



The proficiency 'problem' on campus

Dr Jay Woodhams

Dr Vivien Silvey

Academic Skills & Learning Centre

*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

7	Good user	The test taker has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies , inappropriate usage and misunderstandings in some situations. They generally handle complex language well and understand detailed reasoning.
6	Competent user	The test taker has an effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies , inappropriate usage and misunderstandings. They can use and understand fairly complex language , particularly in familiar situations.

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’

=

‘We don’t/can’t help with English’

=

‘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.

