

TOEIC Results and Lexile Level Equivalency: Basis for English Proficiency Intervention Program

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Abstract – *One of the strategies that can aid in measuring students' English language proficiency is administering a standardized and widely recognized examination such as the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) which provides accurate, reliable measurement of English proficiency. This study aimed to present the TOEIC results of LPU Batangas students for AY 2014-2016; to describe these TOEIC results' respective Lexile level equivalent on a per year level basis; and to propose an intervention program that may help enhance the students' proficiency in the English language. This study used descriptive research using retrospective study in formulating the intervention program which sought to enhance students' TOEIC scores, and thus, their English language proficiency. Data utilized came from the records provided by Hopkins which contained the TOEIC results from AY 2014-2016. It was found out that majority of the students are in the intermediate level of English proficiency which is the fourth to the highest TOEIC level of proficiency. Further their Lexile level equivalency is within the independent-user threshold (B1) Hence, an intervention program was proposed in order to help enhance students' English language proficiency. It was recommended that the College of Arts and Sciences, its Dean, and the Center for Language and Applied Media may compare the performance of the ten colleges so as to identify the specific students who should be prioritized in the proposed intervention program. Lastly, the study's proposed intervention program may be utilized in order to help address the students' English proficiency concerns.*

Keywords – *English Language proficiency, Lexile level equivalency, TOEIC results.*

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INTRODUCTION

The continuing demand for English language proficiency either in the national or in the international workplace has become a primary concern of every academic institution in the country. Today, more than ever, colleges and universities tend to address their students' English language and communication dilemmas and try the most effective ways possible in order to ensure that they will produce communicatively competent graduates. Indeed, the global challenge dictates that one must be adequately equipped with the fundamental skills in communication especially in listening and reading which are considered to be the fuel for speaking and writing.

One of the strategies that can aid in measuring students' English language proficiency is administering a standardized and widely recognized examination such as the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) which is produced by ETS® (Educational Testing Service). For more than 30 years, the TOEIC test has set the standard for assessing English-language skills used in the workplace. Today TOEIC test scores are used by nearly 14,000 companies, government agencies and English Language Learning programs in 150 countries, and more than seven million TOEIC tests were administered in 2013.

TOEIC test questions are based on real-life work settings in an international environment (meetings, travel, telephone conversations, and others). There are two separate parts to the TOEIC test. In view of this, the examinee can do one or both parts. One of these is the Listening and Reading test, which is a paper and pencil test that takes 2.5 hours and is taken at a test center. On the other hand, the Speaking and Writing test is an online test that is taken in a test center and takes 90 minutes. The Speaking and Writing test is a new test which is only available in some countries.

Invariably, TOEIC test scores provide accurate, reliable measurement of English proficiency — they can be compared regardless of where or when the test is administered. For example, last year's scores of a test taker in Japan can be compared with this year's scores

of a test taker in Korea. Because test takers of any background can be compared fairly, companies can use the TOEIC tests to make the most informed decisions and build a more diverse workforce [1].

LPU-Batangas offers 34 programs under 10 departments. Due to the increasing demand of employment that necessitates fluency in English, the institution recognizes not only active teaching approaches which can improve the students' proficiency in English, but also in assessment. The performance of students has been a great challenge to teachers nowadays since many examinations revealed that they do not show a very impressive level of competence that directly affects their employment after graduation.

In LPU's adherence to developing English language proficiency among its students, it has been administering TOEIC among its entire student population for the last five years. In addition, since the university is fully aware and has completely understood the paramount role of English language proficiency, it has likewise been utilizing certain software such as Tell Me More and Grammarly in order to further prepare the students not only for TOEIC but more importantly, for their professional careers ahead. Nevertheless, the students' TOEIC results have also been linked to specific Lexile levels so that their comprehension abilities can be characteristically determined.

A Lexile measure is a valuable piece of information about either an individual's reading ability or the difficulty of a text, like a book or magazine article. The Lexile measure is shown as a number with an "L" after it; for instance, 880L is 880 Lexile. The idea behind the Lexile framework for reading is simple; that is, if the teacher knows how well a student can read and how hard a specific book is to comprehend, he or she can predict how well that student will likely understand the book. However, with the reading habits of students nowadays, to which this skill has become one of the most neglected, it is still a need to look into how every student perform in reading. Hence the use of Lexile, which is a measurement of reading performance would be valuable. Accordingly, when used together, Lexile measures help a reader find books and articles at an appropriate level of difficulty, and determine how well that reader will likely comprehend a text. Nonetheless, the teacher also can use Lexile measures to monitor a reader's growth in reading ability over time [2].

It is in this light that the researchers deemed the study significant. They themselves are immensely

involved in the university's noble goal of producing graduates who are proficient in the English language, and therefore, globally competitive ones. Similarly, since developing English language skills is essential, the students' TOEIC results vis-à-vis their scores' Lexile level equivalent, may serve as indicators of specific areas that require further attention and intervention on the existing English program of the university. Further, additional programs and activities could be introduced to students depending on their TOEIC results and Lexile level that would further enhance their communication skills.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to present the TOEIC results of LPU Batangas students for AY 2014-2016; to describe these TOEIC results' respective Lexile level equivalent on a per year level basis; and to propose an intervention program that may help enhance the students' proficiency in the English language

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study used descriptive research using retrospective study in formulating the intervention program which sought to enhance students' TOEIC scores, and thus, their English language proficiency. In retrospective study, the outcome of interest has already occurred at the time the study is initiated. This design also allows the investigator to formulate ideas about possible associations and investigate potential relationships, although causal statements usually should not be made [3].

Instrument

The research utilized the records provided by Hopkins which contained the TOEIC results from AY 2014-2016. These records were obtained through a letter sent to the Dean of the College of Education Arts and the Coordinator of Center for Language and Applied Media who keep the summary records of the TOEIC tests conducted This included the results of students per program in their Reading and Listening tests.

Procedure

Upon approval of the proposal, the researchers started checking the available TOEIC results sent by Hopkins. After carefully checking the validity and authenticity of the results, the researchers asked for the help of the statistician for data analysis and treatment.

Further, the researchers-maintained confidentiality of the records obtained as there were names included that were not to be divulged. The treated data were sent back to the researchers who interpreted the outcomes which were upheld by literature and other related reviews to make the study, more effective and comprehensible.

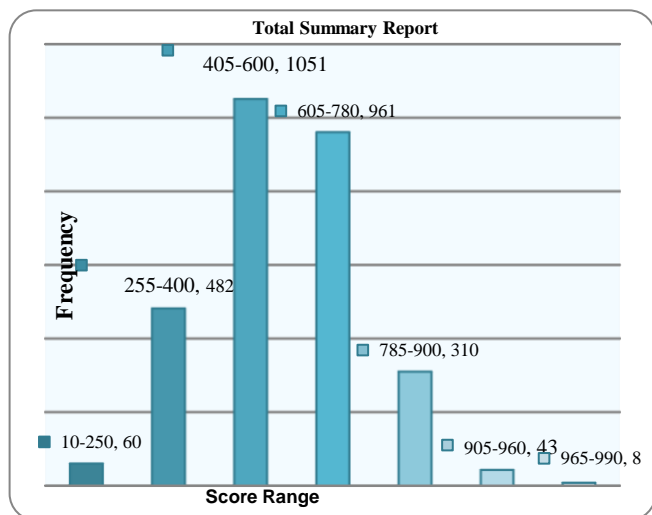
Data Analysis

Upon gathering the data, the results were interpreted using descriptive statistics. All data were treated using a statistical software, PASW version 18 to further analyze the results of the study.

Ethical Consideration

The data gathered had the assurance of being protected with utmost confidentiality. Misleading information was not tolerated, and the researchers conducted this study with honesty and accuracy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION



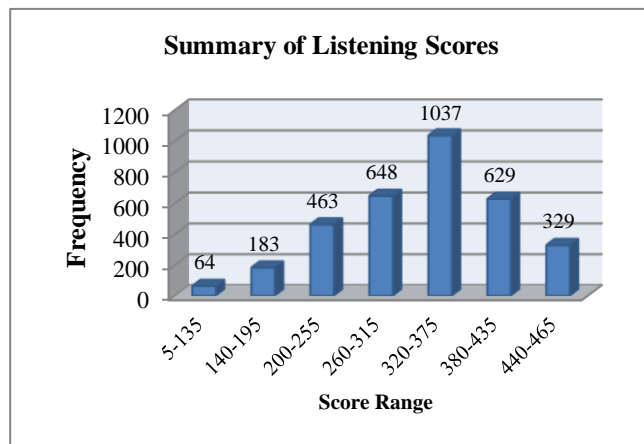
Legend: 945pts = Proficient User; 785 pts = Independent User (Vantage); 550 pts = Independent User (Threshold); 225 pts = Basic User (Waystage); 120 pts = Basic User (Breakthrough)

Figure 1. Summary of TOEIC Scores for SY 2014 – 2015

As the graph illustrates, majority of the students particularly 1 170 got scores ranging from 605-780 which represents the basic working proficiency group. Only 14 students out of the 3 353 examinees achieved scores that belong to the highest score range of 965-990.

What seems alarming however, are the 70 students whose scores range from 10-250, the lowest score range. These students, as well as those who got other low scores ranging from 255-240 involving 454 test takers. Thus, there is a total of 524 students who belong to the intermediate and novice levels of proficiency. Souriyavongsa et al. [4] revealed that students lack of

English foundation background and confidence to use English because they are afraid of mistakes and shy feeling. Moreover, curriculum is inappropriate for helping students to improve their English proficiency and English language is difficult to learn due to students are not well-motivated, encouraged and gained learning strategy.



Legend: 945pts = Proficient User; 785 pts = Independent User (Vantage); 550 pts = Independent User (Threshold); 225 pts = Basic User (Waystage); 120 pts = Basic User (Breakthrough)

Figure 2. Summary of Listening Score for 2014 – 2015

Figure 2 presents the summary of listening scores of the LPU TOEIC test-takers for the school year 2013-2014. As shown in the table, majority of the students or 1037 of the total test takers fall at the score range of 320-375 and are categorized as independent user-Threshold. It was followed by 648 and 629 test-takers which are also under the same language level. According to the TOIEC Listening and Reading Descriptors and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Language Levels [5], students who belong to the independent user-Threshold level understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, and leisure. They can also deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken and can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Furthermore, students who belong to this level can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes, and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. Liao [6] specified that students who scored around 300 in TOEIC were found to have strengths in understanding the central idea, purpose, and basic context of extended spoken texts when information is supported by repetition or paraphrase and when easy or medium-level vocabulary is used. He further affirmed that students in this level found it difficult to understand most paraphrased information or

difficult grammatical constructions and do not usually comprehend on details that include negative constructions. On the other hand, the lowest numbers of test-takers (64 and 183) fall under the Basic User-Breakthrough which is also the lowest level in CEFR. Under this level are students who understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type and can introduce him/herself and answer personal questions. It also includes students who can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help. However, students in this level are found to be weak in understanding details in extended spoken texts when the requested information is heard in the middle of the text and in paraphrasing information or difficult grammatical constructions.

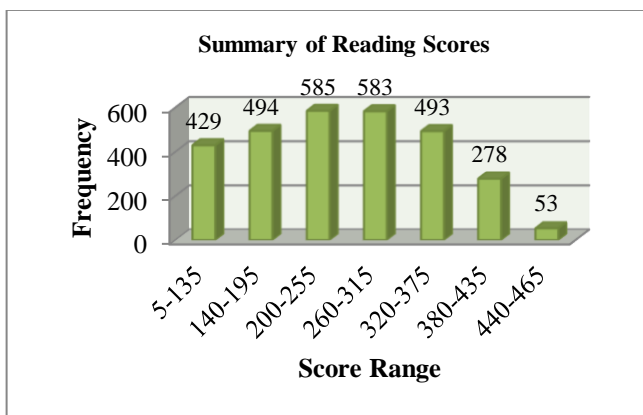
readers are having troubled in understanding difficult vocabulary, unusual meanings of common words or idiomatic usage and usually cannot make distinctions between the meanings of closely related words.

Following closely in number is the 260-315 score range with a total of 583 test-takers and are categorized as independent user-Threshold who understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered. Students who belong to this level can infer the central idea and purpose of a written text and can make inferences about details. However, they do not connect information across a wide area within a text. According to the Educational Testing Service TOEIC reading exam for students is a-hundred item exam divided into three parts- Incomplete Sentences, Error Recognition or Text Completion and Reading Comprehension.

The figure also shows the increased number of test-takers who met the lowest range of score level or the Basic user- Breakthrough with a total of 429 test-takers. This level implies basic understanding and usage of familiar everyday expressions and phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type but are often unable to connect information even within a single sentence. On the other hand, 53 of the test-takers are in the 440-465 score range and are also categorized as independent user-Threshold wherein they can produce simple connected text on topics that are familiar or of personal interest. Also, they can understand the main points of a clear discussion. This is parallel to the global scale of the skills of level B1 of the CEFR that defines level B1's user capable of linguistic skills. This confirms that at this level, they could already understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, and others and could deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken [7]).

The figure 4 that out of the 2 915 examinees, a majority of 1 051 (36%) students got scores ranging from 405-600 and are in the intermediate level which is the fourth of the seven levels of proficiency. It is likewise revealed that only eight students have the advanced professional proficiency whose scores range from 965-990 which is the highest score range.

The second to the largest population of test takers include those who got 605-780 which represents basic working proficiency group. On the other hand, it is also notable that there were 60 (2%) students who got scores ranging from only 10-250. Although this is relatively

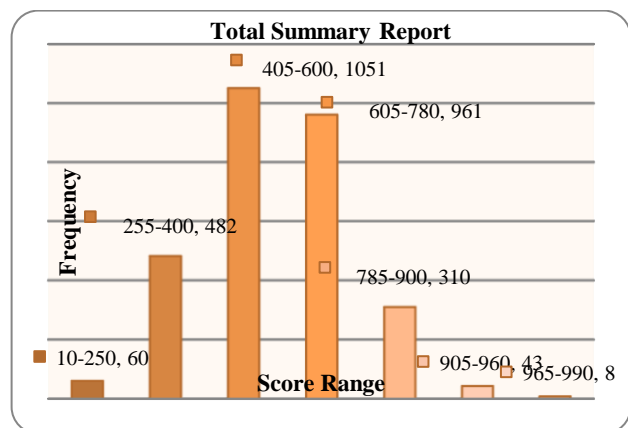


Legend: 945pts = Proficient User; 785 pts = Independent User (Vantage); 550 pts = Independent User (Threshold); 225 pts = Basic User (Waystage); 120 pts = Basic User (Breakthrough)

Figure 3. Summary of Reading Score for 2014 – 2015

Figure 3 shows the summary of reading scores of the LPU TOEIC test-takers for the school year 2013-2014. As reflected in the table, majority of the students or 585 of the total test takers fall at the score range of 200-255 and are categorized as Basic user-Waystage. This level includes students who can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g., very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). They can also communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters and can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need. However, these

lower than the previous school year's data for the same score range, this is still the lowest score range which means that the students mentioned are relatively novice in terms of using the English language. Also, this implies that these students have almost no knowledge in English language use. And although this is a comparatively low number, as regards the other data, intervention appears to be highly necessary. For by the time students step into college, they are supposed to have acquired the fundamental skills in English language and communication.



Legend: 945pts = Proficient User; 785 pts = Independent User (Vantage); 550 pts = Independent User (Threshold); 225 pts = Basic User (Waystage); 120 pts = Basic User (Breakthrough)

Figure 4. Summary of TOEIC Scores for SY 2015–2016

Based on these results, there appears to be a surfacing problem on the students' English proficiency level. In view of this, the researchers see several reasons as contributory to these unlikely results. First, students come from various elementary and high schools which could have addressed the dominant English and communication problems among them. In fact, the university caters to students coming from the different provinces of the region, of which remote schools may be common.

Additionally, establishing good reading habits may not have been the students' priority since most of them would tend to spend most of their time with social media, or perhaps technology itself provides them the biggest disadvantage of acquiring instant classroom requirements such as the supposed to be challenging and skill enhancing book report or literary analysis. Indeed, students nowadays would usually utilize technology for their mere convenience and not for their learning advantage.

Another reason that may have caused the students' low scores is their common fear of the English language. It is true that the language has long been taught in Philippine schools. However, the students'

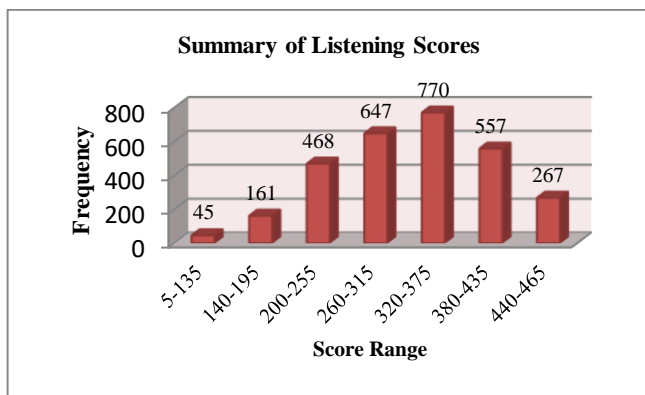
tendency to fear committing grammatical errors especially inside the classroom during discussion recitation, or seeing several red marks on their essays, must have brought about larger inhibitions especially now that they are already in college. Apparently, this disadvantageous culture in Philippine classrooms and even beyond serves as a heavy pressure for students of English. And the worst situation is when the students themselves simply ignore the problem since they may think that they really cannot do anything about it.

This considerable contentment of students about their English proficiency level tends to be the cause of the seemingly closure about their further chances of improving. They just might see English proficiency enhancement as a difficult-to-achieve goal. Knowing the young people of today, they have high tendencies of depriving themselves of things they do not see high possibility of.

In terms of the students' *Lexile* level equivalency, most of them are within the independent-user threshold (B1). This means that most of them can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Also, this majority can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. They can likewise produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Lastly, they can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.

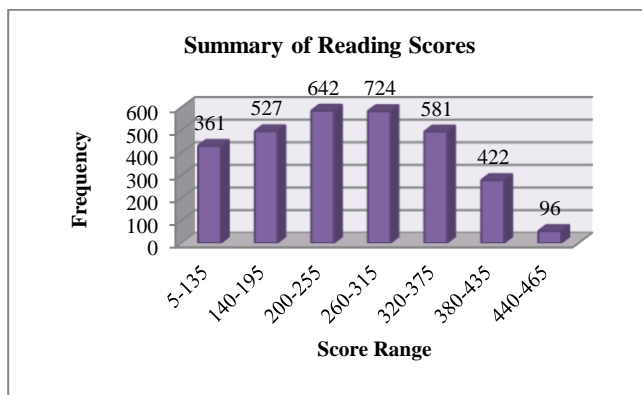
However, the students who are regarded as basic users-breakthrough require greater attention. This is in view of the purely basic skills that they can only do. Specifically, they can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of the needs of a concrete type; can introduce themselves and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where they live, people they know and things they have; and can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

With these results and verbal characterizations, it is evident that the students must be provided with the necessary intervention in order for them to enhance not only their TOEIC scores and their *Lexile* equivalency levels, but also their English proficiency in general. Richards-Tutor et al. [8] found out that there significant moderate-to-large effect sizes for interventions targeting beginning reading skills given that these interventions should include explicit instruction, and group size, minutes of intervention, and type of personnel delivering the intervention should be taken into consideration.



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Figure 5. Summary of Listening Score for 2015– 2016



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Figure 6. Summary of Reading Score for 2015 – 2016

Figure 5 shows the summary of listening scores of the LPU TOEIC test-takers for the school year 2014-2015. As presented in the table, majority of the students or 770 of the total test takers are at the score range of 320-375 and labelled as independent user-Threshold. It was followed by 260-315 and 380-435 score ranges with 647 and 557 student-takers respectively and both under the same CEFR level. These score ranges are far below the minimum score frequently required by higher education and companies which is 785 or the independent user-Vantage. This only shows that the student-takers English background was weak and therefore, needed to enhance their listening abilities urgently. In addition, it is also a necessity for them to improve every part of listening, including sentences about photographs, questions/responses, dialogs, and short talks. TOEIC exam for listening includes Photographs, Question-Response, Conversations, and Short Talks [9].

On the other hand, 45 or the least number of the test-takers are under the score range of 5-135 and are labeled as the Basic User-Breakthrough. This means that students in this level can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. They can also interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help. However, these students have found to have weakness in understanding detail in short spoken exchanges when somewhat difficult vocabulary is used or when the language is syntactically complex. With this, intervention focusing on developing and upgrading student’s vocabulary is needed.

Figure 6 shows the summary of reading scores of the LPU TOEIC test-takers for the school year 2014-2015. As stated in the table, majority of the test takers or 724 of the total number belong to the 260-315 score range and are categorized as independent user-Threshold. Students in this level are said to have strength in understanding medium-level vocabulary and difficult vocabulary in context, unusual meanings of common words and idiomatic usage. However, they are weak in connecting information across a wide area within a text and in making distinctions between the meanings of closely related words. This does not correspond to the level required by business companies and other higher education in that it indicates an unsatisfactory degree of reading facility and therefore attains a low performance. Hence, there is a need for an intervention to achieve the improved communication goals of LPU learners.

On the other hand, 640 of the total test takers fell at the 200-255 score range level or the Basic user-Waystage. It was followed by 300-327 range with a frequency of 581 while 440-465 range has the least frequency of 96 test takers. Students in this level have weaknesses only when the information tested is particularly dense or involves difficult vocabulary.

The study’s proposed intervention program aims to address the students’ English language proficiency problems. Through utilizing this, the researchers believe that the students’ TOEIC scores and reading comprehension skills may be enhanced. Since most educational approach did a major shift due to the pandemic situation, blended learning combines self-study with valuable face-to-face interaction has been utilized. Relatively, Banditvilai [10] suggests that online practice is directly beneficial to enhance the four language learning skills as well as autonomous learning and learner motivation.

Table 1. Proposed Intervention Program to Improve the English Proficiency Level of Students

Objectives	Program	Persons Involved
1. To improve the English Proficiency level of students	A. English Festival both for the High school and College levels B. Conduct of English Festival/Academic Competitions C. Issuance of Certificate of English Proficiency (a requirement for graduation; given to successful TOEIC takers) D. Strengthening the English Society/Organizations of the three campuses- LIMA, Main, Gulod E. English Proficiency Intervention Program E1. Those who failed in the Post-test have to retake the exam E2. Tell Me More is offered to students after the Pre-test. This serves as the learning path of the teachers to enhance the performance of the students. F. Inclusion of English for Specific Purposes in the Curriculum G. Strict Implementation of Just English Please (JEP) program H. Implementation of Straight English Monday I. Identification of GE subjects that utilize English as the medium of instruction	CEAS Dean Language Faculty HS Principal College Deans Students

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings most of the students are in the intermediate level of English proficiency which is the fourth to the highest TOEIC level of proficiency. Majority of the students' *Lexile* level equivalency are within the independent-user threshold (B1). An intervention program was proposed to help enhance students' English language proficiency.

Based on the students' TOEIC results, the CEAS, its dean, and CELL may compare the performance of the ten colleges to identify the specific students who should be prioritized in the proposed intervention program. The study's proposed intervention program may be utilized to help address the students' English proficiency concerns. The syllabi of English 1 and English 3 may be aligned to TOEIC so that students can be better prepared for the test. Additional hours for *Tell Me More* practice may be allotted for students have further learning and preparation for TOEIC. Students' awareness on TOEIC may be increased through classroom information dissemination by Language faculty aside from the university wide orientation administered by Hopkins. Target TOEIC scores may be required on a board-program and non-board-program basis, and on a year level basis. A mock TOEIC may be administered in English classes with the respective Language faculty as administrators to let the students experience the test before undergoing the actual examination. Future researchers may conduct similar study using a more recent time period.

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