



Jashireen Mohd Bashir teaching a MUET class.

# The MUET impact

## PROFICIENCY TEST:

Local requirement for tertiary studies emphasises importance of English language



Professor Datin Paduka Dr Aini Ideris



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STUDENTS in Malaysia planning to pursue a first degree in a local university are required to sit for the Malaysian University English Test (MUET), a test of English language proficiency.

Run by the Malaysian Examinations Council (MPM) to set a benchmark for English among Malaysian students, MUET is recognised mainly in Malaysia and Singapore.

As stated by MPM, the objective of MUET is to measure the English language proficiency of pre-university students for entry into tertiary education.

The test involves the four language skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.

Candidates' level of proficiency will be based upon an aggregated score range of zero to 300. The scores correlate with a banding system ranging from Band 1 to Band 6.

Dr Koh Soo Ling, a former associate professor of UiTM who has written books and conducted courses on MUET for both students and teachers, said that MUET is a reason why more students are acknowledging the importance of the English language.

"It's not just to be able to get by, but it is to be able to communicate effectively, to be able to comprehend what you read or hear and to put what you know into writing," she said.

"It is about having an acceptable level of spoken and written English."

Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) Vice-Chancellor Professor Datin

Paduka Dr Aini Ideris said MUET generally serves as a useful indicator of English proficiency levels of potential university students.

"As it assesses and reports on performance for all four types of language skills, the students' MUET scores help us plan the English language learning experience they will be given when they are admitted into the university," she said.

While a MUET score is required for admission to undergraduate programmes, different programmes and courses require different MUET score levels, with Band 1 being the lowest and Band 6 the highest.

"In UPM, professional programmes require higher scores. Such programmes include Veterinary Medicine, Medicine, Engineering, and of course, English Language-centred programmes."

Most courses in the Malaysian universities set the minimal requirement of a Band 3 in MUET.

Said Koh: "Students aiming to enrol for courses like Law or Pharmacy should obtain a minimum Band 4 or even Band 5, not only to get a place in the university but also to be able to cope with the demands of these courses, which include long reading lists with most of the books written in English."

Professor Dr Nuraihan Mat Daud, Kulliyah of Languages and Management dean at the International Islamic University Malaysia, said that students applying for direct

admission into the first year must have achieved at least a Band 3 in MUET.

"However, they still have to sit for our in-house test, the EPT, and will be required to take our English courses if they fail this test," she said.

A high band score for MUET would also be a plus point for graduates, especially in the private sector, Koh added.

"I have friends working in human resources and recruitment, and they have horror stories of hopeful applicants who fail at interviews, not because they do not have content knowledge but because of a poor command of the language," she said.

Nevertheless, while the MUET score is considered for admission into universities like UPM, it is not an exit requirement where students instead

## PREPARING EFFECTIVELY

STUDENTS in matriculation colleges are required to take the MUET.

They attend English classes where the lecturers include preparation for MUET as part of the syllabus.

Johor Matriculation College lecturer Jashireen Mohd Bashir said matriculation and Form Six students would need to be introduced to the MUET format as it is different from what they were used to in schools.

Apart from attending classes for at least three hours each week, the students will also take part in workshops.

Jashireen said that private candidates preparing for the MUET but who do not have access to such classes and workshops usually face problems during the Speaking test.

"From my experience as an examiner for MUET Speaking component, I usually encounter private candidates who do not know what to do during the test," she said.

"There are reference books that they can practise with but they need to be exposed through classes to prepare more effectively, especially for Speaking and Writing.

"In the case of Writing, they have to be familiar with the format and the different genres.

"It is best for private students to look for teachers who can help them or, at least, talk to those who have taken the test."

Leela Chakrabarty regularly conducts MUET workshops as part of the NST school holiday programme for students.

These workshops are mainly attended by students who have no access to school-based MUET preparation classes.

"Many of these students register to take the MUET but do not know what or how to prepare," said Chakrabarty.

"Getting the reference books only helps to some extent, and many do not even find the time to go through the whole book.

"The workshop opens their eyes to what they should expect, especially for the Speaking and Writing components, and they get a better idea what to do for their personal preparation later."

are given a specific English language package known as ELEX (English Language Experience) which includes courses and activities.

Tests are given to monitor and ensure that they exit with proficient English.

"It is more likely that employers assess the graduates' English during interviews or based on their grades in English language courses," said Aini.