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The Role of Language Proficiency in Shaping Academic Performance of International Students

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Abstract

This research applies a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design to explore the influence of language ability on the academic achievement of international students. Quantitative measures from 160 students indicated a high positive correlation ($r = .624$) between IELTS/TOEFL and GPA, where listening and reading abilities emerged as strong predictors. Qualitative interviews accentuated difficulties in lecture understanding, writing for class, and class participation, as well as emotional and social effects. Students practiced coping mechanisms like support from peers and institutional resources. The integration of findings indicates that although language competency is essential, institutional support and coping strategies affect its influence. The study suggests stronger language programs, faculty development, and support service promotion to enhance academic performance and well-being.

Keywords: *Academic Performance, Institutional Support, International Students, Language Proficiency, Mixed-Methods Research.*

Introduction

The second half of the 20th century and the early 21st century saw unprecedented growth in worldwide student mobility, and higher education was instrumental worldwide (OECD, 2023; Wang & Wang, 2022). International host countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia actively hired these students, valuing their dynamic cultural, intellectual, and economic input (Martin, 2022). However, the sudden upsurge in foreign students also brought to the fore key issues of academia, most important being language competence (Ennin & Manariyo, 2023; Sherry,

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Thomas, & Chui, 2009). Research has universally recognized language ability as the most powerful personal factor in determining the academic achievement and integration of international students in English-medium institutions (Fakeye & Ogunsiji, 2009; Martirosyan, Hwang, & Wanjohi, 2015; Azkiyah et al., 2023).

Proficiency does not merely mean grammatical accuracy but entails the cognitive academic language proficiency needed to understand lectures at higher levels, buildup of complex written arguments, and engage in higher-order classroom discussions (Arkoudis and Tran, 2010; Tai and Zhao, 2022). As a result, students with poor language proficiency upon entry tend to have major problems, including the inability to follow the lectures, inability to write scholarly good essays and research reports (Taye and Mengesha, 2024; Rachmawati and Fadhilawati, 2024), as well as unwillingness to engage in seminars and group work. This causes them to stay on the periphery, a factor that results in frustration and isolation (Hussain, Fareed, and Akhtar, 2020; Gu, Schweisfurth, and Day, 2010).

Although the association between language and academic performance was now considered to be beyond any doubt, a relatively large proportion of international students reportedly still encountered serious academic challenges and developed greater levels of psychological pressure that could be directly related to language barriers (Singh & Jack, 2021; Rienties et al., 2011). Such difficulties often resulted in lower grade point averages (GPAs), increased course deletion rates, and an increased time to degree completion (Neumann, Padden, and McDonough, 2019). Although the available body of literature was very satisfactory, there was one distinct gap. Other studies employed purely quantitative methods to determine the GPA of study participants in relation to their scores on standardized tests, such as IELTS or TOEFL (Abunawas, 2014; Fakeye & Ogunsiji, 2009). However, these studies do not provide any insight into the lived experiences of these students. On the contrary, other studies have used qualitative approaches to investigate these personal experiences (Okuda & Anderson, 2017; Tran & Pham, 2015), without empirical results to extrapolate the findings and statistically support the perceived effect. Thus, it is quite evident that few studies have been able to overcome the disciplinary division between quantitative and

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qualitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive and multifaceted picture of how language proficiency directly and indirectly influences academic performance.

This research was conducted to fill this methodological void and, in doing so, make important practical and theoretical contributions. For policy-makers, administrators, and university educators, the results gave key evidence-based information to fine-tune and enhance student support frameworks (Williams, 2024; Lavadenz, 2011). The findings have guided the strategic planning of pre-sessional and in-sessional language support courses, writing centre innovation (Okuda & Anderson, 2017), and other tailored academic support interventions, such as discipline-specific language workshops and faculty training to enhance support for linguistically diverse classrooms. Theoretically, the research contributed to academic literature by proposing a more holistic perspective on the intricate relationship between linguistic proficiency and academic achievement (Tai & Zhao, 2022; Bahrani & Nekoueizadeh, 2014). In bridging the qualitative-quantitative gap, it provided a more holistic model for understanding the issues of international students beyond test scores to incorporate the affective and sociocultural aspects of language use in educational settings (Gu, Schweisfurth, & Day, 2010; Hamade, Ismail, & Mohamed, 2024). Ultimately, this study aimed to translate research findings into practical actions that enhance the academic performance and overall educational experience of international students.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the quantitative relationship between language proficiency and academic performance.
2. To explore the qualitative experiences and challenges of international students related to language barriers.
3. To integrate quantitative and qualitative findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of academic difficulties faced by international students.

Research Questions

1. How does language proficiency affect the academic performance of international students?
2. What specific challenges do students encounter due to language barriers?

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3. What coping strategies do students employ to overcome language-related academic difficulties?

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study of the connection between language proficiency and academic performance was anchored on the following theoretical constructs. The most prominent of these was the Threshold Hypothesis by Cummins, which posits that a particular threshold level of second language proficiency must be reached before a learner can enjoy the cognitive benefits of bilingualism and perform to their intellectual potential in academic tasks (Cummins, 2014; Ardasheva, Tretter, and Kinny, 2011). According to this theory, learners who work below this level might suffer cognitive impairment and poor academic performance.

Moreover, Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories, especially the Input Hypothesis and the Output Hypothesis, helped to view the processes in question (Bahrani and Nekoueizadeh, 2014). The Input Hypothesis underlined the significance of comprehensible input in acquisition, which had a direct effect on the possibility of a student comprehending lectures and readings (Bailey and Fahad, 2021). On the other hand, the Hypothesis of the Output stated that comprehensible output the necessity to write coherent and correct language was also imperative to reach academic language proficiency, which was vital to write essays and attend seminars (Ying, 2018). These theories were supplemented with academic performance models which explicitly integrated linguistic competence as one of the key variables that determines the learning outcome, stating that a language is not only a medium of instruction, but also one of the core elements of cognitive academic development.

Review of Empirical Studies

The past empirical studies about this issue historically separated into quantitative and qualitative studies. The quantitative studies that were majorly conducted aimed at creating a correlational association between the standard scores on language tests and academic performance measures. An example is that a considerable amount of research examined predictive validity of such tests

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as IELTS and TOEFL on Grade Point Average (GPA) (Abunawas, 2014; Fakeye and Ogunjsiji, 2009; Martirosyan et al., 2015). These entrance scores were significantly positively but frequently weak to moderate predictors of first-year GPA, indicating that proficiency played a role, but not the only one, in success (Neumann et al., 2019; Wang, Schultz, and Huang, 2023).

Conversely, qualitative studies were based on lived experiences and subjective issues among students (Ennin and Manariyo, 2023; Sherry et al., 2009). The research results were uniform in that language barriers went well beyond test scores, taking the form of inability to follow academic lectures (Arkoudis and Tran, 2010), to participate in critical discourse, and to master the particularities of academic writing (Rachmawati and Fadhilawati, 2024; Taye and Mengesha, 2024). The mental toll was also significant, as students complained of increased stress, a sense of anxiety, and social isolation because of their incompetence to communicate in an effective manner (Hussain et al., 2020; Singh and Jack, 2021).

Due to the shortcomings of a single-method approach, several researchers have employed mixed methods. For example, a few studies combined quantitative analysis of test scores and GPA with qualitative interviews (Rienties et al., 2011). Their study found a statistical correlation and also revealed the detailed mechanisms through which language anxieties and cultural differences mediated the correlation, providing a more complete and holistic insight (Gu et al., 2010; Tran & Pham, 2015).

Gaps in Literature

This review found two important gaps, notwithstanding the extensive body of work. First, there were a few studies that combined quantitative and qualitative data in a complete narrative. Although mixed-methods studies were present, most approached the strands of data one at a time, rather than integrating them to describe how quantitative patterns (e.g., a moderate correlation) were reflected in the daily academic pain and processes of students. Second, a large portion of the studies was conducted in large, research-intensive institutions in the Western world (e.g., Cordova Mosquera, 2022; Martin, 2022). It was also found that there were no context-specific studies in various types of higher education institutions (e.g., teaching-oriented universities, colleges, or in

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non-English-speaking countries, which provide English-Medium Instruction) (Naka & Spahija, 2022; Wang & Wang, 2022), whose institutional support structures and academic culture may result in different outcomes (Hamade et al., 2024).

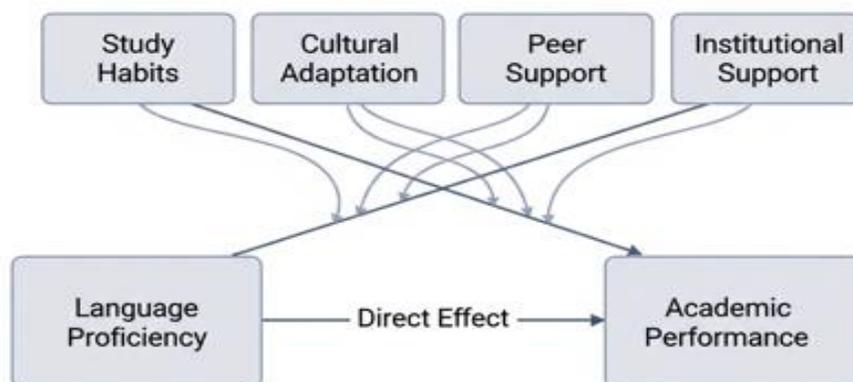
Conceptual Framework

Informed by the theoretical and empirical literature, this study conceptualized a theoretical framework where language proficiency and academic performance have a direct relationship. Language proficiency, the independent variable, was assessed based on both objective measures (e.g., IELTS/TOEFL score) and subjective self-ratings (Agustin, Wahyudin, & Isnaini, 2021; Sari, Sofyan, & Hati, 2019). Academic achievement, the dependent variable, was measured by cumulative GPA and certain course grades (Azkiyah et al., 2023; Sadia, Memon, & Pathan, 2021). Yet, the model hypothesized that this is not in a straight or singular relationship. It is moderated and mediated by multiple internal and external variables, such as students' study habits, learning approaches (Tai & Zhao, 2022), acculturation stress, cultural adaptation, social support networks, and peer networks, as well as utilization of institutional academic support services such as writing centers and tutoring programs (Okuda & Anderson, 2017; Williams, 2024). Such mediating and moderating variables can intensify or reduce the effect of language proficiency on academic performance.

Conceptual Framework Showing the Influence of Language Proficiency on Academic Performance with Mediating and Moderating Variables

Figure 1 illustrates the direct and indirect effects of language proficiency on academic performance, mediated through multiple mediators and moderated by various factors.

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The theoretical map, as illustrated in Figure 1, shows the direct and indirect routes through which language proficiency affects academic performance. As the independent variable, language proficiency directly influences academic performance, as depicted by an arrow labeled "Direct Effect." This means that students with improved language skills will exhibit better academic performance, as evidenced by higher grades and overall academic achievement. Nevertheless, four mediating and moderating factors, which include study habits, cultural adaptation, peer support, and institutional support, also influence the relationship. These variables affect the strength and direction of the relationship, either positively or negatively, in terms of their effects on the relationship between language proficiency and academic success. An example is that successful study behavior and good peer support can enhance the advantages of language proficiency, while cultural adaptation and institutional support programs (e.g., tutoring, workshops) can reduce the barriers associated with being less language-proficient. The presence of several arrows linking these factors to language proficiency and academic performance underlines the contribution of each factor to the overall relationship, facilitating, moderating, or mediating it. This model emphasizes that academic achievement is multidimensional, and it is the language capacity only, though not behavioral, social, and institutional conditions.

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Methodology

Research Design

This research employed a mixed-methods design with an explanatory sequential approach to investigate how language proficiency influences the academic performance of international students. The use of this design was due to its ability to facilitate the researcher to begin with collecting and analyzing quantitative data in order to determine statistical associations before proceeding with qualitative interviews to gain in-depth information and explanations for the trends identified. This method provides a complete appreciation of the research issue through numerical data and contextual data triangulation. The sample of the study constituents was composed of 200 participants (170 international students and 30 secondary participants), which included the faculty and support staff. In the quantitative phase, 160 international students were sampled through a stratified random sampling method to ensure that they were represented in various programs, academic levels, and countries of origin. The inclusion criteria were based on the enrollment of participants as full-time international students at institutions of higher learning.

To complete the qualitative phase, 10 international students were selected purposely to reflect on various language proficiency levels high, medium and low using standardized test scores. Further, 30 additional respondents were incorporated 20 faculty members and 10 academic advisors or language support personnel, who provided input into the institutional view of the language-related issues. There were three main sources of quantitative data. The first one is the standardized language proficiency scores (IELTS or TOEFL), which were acquired based on institutional records. Second, student achievement measures such as Grade point average (GPA) and course grades were examined. Third, data were collected using a structured questionnaire which had 20 questions, which covered demographic information, study habits and language usage patterns. The questionnaire used 5-point Likert scale with options of strongly disagree to strongly agree. In order to measure reliability, Cronbach alpha was computed and produced a coefficient of 0.85, which represents good internal consistency. To determine content validity, the two education experts were used.

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For the qualitative component, semi-structured interview schedules were prepared to address students' experiences of language difficulty, coping mechanisms, and institutional support. Each interview lasted around 30–45 minutes and was conducted either face-to-face or through secure video conferencing mediums.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection was conducted over a period of 6 weeks. To use the quantitative phase, the questionnaires were asked to be completed via an online system in a secure location. The scoring of language proficiency and academic records was conducted with the participants' consent using institutional databases. Participation was carried out with informed consent, and the process was ensured to maintain confidentiality.

During the qualitative phase, interviews were to be conducted once the quantitative data analysis was completed so that the sample of participants could be chosen according to their level of language proficiency. Each interview was audio-recorded with the respondents' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data Analysis

SPSS Version 26 was used to analyze the quantitative data. The demographic characteristics and the level of language proficiency of the participants were summarized by descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and frequency distributions). The correlation coefficient used by Pearson was used to investigate the association between academic performance and language proficiency. Further, a multiple regression analysis was done to come up with significant predictors of academic success among the international students.

Thematic analysis was applied in the analysis of qualitative data. Coding of transcripts was done manually, and the themes that emerged according to language barriers, academic difficulties, and coping strategies were determined. In a bid to achieve a high level of reliability, the themes were double-coded by two independent coders, and the differences were resolved by discussing them.

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Lastly, findings integration was conducted by means of a triangulation process, which compares and interprets the results of both the quantitative and qualitative stages, giving a complete picture of how language proficiency affects academic performance.

Result

Quantitative Findings

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
IELTS/TOEFL Score	160	5.50	9.00	7.20	0.80
GPA	160	2.00	4.00	3.25	0.45
Reading Skill	160	2.00	5.00	4.10	0.60
Writing Skill	160	2.00	5.00	3.90	0.70
Listening Skill	160	3.00	5.00	4.20	0.50
Speaking Skill	160	2.00	5.00	3.80	0.80

Note: Valid N (listwise) = 160

This table shows the average scores and range of results for 160 students across different academic and language skills. The IELTS/TOEFL scores ranged from 5.5 to 9.0, with an average of 7.2. Students had GPAs between 2.0 and 4.0, averaging 3.25. Their reading, Writing, listening, and speaking skills were scored from 2 to 5, with listening being the highest on average (4.2) and speaking the lowest (3.8). The "standard deviation" tells us how much the scores vary a higher number means more variation among students. Overall, the table gives a summary of how well these students performed in English and academics.

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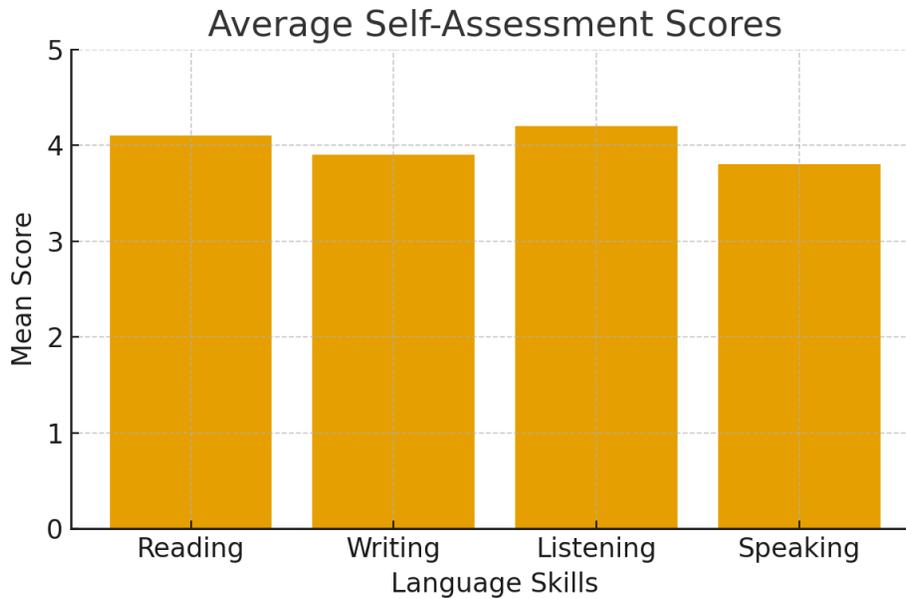


Table 2: Correlations

Variables	GPA	IELTS/TOEFL	Reading	Writing	Listening	Speaking
GPA (Pearson r)	1	.624	.482	.441	.511	.392
Sig. (2-tailed)	–	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
IELTS/TOEFL Score	.624	1	.552	.521	.581	.503
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	–	.000	.000	.000	.000

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

N = 160 for all variables.

This table shows the relationship (correlation) between students' GPA and their English language skills, based on IELTS/TOEFL scores and the four language skills: Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking. All the numbers marked with "***" are statistically significant, meaning the results are reliable. A positive number (closer to 1) means a stronger relationship. For example, GPA has a strong positive correlation with IELTS/TOEFL scores ($r = .624$), meaning students who score higher on English tests also tend to have higher GPAs. Similarly, GPA is also positively related to

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Reading (.482), Writing (.441), Listening (.511), and Speaking (.392), though the relationships are slightly weaker. Overall, better English skills are linked to better academic performance.

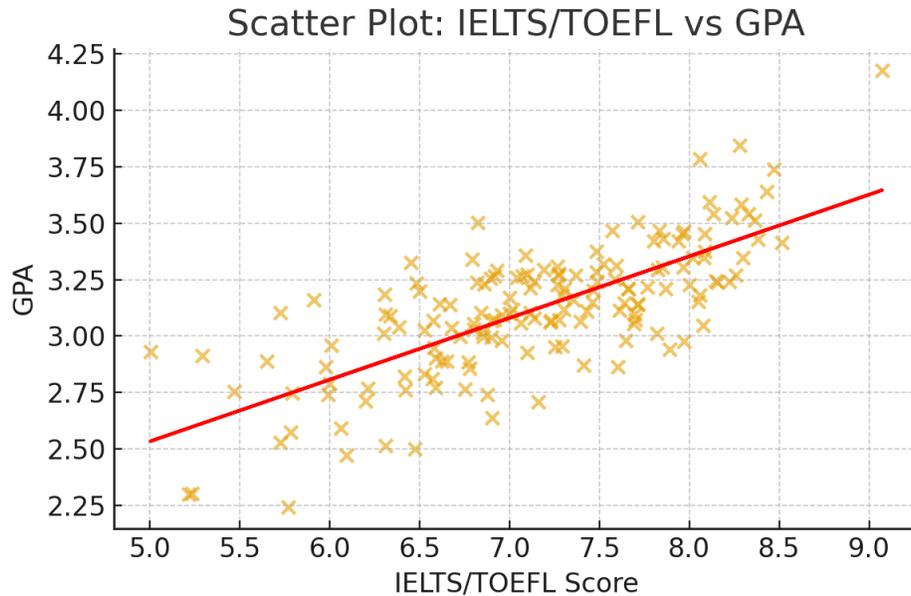


Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.678	.460	.448	0.330

Predictors: (Constant), Writing Skill, IELTS/TOEFL Score, Listening Skill, Reading Skill

Table 4: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	18.120	4	4.530	41.520	.000
Residual	21.230	155	0.137		
Total	39.350	159			

Dependent Variable: GPA

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Predictors: (Constant), Writing Skill, IELTS/TOEFL Score, Listening Skill, Reading Skill

Table 5: Coefficients

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.120	0.280	–	4.000	.000
IELTS/TOEFL Score	0.280	0.060	.420	4.670	.000
Reading Skill	0.150	0.050	.220	3.000	.003
Listening Skill	0.180	0.060	.240	3.150	.002
Writing Skill	0.090	0.050	.140	1.800	.075

Dependent Variable: GPA

This table shows the results of a study that looks at how well different language skills (like IELTS/TOEFL scores, reading, listening, and Writing) can predict a student's GPA (grade point average). The "B" values tell us how much GPA changes when each skill improves. For example, a higher IELTS/TOEFL score has the biggest positive effect on GPA, followed by listening and reading skills. Writing has the smallest effect and is not as strongly linked to GPA (since its Sig. value is above .05, it's not statistically significant). Overall, the study suggests that better language skills especially test scores, listening, and reading are linked to higher GPAs.

Qualitative Findings

Theme 1: Language-Related Academic Challenges

Interviews indicated that language skills had a huge influence on students' educational lives, especially in comprehending lectures, performing written tasks, engaging in class discussions, and coping with heavy reading assignments (Ennin & Manariyo, 2023; Hussain et al., 2020). A common complaint was the fast delivery and idiomatic use of spoken English during lectures. As a respondent said: *"Many idioms are used by the professor, and he talks very quickly. I know perhaps 60% of the lecture. I watch more after class time, reading the recording and translating the part I missed, than I spend on actual assignments"* (Participant 7, Low Proficiency). Writing

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academically was also a significant problem, particularly when writing about complex concepts in formal English (Rachmawati & Fadhilawati, 2024; Taye & Mengesha, 2024). Participant 3 (Medium Proficiency) described: *"I know the ideas, but writing them down in a proper, academic style is the problem. I fear my Writing sounds too basic or that I am employing the incorrect terminology, which will penalize me."* In the same vein, spontaneous speech within in-class discussions were frequently circumvented for fear of making grammatical mistakes or taking time to articulate thoughts (Hussain et al., 2020). Participant 5 (Medium Proficiency) mentioned: *"Before I have worked out my idea and double-checked the grammar in my head, the conversation has already shifted to another subject. Therefore, most of the time, I just remain quiet."* Even those students who were quite proficient complained about academic reading volumes (Arkoudis & Tran, 2010). One of the participants noted: *"The amount of reading is huge. For a native speaker, it could take two hours; for me, it takes five or six as I need to keep stopping to check words."* (Participant 9, High Proficiency)

Theme 2: Coping Strategies

In spite of these difficulties, students demonstrated resilience through taking up different coping strategies (Agustin et al., 2021; Sari et al., 2019). One of the most prevalent strategies was peer support. For instance, Participant 2 (Low Proficiency) mentioned: *"I made a study group with two fellow students from my nation. We translate the challenging readings to one another in our native language first, which is very helpful. Next, we attempt to discuss it in English to practice."* Institutional resources like writing support services were also greatly appreciated (Okuda & Anderson, 2017). Participant 4 (High Proficiency) highlighted: *"The writing center is my lifeline. I make an appointment for each essay. They don't write for you, but they help you see where your sentences are confusing."*

Technological resources were another vital support, especially to enhance understanding and listening skills (Bahrani & Nekoueizadeh, 2014). As Participant 10 (Medium Proficiency) put it: *"I read PDFs out loud using software so that I can listen and read simultaneously. It enhances my understanding and my listening ability simultaneously."* Aside from that, informal activities like media immersion assisted in strengthening language acquisition (Bailey & Fahad, 2021). Medium

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Proficiency Participant 6 stated: *I have all my entertainment, so Netflix and YouTube, set to English subtitles. It doesn't feel like studying, but you begin to learn certain words and how people really speak.*

Theme 3: Emotional and Social Impact of Language Barriers

Language challenges spilled over into emotional and social issues (Sherry et al., 2009; Gu et al., 2010). Some participants described a lost sense of identity when limited fluency existed. Participant 1 (Low Proficiency) commented: *"It is very frustrating. You feel like a different person. In my language, I am smart and I have opinions. Here, I feel shy and sometimes stupid, which is not true."* Speaking in class or presenting was another salient issue of concern (Hussain et al., 2020). Participant 8 (Medium Proficiency) recounted: *"Constantly worrying about being asked to speak in class or needing to give a presentation is tiresome. It causes me a lot of stress."* Language was also a barrier to making friendships among domestic peers (Tran & Pham, 2015; Rienties et al., 2011). Participant 4 (High Proficiency) mentioned: *"Making friends with local students is difficult because light banter is actually the most difficult. You can't joke; the banter is always at the surface level. So, you just stick with being in the international student bubble."*

These challenges sometimes made the students question that they were doing the right thing by pursuing studies abroad (Singh & Jack, 2021). Participant 7 (Low Proficiency) summed up the sentiment as: *"Some days you're like, 'Why am I doing this to myself?' It does make you wonder about your choice to study abroad, even if you know it's a good experience."*

Integrated Findings

This study used an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to explore how language proficiency affects international students' academic performance, integrating quantitative trends with qualitative insights for a deeper understanding.

Comparison of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

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The qualitative and quantitative results are generally convergent, upholding the central assumption that language skills play an essential part in academic performance.

The quantitative findings revealed a strong, statistically significant positive relationship between language skill (measured through IELTS/TOEFL scores) and academic achievement (GPA), with Pearson correlation coefficient $r = .624$. Regression analysis also determined that IELTS/TOEFL scores, listening skills, and reading skills were predictors of GPA. These results yield a macro-level understanding, confirming that higher levels of language skill are linked with improved academic performance.

The qualitative results enrich the understanding by describing how this correlation works in students' daily lives within academia. A number of themes supply contextual significance to the statistical patterns:

1. **Comprehension of Lectures:** Quantitatively, listening ability proved to be a robust predictor (Beta = .240). Qualitatively, students indicated that they only "understood 60% of lectures" because of fast-paced delivery and idiomatic statements, usually taking long periods to study recorded lectures.
2. **Academic Writing:** While the regression model suggested writing ability as a less significant predictor (Beta = .140, Sig. = .075), it came out qualitatively as a fundamental challenge. Students were worried about "conveying sophisticated ideas in formal academic English," as they believed that restricted vocabulary and syntactic understanding would be detrimental to their grades. This implies that the effect of writing problems will not be entirely captured by the quantitative model, perhaps due to moderating factors like the availability of institutional writing assistance.
3. **Class Participation:** The relationship between speaking ability and GPA ($r = .392$) is exemplified by students' accounts of cognitive lags in constructing answers, resulting in lost chances for participation. As one of the participants said, "*By the time I have framed my idea, the discussion has already proceeded.*"

How Students' Lived Experiences Explain Statistical Results

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Qualitative accounts are essential critical recontextualizations of the why and how of the quantitative associations, bringing abstract numerical relationships into concrete academic realities.

To illustrate, the regression model could measure the predictive ability of the listening skills in GPA, but the lived experience was described through the qualitative interviews: the feeling of being tired of hearing the lecture tapes many times to repeat the concepts they missed. Correspondingly, the moderate association between language proficiency and GPA is partly justified because of the coping mechanisms of the students, which include the formation of study groups, the use of writing centers, and the utilization of technology to reduce the impact of language barriers. These tactics assist in explaining the reason why the relationship, despite being strong, is not absolute.

In addition, qualitative data brought out aspects that could not be quantitatively described: emotional and social costs of language barriers. Although statistics are able to document changes in GPA, they are not able to produce any feeling of anxiety, identity crisis, or social alienation. These emotional aspects, which are emphasised in interviews, are critical moderators of motivation, mental health, and eventually academic success.

Patterns, Consistencies, and Contradictions

On the whole, the two sets possess a high level of consistency: academic performance has a substantial influence on academic performance, statistically and practically. The appropriateness of the four mediating factors that were suggested in the conceptual framework, namely, study habits (coping strategies), cultural adaptation (social isolation), peer support (study groups), and institutional support (writing centers), was clearly established in the qualitative phase and confirmed their role in the proficiency-performance relationship.

A salient area of conflict is the place of writing skills. Quantitative analysis indicated writing was the least important—and statistically insignificant factor predicting academic performance. Yet, qualitative analyses found that students perceived writing as one of the most difficult items on their academic agenda. This seeming contradiction can be attributed to the availability of institutional

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writing assistance. Writing centers reduce the damage that writing challenges have on students' grades and even diminish their influence on GPA. Hence, the results are complementary rather than contradictory: they identify how support at the institutional level can mitigate the academic damage of language issues. Overall, it can be stated that a combination of quantitative and qualitative results highlights the overarching idea that language proficiency constitutes the primary precondition to academic success. Nevertheless, the qualitative results indicate a more dynamic story, in which behavioral strategies, social adaptation, and institutional resources mediate this relationship. These results demonstrate that international students encounter not only academic challenges but also show their strength and adaptability in defeating the language-related barriers.

Discussion

The quantitative results demonstrate a robust and statistically significant correlation between English language proficiency and academic performance. The positive correlation ($r = .624$, $p < .01$) between GPA and IELTS/TOEFL scores attests to the central contribution of language ability to academic achievement. This result complements earlier studies highlighting the key impact of language ability on educational performance (Fakeye & Ogunsiji, 2009; Martirosyan et al., 2015). It implies that higher levels of initial proficiency among students lead to a higher likelihood of obtaining better academic outcomes. Regression analysis also revealed the major predictors of academic achievement. Listening ability ($\beta = .240$, $p = .002$) and reading ability ($\beta = .220$, $p = .003$) surfaced as significant predictors in addition to the composite score of proficiency ($\beta = .420$, $p = .000$). These findings emphasize the significance of receptive skills, which allow students to understand difficult lectures and integrate heavy academic texts (Neumann, Padden, & McDonough, 2019; Tai & Zhao, 2022). Writing skill, by contrast, proved to be a weaker and non-significant predictor ($\beta = .140$, $p = .075$). This counterintuitive finding needs to be investigated further in the light of qualitative evidence.

Interpretation of Qualitative Results

These statistical trends are supplemented by the qualitative results that can help understand the impact of language-related issues on the academic and social experience of students. Thematic

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analysis has shown that there are three major areas of weakness, which include the lecture comprehension, the academic writing, and oral participation.

Students have often complained that they cannot keep up with lectures given at a fast pace related to idiomatic speech, and have to use additional time to revisit some topics. This observation confirms the quantitative result concerning the role of listening skills (Ennin & Manariyo, 2023). Academic Writing became another nagging problem, and students said that they found it difficult to express complex ideas with the help of proper vocabulary and grammar (Arkoudis & Tran, 2010; Rachmawati & Fadhilawati, 2024). Moreover, only the cognitive load of composing correct answers in real-time inhibited classroom participation, resulting in lower engagement (Hussain, Fareed, and Akhtar, 2020).

Students responded to this by engaging in coping behaviors that included peer study groups, institutional resources (e.g. writing centers), and leveraging the use of technology (e.g. text-to-speech applications) (Sari, Sofyan, and Hati, 2019; Agustin, Wahyudin, and Isnaini, 2021). These are important moderating strategies that can be used to curb the effects of language barriers on academic performance. Last, emotional and social outcomes were associated with language problems, such as anxiety, identity difficulties, and isolation (Sherry, Thomas, and Chui, 2009; Gu, Schweinfurt, and Day, 2010). Though these factors do not have a direct influence on GPA, they result in a stressful learning environment that would indirectly stimulate motivation and performance in academics.

Integration of Findings

Mixing numbers and anecdotal evidence creates a more complete picture of how language ability impacts school achievement. Both sets of data indicate that having good language skills is central to performing well in school. The statistics correlate improved language skills with higher GPAs, and student testimony illustrates this by demonstrating that students with lower skills work harder to comprehend language rather than content (Azkiyah et al., 2023).

One such interesting discovery is regarding writing. The findings indicated that writing abilities did not significantly influence GPA, but students reported that writing caused them a great deal of

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stress. This can be accounted for through the assistance they receive from writing centers (Okuda & Anderson, 2017), thereby lessening the influence of writing difficulties. In the absence of this assistance, writing could influence grades more. This affirms the study's theory that institutional support can mitigate adverse consequences of poor language skills (Rienties et al., 2011).

Practical Implications for Universities

1. Language courses need to do more than simply teach native-level English. Students need to learn how to follow lectures, acquire special vocabularies, and write in ways that suit their fields. In this manner, students can improve at the kind of English that they actually need to study.
2. Teachers need to learn how to assist multilingual students. This might involve providing clear summaries of lectures, utilizing images or videos, steering away from ambiguous language, and having a friendly and welcoming classroom atmosphere where everyone feels included.
3. Universities must provide and market useful services such as writing centers, tutoring, and workshops for various subjects. Additionally, programs that match international students with local students, such as buddy or mentoring systems, can make students feel less isolated, use their English conversationally, and more confident in social situations.

Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the current knowledge on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and academic achievement by empirically confirming the fact that students with a particular level of proficiency are considered to be affected by critical cognitive and academic problems (Throughout Threshold Hypothesis of Cummins, 2014). Moreover, the results also support the Hypothesis of the Output (Ying, 2018), which states that the constraints in productive skills (speaking and Writing) hinder academic engagement.

Notably, the current study is an extension of the previous framework since it adds the moderating effects of institutional resources, cultural adjustment, and peer support (Singh & Jack, 2021). The suggested integrated framework addresses the direct influence of language proficiency and the

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social and institutional buffering effect, and is a subtle basis for future studies. Though language proficiency is one of the critical factors of academic performance among international students, this paper has established that the performance is determined by an intricate interaction of linguistic, social, and institutional factors. The holistic support model, i.e., considering academic, linguistic, and socio-emotional needs, is needed to promote equity and capitalise on the academic potential of linguistically diverse student groups.

Conclusion

This study identifies the central role that language proficiency has in contributing to the academic performance and well-being of international students, through a mixed-methods design. Quantitative findings show a significant positive relationship ($r = .624$) between language test scores and GPA, with listening and reading being major predictors of success. At the same time, qualitative evidence identifies most difficulty for students with expeditious lectures, academic writing, and spontaneous class discussions, since cognitive processing while working within a second language imposes tremendous mental effort.

In spite of these difficulties, however, students exhibit resilience by using peer groups, writing centers, and computers to manage. Outside of the classroom as well, language struggles also impair socio-emotional adjustment, triggering anxiety, identity issues, and social isolation—factors that indirectly impair academic achievement. Notably, institutional assistance plays a strong moderating function. Support such as writing centers and peer networks mitigates the harmful effects of low language ability, which might account for why, whereas academic writing causes distress, it has a less straightforward effect on GPA in the regression model.

Study Limitations

1. The quantitative sample of 160 students is statistically acceptable but comparatively small and was taken from a particular institutional context. Thus, the findings cannot be projected to all international students, particularly those enrolled in non-English-speaking countries or institutions of other kinds.

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2. While objective outcomes like test scores and GPA were employed, many of the qualitative data and some survey reports relied on self-reporting. This use of self-reported measures can introduce bias, such as social desirability and recall bias.
3. Data were gathered at a single point in time, which constrains the capacity to monitor how language difficulties and coping mechanisms change through the course of students' studies. A longer-term longitudinal study design would offer more insight into these changes over time.

Recommendations for Future Research and Policy

1. Subsequent studies must employ longitudinal designs in order to follow students' language problems and coping mechanisms across time. Extending studies to diverse institutions—e.g., community colleges, private universities, and EMI programs in non-English-speaking nations—will provide wider insights. Moreover, investigating faculty views of their awareness, attitudes, and instructional approaches is most important for elucidating how faculty assist linguistically diverse students.
2. Policy action has to be directed towards establishing discipline-specific language support programs that extend beyond English courses, taking care of the specific needs of various academic disciplines. Training of faculty is also necessary, equipping teachers with inclusive strategies such as multimodal resources, lecture outlines, and ways to incorporate non-native speakers.
3. In practice, support services like writing centers, tutoring, and counseling need to be embedded in curricula and proactively promoted from the first day of students. This embedding provides students with timely access to support and facilitates them to overcome language difficulties, eventually leading to their academic success.

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