

Pre-College English Course Score and First Semester Achievement *Are They Truly Correlated?*

Nihta V. F. Liando, Rafael Sengkey and Orbanus Naharia
Universitas Negeri Manado, Tondano, Indonesia
nihtaliando@unima.ac.id

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Abstract: It is compulsory for all new undergraduate students at Unika De La Salle Manado to take pre-college English course provided by the institution. Having implemented this program since this institution started has triggered the curiosity to find out its effectiveness. The purpose of this study was to investigate if there is a significant relationship between English language proficiency (measured by PCEC Score) and the students' academic achievement (measured by first semester GPA). This study involved undergraduate students at Unika De La Salle Manado majoring in Informatics. From 38 Informatics students, 20 students were selected as samples. After the data were processed using Pearson's Correlation, the results showed that the correlation between students' PCEC score and their GPA reached 0.635. It could be concluded that the PCEC score (representing English knowledge) is correlated positively with GPA (representing academic achievement). This may mean that English knowledge contributes to students' academic achievement.

1 INTRODUCTION

English Proficiency is one of the important aspects to help university students achieve their success in their education. According to Chomsky (1965:3) "Linguistic theory is primarily concerned with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance." Chomsky introduced this theory about language proficiency or competence as something which is mainly used in communication that speaker and listener can share their thoughts without misconception. In other words, language proficiency or competence is the ability to understand a spoken language and to communicate using the language. In a more specific context, language proficiency can be defined as "the ability of students to use the English language to make and communicate meaning in spoken and written context while completing their university studies." (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009:1) This definition specifies the English proficiency as the ability of

students to use English both spoken and written in their time as students in university.

Universities in UK, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and other universities world-wide apply the policy of only accepting students whose mother tongue is not English if they reach certain score in an English proficiency test. In most universities in Indonesia general English subject is one compulsory subject students (non-English major) have to take in the first year of college. English is still regarded important as a skill that can complete their personal skills given now many companies in Indonesia are seeking English speaking employees. Schneider (2011:2) states that "no doubt English is truly the world's leading language today. It is used on all continents. In surprisingly many countries (more than 100, according to recent estimates) it has important internal functions as a second-language in addition to one or more indigenous tongues, being used in politics, business, education, technology, the media, etc. It is almost used as the mediator language by people who need to talk to each other but have different mother tongues." Therefore, to be able to compete in today's world graduates should have adequate English skill.

It is also in line with the program of Economy Community of ASEAN which will be implemented in the end of 2015. In this program, all countries in the

ASEAN will have easier access to market their products as well as their human resources among ASEAN countries. In other words, Indonesian students (especially college students) after being graduated, should be able to compete not only with their fellow citizens but also with others graduates from Singapore, Malaysia, The Philippines, Brunei, Thailand, and other countries in ASEAN. English proficiency is going to play an important role in this matter.

English learning ability varies from one student to another and so does their ability in learning other subjects. Based on the writer's random observation on students at Unika De La Salle Manado, it is often found that students who performed well in English class and generated good score tended to have high GPA in the running semester, meaning that they also did perform well and generate good score in other subjects too, especially the subjects they were majoring. This research focuses on finding the relationship between student's Pre-College English Course score and their GPA in the running semester.

2 RESEARCH DESIGN

This research used quantitative design in processing the data. According to Khotari (2004:31) "research design is the conceptual structure within which research is conducted; it constitutes the blueprint for the collection measurement and analysis of data." Therefore, the research design is indeed important in every research as to generate valid and reliable result. This research used correlation research design to see the relationship between students' scores in English subject and their GPAs. This research was conducted at De La Salle University Manado, one of private universities in North Sulawesi. This research took samples from students commencing in 2014 majoring Informatics. From 38 students, 20 were taken for samples. Having collected all the data (the English score and the GPA) then it was processed using Pearson's Correlation in statistical measurement program SPSS (Statistical Product and Service Solutions) to see the relationship between PCEC score and GPA.

3 RESULTS

The purpose of this research was to measure the extent of relationship between students' score in PCEC and their GPA in the running semester. The

strength of correlation level by Sarwono (2006) was used to interpret the correlation between PCEC score and first semester GPA as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Strength of correlation.

Strength of Correlation	
r	Interpretation
0.67 – 1.00	Very high correlation
0.50 – 0.75	High correlation
0.26 – 0.49	Moderate correlation
0.00 – 0.25	Low correlation

The PCEC score and GPA of students involved in this study were depicted in Table 2.

Table 2: Data for informatics students.

Student	PCEC Score	1 st Semester Grade Point
Student 1	69.67	3.05
Student 2	86.25	2.6
Student 3	79.54	2.7
Student 4	89	3.3
Student 5	80.29	3.35
Student 6	99.25	3.4
Student 7	84.17	2.55
Student 8	95.17	3.45
Student 9	49.92	2.68
Student 10	61.17	2.3
Student 11	77.5	2.1
Student 12	74.25	3.1
Student 13	86.54	2.8
Student 14	65.33	3.15
Student 15	53.08	2.4
Student 16	59.46	2.6
Student 17	77.25	2.65
Student 18	46.75	2.05
Student 19	92.42	3.9
Student 20	68.08	2.53

After the data were calculated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation, it was found that the correlation between PCEC and academic achievement is 0.635. The results show that in the Informatics study program the correlation between students' PCEC score and their Grade Point in semester 1 is high (0.635) seen in Table 3. Student 19 finished PCEC with the score of 92.42 and then generating Grade Point of 3.9. The highest PCEC score was scored by student 6 for 99.25 and then generating 3.4 for Grade Point, followed by student 8 with 95.17 and 3.45 for Grade Point. The lowest PCEC score was scored by student 18 with 46.75 and generating Grade Point of 2.05, followed by student 9 with PCEC score of 49.92 and Grade Point of 2.68.

Table 3: Correlation for informatics students.

		PCEC score	IP sem1
PCEC score	Pearson Correlation	1	.635**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.003
	N	20	20
IPsem1	Pearson Correlation	.635**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	
	N	20	20

4 DISCUSSION

The results of this current research that students' score in PCEC correlates significantly with their first semester GPA. This may explain that when students perform well in the pre-college English course provided by the institution to prepare them before starting their course, they would most likely perform better in their first semester which consequently result in obtaining better GPA for first semester. This current study results confirm the findings by Peal and Lambert (1962:14). In their research study, the sample, in this case the bilingual students showed superior performance on measures of verbal intelligence and on nonverbal test than the monolingual students. Peal and Lambert's study was also supported by Hakuta and Diaz (1985) who argued that there was a significant correlation between having the ability to speak more than one language and their cognitive ability.

Students' academic performance can be affected by their English skill. It shows that being able to have good English skill benefits students in a general way. The current result is supported by the research conducted by Kerstjen and Nery (2000:84) who suggest that the IELTS scores of first-year international students in Australia were correlated with their first semester grade point average. Cummins (1976) stated that becoming bilingual, either as a result of home or school experiences, can positively influence aspects of cognitive functioning. It is understood why there is a significant correlation between general English skill (represented by PCEC score) and academic achievement.

Consistent with these studies, Bialystok (1988) in her research findings also claimed that all bilingual children in involved in her research performed better than monolingual children on all metalinguistic tasks requiring high levels of control of processing and analysis of knowledge. This confirms the arguments

that second or foreign language mastery may support academic performance.

However, correlation does not automatically mean causation. In other words, just because there is a significant correlation between variables does not automatically mean that one variable causes the other variables. If related to this research, students' English knowledge does not automatically mean that it causes their Grade Point Average to be high or low. Factors in English knowledge that influence high Grade Point Average need to be researched further in order to predict that English knowledge affects Grade Point Average.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The findings and discussion lead to a conclusion that the PCEC score (representing English knowledge) is correlated positively with GPA (representing academic achievement). This may mean that English knowledge give positive contribution to students' academic achievement.

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