



Examining the Link Between English Proficiency and Academic Performance Among EFL Undergraduate Students

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Received: 19/4/2025

Accepted: 21/4/2025

Published: 1/5/2025

Abstract

English language proficiency plays a vital role in supporting students' academic performance, especially in higher education settings where English is both the subject of study and a medium for learning. This study aimed to examine the relationship between English proficiency and academic performance among undergraduate students in the English Education Department at Universitas Sulawesi Barat, Indonesia. A quantitative correlational research design was employed, involving 90 students whose English proficiency was measured using the English Proficiency Test for Internal Control (EPTIC), while academic performance was represented by their Grade Point Average (GPA). Data analysis using Pearson correlation revealed a strong and statistically significant positive relationship ($r = 0.664$, $p < 0.001$) between English proficiency and GPA. Linear regression analysis further indicated that English proficiency predicted 44.1% of the variance in academic performance. These findings highlight the importance of English proficiency as a predictor of students' academic success. The results also support the use of institutional language assessments like EPTIC for evaluating academic readiness. It is recommended that higher education institutions provide structured language support programs to enhance student learning outcomes. Future studies should investigate the contributions of individual language skills and other influencing factors.

Keywords: *English Proficiency; Academic Performance; EPTIC; GPA; Higher Education*

Introduction

In today's globalized world, proficiency in the English language has become increasingly essential, particularly within academic contexts. As the dominant language of science, technology, international communication, and higher education, English serves not only as a medium of communication but also as a gatekeeper to academic success in many non-English speaking countries (Azizi, 2024; Isma et al., 2023, 2024; Liu, 2024). In countries such as Indonesia, where English is taught as a foreign language but functions as the primary medium of instruction in various academic disciplines, especially in English education programs, students' proficiency in English plays a pivotal role in determining their overall academic performance. Given the dual function of English as both subject and medium of instruction in such contexts, understanding how English language proficiency relates to academic performance is vital for educators, policy-makers, and curriculum developers.

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How to cite this article (APA):

Isma, A., Amrang, A., Ridwan, R., & Rusdiah, R. (2025). Examining the link between English proficiency and academic performance among EFL undergraduate students. *Journal of Teaching and Education for Scholars (JOTES)*, 2(1), 24-33

A Research Article

Over the last few decades, a growing body of research has sought to examine the relationship between English language proficiency and students' academic performance. The underlying assumption in these studies is that higher levels of proficiency enable students to better comprehend instructional content, participate in classroom discussions, engage with academic texts, and complete assignments with greater clarity and accuracy (Devi, 2023; Emmanuel & Andala, 2024; McGehee & Isbell, 2024). However, despite the wealth of research available, there remains an ongoing debate over the strength and consistency of this relationship across different disciplines, educational levels, and linguistic contexts.

Several studies have offered compelling evidence that English language proficiency is positively correlated with academic performance. For example, Barkaoui (2025), in a longitudinal analysis of undergraduate students at a Canadian English-medium university, found that English proficiency test scores (IELTS and TOEFL) significantly predicted students' GPA trajectories over time. Similarly, Elvira et al. (2024), using structural equation modeling, identified reading and speaking as significant predictors of academic success among English Literature students in Indonesia. In the African context, Plooy et al. (2025) reported that poor English proficiency among vocational students in South Africa acted as a substantial barrier to academic progress, especially in content-heavy courses where English served as the medium of instruction.

Conversely, some studies suggest that the relationship between English proficiency and academic performance may not be as straightforward as previously assumed. Tin (2024), for instance, explored the mediating roles of parental involvement and personality traits among Malaysian students and concluded that English proficiency did not significantly affect academic performance when other psychosocial factors were considered. Similarly, Escobal et al. (2025) found that while certain language skills (e.g., reading and listening) were positively correlated with academic success, writing proficiency did not show a significant effect, and the overall correlation between English proficiency and GPA was weak. These findings suggest that while English proficiency is important, it is one of several factors influencing academic outcomes and may not exert uniform influence across all contexts.

The divergence in findings from prior studies highlights the need for more context-specific investigations that consider local educational environments, student populations, and proficiency assessment methods. In the Indonesian context, the interplay between English proficiency and academic performance is particularly significant in English Education Departments, where students are expected not only to master the language but also to use it as a tool for teaching and scholarly engagement. Despite this, relatively few empirical studies have examined how institutional measures of English proficiency correlate with students' academic performance at the undergraduate level in Indonesian universities.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the relationship between students' English language proficiency, as measured by the English Proficiency Test for Internal Control (EPTIC), and their cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA) at the English Education Department of Universitas Sulawesi Barat. Unlike standardized international tests such as TOEFL or IELTS, the EPTIC is a locally developed assessment adapted from Phillips (2001) and aligned with the context. By doing so, the research seeks to answer the following research question: *To what extent does English language proficiency, as measured by EPTIC scores, predict academic performance (GPA) among undergraduate students in the English Education Department at Universitas Sulawesi Barat?*

Method

This study employed a quantitative research approach to investigate the relationship between English language proficiency and academic performance among university students. The research design was correlational in nature, examining the association between students' performance on an English proficiency test and their academic performance as measured by grade point average (GPA). A correlational research design was utilized to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between English proficiency test scores and academic performance. This design was selected as it allows for the examination of relationships between variables without manipulating the independent variable, making it appropriate for investigating naturally occurring associations in educational settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The participants in this study consisted of 90 undergraduate students enrolled in the English Department at Universitas Sulawesi Barat, Indonesia. These students were selected based on their enrollment in the English language program and the availability of both their English Proficiency Test scores and GPA data.

The English Proficiency Test for Internal Control (EPTIC) was used to measure students' English language proficiency. This test was developed internally by the English department team by adapting test items from Phillips (2001) and follows a structure similar to the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). The EPTIC consists of three sections: Listening Comprehension (50 items), Structure and Written Expression (40 items), and Reading Comprehension (50 items). The EPTIC utilizes a scoring system ranging from 217 to 677, comparable to the TOEFL scoring scale. The test has been validated for use within the institution and serves as a standardized measure of English proficiency for internal assessment purposes. Students' academic performance was measured using their cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA), which was obtained from their academic transcripts. At Universitas Sulawesi Barat, GPA is calculated on a 4.0 scale system, with possible scores ranging from 0.0 to 4.0. The GPA serves as a comprehensive indicator of overall academic performance across all courses taken by students during their university studies.

The data collection process involved two main steps. First, students' EPTIC scores were obtained from records of the English Proficiency Test for Internal Control administered by the English Department. Second, students' GPAs were collected from their academic transcripts, which were retrieved from the archives of the study program and faculty with proper authorization and adherence to confidentiality protocols. All data were collected during the 2021-2022 academic year. Prior to data collection, necessary permissions were obtained from the university administration and the English Department. Students' identities were kept confidential through the use of coding systems, and all data were stored securely in compliance with institutional research ethics guidelines.

The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. The analysis proceeded in several stages: (1) Descriptive statistics were calculated for both EPTIC scores and GPAs, including measures of central tendency (mean), dispersion (standard deviation, minimum, maximum), and distribution characteristics (skewness and kurtosis); (2) Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between EPTIC scores and GPA; (3) Simple linear regression analysis was performed to quantify the predictive relationship between EPTIC scores (independent variable) and GPA (dependent variable). This included calculating the regression equation, coefficient of determination (R^2), and evaluating the statistical significance of the model through ANOVA.

Graphical representation of the relationship between the variables was created using a scatter plot with a fitted regression line to visually illustrate the nature and strength of the relationship.

Results

The findings of this study are presented in three main sections: descriptive statistical analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. These analyses collectively elucidate the relationship between English proficiency as measured by EPTIC scores and academic performance as represented by students' GPA.

Descriptive Statistical Analysis

The descriptive statistical analysis provides fundamental insights into the distributions of the two primary variables under investigation: EPTIC scores and GPA.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of EPTIC Scores and GPA

Descriptive Statistics									
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
EPTIC Score	90	300	473	381.89	41.744	.328	.254	-.489	.503
GPA	90	3.07	3.92	3.5843	.20134	-.187	.254	-.676	.503
Valid N (listwise)	90								

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for both the EPTIC scores and GPA of the 90 English department students participating in this study. The EPTIC scores ranged from 300 to 473, with a mean score of 381.89 (SD = 41.744). This suggests a moderate level of English proficiency among the sampled students, with considerable variability as indicated by the standard deviation. The distribution of EPTIC scores demonstrated a slight positive skewness (0.328, SE = 0.254), indicating that the majority of scores clustered at the lower end of the distribution with a longer right tail. The kurtosis value (-0.489, SE = 0.503) indicated a platykurtic distribution, suggesting a relatively flat distribution compared to a normal distribution.

Regarding academic performance, the GPA scores ranged from 3.07 to 3.92, with a mean of 3.5843 (SD = 0.20134). This indicates that the academic performance of the participants was generally good, with relatively less variability compared to the EPTIC scores, as evidenced by the lower standard deviation. The GPA distribution showed a slight negative skewness (-0.187, SE = 0.254), suggesting that the majority of GPA scores tended toward the higher end of the scale. The kurtosis value for GPA (-0.676, SE = 0.503) also indicated a platykurtic distribution, implying that the GPA scores were more widely spread around the mean than would be expected in a normal distribution.

Correlation Analysis

To examine the relationship between English proficiency and academic performance, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. Table 2 presents the results of this analysis between EPTIC scores and GPA.

Table 2. Correlation Analysis between EPTIC Scores and GPA
Correlations

		EPTIC Score	GPA
EPTIC_Score	Pearson Correlation	1	.664**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	90	90
GPA	Pearson Correlation	.664**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	90	90

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

The correlation analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between EPTIC scores and GPA ($r = 0.664$, $p < 0.001$). This correlation coefficient, significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), indicates that higher levels of English proficiency are substantially associated with higher academic performance among the students in the study. The strength of this correlation suggests that approximately 44% of the variance in students' academic performance might be shared with their English language proficiency. This finding is particularly significant for English department students, as it empirically validates the importance of English language proficiency for academic success in programs where English serves as both the medium of instruction and the subject of study. The correlation strength exceeds what might be expected from chance alone, as indicated by the significant p-value ($p < 0.001$), providing robust evidence for the relationship between these two variables in the academic context of Universitas Sulawesi Barat.

Regression Analysis

To further investigate the predictive relationship between English proficiency and academic performance, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted, with EPTIC scores as the predictor variable and GPA as the dependent variable. The results of this analysis are presented below.

Table 3. ANOVA Results for Regression Analysis
ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.591	1	1.591	69.452	.000 ^b
	Residual	2.017	88	.023		
	Total	3.608	89			

a. Dependent Variable: GPA

b. Predictors: (Constant), EPTIC_Score

The ANOVA results in Table 3 confirm that the regression model was statistically significant ($F(1, 88) = 69.452$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that EPTIC scores significantly predict GPA. The F-statistic of 69.452 represents the ratio of explained variance to unexplained variance, and its high value suggests that the model provides a significantly better fit to the data than would be expected by chance alone. This finding substantiates the predictive utility of English proficiency measurements in forecasting academic performance.

Table 4. Model Summary of Regression Analysis
Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.664 ^a	.441	.435	.15138

a. Predictors: (Constant), EPTIC_Score

b. Dependent Variable: GPA

The model summary presented in Table 4 provides additional insights into the relationship between these variables. The R-value of 0.664 represents the multiple correlation coefficient, which in this simple regression analysis is identical to the Pearson correlation coefficient reported earlier. The R^2 value of 0.441 indicates that approximately 44.1% of the variance in students' GPA can be explained by their EPTIC scores. This represents a substantial proportion of the variance in academic performance that can be attributed to English language proficiency. The adjusted R^2 value of 0.435 provides a more conservative estimate of the explained variance, accounting for the sample size and the number of predictor variables. This adjustment results in only a minimal reduction from the R^2 value, indicating the robustness of the finding even when considering sample size constraints. The standard error of the estimate (0.15138) represents the average distance that the observed values fall from the regression line. This relatively small value, especially when compared to the range of GPA values (3.07 to 3.92), indicates a reasonably good fit of the data to the regression model. It suggests that the model provides relatively accurate predictions of GPA based on EPTIC scores, with an average error of approximately 0.15 points on the GPA scale.

Table 5. Regression Coefficients
Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2.361	.148		15.990	.000
	EPTIC Score	.003	.000	.664	8.334	.000

a. Dependent Variable: GPA

The regression equation derived from the unstandardized coefficients is expressed as: $GPA = 2.361 + 0.003 \times EPTIC_Score$. This equation suggests that for each one-point increase in EPTIC score, there is an associated 0.003-point increase in GPA. The constant value (2.361) represents the predicted GPA when the EPTIC score equals zero, though this is an extrapolation beyond the observed data range and has limited practical interpretation. The standardized coefficient (Beta = 0.664) matched the correlation coefficient, confirming the moderately strong relationship between the variables. Both the constant ($t = 15.990$, $p < .001$) and the EPTIC score coefficient ($t = 8.334$, $p < .001$) were statistically significant, validating the components of the regression equation.

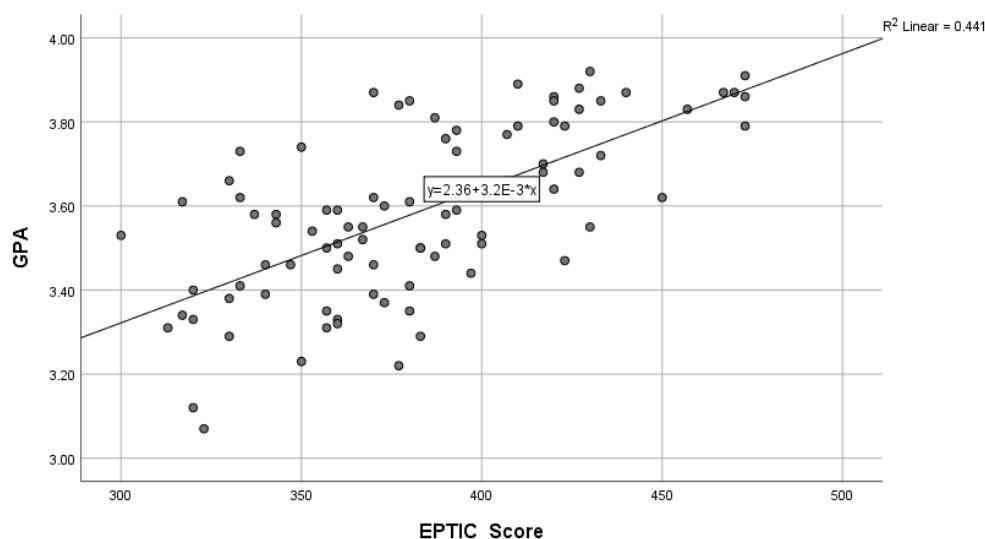


Figure 1. Scatter Plot of EPTIC Scores and GPA

The scatter plot (Figure 1) visually represents the positive linear relationship between EPTIC scores and GPA. The plotted regression line clearly demonstrates the upward trend, with the equation $y = 2.361 + 3.2E-3 \cdot x$ displayed on the graph. The R^2 Linear value of 0.441 visually confirms the proportion of variance explained by the model.

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between English language proficiency, as measured by the English Proficiency Test for Internal Control (EPTIC), and academic performance, indicated by students' cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA), among undergraduate students in an English Education program at Universitas Sulawesi Barat. The findings revealed a statistically significant and strong positive correlation between EPTIC scores and GPA ($r = .664$, $p < .001$), and further regression analysis confirmed that English proficiency is a significant predictor of academic performance, explaining approximately 44.1% of the variance in students' GPA. These findings not only contribute to the growing body of literature on language proficiency and academic success but also offer practical implications for English-medium higher education contexts in Indonesia and beyond.

The positive correlation found in this study is consistent with a wide range of prior research across different contexts and educational levels. For instance, Devi (2023) reported a significant linear relationship between TOEFL scores and GPA among postgraduate students in an English education program in Bandung, Indonesia. Similar findings were also noted by Azkiyah (2023), who analyzed data from 4,959 students at a state Islamic university and found that English proficiency significantly predicted GPA, particularly in the Faculty of Medicine where English was heavily used as a medium of instruction. These findings underscore the relevance of English language proficiency not only for language-related programs but also for disciplines where English is a vehicle for content delivery.

In a broader international context, Barkaoui (2025) conducted a longitudinal study of undergraduate students in a Canadian English-medium university and found that English proficiency test scores (IELTS and TOEFL) significantly predicted GPA trajectories over ten semesters. Notably, students with higher initial English proficiency scores maintained more stable and higher academic performance across semesters compared to those with lower scores. This dynamic was also reflected in McGehee and Isbell's (2024) study at a U.S. public research university, which found that English language proficiency scores, including results from the Duolingo English Test (DET), were moderately predictive of both GPA and academic probation outcomes. The alignment of these findings with the current study suggests a degree of consistency in the role of English proficiency across various institutional and geographical contexts.

In addition to general proficiency scores, several studies have examined the differential impacts of specific language skills. For example, Escobal et al. (2025) found that among Grade 12 students, reading, speaking, and listening proficiency were positively correlated with GPA, while writing proficiency showed no significant relationship. Similarly, Elvira et al. (2024), employing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), demonstrated that speaking and reading skills had a significant influence on academic performance among English Literature students, whereas listening and writing were not significant predictors. The current study did not disaggregate language skills, but given that the EPTIC includes sections on listening, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension, the results indirectly suggest that a

composite proficiency score encompassing these skills is a strong indicator of academic success.

A number of studies have also explored how contextual or demographic factors interact with English proficiency in influencing academic performance. For instance, Plooy et al. (2025) investigated Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) students in South Africa and found that English proficiency acted as a structural barrier to academic progress, especially for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds who spoke English as an additional language. Similarly, Cui and Gardiner (2025) emphasized the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between English proficiency and success in English Medium Instruction (EMI) programs in China. These findings suggest that while English proficiency is a strong predictor of academic performance, its effect may be mediated or moderated by other psychological and sociocultural factors such as motivation, confidence, and institutional support.

Interestingly, some studies have challenged the universal predictive power of English proficiency on academic performance. Tin (2024), for example, found that while parental involvement positively influenced English proficiency, the proficiency itself did not significantly mediate the relationship between student personality traits and academic outcomes among Malaysian university students. Likewise, in the study by Escobal et al. (2025), the overall correlation between composite English proficiency and GPA was positive but negligible, indicating that other non-linguistic factors might be at play in determining academic performance. These findings point to the complexity of academic performance as a multifactorial construct and caution against overgeneralizing the impact of language proficiency.

Despite these nuances, the robust findings of the present study, in line with the majority of prior research, reinforce the central role of English language proficiency in academic success, particularly within English departments and other programs where English is the medium of instruction. The relatively high R^2 value (0.441) found in this study is especially notable when compared to prior studies. For instance, Azkiyah (2023) reported that English proficiency accounted for only 1.6% of GPA variance across faculties, suggesting that the strength of the relationship may vary significantly by discipline. In contrast, Curle et al. (2024) found that English proficiency explained 90% of the variance in EMI course outcomes, highlighting its overwhelming importance in content-heavy programs conducted entirely in English.

The implications of these findings are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this study contributes to the body of evidence supporting the use of English proficiency tests as valid indicators of students' academic preparedness in higher education. Practically, the results suggest that universities, especially those offering English-medium instruction, should integrate continuous English language support into their curricula. This could include targeted programs to strengthen specific language skills, ongoing proficiency assessments, and the provision of language resources such as writing centers and tutoring services. Moreover, the predictive value of EPTIC scores demonstrated in this study suggests that such internal proficiency assessments can be effectively used not only for student placement but also for identifying those at risk of academic difficulties.

Nevertheless, several limitations of the current study must be acknowledged. First, the study is limited in scope, focusing solely on students from the English Education Department at a single institution. This restricts the generalizability of the findings to other disciplines or universities with different academic and linguistic contexts. Future studies should consider

larger and more diverse samples, encompassing multiple faculties or institutions, to examine whether the relationship holds across different academic settings. Second, the study used a cross-sectional design, which does not allow for the exploration of changes in the relationship over time. Longitudinal research could provide deeper insights into how English proficiency influences academic trajectories and how students' language development co-evolves with their academic performance.

Additionally, while the EPTIC test used in this study mirrors the structure and scoring of standardized tests like TOEFL, it remains an institutional measure, and its external validity may be limited. Future studies could consider using internationally recognized standardized tests or disaggregating the components of the test to examine the relative influence of individual skills, as done by Escobal et al. (2025) and Elvira et al. (2024). Moreover, other relevant variables such as motivation, learning strategies, socio-economic status, or instructional quality were not included in the current model, yet these could significantly interact with language proficiency in shaping academic outcomes.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the relationship between English language proficiency and academic performance among undergraduate students in the English Education Department at Universitas Sulawesi Barat. Using the English Proficiency Test for Internal Control (EPTIC) as a measure of language proficiency and Grade Point Average (GPA) as an indicator of academic performance, the findings revealed a significant and strong positive correlation between the two variables. The regression analysis further confirmed that English proficiency is a substantial predictor of students' academic success, accounting for over 44% of the variance in GPA scores. These results align with a broad spectrum of previous studies conducted both in Indonesia and internationally, reinforcing the importance of English language skills, particularly in English-medium instruction (EMI) settings. The findings underscore the necessity for educational institutions, especially English departments, to provide consistent and comprehensive language support for their students. This is crucial not only for improving academic outcomes but also for preparing future English teachers to meet professional standards. Despite its contributions, the study is limited by its single-institution scope and the use of a locally developed test. Future studies could expand this inquiry across multiple universities and explore the role of individual language skills or mediating factors such as motivation, instructional quality, or socio-economic background. In the end, English language proficiency plays a critical role in shaping students' academic trajectories. Strengthening proficiency through targeted programs may serve as a key strategy in enhancing educational quality and equity in higher education, particularly in EFL contexts.

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