

Issues in TESL

Ratnawati Mohd Asraf

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LEARNING SCIENCE IN ENGLISH: THE PLIGHT OF RURAL STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA

BY

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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Introduction

In 2002, a group of Japanese investors with firms in Malaysia was reported to have told Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad – the Prime Minister of Malaysia then – that the English proficiency of Malaysian graduates was so poor that they were simply unemployable. The investors related that in the Japanese firms where Malaysian graduates were hired, serious communication problems occurred. Ironically, while the firms' Japanese managers took the pains to learn English to enable communication with their Malaysian employees, the Malaysian graduate employees on the other hand did little to improve their English (Kuppusamy, 2005).

This and other reports on Malaysian graduates' poor command of the English language, exacerbated by a host of other factors, eventually led the Prime Minister to implement a drastic educational policy in 2003 by decreeing that Science and Mathematics, the two most important school subjects, would once again be taught in English. The aim of the policy was noble – to help all school students acquire greater mastery of English through increased exposure to the language. Hopes were high that through this increased exposure that would provide more