

Diploma Students' Overall English Performance Based on their Different Proficiency Skills

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ABSTRACT

Proficiency in the English language is predominantly associated with the linguistic skills of listening, reading and grammar. This study investigates the relationship between English proficiency and academic performance among multi-disciplinary diploma students at University Technology MARA (UiTM) in Malaysia, emphasising the importance of language skills in non-English medium contexts. With the utilisation of a quantitative approach, the research analysed secondary data from 5,422 students who sat for the English Placement Test (EPT) in March 2023, focusing on their test scores revolving around listening, reading and grammar components. From the analysed data, the findings reveal that students' English performance could be significantly predicted through their interconnected proficiency in reading, listening and grammar. Notably, reading emerged as the most influential skill, suggesting that enhancing reading abilities may improve students' comprehension across various contexts. However, the study underscores the necessity for a balanced instructional approach that prioritises listening and speaking alongside grammar and reading to foster comprehensive language proficiency. Relevant parties are recommended to integrate innovative teaching methods such as technology-assisted learning to address the specific challenges faced by students, particularly in listening comprehension. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to track skill development and examine discipline-specific language needs, ensuring that educational programmes are tailored to effectively support students in achieving higher levels of English proficiency, thus resulting in their academic success.

Keywords: English Placement Test (EPT), listening, reading, grammar, English proficiency

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

English proficiency plays a significant role in the overall academic performance of diploma students, influencing their ability to engage with course content and achieve higher grades. The predictive value of English proficiency has a great significance in non-English medium contexts. In contexts where English is not the primary language of instruction, students with higher English proficiency tend to perform better academically. Studies have shown that international students with strong English skills achieve higher GPAs compared to their peers with lower proficiency levels (Azkiyah et al, 2023; Wang et al., 2023). This trend underscores the importance of English as a medium for understanding complex subject matter. English language proficiency among university students varies significantly, with many first-year students demonstrating basic competence levels. According to Damayanti et al. (2024), most university ESL students were at least at the A2 level (basic English usage) according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). This level is comparable to the English proficiency of elementary school children, indicating a need for curriculum enhancement.

Recent studies have highlighted several issues and concerns regarding diploma students' English competence and quality, with listening, reading, and grammar skills being the primary areas of difficulty. Listening skills have been identified as a major challenge for diploma students. Salleh et al. (2018) pointed out that the physical setting was the main listening problem, leading to a need for technology to be used to enhance listening skills. In the age of social media, listening skills can be improved through the students' guided technology-related exposure to audio-aural platforms such as Tiktok and the likes (Onn et al., 2024). Another study revealed that diploma students struggled with higher cognitive listening skills, such as guessing meaning from context (Ibrahim Shousha, 2021). Additionally, research on English-majored students in a Vietnamese university highlighted various barriers to listening comprehension, including language competence levels, exposure to different accents, and lack of realistic listening materials (Nhan, 2024).

Reading skills are often a significant challenge for students learning English as a second language. This difficulty can stem from various factors, such as limited vocabulary, lack of exposure to diverse reading materials, and insufficient practice in reading comprehension strategies. In the context of Yuyun et al. (2018), students may struggle with understanding the main ideas and details of texts, which can hinder their overall academic performance. Similarly, Zhang (2021) highlights that English reading competence varies among students from different majors, which could be due to the varying emphasis on English in their respective curricula. For instance, students in science and engineering might have less exposure to extensive reading in English compared to those in humanities or social sciences. This disparity can lead to differences in reading proficiency levels, affecting their ability to comprehend and analyse academic texts effectively. Furthermore, Ibrahim Shousha (2021) also identified that these grammatical difficulties were linked to various barriers such as institutional, dispositional, situational, academic, and pedagogical challenges faced by adult learners. Meanwhile, Ngo et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of continuous study and suggested that a more focused approach to teaching grammar could significantly improve students' proficiency. Additionally, they recommended incorporating more interactive and practical grammar exercises to help students apply grammatical rules in real-life contexts.

Thus, diploma students with significant challenges in listening, reading, and grammar skills may collectively see the impact on their overall English competence and quality. The specific difficulties in any of the skills not only hinder their academic performance but also affect their confidence and self-esteem to use the language in any contexts.

With that, most diploma students facing considerable difficulties in listening, reading, and grammar skills may commonly see the impact towards their overall competence and quality in English. The issues they face in any of the language skills not only hinder their academic performance but also affects the users' confidence and self-esteem to practice the language in any contexts. The present research seeks to explore the effects of these skills on their overall English competence by addressing the following research questions:

Objective of the Study and Research Questions

The present research seeks to explore the effects of these skills on their overall English competence by addressing the following research questions:

RQ1: Do three different English proficiency skills (Reading, Writing, Grammar) predict students' overall English performance?

RQ2: Do the three proficiency skills (Reading, Writing, Grammar) have differences in their relative influence on students' overall English performance?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This research is driven by the skill interdependence model and the influence of reading, listening, and grammar on English language competence. The Skill Interdependence Model (SIM) posits that the four essential language proficiency skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—are interrelated and collectively contribute to

overall English language competence. This model emphasizes that proficiency in one skill can enhance performance in others, creating a synergistic effect that supports comprehensive language acquisition. Theoretical underpinnings of this model draw from cognitive and sociocultural theories of language learning, which highlight how language skills develop through interaction and practice in meaningful contexts (Vygotsky, 1978).

Reading is a foundational skill that enhances vocabulary, comprehension, and critical thinking abilities. It exposes learners to varied sentence structures and grammatical forms, thereby enriching their understanding of grammar in context. As students engage with diverse texts, they not only gain knowledge but also develop inferencing skills, which are crucial for both reading comprehension and effective communication (Tonks et al., 2021). The ability to interpret and analyse written material directly influences students' writing and speaking abilities, as they can draw upon rich vocabulary and complex structures encountered in their reading.

Listening, on the other hand, is essential for real-time comprehension and active engagement in communication. It facilitates the internalisation of language patterns, intonation, and pronunciation, which are critical for speaking proficiency. Effective listening strategies, such as identifying key ideas and summarizing information, enhance comprehension skills and foster more articulate spoken responses. Research indicates that students who excel in listening often demonstrate stronger overall language competence, as they can effectively process spoken information and respond appropriately (Kök, 2017).

Meanwhile, grammar serves as the structural foundation that supports all four language skills. A strong grasp of grammatical rules enables learners to construct coherent sentences in writing and speaking, while also aiding in the accurate interpretation of texts during reading and listening activities. Understanding grammar enhances students' ability to apply complex structures effectively, allowing for nuanced expression in both written and spoken forms. Consequently, grammar acts as a linking element between reading and listening skills, as comprehension in these areas often relies on recognizing and utilizing grammatical forms accurately. Thus, the integration of grammar instruction within reading and listening activities is crucial for fostering overall language competence, reinforcing the interconnected nature of these skills within the Skill Interdependence Model. In summary, the Skill Interdependence Model illustrates how reading and listening skills not only contribute to English language competence but also interact with grammar to enhance overall proficiency. By recognizing the interrelatedness of these skills, educators can design more effective language learning experiences that promote comprehensive language development.

As highlighted earlier, the Skill Interdependence Model (SIM) emphasises on four language proficiency skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening which corresponds to English language competence in general. The positive performance on the four skills is dependent on the aptitude in each skill showcased by cognitive and sociocultural theories of language learning. These theories enhance language skills via substantial contexts of interaction and practice and subsequently create dynamics for a comprehensive language acquisition process (Vygotsky, 1978). This shows the importance of linguistic competence to be perceived not merely based on the surface, but with a further view that it strongly affects students' cognitive abilities at the deeper level involving their competence to understand other subjects than English language. The fundamental vocabulary, comprehension, and critical thinking abilities are all localised in the reading skill. It encourages contextual understanding through exposure to a variety of language structures and grammatical as well as lexical aspects. Tonks et al. (2021) highlighted that using a variety of reading materials allows students to achieve better comprehension and effective communication when they gain more knowledge and inferencing skills. Besides, students' writing and speaking competencies are reflected in their ability in interpreting and analysing written materials regardless of the subject matters. Reading helps students heighten vocabulary capacity and identify complex sentence structures.

On the other hand, listening involves spontaneous comprehension and active engagement in communication due to personalised language patterns, intonation and pronunciation. Efficient use of listening strategies such as identifying key ideas and summarising information resulted in highly articulated spoken responses and enhanced comprehension. Kök (2017) concluded that students who are proficient in listening are mostly competent in overall language skills due to their ability in providing and processing oral responses.

Research on English for Business Management students revealed low scores across all areas of an Intensive English test, with challenges in listening and speaking (Nithideechaiwarachok et al., 2022). Apart from the challenge in comprehending English interactions, Students in this study showed struggles in writing in-class notes from the lectures. When they had to speak, they had difficulties in ensuring the accurate pronunciation, the usage of correct grammar and choice of words. It can be typically seen that this is especially true when students need to make sense of different English accents and generally apparent in grasping English with the native levels of pace. Similarly, a study of English majors at the University of Burundi showed that most graduating students were at an intermediate level, with receptive skills (grammar, reading comprehension, and vocabulary) being better developed than productive/communicative skills (Nizonkiza & Van De Poel, 2022). These studies revealed that students are keenly aware of their English language challenges and express a strong desire to improve their skills, with preferences for diverse teaching methods and an understanding of the importance of English for regional integration.

Interestingly, the development of language skills appears to follow a specific order. Grammar and reading comprehension tend to be stronger, while listening skills are often less developed (Davies, 1967; Nizonkiza & Poel, 2022). This is elaborated by Chou (2015) who argues further that his pattern may be influenced by traditional teaching methods that emphasize reading and grammar over listening and speaking. The relationship between listening and the ability to comprehend is complex but mutually reciprocal. Research has shown a positive correlation between listening comprehension strategy use and overall listening proficiency (Kök, 2017), suggesting that targeted instruction in listening strategies could improve overall language competence. This is because university students' English language competence often falls short of advanced levels, with many at basic or intermediate stages. While grammar and reading skills tend to be stronger, listening comprehension remains a continuous challenge for many learners. To improve overall language proficiency, a balanced approach that addresses all language skills, particularly emphasising listening and speaking, is crucial. Incorporating innovative teaching methods, such as using podcasts for listening practice as suggested by Syifa et al. (2024), could help enhance students' language competence across all skills.

It can be concluded that the four language skills are interrelated and pivoted by the grammar component. Students are required to possess grounded understanding on grammatical lexical to excel sentence constructions in writing and speaking as well as to internalise texts during writing and reading processes. Extensive grammar control leads to better application of complex structures in both reading and listening processes and subsequently provides nuances in the quality of written and oral activities. The Skill Interdependence Model is grounded in the linguistic interdependence concept, which expounds that skills developed in one language can be transferred to another language or other skills, thereby aiding in holistic language development. Therefore, it can also be drawn clearly that this model is crucial in creating effective language learning experiences for students pivoting on the promoted skills to cater to comprehensive language development.

The Predictive Elements of Listening, Reading, and Grammar and Their Challenges towards ESL Learners' Proficiency

Proficiency in the English language plays an important role in the overall academic success of diploma students, whereby it directly influences students' ability to engage with course content and achieve excellent results. The predictive value of English proficiency is noteworthy even in non-English medium contexts. Azkiyah et al, (2023) explored the effects of English language proficiency and multilingualism on the academic performance of international students by investigating 59 second- and fourth-year international students at the Louisiana University in the USA. Students with higher self-perception of their English proficiency and those who spoke at least three languages had higher mean GPAs. In a situation where the primary language of instruction is other than English, students with better English proficiency have the tendency to do better in their studies. The research has also proven that international students with higher English proficiency levels achieve better GPAs as compared to their fellow peers with a weaker grasp of the English language (Azkiyah et al, 2023; Wang et al., 2023). The finding of the research proves the significance of the English language in comprehending complex subject matter. The proficiency of the English language among university students differs notably, with most first-year students showcasing basic competence levels. According to Damayanti et al. (2024), most of the students enrolled in Early Childhood Education at Universitas Negeri Medan were identified as possessing A2

level (basic English usage) based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). This level is like the English proficiency capabilities of children in elementary school, showcasing a dire need for an enhancement in the national curriculum specifically in tertiary education.

Listening comprehension is viewed as an active process where learners focus on selected aspects of aural input, construct meaning, and relate it to existing knowledge (O'Malley et al., 1989). The schema-based teaching model, applying pre-, while-, and post-listening stages, has shown promise in improving students' involvement, comprehension, and participation in listening activities (Wang, 2024). This approach aligns with the theoretical view of listening as an active process. Reading comprehension is closely linked to inference strategies, competence beliefs, and task value. Tonks et al. (2021) explored two studies and one of them involved 93 participants from a community college who completed comprehension assessments followed by a survey of their beliefs in their competence and value towards tasks. The other study involved 418 students at three different colleges who completed the same assessment tasks. The studies have shown that task value positively predicts comprehension performance through increased elaborations while thinking aloud (Tonks et al., 2021). Additionally, foundational reading skills are strong predictors of both types of inferencing (elaboration and bridging) and comprehension. In summary, task value and foundational reading skills are significant predictors of comprehension performance, thus underscoring the importance of fostering both motivational and skill-based components in educational settings to improve reading comprehension.

Furthermore, O'Malley et al. (1989) elaborates that the active process of listening comprehension occurs in the manner that learners focus on certain aspects of aural input and construct meaning by relating it to their prior knowledge. Students can engage, understand, and participate more effectively in listening activities when using a schema-based teaching model that incorporates pre-, while-, and post-listening stages (Wang, 2024). This approach aligns with the theoretical perspective of listening as an active process. In contrast, reading comprehension is associated with inference strategies, beliefs about one's competence, and the value of the task. This is substantiated by Zolkapli et al. (2024) who maintained that students would demonstrate their greatest satisfaction when the lesson content is felt to be strongly relevant, critical, and easily understandable to them, validating the importance of students' task-value belief in the learning process through active listening.

Proficiency in English are typically associated with stronger receptive skills compared to their productive abilities, alongside a clear awareness of their challenges and a desire for improvement. This is supported by a mixed-method study conducted on the English majors at the University of Burundi involving final-year English students who sat for The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) followed by a survey questionnaire. It was revealed that most of the final year students' English proficiency was at an average level, but their receptive skills (grammar, reading, comprehension and vocabulary) are better developed than the productive or communicative skills (Nizonkiza & Van De Poel, 2022). The study has shown that students are deeply aware of their English language skills and challenges faced, with a keen interest in improving their skills. Students also possess preference for different teaching and learning approaches as well as an understanding of the importance of English mastery for regional integration. Besides that, it is worth noting that the development of language skills among most students appears to follow a certain order. The stronger components tend to be developed are grammar and reading comprehension, while listening skills are usually less progressed (Davies, 1967; Nizonkiza & Poel, 2022). This could possibly be attributed to the traditional teaching approaches that focus more on reading and grammar especially at a younger age as compared to other components like listening and speaking (Chou, 2015). However, according to Kök (2017), several research studies have highlighted the positive correlation between listening comprehension strategy use and overall listening proficiency, suggesting that targeted instruction in listening strategies could improve overall language competence.

This shows that a significant number of university students' English language proficiency are at a low or intermediate level, and competency on the language itself is often far from advanced levels. A challenge many learners face would be listening comprehension, even though they are more competent with their grammar and reading skills. To improve overall proficiency in the language, it is important to practice a holistic approach that addresses all language skills, with more importance placed towards listening and speaking. Incorporating innovative teaching methods, such as using podcasts for listening practice (Syifa et al., 2024), could be one of the tools used to enhance students' language skills across all areas.

In addition, reading skills are argued to be a common challenge for students learning English as a second language. This difficulty could stem from varying factors, such as limited vocabulary, lack of exposure to abundant reading materials, and lack of practice in reading comprehension strategies. In a study by Yuyun et al. (2018) involving students who took English Proficiency Test (EPT) at tertiary level or university students, particularly the first-year university students (freshmen), students would face difficulties in understanding the main ideas and details of text, which could be an impediment towards their overall academic performance. Another study by Zhang (2021) complements the study by highlighting that the competence in reading English materials differs between students of different majors. This could be attributed to the difference in emphasis on the English language in their respective curricula. For example, as compared to students in humanities and social sciences majors, students in STEM fields may possibly have lesser exposure to substantial reading in English. Due to this disparity, students develop different levels in reading proficiency, which affects their ability to understand and analyse academic texts with ease. These language difficulties were linked to various complications such as institutional, dispositional, situational, academic, and pedagogical challenges faced by adult learners, as suggested by Shousha (2021). On the other hand, a study by Ngo et al. (2021) stresses the importance of continuous study and recommends a more concentrated approach to teaching grammar which could considerably enhance students' proficiency. Additionally, they suggested incorporating more interactive and practical grammar exercises to aid students in applying the correct grammatical rules within real-life contexts.

Regarding grammar competence, diploma students often struggle with tenses, question formations, and reported speech (Shousha, 2021). These challenges are attributed to various barriers, including institutional, dispositional, situational, academic, and pedagogical factors. A study on Malaysian ESL students found that most students' performance in grammar tests falls in the middle range, suggesting a need for enhanced focus on grammar teaching and learning (Ngo et al., 2021). In grammar competence, diploma students usually face difficulties in tenses, question formations, and reported speech (Ibrahim Shousha, 2021). These difficulties are caused by many factors, such as institution, disposition, situation, academic, and pedagogy. According to Ngo et al., (2021), it is recommended to pay more attention to grammar teaching and learning for the Malaysian ESL students as they scored moderate marks in grammar tests conducted.

Recent studies have explored innovative approaches to improving these competencies. For instance, cooperative learning has shown a larger effect on vocabulary knowledge, grammar, listening, and reading skills compared to traditional methods (Yavuz & Arslan, 2018). Video-based instruction has also been found to improve students' understanding of grammar in writing assignments, particularly in areas like degree comparison (Devi et al., 2024). These studies highlight the complex nature of language learning and the importance of adopting diverse, engaging teaching strategies to address the specific challenges faced by diploma students in English language acquisition. Current research has identified innovative methods to improve competencies such as applying cooperative learning. This method has been proven to have positive effects towards the students' vocabulary knowledge, grammar, listening as well as reading skills (Yavuz & Arslan, 2018). Another method to improve their understanding of grammar in written assessment is using video-based instruction especially in aspects like degree comparison (Devi et al., 2024). These studies identify the need to apply various methods of teaching strategies to overcome the difficulties faced by diploma students in acquiring English language. This is also because language learning is complex in nature.

Various studies on diploma students' English competence in their first year at university reveal diverse findings, highlighting significant improvements in proficiency levels while also identifying persistent challenges, particularly in writing and reading comprehension skills. Some studies on diploma students' English competence and quality in their first years at university have employed various research designs and sampling methods, yielding diverse findings. A study done by Lestari (2020) on 100 first-year students at an EMI university used purposive sampling and a mixed-methods approach, including pre- and post-tests and questionnaires. The results showed improvement across all proficiency levels, with the B2 group experiencing the highest improvement. Writing skills were found to have the least improvement (Lestari, 2020). Another study focusing on first-year university students used an English Proficiency Test to analyse listening, structure, written expressions, and reading skills. The findings revealed that reading comprehension was the major challenge for students, particularly in reviewing overall reading texts (Yuyun et al., 2018).

In addition to the above, various studies that applied a variety of research designs and sampling methods have been conducted on first-year university students' English language competency and quality and produced diverse findings. For example, a study conducted by Lestari (2020) at EMI university applied purposive sampling and a mixed-methods approach which includes pre- and post-tests and questionnaires on 100 first-year students. According to Lestari (2020), the results portrayed improvement for all proficiency levels, specifically the B2 group that scored the highest achievement. Meanwhile, another study conducted by Yuyun et al. (2018), showed that the biggest problem faced by the first-year students was the reading comprehension. The study analysed skills like listening, structure, written expressions and reading through an English Proficiency Test.

A mixed-method study on 12 female freshmen at Majmaah University examined the effect of Project-Based Learning (PBL) on productive skills. The research design included pre- and post-tests, semi-structured interviews, and participant observations. Results showed significant improvement in speaking and writing performance after implementing PBL strategies (Aldobekhi & Abahussain, 2024). Interestingly, a case study of 28 English Department first-year students at Wijaya Kusuma University Surabaya focused on language anxiety levels. Using a Likert scale questionnaire, the study found that most students experienced moderate anxiety levels, with fear of negative evaluation being the most common type (Surjowati et al., 2022). A quantitative study on first-year Early Childhood Education students at Universitas Negeri Medan assessed various English language skills. The findings indicated that 70% of students demonstrated proficiency at the A2 level (CEFR), corresponding to basic English usage (Damayanti et al., 2024). The insights derived from the above studies can significantly enhance productive language skills among students, but issues such as language anxiety persist, particularly among freshmen, suggesting that educational strategies must address both skill development and emotional factors to foster comprehensive language proficiency.

There are studies which have shown specific issues and growing concerns over the competence and quality of English within Diploma students. Particularly, listening, reading, and grammar skills are the main areas of difficulty. It was identified that listening skills are a major challenge for diploma students. Research involving 210 Part 1 Diploma students at UiTM Kelantan branch found that the physical environment was the main problem for listening, leading to a need for Technology Assisted Language Learning (TALL) to enhance listening skills (Salleh et al., 2018). Another study revealed that diploma students face difficulties with higher cognitive listening skills, such as when guessing meaning from context (Shousha, 2021). To add, research conducted on Vietnamese university students majoring in English, showcased numerous barriers when it comes to comprehension in listening. This includes language competence levels, exposure for different accents, and insufficient realistic listening materials (Nhan, 2024).

Based on the reviewed literature, the limited focus on specific disciplines or contexts is one of the gaps discovered in the existing research. For instance, a study on Health Science students' English language gaps employed a mixed-methods approach, revealing good proficiency in grammar and reading but poor listening skills and essay writing abilities (Mohammed & Gayessa, 2024). This suggests a need for more targeted research on English language competence in specific academic fields. In conclusion, these studies highlight the diverse approaches to assessing English competence among first-year university students. While some focus on general language skills, others examine specific aspects such as anxiety levels or the effectiveness of teaching methods like PBL. The findings consistently show areas for improvement, particularly in productive skills and reading comprehension, emphasizing the need for tailored English language courses and teaching strategies in higher education.

The reviewed literature also identified one important gap in existing research which is the limited focus on specific skills and contexts. For example, a study among Health Science students that applied a mixed-method approach found that students who were good in grammar and reading skills did not possess the same proficiency in listening and essay writing skills (Mohammed & Gayessa, 2024). This indicates that in the future, researchers must come out with more focused studies on English language competency within specific academic fields. In a nutshell, these studies emphasise various methods to assess first-year university students' English competency. Some studies concentrate on general language skills while others investigate specific elements like anxiety levels or the effectiveness of teaching methods such as PBL. There is a need for specific English language courses and

teaching strategies implemented in higher education as the findings of the studies consistently show some areas of improvement. These include productive skills such as speaking and writing as well as reading comprehension.

METHOD

Research Approach and Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research approach, specifically utilising correlation studies to examine the relationship between various components of the English Placement Test (EPT) and overall test scores among diploma students. The quantitative approach is particularly effective in identifying patterns and relationships within numerical data, allowing for statistical analysis to draw meaningful conclusions (Creswell, 2014). The research design focuses on analysing secondary data from an existing database of EPT results, which includes scores for listening, reading, and grammar skills. By correlating these component scores with overall performance, the study aims to identify which skills most significantly predict English proficiency, thereby contributing to the understanding of language acquisition in educational contexts (Field, 2018).

Sampling

The sample for this study consists of the English Placement Test results of all 5,422 diploma students who participated recorded in March 2023. These students took the test to qualify for exemption from the first-level diploma code, making it a relevant population for assessing English language proficiency. The use of a comprehensive sample allows for a robust analysis of the data, as it encompasses a wide range of student abilities and backgrounds. By having a comprehensive population sampling, it enables the research to closely reflect the behaviours of the general population (Mohamad et al., 2024). This approach enhances the generalisability of the findings, as it reflects the performance of a significant cohort within the educational institution (Cohen et al., 2018). By including all students who sat for the test, the study ensures that the results are representative of the broader student population.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data collection involved gathering the EPT results, entailing individual component scores for listening, reading, and grammar. These scores were extracted from the available database and analysed using SPSS software, which is widely recognized for its capabilities in statistical analysis (Pallant, 2020). The primary statistical method employed was multiple regression analysis, which examines the impact of the predictor variables (listening, reading, and grammar) on the overall English test score. Following the regression analysis, correlation coefficients were calculated to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between each component and overall performance. This comprehensive analysis provides insights into which specific skills contribute most significantly to English proficiency, guiding future instructional strategies (Field, 2018).

RESULTS

RQ1: Do students' three different English proficiency skills (Reading, Writing, Grammar) predict their overall English performance?

To investigate whether students' three different English proficiency skills (Reading, Writing, Grammar) predict their overall English performance, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. The model included three predictors: Reading EPT Grade, Grammar EPT Grade, and Listening EPT Grade.

Model Summary

Model	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> Square
1	.932	.869

ANOVA

Model	F	df	Sig.
Regression	11, 966.95	3	.000
Residual		5,419	

The results indicated a strong relationship between the predictors and overall English performance, with $R = .932$, suggesting a high level of correlation. The coefficient of determination, R^2 , was .869, indicating that approximately 86.9% of the variance in overall English performance can be explained by the three proficiency skills, thus confirming the robustness of the model.

ANOVA results revealed that the regression model was statistically significant, $F(3, 5419) = 11966.951$, $p < .001$. This suggests that the combined effect of the predictors significantly contributes to predicting overall English performance. Overall, the findings support the Skill Interdependence Model hypothesis that students' proficiency in reading, writing, and grammar significantly predicts their overall English performance, thus complementing to the existing body of knowledge on the significant functions of the interrelatedness of the relevant proficiency components.

RQ2: How much does each of three proficiency skills (Reading, Writing, Grammar) predict their overall English performance?

Coefficients

Predictor	Standardized Coefficient (Beta)	T	Sig.
(Constant)		15.52	<.001
Grammar EPT Grade	.340	63.16	.000
Reading EPT Grade	.542	97.87	.000
Listening EPT Grade	.361	68.84	.000

Dependent Variable: Overall EPT Marks

Examining the coefficients, the results indicated that all three proficiency skills were significant predictors of overall English performance. Specifically, the Grammar EPT Grade ($t=63.18$, $p < .001$) showed a significant positive prediction to English performance, with a standardized coefficient (β) of .340. The Reading EPT Grade ($t=97.87$, $p < .001$) had the strongest significant positive impact, with a standardized coefficient (β) of .542. Finally, the Listening EPT Grade ($t=68.84$, $p < .001$) also significantly predicted overall performance, with a standardized coefficient (β) of .361. In summary, all three proficiency skills—Reading, Writing, and Grammar—were significant predictors of students' overall English performance, with the Reading skill demonstrating the highest predictive power. This finding also suggests the importance of all sub-aspects related to the students' significant role of reading skills, eventually being the driving factors for the other English proficiency components which include Writing, and Grammar to be later attainable to the students.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results indicated that students' proficiency in all Reading, Writing, and Grammar skills significantly predicts

their overall English performance. This finding suggests that these skills are interconnected and that improvements in any one of them may positively influence overall performance in English. It validates the importance of a well-rounded approach to language instruction, where each area of proficiency is developed to enhance overall language competence (Nithideechaiwarachok et al., 2022; Yuyun et al., 2018). This interconnectedness is crucial, as it aligns with theories of language acquisition that advocate for integrated skill development (Wang et al., 2023). This interconnectedness emphasizes the need for educational programs to adopt a holistic approach that fosters simultaneous development across all language skills, ultimately leading to improved overall language proficiency and academic success.

Individually, further analysis revealed that each proficiency skill—Reading, Listening, and Grammar—contributes uniquely to predicting overall English performance. Among these, Reading emerged as the most influential skill, suggesting that strong reading abilities may enhance comprehension and application of language in various contexts. The findings also indicated that Listening and Grammar are essential components, reinforcing the idea that a balanced focus on all three skills is crucial for effective language learning. This underscores the necessity for educational programs to integrate strategies that foster development in these key areas to support students' overall English proficiency. Therefore, prioritising a balanced curriculum that simultaneously enhances Reading, Listening, and Grammar skills will be essential in equipping students with the comprehensive language proficiency needed for success in both academic and professional contexts.

It can be suggested from all the findings of this research that a comprehensive language curriculum should prioritise the interplay aspect among these skills, ensuring that students receive proportionately relevant learning experience that fosters growth across all domains. In addition, educational programs must implement targeted interventions that not only improve reading skills but also support listening and grammar development, ensuring that students are well-equipped for both academic and professional settings.

In terms of the theoretical contributions, this research underscores the long-term integrated nature of Reading, Listening, and Grammar skills in predicting overall English proficiency among diploma students, aligning with existing literature that emphasizes the active nature of language learning (O'Malley et al., 1989). By revealing that Reading is the most influential skill, this study supports the notion that strong reading abilities enhance comprehension and application across various contexts (Tonks et al., 2021). Moreover, it highlights the necessity of a multi-faceted instructional design and approach, incorporating innovative strategies such as schema-based teaching and cooperative learning, which have been shown to significantly improve language competencies (Wang, 2024; Yavuz & Arslan, 2018). The implications of these findings are profound, suggesting that educational programs must prioritise the simultaneous development of all three skills to nurture the comprehensive mastery of language proficiency. This holistic approach not only addresses the specific challenges faced by students in grammar and reading (Ibrahim Shousha, 2021; Ngo et al., 2021) but also enhances their overall academic performance and self-efficacy in English. Ultimately, this research provides a framework for educators to design curricula that are responsive to the diverse needs of students, ensuring they are well-equipped for both academic and professional success in an increasingly globalised context.

Apart from the interconnectedness that aligns with theories of language acquisition advocating for integrated skill development, this study demonstrates that Reading, Listening, and Grammar skills contribute differently at different degrees to overall English performance in its individual manner respectively. Among these skills, Reading proved to be the most impactful skill, indicating that strong reading abilities can significantly enhance comprehension and the practical application of language across various contexts (Tonks et al., 2021). However, the results still highlight the importance of Listening and Grammar as essential components. Thus, maintaining a careful perspective with proportionate emphasis on these skills is crucial for effective English learning.

Overall, it can be concluded that there is a strong necessity of a balanced instructional approach, integrating innovative strategies such as schema-based teaching and cooperative learning, which have been shown to significantly improve language competencies (Wang, 2024; Yavuz & Arslan, 2018). Similarly, Nithideechaiwarachok et al. (2022) and Yuyun et al. (2018) stress the importance of a well-rounded approach to language instruction, whereby all areas of proficiency are developed simultaneously to enhance overall competence. In other words, educational programs should adopt a holistic approach that promotes the

simultaneous development of all language skills, ultimately leading to improved language proficiency and academic success. Such an approach addresses the specific challenges students face in grammar and reading (Ibrahim Shousha, 2021; Ngo et al., 2021), while simultaneously enhancing their overall academic performance and self-efficacy in English. Therefore, this research provides a framework for educators to design curricula that are responsive to the diverse needs of students, ensuring they are well-equipped for both academic and professional success in an increasingly globalized context.

Future research should concentrate on several key areas related to reading, listening, and grammar skills in English language proficiency among UiTM diploma students, as identified in the findings. Firstly, more longitudinal studies can be conducted to track the development of students' skills over time. Thus, equipping the current literature with more insights into how improvements in any one of these areas can influence the students' overall proficiency and academic performance. Furthermore, additional research is required to determine the best practices for improving language skills by examining the efficacy of teaching strategies in various educational contexts, such as project-based learning and technology-assisted language learning (Aldobekhi & Abahussain, 2024; Mohd Salleh et al., 2018; Onn et al., 2024). Apart from that, the impacts of students' psychological factors, such as language anxiety and motivation on their proficiency need to be examined. Thus, educators may further strategies their approaches to address the barriers that students mainly face (Surjowati et al., 2022). Another context, such as discipline-specific language needs, should be emphasised as well, particularly in fields like Health Science and Early Childhood Education, to tailor and personalise interventions effectively (Mohammed & Gayessa, 2024; Damayanti et al., 2024). Lastly, future studies could amend the current research design and incorporate mixed method approaches to capture a comprehensive view of the students' experiences and challenges. This effort may further entail the current situation of language acquisition in higher education settings.

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