

# **Major Paper**

# **Master of Education**

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**Date : 26<sup>th</sup> May 2008**

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## **Abstract**

In this paper the results of a Quantitative Study on the linguistic proficiency and metalinguistic awareness of trainee teachers in an English as a Second Language (ESL) undergraduate programme in Malaysia will be presented. A detailed analysis and discussion of the results from the study will indicate that certain factors in the background and educational experiences of these trainee teachers have a direct impact on their language proficiency. Consequently in a non-native English speaking country like Malaysia, the design and execution of ESL teacher training programmes have to take into account these factors to ensure that the specific needs of these trainee teachers are met effectively.

## **Introduction**

This paper will report the findings of a Quantitative Correlation Study in the area of metalinguistic awareness and linguistic proficiency among non-native English as a Second Language (ESL) trainee teachers at a private Malaysian tertiary institution. In this chapter some of the key issues surrounding the issue will be provided to the reader to facilitate an understanding of the environmental and theoretical context of the study.

### Aims

The intention of this study was to examine the relationship between background and educational experiences on the linguistic proficiency of Malaysian non-native English speaking ESL trainee teachers. The study was looking for specific data to help understand this relationship given that Malaysia is a non-English speaking, multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-lingual country. Secondly the study was concerned with determining the specific levels of linguistic proficiency and metalinguistic awareness among these trainee teachers upon completion of the pre-requisite foundation language proficiency courses.

### Background to the Study

The Ministry of Education Malaysia announced in 2002 a massive change with regards to the use of English in the Malaysian education system. Policy document 11/2002 (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia,2002) outlined the introduction of English as the medium of instruction for Mathematics and Science in all national primary and secondary schools starting January 2003. Simultaneously, the English syllabus for primary and secondary schools was revised in-line with the increased focus on improving language competency among Malaysian

students. A completely new, examinable subject; English for Maths and Science(EMS) was introduced at secondary school level. The aim of the policy was that by 2008 all national public examinations for Mathematics and Science would be in English and at a minimum all Mathematics and Science courses at institutions of higher learning would be delivered in English.

This policy was a reversal of the 1972 policy which saw the phasing out of English as a medium of instruction in all Malaysian schools to be replaced by the national language Malay, which was complete by 1982. (Tan, 2005). From a situation where nationalistic sentiments post-independence were the driving force of education policy, suddenly the economic needs of the country in an increasingly inter-connected global environment became of paramount importance. The increasing number of unemployed and unemployable graduates was being attributed to their inability to function in a globalized world economy where the dominant medium of communication was English. (Edge; 2006). Moreover at the highest levels of government it was acknowledged that foreign affairs officers were not capable of playing their role and pushing Malaysia on the international stage as they lacked an adequate command of the English language having been through a Malay medium education system. (Gunasegaram; 2006). Suddenly in Malaysia , being able to function competently in the English language was of utmost importance and urgency.

### Significance of Study

This policy change has had significant consequences on the Malaysian education environment. Suddenly the teaching of English has become a “hot” economic activity with more institutions in dire need of teachers and lecturers competent in English. At the same time there has been a surge of local non-native English speakers entering the ESL profession and ESL teacher training courses. As a result, an area of concern that has emerged is the level of proficiency among these trainee teachers at the time of admission into the course. Most of these trainees’ completed their basic education in an environment where Malay was the medium of instruction and the teaching of English was for communicative purposes with grammar being taught implicitly. This seems to be inadequate preparation for an ESL teacher training course as anecdotal evidence suggests that these trainees struggle to complete.

Studies by Andrews (1999), Morris (2002), Carrier (2003) and Weddell (2004) all indicate that non-native ESL trainee teachers seems to lack metalinguistic awareness which is a direct consequence of their personal and educational experiences in English. This is a significant point to note within the context of recruiting non-native teachers to teach English if their ability to understand linguistic concepts, present linguistic items, process information and deliver structured language skills is potentially compromised. It is within this environment that this study was conducted to obtain specific data that would assist in the design and implementation of ESL teacher training programmes in Malaysia.

## Context of Study

The institution where this study was conducted, Universiti Tun Abdul Razak (UNITAR) is a local private university that comes under the purview of the National Accreditation Board (LAN). UNITAR has been offering an undergraduate degree in Education specializing in the teaching of English; since 2004. With the policy changes introduced by the Ministry of Education enrollment in this course has been steadily increasing. Interestingly unlike most undergraduate courses at the university, this degree programme has attracted a significant number of working adult learners. The oft given reason for this is the perception that teaching English now provides significant career opportunities given the educational and economic climate of the country.

Within this context, this study was considered of significance as students being admitted into this Bachelor of Education, English programme are from a generation that acquired English as a second language in an education system that emphasized the national language, Malay. The admission criteria for this course as stipulated by the National Accreditation Board, is 5 passes in the Malaysian School Certificate (SPM) and specifically a pass in English. While students on this undergraduate programme may have significantly higher metalinguistic awareness and language proficiency compared to their peers, however it is uncertain if this is a sufficient base from which to develop competent and effective ESL teachers. Holliday (1994) and Crystal (1997) have noted that the critical competence criteria for ESL teachers includes the ability to identify language forms and functions, to use the appropriate language form for the appropriate function and the ability to correct language errors.

As such this study is intended to clarify the relevance of the existing pre-defined admission criteria as a suitable measure of language proficiency for admission into the B. Education English programme given

the nature of the educational experiences of these students. It may be worthwhile considering other factors that have a significant impact on linguistic proficiency to inform admission criteria.

The other area of interest in this study is the linguistic proficiency and metalinguistic awareness of these undergraduates as they prepare to enter the classroom. In a study of national school teachers in the Asia-Pacific region, Nunnan (2003) observed that Malaysian government school teachers do not have sufficient command of the English language to conduct classes with confidence. These were teachers who had completed a 4 year degree programme. The structure and content of the B. Education English course has to adhere to the guidelines outlined by the National Accreditation Board. Students have to complete foundation English modules ; English Proficiency I, II and III in their first year before they can progress to the pedagogical and theoretical aspects of ESL teaching and learning. Currently ad-hoc feedback from tutors seems to indicate that linguistic proficiency and metalinguistic awareness still remains low despite completing these compulsory modules. Thus the design and results of this study are intended to provide information about these undergraduates' linguistic proficiency and metalinguistic awareness to allow an examination of the appropriacy, relevance and efficacy of the current course structure and content.

### Definitional Framework

This study was built around several critical concepts in the domain of ESL teaching and learning. The first fundamental idea is that of linguistic proficiency which Harmer (2003) defines as the demonstration of language skills and knowledge through the ability to Read, Write, Listen and Speak. The focus here is on comprehensibility; that is simply put the ability to understand and be understood. This is considered the most basic element of linguistic proficiency. Metalinguistic proficiency is concerned with the technical understanding of how language works. This is the ability to treat language as an object with separate components of structure, phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, syllables, sounds and lexical groupings. (Thornbury; 1997). As an English teacher in the classroom it is critical to have this knowledge to be able to process and present language structures in a manner that aids learner comprehension. (Nunan, 2003) Thus metalinguistic awareness was considered a key element in this study as linguistic competence does not necessarily assume metalinguistic proficiency.

Another key concept that was used to define and distinguish the participants of this study was that of non-native speaker. This term used in contrast to that of a native speaker assumes the superiority of one group over another in terms of linguistic proficiency. The most commonly accepted definition assumes native speakers to originate from the Anglophile countries of Britain, Australia, America and New Zealand who have learnt English and only English from birth in a purely English environment. (Harmer; 2003) However this term has become fraught with contention given the ever-expanding role and use of English as an international lingua franca (Crystal; 1995&1997). For simplicity and the purpose of this study this study adopted the position of David Crystal (2003) in defining non-native speakers as those who learnt English later in life and

whose fluency ranges from one that is comparable to native speakers to a relatively limited range of communicative functions. Some of these non-native speakers may also be effectively bi-lingual which is critical given the context of Malaysia as a multi-racial and multi-lingual country.

### Conclusion

It is with these aims and within this context that this study was undertaken. The review of existing Academic Literature that follows will provide the theoretical underpinnings for the design of this study.

## **Literature Review**

For the purpose of this study a review of the existing literature in the field of ESL teacher training was undertaken. Given the aims and orientation of the study this review focused on three streams of ESL academic literature; the importance of metalinguistic proficiency for ESL teachers, the design of ESL teacher training programmes and the relevance of non-native ESL teachers in the classroom. These three streams of academic research are both important and interrelated with regards to the training of ESL teachers in Malaysia.

### *Importance of Metalinguistic Awareness for English as a Second Language teachers*

Metalinguistic awareness and linguistic proficiency are critical for any ESL teacher and in Malaysia more so given the fact that it is non-native English speaking country. Malaysia is as Crystal (1997) describes an outer circle English speaking country whereby through earlier phases of colonization the language plays an important second language role in a multilingual setting. In this context and given the Malaysian educational environment where Malay was the medium of instruction in school since the 1970's, an understanding of the importance of linguistic proficiency and metalinguistic awareness in the field of ESL teaching is critical for this study.

The basic expectation of ESL teachers in the classroom is that they are able to present themselves as role-models of English use and guide students learning (Llurda, 2004). Holliday (1994) and Crystal (1997) have proposed that regardless of an ESL trainees teachers origin; as a native English speaker or non-native English speaker, knowledge of certain fundamental linguistic rules, structures and conventions are necessary to

teach English as a Second Language effectively. This therefore assumes a certain amount of explicit metalinguistic knowledge and application.

In 1999, Andrews conducted a study among native and non-native ESL teachers in Hong Kong to compare levels of metalinguistic proficiency. It was illustrative in demonstrating the possibility that the difference in the metalinguistic knowledge among native and non-native speaker could be related to their teaching-learning experiences and tertiary education. From the study, Andrews (1999) noted that while non-native teachers had “relatively high levels of language proficiency as indicated by their performance on error recognition and correction, it was not matched by their ability to produce metalanguage”. (Andrews, 1999 ;156 )As the main area of classroom practice in English as a Second Language teaching typically involves rule explanation(Andrews, 1999) this highlighted a critical area of concern as it potentially indicated that these teachers were not able to meet the most basic, fundamental expectation in ESL teaching. Andrews (1999) noted that for non-native English as a Second Language trainee teachers; “despite 13 years of typically form-focused teaching of English, they did not perform well on a test of explicit grammar knowledge”. (Andrews, 1999; 157) This study noted that “the potential experiences with being a non-native speaker are like to be a potentially contributing factor in the explicit development of grammar and grammatical terminology”. (Andrews, 1999; 156). “Tertiary study background seems to have a significant influence on explicit knowledge of grammar and grammatical terms”. (Andrews, 1999; 156)

Another study that lends credence to these findings of low levels of metalinguistic proficiency among non-native speakers was conducted by Morris (2002) in Canada. This study tracked the progress of students who demonstrated relatively low levels of metalinguistic knowledge at the time of admission into an ESL teacher education programme and over a

period of one year where declarative courses in grammar were completed. Despite completing these foundation language modules ; “the lowness of the raw score results indicate inadequate understanding almost across the board and catastrophic results on half of the items” (Morris, 2002 ;198). This study concluded that while pre-determined levels of linguistic proficiency allowed for admission into an ESL teacher education programme, the critical aspect of metalinguistic knowledge remained low among these trainee teachers.

Nunan's (2003) has observed that in Malaysia a significant proportion of teachers do not have a sufficient command of the English language to conduct classes with confidence. This is linked directly to the fact that these teachers through the education system have not received sound language instruction leading to a lack of knowledge about what is correct in the English language. The case he presents indicates that metalinguistic knowledge that is considered necessary for effective ESL teaching is lacking among Malaysian English as a Second Language teachers leading to what is generally perceived as a failure of the English language policy in Malaysian schools. (Nunan, 2003)

### Design of ESL teacher education programmes

Using the earlier studies as a starting point, the indications are that non-native ESL teachers require specific training to build their linguistic proficiency and metalinguistic awareness to allow them to function effectively in the classroom. Thus, the model of teacher education programmes have to be distinctively different from that adopted to train native English speakers to become ESL teachers. Most often though in Asia; and specifically Malaysia a western model of teacher education is adopted which as the following studies indicate may have questionable results.

The survey by Yeon and Hyo (2007) of English teachers in Asia noted that Malaysian primary school ESL teachers only require a Diploma in TESL while secondary school ESL teachers required a B. Education in TESL (Teaching of English as a Second Language) and a teaching certificate. In their study it was noted that the main focus of ESL teacher education in Malaysia was on “content, theory and pedagogy, all aspects related to English language teaching” (Yeon & Hyo, 2007;11). There was little to no focus on developing linguistic proficiency which was assumed upon admission into the programme. Wedell (2004) notes that “initial TESL teacher education throughout the APEC region is not fit for the purpose of enabling teachers to help learners achieved curricular outcomes” (Wedell, 2004; 4). He goes on to explain that the ideas about the nature of language, language teaching process and language learning have been imported from native English speaking countries. Research by Carrier (2003) and Morris (2003) indicates that communicative competency dominated the learning of English as a Second Language for these non-native speakers, which is a significantly different teaching –learning modality compared to native speakers. This has therefore directly affective their ability to understand and express the explicit areas of language use known as metalinguistics. While linguistically these trainee teachers may have near-native levels of fluency; Morris (2002) critically questions the professional competence of a teacher who cannot consistently identify verb forms or provide basic grammatical explanations. Therefore when non-native trainee teachers enter an English as a Second Language teacher education programme they require a course structure that is significantly different from native speakers and specific to their metalinguistic competencies. (Andrews, 1999), (Carrier, 2003), (Morris, 2003)

In a study of the Language for Special Purposes course that was conducted for non-native speakers on the Teaching of English as a

Second Language (TESOL) degree programme at the University of Pennsylvania, Carrier (2003) established the benefits of pre-course language training for non-native speakers. Through his research, Murdoch (1994) has noted that a pre-course language programme allows non-native trainee teachers to practice their oral English which trainee teachers themselves identified as an important skill for their own studies and their future teaching. Morris (2002) noted that the nature of grammar based linguistic courses taught in ESL teacher education programmes would be more effective if it adopted a procedural orientation as opposed to the current declarative focus. These practitioners have proposed an additional pre-course programme or a re-structuring of current courses to meet the specific needs of these non-native speaking ESL teacher trainees to ensure their success on the academic programme and as professional teachers.

### Relevance non-native speakers as English as a Second Language teachers

As a direct result of the expansion of English as a global language (Crystal, 1997), English is being spoken by more people as a second language than as a mother tongue. (Widdowson, 1994). In this context the notion of non-native English speakers in the ESL classroom has taken root not just out of economic exigency but due to sound educational principles.

The opinion that is gaining common acceptance in the ESL field is that proficiency in speaking English is not determined by birth but rather by the capacity to use the language properly (Modiano, 1999). McKay (2000) and Lurda (2004) have both supported the position and role of non-native English as a Second Language teachers in the ESL profession. They posit that these non-native speakers having experienced first hand

the challenge of learning English as a second language, are able to better understand , empathize and provide for their learners in the classroom. Alptekin (2002) has suggested that these non-native speaker teachers have the capacity to incorporate instructional materials and activities that learners are familiar with and meet the needs of localized contexts. More importantly these non-native teachers have the capacity to present the language use in a realistic and multi-faceted context that language learners are going to face. (Llurda, 2004). The notion of native English speakers being superior and more effective in the ESL classroom is slowly losing currency as non-native English speakers are shown to be equally if not more effective. (McKay; 2000)

This would therefore support the role of Malaysian non-native English speaking teachers in the classroom, notwithstanding the studies from Andrews(1999), Nunan(2003) and Morris (2004) which all indicate the possible need to address significant gaps in metalinguistic awareness and linguistic proficiency.

## **Methodology**

This chapter will provide a brief explanation of the research strategy adopted in this study, the process of designing the research instrument and the process by which data was collected. Where relevant, the specific academic studies that guided the research design have been highlighted.

### Strategy

For the purpose of this research project a Quantitative Correlational Survey was designed to collect specific statistical information about the background and educational experiences of the undergraduate trainee teachers in relation to their linguistic proficiency. Simultaneously the research instrument also facilitated the collection of data to measure the level of linguistic proficiency and metalinguistic awareness. The research instrument was designed after reviewing two earlier studies on the relationship between specific factors and metalinguistic awareness of non-native ESL trainee teachers by Andrews (1999) at the University of Hong Kong and Morris (2002) at the University of Quebec.

### Research Design

The research instrument comprised two parts. In Part One, participants had to complete a Personal Questionnaire designed to elicit specific information about their background and educational experiences. The information provided here formed the basis of the Independent Variables of this study. The Independent Variables identified for this study mirror those of the study by Morris (2002) in Canada, where mother tongue, educational background, gender, age and the number of languages spoken were considered. All these factors are critical

elements of language acquisition at a first and second language level (Harmer, 2003) and therefore relate directly to levels of metalinguistic proficiency.

Of the independent variables the following were the discrete variables for which data was collected ; gender, ethnicity, first language acquired, second language acquired, medium of instruction in school and work experience. The remaining independent variables comprised continuous variables providing information about age, level of education and English Language results in National Examinations.

Metalinguistic awareness and linguistic proficiency was measured in Part Two of the research instrument; through the completion of an Error Correction Exercise. Participants were given 30 sentences with errors for which they had to identify the error, provide the correction and finally explain the type of error in the sentence. Identification of errors is the lowest level of language proficiency as it is merely requires a demonstration of knowledge. Correcting the error requires more advanced cognitive capabilities as participants have to analyze the error, draw on their existing knowledge and synthesize it to provide the correct version. This is a demonstration of linguistic proficiency and metalinguistic knowledge, which also accurately reflects the work that English teachers are engaged with in their classroom. (Andrews, 1999), (Morris, 2002) ,(Carrier,2003). Lastly providing an explanation of the error is at the highest level of metalinguistic awareness as it requires an explicit expression of metalanguage knowledge. This involves the ability to process information about the error and connect it with existing technical knowledge of the language.

The structure and design of this error correction exercise was based on the studies by Andrews (1999) and Morris (2002). The original Canadian Error Correction Exercise (Morris, 2002) comprised 3 separate exercises

conducted over a period of 6 months and the Hong Kong study (Andrews, 1999) had 60 questions on the Error Correction Exercise. A matrix indicating the critical aspects of English metalinguistic proficiency was developed with reference to these 2 studies and the scope of the Error Correction Exercise was reduced to 30 questions (Attached as Appendix 1). The breakdown of the error type and number of questions allocated for this study are illustrated in Table 1. The choice of language forms and functions tested progressed from articles being the most simple to sentence construction the most complex. This corresponds to the theories of language acquisition and language teaching where understanding the meaning of specific words and its function precede the ability to construct comprehensible output in terms of grammatically correct sentences. (Brown; 2000)

**Table 1 :Matrix of Language Forms and Function on the Error Correction Exercise**

<b>Error Type</b>	<b>Number of Questions</b>
Articles	<b>2</b>
Noun Form (Uncountable Nouns)	<b>1</b>
Verb Forms	<b>3</b>
Tenses	<b>5</b>
Subject –Verb Agreement	<b>4</b>
Spelling	<b>1</b>
Vocabulary	<b>3</b>
Prepositions	<b>2</b>
Conjunctions	<b>3</b>
Punctuation	<b>1</b>
Syntax – Sentence Structure	<b>4</b>

### Sampling

The participants of this study comprised all the second and third year undergraduate students in the B. Education (English) programme at UNITAR. The total number of participants in this study was 63. The sample here comprised the entire target population, so it was a naturally occurring treatment group. These students were selected as they would have completed the required compulsory language modules ; English Proficiency I, II and III. The background and educational experiences selected for correlation would have occurred prior to admission into university thus not making a difference to the choice of these participants.

### Data Collection Process

This study was planned for the end of the second semester ; coinciding with the end of the academic year in August/September 2007. Once the design of the research instrument and target sample was determined, a letter requesting permission to conduct this study was sent to the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at UNITAR. The letter outlined the aims of the study, the research instrument, the target population, the proposed dates of the pre-testing, briefing of students and conduct of actual research. (Attached as Appendix 2) The Dean gave the approval for this study within two weeks and further coordination was done in consultation with the Deputy Dean.

A group of 17 first year B. Education (English) students were selected for pre-testing the research instrument. This pre-test was conducted in early August 2007. There were two questions in Part Two, the Error Correction Exercise which had to be re-designed based on the feedback during the pre-test. One of the Variables in Part One had to be restructured as in its original form it was confusing for the participants.

Once that was completed, the dates for the actual conduct of the study were determined in consultation with the Deputy Dean. All the students were briefed about the purpose of the study and given the Informed Consent Letter for review a week in advance. (Attached as Appendix 3) Students were informed that their participation was optional, that all information gathered would remain confidential and that there would no way to identify any specific student. Nowhere on the Questionnaire would students be required to identify themselves by name, matriculation number or class. More importantly the information and performance in this study would not affect their course results in any way. Those who agreed to participate in the study were required to return their letters two days prior to the conduct of the study. 4 students choose not to participate in this study, which left a total of 63 participants as the sample group.

The study was scheduled for one hour prior to the start of 4 different lecture groups on the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 2007. Each group of students were briefed about the structure of the Survey Questionnaire and Error Correction Exercise for about 10 minutes prior to the start data collection process. Each group was given one hour to complete the Questionnaire under the supervision of the researcher.

### Data Analysis Process

Once all the data had been collected the next step was to organize the information for analysis and allow significant correlations to be made between background factors and language proficiency. The information about the Independent Variables as provided in Part One of the Questionnaire were coded and categorized for analysis.

For the variable gender, Male was defined as category 1 and Female as category 2. There were 2 categories for the variable age, 1 was

designated for age 19 to 25 and 2 for age 25 and above. Ethnicity was categorized from 1 to 5 ; 1 for Malay, 2 for Chinese, 3 for Indian, 4 for Other Asian and 5 for Others. For the variable first language and second language acquisition, English was defined 1 and Other Language as 2. The variable Level of Education was categorized as 1 for Malaysian School Certificate (SPM), 2 for Malaysian Higher Education Certificate (STPM), 3 for Matriculation, 4 for Diploma and 5 for Others. The English Results for the Malaysian School Certificate was scored from 1 for an A1/A2 in continuous progression to 5 for an F9. Conversely the Malaysian University English Test results and Matriculation English results were scored 1 for Band 6 and a 6 for Band 1. This is due to the fact that in both these examinations a high band score reflects a high level of competence a low band scores reflects a low level of competence. Thus the scoring for the critical variable of English results was consistent with a score of 1 indicating the highest level of achievement and a high score indicating a low level of achievement. If students indicated work experience this would categorized as 1 and lack of work experience was categorized as 2.

The responses on the Error Correction Exercise were marked and then scored using a Guttman Scale, adopting a cumulative scaling of responses. (Punch, 2005) For each question on the Error Correction Exercise participants were able to score a total of 6 marks per question. The scores were cumulative, starting with 1 mark for correctly identifying the Error, 2 marks for providing the correction and 3 marks for correctly identifying the type of error. Thus the total score for the Error Correction Exercise in Part Two of the Questionnaire was 180 marks.

Once the marking of the Error Correction Exercise was completed, the responses for Part 1 and the scores from Part Two were organized by in a table form as an EXCEL document. From here preliminary analysis of

linguistic proficiency and metalinguistic awareness was done using EXCEL to calculate total linguistic scores, average scores per question and average scores per language form. Comparisons were made between the performance on similar language forms in different questions.

The data was also transferred to SPSS for analysis of correlation between the Independent Variables and Dependent Variables using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient and One Way Annova.

### Conclusion

From the explanation of the research strategy presented in this chapter, it can be noted that by adopting established research methodology this study drew from the existing pool of academic knowledge and intends to contribute to the growing field of ESL teacher training. With the data collection and data analysis completed the findings from this study will be presented and discussed in the next chapter.

## **Findings**

The findings from the study will be presented in this chapter starting with a brief description of the profile of the sample according to gender, age, ethnicity and educational background. This will be followed by a detailed analysis of the relationship between specific background factors and the Total Score from the Error Correction Exercise. Finally the analysis of the average student score by question type on the Error Correction Exercise will be presented as an indicator of the level of linguistic proficiency of the participants in this study.

### Profile of Sample

The profile of the 63 participants according to gender, age, ethnicity, educational background, first and second language acquisition was representative of each cohort on this programme, the details as illustrated in Table 2. There were 7 males and 56 females, of which 11 were above the age of 25 comprising mature adult learners. The remaining 52 participants, comprising 82.5% were between the ages 19 to 25 which would be the normal age range for post-secondary education. The higher proportion of females on the course at 88.9% is reflective of the fact that females tend to dominate in the education sector. Thus, the composition of this sample provides an accurate representation of the population of females in the education sector.

**Table 2 : Distribution of Sample by Variable**

<b>GENDER</b>	Male: 7	Female : 56				
<b>AGE</b>	19- 25 : 52	Above 25 : 11				
<b>ETHNICITY</b>	Malay : 24	Chinese : 4	Indian : 30	Other Asian : 5		
<b>1<sup>st</sup> LANGUAGE</b>	English : 11	Other Languages: 52				
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> LANGUAGE</b>	English : 41	Other Languages : 22				
<b>EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE Primary Language</b>	English : 2	Malay : 44	Other : 17			
<b>EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE Secondary Language</b>	English : 5	Malay : 58				
<b>LEVEL of EDUCATION</b>	Secondary : 63	Post – Secondary : 59	Other : 2			
<b>ENGLISH RESULTS : SPM</b>	A1/A2 : 27	B3/B4: 19	C5/C6: 8	D7/D8: 7	F9: 2	
<b>ENGLISH RESULTS : MUET</b>	Band 6 : 1	Band 5 : 8	Band 4: 11	Band 3 : 19	Band 2 : 13	Band 1: 3
<b>ENGLISH RESULTS : Matric</b>	Band 1: 4	Band 2 : 2	Band 3 : 1	Band 5: 1		
<b>WORK EXPERIENCE</b>	Yes : 52	No : 11				

The breakdown of this sample by ethnicity was 24 Malays making them 38.1% of the sample, 4 Chinese at 6.3%, 30 Indians at 47.6% and 5 participants of other Asian ethnicities making up the remaining 7.9% of the sample. This is interesting considering that in Malaysia the population distribution by ethnicity is 56% Malays, 32 % Chinese and 8.1% Indians (Ninth Malaysia Plan; 2005). Thus while all ethnic groups are represented in this sample, the disproportionately high representation of Indians in this course is connected to the perception that Indians in Malaysia generally

have higher levels of fluency in English (Gunasegaram; 2007). In the field of ESL teaching in Malaysia, Indians make-up a high proportion of the teachers, quite like the way they also disproportionately dominate the fields of law and medicine which require higher levels of competency in English. (Gunasegaram; 2007)

In addition, as this is a private institution of higher learning we do not receive government sponsored ESL teachers where ethnic representation is a consideration.

All the 63 participants had completed their secondary education at the level of the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM). The Malaysian national education system has 2 pathways for pre-university preparation. The first is the national Malaysian Certificate of Higher Education (STPM) which students complete within the secondary school system and allows them admission into any local university of their choice. 74.6% of the participants in this study had completed their STPM and attained the required English grade on the Malaysian University English Test (MUET). The second pathway for entrance into university is through the completion of a Matriculation programme run by specific universities with admission limited to specific courses at that university. In this sample 8 participants comprising 12.7% had gained admission through the Matriculation programme. The remaining 12.7% had gained admission through other relevant post-secondary qualifications as stipulated by the university.

Only 11 participants at 17.5% in this study indicated that English was their first language which is normal considering that Malaysia is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual country whose national language is Malay. 41 participants comprising 65.1% of the sample indicated that English was their second language with the remaining 34.9% indicating that their second language was another language other than English.

Only 2 participants at 3.2% experienced their primary education in English, which would have been prior of 1972. 27% or 14 participants attended a vernacular primary school and a majority at 69.8% of the participants attended a national primary school with Malay as the medium of instruction. This is significant in a country where there is a national education system using the Malay language and a vernacular national education system using the language of the 2 significant ethnic groups, the Chinese and Indians. Therefore it was relevant to consider the medium of instruction in school of these participants. At secondary level this distribution changes quite significantly with 58 participants comprising 92.1% of the sample attending national secondary schools where Malay was the medium of instruction.

### Overview of Findings

The total score for the 30 question Error Correction Exercise was low across the board. The average mark was 37 out of 180 or 21.46%. Only 4 participants or 6.3% of the sample scored above 50% on all the 30 questions. This meant that 93.6% of the participants failed the Error Correction Exercise by scoring less than 50% or 90 marks out of a total of 180 marks.

### Findings on Correlation with Linguistic Proficiency

The Pearson Correlation Coefficient analysis indicated two levels of significance between the Independent Variables and the Dependent Variable of linguistic proficiency as outlined in Table 3. The variables Gender, First Language Acquired, Second Language Acquired, Level of Education and Work Experience demonstrated no significant impact on levels of linguistic proficiency.

**Table 3 : Pearson Correlation Significance**

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE	PEARSON COEFFICIENT	SIGNIFICANCE
<b>Significant at p=0.05</b>		
Language of Secondary Education	0.308	0.014
MUET Results	-0.307	0.014
<b>Significant at p=0.01</b>		
Age	0.439	0.000
Ethnicity	0.336	0.007
Language of Primary Education	-0.353	0.004
SPM English Results	-0.429	0.000

The two Independent Variables that had the most significant relationship to the linguistic proficiency of participants was the Language of their Secondary Education and MUET scores at  $p = 0.05$ . The Pearson Correlation Coefficient for Language of Secondary Education was 0.308 with a significance of 0.014 and for MUET scores it was -0.307 with a significance of 0.014.

The Independent Variables of Age, Ethnicity, the Language of Primary Education and SPM English results showed a lesser degree of correlation to linguistic proficiency at  $p = 0.01$ . For the Independent Variable of Age the Pearson Coefficient was 0.439 with a significance of 0.000 and for English results on the Malaysian National Certificate the correlation coefficient was -0.429 also with a significance of 0.000. Ethnicity had a correlation coefficient of 0.336 with a significance of 0.007 and the Language of Primary Education had a correlation coefficient of -0.353 with a significance of 0.004.

The One Way Anova analysis provided an interesting understanding of the extent of variance between the different categories

of each Independent Variable in terms of linguistic performance as illustrated in Table 4. The ratio **F** indicating the degree of variance was significant for the Independent Variables of Age, SPM English results, Language of Primary Education, MUET results, Ethnicity and Language of Secondary Education. In the order of variables listed above the **F** ratio was 14.53, 13.18, 10.18, 8.56, 8.24 and 6.41 respectively.

**Table 4 : Results of One Way Anova**

<b>Independent Variable</b>	<b>F Ratio - Variance</b>	<b>Significance</b>
Age	14.532	0.000
SPM English Results	13.179	0.001
Language of Primary Education	10.183	0.002
MUET English Results	8.559	0.005
Ethnicity	8.242	0.006
Language of Secondary Education	6.411	0.014
Work Experience	1.184	0.281
Gender	0.639	0.427
Matriculation English Results	0.322	0.573
Level of Education	0.206	0.651
2 <sup>nd</sup> Language Acquired	0.015	0.902
1 <sup>st</sup> Language Acquired	0.02	0.967

The mean linguistic scores for the different categories within the Variables of Age, SPM English results, Language of Primary Education, MUET results, Ethnicity and Language of Secondary Education all indicate a range to concur with the **F** ratio of the One Way Anova analysis. Table 5 lists the detailed mean scores for each category within the 12 Independent Variables.

The mean linguistic score for the age group 19-25 was 32.1 out of a total of 180 as compared to the 62.1 mean score for the age group above 25. For the variable Language of Primary Education the mean linguistic score for those whose medium of instruction in school was English was 108 marks, whereas those who attended a Malay medium school had a mean score of 37.4 and those who attended a vernacular school had a mean score of 28.8. Similarly those whose medium of instruction in Secondary school was English scored higher in terms of their linguistic proficiency with a mean score of 64.6 compared to those whose medium of instruction in secondary school was the Malay language with a score of 34.9. Given the importance of ethnicity in multi-racial Malaysia, the mean linguistic scores by ethnic group also indicated significant variance. The mean score of the Malay ethnic group was 31.5, Chinese was 37, Indian was 35.7 and Other Asian was 75.4.

The mean linguistic scores corresponded with the SPM English results and MUET results as should be expected. The 27 participants who scored a Distinction in SPM had the highest mean score of 47.3. This was followed by the 19 participants with a mean of 37.6 who attained a B grade in SPM, the 8 participants who attained a C grade had a mean score of 28.5, the 7 participants with a D grade had a score of 14.6 and the 2 who failed their English in SPM achieved a score of 14.5. The only participant who attained a Band 6 in MUET; the highest achievement band scored 22 marks, the 8 who attained a Band 5 got a mean score of 43.1, the 11 in Band 4 got a mean of 37.7, the 19 in Band 3 got a mean score of 21.9, the 13 in Band 2 a mean score of 15.3 and the 3 in Band 1 a mean score of 15.7.

The **F** ratio for the Independent Variables of Gender, First Language, Second Language, Level of Education, Work Experience and Matriculation English results did not indicate a significant degree of

variance. The **F** ratio ranged from 0.015 for Second Language to 1.184 for Work Experience. The mean scores for the different categories in these variables also did not indicate a significant degree of variance as indicated in Table 5.

**Table 5 : Mean Linguistic Scores within the categories of each Independent Variable**

<b>INDEPENDENT VARIABLE</b>	<b>MEAN SCORE (Total 180 marks)</b>
<b>GENDER</b>	Male: <b>29.9</b>
	Female : <b>38.3</b>
<b>AGE</b>	19- 25 : 32.1
	Above 25 : 62.1
<b>ETHNICITY</b>	Malay : 31.5
	Chinese : 37
	Indian : 35.7
	Other Asian : 75.4
<b>1<sup>st</sup> LANGUAGE</b>	English : 37.6
	Other Languages : 37.2
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> LANGUAGE</b>	English : 37.6
	Other Languages : 36.8
<b>EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE</b> <b>Primary Language</b>	English : 108.0
	Malay : 37.4
	Other : 28.8
<b>EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE</b> <b>Secondary Language</b>	English : 64.6
	Malay : 34.9
<b>LEVEL of EDUCATION</b>	Secondary : 53.5
	Post –Secondary : 36.64
	Other : 41.5

<b>INDEPENDENT VARIABLE</b>	<b>MEAN SCORE (Total 180 marks)</b>
<b>ENGLISH RESULTS : SPM</b>	A1/A2 : 47.3
	B3/B4 : 37.6
	C5/C6 : 28.5
	D7/D8 : 14.6
	F9 : 14.5
<b>ENGLISH RESULTS : MUET</b>	Band 6 : 22
	Band 5 : 43.1
	Band 4 : 37.7
	Band 3 : 21.9
	Band 2 : 15.3
	Band 1 : 15.7
<b>ENGLISH RESULTS : Matric</b>	Band 1 : 59
	Band 2 : 43
	Band 3 : 47
	Band 5 : 29
<b>WORK EXPERIENCE</b>	Yes : 38.9
	No : 29.5

### Findings on Linguistic Proficiency and Metalinguistic Awareness

The trend observed in the Error Correction Exercise was that in general the ability to identify the error in the sentence, the first of the three skills checked was high. By comparison the number of participants who could then provide the correct response and explain the error dropped significantly. Generally the graph for 28 out of the 30 questions indicated a downward trend across the 3 skills as illustrated in Table 6. Only 2 questions did not adhere to this pattern; Question 8 and 29 on sentence structures. Given that the ability to identify the error and correct the error are demonstrations of linguistic proficiency, the detailed statistics below

will indicate that less than 50% of the participants were able to consistently do this correctly for most questions. The early indications from here are that linguistic proficiency among the participants on this study is generally low despite meeting the course admission criteria and having completed the compulsory English Proficiency modules I, II and III. Metalinguistic awareness was measured through the third skill; the ability to explain the type of error. It was in this domain that the significant lack of metalanguage knowledge stood out through the Error Correction Exercise. Review of the statistics from the individual questions as outlined below will indicate that for a majority of the questions, less than 20% of the participants were able to provide the correct explanation indicating very low levels of metalinguistic awareness.

The most simple language form checked was that on the use of Articles in Question 1 and Question 13. For Question 1, 55.5% of the participants were able to identify the error and provide the correct response. However, only 15.9 % were able to explain the error. Similarly in Question 13, 47.6% were able to identify the error, 31.7% provide the correction and only 11.1% explain the error. The average score for the question on articles was 3.59 out of 6 marks. While both questions focused on an error in the use of the article 'the', the reason for the performance difference could be that Question 1 was a simple sentence whilst Question 13 was a compound sentence with the use of the conjunction 'but'. This could indicate that while the language form is simple, when used in more complex arrangements with multiple language clauses participants linguistic skills become compromised.

**Table 6 : Summary of Performance in Error Correction Exercise**

<b>QUESTION</b>	<b>Identify Error</b>	<b>Correct Error</b>	<b>Explain Error</b>
<i>ARTICLE</i>			
1	55.6%	55.6%	15.9%
13	47.6%	31.7%	11.1%
<i>VERB FORMS</i>			
2	92%	79.4%	34.9%
5	19%	7.9%	1.6%
<i>CONJUNCTIONS</i>			
4	87.3%	82.5%	17.5%
9	38.1%	34.9%	4.8%
15	31.7%	22.2%	1.6%
<i>SUBJECT –VERB AGREEMENT</i>			
12	44.4%	41.3%	3.2%
27	52.4%	31.7%	3.2%
<i>TENSE FORMS</i>			
7	61.9%	46%	4.8%
14	46%	22.2%	15.9%
18	55.6%	41.3%	6.3%
22	34.9%	6.3%	6.3%
26	52.4%	12.7%	4.8%
28	58.7%	31.7%	20.6%
<i>VOCABULARY</i>			
10	11.1%	11.1%	7.4%
17	17.5%	9.5%	6.3%
20	57.1%	38.1%	4.8%
30	20.6%	15.9%	3.2%
<i>PREPOSITIONS</i>			
19	42.9%	25.4%	6.4%
21	9.5%	6.3%	4.8%
<i>NOUN FORMS</i>			
3	90.5%	90.5%	28.6%
6	17.5%	14.3%	1.6%
25	22.2%	19%	6.3%
<i>Punctuation</i>			
11	22.2%	17.5%	7.9%
<i>SENTENCE STRUCTURE</i>			
8	17.5%	31.7%	6.3%
16	58.7%	20.6%	1.6%
24	39.7%	20.6%	3.2%
29	11.1%	6.3%	14.3%

In the use of Verb Forms, while the downward trend was consistent, there was a huge gap in the skill level demonstrated. Question 2 saw 92% of the participants identify the error correctly, while that dropped to 19% for Question 5. This tapered off to 79.3 % for Question 2, and 7.9% for Question 5 in terms of the ability to provide the correct answer. In terms of the ability to explain the error Question 2 registered 24.9% participants and Question 5 only 1.6%. For these 2 questions on Verb Forms the average mark was 2.68 per question. In Question 2, the error of the irregular verb form tested was the word 'eat' which is a commonly encountered word possibly making it easier for participants to identify and explain the error. For Question 5, the irregular verb form checked was the word 'lie' which in meaning and use are commonly confused with the word 'lay'. When the language forms and functions become more complex participants metalinguistic awareness is relatively low.

For the language form of Conjunctions, the skill level demonstrated in Question 9 and 15 were closer than that of Question 4. The performance on Question 4 was 87.3% for error identification, 82.53% for error correction and 17.4% for error explanation. The relatively high linguistic proficiency demonstrated in Question 4 could be due to the fact that the error was with the use of the subordinating conjunction 'because' instead of the coordinating conjunction 'but'. In most language courses and the Malaysian National School English syllabus, this use of Conjunctions is taught in primary schools. These participants would therefore have a greater degree of familiarity with its meaning and use. For Question 9 and 15 only 38.1% and 31.7% of the participants were able to identify the error, 34.9% and 22.2% respectively were then able to provide the correction and the ability to explain the error dropped to 4.8% and 1.58% of the participants. In Question 9, the error was in the use of the conjunction 'since' instead of the preposition 'for' in a complex sentence

with an Independent and Dependent clause. The error in Question 15 was the use of 'when' instead of the conditional 'if' as a conjunction with the phrase 'would have'. The same pattern of limited proficiency and metalinguistic knowledge is seen here once the language form and function increase in complexity.

The 3 questions on Subject-Verb Agreement also demonstrated the same consistent downward pattern. The scores for Question 12, 18 and 27 were relatively close in terms of the skill of identifying the error and providing the correction. The scores for Question 12, 18 and 27 were 44.4%, 55.6 % and 52.4% of participants being able to identify the error while 41.3%, 41.3 % and 31.7% were able to provide the correction. On Questions 12 and 27, 3.17% were able to explain the error while this was marginally higher on Question 18 at 6.4%. Both Question 12 and 27 focused on the agreement of the 'to be' verb in the present and past tense. In Question 18 the agreement error was in the incorrect form of the verb. Subject-Verb agreement is a fundamental area of language form and function on which much time is spent at the primary levels of education explaining the comparatively high numbers of participants who are able to identify and correct the mistake. Despite this, metalinguistic awareness in this area is still limited.

In the area of Tense Form use, the highest level of achievement was 61.9% of participants on Question 7 in terms of the ability to identify the error. This achievement rate remained relatively close at 46% for Question 13, 35% for Question 22, 52.4% for Question 26 and 58% for Question 28. The ability to provide the correction dropped to 46% for Question 7, 22.2% for Question 14, 6.3% for Question 22, 12.7% for Question 26 and 31.7% for Question 28. Finally the percentage of participants who were able to provide an explanation for the error was low across all 5 questions with 20.6% for Question 28, 15.9% for Question 14, 4.8% for Question 7 and 26,

and 6.3% for Question 22. Question 7 and 26 both contained errors in the use of the future tense instead of the present tense. The number participants being able to identify and explain the error, while low were at a similar level. The gap in the ability to provide the correction in both questions could be attributed to the fact that in Question 7, the tense error in the verb form occurred once. In Question 26, participants had to correct the tense form in a complex sentence within the Independent and Dependent clause, thus making Question 26 significantly more difficult than Question 7. The relatively high levels of performance on Question 28 could be due to the fact the tense error was relatively simple in the present tense form of the verb. Questions 14 and 22 on which performance was significantly lower were questions with errors of the Present Perfect and Present Perfect Progressive tense forms. These are the more complex tense forms and functions in language.

In the area of understanding the meaning of words in context; Vocabulary, only 57.1% of the participants were able to identify the error in Question 20. This dropped to 11.1% for Question 10, 17.5% for Question 17 and 20.6% for Question 30. The ability to provide the correct form of the word was only 38.1% for Question 20, 11.1% for Question 10, 9.52% for Question 17 and 15.8% for Question 30. However very few participants were able to explain that the error in each question was a vocabulary error at 7.9% for Question 10, 6.3% for Question 17, 4.8% for Question 20 and 3.2% for Question 30. The statistics indicate that participants were not able to differentiate the meaning of nouns 'Principal' and 'Principle' in Question 10, adverbs 'hard' and 'hardly' in Question 20 and verbs 'bring' and 'take' in Question 17. Question 17 is a common error in Malaysia as the Malay and Chinese languages do not make similar distinctions in the use of both these words. The vocabulary error in Question 30 was the most complex, requiring participants to distinguish between the use of the verb

'say' and 'speak' which could therefore explain the relatively low competencies demonstrated.

The trend illustrated in the ability to identify, correct and explain errors of Prepositions in Questions 19 and 21 was similar to the downward trend of the other language components in the Error Correction Exercise. On Question 19, 42.9% of the participants were able to identify the error, 25.4% were able to provide the correction and only 6.3% were able to explain the nature of the error. The percentage of participants able to identify the error was significantly lower on Question 21 at only 9.5%, which then dropped to 6.3% being able to provide the correction and only 4.8% being able to explain the error. In Question 19, the error was relatively straightforward with the incorrect use of the preposition 'at' which needed to be corrected with 'to'. The drop in performance on Question 21 could be explained by the fact that the prepositional error was one of redundancy in a complex sentence which participants had to remove without any replacement. This supports the earlier observed trend that when the language form and function become more complex, linguistic proficiency and metalinguistic awareness drops significantly.

Question 3 on Uncountable Nouns saw a high number of participants at 90.5% being able to identify the error and provide the correction. This then dropped to 28.5% being able to explain the error. The high level of proficiency in Question 3 could be attributed to the fact that the error in the use of 'much' and 'many' in the sentence is a commonly featured topic, grammar exercise and test question in Malaysian national examinations. For the Noun Forms in Question 6 and 25 only 17.5% and 22.2% participants were able to identify the error while 14.3% and 19% were able to provide the correction. The ability to explain the error dropped to 1.58% on Question 6 and 6.3% on Question 25. These two Questions focused on the Uncountable Nouns 'equipment' and

'information' which participants were not able to correctly identify in the plural form.

Due to the limited nature of the Error Correction Exercise, only 1 question was allocated for language function of Punctuation. The trend here was also consistent with the pattern of the other language items. The error in Punctuation contained in Question 11 saw 22.2% of the participants were able to identify the error. This then decreased to only 17.4% being able to correct the error and 7.9% being able to explain the error.

The only language form in the Error Correction Exercise which did not adhere to the downward trend of the other language forms were the 4 sentences with errors in sentence structure. Question 16 and 24 both displayed a downward trend in participants ability to identify, correct and explain the error. In Question 16, 58.7% were able to identify the error, 20.6% were able to correct the error and only 1.58% were able to explain the error. Similarly in Question 24, 39.7% of participants were able to identify the error, 20.6% were able to explain the error and 3.2% were able to explain the error. In both these questions the error in the sentence construction was one of repetition that required correction with the addition of the appropriate conjunction. However Question 8 and 29 jump out as they did not adhere to the trend of all the other questions. In Question 8 more participants were able to correct the error at 31.7% than identify the error at 17.5% or explain the error at 6.3%. The results of Question 29 was even more odd as more participants were able to explain the error correctly at 14.2% than identify the error at 11.1% or correct the error at 6.3%. The error in both these question was that of word order, where in Question 8 the noun phrase was structured incorrectly and Question 29 had two dependent clauses in the wrong position. It is possible that with both these questions, participants could instinctively

provide the correct version, yet due to the complexity of the error were not able to correctly identify or explain the error as it required identification of more than one sentence fragment.

### Conclusion

From the analysis presented above several key findings stand out despite the generally low levels of linguistic proficiency revealed. The most important factor that seems to influence linguistic proficiency is the language of education used in Primary and Secondary education. This seems to go against the prevailing notion that the first or second language acquired by a trainee teacher determines to a large degree the level of their English language proficiency. Moreover, it was interesting to note alongside the low overall scores on the Error Correction Exercise demonstrating low linguistic proficiency, metalinguistic awareness among these trainee teachers was relatively non-existent despite having completed the compulsory foundation language modules.

## **Discussion of Findings**

The evidence thus far seems to indicate that current perceptions about the linguistic proficiency and metalinguistic awareness of non-native ESL trainee teachers in Malaysia may not be completely accurate. Following on from the findings detailed in the previous chapter, it is the intention of the discussion below to provide useful insights to other practitioners that may guide the process of developing relevant admission criteria and course structures for ESL teacher training programmes. This discussion will be structured to address the key ideas underpinning this study as presented in the earlier Literature Review.

### Implication on the Linguistic Proficiency and Metalinguistic Awareness of ESL teachers

As all participants in this study were second and third year undergraduates who had completed the compulsory English Proficiency Modules I, II and III their scores in the three domains of error identification, error correction and error explanation were not encouraging. A majority of the participants failed the exercise in its entirety and the analysis of individual questions indicate that less than 20% of participants were able to provide accurate explanations of errors. The observed pattern was that on the more simple language forms and functions with simple sentence constructions participants were able to effectively apply their metalanguage. As soon as compound or complex sentence structures were introduced and more advance tense forms of the Present Perfect and Progressive were used, the performance levels dropped significantly. Considering that most ESL teachers are involved in presenting and explaining language forms and functions (Holliday;1994), the data from this study does not bode well of their future classroom competence.

Currently, the main criteria for admission into this B. Education (English) programme are the SPM and STPM national examination results. From the correlational study, the indications are that the English results from these two national examinations are important and significant criteria in determining proficiency. The current line of thinking is that the results on a standard National Examination suffice and the inherent difference in proficiency can be overcome by conducting intensive English foundation modules. While there was a correlation between these factors and proficiency levels, these national examination results did not ensure appropriate high levels of proficiency as would be required by future ESL teachers.

What is noteworthy is the degree of variance and the mean scores for both these criteria. From the data collected, students who attained a Distinction in the SPM examinations still failed the measure of linguistic proficiency in the Error Correction exercise with an average of 26.2%. Neither did achievement in MUET seem to be an accurate indicator of high levels of language proficiency. Admission based on these criteria seems to be ineffective in ensuring baseline linguistic proficiency that will translate into competent English language teachers in the classroom. The focus of the SPM English examination is on achieving communicative competence among the general student population. A significant percentage of the examination is in Multiple Choice format and the written component focuses on directed communicative writing skills. The MUET examination involves students using English to express logic and make analysis, which is relevant for most university based courses. In the context of ESL teaching, the type of language competence as measured in these two examinations does not seem to provide students with the requisite linguistic proficiency and metalinguistic awareness.

### Implication on the Design of ESL teacher education programmes

The indicators of linguistic proficiency and metalinguistic awareness from this study seem to suggest that these compulsory English Proficiency Modules I, II and III need review. Currently the orientation of these foundation modules is highly communicative, with a focus on preparing students to make Oral presentations, write reports, understand lectures in English and respond to written texts. Given the nature of the B. Education (English) programme and the demands of ESL teaching, this generic course does not seem to have a positive impact on the linguistic proficiency and metalinguistic awareness of these undergraduates.

### Implication on the relevance of non-native speakers as ESL teachers

There is growing support for non-native speakers to take the lead as teachers in the English as a second language classroom. (McKay; 2000, Llurda; 2004). In multi-lingual and multi-ethnic Malaysia where a vernacular school system exists, including teachers from this educational background into the ESL education system as they may be able to use their personal challenges with the language to ensure a teaching-learning environment that better meets the needs of their students.

The data from this study has indicated that the medium of instruction in Secondary and Primary schools are critical in ensuring linguistic proficiency. This study also calls into question the efficacy of the current vernacular national type primary schools in ensuring proficiency in English. The range of mean scores between the participants from the different primary school language streams seems to suggest that the current system is not producing undergraduates who can function competently in the language. The two participants who had the opportunity to study in the English medium at primary level outperformed the others by a significant margin. While some degree of this variance

could be attributed to life experience and other factors, the difference in mean scores of over 71 marks is too large to ignore. Thus it may be relevant to include filters to screen students who have experience in vernacular primary schools when admitting them into ESL teacher training courses which require a certain degree of linguistic proficiency. Whilst this is politically sensitive, the data from this study seem to indicate that this may be a reality that needs to be addressed.

### Conclusion

As can be noted from the discussions of the findings in this study there are several areas that need review and possible modification in the field of ESL teacher training in Malaysia. In the following chapter some ideas will be presented for consideration by ESL practitioners to ensure increased efficacy of ESL teacher education programmes.

## **Conclusion**

In the final part of this report on the linguistic proficiency and metalinguistic awareness among trainee ESL teacher in Malaysia the critical findings will be summarized and several proposals will presented for consideration by other professionals in the field.

### Summary of Key Findings

Among the finding that stands out in this study is the fact that linguistic proficiency and metalinguistic awareness among these trainee teachers is relatively low despite having completed the compulsory foundation language modules. At the same time the factor that has the most significant impact on levels of linguistic proficiency is the language of education in primary and secondary school. The English Language results from the National Examinations at secondary level seems to be a poor indicator of linguistic proficiency despite being a key criteria used for admission into university courses. As politicians, parents and educators are in heated debate over the impact of Policy 11/2002 (New Straits Times; 2007) to teach Mathematics and Science in English, revise the English syllabus and focus more attention on improving English language proficiency in our schools, this study seems to suggest the current policy direction may have be beneficial in improving the level of language competency in the country.

### Recommendations

The findings from the study seem to indicate two immediate and critical changes that may lead to improvements in the level of linguistic proficiency and metalinguistic awareness among ESL trainee teachers in Malaysia.

Firstly, the admission criteria into these courses needs to be thoroughly reviewed in light of the experiences of the current students and the dramatically changed requirements in the Malaysian ESL field. Given the correlations that have been identified through this study, apart from more stringent English Language proficiency criteria, institutions of higher learning may want to consider getting a more complete profile of their students' educational background experiences upon admission. This may allow a better understanding of their linguistic proficiency and metalinguistic awareness rather than solely relying on the English results of National Examinations. Simultaneously, it may allow students to be sorted into different groups according to their experiences for the compulsory English proficiency modules. In this manner lecturers and tutors can target specific needs and requirements that students may have due to their educational background and experiences more effectively.

The content, structure and assessment mode of the English Proficiency module may need to be reviewed and re-structured. Apart from the communicative aspect of language, students completing these foundation modules in preparation for a B. Education (English) programme may require specific explicit instruction in the area of linguistic. The assessment of proficiency may need to be more rigorous to ensure linguistic proficiency and metalinguistic awareness rather than communicative competence. In the course of reviewing the English Proficiency module, there could be consideration given to introducing differentiated modules to deal with the specific needs of different groups of undergraduates who are admitted with significantly different linguistic abilities. In this scenario a generic one-size –fits-all course, as is currently the case may not be appropriate.

In conclusion it is the intention of this study to provide a starting point for further research into the training of ESL teachers at public

universities in Malaysia. While the findings highlighted here are by no means comprehensive or conclusive, it is hoped that this will provide other professionals in the field a point of reference as ESL teacher training programmes are reviewed and restructured.

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**Appendix 1**

**“ Is there a relationship between the background of Non-Native ESL trainee teachers and their Metalinguistic Proficiency ?”**

**RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Part I : Personal Profile**

**Instructions :** Tick the boxes below to provide a composite personal profile.

<b>GENDER</b>	:	<input type="checkbox"/> Male	<input type="checkbox"/> Female
<b>AGE</b>	:	<input type="checkbox"/> 19 years <input type="checkbox"/> 20 years <input type="checkbox"/> 21 years <input type="checkbox"/> 22 years <input type="checkbox"/> 23 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 24 years <input type="checkbox"/> 25 years <input type="checkbox"/> ≥ 25 years Please Specify : _____
<b>ETHNICITY</b>	:	<input type="checkbox"/> Malay	<input type="checkbox"/> Chinese
		<input type="checkbox"/> Indian	<input type="checkbox"/> Eurasian
		<input type="checkbox"/> Other Asian	<input type="checkbox"/> Caucasian
<b>1<sup>ST</sup> LANGUAGE</b>		<input type="checkbox"/> English	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Lang
<b>Acquired</b>	:		Please Specify : _____
<b>2<sup>ND</sup> LANGUAGE</b>		<input type="checkbox"/> English	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Lang
<b>Acquired</b>	:		Please Specify : _____
<b>EDUCATIONAL</b>		<i>In which language was your</i>	
<b>EXPERIENCE</b>	:	Primary Education	<input type="checkbox"/> English <input type="checkbox"/> Malay <input type="checkbox"/> Other Lang Please Specify : _____
		Secondary Education	<input type="checkbox"/> English <input type="checkbox"/> Malay <input type="checkbox"/> Other Lang Please Specify : _____

<b>LEVEL of EDUCATION</b> :	Secondary	<input type="checkbox"/> SPM/ O Level
	Post – Secondary	<input type="checkbox"/> STPM Foundation <input type="checkbox"/> /Matric <input type="checkbox"/> Diploma <input type="checkbox"/> Others Please Specify : _____
<b>ENGLISH RESULTS</b>	SPM	<input type="checkbox"/> A1 / A2 <input type="checkbox"/> B3 / B4 <input type="checkbox"/> C5 / C6 <input type="checkbox"/> D7 / D8 <input type="checkbox"/> F9
	MUET	<input type="checkbox"/> Band 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Band 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Band 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Band 4 <input type="checkbox"/> Band 5 <input type="checkbox"/> Band 6
	Foundation / Matric/ IELTS	Grade : _____
<b>WORK EXPERIENCE</b> :	Have you worked before ?	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No If <b>YES</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Part – Time OR <input type="checkbox"/> Full – Time Please specify nature of work : _____	

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE**

### **Part II : Error Correction Exercise**

**Instructions** : There are 30 sentences in this section. Each sentence contains a linguistic error. For each sentence ;

- i) circle the error,**
- ii) provide the correction**
- iii) and give an explanation of the error.**

An example has been provided below :

0. **John builds the house last year.**

Correction : John built the house last year.

Explanation : Error of Tense form

1. My sister goes to the school every day.

Correction : \_\_\_\_\_

Explanation : \_\_\_\_\_

2. He eated all the chicken on the plate.

Correction : \_\_\_\_\_

Explanation : \_\_\_\_\_

3. How much people does he know?

Correction : \_\_\_\_\_

Explanation : \_\_\_\_\_

4. They have been married for five years because they haven't got any children yet.

Correction : \_\_\_\_\_

Explanation : \_\_\_\_\_

5. He laid in the bath reading for an hour yesterday afternoon.

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

6. When is the equipments arriving ?

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

7. If the weather will be fine we can play tennis tomorrow.

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

8. She bought an Italian small red sports car.

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

9. I've lived here since three years.

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

10. The Principle spoke for an hour during assembly this morning.

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

11. Why, would you like to meet him ?

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

12.Ten dollars are too much to pay for that book.

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

13.He studied the electrical engineering but he gave it up for physics.

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

14.He is in prison since1978 and won't be released for a long time.

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

15.When he really wanted to pass the test he would work harder.

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

16.Simon did well in the chess championship and Tineke also.

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

17.Can you bring her to the shop ?

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

18. The car that he is using these days is belonging to his company.

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

19. Do you ever go to Seremban at the weekends to see your parents ?

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

20. Although he works hardly I don't think he will have the job finished  
by tomorrow.

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

21. When children are still young parents must emphasize on the  
importance of road safety.

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

22. Her goals in life has been continuously changed over the last ten  
years.

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

23. That girl wants to marry a cousin of me but I don't think he even  
likes here.

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

24. He didn't read that book and I didn't read it also.

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

25. The informations we were given at the Tourist Center proved very useful to us.

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

26. If there would be heavy rain tonight our seedlings would not survive.

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

27. The speaker said that it were always the poor who suffered most at times of economic crisis.

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

28. My father retires last year but he has since found a lot to do at home.

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

29. For breakfast from a neighbour I had to borrow as we didn't have enough milk .

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

30. When he said that he had never read a word of Shakespeare he was saying the truth.

*Correction* : \_\_\_\_\_

*Explanation* : \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 2**

**Anushia Senthevadivel**

No 23, Jalan 12/12,  
46200, Petaling Jaya,  
Selangor, Malaysia.

**Assc. Prof. Dr. Raja Fauzi Musa**

Dean Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Universiti Tun Abdul Razak  
Kelana Jaya,  
Selangor, Malaysia.

Dear Sir ,

**RE : Request for Permission to conduct Research**

I am currently pursuing my Masters in Education at the University of Western Australia and would like to seek your permission to conduct a Research Project with the students on the B. Education and B. English programmes at University Tun Abdul Razak during the second half of 2007.

My Research Project intends to study relationship between background factors and metalinguistic competence of undergraduate students pursuing these courses. Students will be required to complete a Questionnaire that will take approximately one hour. Together with this letter I have attached a copy of the Consent Form and Questionnaire for your perusal.

Should you require I will be happy to forward my Resume and the Acceptance Letter from the University of Western Australia to confirm my status as a student on their Graduate Studies programme. I would like to indicate from the start my intention to keep the identity of your institution and students confidential in my Project Paper.

I would sincerely appreciate your guidance in this matter and look forward to a positive response to my request.

Sincerely,

**Anushia Senthe**

**University Tun Abdul Razak  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences**

**Study on Metalinguistic Proficiency of B.A / B.Ed Students**

for the purpose of Masters in Education Research  
Anushia Senthevadivel

**INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT**

**1. Invitation of Participate and Description of Study**

I would like to invite you to participate in this research study on the relationship between personal background factors of non-native speaker English degree students and their linguistic competence. The purpose of this research study is to gather information for my Masters in Education Project with the University of Western Australia. Attached is a copy of a letter from the University of Western Australia confirming my status as a graduate student on their Masters in Education course. Your participation in this study is voluntary. Before agreeing to be part of this study, please read the following information carefully. Feel free to raise questions if you do not understand any of the following information.

**2. Description of Procedure**

If you participate in this study , you **will** be asked to ;

- i) Complete a Personal Profile Questionnaire
- ii) Complete an English Error Correction Exercise

Completion of the above questionnaire and exercise will take about 1 hour.

### **3. Risks and Inconveniences**

There is a possibility that you may not be able to complete some of the questions on the Personal Profile Questionnaire and the English Error Correction Exercise. If you feel uncomfortable completing the questionnaire and exercise you may choose to leave the study group.

### **4. Benefits**

This study has not been designed to benefit you directly, however there is a possibility that you may gain a better understanding about the nature, structure, uses, forms and functions of the English Language through your participation. In addition, results from this study will contribute towards a more effective course design of courses to suit the needs of non-native speaker English degree students.

### **5. Financial Considerations**

Participation in this study will not incur any additional financial commitments on your part.

### **6. Confidentiality**

All information obtained from you during this study will be confidential. Your privacy will be protected at all times. Although you will be requested to provide a personal profile, you will not be asked to provide your name, student identification number or any other information that will directly reveal your identity. You will not be identified individually in any way as a result of your participation in this research. The data collected and research paper may however be used as part of publications and papers related to teacher training programmes.

## **7. Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study. Such refusal will not have any negative consequences for you. If you begin to participate in this study, you may at any time, for any reason, discontinue your participation without any negative consequences.

## **8. Other considerations and questions**

Please feel free to ask any questions about any of the above matters that are unclear or any other issues that may be of concern to you.

## **9. Authorization Form**

Attached is an Authorization Form for your completion should you agree to participate in this study. Please complete this form for collection prior to the start of the study.

## **AUTHORIZATION FORM**

### **Study on Metalinguistic Proficiency of B.A/ B.Ed Students**

I have read the above information and I have decided that I will participate in the project described above. The researcher has explained the study to me and answered my questions. I know what will be asked of me. I understand the purpose of the study. If I don't participate, there will be no penalty or loss of rights. I can stop participating at any time, even after I have started.

**I agree to participate in the study on the Metalinguistic Proficiency of B.A / B.Ed in English Students. My signature below indicates that I have received a copy of the Consent Form.**

**Participants Signature :** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participants Name :** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date :** \_\_\_\_\_

If you have further queries about this research project, questions about your rights as a research participant of it you have a research related complaint please contact ;

***Principal Investigator*** Anushia Senthe

by phone at 03-22744165 or via email at [asenthe@streamyx.com](mailto:asenthe@streamyx.com)

*A copy of this form is to be kept by the investigator for at least 5 years.*