Does the Malaysian English Language syllabus cater to the academic vocabulary needs of secondary school students entering universities?

Abstract

More and more Malaysian upper secondary school students are doing well in their studies and entering colleges and universities for matriculation and diploma programmes immediately after school. Besides English for General Purposes (EGP), secondary school students should also be familiarized with the 570 academic words (in the Academic Word List) that may appear frequently in academic texts. At tertiary learning institutions, academic words are essential because students have to read more specialised and complex academic texts. This research was carried out to investigate whether the Malaysian secondary school English language syllabuses cater to the academic vocabulary needs of students who enter tertiary institutions. To investigate this, the researcher put all the 1,316 words listed in the word lists (for the lower and upper secondary school syllabuses found at the end of the syllabuses’ booklets) into Range (Nation, 2005), a tool which separates words into General Service Word List (GSL) and Academic Word List (AWL). The results reveal that of the 1,316 words, only seven belong to AWL while the majority are GSL words. Although there are statements made in the syllabuses indicating that they also cater to the students’ needs for their further education, the target words specified in the word lists suggest that they are meant mainly for EGP. The students’ academic vocabulary need has apparently been neglected.