

RAISING THE BAR FOR OUR GRADS

By Richard Ng

In 2002, the then prime minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamed, came up with a proposal that Maths and Science be taught in English in all government schools. He noted that many government officers had a poor grasp of English and that many graduates were unable to secure a job because of their poor command. By introducing the move, he said, he hoped that Malaysians would be able to master the global language of the Internet and commerce so that they could become more knowledgeable and competitive.

Many institutions of higher learning in Malaysia started to take a proactive approach by implementing English as a medium of instruction to improve their learners' grasp of the language and increase their marketability.

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Last year, OUM took the cue to implement the policy, with the hope of increasing the competitiveness of its programmes and bringing its graduates to higher standards. After receiving feedback from OUM learners, the management decided that, to ease learners into it, the full transition would be preceded by a policy which allowed learners to answer exam questions in either English or Bahasa Malaysia.

This January 2009 semester marks the full transition from Bahasa Malaysia to English. Are our learners ready for it? Observations of one of the courses in the online discussion forums suggest that the majority of learners already use English as the medium for discussion. Some of them might not write in perfect English but they are comfortable with it, knowing perhaps that lessons are learnt through mistakes.



In fact, a large section of OUM learners either have no issue or are happily supportive of the University's transition to English as the medium of instruction and assessment. There will of course be segments of OUM's learner population whose command of the language is still very much a work in progress, who require additional learning support to compensate for the gap, and who are, at the same time, privileged to have the opportunity to upgrade their English skills.

Let us all then make the best out of the timely transition. After all, as no one would disagree, it is ultimately not the piece of paper (the degree) that counts in graduate employment. Without language and communicative competencies, the graduate employment seeker will be severely disadvantaged. **TCX**