



**USING CORPUS-BASED ERROR ANALYSIS TO
COMPARE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY OF
ETeMS AND NON-ETeMS LEARNER GROUPS IN
MALAYSIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

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ABSTRACT

The issue of poor levels of proficiency in English among students in Malaysian schools has been one of intense debate. This is especially so in terms of the efforts needed to make much-needed improvements in student performance. Such efforts have been deemed necessary in order to ensure Malaysia's capability in keeping up with an increasingly technology driven and competitive world. This study involved two groups of Form Four national secondary students. It was carried out to investigate a range of errors made by students and to show how an analysis of these errors could be used to demonstrate the difference (if any) in English Language proficiency as a result of the change in the medium of instruction for Mathematics and Science. In addition, one of the research objectives included making a comparison between the two groups of students and from there, to look for patterns of error which could shed light on student performance. The results of the study have shown that there are problematic areas for both groups of students. These were indicated by patterns of grammatical errors revealed by the analysed samples. The study also indicated that learner corpus research is an area that researchers in Malaysia should explore further with a view of finding ways to improve the teaching of English.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background To The Study

The subject of Malaysian students' proficiency in using English, whether spoken or written, has created some rather intense controversy in recent years. This has been shown by the various reactions from parents, academics, teachers and the general public as a whole, to the government's policy of increasing the use of English in the teaching of subjects other than the English Language.

In spite of such arguments for and against the use of English, the policy of using English to teach Mathematics and Science in Malaysian national schools continues (Saiful, 2005). In addition, another earlier effort by the government to improve the standard of English came in the form of "Literature in English", a component of the English Language syllabus and whose main goal was, again, to improve learners' proficiency.

Hence, it is very appropriate that studies be carried out to provide information on students' progress in using English. Among these is the study conducted by Universiti Putra Malaysia (Arshad, 2002) which resulted in the setting up of a 'learner corpus'- the EMAS (**E**nglish Language of **M**alaysian **S**chool Students) Corpus. This corpus, among other things, can provide us with information regarding secondary school learners' use of the English language.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Use Of The English Language In Malaysia Before ETeMS

In her article about problems related to the teaching of English in Malaysia, Pillay (1998) raised the question of the possibility of moving towards bilingual education in Malaysia. She mentioned policy changes in tertiary education whereby private institutions of higher learning were allowed to use English as the medium of instruction for all courses after the Malaysian economic crisis. About 5 years later, in 2003, the government implemented its latest policy in line with efforts in improving the general proficiency of English, especially in the midst of falling standards in Malaysian schools. This policy was called "The teaching of Mathematics and Science in English", or in short, ETeMS.

Before the ETeMS policy, the mediocre performance of students in the English Language examination became a matter of concern on a nationwide scale. In 1991, the worrying trend in the fall of proficiency prompted the then Prime Minister, Tun Mahathir, to express his concern that Malaysians and Malaysia may lose out in economic terms internationally because the people lacked proficiency in using English when competing with others (Pillay, 1998).

During the colonial period, English had been used in almost all aspects related to administration, business and education. People had to learn English in