

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

One of the attributes to the demand for industrial manpower is being proficient in English as a second language. This was stated in the ESP volume 2 June 1994 from the Second Outline Perspective Plan (OPP2). This demand is coherent with the “increasing globalisation and internationalisation of the world economy” (OPP2: 25), in which English is widely used as the language for communication. To make the scenario more critical, the implementation of AFTA that takes away the trade and import barriers, forces the local businesses to compete with other leading businesses in the world (Phang: 2001), and language plays a significant role for a business to succeed especially when the business is to be exposed and expanded internationally. It is an important tool used to promote or introduce a particular business or technology to the outside world.

Parallel to today’s business and technological development, English is the primary language used in international communication. As claimed by Duncan (1999) English has become a language that is globally used. It is no longer the language for the elites but it is a common language used by almost everybody from all walks of life. Individuals with the ability to communicate in English would be at an advantage because they would be able to widen their communication scope, and enhance their business progression.

Since globalisation will eliminate the trade barriers of the countries and encourage the advancement of technology, individuals need to prepare themselves for any changes in technology. Individuals must also be multi-skilled to improve their employment prospects and part of being multi-skilled is to be able to communicate effectively. Individuals who are competent in English might adapt easily to the changing technological needs of the country because it can help them to communicate with varieties of English speaking community and understand more English genres.

According to Dato' Dr. Ir. Abu Hashim, the owner of Perunding Hashim & Neh Sdn. Bhd. in his speech entitled "Engineering graduates: Employer's expectations" at the 3rd International Seminar LSP 2000, one of the required attributes of a graduate is the ability to communicate effectively, and from his brief analysis on the job advertisements which appeared in several newspapers, one of the compulsory requirements is the ability to communicate in English. This is also supported by Mark Hall (2001) in his article "Business Benefits of a Second Language" that high-level executives in global companies prize the multilingual skill, like native speakers of Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Hebrew or Japanese who are running companies in the United States with the ability to speak English. Thus, the ability to communicate in English is no longer a choice in order to step up the career ladder, it can also be a career advantage in order to adapt successfully in the global corporate environment.

Acknowledging this fact, the government is trying to improve the school curriculum by implementing English Language as the medium of instruction for Science and Mathematics. By implementing the programme, it is hoped that the new generation will have a higher standard of English and are more prepared to face the globalisation

era (OPP2: 170). In this era, new types of work are created by new types of workers (Anonymous, 2000: 2). Thus, this generation should be prepared to participate in the areas that they have not been trained in (Phang: 2001). One of the skills that the individuals have to master in order to gain career or business advantages is communication ability (Hall: 2001). By having proficient communication ability, it would expedite the process of acquiring new knowledge and skills.

In order to provide communication empowerment at the work place, the existing curriculum of Technical English and Communication offered at German Malaysian Institute becomes the subject of this study. By investigating the curriculum, it could provide some insights in improving the needs of the English language communication in offices or organizations based on students' experiences.

In this chapter, brief definitions of the curriculum and evaluation are discussed. A general explanation of the institution, the trainees and the curriculum are also mentioned. In addition, the statement of problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, research objectives, the significance and the limitations of the study will also be presented.

1.1.1 Curriculum and Syllabus

A curriculum is basically a sum of learning activities and experiences provided to a student (Mc Neil: 1996). The curriculum gives a clear idea of what should be taught, when it should be taught, how it should be taught and why it should be taught. It represents a collection of intentions or the collection of learning outcomes (Posner and Rudnisky: 1997) of a particular school or institution. Finch and Crunkilton (1992)

define curriculum as the collection of activities and experiences of learning provided to students by a particular school for its own direction. Johnson (1989) looks at curriculum as the products of every participant's decision making processes which are observable and describable as in policy documents, syllabuses, teacher-training programmes, teaching materials and resources, and teaching and learning acts. Cambridge International Dictionary of English (1995) defines curriculum as:

- i. The group of subjects studied in a school, college etc.
- ii. A particular course of study in one subject.

White (1988) mentions that, uncertainties exist with the difference of the syllabus and curriculum between the British and American. The British perceives syllabus as the content or subject matter of a particular subject and curriculum refers to the entire content to be educated which would be realized inside a school or institution. However, the American perceives curriculum as similar to syllabus (Brumfit: 1984). Syllabus according to Brumfit (1984: 5) is "a statement of the subject matter, topics, or areas to be covered by the course leading to the particular examination." Thus, considering the definitions available and the various versions of the terms used, for the course of this study, the researcher will use curriculum to refer to the whole semesters' syllabuses, because the study focuses on the whole syllabuses of the Technical English and Communication. Syllabus is used to refer to the topics in the curriculum.

In determining the content of the curriculum, there are some stages that a developer would normally go through but most importantly "one should be clear about the functions the proposed curriculum will serve" (McNeil: 1996:118). Johnson (1989)

suggests 5 different phases involved in the second language curriculum establishment; curriculum overview, curriculum planning, end/means specification, programme implementation, classroom implementation and evaluation. Hutchinson and Waters (1994) suggest that “a language-centred course design” is a common approach in ESP course. This approach tries to connect as directly as possible the content of the ESP course and the analysis of the target situation.

In relation to the development of the curriculum, Karl Popper (cited in Ellington and Aris: 2000: 93) produced four basic stages in developing an instructional system (Figure 1)

| P₁ | TS | EE | P₂ |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Initial problem situation</i> | <i>Trial solution</i> | <i>Error elimination</i> | <i>New problem situation</i> |
| (identification of the need for the instructional system) | (development and operation of the instructional system) | (looking for ways in which the instructional system is failing to achieve its objectives) | Identification of areas in which the instructional system could be improved) |

Figure 1. The Basic Role of an Instructional System (Ellington and Aris: 2000: 93)

Based on the stages advocated by Popper, the first stage is the identification of the preliminary “problem situation” that is **P₁** containing three chronological stages which are in summary the identification of the need for the instructional system. The second stage involves the instructional system (**TS**) development and operation. At this particular stage the instructional system is designed and administrative arrangements are made so that the system can be implemented. The third stage is the “error elimination” process that is termed as (**EE**) that carries the evaluation of the stage one

(P₁) and two (TS). The EE stage according to Popper is (cited in Ellington and Aris: 2000: 94)

... a new instructional system can be regarded ... the same ... as new scientific theory....such theory should be tested not by trying to prove it right... but trying to prove it wrong

At this point, if the process is properly conducted it would reveal the areas of the instructional system which should be improved and how should it be improved. This stage is directly related to the purpose of this study as Popper suggested that the error elimination process can be carried out by surveying the students who have undergone or used the instructional system or the former students and by surveying people who are not directly involved in the instructional system under investigation.

The fourth stage is the new "problem situation" P₂ is identified after the error elimination procedures have been performed. These stages can form a continuous cycle in which it shows that the development of an instructional system is open, flexible and progressive.

For that reason, a certain curriculum seldom stays perfect throughout its implementation. So often it needs an evaluation to maintain its establishment and it needs an evaluation to identify any deficiencies or loopholes. The evaluation therefore helps to maintain or establish its quality (Finch and Crunkilton: 1992). As suggested by Finch and Crunkilton (p: 17)

...curriculum developers must give consideration to the basic character of the curriculum and build in those factors that contribute to its quality....it is hoped that these outcomes will lead to a ... curriculum that is data-based, dynamic, explicit in its outcomes, fully articulated, realistic, students-oriented, evaluation-conscious, and future oriented.

Hence, in an educational process, a high quality curriculum is vital to fit the learning activities. The outcome of having an excellent curriculum is therefore producing excellent products. In order to develop a curriculum without deficiencies, evaluation should be done on the curriculum (McNeil: 1996). This is supported by Finch and Crunkilton that in helping to ascertain the high quality curriculum, evaluation is needed to identify its weaknesses to avoid major problems.

Consequently, in maintaining the quality of a curriculum of a certain course, evaluation is definitely invaluable to be conducted by an individual (course designer/teacher) of a particular institution. For obvious reason, evaluation of a curriculum helps to solve some arising problems posed by the public on the curriculum accountability, developers on curriculum materials improvement and the teachers on the effect of individual students' learning opportunities. Furthermore, evaluation on the curriculum would reveal solutions to certain problems relevant to the curriculum that enable the course to be upgraded or improved (McNeil). Subsequently, an upgraded curriculum might enable the learners to function effectively in the workforce if the curriculum provided satisfies the job market requirements.

1.1.2 Curriculum Evaluation

Evaluation is a series of activities designed to gauge the effectiveness of an instructional system or a part of the system (Ellington and Aris: 2000) There are many approaches to be considered in evaluating the curriculum. An example of a framework suggested by Finch and Crunkilton is drawn below:

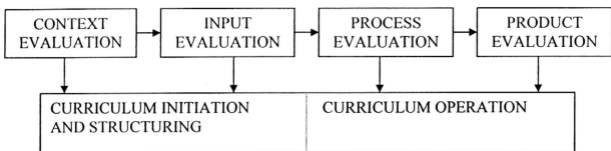


Figure 2. A framework for curriculum evaluation (Finch and Crunkilton: 1992: 268)

The framework is similar to Dan Stufflebeam's model for evaluation which consists of Context, Input, Process and Product for data gathering (Stake: 1973). Finch and Crunkilton suggest four major subjects of evaluation: context evaluation, input evaluation, process evaluation and product evaluation. Context evaluation and input evaluation are categorised under curriculum initiation and structuring and process evaluation and product evaluation fall under curriculum operation. Context evaluation and input evaluation are categorised under curriculum initiation and structuring and process evaluation and product evaluation fall under curriculum operation (Figure 2).

Context evaluation considers the decision on whether a curriculum should or should not be offered under the circumstances of goals and objectives to be applied. It is based on the definition and description of the environment in which the curriculum will be offered, identification of needs required as the criteria of the curriculum, and cautions of the possible unmet needs. Evaluation on input evaluates the resources ranging from media, modules, and learning environments to teaching and learning experiences that make up the input.

On the other hand, process evaluation generally engages in the instructional methodology and the assessments on the students' achievements. Product evaluation considers the former students' point of view to determine the quality and worth of the curriculum. Johnson (1989) suggests, A Product Approach to evaluation can offer an initial insight into the coherence of a curriculum; that is it can check the products of the four stages of development for mismatch and it can assess summatively the performance of learners against the original aims.

This study focuses exclusively on product evaluation in which the former students and the part-time students are requested to evaluate the topics available in the curriculum according to their importance.

1.1.3 German Malaysian Institute (GMI)

German Malaysian Institute, which was established in 1992, is a joint venture project between the Malaysian and the German Government. This project aims to transfer the German technology to Malaysians. GMI is one of the institutes in the country which offers technical courses by giving hands-on training. Having this practice, the trainees will hopefully become highly skilled and competent in operating and using modern technology especially in the manufacturing and engineering industries. Such elite technicians / technologists are expected to be able to combine theoretical know-how with practical know-why in design, manufacture, operation and maintenance. As a result, it could contribute to materialise the Malaysians' aspiration to be a fully developed country by achieving technological competency (GMI prospectus: 1).

The German Malaysian Institute is a centre for advanced skills training in the fields of Production Technology and Industrial Electronics with specializations in Mould, Tool and Die, Mechatronics, Process Instrumentation and Control, and Electronics and Information Technology. These programmes are offered for full-time as well as part time trainees. For the full time programmes, the trainees will take six semesters that is three years to complete each of the selected training programmes and for part time programmes, the trainees will take seven semesters that is three and a half years to complete. At the end of each programme which is the final semester, the students are required to fabricate a product as part of their graduation requirement. The products vary according to the specific programme that the students pursue, for instance students from Mould Technology are required to produce a mould for a selected mould product and students from Process Instrumentation and Control (PIC) have to construct a machine which applies the PIC discipline. The medium of instruction for all these programmes is English. Therefore, to be able to follow the training courses and modules it is crucial for trainees to possess the basic ability to understand and communicate in English.

1.1.4 GMI Trainees

There are two major groups of students in GMI. They are full time students and part time students. Full time students come from various backgrounds. Some of them are fresh SPM leavers and some are graduates from various technical institutions, such as Institute Kemahiran Mara (IKM) and Industrial Training Institute (ITI). In general, the trainees share a common interest in the technical and vocational education with the intention to upgrade their technical education level.

The majority of part time students on the other hand, are students who are mainly working in the industry and it is part of the requirement that these students should have some working experience in order to get accepted in the institute. They come to GMI for different reasons but in general it is for their self development and career advancement. Their classes are conducted at night and weekends.

Since English Language is the medium of instruction at the institute, the trainees need to have some degree of knowledge and ability to communicate (written and oral) in English. Considering the various backgrounds that they come from, not all trainees have the ability to do so. They may understand the lessons but many of them are not able to speak and write confidently in the language. Therefore, in helping the students to grasp and use the language better, during and after their training, Technical English and Communication course is offered in the institute. This course is supposed to help the trainees prepare for their future communication needs, besides improving their competency in the use of the language. In fact, during the final semester, it is compulsory for the students to present their project (a product) in front of internal (GMI Technical Training Officers) and external (Academics from universities and Engineers from related industries) verifiers to evaluate the students' presentation of their (the students') product. This presentation is carried out in English and it is necessary for the students to convince the verifiers of their ideas and work.

1.1.5 Technical English and Communication Curriculum

Technical English and Communication is offered for 6 semesters. The course is divided into four major areas: reading, writing, listening and speaking. The main skills being stressed at GMI are writing and speaking. These two skills are important for the

students to be proficient in English communication. That means trainees should be able to write and speak or present ideas to enable them to survive in the industry. Other than that, the trainees need to have the ability to read and understand English texts (oral and written). These four skills are integrated in the syllabus so that the trainees can function in the language (Appendix B for syllabus).

Although the general objectives for the TEC are not clearly stated, the objectives for each syllabus for the semesters are outlined clearly (refer to appendix B). TEC is mostly meant for the students who need English language skills for their course of study and after their course of study, that is for their working environment (refer to the Course Description in Appendix A). Despite the four skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing -are integrated in the curriculum, it still needs improvement due to the rapid change of communication mode since what applies today might be obsolete by the time the trainees enter the workforce.

However, in delivering the lessons to the learners, certain aspects must be taken into account, that is, the purposefulness of the curriculum as suggested by Hamzah et.al (1992: 118).

In order for language training to be purposeful it should be based on the learners' needs for the language. Therefore, English Language training and its accompanying pedagogical activities should be delivered from and embedded in the learners' ongoing activities.

In language learning there are two types of needs. They are immediate needs and delayed needs. Having these two needs, the syllabus should prepare the trainees not only during the training period but also after they graduate. Thus, looking at these

parameters, curriculum evaluation is very important in ensuring what is offered fulfils the learners' requirement for their learning and working activities.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

Wier and Roberts (1994: 4) define evaluation as

The systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information necessary to promote the improvement of the curriculum, and assess its effectiveness and efficiency, as well as the participants' attitudes within a context of particular institutions involved.

That definition promotes the purpose of a particular evaluation that is to identify the strengths of a particular curriculum. As discussed by Wier and Robert (1994) on evaluation, development-oriented evaluation is closely related to the subject of this study that is to improve and implement the curriculum effectively.

Evaluation of the curriculum offered is essential to promote an effective and efficient product (trainees). Since German Malaysian Institute (GMI) was set up ten years ago, there has never been any measurement or analysis done to determine how the Technical English and Communication Course offered for Diploma Level has aided the students to function effectively at their workplace. There is no empirical evidence that the course has helped the students in enhancing their performance at work. In addition, there is no specific study conducted in evaluating the course (TEC) at GMI especially in identifying the major objectives for the course offered. The syllabus was constructed based on a set of assumed objectives and skills that the students might need during their study years and later at their work place

A study conducted by the Resources and Development Centre of GMI on the effectiveness of TEC course found that the majority of the responses valued the effectiveness of TEC as average and above average (refer to Appendix C for detailed reference of the study result). This study did not look at the course in detail since there were no analyses on the methodology, syllabus content, and material used. However, it shows that majority of the students are satisfied with the course offered.

Thus, this study is the first step in evaluating the curriculum which aims to find out the worth of the course in terms of how it can assist the students in performing their communication tasks (mainly speaking and writing) at work. In addition, there are three other aims that this study hopes to achieve which are:

- i) to identify important topics in the syllabus which can be retained and emphasised.
- ii) to identify topics which are not relevant and can be eliminated or given less emphasis in the syllabus.
- iii) to identify new topics to be incorporated in the syllabus.

By achieving these aims, the curriculum can be improved or revamped according to the current needs of the future workers (current students) based on the experiences of the former students. Finally, this evaluation can prove whether the syllabus content is parallel to the industry requirements in terms of the communication needs.

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of the research can be summarised into five aspects, which are listed below:

- i. To identify the most significant types of English communication mode in the industry.
- ii. To evaluate if the TEC curriculum offered at GMI is sufficient in helping the trainees to perform their communication activities at work.
- iii. To analyse the insignificant areas that should not be emphasised and included in the Technical English and Communication.
- iv. To find out the proficiency levels of GMI graduates and their satisfaction with the TEC curriculum provided.
- v. To identify any other relevant areas that could be incorporated in the syllabus in helping the students to perform their job tasks.

1.4 Research Questions

This study aims to answer several questions. The questions are as follow:

- i. What are the English Language (and Communication) needs of industry?
- ii. How much is the current TEC curriculum in GMI adequate for meeting these needs?
- iii. How can the curriculum be further improved (if necessary) to meet these needs?
- iv. What are the English proficiency levels and satisfactory levels towards the TEC curriculum of GMI graduates?
- v. What are the other areas that the former full-time students and part-time students think relevant to be included in the syllabus?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study will provide some feedback about the Technical English and Communication offered at GMI from former students' and part time students' point of view. As pointed out by Hutchinson and Waters (1986: 155)

This is potentially the most valuable, since the learners will be in the position to judge how well the course prepared them for the target situation they are now in.

Obtaining feedback from former students will provide some proof on the status of TEC. Besides, the former full-time students are able to respond to the questionnaire by relating directly to their current working communication needs. By involving the current part-time students who are also industrial workers, some feedback on their real needs of the English language (and Communication) in the industry can be analysed. The part-time students can also identify the needs for TEC whether the curriculum should be offered to them (part time students) as well.

Finally, this study might also identify some irrelevant areas in the course besides generating some ideas for the course improvements. The study would provide an opportunity to upgrade the establishment of the curriculum content that satisfies the needs and requirements of the students as well as the industry.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

There are a number of limitations to this study. Finch and Crunkilton (1992) outlined four aspects of evaluation which are context evaluation, input evaluation, process evaluation and product evaluation. This study, however, concentrates on only one area of evaluation that is product evaluation. It focuses on the products' feedback, the former full-time students and the part-time students, on the usefulness of the course

offered and on the necessity for syllabus improvements. It does not intend to evaluate context, input, or process of the curriculum. Having concentrated on only one particular area that is the product, the study will not give the overall conclusion to the effectiveness or worth of the programme, but it would still provide some answers to the requirements of the curriculum.

Secondly, this study concentrates on the former students' feedback, thus, the feedback obtained might be beyond the intended scope, to exemplify, although the students obtained a diploma in Production Technology or Industrial Electronics, they may not necessarily be working in that particular field and they might suggest other topics which are not relevant to the fields learnt. As a result, the suggestions might be irrelevant for implementation.

On the other hand, the number of former students who will respond to the questionnaire might be less than expected. This is based on a few reasons:

- i. The students are unable to retrieve the attachment from the e-mail because of (probably) incompatible software used.
- ii. The e-mail addresses given are invalid or not correctly spelt resulting the message sent being rejected.

Therefore, the researcher might not be able to obtain the optimum feedback for the analysis. To overcome this setback, the researcher also gives the questionnaire by hand to the former students. This is accomplished through social encounters and friends. As a result, the researcher is able to obtain adequate responses for the data analysis.

Another limitation might be encountered is the students are not cooperative enough in answering the questionnaire especially with the open-ended questions. They are reluctant to think further than the questions posed. Consequently, the answers to the questionnaire are incomplete. In addition, each student may have different needs because they also have their own unique interests that motivate them to learn the language. Thus, their rating on the syllabus content can be misleading as compared to what the industry requires.

Nevertheless, having interviewed the people who have experienced working in the industry will hopefully provide some counter feedback to the responses given by the students. The interviews cannot be the medium to obtain the data because the samples are not the direct users of the curriculum that is the product of the curriculum. Therefore, the questionnaire is still needed in obtaining the data concerning the curriculum.

In conclusion, this study reveals some interesting facts on the status of the TEC at GMI. It manages to identify the sufficiency of the curriculum offered, the students' satisfaction with the curriculum, the significance of certain types of communication mode in the industry and the unimportance of certain areas of the curriculum. Having identified the respective aspects, the curriculum can either be maintained as it is or improved for better implementation.