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**AN EVALUATION OF TEACHER PERCEPTIONS  
OF THE LEVEL I  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING MATERIALS  
IN INSTITUT TEKNOLOGI MARA :  
A BASIS FOR COURSE IMPROVEMENT**

by

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for the degree of Master of Arts**

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ITM</b>	<b>Institut Teknologi MARA</b>
<b>ELT</b>	<b>English Language Teaching</b>
<b>TESL</b>	<b>Teaching English as a Second Language</b>
<b>ESP</b>	<b>English for Specific Purposes</b>



## ABSTRACT

In 1989, the Language Centre of ITM carried out major revisions to the English language teaching materials. The aim was to develop materials that would meet the growing needs of the students, the institute as well as the nation. But due to time and administrative constraints, the materials did not undergo any trialling. Thus the effectiveness of the materials is not known. The purpose of this study is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the materials using teachers' perceptions in order that this might contribute to course improvement.

The teachers' perceptions were explored in the following areas: objectives, content, approach, support and guidance and testing procedures. The design of the study consisted of a Materials Evaluation Questionnaire and teacher interviews. The subjects for this study were English language teachers from seven ITM branch campuses located in West Malaysia. The results of the study show that: (a) to a great extent the materials are not appropriate to the students, (b) to a great extent the materials are not adequate, (c) to a great extent the recommended communicative approach is successful with the students, (d) to a great extent the materials do not provide support and guidance for the teachers, (e) to a great extent the testing procedures are not effective in measuring student learning, (f) only to a certain extent the materials are stimulating, and (g) only to a certain extent the materials are successful in achieving the objectives of the course. The overall findings of the study support the recommendation for the improvement of the materials. Apart from providing recommendations for the improvement of the present Level I ELT materials, teachers also requested for training in areas such as materials development, ELT methodology, testing procedures and time and classroom management.

This study has made available information that can help improve the existing Level I ELT materials and also enable the future development of better and more purposeful materials. It has shown that teachers can provide useful and reliable information to materials

developers. As such, the researcher recommends that materials evaluation especially by classroom teachers be incorporated into the development of English language teaching materials in ITM and also in other institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. This study provides a model for materials evaluation along with guidelines for conducting the evaluation.

## ABSTRAK

### SATU PENILAIAN PERSEPSI GURU-GURU MENGENAI BAHAN PENGAJARAN BAHASA INGGERIS PERINGKAT SATU DI INSTITUT TEKNOLOGI MARA : SATU ASAS BAGI PENINGKATAN KURSUS

Pada 1989, Pusat Bahasa ITM telah mengambil langkah memperbaiki bahan pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris. Tujuannya ialah untuk menghasilkan bahan pengajaran yang dapat memenuhi keperluan semasa pelajar-pelajar, institut dan negara. Oleh kerana kekurangan masa dan masalah pentadbiran, bahan-bahan pengajaran ini tidak melalui sebarang penilaian. Yakni, keberkesanan bahan-bahan pengajaran ini tidak diketahui. Kajian ini mengemukakan satu penilaian persepsi guru terhadap bahan pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris Peringkat Satu di ITM. Kajian ini bertujuan mengenalpasti kekuatan dan kelemahan bahan pengajaran ini agar ia dapat menyumbang ke arah memperbaiki kursus Bahasa Inggeris di ITM.

Persepsi guru ditinjau dalam aspek-aspek berikut: objektif, kandungan, pendekatan, sokongan dan bimbingan dan prosedur pengujian. Rekabentuk kajian terdiri daripada Soalselidik Menilai Bahan Pengajaran yang direka oleh penyelidik dan temuduga guru. Subjek kajian terdiri daripada guru-guru Bahasa Inggeris dari tujuh kampus cawangan di Semenanjung Malaysia. Dari kajian ini keputusan berikut didapati : (a) sebahagian besar daripada bahan pengajaran ini tidak sesuai untuk pelajar-pelajar, (b) sebahagian besar daripada bahan pengajaran ini tidak mencukupi, (c) ke tahap yang tinggi kaedah mengajar yang digunakan berjaya di kalangan pelajar-pelajar, (d) ke tahap yang tinggi bahan pengajaran ini tidak memberi sokongan dan bimbingan yang cukup untuk guru-guru, (e) ke tahap yang tinggi prosedur pengujian tidak efektif dalam menguji pembelajaran pelajar, (f) hanya sebahagian kecil daripada bahan pengajaran ini merangsangkan pelajar, dan (g) bahan

pengajaran ini tidak begitu berjaya dalam mencapai objektif-objektif kursus Bahasa Peringkat Satu. Keputusan kajian, secara keseluruhan, menunjukkan bahawa bahan pengajaran ini perlu diperbaiki. Di samping memberi cadangan-cadangan untuk memperbaiki bahan pengajaran ini, guru-guru juga mencadangkan supaya diadakan latihan dalam bidang-bidang seperti penghasilan bahan pengajaran, kaedah mengajar, prosedur pengujian dan pengawalan masa dan bilik darjah.

Kajian ini telah membolehkan pengumpulan maklumat yang dapat membantu membaiki bahan pengajaran Peringkat Satu yang kini digunakan di ITM. Maklumat ini juga dapat membantu menghasilkan bahan pengajaran yang lebih bermutu dan berguna pada masa hadapan. Di samping itu, kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa guru-guru dapat memberi maklumat yang berguna kepada penghasil bahan pengajaran. Oleh kerana itu, penyelidik mencadangkan supaya penilaian bahan pengajaran disertakan dengan penghasilan bahan pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris di ITM dan juga di institusi-institusi pengajian tinggi yang lain di Malaysia. Kajian ini menyediakan sebuah modal untuk menilai bahan-bahan pengajaran serta langkah-langkah untuk mengendalikan penilaian tersebut.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The Importance of English in Malaysia

#### 1.1.1 Background

English is the second most important language in Malaysia. It is a compulsory language in all schools and all the institutions of higher learning in Malaysia offer English language programs. One of the important reasons for promoting the teaching and learning of English in Malaysia is because of its role as an international language. The utilitarian aspects of English can be further seen in its role as the language of commerce and trade and science and technology.

#### 1.1.2 English for Commerce and Trade

English has always been recognised as an important language in international dealings and communications. It is used, for instance, in international travel, correspondence, conferences and in signing international treaties and agreements. It is the major language of international commerce and trade. Malaysia is located in the booming Asia-Pacific region which has been hailed as the new growth centre of world trade. It is already witnessing tremendous growth in the commercial, communicative and diplomatic areas. Knowledge of the international language is indispensable in maintaining contact with the rest of the world and for involvement in international level commerce and trade. The vast majority of Malaysians who form the backbone of the commercial sector in fields such as banking, tourism, shipping, airline travel and the hotel business thus need to be fluent in English.

### 1.1.3 English for Science and Technology

The value of English in the fields of science and technology also cannot be ignored. Most of the world's scientific and technical knowledge is available in English. Kennedy (1989) says English not only makes available the latest published sources concerning scientific and technological developments but is also paramount as an international medium for offering direct access to workers and specialists in these areas. In addition, most of the countries that are capable of giving valuable technical assistance, like America and the European countries, operate successfully with English. English is thus the chief language of technical assistance.

In Malaysia, the phenomenal socio-economic growth has generated an urgent need for trained manpower. The Sixth Malaysia Plan states that more highly trained manpower is needed under the Plan as Malaysia continues to push its industrialization program (National Planning Development Committee, 1991). Malaysia also hopes to become a developed nation by the year 2020. In order to do this, its knowledge must be on par with that of other developed nations. English would enable Malaysians to understand the literature of science and technology and to interact effectively in these fields. This would, in turn, enable the country to meet its need for trained manpower to promote the socio-economic development.

## 1.2 The Role of English in Institutions of Higher Learning

Although all courses in institutions of higher learning in Malaysia have been conducted in the Malay language since 1983, English still plays a significant role in higher education. The fact that nearly all the institutions of higher learning have language units to upgrade the proficiency in English is proof of the seriousness of the need for English (Rogers, 1979). Most of the reference materials used by students to complement

their studies in these institutions are in English. According to Kaplan (1987), 80 to 85 percent of all scientific and technical information in the world today is either written or abstracted in English. These institutions have devised programs that not only emphasize the use of the national language but also maintain a comparable standard of proficiency in the English Language among the students.

Students not only require English in their academic pursuits but they also need the language to operate satisfactorily in their professional and social lives. Most of the graduates especially technical graduates are absorbed by the private sector where the lingua franca is still English. A research study conducted by Lee Kiong Hock (1985) on "Perspectives of Employers" confirms that the private sector establishments place greater importance on proficiency in English than on the Malay language. According to the Deputy Education Minister, Mr. Woon See Chin, those with single Malay language proficiency accounted for 100 percent of unemployed graduates compared to only 6.7 percent for those who are proficient in three languages: English, Malay and their respective mother tongues (Tamil or Mandarin) (NST: 12 Jan. 1990). As English plays an important role in the pursuit of knowledge and is a dominant medium of communication, institutions of higher learning in Malaysia, like ITM, give emphasis to the teaching and learning of the language

### 1.3 ITM : An Introduction

Institut Teknologi MARA or more popularly known as ITM was established in October 1967. The two main aims of the establishment are:

- i. to increase the annual student intake and add to the existing number of courses with the aim of providing more professional courses;
- ii. to assist the government by playing its part in satisfying the country's need for trained manpower, by producing bumiputeras with

professional and subprofessional qualifications. (The MARA Institute of Technology: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow, 1969:41).

In order to meet the need for trained Bumiputera manpower, ITM provides 78 courses for a student population of over 30,000. The courses, provided through 'schools', are divided into technical and non-technical courses. Some of the technical courses offered by ITM are Diploma in Architecture, Computer Science, Interior Design, Building, Town and Regional Planning and Engineering. Among the non-technical courses are Diploma in Banking, Business Studies, Secretarial Science, Public Administration and Accountancy. These are normally two to three year courses with the Malay language as the medium of instruction. ITM graduates generally find employment in junior and mid-management level positions in both the government and private sectors.

#### 1.4 The ITM Language Programs

Since its establishment language teaching has become a part of all ITM's courses. ITM has readily accepted the fact that the knowledge of several languages, especially those required in this part of the world, is essential (The MARA Institute of Technology: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow, 1969). ITM conducts three types of language programs.

1. English Language Program which is compulsory for all students and a pass is necessary for graduation.
2. Malay Language Program which is offered mainly to the academic staff and selected schools such as the School of Mass Communication and Law.
3. Asian and European Languages Program, which consists of Arabic, Japanese, Tamil, Mandarin, German, Italian and French. These are offered as electives.



It can be seen therefore that English holds the most important place in the ITM language program. Since most of the courses offered are technically oriented, the students need English to handle reference materials such as scientific and technical journals, magazines, reports and textbooks. It is also needed in their working environment and when pursuing further studies overseas. All the language programs are conducted by the Language Centre which was set up in 1973. The Language Centre currently provides language courses to 13 schools in ITM. About 12,000 students are involved in the various language programs.

#### 1.4.1 The ITM English Language Program

The ITM English Language program can be divided into two main levels: Level I and Level II.

Level I, which represents the base or foundation level, aims at improving the proficiency of the students. The Level I course consists of remedial and proficiency units that focus attention on the acquisition of grammatical structures, comprehension practice and language activities (role-play, public speaking, group discussion and drama). The units seek to develop fully the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. The duration for each unit is one semester. The testing procedures include an on-going assessment of 60 percent and a final written examination of 40 percent. The on-going assessments comprise various language activities and grammar tests. The written examination includes reading comprehension and essay writing (See Appendix A).

Level II deals with English for Specific Purposes. It is an optional level and caters for school demands. Level II aims at successful performance of occupational roles and therefore focuses on preparing the students for job-related

communication. The condition for entry into this level is that the students must have passed Level I. The design for Level II assumes that the students have already attained grammatical accuracy. The courses offered at this level are Reading and Report Writing, Business Correspondence and Interviews and Meetings. Unlike Level I which is offered to all the students, Level II is only offered to non-technical students. The students taking this level undergo either a practical assessment or a written progress test of 50 percent and a written final examination of another 50 percent.

### 1.5 Summary

The teaching and learning of English is given a lot of emphasis in Malaysian schools and institutions of higher learning. This is important if Malaysia is to participate actively in trade and commerce and keep abreast with scientific and technological development. In its effort to train Bumiputera professionals and semi-professionals, ITM also gives a lot of attention to the teaching and learning of English. The ITM English program, which is compulsory for all students, aims at upgrading the English language proficiency of the students and developing their language ability for specific purposes.

## CHAPTER 2

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

#### 2.1 ELT Materials Development and Evaluation in ITM: Issues and Problems.

Given the importance of English in science, commerce and industry, the ultimate objective of the ELT program of ITM is for its students to have a working command of English in order to succeed in these fields. The implication is that by improving English language teaching in institutions of learning, the students will use English more effectively in their vocations and this will improve the nation's access to development in science, commerce and industry (Chambers & Erith, 1990). As part of its major effort to improve English language teaching and learning in ITM, the Language Centre decided to revise the ELT materials in 1989. The revisions were carried out over a period of one year and were based on assumptions of student type, student need and prospective employer need (Habibah Salleh, 1979). The revisions so far include:

- a. the introduction of communicative language teaching,
- b. the inclusion of content-based reading comprehension,
- c. the introduction of new testing procedures (based on the above revisions).

The materials were developed and later revised in the main campus of Shah Alam. Due to time and administrative constraints, there was no proper trialling of the materials. Therefore, it is not known to what extent the assumptions are true or what the strengths and the weaknesses of the materials are. Designing or revising materials based on assumptions alone might run the danger of missing important aspects or items or including those that are not relevant to the particular teaching and learning situation.

A random survey of the English language teachers so far shows:

- i. inappropriate and inadequate texts and accompanying exercises;
- ii. lack of clear instructions and guidelines;
- iii. discrepancies between the recommended approach (communicative) and the course content.

These 'undirected' or 'undocumented' perceptions of the teachers can contribute to the improvement of the ELT materials. This can be accomplished through proper systematic evaluation of the materials. Teachers are a direct source of information on what goes on in the classroom. They can therefore reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the materials. This information can in turn reveal what modifications are necessary and how these modifications can be implemented.

## 2.2 Purpose of the Study

This study will be undertaken to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the existing Level I ELT materials in ITM. Being primarily a formative evaluation, it will contribute to course improvement. By helping to develop certain basic skills and competencies in materials evaluation, the study will also enable the teachers to arrive at a better understanding of the materials and their use. It will help materials writers to design and develop more purposeful and effective materials for students of varying language abilities, skills and knowledge. Finally, it is hoped that this study will establish an on-going evaluation for language teaching in institutions of higher learning particularly in ITM.

## 2.3 Research Questions

This study will look into the following aspects of the existing Level I ELT materials in ITM: objectives, coverage, appropriateness, approach, testing

procedures and support and guidance.

The following questions will be investigated:

- i. To what extent are the materials, appropriate, adequate and stimulating to the students?
- ii. To what extent is the recommended approach successful with the students?
- iii. To what extent do the materials provide support and guidance for the teachers?
- iv. To what extent are the testing procedures effective in measuring student learning?
- v. To what extent are the materials successful in achieving the objectives of the course?

## 2.4 Limitations of the Study

Level II materials are not included in this study. This is because Level II comprises optional ESP courses such as Business Correspondence, Meetings and Interviews and Report Writing which are only offered to non-technical students (Diploma in Banking, Business Studies, Secretarial Science, Public Administration and Accountancy).

## 2.5 Definition of Terms

### Teaching Materials

Teaching materials are operationally defined as specially designed classroom tools which contain instructions to learners or teachers and which specify for each increment of learning (a) the content to be learnt (b) the techniques of presentation, practice and the use of that content and (c) the modes of teaching associated with these techniques (Johnson, 1972, p. 1).

### Curriculum Evaluation

Curriculum evaluation is the collection and provision of evidence, on the basis of which decisions can be taken about the feasibility, effectiveness and educational value of curricula (Cooper, 1975, p. 10).

### Formative Evaluation

Formative evaluation addresses such criteria as: the appropriateness of the program's objectives, teachers' competence in the classroom, the usefulness of the syllabus, texts and materials, the effectiveness of scheduling and organisation and the selection and use of text instruments. It could reveal, in part, to what extent the program, as implemented, matches what its planners intended. It could also provide a basis for whether parts of the program ought to be improved, replaced or augmented.

### Communicative Approach

The communicative approach stresses the importance of learning through using the language and which gives learners frequent opportunities to interact with each other and with the teacher in natural situations.

### English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

This refers to the teaching of English for a clearly utilitarian purpose such as for occupational requirements. It is based on a close analysis of the learners' communicative needs for a specific occupation or discipline as well as a detailed analysis of the language of that occupation or activity.

### Perception

It refers to the teachers' opinions, beliefs, conceptions and insights obtained from the ability and opportunity to see, hear, conceive, distinguish, identify, understand, process and apply the information in relation to teaching materials.

### Goal

The result or the achievement toward which effort is directed. It is used to designate the broad significant outcomes desired from the whole course.

### Objectives

They state the specific, overt changes in student behavior that are expected to result from participation in a unit of learning activity.

### English as a Second Language

A situation where English is not the mother tongue of any group within the country. It is a language learnt other than the native language. It is taught as a subject in school and is widely used in commerce, trade, international dealings and in the media.

### Content-based Texts

Texts used in the teaching of the Level I English course in ITM. These texts are taken from the students' own course of study or subject area, for example, Architecture, Interior Design, Accounting, Banking and Computer Science.

### Communicative output

Communicative output refers to activities suggested in a unit of teaching materials in which students use language as a vehicle of communication, and where the students' main purpose is to complete some kind of communicative task.

### Distortion

Distortion refers to a situation where information given in a unit of learning, e.g. in a reading comprehension texts, which has turned from its original or true meaning.

## 2.6 Summary

The Language Centre of ITM decided to revise the ELT materials as part of its major effort to upgrade the teaching and learning of English in ITM. But due to time and administrative constraints no form of evaluation was carried out to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the materials. This study will be undertaken to show that proper systematic evaluation can contribute information that would enable the development of more purposeful and effective materials.