GRADUATES' PERCEPTION TOWARDS THEIR ENGLISH EDUCATION :
A CASE STUDY

JEYA AMANTHA A/P DAVID PANDYA KUMAR

Laporan projek ini dikemukakan
sebagai memenuhi sebahagian daripada syarat
penganugerahan Ijazah Sarjana Pendidikan
(Teknik dan Vokasional)

Jabatan Pendidikan Teknik dan Vokasional
Kolej Universiti Tun Hussein Onn

SEPTEMBER, 2002

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

ABSTRACT

The English language is the most important communication language in the world. English is perceived as a highly rated skill required by graduates entering the industry. Never the less, recent survey has proven that Malaysian graduates lack adequate English communication skills to perform well in their workplace. The declining standard of English has prompted a review of our education system. The research was carried out on 30 graduates of Kolej Universiti Teknologi Tun Hussein Onn (KUiTTHO), Parit Raja , Batu Pahat, Johor Darul Ta'zim. Questionaires were used as an instrument to collect the data on the perception of students towards their English education in KUiTTHO. The research finding as perceived by the graduates, reveals that the English education in KUiTTHO should be improved to cater the needs engineers and should be more competent.

ABSTRAK

Bahasa Inggeris merupakan bahasa komunikasi yang terpenting di dunia. Ia dianggap sebagai suatu kemahiran penting yang diperlukan oleh graduan yang merangkah ke alam pekerjaan. Namun kajian terbaru telah membuktikan bahawa graduan Malaysia kekurangan kemahiran berkomunikasi dalam Bahasa Inggeris di tempat kerja. Kemerosotan taraf penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris telah menyebabkan sistem pendidikan kita dipersoalkan. Kajian ini menyampelkan 30 graduan dari Kolej Universiti Teknologi Tun Hussein Onn (KUiTTHO), Parit Raja , Batu Pahat, Johor Darul Ta'zim. Borang kaji selidik digunakan untuk mengumpul data mengenai persepsi pelajar terhadap pendidikan Bahasa Inggeris mereka di KUiTTHO. Hasil kajian seperti mana yang dipersepsi oleh graduan menyatakan bahawa pendidikan Bahasa Inggeris di KUiTTHO harus diubah agar ia dapat memenuhi keperluan seoarang graduan kejuruteraan.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

REFERENCE

APPENDIX

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF APPENDIX

CHAPTER I

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

The English Language is the most important communication language in the world (Smith and Taylor,1996). This language is used by every country and every industry, making it the "international language" of communication. English the de facto global language has turned from a mere useful skill into a prerequisite for access to the best jobs and the highest incomes (Sprague,1995).

With less emphasis given to English in recent years, our Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohammad stated that the government found that those lacking a good command of the language were handicapped in integrating as well as facing the challenges of the new economy (*'Looking back to English'*, NST, 7th May 2002). This statement was supported by the Malaysian Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohammad in the same article stating that:

> "We *are living in the era of globalization where we need to communicate with the international community which predominantly uses English. We need to study this from all aspects and the ministry want the public input before making a decision"* ('Looking back to English', NST, 7th May 2002)

Anshar (2002), in an article titled `Survey Shows big 'aye' for English Medium' has stated that according to the NST Online Survey, an overwhelming 72.08 percent of 1,089 votes polled are in favor of bringing back the 'English – medium schools systems' to arrest declining standards in the language.

Looking back to history the national language was subsequently introduced as the medium of instruction for the first year of university studies in 1980. In 1982, the national language was used as the medium of instruction at all school levels. Despite the decision to introduce Bahasa Melayu as the medium of instruction, the Government was committed to a policy of maintaining English as a strong second language. Through out the years, the declining standard of English had prompted politicians, educationist, academicians, community leaders and parents to clamor for improved teaching methods. ('Looking back to English', NST, 7th May 2002).

It is believed that our education system, with Bahasa Melayu as the medium of instruction, has alienated most students from the English Language at a tertiary level. The residual English they acquire at schools has proofed to be inadequate to prepare them for university and the industry (Pillay, 1998). The standard of English in Malaysia is so poor that when our students enroll in universities abroad, they face difficulties (Anshar, 2002).

Therefore it has been suggested that the English curriculum in a higher learning institutions to emphasize on the needs of the industry. The industry needs graduates who are capable of communicating in English not only verbally but also orally.

A study entitled the *Employability of Graduates in Malaysia : The Employers Perspective* found that 51 employers surveyed, regarded academic qualifications and positive personality traits as equally important. According to the survey a good command of the English language is a huge advantage in the engineering field (Ismail,2002). Even though technology helps an individual to function more efficiently and across long distance, there rises a need for polished English communication skill. In fact, the value of an employee and the prospects for a promotion may depend largely on communicating in English.

According to Clement Tan, author of the study *Employability of Graduates in Malaysia : The Employer Perspective* and vice-president of International City Institute of Technology, employers place a high premium on English proficiency. Never the less he added that, Malaysian graduates are found to be unable to express themselves well in the English language hence limiting their perspectives on many issues (Ismail, 2002).

1.2   Background Problem

According to Malaysia's former Minister of Education, Datuk Seri Najib bin. Tun Razak, a command of English is essential in technology, business and diplomacy (Sprague, 1995). Malaysia has always recognized the importance of being able to communicate in English due to historical, political and economic ties with other countries.

Now, the demand for a more and better English is increasing so fast that individuals, companies and nations are wondering if they can keep up with this demand. Datuk Seri Najib bin Tun Razak also said that there is a growing concern within the government that conscious effort must be made to improve the proficiency in English throughout the educational system (Sprague, 1995).

In 2002, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohammad urged Malaysian students to master English which is necessary for communication and essential to keep abreast of developments in the technical fields such as engineering and science (Kaur,2002). To support his statement, he stated:

> *"It will be impossible to translate all the latest English Text into Bahasa Melayu and anyone who knows the language can have immediate access to the latest in Engineering and Science." (Kaur,2000).*

DAP chairman Lim Kit Siang said the problem of the unchecked decline in the standard of English had become *"too chronic and protracted"*. He said all efforts in the past decade to raise the standard of English had not only come to naught, but seen a further deterioration of the language in schools and universities (Ling.S.K, 2002).

English is called the world language, the international language or the language of technology (Miller, 1995). Malaysian students come from a background of traditional Malay-medium schools where English is focused as a Second Language (ESL). English is looked upon as subjects that requires learning to pass traditional language tests. When entering the university learners not only need to

develop their language skills, they will have to improve their listening skills to cope with lectures in English. This problem will most probably be carried on in to their working life.

KUiTTHO as an institution of higher learning produces engineers in the field of Electrical, Mechanical and Civil. The previous English education was aimed at the foundation years so that before the undergraduates gets into their third year, they will accomplish all the requirements for an English education in higher learning institution. Undergraduates in KUiTTHO are entitled to take three English courses that is the English I, English II and English III in their first and second year (KUiTTHO,2001).This English course is aimed to build students reading, listening, speaking and writing skills.

Engineering students usually believe that their English Education is less important than their ideas because it does not emphasize a fundamental tool for expressing their ideas clearly (Duerden and Green,1995). Students do not think that writing and communicating in English is important after they graduate because they are not exposed to the value placed on it in their major workplace. A recent survey of engineering professionals found that they spent 44% of their time writing, and almost all sometimes wrote as members of a team (Nelson, 2000).

Traditionally, English is believed to be an "empty course" (Duerdan and Green, 1995). English Education in KUiTTHO does not specify subjects in the focus. Therefore, English teachers usually supplement their courses with anthologies of units that range across the curriculum. The units here consist of subject from biology, sociology, business and humanities. In the process of providing a subject for students' writing, understanding and communicating, these units failed in connecting English with the engineering subjects.

Thus to have students to write and speak about engineering in English is well within the matter of English itself. Duerden and Green (1995) suggested that, English courses should be made engineering specific. English education for engineers should be revised in basically two areas that are the course content and teaching methodology. In a 1991 survey conducted by the National Society of Professional

Engineers, engineering industry representative named the number one priority for engineering educators: *"more instruction in written and oral communication"* (Nelson, 2000).

Ninety years ago, a survey conducted by S.C. Earle – the so called "father of technical writing" – found that most engineering industry representatives believed that most engineering graduates "did not have adequate English skills to perform at work". (Nelson,2000). Therefore the competence of the English education of KUiTTHO could only tested by sampling the first batch of graduates that were from Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) intake of Tun Hussein Onn Institute of Technology (ITTHO).

1.3   Statement of Problem

Is KUiTTHO really producing workforce that meets the demands of the industries English Language requirement ?

1.4   Objectives

1.4.1   The objective of this research is to determine the students' perception on whether the English curriculum in KUiTTHO is adequate in providing an English Education that is necessary for an engineer to be competent in the international field of technology.

1.4.2   The objective of the research is to identify units in the English Curriculum in KUiTTHO that are relevant for an engineer's English education in a higher learning Institute.

1.4.3   The objective of this research is also to suggest a new English Course Framework for Engineers based on the perception of the graduates.

1.5   Research Questions

The problems addressed in this study is to discover the level of English education for engineering students in KUiTTHO. The researcher will like to emphasis here that the research was intended for only the graduates of KUiTTHO who undertook the English classes of English I (BUB1112), English II (BUB1122) and English III (BUB2132). The aim the research questions here is to identify whether or not the three subjects taken by the students has fulfilled the English education requirement for an Engineer in a developing world of technology. The research questions are:

i.   What are the perception of the student regarding their English Education in KUiTTHO (English I, English II and English III) ?

ii.   Does the English Education in KUiTTHO attends to the English requirements of the industry?

iii.   What are the units that were relevant in their English course?

iv.   Are engineering subjects integrated into the English Education in KUiTTHO ?

v.   What are the changes required in the current English education of KUiTTHO so that it will meet the English Education requirement for an Engineer?

vi.   What are units required in developing a course content so that it will meet the English Education requirements for an Engineer?

1.6   Purpose of Study

The purpose of study is to determine whether KUiTTHO has been able to produce a workforce that meet the current demand of English proficiency of the industry. The study is also to identify the English education requirements for an engineer. Specifically, this study intended to :-

i.   To determine the overall students perception towards their English education

ii.   To determine if they rises a need to improve the level of English education in KUiTTHO.

iii. To pinpoint English materials that have not been competent.

iv.   To pinpoint English educational materials and learning methods that fulfills the requirements for a better English education.

based on the perception of the graduates.

1.7   Research Scope

The research scope here consists of three particular English subjects that are English I (BUB1121), English II (BUB1122) and English III(BUB2132). The researcher will emphasize on the course content not the teaching methodology. The sample of the research will consist of graduates form Civil, Electrical and Mechanical Engineering of KUiTTHO. The researcher will not relate to the graduates background and prior English education level.

1.8   Limitations

The research is based on graduates who have already been in the industry for more than 6 months and are scattered around Malaysia . Therefore, the researcher may face difficulties during the data collection process.

The limitation are also due to the scope of students selected which is from the graduating class of 2001 of KUiTTHO and not from the previous batches of Engineers. Additionally, wrong information gathered in the finding would also make the research inaccurate. Factors such as loss of questionnaire forms, incomplete data and other problems would contribute further to the errors in the research. Biased participant selection in the participating individual (respondent) might occur due to different races, interest, tendencies and background education.
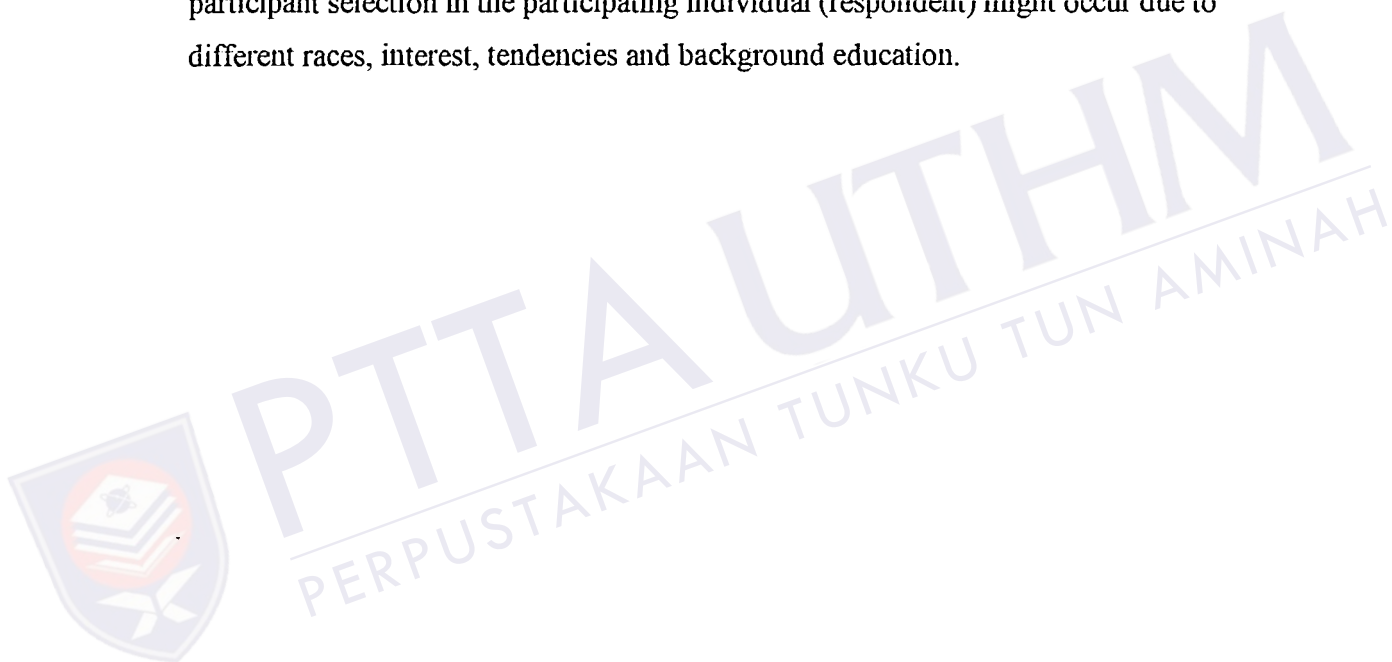
1.9   Importance of Study

This research is important in identifying the influence of an inadequate English curriculum to the quality of the graduates of KUiTTHO. The study will give an feedback from the graduates of KUiTTHO on their English education.

Based on the study, a new English Course framework will be suggested by the researcher. It will give an insight on the demands of English education for graduates in the field of Engineering. The course outline will be an aid in meeting the ever challenging need of the industry and in producing quality Engineers that show competence from the English communication perspectives.

This research will also be an aid for the students who are currently undergraduates, as it will consists of unit suggestion that integrates engineering subjects in English courses and eliminate units that are not important. Nevertheless this will help the students to have a better command in their engineering subjects and to develop fresh thinking of technical communication in their studies and throughout the rest of their career.

1.10   Definition of Terms

1.10.1 Graduates

i.   A person who has been awarded an academic degree.

ii.   A person who has completed a course of study.

        (Illustrated Oxford Dictionary, 1998)

1.10.2 Perception

i.   The faculty or an instance of perceiving.

ii.   The intuitive recognition of a truth aesthetic quality.

iii.   An interpretation or impression based on one's understanding

        of something. (Illustrated Oxford Dictionary, 1998)

1.10.3 English

        English is defined as the language of England, now used in the British Isles, the United States, and most Commonwealth or ex-Commonwealth countries (Illustrated Oxford Dictionary, 1998).

REFERENCE

REFERENCE

Ahearn, A.L. (2000). "Word Fail Us : The Pragmatic Need for Rheotic in Engineering Communication." [Online] http://www.mse.vt.edu/people/undergrd/communications.html

Anshar, A.M. "Survey Shows big 'aye' for English Medium." (12th May 2002). New Straits Times.

Ball,V., Mossop, R. and Steward, M. (1987). "Business English and Communication." McGraw-Hill. Australia

Barnes, G.A. (1994). "English Communication skills for Professionals." National Text Book Company, Illinois USA.

Beer, D. (1998). "Engineering Communication (EE333t)." [Online] http://www.ece.utexas.edu/projects/courses/ee333t.html

Beer, D. (1998). "A Guide to Writing as an Engineer." [Online] http://www.ece.utexas.edu/~beer/faculty.html

Beer, D. and McMurrey, W. (1995). "A Guide to Writing as an Engineer." John Wiley & Sons. Inc

Beder, S. (2000). "Valuable skills learned from 'basket-weaving'". [Online] http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/sts/sbeder/columns/probe3.html

Blair, G.M (   ). "How To Write Right". [Online] http://www.ee.ed.ac.uk/~gerard/Management/art4.html

Camenson, B. (1995). "Opportunities in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages." VGM Career Horizons, Illinois, USA.

Cannon, R. and Newble, D. (2000). "A Handbook for Teachers in Universities & Colleges: A Guide to Improving Teaching Methods". Kogan Page Limited, London.

Connor, H., Dench, S. and Bates, P. (2001). "An Assessment of Skill Needs in Engineering". [Online] http://www.employement-studies.co.uk/summary/dfeesdsum.html

Corson, D. (1991). "Education for Work : Background to Policy and Curriculum". The Open University : Multilingual Matters Ltd. England

Curtin University of Technology (   ). "What Employers and Students say about Professional Skills". [Online] http://www.cbs.curtin.edu.au/staff/psp/what_emp.cfm

Diamond, R. M. (1989). "Designing and Improving Courses and Curricula in Higher Education". Josey-Bass Piblisher. San Francisco.

Duerdan, S. and Meredith, G. (1995). "Enhancing Freshman Engineering Education : Integrating Freshman English Composition With Engineering, Math, Physics and Chemistry". [Online] http://fie/engrng.pitt.edu/fie95/3a6/3a6.htm.

Eisner, E.W. (1979). "The Educational Imagination", Macmillian Publication, New York

Kerr, D. (1989). "Principles Underlying the Dissemination Implementation of Curriculum Frameworks" in Marsh, C. J. (1992). "Key Concepts for Understanding Curriculum". The Falmer Press Teachers' Library. London

Emden, J. V. and Eastel, J. (1996). "Technical Writing and Speaking : An Introduction". McGraw-Hill Publishing Company. England.

Finch, C. R. and Crunkilton, J. R. (1999). "Curriculum Development in Vocational and Technical Education : Planning, Content and Implementation". Allyn and Bacon. Boston

Finkelstein, L. (2000). "Pocket Book of Technical Writing for Engineers and Scientists". The McGraw – Hill Companies, Inc. USA

Finocchiaro, M. (1989). "English as a Second / Foreign Language". 4th edition. Prentice Hall Regent, New Jersey

Fogarty, R. and Stoehr, J. (1991). "Toward an Integrated Curriculum". [Online] http://ncrve.berkeley.edu/ST2.1/TowardanIntegrated.html

Griffiths, B. (1986). "Negotiating the Curriculum". Melbourne, Ministry of Education. Australia.

Harris. I. B. (1993). "New Expectations for Professional Competence: Educating Professionals" in Curry, L. and Wergin, J. F. "Educating Professionals". Josey-Bass Inc, California 94104

Gaff, J.G. (1991). "New Life For The College Curriculum". Josey – Bass Publishers. USA

Hayslett, H.T. (1974). "Statistics Made Simple". W.H Allen & Company.

INTELECOM Intelligent Telecommunications and The Partnership for Environmental Technology Education. (1999). "Communication Skills for the Environmental Technician". John Wiley & Sons. Inc. Canada.

Ismail, F. "Graduates with the Edge". (14 July 2002). New Sunday Times.

Kaur,H. "Dr.M : It's Vital to Master English : Language Essential for Engineering and Science Fields". (17 May 2002). New Straits Times.

Ling, C. S. "Science and Maths will be in English : Panel to Study its Implementation". (12 May 2002). New Straits Times.

Material Science and Engineering Department. (2001). "Writing Communication, and Design in the Curriculum". [Online] http://www.mse.vt.edu/people/undergrd/communications.html

Marsh, C. J. (1992). "Key Concepts For Understanding Curriculum". The Falmer Press Teacher's Library. London.

Measor, L (1984). "Pupil Perceptions of Subject Status", in Goodson, I. F. and Ball, S. J. "Defining the Curriculum : Histories and Ethnographies". Falmer Press. London.

Miller, L. (1995). "English for Engineers in Hong Kong". [Online] http://www/gsu.edu/~wwwesl/understanding/ch14.htm..

Nagu, S. U. (2002). "For Better English at Tertiary Level".(31st July 2002). New Straits Times

Nelson, S. (2000). "Teaching collaborative writing and peer review". [Online] http://fie.engrng.pitt.edu/fie2000/papers/1422.pdf

Omar, R. "Mastering English Vital for Rural Malay pupils". (4 January 2002). The New Straits Times.

Oxford University Press. (1998). "Illustrated Oxford Dictionary" . Great Clarendon Street, Oxford 0X26DP

79

Ozar, D. T. (1993). "Building Awareness of Ethical Standards and Conduct" in
Curry, L. and Wergin, J. F. "Educating Professionals". Josey-Bass Inc,
California 94104

Pillay, H. (1998). "Issues in the teaching of English in Malaysia". [Online]
http://langue.hyper.chubu.ac.jp/jalt/pub/tlt/98/nov/pillay.html

Raju. P.K. and Shankar. A ( ). "Integrating Theory, Design, and Practice in a
Mechanical Engineering Design Course". [Online]
http.www.asme.org/educate/awards/ciapapers/raju.pdf

Reynolds, I. "Japanese Struggle with English". (11 July 2002). New Straits Times.

Sharmini, P. "Cautious 'aye' to Re-introduce English Medium School System". (8th
May 2002). New Straits Times.

Smith, L. and Taylor, M. (1996). "English for Careers : Business, Professional and
Technical". 6th Edition. Prentice Hall. Eaglewood Cliff, New Jersey.

Squires, G. (1990). "First Degree : The Undergraduate curriculum". The Society for
Research into Higher Education & Open Press, Bristol, USA.

Wiersma, W. (1995). "Research Methods in Education: An Introduction". 6th
Edition. Allyn and Bacon, Massachusetts.

( ), "English In Higher Education". (4 May 1998). The Star .

( ), "ENGL 398N Professional Communication for Engineers Spring 2001".
[Online] http://www.cwru.edu/2774/artsci/engl/porter/398N.html.

( ), "Faculty on Writing : The Writing Center New Mexico Tech". [Online]
http://www.nmt.edu/~write/faculty.html

(   ), "Freshman English for Engineers". [Online]
http://www.english.howards.edu/engineers/info.htm#/CourseInformaion.htm·

(   ), "Types of English Language Programs". [Online]
http://www.embark.com/esl/program/advice/profiles.asp.

(   ). "Looking Back to English: Dr. M: Government willing to consider move to arrest decline in subject". (7 May 2000). New Strait Times

(   ). "Skills Employers want in a Graduate". [Online]
http://www.jcu.edu.au/office/tld/td/genericskills/why/employers.html

(   ). "SPOT Rating Interpretation Guides". [Online]
http://www.csd.uwa.edu.au/spot/Rigs.html

(   ),."Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT) – Itembank". [Online]
http://www.csd.uwa.edu.au/spot/itembank.html.

(   ),. "Writing in the Workplace". [Online]
http://athena.english.vt.edu/~1styear/bb/workplace.html

(   ). "Skills employers want in graduates". [Online]
http://www.jcu.edu.au/office/tld/td/genericskills/why/employers.htm

(   ). "Audience Analysis". [Online]
http://www.io.com/~hcexres/tcm1603/acchtml/aud.html