

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Language is an important code of communication which is used to convey messages. Language varies according to certain characteristics such as ethnicity, culture, country, and so forth. In this globalised arena, people are striving to acquire more than one language. Thus, many are bilingual, trilingual or even multilingual. These groups of people have an added advantage of selecting the language they wish to use according to their purpose of communication. Thus, the English language, being the international medium for communication, is not less important among people of various walks of life. As in other fields, English has become an important language of the tourism industry.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) have highlighted that people want to learn English not merely for pleasure or prestige of knowing the language, but to master the language of technology and commerce. They claim that since English is the accepted international language for communication, people had created specific reasons for learning it. Eventually, this, inevitably led to the development of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Individuals from various professions, such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, and business professionals, all need English for their specific job functions.

Many institutions are focusing on providing the best means of English language courses for their undergraduates in order to guarantee them good job prospects in their relevant industries. Several English courses are offered according to the competence and

needs of the respective undergraduates. One of the English courses designed to cater to the specific needs of the learners is known as English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

However, certain issues have to be given deep consideration before designing and offering an ESP course. A needs analysis is necessary to identify the issues that need to be taken into account before designing any ESP course. Needs analysis could be defined as a process of identifying the needs of various stakeholders; the participants, the sponsor, the ESP trainer and other relevant people involved with the specific ESP course. In the case of offering an ESP course, needs analysis not only identifies the needs, but also aids in developing the English language teaching for the specific context. Harding (2007) points out that identifying and analyzing the needs of students is vital in ESP teaching. Thus, this clarifies its contribution towards the course design. He also states that needs analysis is not just an “initial one-off activity”; it should be an ongoing process (Harding, 2007). Obviously, this does make sense, because the needs of those involved may differ from time to time based on several factors such as changes in government policy, market needs, as well as economic and financial changes.

1.1 Background of the Study

This study focuses on an ESP course which was designed for students of Hospitality and Tourism Management at University Tun Abdul Razak (UniRazak). UniRazak was established in 1997 as one of the first private universities in Malaysia. The university received its first batch of 162 students in September 1998 (UniRazak, 2011). Since then, it has rapidly established itself as a centre for premier education. The university

views its responsibility of shaping the minds of the young and the intellectual leaders of tomorrow very seriously. In its efforts to produce competitive and capable graduates, the university offers various programmes in the field of Business Administration, Information Technology, Education and Social Sciences and also Hospitality and Tourism Management. In addition, the management of UniRazak constantly upgrades its syllabus in accordance to the current industrial requirements. The university also implements innovative teaching methods to provide the best education options for its students. The Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Management (FHTM) embraces the vision of the university and enhances its good name in the tertiary education circles by producing many talented graduates for the local hospitality and tourism industry.

The issue to be investigated in this paper is the need to improve the current ESP course, which is offered for the students of Hospitality and Tourism Management in UniRazak. The problem identified is that even if the students pass the ESP course, they are still unable to communicate confidently in English. This problem is quite obvious when they perform their practical training in the hotel or tourism industry. Many comments have been received from the practical trainers; they claim that most of the Hospitality and Tourism students from UniRazak are not proficient in English, especially when communicating with customers. With regard to this problem, a needs analysis was conducted to identify the requirements of the various stakeholders involved, particularly the students of ESP and the lecturers involved in providing the said academic requirements. This has led to the identification of the stakeholders' expectation which should facilitate the efforts to improve the current ESP course.

1.2 Statement of Research Problem

The hospitality and tourism industry is a well known sector which requires professional staffs with very good communication skills. Therefore, a good command of English and knowledge of any other languages such as Mandarin, Arabic, and French would be an advantage for those seeking jobs in the industry. Since UniRazak aims to produce relevantly qualified professionals, the university has to concentrate on the development and improvement of the courses offered. Taking this into consideration, the Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Management (FHTM) of UniRazak has made ESP a compulsory course for their students. The students of FHTM are required to enroll for the ESP course during their final year, before they begin their industrial training in various sectors such as hotels, restaurants and tour agencies.

Feedback from the industrial trainers indicates that the trainees from FHTM are not competent enough to communicate in English. They claim that most of the trainees from FHTM have little confidence when it comes to communicating in English. This problem is quite obvious among the trainees placed at the front desk or customer service counters.

This raises questions about the effectiveness of the English courses offered for the students of FHTM especially the ESP course offered at the faculty, since this particular course aims to provide the English language knowledge and skills applicable to the related industry. In addition to this doubt, the lecturers of FHTM also admitted that most of their students hesitate to speak in English; they also complained that these students' written assignments in English contained extensive grammatical and structural errors.

The informal discussions with the industrial trainers and lecturers of FHTM indicate that development and improvement of the ESP course is essential to furnish the graduates of FHTM with the required competencies. Subsequently, a necessity to conduct a needs analysis emerged. This needs analysis was aimed at the ESP students of FHTM in an attempt to discover their current level of English proficiency, their needs, favourable teaching methods and resources for the ESP course.

1.3 Objectives and Scope of Study

The primary objective of this study is to identify whether the current ESP course meets the needs of the stakeholders especially the students of FHTM, and both the subject lecturers and English language lecturers. Therefore, a needs analysis is conducted to collect the necessary information. The needs analysis is aimed at identifying the relevant expectation of the ESP students. Eventually, this would help to find out whether the current ESP course fulfills their needs or otherwise.

Currently, the ESP course concentrates on all four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. This needs analysis is essential to identify the students' perception on the language skills that they perceived to be important in this ESP course so that the feedback would enable further development of the ESP module. Another issue to be solved is the right person to teach the ESP course: the subject lecturer or the English language lecturer. Consequently, this is an attempt to identify the challenges involved in designing and conducting an ESP course for FHTM. This study will also consider the suitability of the current materials and resources utilised in delivering the ESP course.

The findings of the needs analysis are aimed at outlining necessary recommendations for modifying and improving the current ESP course. Eventually, this study would indirectly favour the faculty's objective of transforming students into capable individuals who are ready to contribute to the development of the dynamic field in which they graduate.

1.4 Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study stated above, the following research questions will be investigated:

1. What are the needs of the students undertaking the ESP course?
2. What are the language skills that need to be emphasised in the ESP course?
3. What are the challenges involved in creating a holistic ESP course for FHTM students?
4. Are the teaching resources and teaching methodologies suitable for this ESP course?

1.5 Significance of the Study

ESP for hospitality and tourism students is an essential course which focuses on moulding effective human capital for the Hospitality and Tourism industry. This course is aimed at providing the FHTM students with the necessary English language knowledge

and communicative ethics essential for the industry. Since ESP is a course designed to cater to the specific needs of those involved in the course, it is essential to review the course based on factors which influences the output of the course. ESP was first introduced in 2007 for the students of FHTM, and it is quite disappointing that there have not been any surveys conducted to identify the students' needs. None of the feedback about the ESP course was received in a formal manner, or used as a foundation for possible remedial action. Therefore, this study would be an initial study to survey the needs of the students and the lecturers in order to identify the weaknesses and strengths of the ESP course. This would allow further development and improvement of the ESP course.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

It is worth pointing out that only 33 students were registered for the ESP course conducted during the January 2010 semester which lasted 14 weeks. This has limited the number of respondents for this survey. The former ESP students of FHTM were not available to respond to this survey since some of them were doing their practical training while the others had graduated. Apart from that, this study could only obtain the feedback from the one and only ESP lecturer who is involved in teaching the ESP course in FHTM since this course was allocated to one particular lecturer.

The findings would have been more reliable if the feedback from the industry were taken into consideration, since these students will be contributing their service to them and at the same time, a clear picture of what is expected in the industry would have been captured if the industry players were included in this study. Factors such as time,

money, distance and accessibility were the major problem in getting industry personnel feedback in this study.

1.7 Conclusion

In this study, needs analysis is important to determine the current requirements of the students involved in this ESP course. The collected data would help to identify whether the current ESP course functions according to its objective, and at the same time, contribute towards the development and improvement of the ESP course. This study would also benefit the English language lecturers by facilitating identification of the preferred materials and teaching technique. The Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Management would benefit indirectly once the current ESP course is upgraded. Eventually, the possible outcome of this could be that the ESP students who pursue their industrial training would be known for their excellent English communication skills during their training which would also be indicative of raised English proficiency levels among the graduates of FHTM.