

# Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) Scores as Inputs to English Proficiency Intervention Program

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Imelda L. An, PhD

College of Education, Arts and Sciences,  
Lyceum of the Philippines University Batangas  
ilan@lpubatangas.edu.ph

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**Abstract** – In order to explore how TOEIC can help address the declining students' competencies in English, this study was pursued. More specifically, it described the TOEIC takers in terms of their program whether board or non-board and compared the listening and reading TOEIC scores when grouped according to program. It also determined the difference of responses on the listening and reading TOEIC scores when grouped according to respondents' profile; and finally proposed an English proficiency intervention program for LPU – Batangas. The study revealed that more non-board degree program students took TOEIC in the 2nd batch of 1st semester for the school year 2017 - 2018. The participants have Limited Working Proficiency ranging from basic to working proficiency. When compared, TOEIC Listening and Reading total scores of the board degree programs is higher than the non-board degree programs. The performance of the students was significantly better when grouped according to their program. Therefore, a step-up Process showing a student's progress through English Proficiency Intervention Program is proposed for the administration to consider and later evaluate its implementation.

**Keywords** – English proficiency, English proficiency intervention program, TOEIC scores

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## INTRODUCTION

For almost a decade, the Lyceum of the Philippines University – Batangas has been a subscriber to several technologies driven learning materials that help

increase the English proficiency of the students. Dynamic English (DynEd) had been for more than four years a partner for English proficiency and Tell Me More (TMM) at present has continuously supplemented the English courses in college, not to name a few like American Hospitality Academy (AHA) for College of International Tourism and Hospitality Management and some other applications embedded to Learning Management System (LMS) across all disciplines.

These initiatives of the management are in response to the alarming quality of the English proficiency level of the students; though, also considering a factor that the university caters to heterogenous types of enrollees.

Several studies Racca and Lasaten,[1] show that the English skills of the Filipinos are deteriorating. National Achievement Test (NAT) and the Professional Regulatory Commission (PRC) report that passers in all fields of endeavor have continued to go down. This academic performance of the students can be attributed to their decreasing proficiency in the English language.

Since the university is very serious with its quality pursuit, it has continued to find ways on how the level of English language proficiency can be remedied. It has been trying; Just English Program coupled with

English club activities like Drop Everything and Read, Lyceum Reading Circle, and other small gatherings whether contests or in-class activities have been supplementary to the cause. All these with the end goal to produce Lyceans who are English proficient to be globally employable.

The bold step came in when during the SY 2012-2013, the university implemented the Test of English for International Communication. TOEIC, a standardized test, is an English language proficiency test for listening and reading created by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) for non-native speakers of English. The test uses the language of international business to measure examinees' ability to understand English. Since its adoption, before during the old curriculum, this has been given once to every Lycean

during their English 1 (for freshmen) and Oral Comm (for junior) years. Despite these efforts, the results of the study by Andal and Caiga, [2] registered still on intermediate level across disciplines. Some problems are attributed to student, faculty, and facilities factor. Started in 2015, the university implemented the test twice a year having pre-test for freshmen and post-test before graduation requiring 650+ score. With the current change of curriculum in English, there is only Purposive Communication as a General Education course left across all programs and the burden of levelling up English language proficiency is getting a more serious concern.

In order to relate with testing, Jaafar, [3] investigated on the "Schema theory" of Frederic Barlett that confirms that humans store memories in the form of schema, which gives mental structures needed to process, understand and remember information. When an information is received, it is either related to pre-existing knowledge or can detect a conflict between new and old concepts. In essence, schema is a collection of knowledge that is stored in long-term memory banks for later use. Hence, background knowledge, often called schema, enhances comprehension, and there are several studies suggesting that background knowledge has a strong effect on listening and reading comprehension Pappas, [4] in an EFL environment.

In the case of TOEIC pre-test, takers capitalize on their stored memories while post-tests are assumed to have improved because of the inputs gained after enrolment. These and still many other factors can be behind the scores that may suggest important interpretation on how teachers teach or how learners learn before an examination take place and what the management can do about them.

Therefore, the researcher as the point person in the department would like to explore on things like how TOEIC as an evaluation tool enables the performer to assess the outcome and bring out the best among the students' English language proficiency performance. Findings may inform educational policy planners, teacher educators, employers, and career advisers to maximise English language learning programs that support increased proficiency through tests. Moreover, to do so, she proposes an intervention program that hopefully shall guide the planners.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The paper generally aimed to propose an English proficiency intervention program, more specifically

for listening and reading for LPU – Batangas for the school year 2021- 2024. More specifically, it described the TOEIC takers as to their program; presented the compared pre and post test scores in TOEIC listening and reading when summarized and itemized according to program; also determined the difference of respondents' L and R TOEIC scores when grouped according to program; and finally proposed an English proficiency intervention program for LPU – Batangas.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Research Design**

The researcher employed a quantitative type of research where she used descriptive coupled with correlation designs to come up with a comprehensive review of the past results of the TOEIC examinations. Thus, a documentary analysis was also used to analyze the pre-tests and post-tests of the selected examinees. Records of test results archived in the Hopkins Philippines Inc. office made available through the CEAS department were requested. Hence, the paper became descriptive still because it enabled to explore the past result of the group's TOEIC scores, compared it with the post-test and from these, was able to plan for the intervention in the future.

### **Participants**

The respondent's population was identified from the CEAS records of the TOEIC results. These are the 2<sup>nd</sup> takers, specifically the seniors included in the first and second batch of test takers for the year 2018. They were examinees of October 29 and November 5, 2018, respectively. Through convenience sampling, the names were traced in order to track back the results of their pre-tests. Thus, the samples were limited only to 281 from the total of a thousand plus takers for that year because majority were first time takers, but this number allowed the researcher to obtain basic data and trends regarding the study.

### **Data Gathering Procedures**

Permission from TOEIC Phils. and CEAS specifically Center for Language and Applied Media was sought before data analysis began. The records both in documents and emails were reviewed for further investigation. After data were presented, analysis and interpretation until final completion was reached.

### **Data Analysis**

For treatment of gathered data, the study used frequency and percentage for TOEIC scores and respondents' profile. Using the scale: 905 – 990, Professional Proficient; 785-900, Working Proficient;



**Table 1**  
TOEIC Listening and Reading Test Scores

	Post-Test		Pre-Test	
	Mean	I	Mean	I
Listening	402.97	WP	377.53	BWP
Reading	342.77	BWP	302.28	EP
<b>Total Mean Score</b>	<b>746.31</b>	<b>WP</b>	<b>680.36</b>	<b>BWP</b>

Legend: 905 – 990, Professional Proficient; 785-900, Working Proficient; 605-780, Basic Working Proficient; 405-600, Advanced Elementary Proficient; 255-400, Elementary Proficient; 10-250, Basic Proficient

However, looking more closely, for reading, the test takers had established a quite low 302.28 mean falling under the Elementary proficiency. Since the university does not implement an English proficiency test during the entrance examination, it can be inferred also that it has affected the scores. These test takers were those who had just graduated their senior high schools from different government and private schools. Based on an interview conducted, most do not have an orientation about computer-based English language tests. They usually had taken their language assessment through paper and pencil.

Upon enrolment to LPU-Batangas, their English courses have incorporated during the first months of the semester an access and use of the English laboratories where there were computer-based reading and listening practices. Some activities were patterned after TOEIC assessment; hence, their skills were enhanced before taking the post test, which is very evident on the post-test results increasing to BWP from EP.

Same is true with the results of the respondents' listening scores. From basic working proficiency, they increased the scores to working proficiency. By working proficiency, the person can understand details in extended spoken texts when the information is supported by repetition and when the requested information comes at the beginning or end of the spoken text. They can understand details when the information is slightly paraphrased. However, they do not understand details in short spoken exchanges when language is syntactically complex or when difficult vocabulary is used. They do not usually understand details that include negative constructions.

A study by Clement and Murugavel [5] pointed out that participants have agreed that poor English communication skills harm the possibility of getting recruited during job interviews. Getting stuck due to lack of educated vocabulary could embarrass the candidate who is looking for a better job opportunity. Likewise, using wrong tenses may confuse and affect the communication process.

With regard to reading TOEIC scores, the students had a great leap from Elementary Proficient to Basic Working Proficient showing the great difference again of having a test before and an after test. This has changed their knowledge on the process, their attitude perhaps and their persistence to achieve a higher score for the second time. Test takers who score around EP typically do not understand inferences that require paraphrase connecting information, more so, have a very limited ability to understand information expressed as a paraphrase using difficult vocabulary. They often depend on finding words and phrases in the text that match the same words and phrases in the question.

Advancing to BWP in reading means the test takers can understand medium-level vocabulary, can sometimes understand difficult vocabulary in context, unusual meanings of common words and idiomatic usage. Moreover, they can infer the central idea and purpose of a written text, and they can make inferences about details.

**Table 2**

Respondent's TOEIC Scores on Listening per program

Board Programs	Pre-Test		Post -Test	
	Listening	Rank	Listening	Rank
BS NURSING	401.17	2	434.00	3
BS PHARMACY	392.31	3	408.85	5
BS PT	357.50	6	449.77	1
BS RADIO TECH	351.33	7	375.33	7
BSA	443.33	1	447.67	2
BSCA	365.39	4	373.68	8
BSED	350.00	8	394.17	6
<u>PSYCHOLOGY</u>	365.00	<u>5</u>	430.00	<u>4</u>
Non- Board Prog				
ABMA	452.50	1	470.83	1
BAMC	425.00	3	420.00	2
BAPL	445.00	2	260.00	8
BSBA	350.47	6	380.87	4
BSBCM	326.50	7	369.50	6
BS Comp Science	370.31	5	380.00	5
BS Information Tech	404.55	4	412.27	3
BS Marine Educ	290.00	8	305.00	7

Legend: 490 - Proficient user; 400 - Independent user, Vantage; 275 - Independent user, Threshold; 110 - Basic user, Waystage; 60- Basic User - Breakthrough

Table 2 is a detailed presentation of the TOEIC scores in Listening compared between pre-test and post-test by each program categorized as board and non-board degree programs.

Overall, the data correspond to independent user level of the students indicated from the results of the top three scores both for pre-test and post-test from the board programs namely: Accountancy, Nursing, Physical Therapy, Psychology and Pharmacy.

A band of 400 for TOEIC listening describes this is the minimum score frequently required by higher education and companies, meaning the fundamental competences necessary in workplaces. A more active participation in conversation because of understanding from listening command assistance and certain limitations. For example, students from this level can understand functions or notions like listening to conversations describing habits and routines, peoples, things; also requests, suggestions, advice, invitations or offers on mails, advertisements, and storytelling. They can distinguish discourse markers, correct tenses of verbs, proper use of modals and other parts of speech.

As to tabulated results on listening scores for non-board program, the Multi-media Arts students consistently topped both on the pre and post-tests garnering 452.50 and 470.83, even higher than the

score gained by the Accountancy and PT. As their choice of program, it can be surmised that these students have practiced more their auditory competences even before college enrolment; thus, their inclination to similar choice of activities in school.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> rank is BS Paralegal, also an Arts and Sciences program. However, it is surprising to note that they established a high pre-test but became on the last spot for post-test. Based on the data, majority of the takers came late during the scheduled post-test because they were just pulled out from their internship; as they said, they were exhausted and cramming due to same day travel, distance, and no enough preparation. The Physical Therapy examinees got the 2<sup>nd</sup> post-test slot. Although, it can still be described as B2 or independent user- vantage, they had a giant leap from rank 6<sup>th</sup> in the pre-test to 2<sup>nd</sup>. This clearly suggest how a pre-test supported by classroom intervention makes a difference on the post-test. Naturally, they had an experience, they were able to anticipate the kind of post- test. Very conservatively, the Accountancy program maintained their rank from pre-test to post test, establishing a small difference of 4-point increase. Although falling under B2, the researcher believes, the performance may be improved better if, again, given enough time and focus.

**Table 3.** Respondent's TOEIC Scores on Reading per program

<b>Board Programs</b>	<b>Pre-Test Reading</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Post -Test Reading</b>	<b>Rank</b>
BS NURSING	346.50	4	387.50	4
BS PHARMACY	336.15	5	377.12	5
BS PT	381.67	1	393.33	3
BS RADIO TECH	245.00	8	306.00	8
BSA	375.67	2	423.33	2
BSCA	286.74	6	313.42	7
BSED	280.00	7	353.34	6
PSYCHOLOGY	365.00	3	430.00	1
<b>Non- Board Prog</b>	<b>Pre-Test Reading</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Post -Test Reading</b>	<b>Rank</b>
AB MULTIMEDIA ARTS	350.00	2	404.17	2
BAMass Comm	327.68	3	362.15	3
BAPL	380.00	1	430.00	1
BSBA	279.79	6	317.42	6
BSBCM	225.50	7	270.50	7
BS Comp Science	299.69	5	331.56	4
BS Information Tech	305.00	4	325.00	5
BS Marine Educ	140.00	8	260.00	8

*Legend: 490 - Proficient user; 400 - Independent user, Vantage; 275 - Independent user, Threshold; 110 - Basic user, Waystage; 60 - Basic User - Breakthrough*

Table 3 illustrates the compared results of pre and post tests for reading. The TOEIC scores on reading for Board programs is somewhat parallel with the results in

listening having Accountancy takers dominating the top ranks joined by Physical Therapy and Psychology. Though the ranks varied, it can be noted that they

occupied the three highest places. Test takers who score around 350 typically can infer the central idea and purpose of a written text, and they can make inferences about details. Also, they can read for meaning, can understand information, even when it is paraphrased. Further, they can understand rule-based grammatical structures, difficult, complex, and uncommon grammatical constructions.

Considering that the profession of PT, Accountancy and Psychology deal more on cases to analyze facts and data concerning their profession, this test could be very helpful. The results will determine their weakness, so an intervention is likely to be given before they graduate. The table also shows that though post-test scores increase, the level does not change, still occupying B2 or independent user - vantage.

However, it is sad to note that consistently lowest among the programs was Radiologic Technology falling under Basic User-Waystage. Test takers who score around 250 have a very limited ability to understand information expressed as a paraphrase using difficult vocabulary. They often depend on finding words and phrases in the text that match the same words and phrases in the question and usually do not connect information beyond two sentences. They do not

understand difficult vocabulary, unusual meanings of common words, or idiomatic usage. They usually cannot make distinctions between the meanings of closely related words.

Similarly with the results on listening, Paralegal, Multimedia and Mass Communication students dominated the first three spots on highest scores falling under 350 - 450 or in the Independent User - Vantage level. These programs belong to arts and sciences. Normally, enrollees under these programs have a good grasp of reading materials and excel in English language.

On the other hand, a very significant result for the lowest score can be identified for Marine Engineering which is quite low at 140 for pre-test increased to 260 after; however still very low. This falls under the Basic User-Waystage level or A2. This suggests an alarm because this means they understand only a limited range of vocabulary, cannot make inferences about information in written texts and often unable to connect information even within a single sentence. They do not understand even easy grammatical constructions when other language features, such as difficult vocabulary or the need to connect information, are also required.

**Table 4.** Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test scores in TOEIC Listening and Reading per Program

Board Programs	Pre-Test		Post -Test	
	Listening/Reading	Rank	Listening/Reading	Rank
BS NURSING	747.50	2	815.50	3
BS PHARMACY	713.08	4	772.15	5
BS PT	717.62	3	835.35	2
BS RADIO TECH	587.00	7	743.50	6
BSA	825.00	1	871.00	1
BSCA	653.42	6	688.55	7
BSED	352.50	8	630.00	8
PSYCHOLOGY	685.00	5	802.50	4
<b>Mean Score</b>	<b>667.02</b>		<b>777.32</b>	
Non- Board Prog	Listening/Reading	Rank	Listening/Reading	Rank
AB MULTIMEDIA ARTS	802.50	2	875.00	2
BAMC	766.79	3	817.07	3
BAPL	825.00	1	890.00	1
BSBA	641.24	5	708.45	6
BSBCM	552.00	7	640.00	7
BSCS	611.88	6	739.69	4
BSIT	691.36	4	737.27	5
BSMarE	430.00	8	615.00	8
<b>Mean Score</b>	<b>661.75</b>		<b>746.30</b>	

*Legend:* 905 – 990, Professional Proficient; 785-900, Working Proficient; 605-780, Basic Working Proficient; 405-600, Advanced Elementary Proficient; 255-400, Elementary Proficient; 10-250, Beginning Proficient

Table 4 summarizes the compared scores of Listening and Reading (LR) both for pre-test and post-test for all board and non-board programs. On an average, both the pre-test and post-test scores were ranging from basic to working proficiency level. This further suggests that scores of Accountancies, Nursing and Physical Therapy are able to satisfy most work requirements with language that is often, but not always, acceptable and effective. Test questions on understanding public announcements that are broadcast, explanations about how to perform a routine task related to a job, or even taking a telephone message for a co-worker were some examples that might had helped them achieve better scores.

However, it can be noted that there is one pre-test score which fall within Elementary proficiency which made it to the lowest spot, the Education test takers. Though it constituted a small 1.42 percent of the takers' population, still considering that the program is a teaching profession in the future does not give a very good indication for the performance of the university. This means that the taker has functional, but limited proficiency and can be able to maintain a very simple face-to-face conversations on familiar topics.

As regard to non-board programs, the arts and sciences takers dominated the first three highest ranks though PL and MMA falling still within Working Proficient. Mass Communication with the other 3 programs, Business Administration, Computer Science, and Information Technology were on the limited or basic working proficiency level, meaning they can satisfy most social demands and limited work requirements. Again, since the university sets a 650> required score, two non-board programs did not meet this: Marine Engineering and Computer Business Management.

Quite alarming, since these are college students already specifically, the takers of post-test who are about to graduate. There are also a few numbers of students who got advanced elementary level during pre-test however, improved and scored BWP.

**Table 5** Difference on the Respondent's TOEIC scores when grouped according to Program

	Mean <sub>post</sub>	Mean <sub>pre</sub>	F	p-value	I
Listening	402.97	377.53	6.454	.000	HS
Reading	342.77	302.28	12.936	.000	HS
Total Score	746.31	680.36	9.959	.000	HS

Table 5 presents the differences on the respondent's performance on the TOEIC examination when grouped according to program.

The computed p-values for the listening, reading, and the total score of the respondents were all higher than the alpha level 0.05 which can all be interpreted as highly significant. This means that the score of the respondents on TOEIC can vary or can be influenced by their program.

Take for example, the findings show that among the board degree programs, students from Accountancy, Nursing, Physical Therapy and Psychology obtained the highest scores on pre and post-tests both for reading and listening. These same college degree programs underwent rigid screening or entrance examinations and had maintained grade point average to qualify for their majors. That follows that student are conscientious with their performance not only in classes but most importantly with tests.

As Laguador [6] expressed, different college degree board programs have various means of screening the students who can be allowed to enrol and pursue it until graduation. Those who did not pass the qualifying exam have to take the non-board degree program of their choice. However, it is quite interesting to note that the results indicate the other way around; that between the board and non-board degree programs, students from College of Education, Arts and Sciences obtained higher scores both in pre and post-tests.

As stated in the program educational objectives of majority of arts colleges, some of the key workplace competencies that liberal arts learning help students enhance their macro skills in order to understand the human experience. Students have more courses about reading and writing skills, critical thinking, and research skills, also presentation, creative and cultural skills. These led to students becoming wide readers, attentive listeners which are the core activities of the TOEIC test.

Hence, it does not follow, or it cannot be generalized that when a student belongs to a board degree program, his or her TOEIC score is higher than those from non-board degree program. The results further imply that there can be other factors that might be significantly affecting the scores other than program, like students' motivation, attitude, and confidence or even the environment.

As Hughes [7] advised in his paper, there are at least some five important conditions needed to be met before all possible effects of washback. These are:

importance to succeed on the part of the learners, the same thing that teachers wanted their students to succeed, familiarity with the test, understanding of the content and nature, fourth is participants' expertise demanded by the test including the teaching methods, syllabus design and the materials used; and last is the availability of the necessary resources for successful test preparation.

For more than 30 years, the TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) has been administered effectively. The major goal of the test is to assess the everyday English skills of people who operate in an international context and speak a language other than English as their first language [8]. Therefore, the proponent, because of the analysis inferred that TOEIC scores may suggest many important decisions on the part of the teacher and students, likewise, the management. The objectives of the TOEIC implementation must be reoriented time and again since the takers come from different seasons. The test preparations must be included in the syllabus design i.e., during laboratory English courses hrs. and a periodic analysis of the results must be given attention for immediate intervention. With these, the success of the university's goal of having a community of English proficient and employable graduates may be more

achieved. As supported by the study of Nguyen and Gu [9], using the TOEIC Listening and Reading test as the sole exit criteria may have resulted in a restriction of the teaching topic and a shift away from communicative language education, but its overall influence was not viewed as strong.

### Proposed English Proficiency Intervention Program

Four years ago, LPU Batangas have started to implement the English Proficiency Program (EPP) for SY 2018 – 2019 (as indicated in the approved roadmap). Last October 29 and 30, 2018, the TOEIC 2<sup>nd</sup> batch of Pre-Test and the 1<sup>st</sup> Batch of Post Test were scheduled. However, based on the previous 1<sup>st</sup> batch of pre-test results, 918 (89%) out of 1024 takers did not make it to the 650-university set TOEIC score.

This was very alarming; hence, the researcher proposes English Proficiency Intervention Program. The EPIP will be taken by the students who have received below 650 TOEIC pre-test scores or those who do not meet the Basic Working proficiency level. Since during the semester, they were working with different learning paths to achieve independent user level, they will still need extra learning and reading skills to keep abreast with the succeeding lessons.

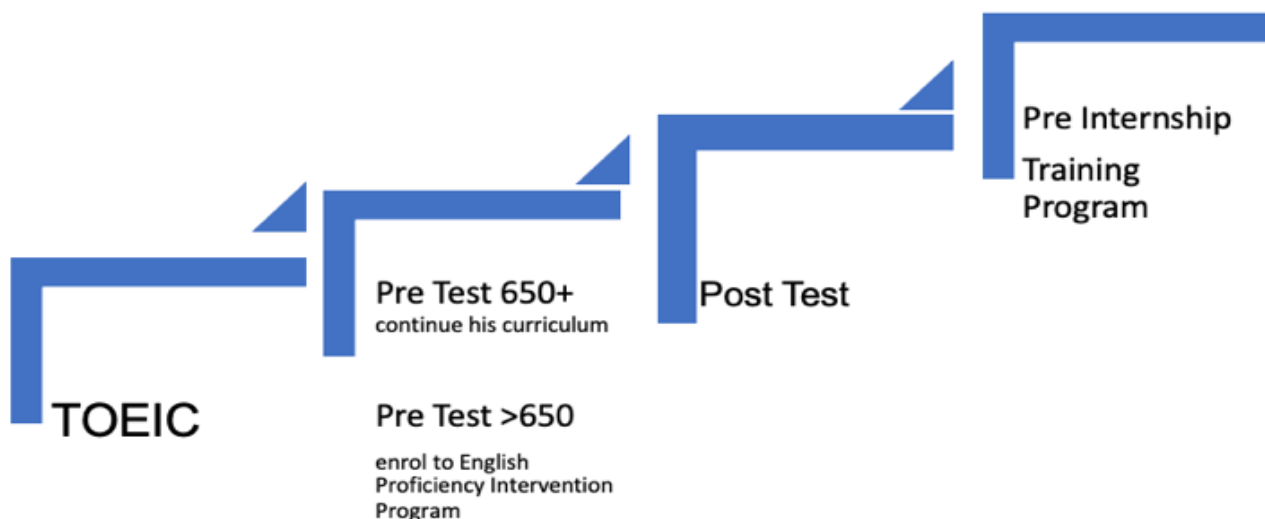


Fig. 3- A step-up Process showing a student's Progress through English Proficiency Intervention Program

With the onset of K+12 curriculum, the General Education curriculum in college had started offering only one English course where students can enhance this skill; so, EPIP may be taken immediately the following semester before he gets the post-test which will allow him to Pre-internship Training Program (for all programs).

For Post Test results, in lieu of the National Certification or Equivalency merit which the university President has been asking, each College must implement during recognition rites awarding of exemplary results like those who have reached professional proficiency; 865 – 990 TOEIC scores. This is to continuously raise the awareness of the whole



community regarding the importance of English Proficiency level.

After the EPIP, the student now is ready to take his post test; results then will help the Internship Office about the readiness of the student for his upcoming training. Thus, Learning motivation is an initiative of the students and shall be reinforced by the teacher [1].

The English Proficiency Intervention Program has its distinctive features, as follows: first is Alternative 1. This can be called Specialized or short-term course 0in English to be taken or completed in 20 hrs. This can be tutor led and computer based with several hrs. of TOEIC designed tests as preparation. Special rates for tutor may be applied.

Second option is inclusion of a 3-unit English course as an elective in the curriculum of GE. This will be optional depending on the TOEIC pre-test result to be taken in a regular semester; 50 hrs. with another 3 hrs. for the TOEIC test itself. The course syllabus must be designed according to the need. This is a regular load with a regular faculty rate. Similar with the recommendation of Borbon and Ricafort, [11] to revisit their course syllabi and focus on the performance task of the student rather than focusing on the theories and knowledge-based tasks to enhance the communication skills of the students especially on English language. Hence, According to Schmidgall and Powers [12], TOEIC takers' performance should be seen as successful in score ranges frequently associated with significant decisions.

#### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

More non-board degree program students who took TOEIC had Limited Working Proficiency ranging from basic to working proficiency. When compared, TOEIC and total scores of the board degree programs is higher than the non-board degree programs. Their performance was significantly better when grouped according to board programs.

The Center for Language and Applied Media may conduct an annual review of the result of its TOEIC and implement thereafter an intervention. The university may consider the proposed intervention program to enhance the students' English proficiency. Also, students may consider a thorough preparation in getting the test to not just meet the required score but to satisfy self-esteem and attitude. Teachers may consider re-engineering course plan and syllabus to include TOEIC preparation for students. Colleges through a collaboration with CLAM may implement awarding of certificates and recognition to top and deserving students who received Professional Proficient rating. A follow up study may be conducted specifically the comparison of the pre-test and post test scores per student involving a greater sample to find out areas to strengthen in both listening and reading. It is a very good study to develop an instructional material to be utilized in an intervention program.

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