, the next step is to find out whether the writing

lessons included in the MAF-sponsored technical courses match the perceived writing needs which have been identified earlier.

ESP is one of the important activities in technical courses sponsored by the MAF. Writing in ESP is one of the issues that need to be explored, as many jobs such as IT personnel, commandant and education core officers in the military today need to have the abilities in specific writing skills in order to perform job-specific functions at workplaces. Thus, though the issue of ESP has long been explored, the connection of ESP and writing should always be encouraged. The study attempts to reveal the underlying situations of ESP in NDU and in particular, the writing needs required by the employers in the MAF technical departments; and the writing skills that the graduates who are preparing themselves to venture into these departments want to learn. The ESP writing syllabus in NDU will be effective if it reflects the needs and expectations of the employers and the students.

1.4   THE CURRENT ENGLISH LANGUAGE COURSE FOR COMPUTER SCIENCE STUDENTS IN NDU.

Students undergoing a Degree in Computer Science in NDU are required to undergo one (1) year of foundation studies which consists of two (2)

semesters and 4 years of mainstream programme which consists of (8) semesters.

During the first semester of their foundation year, they have to pass one proficiency course which is UZB 0312 - Proficiency in English in semester one of their foundation year. The course outline is provided in Appendix A.

In their second semester of the foundation year, they are required to take one English for Academic Purpose (EAP) course that is UZB 0322 – English for Academic Communication. The outline of the course is provided in Appendix B.

Upon completion of the foundation studies, the students then enroll into a four-year (8 semesters) mainstream programme. During the first semester of the first year in the mainstream programme, the students are required to register for another EAP course that is UZB 1412 – English for Academic Communication. The course outline is as in Appendix C. The students are not required to take any English language course during the second semester of their first year and the first semester of the third year of the mainstream programme. Hence, English language is required in the

following semesters; the first semester of the first year, both semesters in the second year and the second semester in the third year.

1.5 ESP WRITING COURSE FOR COMPUTER SCIENCE STUDENTS IN NDU

The students are required to take one ESP course in the second semester of the third year of the mainstream programme that is UHB 3042 – Writing for Specific Purpose. This is the course that the study is intended to focus on. The course outline is as in Appendix D.

The objectives of the course which are stated in the course outline are to enable the students to understand techniques on gathering information, to enable the students to present information and findings in various forms, to enable students to understand the steps in writing a thesis and to enable the students to apply various steps in writing a thesis. In summary, as stated in the synopsis of the course outline, the course focuses only on two areas of writing; writing of technical information that students would be expected to perform in their professional career and the skills of organizing various types of data towards producing a thesis.

In the first part of this course the students will be introduced to the techniques of gathering technical information about product, service or specialized subjects and to present that information to a target audience in the form of instructional manuals, brochures, memorandums and reports. The various forms and functions of these written documents are also discussed.

In the second part of this course, students are given the opportunity to go through the steps in planning a thesis, assembling and presenting data, writing the findings and drawing conclusions from a study. Besides, the students are also exposed to the nature of academic thesis and the process of analyzing and evaluating existing thesis. For both parts, the English grammar, proper language usage, and acceptable writing standards will be covered.

1.6   THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study was to find out whether the present ESP writing syllabus for the students of Degree in Computer Science in National Defence University (NDU) matched the writing needs required in their job as officers in the technical departments in the MAF and the needs of the students.

Firstly, this research investigated the writing needs of the technical departments in the MAF. In other words, the investigation was meant to look for the writing tasks the officers need to perform in English in order to function effectively in their respective departments. In doing this, the employers were asked questions about the writing tasks which need to be accomplished by the officers working in their departments and they were also asked about their expectations on the performance of the officers in accomplishing the writing tasks.

Secondly, this research investigated the writing needs of the students who are the undergraduates of Degree in Computer Science in NDU. It is vital in any design of ESP syllabus to determine the needs of the learners as among the most important ESP component. This is according to Celce-Murcia (2001) in which they stated that "ESP focuses on the learner's need and wastes no time; as it is relevant to the learners", (p.44). Thus, an awareness of the learner's needs should be given primary importance in syllabus design.

Thirdly, as the first and second tasks were accomplished, the research then investigated whether the present ESP writing syllabus taught to the students of Degree in Computer Science in NDU reflects the needs of these two

important groups of subjects; the employers and the students. This is imperative as the objectives of the writing syllabus are to meet the job requirements in the technical field in the MAF and it also should match the students' needs who are adult learners.

Finally, from the findings of the stated investigations, this research will recommend whether the current ESP writing syllabus needs to be reviewed or retained. The recommendation will be entirely based on the responses gathered from the two subjects; the employers and the students and the analysis of their needs and what is offered in the current ESP writing syllabus.

1.7   THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To achieve the objectives of this study, three research questions have been identified. The following are the research questions for this study:

a.   What are the needs and expectations of the employers' in the technical department of MAF in terms of writing skills in English?

b.   What are the expectations and needs of the students with regards to their writing needs in order to function well in the IT department of MAF?

c.   Based on the findings of the expectations and needs of employers and students, is there a need for a change or review of the current English writing syllabus?

1.8   THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research has aimed to evaluate the current English language writing syllabus in order to benefit the parties involved which are the UPNM students and the MAF IT department. This is because through the findings of this study, it is hoped that UPNM is able to review the syllabus and provide a more enhanced writing syllabus that could assist the UPNM Computer Engineering students in applying the writing skills to the demand of writing tasks in the IT department. As for the personnel of MAF in the IT Department, they are able to allow for more independence in executing tasks related to English language writing among the newly-appointed officers graduating from UPNM.

The study reflects different significance for different groups of people. For the employers, in the future they can expect to have graduates who are posted to various technical departments in MAF to be equipped with the required writing skills needed in their work settings.

For the students, this study will be the foundation for them to have a writing syllabus that they really need for the workplace and also match their needs so that they will be well equipped with the necessary skills when they venture into the working environment.

Finally the course designers; they will have to organize and integrate work needs into the syllabus and try to minimize the mismatch of skills in syllabus and work setting. This is to ensure all the relevant parties who are involved in the teaching and learning process will benefit in the long term. Furthermore, the findings can later be extended to the National Defence University to review its current syllabus.

1.9   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In conducting this research, there is no doubt that the researcher is bound to face several constraints and limitations. The major ones are as below:

In this study, only twenty (20) students are involved and this is a very small number as compared to the number of Technology personnel in the Malaysian Armed Forces which is approximately 2000. The sample size is small because when the study was conducted, only 30 students have enrolled in and passed the ESP writing course. They are the first intake of the Degree in Computer Science. Other students, who were doing the same programme which is Computer Engineering, cannot be considered as samples because they had not done the ESP writing course.

The problem of a small-scale survey is the reliability and the validity of the study. Based on the information gathered in the study from the small population, other researchers might question the possibilities of other students who do not face the problem of syllabus relevance in their courses that are sponsored by the MAF.

As this is a small scale study, there is only one institution that is selected; that is National Defence University. This is because National Defence University is the only higher learning institution in the MAF who offered bachelors degree programmes to the students. The other training institution offers diploma and certificate programmes only.

The research is viewed as an initial stage towards a positive and clear objective of ESP in the Armed Forces. The findings can be used as reference in designing any ESP courses in the Armed Forces to ascertain the English language writing needs reflect the workplace writing needs demands.

For the purpose of validation, in chapter two several studies related to writing skills are being analyzed and synthesized. The information gathered in the literature review could also be useful in improving the conduct of this research as the studies provide the principles of successful English language writing programmes in other higher learning institutions.

1.10 SUMMARY

In brief, this chapter provides the direction of this study and the underlying problems related to the English language writing programme which is offered in the National Defence of University (NDU). It further explains the objectives, research questions, significance and limitations of the study.