CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The analysis of data in the previous chapter has revealed some interesting and important facts about the course under study and other issues related to it. Consistent with the purpose of this study, this concluding chapter will present a summary of the findings; and some recommendations will also be made. It is hoped that the discussion here will answer the three research questions put forward in Chapter One.

This chapter will be divided into five sections. The first section is the introduction, while the second is the discussion of the findings drawn from the results of this study. That means the findings obtained from the questionnaires and interviews will be combined and summarised to provide an overall conclusion. Next, the discussion will be on the implications of the study. After that, some suggestions for course improvement and recommendations for further research will be discussed. The chapter ends with a summary of the important points highlighted in this study.
5.2 Discussion of Findings

This section will provide answers to the first and second research questions put forward in Chapter One. The questions are given below.

Research question one:
What are the perceptions of the students and teachers regarding the Commercial English 1 (CE 1) course, in relation to the following aspects:

a) Students’ needs  f) Evaluation system
b) Course objectives  g) Time allocation
c) Syllabus / curriculum  h) Problems faced
d) Materials used  i) Overall perceptions
e) Methods of teaching

Research question two:
How did the two groups of students (CBSS and DBSS) perform in the CE 1 course?

a) What are their overall evaluation results?
b) What are the implications of these results?
5.2.1 Research Question One

5.2.1.1 Students' Needs

First of all, the findings indicate that the majority of the respondents agreed that the CE 1 course helped to improve the students' four basic language skills (L, S, R, W) to a certain degree. The majority of the CBS students felt that they had made some improvements in the speaking skills, while most of the DBS students said that their writing skills had improved more than the other skills.

5.2.1.2 Course Objectives

In terms of meeting the general course objectives, the respondents felt that the CE 1 course was successful in equipping a student with certain skills and knowledge necessary for their present study and future job needs. However, there is a gap between the students and the teachers with regard to which specific objectives are more important for a student to achieve at the end of the course. Both groups of students voted for the spoken skills, that is, conversational strategies and participation in oral exchanges. The teachers, on the other hand, preferred the study skills, that is, the ability to use a dictionary effectively.
5.2.1.3 Syllabus / Curriculum

This study shows that there are similarities and differences in opinions regarding the language skills taught. In terms of the areas of focus, the teachers focused more on teaching the ECP skills suggested in the syllabus, but the students wanted the focus to be on the basic language skills, especially the speaking skills. There is a gap even in the perceptions of which ECP skill should be regarded as the most important for their current study needs. While the CBS and DBS students perceived the social English skills and the oral communication skills as being the most important skills, respectively, the teachers were of the view that the study skills should be the focus in this course. However, all the respondents were of the similar view that the most important basic skill to be improved at PUO was the speaking skill.

5.2.1.4 Materials Used

In terms of the materials used in this course, more than half of the students said that they were not happy with them but the majority of the teachers said otherwise. It can be concluded that the teachers relied too much on a single ‘textbook’ and even this material was not very effective for teaching weak students in the class because they could not understand or perform some of the
tasks listed in it. There was a lack of variety in terms of the materials used by the teachers.

5.2.1.5 Teachers and Teaching Methods

The findings indicate that all the teachers involved in this study were qualified teachers with many years of teaching experience. Most of them, except two, had several years of experience in teaching the CE 1 course and had attended at least three ESP courses. However, two teachers were not very familiar with the concept of ESP. This study has shown that the teachers were generally perceived as being helpful and understanding. However, their methods of teaching were considered not very effective and interesting. Some students felt that the course was boring due to this weakness.

5.2.1.6 Evaluation System

This study has found that there is a gap regarding the perceptions about the evaluation system used for this course. The majority of the teachers felt that the evaluation system was suitable. However, the responses given by the students were mixed. That means there is room for improvement in this aspect. The findings also show that more than half of the students did not know whether a standardized evaluation system (for the CE 1 course) was used in all
polytechnics in Malaysia. (At present, the evaluation system for all the core subjects in the Commerce Department is standardized).

5.2.1.7 Time Allocation

With regard to time allocation, the majority of the respondents felt that the total time allocated for the CE 1 course was adequate. However, some students (about 15%) said that the time spent on doing this course was not very worthwhile. Interviews with the students confirmed that these students were not interested in doing this course because they did not see the need to do it.

5.2.1.8 Problems Faced

The results of this study also provide explanation for the common problems faced by the teachers and students. It can be concluded that teachers teaching this course are faced with poor response from the students in the teaching and learning process. These problems are mainly due to their students' poor command of the language and the lack of interest to learn. Besides, they are also faced with time-constraints to prepare enough teaching materials to suit the needs of all their students.
The students, on the other hand, are not without problems too. The biggest problem faced by them was their inability to follow the course. This was evident among the CBS students. Other problems include lack of time to do assignments and lack of adequate language skills practice in class. Though these are common problems faced by any student or teacher in any polytechnic, they will remain there if no measure is taken to overcome them. It is hoped that steps would be taken by relevant parties to work out an amicable solution to these problems.

5.2.1.9 Overall Perceptions

As a whole, the CE 1 course was perceived as useful for a student's present study and future job needs. The topics were seen by the SS and TS as being relevant to the students' courses of study. The course was perceived by them as being effective in improving the English level of students to a certain extent. It was also perceived as being useful in helping students to use English materials to do assignments in their course of study. However, some students (about 15% as mentioned in section 5.2.1.7 earlier) perceived it as boring. These students were either not interested in learning English (for weak students), or felt that the course was too easy and not challenging enough (for good students).
With regard to the perceptions about English, this study has found that the majority of the students perceived English as being important for their current study and future job needs. However, it was not widely used by the students in and outside the classrooms as compared with the other languages such as Bahasa Melayu, Mandarin and Tamil. Most of the students, especially the CBS students, had no confidence in using the language even after having completed the CE 1 course.

5.2.2 Research Question Two

The findings (in section 4.2.2 in chapter four) revealed that academically the DBS students were better than the CBS students based on the SPM grades obtained upon entry into PUO. The former was also more proficient than the latter (based on the SPM English grades obtained by them). However, both groups of students were considered as having a rather low proficiency level based on their GCE English results.

In terms of their performance in the CE 1 course, there was a significant difference in the performance of the students (based on their overall evaluation results). On the whole, the DBS students performed better than the CBS students. As mentioned earlier in section 4.2.3 in chapter four, the better performance in the CE 1 course shown by the DBS students compared with the
CBS students confirmed that the academically better and more proficient students (DBSS) performed better than the academically weaker and less proficient students (CBSS).

Although in general the proficiency level of both groups of students is considered to be low (as mentioned in section 4.2.3 in chapter four), it can be concluded from the interviews that the DBS students could converse better than the CBS students in English. The latter were also facing more difficulties in following the CE 1 course as compared with the former. All these confirmed the possibilities mentioned in section 1.3 in chapter one.

5.3 Implications

This section will look at the implications arrived at based on the findings obtained in research questions one and two above.

5.3.1 Research Question One

Firstly, the findings of this study indicate that there is room for improvement with regard to the course under study. The weaknesses highlighted deserve the serious attention and consideration of the various parties involved
either directly or indirectly in the planning and designing of ESP courses in general, and the course under study in particular. The highlighted weaknesses should not be seen as a criticism to course designers but as invaluable information for them to improve the quality of the course if they decide to make revisions later.

The teachers too, should not feel angry or offended by any negative comments made against them in the course of investigation. They should accept the findings with a positive attitude in the hope that they will rectify any of their weaknesses for the sake of their students. After all, unlike GE, ESP is mainly concerned with meeting the specified needs of the learners (Strevens, 1988).

Secondly, the problems faced by the teachers and students imply that there is room for improvement with regard to the education system in Malaysia. Students entering an institution of higher learning such as PUO are supposed to be above average students who have either obtained grade one or at least a good grade two at the SPM level. For example, almost 85% of the DBS students and 46% of the CBS students involved in this study were SPM grade one holders, yet they faced various problems when they were doing the CE 1 course. What will happen if the not-so-good students (SPM grade three and below) are allowed to enter polytechnics and sign up for the course? The fact that students still do not possess the basic language skills after spending so many years in
schools imply that there are weaknesses in our education system.

Thirdly, the results of this study show that both the CBS and DBS students gave high priority to improving their speaking skills at PUO. This implies that the needs analysis report in 1994 which concluded that spoken English as the dominant skill most wanted by polytechnic students still holds true today (2000). In other words, if the results of this study can be used as a guide, that means there is no need to carry out another large-scale needs analysis similar to the one in 1994. Perhaps what should be done is to conduct specific needs analysis study on specific courses for different groups of students, for example, a comparison of needs between all certificate level students in all polytechnics with regard to the Commercial English courses. This is useful because these courses may not be suitable for all certificate level students of different majors.

5.3.2 Research Question Two

The findings of this study (discussed earlier in section 5.2.2 in this chapter) confirm that the DBS students who were required to have at least a pass in English at the SPM level to enter PUO, faced less problems in following the CE 1 course compared with their peers (CBS students) who were not required to fulfil this requirement to enter PUO. This implies that there is a need to provide
different ESP courses for students at certificate and diploma levels if the present system of entry requirements into PUO is maintained (currently the entry requirements are different for those applying for certificate and diploma level courses, as mentioned in section 1.2.4 in chapter one).

The findings also confirm that the DBS students performed better than the CBS students as shown by their CE 1 course test results, for example, almost 39% of the DBS students obtained grade A compared with 0% in the case of the latter. This implies that there is a weakness in the intake system set by the Ministry of Education. They should pay serious attention to this weakness if they want to produce certificate level graduates who have a comparable standard of English with graduates from other institutions of higher learning such as Tunku Abdul Rahman College (TARC). (Currently many private institutions of higher learning such as the TARC requires its students to have a credit in the SPM English for admission into all courses at certificate and diploma levels).

5.4 Recommendations

To facilitate more effective teaching and learning of the CE 1 course, some changes should be seen as being necessary. Therefore, some recommendations will be discussed in this section. The suggestions put forward
by the respondents in the questionnaires and interviews will be summarized and discussed here. Where necessary, additional suggestions by the researcher would be included as well. It is hoped that this section will provide answers to the third research question mentioned in chapter one. The question is given below.

5.4.1 Research Question Three:

What are the recommendations made by the respondents to improve the quality of the CE 1 course in terms of:

a) Students' needs
b) Course objectives
c) Syllabus / curriculum
d) Materials used
e) Methods of teaching
f) Evaluation system
g) Time allocation
h) Problems faced
i) Overall perceptions

5.4.1.1 Students' Needs

The findings have shown that there is a gap between the students and teachers regarding the skills to be focused upon. It is suggested that the syllabus should be revised to include more practice in the speaking skills. This means that more emphasis should be given to teaching the students how to converse in the language correctly in various business situations. Besides, they should also be given more practice in the listening skills. This can be carried out in the
language laboratory. Grammar can also be incorporated in the teaching of these basic skills.

5.4.1.2 Course Objectives

Since basic skills are needed by the students and the general objectives stated are too broad and general, it is suggested that the general objectives of the course should be revised as follows:

A). To equip a student with the necessary basic language skills to be a competent user of the English language.

B). To equip a student with a certain amount of skills (ECP) and knowledge necessary to cope with his present study needs.

C). To equip a student with a certain amount of skills (ECP) and knowledge necessary to function in future working environments.

The first objective is stated to reflect the inclusion of the four basic language skills in the course as suggested by the respondents. The second and third objectives are revised from the previous ones to show that the students will acquire some ECP (English for Commercial Purposes) skills and knowledge after completing the course. The previous objectives were too general and broadly stated and not suitable.
It is also suggested that the specific objectives to be achieved at the end of the course should include basic language skills. The inclusion of the basic skills as the specific objectives to be achieved at the end of the course is aimed at developing competency in using the language before they master the ECP skills. These skills should be dealt with first before teaching the ECP skills. This is to develop confidence among the students before they proceed to learning the latter. The teaching of grammar can be incorporated into the basic skills.

5.4.1.3 Syllabus / Curriculum

Consistent with the suggestions made in section 5.4.1.2 to revise the specific objectives of the course, the syllabus should also be revised to include learning the basic language skills. The suggested syllabus is given below.

1. Basic Skills (BS)
   1.1 Speaking skills
   1.2 Listening skills
   1.3 Reading skills
   1.4 Writing skills

2. Study Skills (SS)
   2.1 Dictionary skills
   2.2 Information gathering skills

3. Social English Skills (SES)
   3.1 Introducing and greetings
   3.2 Conversational strategies
4. *Oral Communication Skills (OCS)*

4.1 Responding to oral exchanges

4.2 Interpreting information

For the ECP skills suggested in the syllabus, the teachers and students should come to a compromise. Since the students would like more emphasis on the social English skills and oral communication skills, and less emphasis on the study skills, it is suggested that teachers should spend more time on the former and less time on the latter. This measure can be taken because an ESP course should be learner-centred, and based on the needs and wants of the learners.

As for the English curriculum, this study shows that more than half of the students and about half of the teachers preferred to have a General English (GE) course for first year first semester students and Commercial English (CE) courses for second semester onwards. However, the researcher feels that it would be better to include GE as a component of the CE 1 course. The reason is that the students have been doing GE in schools for many years. A GE course would not be suitable for polytechnic students. It is hoped that the inclusion of GE as a component in the CE 1 course will be more effective in serving two types of needs, i.e., the need for the learners to be more proficient in the English language, and their need to cope with the current study needs at PUO.
5.4.1.4 Materials Used

This study has found that the students were not happy with the materials used in this course. Two weaknesses were:

1. the content of the 'textbook' used in this course;
2. the lack of variety in teaching materials.

To overcome the first weakness, it is suggested that all the teachers should come together and revise the content of the 'textbook' when the need arises. For example, during the discussion with their students at the end of the course which was suggested in section 5.4.2 earlier, feedback from their students can be obtained regarding which areas in the 'textbook' cause problems to them. The feedback can be used as a guide for teachers to revise its contents.

As for the second problem, it is suggested that teachers should take the initiative to make use of other teaching materials in the course of teaching their students. They have to make some efforts to select suitable materials from various sources such as newspapers, magazines and language journals. They can also make arrangements to take their students to the language laboratory to make full use of the facilities in the lab. Besides, they can also make use of other
teaching aids such as television, radio, and video to make their lessons more interesting.

5.4.1.5 Methods of Teaching

Though the findings show that teachers involved in teaching the CE 1 course were trained teachers, two of them did not have much experience in teaching ESP courses in polytechnics. To equip them with the basic concept of ESP, they should attend short training to familiarise themselves with ESP. For those with much experience in teaching ESP courses, they should also be sent for short courses or seminars to acquire new knowledge. They can conduct in-house training for other teachers based on their newly acquired knowledge.

Another related weakness as perceived by the students is regarding the methods of teaching. The teachers may not be aware of their ineffectiveness if they do not get feedback from their students. Therefore, it is suggested that the administrators should introduce the student evaluation system whereby the students will assess their respective teachers by filling in evaluation forms at the end of the course. Another way is to get the teachers and students to come together, say at the end of each semester, to have an exchange of views about all issues related to the course. This will help the teachers understand the needs of
their students and make necessary changes in the following semester.

5.4.1.6 Evaluation System

This study has revealed the uncertainty of students regarding the evaluation system used to assess them in this course. It is suggested that there should be a standardized evaluation system for all polytechnic students taking this course and other ESP courses so that confusion will not arise. This will also assure fairness among all polytechnic students taking this course. Since the other core subjects in the students' respective courses of study have a standardized evaluation system for all polytechnic students in the country, there is no reason why this should not be applied to ESP courses as well.

This study has also found that both the students and teachers preferred more weightage to be given to the coursework component rather than the examination component. If their views can be adopted and applied to ESP courses in other polytechnics, then it is suggested that all polytechnic students taking this course should follow the 100% continuous evaluation system which is going to be implemented in PUO beginning this year (2000).
5.4.1.7 Time Allocation

Although the findings indicate that both the students and teachers have differing views regarding the total time allocation for this course, the researcher feels that it would be a wise move to increase the weekly teaching periods from four right now to five so as to provide more time for the teaching of basic language skills to be included in the course as suggested in section 5.4.1 earlier.

The rationale for the increase in more teaching periods is further strengthened by the results obtained from the views of the CBS students who cited the lack of adequate language skills practice as one of their main problems. Likewise, the DBS students also cited the lack of time to complete their coursework as their major problem. Hence, the increase in the teaching periods would be of great help to both groups of students.

5.4.1.8 Problems Faced

This study has highlighted three major problems faced by teachers:

1. poor response from students due to poor command of English;
2. poor response from students due to lack of interest;
3. time constraints to prepare teaching materials.
The teachers admitted that the first problem was the most common one at PUO. They also admitted that it was more obvious among the CBS students than the DBS students. This is not surprising as the former are 'weaker' than the latter academically. To overcome this, it is suggested that teachers should motivate students to participate in simple but interesting activities in class. They should provide them with more language skills practice to build up their confidence.

The second problem is related to the first in the sense that normally weak students will lose interest in learning. It is suggested that teachers should plan their lessons in such a way that the weak students can take part in classroom activities. After all, ESP teachers do not only teach, but also facilitate learners to improve themselves with regard to acquiring or improving their English language skills.

The teachers said that the third problem was related to their heavy workload due to shortage of English teachers at PUO. To overcome this, it is suggested that the administrators should ask for more teachers from the Ministry of Education. At the same time, the teachers should not use this as an excuse but come up with certain group efforts that will help them to pool their resources.
The students also faced with some problems. The major ones were:

1. being unable to follow the course due to their low proficiency in English;
2. lack of adequate language skills practice;
3. lack of time to do assignments.

As mentioned earlier (in this section), the first problem was more obvious among the CBS students. This is due to the fact that many of the students did not obtain good grades in English at the SPM level, they were more likely to face difficulties when they signed up for an ESP course. It is therefore suggested that the entry requirements for admission into PUO should include a good pass or a credit in English at the SPM level. This will raise the quality of students and also help to overcome this problem.

The second and third problems were related to the time factor. As mentioned earlier, to overcome these problems, it is suggested that the weekly English periods be increased from four to five to accommodate more time for language skills practice, and for completing any projects given by the teachers.

5.4.1.9 Overall Perceptions

The findings show that most of the respondents agreed that the CE 1 course should be continued as a compulsory course for all first year commerce
students, but with some modifications made to improve the quality of the course. The majority of the respondents agreed that at least a pass in SPM English should be made an entry requirement for admission into all certificate level courses in Malaysian polytechnics. The majority of them also felt that a good pass or credit in SPM English will definitely help certificate level students to follow the CE 1 course better and perform better at the end of the course. Therefore, it is suggested that the present entry requirements into all polytechnics in Malaysia be revised immediately to include at least a good pass (P7) or at least a low credit in SPM English, besides modifying the CE 1 course according to the suggestions made in this study.

5.4.2 Directions for Further Research

The findings of this study were based on data gathered from two sets of questionnaires administered to a total of sixty three students and seven language teachers at PUO. Supplementary information was collected from interviewing a total of twenty two students and five teachers. With this small number of samples, the results obtained were inconclusive. Therefore, it is suggested that a follow-up research be carried out on a large-scale basis. The scope of this research should be widened to include more representative samples from different sample groups in different polytechnics so that it can be widely accepted as being truly representative. This will also make the study
more conclusive and the findings can be generalized. This kind of research can be successfully carried out only if there is financial support from various established organisations and the Ministry of Education.

This present study attempts to evaluate the A104 Commercial English 1 course through the perceptions of the students and language teachers. It should be noted that there are many other variables which will also determine the quality of the course. Hence, it is suggested that other variables should also be looked into if the large-scale research mentioned above is to be conducted. Besides the proficiency level of the students which was investigated in this study, other aspects such as the learning styles, teaching styles, attitudes, and learning environments should also be considered.

A number of possible areas of research related to this study can also be carried out such as, an evaluation of other Commercial English courses currently offered to polytechnic students such as the CE 2, CE 3, and CE 4. The research on all the Commercial English courses will provide a complete understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of these courses. This invaluable information will enable course designers to make decisions when they want to revise or revamp the courses in the near future.
Another important area of research is regarding the language needs of different groups of students in Malaysian polytechnics. At present, there are many types of Commerce courses such as Accountancy, Banking and Finance, International Trade, Insurance, Marketing, Book-keeping, Tourism Management and many others. With so many types of courses offered, it is possible that the language needs of these students might vary according to their courses of study. Thus, it is suggested that research should be conducted to determine whether they all share the same language needs. The results obtained can be very useful for course designers to plan other ESP courses needed for different groups of students in polytechnics.

Last but not least, research on very specific areas of a course can be useful. These include material evaluation, syllabus evaluation, and learner evaluation. For material evaluation, various aspects of materials used for a course can be investigated in detail to determine their suitability and effectiveness. Likewise, the syllabus content of a particular course can be looked into in depth to find out its strengths and weaknesses. As for learner evaluation, it can be carried out to determine a student’s achievement in an ESP course. The feedback obtained will indirectly reflect the effectiveness of the course itself.

The research studies recommended above can be conducted by an individual researcher or by groups of researchers comprising polytechnic
teachers and officials in the Technical Education Department of the Ministry of Education. It is hoped that such studies will help improve the wealth of research related to course evaluation in technical education in Malaysia. It is also hoped that more established public and private organizations will come forward to offer financial assistance to large-scale research conducted to improve the quality of technical education programmes in general, and ESP programmes in particular.

5.5 Summary

Two important points can be made based on the discussions of the findings above. Firstly, this study has shown that there is a gap between the teachers and students with regard to certain aspects of the course, for example, perceptions about the language skills and the methods of teaching. There is also a gap between the CBS and DBS students in terms of their levels of proficiency, their difficulties in following the CE 1 course and their perceptions about this course. For example, due to their lower proficiency level, the CBS students faced more difficulties in doing this course and obtained poorer results than the DBS students. This kind of problem can be avoided if the views of the learners with regard to the goals, methodology, course content, and evaluation are
considered before the course is designed (Chitravelu, 1993).

Another point is that the relationship between the suppliers (material writers and teachers) and the consumers (learners) of language teaching services is not clear in this course. The learners did not understand clearly the defined goals of this course and thus, they were not motivated to learn English seriously. This has resulted in confusion of the learning objectives. While the teachers feel safe to teach according to the syllabus drawn up for them, the learners have different agendas. For example, they preferred improving their basic skills to mastery of the ECP skills. It should be noted that a clear and well-defined relationship between suppliers and customers form the very foundation of a successful ESP programme (Sargunan, 1994). It is hoped that this study has been very informative and has aroused the interest of the relevant authorities to take the necessary steps to improve the quality of this course for the benefit of the learners.