



ENGLISH PROFICIENCY LEVELS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS BASED ON TOEIC LISTENING AND READING SCORES: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY AT HOLY NAME UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

English language proficiency is essential for academic and professional communication, particularly among college students preparing for the demands of the global workforce. This study aimed to determine the overall English proficiency level of Holy Name University college students based on their Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) Listening and Reading scores. Employing a descriptive quantitative approach, the study analyzed institutional TOEIC examination records covering 2023 to 2025 through complete enumeration. Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, range, frequency, and percentage, were used to describe students' examination performance and proficiency classifications. Findings revealed that the average listening scores across examination administrations ranged from 322 to 403, while average reading scores ranged from 260 to 394. Listening performance was generally higher than reading performance, although both recorded equal average scores of 394 in November 2024. Based on the classifications presented in the institutional results, listening proficiency was predominantly described as Intermediate across examination dates, except in October 2025, when it was classified as High Intermediate to Advanced. Reading proficiency was consistently classified as Intermediate across all reported examination dates. These findings provide an institutional profile of students' receptive English proficiency and highlight the importance of examining listening and reading performance separately. The results may inform targeted language instruction, assessment practices, and academic support initiatives at Holy Name University.

KEYWORDS: English proficiency, TOEIC, Listening Proficiency, Reading Proficiency, College Students, Language Assessment

INTRODUCTION

The Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) is a widely accepted standardized test of English proficiency. It evaluates the communication abilities of non-native English speakers, especially in professional and work contexts. The TOEIC test is designed to test practical English communication ability, not just testing knowledge of English grammar or vocabulary. TOEIC assesses all four language skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing, thereby offering an in-depth assessment of an individual's English abilities (ETS Global, n.d.). Nur Hafiza et al. (2024) noted that many international companies use TOEIC scores in recruitment and employee development to assess employees' English proficiency for cross-border communication. Within higher education, standardized English proficiency assessments provide a means of describing learners' language abilities in relation to the communication demands associated with academic preparation and future employment.

In the Philippines, several higher education institutions have incorporated TOEIC into their academic and language assessment initiatives. The growing emphasis on English proficiency in the ASEAN region has encouraged several higher education institutions to incorporate TOEIC into their programs to help students prepare for workplace communication (Lyceum of the Philippines University, 2015; Lyceum System, 2015). In early 2023, the University of Makati introduced a TOEIC

initiative to assess students' English proficiency and strengthen partnerships between the university and industry as part of its smart city vision (University of Makati, 2023). Other institutions have likewise incorporated standardized English proficiency assessment into their efforts to prepare students for professional communication. These institutional initiatives provide a relevant context for examining English proficiency among college students in the Philippine higher education setting.

English proficiency encompasses different language abilities that may vary according to the communication demands encountered by learners. This study draws on Cummins' theory of language proficiency, which distinguishes between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Cummins (2008) explained that learners may communicate comfortably in everyday situations but still have difficulty using English for more demanding academic or workplace tasks. This distinction highlights the importance of examining specific language skills rather than assuming that students' ability to communicate in familiar situations adequately represents their proficiency across different language tasks. In the context of the TOEIC Listening and Reading assessment, the distinction provides a theoretical perspective for understanding students' performance in interpreting spoken and written English.

Reading proficiency is one of the language dimensions assessed through the TOEIC Listening and Reading examination.



Grabe (2009) and Chang and Millett (2013) state that the need for effective reading skills and strategies has increased to cope with the large quantities of information made available due to the advent of the computer and the Internet. Dy et al. (2024) emphasized that reading involves understanding written texts such as emails, memos, and schedules relevant to professional settings. Galicia et al. (2024) defined reading as the understanding of written English materials, ranging from short texts to longer passages, in academic and work contexts. These perspectives establish the relevance of reading proficiency to the comprehension of written information encountered in educational and professional communication.

Listening proficiency constitutes another essential dimension of English language assessment. According to Velasco and Acuña (2021), listening is a cognitive process that involves the use of different strategies, such as metacognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective strategies, to make sense of spoken language. It is defined as the ability to process and interpret spoken English in work and academic contexts and can be enhanced significantly through structured online interventions (Santos, Salonga, and Urian, 2023). Together, listening and reading provide relevant indicators for describing students' receptive English proficiency. Examining these dimensions through standardized assessment results can help characterize students' performance in understanding spoken and written English.

The interpretation of standardized assessment results also requires consideration of how test scores represent the abilities being measured. Classical Test Theory (CTT) explains observed test scores through the relationship between a person's true score and measurement error, expressed as $(X = T + E)$ (Murray, 2000; Harris, 2025). The University of Delaware (n.d.) explains that test results may be influenced by factors such as the testing environment, anxiety, and familiarity with the test format. This perspective underscores the importance of interpreting TOEIC results as indicators of observed test performance rather than complete representations of students' communicative abilities.

In addition to interpreting test scores, describing proficiency in relation to established language standards provides a framework for examining students' English abilities. According to the Council of Europe (2001, updated 2020), the framework has six levels: A1 and A2 for Basic Users, B1 and B2 for Independent Users, and C1 and C2 for Proficient Users. The CEFR is relevant to this study because the Educational Testing Service (ETS) has established links between CEFR proficiency levels and TOEIC Listening and Reading scores (ETS Global, n.d.). These reference levels provide a means of classifying observed TOEIC performance and describing students' proficiency in relation to internationally recognized language benchmarks.

Previous Philippine studies have examined TOEIC performance among college and graduate students, providing empirical context for the use of standardized English proficiency assessments in higher education. Dy et al. (2024) employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to examine the English proficiency of 179 international graduate students at Lyceum of the Philippines University (Manila) based on their

TOEIC listening and reading scores. The majority of students were at the Basic Working Proficiency level. Caiga (2022) also converted the listening and reading scores of students from Lyceum of the Philippines University (Batangas) on the TOEIC for academic years 2014–2016 into comparable Lexile reading levels. These studies illustrate the use of TOEIC results to describe learners' English proficiency and provide information relevant to language instruction in higher education.

The existing studies establish the usefulness of TOEIC results for examining students' English proficiency in particular institutional contexts. Nevertheless, the proficiency distributions observed in one university cannot automatically be assumed to represent those of students enrolled in another institution. An institution-specific examination is therefore relevant for understanding the actual English proficiency profile of its students. At Holy Name University, TOEIC has been incorporated into the GEC Purposive Communication subject, providing an institutional assessment context in which students' listening and reading proficiency can be examined. The university's available TOEIC records offer an opportunity to describe students' performance using a common standardized assessment and associated proficiency benchmarks.

Accordingly, this study aimed to determine the overall English proficiency level of Holy Name University college students based on their TOEIC scores. Specifically, it examined the students' recorded TOEIC Listening and Reading performance and their corresponding proficiency classifications. By describing the observed proficiency levels of students within the institution, the study sought to provide empirical information relevant to understanding English proficiency in the context of higher education at Holy Name University.

METHOD

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive quantitative approach, drawn from the quantitative phase of an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, to determine the English proficiency levels of Holy Name University college students based on their TOEIC Listening and Reading scores. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize students' examination performance and proficiency classifications without conducting inferential analyses.

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at Holy Name University in Tagbilaran City, Bohol, Philippines, where TOEIC was incorporated into the GEC Purposive Communication subject. Through complete enumeration, the study included 4,441 college students who took the examination from 2023 to 2025: 893 in October 2023, 2,376 in April and November 2024, and 1,172 in March and October 2025. Only students with completed and officially recorded TOEIC results were included.

Research Instrument

The study utilized official TOEIC Listening and Reading examination results administered through Holy Name University



and Princeton Assessment and Training, Inc. The recorded listening, reading, and overall scores served as indicators of students' receptive English proficiency. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) provided the reference for interpreting scores according to applicable proficiency classifications.

Data Collection Procedures

Following institutional permission and ethical clearance, the researcher obtained the official TOEIC examination records from the university. The listening, reading, and overall scores were organized, encoded, and classified according to the applicable proficiency benchmarks. Student information was anonymized to ensure confidentiality throughout data processing and analysis.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, and range, were used to summarize students' TOEIC performance. Frequency counts and percentages were employed to determine the distribution of students across the applicable TOEIC and CEFR proficiency levels. No inferential statistical tests were conducted because the study focused solely on describing students' English proficiency.

Ethical Considerations

Institutional permission and ethical clearance were secured before accessing the examination records. Student identities were anonymized, data access was restricted to

authorized research purposes, and findings were reported in aggregate form. Data were securely stored and handled in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173) and the study's established data retention and disposal procedures.

RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

The TOEIC results showed that many Holy Name University students fell within the Intermediate to High Intermediate proficiency levels in both listening and reading. The following discussion presents the results for listening proficiency, as shown in Table 1.

Most students were classified within the Intermediate to High Intermediate levels across the testing periods. In the October 27, 2023 examination, 42% of the students were classified as Intermediate, while 46% were reported under the High Intermediate to Intermediate category. The April 2024 results showed a different distribution, with 22% classified as Intermediate and 24% under the High Intermediate to Intermediate level.

The March 2025 results showed that 49% of the students were classified as High Intermediate to Advanced in listening, with a reported average score of 403. This result suggests that a considerable proportion of students achieved higher listening proficiency during that testing period. However, comparisons across testing periods should be interpreted in light of the score distributions and the proficiency categories used in the assessment

Table 1
Listening Proficiency Levels of Holy Name University Students

Proficiency Level	Scale	Listening Proficiency Trends													
		Oct.26,2023		Oct. 27,2023		Dec.14,2023		April 15-16,2024		Nov. 8, 2024		March 21, 2025		Oct. 30, 2025	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	F	%	F	%
Beginner	60 – 105	1	<1%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	<1%
Elementary to Low Intermediate	110 – 270	50	3%	59	6%	10	19%	103	4%	39	2%	15	4%	98	12%
Intermediate	275 – 395	366	20%	393	42%	3	6%	615	22%	420	22%	152	39%	326	42%
High Intermediate to Advanced	400 – 485	431	24%	429	46%	7	13%	679	24%	463	25%	190	49%	308	39%
Advanced	490 – 495	45	3%	46	5%	-	-	-	-	-	0%	11	3%	52	7%
Highly Advanced	495	893	50%			34	63%	1421	50%	955	51%	19	5%	-	-
Total		1786	100%	927	100%	54	100%	2818	100%	1877	100%	387	100%	785	100%
Average Score		397		392		322		384		394		403		375	
Description		Intermediate		Intermediate		Intermediate		Intermediate		Intermediate		High Intermediate to Advance		Intermediate	

The results suggest that students can understand spoken English in familiar situations, including everyday conversations and standard instructions. At the Intermediate to High Intermediate levels, students may be able to follow spoken English in academic and professional contexts. However, some difficulties may remain, particularly when listening to fast-paced conversations, understanding unfamiliar accents, or processing complex spoken texts. These areas may need further attention in the proposed TOEIC Preparatory Program.



Table 2
Reading Proficiency Levels of Holy Name University Students

Proficiency Level	Scale	Reading Proficiency Trends													
		Oct.26,2023		Oct. 27,2023		Dec. 14,2024		April 15-16, 2024		Nov. 8, 2024		March 21, 2025		Oct. 30, 2025	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Beginner	60 – 105	11	<1%	14	<2%	2	3%	-	-	2	0%	2	1%	8	<1%
Elementary to Low Intermediate	110 – 270	287	16%	342	37%	17	27%	246	9%	264	14%	87	22%	242	31%
Intermediate	275 – 395	394	22%	384	41%	3	5%	670	24%	560	29%	186	48%	436	56%
High Intermediate to Advanced	400 – 485	196	11%	182	20%	8	10%	496	18%	128	7%	110	28%	98	12%
Advanced	490 – 495	5	<1%	5	1%	-	-	-	-	-	0%	1	<1%	1	<1%
Highly Advanced	495	893	50%	-	-	34	55%	1421	50%	955	50%	1	<1%	-	-
Total		1786	100%	927	100%	62	100%	2833	100%	1909	100%	387	100%	785	100%
Average Score		316		307		260		356		394		336		308	
Description		Intermediate		Intermediate		Elementary to Low Intermediate		Intermediate		Intermediate		Intermediate		Intermediate	

The reading results also placed students, overall, within the Intermediate proficiency level. However, their performance in reading appeared lower than their listening performance during some testing periods. In the October 27, 2023 examination, 41% of the students were classified as Intermediate, while 20% were reported under the High Intermediate to Intermediate levels.

A similar pattern appeared in October 2025, when 56% of the students fell within the Intermediate category. Meanwhile, 31% were classified within the Elementary-to-Low Intermediate range, indicating that a considerable group of students continued to experience difficulties with reading. The average reading scores across the testing periods were 307, 316, 356, 308, and 336, with most remaining within the Intermediate range. These findings point to the need to give attention to reading comprehension in the proposed TOEIC Preparatory Program.

The results suggest that students can understand the main ideas in written texts, particularly those involving familiar topics and academic materials. However, they may find longer passages, unfamiliar vocabulary, and more complex reading tasks difficult. The lower reading proficiency observed in some testing periods suggests that students may benefit from additional support in developing reading comprehension strategies and expanding their vocabulary. Providing more opportunities to read varied English texts may also help address these learning needs. These areas can be considered in developing the proposed TOEIC Preparatory Program.

An (2021) found that students who took the TOEIC examination demonstrated working levels of English proficiency. The findings also suggested that TOEIC results could be used as a basis for developing programs to strengthen students' English language skills. Similarly, Dy et al. (2024) reported that most graduate students who took the TOEIC Listening and Reading Test obtained scores indicating that they could engage in academic and workplace communication. However, the findings also pointed to the need for further language development. These studies support the use of TOEIC results in identifying students' proficiency levels and determining areas that may require additional instructional support. In addition, Mijares and

Bulaybulay (2025) noted that students participating in TOEIC preparation showed improved listening, reading, and vocabulary skills, indicating moderate to high English proficiency.

In general, the TOEIC scores suggest that Holy Name University students have functional English communication skills at an Intermediate proficiency level in listening and reading. However, the results also show some deficiencies in higher-order language skills, especially in advanced reading comprehension and listening accuracy, which support the need for an English preparatory program to enhance further students' communicative competence and preparedness for international English proficiency tests such as the TOEIC.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study underscores the importance of utilizing standardized English proficiency assessments to inform evidence-based instructional planning and language development initiatives. The findings highlight the need to consider listening and reading as distinct yet complementary dimensions of English proficiency, as students may demonstrate varying levels of competence across these skills. For Holy Name University, TOEIC assessment results provide a basis for identifying instructional priorities and strengthening language learning support in response to students' demonstrated competencies. Integrating proficiency assessment findings into curriculum planning and instructional practices may contribute to more responsive and targeted approaches to English language education. Ultimately, the study emphasizes the value of continuous proficiency assessment in supporting the development of students' English communication skills and preparing them for the linguistic demands of academic and professional environments.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, it is recommended that Holy Name University strengthen its use of TOEIC assessment results as a basis for evidence-based instructional planning and continuous language proficiency



development. English language faculty may utilize students' listening and reading proficiency profiles to identify learning needs and implement targeted instructional strategies that address specific areas requiring improvement. The university may also consider integrating periodic proficiency assessments and appropriate language enhancement activities into its existing communication courses to support students' continued English language development. Furthermore, students are encouraged to engage in independent learning activities that strengthen their listening comprehension, reading comprehension, and familiarity with English used in academic and professional contexts. Future researchers may extend the investigation by examining factors associated with TOEIC performance, exploring differences across academic programs, or conducting longitudinal studies to better understand students' English proficiency development over time.

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