CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0   Introduction

This chapter will describe in detail concerning issues related to ESP. It begins by discussing the language challenges faced by Malaysian students, then moving to the role of English language in the hospitality and tourism industry and finally highlighting the function of ESP in the said area. The function of needs analysis and the approaches in developing and improvising an ESP course will also be highlighted in this chapter.

2.1   Language Problems faced by Malaysian students

Malaysia is well known for its diverse ethnic groups, namely the Malays, Chinese, and Indians, which make up the majority population of the country. Each of these ethnic groups has its own language; generally, English will be the second language for these ethnic groups.

The Malaysian Educational system includes English in the curricular syllabus as a second language starting from primary to secondary schools. Thus, it provides a compulsory learning environment of English language for a minimum of eleven years. However, studies indicate that even after undergoing these eleven years of English classes, most of the Malaysian students are still not proficient in English. This is also one of the known reasons for the high level of unemployment among local graduates. The Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents (MATTA) recently highlighted in a local

newspaper (The Star, 2011) that local tourism graduates lack technical and communication skills to succeed in the tour and travel industry. MATTA president Datuk Khalid Harun also pointed out that the higher institutions of learning provide mostly academic content and superficial on-the-job exposure which is not efficient enough to produce professional travel and tour executives. He suggested that 'specific education' and training be emphasized in order to produce employable graduates who can maintain professionalism in the industry (The Star, 2011). This indirectly highlights the importance of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in relation to the hospitality and tourism industry.

Another problem faced by Malaysian students is the motivational factor. Gardner and Lambert's (1972) extensive studies systematically proved the effect of attitudes on language learning. Upon studying the interrelationships of a number of different types of attitudes, they defined motivation as a construct consisting of certain attitudes. According to Gardner and Lambert, the most crucial attitude is the attitude the learner has toward the members of the cultural group whose language he or she is learning. Based on their study, non-English speaking Canadians in Canada and people from France will lead to high integrative motivation to learn French.

Gardner and Lambert's proposition on integrative motivation for effective second language learning explains the lack of motivation among many ESL students in Malaysia. Malaysian students, particularly from the rural areas, may not see the need to integrate with English-speaking individuals; this leads to lack of motivation. The ESP classroom, which aims to tailor the English language required for a target situation is supposed to deliver instruction in an interesting way. The activities involved in teaching ESP should comprise activities which bring fun, joy and interactive tasks which could motivate the students to

achieve the targeted language competency. This study hopes to address these two issues which is important for an effective ESP course.

2.2 The Role of English Language in the Hospitality and Tourism Industry

The hospitality and tourism industry is a well known field which deals with pleasure-centred and entertainment activities. Hospitality can be defined as an act or practice of being hospitable. Specifically, this involves the reception and entertainment of guests, handling of resorts, clubs, conventions, special events and other services for travelers and tourists. Obviously, this indicates that communication is a key feature in the hospitality and tourism industry. Since this industry is international, it definitely involves a range of inter-cultural communication. Hence, English plays a major role in facilitating the communicative activities involved in an inter-cultural context. This notion is also supported by Harding (2007), who claims that the language of the hospitality and tourism industry is clearly English in an international context.

2.3 The Function of ESP

As stated earlier, Malaysian students leaving secondary schools are exposed to English for General Purposes (EGP). English is a compulsory subject, taught in Malaysian schools as a second language. English taught in schools covers general topics by focusing on the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. It is quite obvious that the English lessons in schools are only useful for the most general function. Since the students are widely exposed to the 'General English' syllabus, they will not wish to

undergo a similar experience again in their tertiary education. Therefore, the English courses designed for tertiary education requires application or a specific purpose, as the view of Harding (2007).

Thus, in order to furnish the students of higher learning institutions with the necessary command of English in their specific area of study, most of the universities and colleges have designed and formulated English for Specific Purposes (ESP). ESP helps students to comprehend the language and function effectively not only in their field of study, but also in their prospective career. As stated by Robinson (1991), ESP provides an opportunity for the learners to use the language that they have already been exposed to in a specific area.

Harding (2007, p.6) stated that "the sense of purpose and the sense of vocation" defines ESP well. This definitely relates to the role of ESP which focuses on delivering the specific language needs of the learners. Since ESP has a specific purpose, the ESP practitioner/lecturer plays an important role in designing an effective and successful ESP course. Dudley Evans and St. John (1998) have identified five key roles for the ESP practitioner: teacher, course designer and material provider, collaborator, researcher and evaluator. This clearly explains the important role of an ESP practitioner/lecturer from the beginning till the end of an ESP course.

The above roles have to be met by the ESP practitioner through an effective manner that is by considering the cost, time and resources available. On the other hand, it is also essential for the ESP practitioners to obtain the necessary support which enable them to function accordingly. Thus, Nunan (1988) recognises that issues of time, skills and support are key elements for teachers faced with the very real task of developing curricula.

In relation to this notion, Wu and Badger (2009) have highlighted the problems faced by ESP teachers in terms of handling "subject-specific texts" outside of their main areas of expertise. This leads to the question of "who is the most ideal person to teach ESP?" Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.160) state that ESP teachers "have to struggle to master language and subject matter beyond the bounds of their previous experience". This is quite crucial when it comes to teaching English for vocational purpose. An English language teacher would obviously have specialised in teaching English; however in an ESP context, the aforementioned language teacher might face problems teaching from materials of ESP specialism (Harding, 2007, p.7).Wu and Badger (2009) have highlighted that in the context of ESP, "the division between pedagogic content and subject matter knowledge is complicated" due to controversial distinctions between the ESP teachers' knowledge of the subject and that of the subject specialist.

Apart from that, Wu and Badger (2009), have discovered that the ESP lecturers handle their ignorance of the subject related knowledge, in that they either avoid handling the doubt or by risk taking. Thus, chances of losing face among the participants of ESP are quite obvious.

2.4   Needs Analysis

In an academic context, needs analysis is a process of identifying the needs of various stakeholders involved in conducting a course. In the case of conducting an ESP course, needs analysis not only identifies the needs of stakeholders but also aids in developing English language teaching for the specific context. Thus, identifying and

analyzing the needs of the participants or students is vital in ESP teaching (Harding, 2007). According to Harding (2007) needs analysis is not just an initial one-off activity; instead, it should be an ongoing process. Obviously the needs of the stakeholders such as the industry players and the faculty may vary from time to time based on several factors such as the target situation, learning situation, present situation and other external factors which may influence the needs of the stakeholders.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) claim that the distinguishing factor between ESP and General English is not just the existence of the need, but the awareness of the need. They believe that the awareness of the learners' need of English will influence the design of the ESP course. In relation to this, Munby (1978) had created a detailed procedure called Communicational Needs Processor to identify the target situation needs. His procedure includes several communicative variables such as topics, participants, medium, and so forth, which help to specify the target language needs of groups of learners. Needs analysis can be conducted by obtaining information through the following means:

1. Observation

2. Questionnaires

3. Interviews

4. Discussions/ consultation with the stakeholders; sponsors, organizer, participants, practitioner and others.

Generally, it is advisable to utilise more than one method of data collection since the responses could be compared and validated effectively. Apart from that, as highlighted by Hutchinson and Waters (1987), one method could complement another.

2.5   Approaches to Needs Analysis

Several influential models of needs analysis are available. The most common models of needs analysis are as follows:

2.5.1 Target Situation Analysis

Robinson (1991) claims that a needs analysis which focuses on the learners' needs at the end of a language course is known as 'Target Situation Analysis'. The target situation analysis aids in identifying the upcoming situation or tasks which the learners would have to encounter and contribute in taking the actions to prepare for the performance of the target situation.

According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), a needs analysis for a course has to take into consideration the target situation that leads to the question of "what the learners need to do in the target situation". These researchers have stated that the target situation can be determined by considering the three important elements: necessities, lacks and wants. These elements are elaborated in detail below:

a) Necessities

To define necessities one has to consider "what the learners have to know to function effectively in a given situation"(Hutchinson & Waters, 1987 p.55). In the case of these ESP students (as the learners identified in this study), they would have to interact with customers to provide information, respond to enquiries/ complaints and engage in persuasive kinds of conversations to promote or attract customers in the hospitality and tourism industry.

b) Lacks

The learners' "lacks" can be identified by matching their current knowledge or ability with the needs of the targeted situation. Hutchinson and Waters (1987), claim that the gap between these two aspects can be referred as learners' lacks. Yeoh (2006) highlighted that it is ideal to conduct a pre-course placement or diagnostic test to determine "what the students' lack." She also acknowledges that time constraint is one of the reasons for many practitioners not implementing such tests.

c) Wants

This is one of the elements which determine the learners' motivation to participate in a language related course. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) claim that the learners may acknowledge the "necessities" of the target situation, and determine what they "want" based on their "lacks", but the learners' decision does not necessarily go in hand with that of other stakeholders such as the course designers, sponsors and the ESP practitioners. However, the learners' "wants" should be given priority in order to provide an effective ESP course.

Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) perceive target situation analysis as being too idealistic and language based besides being too restricted in describing the language sub-skills. These researchers claim that target situation analysis lacks the aspect of giving priorities to the skills and the other affective factors that need to be considered.

2.5.2 Present Situation Analysis

The focus of present situation analysis would be to identify the abilities and the circumstances of the learners at the beginning of the course. It aids in designing a course based on the learners' strengths and weaknesses. Richterich and Chanceral (1980) suggest that the identification of the learners' needs should be considered by the course provider and the sponsor involved as this enables an accurate needs analysis. They also stated that it is essential to obtain information on the learners' abilities, the available resources and the perceptions of the stakeholders involved in relation to the teaching and learning process. The learning environment, the learners' social and cultural values and their attitude towards learning English should also be taken into consideration in present situation analysis.

Allwright and Allwright (1977) also highlighted that by considering the overall stakeholders' interest in a needs analysis, the results involved in creating an idealistic course would present the actual situation and at the same time, it will avoid the chances of the objectives of the sponsors overshadowing the actual needs of the learners. Thus, it is important for the learners to locate realistic achievements for their language learning programme.

2.5.3 Learning Needs Analysis

Learning needs analysis is also widely known to discover the learners' learning needs. It aids in obtaining data related to the learners' needs of learning a particular course. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), the target situation analysis will be able to define the objective of a course which focuses on the expected achievements. However, they perceived that target situation analysis alone is not sufficient to conclude the needs of

a course, but the learners' learning needs would be able to draw the guideline to achieve the targeted needs which is the end achievement of the course.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.61) also state that "the needs, potential and constraints of the learning situation must be taken into account" to obtain a useful analysis of the learners' needs. In relation to identifying the learning needs, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) have outlined a framework which focuses on questions such as:

1. Why are the learners taking the course?

2. How do the learners learn?

3. What are the available resources?

4. Who are the learners?

5. Where and when will the ESP course take place?

The information gathered with the guideline of this framework is expected to help in the process of identifying the learners' needs and designing an effective ESP course based on how the learners would prefer to acquire the identified needs.

2.6   Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has discussed the relevant research done by other researchers and several favourable approaches in conducting needs analysis relating to this study. Upon referring to several approaches towards needs analysis, Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) framework of Learning Needs Analysis has been adopted in this study of needs analysis for the students of hospitality and tourism management. The information in this chapter is gathered through Internet, reference books, journals and other research papers.