

**PREDICTING ACADEMIC SUCCESS USING ENTRY-LEVEL
ENGLISH PROFICIENCY SCORES**



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5.2 Enhanced Executive Summary

(Abstract of the research) – 1 page only

Lecturers teaching in the physiotherapy programme of the Health Science Faculty of UiTM, are appalled at the high attrition rate of students in in Physiology and Anatomy in the first year and at the inability of many students to answer examination questions accurately without reproducing tracts of irrelevant information. Students' written answers often do not reflect the complexities in the workings of a physiological mechanism. Aside from a lack of motivation or a deficit in the ability to recall, synthesize or analyse information, they wondered to what extent this inability could be due to their lack of language proficiency which might impede their ability to comprehend the texts and to express themselves. Hence this study which is a collaboration between language and content-area lecturers, attempted to determine whether there is a correlation between language proficiency levels and academic performance. It attempted to correlate entry level MUET scores of students enrolled in the physiotherapy programme of the Health Science Faculty of UiTM and their first semester GPA scores. The MUET is used in Malaysian universities as an entry requirement for language proficiency. Though MUET is designed only to measure language proficiency levels and is not meant as a gauge to predict academic performance, can it actually foretell how a student would do in his or her content area subjects? The study was inconclusive because there wasn't a good spread of students in the different bands ie most students were either in band 3 or 4. There was not a sufficient number of students in band 2 or 5 or 6 in the Physiotherapy programme to enable us to do correlational studies. What we did find is that if students are admitted with a band 3, it can be expected that they would have a GPA of less than 2 in core subjects in their first semester.

5.3 Introduction

Lecturers in content area subjects often complain that students at degree level are unable to synthesize information and express their ideas clearly. Students tend to memorise and regurgitate information but where the question requires some kind of evaluation, interpretation or application they are unable to answer it well. They do not answer the question directly but instead provide a lot of information that is more or less related to the question. They do not orientate the information or link it to the question. They are not adept at integrating information to describe more complex ideas or at applying theoretical knowledge to a practical problem. Some, they say, are unable to string together a sentence in English without making basic errors in structure, much less describe how something works.

Content area lecturers in the Faculty of Health Sciences, notably the Physiology and Anatomy lecturers, were deeply dissatisfied with the performance of students in their subjects, pointing to the high failure rate of 30 percent. They felt that the students did not seem to have the content or the language in which to express themselves. They wondered whether low language proficiency impeded their academic performance. Low language proficiency students operate at a level of desperation – unable to read to learn from advanced level texts, to listen and take notes and express themselves in academic English, life for them is a huge struggle. English courses taught in this programme at degree level are English for Specific Purposes(ESP) or English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses and not proficiency courses which would give students the attention to grammar, skills in reading to learn, speaking, listening, note-taking and writing in which they are deficient. Even English language lecturers have the same complaint: that the English proficiency level of the students is, generally-speaking, low and they are unable to maintain rigour in the criteria they use to assess student performance in ESP or EAP courses such as report writing, business correspondence or public speaking.