

The proficiency 'problem' on campus

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My English is terrible. My lecturer said so. My supervisor won't read my chapter until it has perfect grammar.

Can you do a grammar check?

I hate group assignments, no one else can

speak English properly.

IELTS requirements need to be raised.

International students can't cope.



What's the 'problem'?

- English proficiency the issue
- NESB students in deficit
- Falling standards





We see and hear this

- On feedback students get
- Talking to academics and faculties
- In committee meetings
- From students themselves



A convenient scapegoat

- Simplifies a highly complex issue
- Deficit view can lead to 'impoverished understanding of the English language capabilities' of NESB students (Haugh, 2016)
- Adverse effects on student wellbeing



The 2016 ANU data

- Retention rates even for NESB vs L1
- GPAs generally lower for NESB vs L1



Is it just proficiency?

Many factors at play:

- Academic content
- Learning styles
- Experience, beliefs, values, motivations
- Culture shock
- Social integration
- Academic literacies



Why?

- Discourse of deficit (Zeegers & Barron, 2008)
- IELTS et al. partly responsible
- Negative attitudes & 'native speakerism' (Holliday, 2006)
- Easier to blame proficiency
- Lack of support and training

What can we do about it?



Better communication

- IELTS, TOEFL, CAE, PTE
- Not perfect
- Well-researched
- Best we have

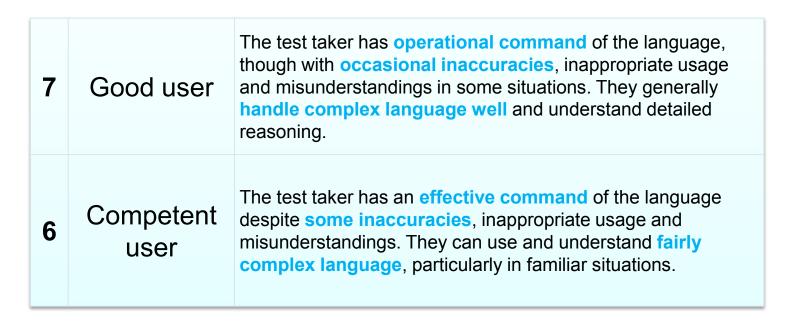


IELTS @ ANU

	Diploma programs taught at ANU College	Regular Degree Programs (Including Exchange & Study Abroad)	Australian National Internships Program, Medicine program, undergraduate Law, JD and Legal Workshop programs	Graduate Law programs (except JD and Legal Workshop programs)
Academic IELTS	An overall score of 6 with 5.5 in each component	An overall score of 6.5 with at least 6 in each component of the test	An overall score of 7 with at least 6 in each component	An overall score of 7 with at least 7 in writing and at least 6 each other component



IELTS bands



What's the ASLC doing?



ASLC

- 5 Learning Advisers
- Focus on persuasive communication
- Developmental approach
- ANU College for TESOL



Messaging

'We don't proofread or do grammar checks'

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'We don't/can't help with English'

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'I won't go to ASLC for help'



Breaking the cycle

- We do help with English
- Redirect students' concerns
- Build fluency and confidence
- 'Deprogram' deficit thinking
- Raise awareness, change narratives



Words into practice

- Let's Speak English!
- Alumni Conversation Groups
- 'Worried About Your English?'



Summary

- LAs well positioned to address the proficiency 'problem'
- Working with and changing narratives
- Doing our best for NESB students
 - ✓ Reduce anxiety
 - √ Value diversity

International students have wonderful things to contribute; their different life experiences and views of the world enrich my classes.

