CHAPTER 1

1.0 Introduction

On 1st September 1967, ten years after independence, English lost its status as the official language of the country. The Constitution of Malaya 1957, particularly its Language Act, placed English as an official language in Malaysia for 10 years after independence. Nonetheless, the other official language was Malay. Revision of the Revised Language Act of 1967 permitted Malay as the sole official language of Peninsular Malaysia. However, English was allowed to remain as the language of the legal domain. The legal domain in this context includes language use in the judiciary and legal services as well as in legal documents such as agreements of hire purchase, insurance, and in various fields of business and commerce.

Besides Malay, English as an official language stayed on for a much longer period in Sabah and Sarawak. The Constitution of Malaysia 1963 provided for the use of English in these two states for ten years as an official language after their independence. In Sabah, English as an official language lasted for ten years after the Independence of Sabah within Malaysia as provided for in the Constitution. On the other hand, although Sarawak was governed under the same Constitution, the

implementation of Malay language as the sole official language was delayed until 1985 by decision made periodically by the State Legislative Assembly.

Hence, the government has retained English as the second most important language in the national education system and has done all it can to improve the standard of English forever in the elevation in the standard of living of its people. If Malay was chosen and is upheld for nationalism, then English is obviously retained for another purpose, and that is nationism.

Presently, it is looked upon as the second language in the country by the government, students at various levels and the people. According to Asmah (1992) when the National Language Policy was formulated English has ceased to be the medium of instruction in institutions of higher learning sponsored by the government. The status of English as stated in this document means that English Language is second in importance in the education system. This implies that teaching of English is compulsory in institutions of higher learning.

In Malaysia, likewise in other countries in the region of South East Asia, technical studies in this region have gained phenomenal recognition and acceptance due to the shift in the economy base from the agricultural to industrial sector. As a result, multiple polytechnics either sponsored by the state or privately owned have sprouted in large numbers.

Ungku Omar Polytechnic (UOP) being an institution highly technical in nature and offering highly technological based courses, undoubtedly a large portion of research and reference were done in English at the UOP in order to meet the requirements of the market. Therefore, the need to enhance linguistic abilities in English is essential for the students. Simultaneously, the UOP as a technical institution particularly the English Department shoulders the responsibility to ensure that the needs are met and most importantly every graduate is equipped with essential language skills to face the challenges and dynamism of the employment sector in the future.

1.1   Significance of English as an International Language

Presently, the country is undergoing a dramatic process of industrialization never recorded and experienced ever since independence. With this development in the economic scenario, the bulk of the population ought to be trained in the technological and industrial fields. Therefore, it is impossible to attain and achieve domination and specialization without a certain level of proficiency in the English language. Furthermore, Malaysia is also playing a predominant role in the international scene as a negotiator and mediator through the various organizations of the United Nations. In addition, Malaysia is implementing aggressive campaigns to woo foreigners to boost its tourism

industry. As a result, Malaysians have been compelled to enhance the proficiency of the English language to cater the various and increasing needs. Lately, a lot of emphasis on the importance of English in the print media has emerged. The creation of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) by the Malaysian government has highlighted the need of English in seeing the MSC successfully realized for the next millennium. In addition, the rapid and radical change in science and technology absolutely require fluency in English. Hence, institutions of higher learning in Malaysia cannot afford to sideline the need of the communication ability in English in order to upgrade and to keep abreast with changes in science and technology. As a result, Malaysians should consciously set aside sentimentalities and nationalistic feelings so that more opportunities exist for the Malaysians to ensure that standard of English is no more allowed to degrade but instead improved and persistently upgraded through concerted efforts of all quarters.

The acceptance of English by the international community is basically due to two reasons .The first is historical and the other pragmatic.

The British have been powerful colonialists that have emerged down in the history. The legacy left behind it a possession of utmost significance, i.e. the English language. This legacy eventually became a vital medium intranationally in some cases and internationally in a wider

spectrum.

Both the United States and England's dominance in the economic, technological and trade fields is the second reason for the perennial stronghold of the English language. The factors that largely contributed to the evolution are the 19th century dominance of the British Empire and the 20th century technological and economic superiority of the United States. Thus, the former colonies and other sovereign countries have acknowledged English for technological access and dissemination and international communications.

All this has led to English being engaged very widely as an international language, thus enabling people who speak different languages all over the globe to communicate with each other in various moods and context amidst the cultural complexities and diversities of the global population.

1.2   The Function of English in the Employment Domain.

Of late, due to the liberalization of the Malaysian economy and globalization that is facilitated by the advent of the information technology, the role of English is gaining momentum in this domain. It was of great importance because it was the medium for higher status positions particularly in the private sector. The need of English language skills in

the Employment domain has been emphasized and is a prerequisite in multinational companies in recent years. The employers' requirement of English language skills can be noticed from newspaper advertisements for technical positions. Asmah Hj. Omar (1975) states that English are the most indispensable requirement in the achievement of social and economic status.

As a specific area of language teaching which has benefited from the work of applied linguistics, the field of English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) once limited to English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has grown. As the profession in science and technology has diversified and specialized, a number of acronyms have also increased. Crandall (1979) cites the acronyms to include EGP, (English for General; Purposes); EAP, (English for Academic Purposes), EST, (English for Science and Technology), VESL, (Vocational ESL) and ESP, (English for Specific or Special Purposes)

Multinational corporations operating locally and employing locals in middle management and professional levels are highlighting the need of competence in the English language. Moreover, these corporations also deal extensively through the Internet or electronic commerce. . Hence, the Internet places them significantly in a strategic marketing position and for acquiring relevant information for the day to day operation of the organization.

1.3 Background of Ungku Omar Polytechnic (UOP)

Ungku Omar Polytechnic is the first polytechnic in the technical and vocational education system in Malaysia. The Malaysian Education Ministry with the help of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) founded this polytechnic in the year 1969. UNDP had allocated RM 24.5 million to support the initial financing of the setting-up of the UOP. On the other hand, UNESCO is responsible for the polytechnic's construction that is on a 22.6-hectare land situated at Jalan Dairy, Ipoh. This polytechnic was named after the late Dato' Professor Ungku Omar Ahmad to appreciate his sacrifice and contribution to the country and nation especially in

the medical field.

The aim of the Polytechnic is to train qualified secondary school students to become skilled technicians in technical field, executive officers and semi professionals for the public and private sectors .In addition, they should also possess high moral values and with high credibility to realize the nation's Vision 2020.

Ungku Omar Polytechnic has 5 academic departments. The segments are:

i.   Civil Engineering Department

ii.   Electrical Engineering Department

iii. MechanicalEngineerinDepartment

iv. Marine Engineering Department

v. Commerce Department

The departments of the various bodies of engineering offer courses at Diploma and Certificate levels.

1.4   Administrative System of the UOP

UOP is headed by a Principal and assisted by a deputy principal. The UOP is divided into several Departments. There are several units such as Mathematics and Science Unit and the Library Unit to support the UOP management. A Head of Department heads every Department. The Head of Department is responsible for their department's management. Specific Units assist the Head of Department.

1.5   Programs at UOP

The polytechnic offers full-time certificate and diploma courses. The course duration is two years (four semesters) for the certificate programs and three years (six semesters) for the diploma programs. As for the Diploma in Marine Engineering Course, the duration is four years (eight semesters). Certificate holders with excellent results will be offered

places to pursue the Integrated Diploma course. The course duration is one year (3rd year of Diploma course).

1.6 Industrial Training

Industrial Training is a compulsory component in all the polytechnic courses. All students have to undergo practical training in industries in the third semester (six months) for the certificate courses and in the forth semester for the diploma courses. On the other hand, the students of Diploma in Marine Engineering Course have to undergo six months of practical training at dockyards in the third semester and on board ship training in the sixth and seventh semesters (one-year). Currently more than four hundred companies are actively involved in providing industrial training programs for the UOP students.

1.7 Student Evaluation

The evaluation of students consists of continuous assessment and final a examination. The continuous assessment involves the students' assignments, projects, practical work and tests. In addition, students must have at least 85% attendance to qualify for the final examination.

1.8   Student Admission

The admission of new students is conducted twice annually for the January and the July Semesters. The advertisements for student admission normally appear in local dailies in the months of March and September. The application forms can be obtained from all the polytechnics in the country under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education Malaysia

1.9   Entry Requirements

Candidates must be Malaysian citizens and possess a SPM/SPMV Certificate or equivalent with a pass in Malay together with the following qualifications obtained in one examination sitting.

For Certificate Courses the entry qualifications are:

Passed SPM/SPMV with Grade 1, 2 or 3;

PASS in Mathematics/Additional Mathematics; and

CREDIT in one of the following subjects:

Physics, Chemistry, Biology, General Science, Additional General Science, Geography, commercial subjects or technical/vocational related subjects.

OR

Passed SPM/SPMV with Grade 1, 2 or 3 and a

PASS in Mathematics Additional Mathematics; and

PASS in one of the following subjects:

Physics, Chemistry, Biology, General Science, Additional General

Science, Geography, technical/vocational related subjects or

commercial subjects.

As for the Diploma Courses the requirements are as follows:

Passed SPM/SPMV with Grade 1 or 2

A PASS in English

CREDIT pass in Mathematics/Additional Mathematics; and

Two CREDITS in the following subjects:

Physics, Chemistry, Biology, General Science, Additional

General Science, Geography, technical/vocational related

subjects or commercial subjects.

1.10   Outline of the English Syllabus for Diploma and Certificate Courses in UOP

A technical student who graduates from the polytechnic with a diploma or

certificate starts work in an organization in which English is the

11

main or a very important medium of communication. English is also the language of technology, business and trade. Therefore, diploma and certificate holders working both in the private and public sectors need an adequate level of proficiency in English to function effectively in the workplace.

The revised syllabus is designed for students taking three-year Diploma courses and two-year Certificate courses in Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Civil Engineering, Marine Engineering and Food Technology. The syllabus is the outcome of a national research to ascertain the nature of the English needed by technical graduates entering the workplace together with associated communications skills and expected levels of proficiency. This needs analysis research was conducted with recent graduates, with employers, and with current students who had just completed their Industrial Attachment.

The research has been carried out, and the resultant syllabus written primarily by practicing Polytechnic English lecturers under the guidance of the Technical and Vocational Department of the Ministry of Education.

1.11   Entry Requirements for English Proficiency

1.11.1 Diploma Course

Diploma courses in the various technical fields cater for post

secondary students who have a minimum of Grade 2 in SPM/SPMV with a pass in English (SPM/SPMV)

1.11.2   Diploma Courses (Integrated)

As mentioned above this program is specially tailored in the various technical fields to cater for post certificate students who have a Polytechnic Certificate (Sijil Politeknik Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia) with a minimum of 2.5 Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) based on the semester system or with a minimum of Grade B in 3 technical subjects in their second year based on the term system. A pass in English is **NOT** required.

1.11.3   Certificate Courses

Courses offered at this stage do not impose a provision that a pass is required in the English language at SPM/SPMV as an entry qualification. Certificate courses in the various technical fields cater for post secondary students who have a minimum pass in SPM/SPMV.

1.12   Time Allocation

1.12.1   Diploma Courses

The Polytechnic Technical Diploma courses are three year/six semester courses with Semester 5 being given over to Industrial Attachment. English is taught in Semesters 1, 2, 3 and 4 or 6 with three 45 minutes periods each week. Total teaching time available for English in a semester is 15 weeks, having allowed for public holidays, examinations, etc. This works to approximately 34 hours per semester.

1.12.2   Diploma Courses (Integrated)

The Polytechnic Technical Diploma (Integrated) course is a one-year/two semester's course. English is taught in Semesters 5 and 6 with two 45-minute periods each week. This works out to approximately 22 hours per semester. Total teaching time available for English being 15 weeks per semester.

1.12.3 Certificate Courses

The Polytechnic Technical Certificate is a two-year/four semester course with semester 3 being given over to Industrial Attachment. English is taught in Semesters 1 and 2 only with three 45 minutes periods each

week. Total teaching time available for English per semester is 15 weeks. This is reached after putting aside a designated time for examinations, public holidays, etc. This works out to about 34 hours per semester.

1.13 General Aims of the Syllabus

The syllabus is underpinned by the following general aims:

1   To develop students' confidence and fluency in English so as to enable the students to function effectively in the workplace.

2   To promote independent learning and self-monitoring.

3   To develop appropriate study skills.

4   To communicate in the workplace both with Malaysians and non-Malaysians for listening and speaking on professional matters for Diploma and certificate level students

5   To write for professional study and personal purpose for Diploma and Certificate level students.

6   To comprehend academic and occupationally related written texts for Diploma and Certificate level students.

7   To communicate outside the workplace in local situations related both to professional and private life for Diploma and Certificate level students

1.14 Syllabus Content and Weightage

The revised syllabus is pedagogic in nature.(See Appendix A}. In other words, it is designed to assist the teacher in preparing the scheme of work, lesson plan and in designing or selecting appropriate classroom materials.

The following are the syllabus Topic areas:

1.0 Study skills (15%)

    1.1 Dictionary skills

    1.2 Information Gathering Skills

    1.3 Library Skills

    1.4 Note-taking and note-making

    1.5 Making Summary

    1.6 General Reading Skills

    1.7 Using spell-check, grammar-check and readability software in
        Word-processing

2.0 Oral Communications skills at the workplace (40%)

    2.1 Instructions

    2.2 Interpreting (Bahasa Melayu <=> English)

    2.3 Describing what some thing is Made of and how it works

    2.4 Describing Processes

    2.5 Understanding Lectures/Talks/Training Sessions

2.6   Participation in Meetingsand Discussions

2.7 Telephone Skills

      2.7.1 Making and Receiving Telephone Calls

      2.7. 2 Using Telephone Directory

2.8   Making and Handling Complaints

2.9   Handling Inquiries

2.10 Giving   and   Understanding   Short   Oral   Reports/Oral Presentations

2.11   Giving, ReceivinandRelaying Messages

3.0   Understanding Technical Documents (10%)

     3.1   Reading Technical Manuals

     3.2   Reading Product Specifications

     3.3   Reading Graphs and Charts

     3.4   Reading Memos

4.0   Job-hunting skills (5%)

     4.1   Understanding Job Advertisements

     4.2   Writing Cover Letter and Curriculum Vitae/Resumes

     4.3   Filling in a Job Application Form

     4.4 Making Inquiries by Telephone about Job Vacancies and arranging for Appointments

     4.5 Preparing for and Handling Job Interview

5.0   Writing at work (10%)

     5.1   Filling   in   Forms/Job   Sheets

     5.2   Reports

5.2.2 Service Reports

5.2.1 Daily/Weekly/Progress Reports

5.2.3 Repair Reports

5.2.4 Accident Reports

5.2.5 Laboratory/Workshop Reports

6.0 English for Special Purposes (10%)

7.0 Reading for Technical Purposes (10%)

Percentages indicate relative weightage, i.e. the proportion of the time to be given to each topic.

In the syllabus specification that forms the main body, each topic is broken down into constituent Topics. Each topic is elaborated in terms of:

*Performance Objective: a statement describing what learners will be able to do in the workplace and/or as a student at the Polytechnic as a result of teaching and learning.

*Sub-skills: the particular sub-components of Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening that are to be focussed on towards achieving the Topic's Performance objective.

*Functions: the communicative uses of English (for introducing, agreeing, recommending) that characteristics of the Topic concerned.

*Language Exponents (of those functions): ways of expressing a particular Function, and to be learnt as part of the Topic concerned.

*Grammar: items that are highly characteristics of the Topic concerned.

*Core Lexis: lexical items that are highly characteristics of the Topic

*Inputs: suggestions as to materials, documents, etc. that the teacher

(and occasionally the student) contribute to the lesson.

*Activities: suggestions as to what happens in the class based on those inputs.

*Outputs: the products and/or consequences of those activities.

1.15 Teaching and Learning Approach As Prescribed In The Syllabus

Each topic specifies what is to be taught and also incorporates advice to the teacher inputs, learning activities and (students) output.

Such advice aims to assist teachers to achieve the Performance objective for each Topic. Teachers are strongly encouraged to supplement these materials and activities with others - teacher made or published - that best help students to learn to be more competent. Of course, whatever materials and activities are employed, they must render help towards the fulfillment of the Performance Objectives of the Topic concerned. In addition, it is recommended that teaching and learning strategies vary to enhance interest and motivation. In spite of advancements in recent years in communicative approaches and learner-centredness, in many English classrooms the teacher still talks too much and dominates the lesson. We must constantly bear in mind that students remember what they use and forget what they do not use. Therefore, learning should be the focus of every lesson rather than teaching

1.16 Methods of Student Assessment in the English Language

Students are assessed by:

a) Continuous assessment comprising quizzes, assignments, projects, etc.

b) Final examination.

NB: At the moment there is no uniform system of assessment among the polytechnics. However, it is projected there will be efforts towards achieving a standardized or uniform form of evaluation in the near future through the efforts of the Technical and Vocational Department of the Education Ministry with the cooperation of the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC).

1.17 Course Evaluation

In order to maintain and improve the quality of teaching and learning and to keep the English curriculum under constant review, the English for Technical Purpose syllabus will be regularly evaluated. This is done in two ways:

a) in the second half of each semester, students are asked to hold meetings at which matters such as course content, teaching/learning approaches, resources, assessment, etc. will be considered. There will be a pre-agreed agenda circulated in advance and students will write a simple report in point form on

the findings and recommendations of the meeting. Staff teaching the course and appropriate or suitable action will be taken subsequently will consider students' views and recommendations arising from these meetings.

b)at the end of semester 4 students will complete the Course Evaluation Questionnaire that will invite their judgements on all aspects of the course. Again, the staff teaching the course will give detailed and serious consideration to the summation of questionnaires responses and will decide what action to take in response to students' views.

1.18 Statement of the Problem

This study is conducted to address the following issues:

1) The English syllabus, namely English For Technical Purposes that came into force in 1995 as a result of a study carried out in 1994 by a team of lecturers from the various polytechnics in the country to ensure that there is a standardized English language programme for all polytechnics. There needs a review of this syllabus as a result of radical changes due to globalization and the increasing importance of information technology in the process of scientific and technological advancement particularly in the field of research and development in the new millennium. It is imperative that a needs analysis be conducted to ascertain the needs of the English Language among UOP students as perceived by i) employers ii) Ungku

Omar Polytechnic's Diploma of Electrical Engineering Final Semester students, and iii) the English Language Lecturers of UOP.

2) Based on reports received from firms to which UOP students are sent for industrial attachment, employers are generally of the opinion that UOP graduates are not able to communicate effectively in English both orally as well as in the written form. A needs analysis of

3) employers' perceived needs for English among UOP graduates in the employment will be useful for the review of the English for Technical Purposes syllabus.

4) Dr. Mahathir Mohamed, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, has on several occasions stressed the importance of being able to communicate effectively in English if Malaysia is to be to be involved in international trade. Vision 2020 which aims to make Malaysia a fully industrialised nation by the year 2020 necessitates that UOP graduates be able to communicate effectively in English as it is the language of science and technology. Consequently, a study of the needs for the English Language among current UOP final Semester students, employers and the English Language lecturers has to be undertaken to identify and verify what the content of the English Language syllabus should be.

5) As the Asia- Pacific rim has been accepted as the highest growth region of the world, the UOP need to respond to the increase in demand for human resources in the industrial, manufacturing and services sectors.. The English Language programmes should

accordingly cater to the needs for the English Language in the different workplaces.

1.19 Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to identify the English language needs of the UOP Diploma of Electrical Engineering students. This is done by collecting data on the needs for the English language as perceived by:

-students currently pursuing the Diploma of Electrical Engineering at the UOP

-employers of the UOP Diploma of Electrical Engineering.

-English language lecturers of UOP.

1.20 Research Questions

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

a) What are the present needs of the UOP Diploma of Electrical Engineering?

b) What are the needs and problems of the UOP Diploma of Electrical Engineering students during industrial training?

c) What are the needs in terms of proficiency of prospective UOP Diploma of Electrical Engineering employers?

d) How can the UOP syllabus be adapted to meet the real and actual needs?

1.21   Significance of the Study

The significance of the study lies in the fact that the data collected can be analysed and interpreted in terms of the communicative needs of the UOP Diploma of Electrical Engineering in the English Language. The information derived can be translated into syllabus content in the current attempt to review the English Language syllabus in use at the UOP.

Another significance of the study could be that the analysis and the interpretation of the data could be indicative of the fact that there should be a separate English language syllabus for the UOP Diploma of Electrical Engineering.

By consistently developing a needs analysis on a regular basis, the communicative needs in the academic and employment domain of a student can be ascertained quite accurately. Hence, more appropriate new and innovative teaching materials and methods can be devised to assist mainly students to perform designated tasks particularly enriching technical knowledge and certain communicative tasks with more confidence and at ease comparatively. Meanwhile, new courses are tailored, as the engineering arena tends to function effectively by amalgamating various fields of engineering. One such engineering course designed by incorporating various field of engineering is the 'Mechatronic'. It consists of the Mechanical, Electrical and Electronics body of knowledge. On the other hand, Information Technology has become part and parcel of all academic and professional courses. Therefore,

technical students' cannot afford to be complacent by simply turning a deaf ear to the evolvement of new terminologies. Consequently, increasing empowerment of comprehension skills is vital as it paves the way to acquire more technical information and better scientific understanding in English.

It is the hope of the researcher that the study will provide sufficient awareness among the syllabus designers to take into account the susceptibility of the syllabus to persistent changes. However, it is left to the authorities to consolidate the syllabus by improving and adapting for the benefit of the students after acknowledging the strengths and the weaknesses highlighted in the study.

1.22   Aims of the Study

The study aims to answer the following questions:

a) What are the present needs of the UOP Diploma of Electrical Engineering?

b) What are the needs and problems of the UOP Diploma of Electrical Engineering students during industrial training?

c) What are the needs in terms of proficiency of prospective UOP Diploma of Electrical Engineering employers?

d) What are the changes that need to be made to the syllabus to meet the real and actual needs of the UOP Diploma of Electrical Engineering students?

1.23   Limitations of the Study

The sampling procedures of the study were far from ideal. Ideally the population should be at random sampling of TESL lecturers and students in polytechnics in the whole country. However, time and financial constraints have resulted in the study being restricted to a manageable area. UOP was chosen because it is located in the home town of the researcher and it would be convenient to meet personally the samplings and the administrators as scheduled for their cooperation and collecting relevant data for the research.

The study is limited to the final semester diploma of engineering students to determine the needs of the English language although UOP offers various courses at certificate level and commercial courses. As a result, conclusions and suggestions and recommendations cannot be assumed as acceptable and valid for the entire polytechnics in the country. Moreover, recommendations and suggestions researched and presented are impossible to be implemented as the UOP is under the jurisdiction of the Technical and Vocational division of the Ministry of Education. Therefore, any initiative to inject superior ideas and to rectify flaws in the present syllabus by the UOP is impossible, as the UOP is not independent and autonomous in its own right.

A variety of instruments would ensure the accuracy of the data collected and reduce errors in sampling. However, due to the constraints of time and resources, questionnaires were utilized as the

key instrument and the informal talks with Heads of the English Language and senior lecturers of the Electrical Engineering Departments as the other supplementary instrument and as a validation instrument as a means of getting feedback from selected scholars. The statistical tools used in the study were limited to those that could be computed on the personal computer. Nevertheless, they are adequate for the purpose of this study.