

Predicting Academic Performance: Correlating IELTS Scores with End-of-Term Grades in Vietnamese High School Students

Nguyen Hoang Huy¹, Pham Ngoc Thang², Ngo Tran Anh Thu³, Nguyen Hoang Anh Thu⁴

¹Business School, Nanyang Technological University, nguyen.huy@theforumcenter.vn

²Master of Business Administration, Western Sydney University, pham.thang@theforumcenter.vn

³School of Information and Communication Technology, Hanoi University of Science and Technology, ngotrananhthu1632001@gmail.com

⁴Faculty of Computer Science and Engineering, Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology, nguyenhathu.int@gmail.com

Abstract

English proficiency is increasingly crucial in Vietnam's globalized landscape, with standardized tests like IELTS serving as key indicators of language ability. However, effectively translating international test scores to local grading systems remains a challenge. This study aimed to establish a reliable conversion method between IELTS scores and end-of-term grades for high school students in Vung Tau, Vietnam. Utilizing a quantitative, correlational design, we analyzed data from 371 students in grade 10 at Le Quy Don specialized school. Data sources included mock IELTS scores administered by The Forum and official end-of-term grades. Pearson correlation and linear regression analyses were employed to examine the relationship between the variables. A significant positive correlation ($r = 0.432, p < 0.01$) was found between IELTS scores and end-of-term grades. Linear regression analysis yielded a statistically significant model ($\text{End-of-term grade} = 0.501 \times \text{IELTS} + 5.843$) for predicting grades based on IELTS scores. A conversion table was developed to provide a practical reference for educators. This study provides a valuable tool for bridging the gap between IELTS scores and academic performance in a Vietnamese educational context. The conversion table can inform educational decision-making regarding student placement, targeted support, and curriculum development, ultimately enhancing the understanding of English proficiency expectations for students and educators alike.

Keywords: IELTS, Grades, High School, Correlation.

1. Introduction

A. Background

In an era defined by globalization, English language proficiency has become paramount for academic success, professional growth, and cross-cultural communication. This holds particularly true for Vietnam, where English skills are highly prized across various industries, fueling a surge in demand for internationally recognized English proficiency certifications. The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) has emerged as a leading measure of English language ability, widely accepted by universities and employers globally as a reliable indicator of communicative competence.

B. Research Gap and Significance

While IELTS scores provide valuable insights into an individual's English proficiency, a significant gap exists in effectively translating these scores into meaningful representations of academic performance within the Vietnamese educational system. There is limited research specifically investigating the correlation between IELTS scores and the traditional grading systems employed in Vietnamese high schools. This gap presents challenges for educators in accurately assessing student capabilities, providing appropriate support, and making informed decisions about curriculum development. This study addresses this critical need by examining the relationship between IELTS scores and end-of-term grades among high school students in Vung Tau City, Vietnam. Establishing a statistically sound conversion method holds significant practical value for various stakeholders:

- **Educators:** A conversion tool can assist teachers in understanding the academic implications of IELTS scores, enabling them to tailor instruction, provide targeted support, and set realistic expectations for students.
- **Students:** A clear understanding of the relationship between IELTS performance and academic grades can motivate students, guide their learning strategies, and provide a tangible benchmark for success.
- **Policymakers:** Research findings can inform educational policies related to English language assessment, curriculum design, and the integration of international testing standards within the Vietnamese educational framework.

C. Research Question

This study aims to answer the following research question: “Is there a statistically significant relationship between IELTS scores and end-of-term grades in a sample of Vietnamese high school students?”

By exploring this question, the research seeks to develop a practical and reliable conversion tool that can bridge the gap between international English proficiency standards and academic achievement in the Vietnamese educational context.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The interconnectedness of the modern world has placed increasing emphasis on English language proficiency as a fundamental skill for academic success, professional advancement, and global engagement [1]. This emphasis is particularly pronounced in countries like Vietnam, where English language skills are highly sought after in various sectors, driving a surge in the demand for internationally recognized English proficiency certifications [2]. Among these, the IELTS has emerged as a prominent measure of English language ability, widely accepted by universities and employers worldwide as a reliable indicator of communicative competence [3].

A substantial body of research underscores the strong correlation between language proficiency and academic achievement. Studies have consistently demonstrated that students with higher levels of English language proficiency, often measured through standardized tests, tend to perform better academically across various subjects [4],[5]. Specifically, research has shown a positive relationship between IELTS scores and academic performance in university settings, particularly in English-medium instruction contexts [6],[7]. However, it's crucial to acknowledge that the predictive validity of standardized language tests like IELTS can vary depending on factors such as the specific academic program, cultural context, and individual learner characteristics [8].

While the relationship between IELTS scores and academic achievement has been explored in various international contexts, research specifically within the Vietnamese educational landscape remains limited. Existing studies on English language assessment in Vietnam have primarily focused on national examinations and classroom-based assessments [9],[10]. There is a scarcity of research investigating how IELTS scores, as an external measure of English proficiency, align with traditional grading systems and academic expectations within Vietnamese high schools. This gap presents challenges for educators in accurately interpreting IELTS scores, providing appropriate support, and making informed decisions about curriculum development. This study aims to bridge this gap by providing empirical evidence and a practical conversion tool to connect IELTS scores with academic performance in the Vietnamese high school context.

3. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, correlational research design to examine the relationship between IELTS scores and end-of-term grades among Vietnamese high school students. Correlational research is well-suited for investigating the extent to which two or more variables are related to each other [11]. This approach allows researchers to determine if changes in one variable are associated with changes in another variable, without manipulating any variables.

B. Participants and Context

The study's participants comprised 371 students enrolled in grade 10 at Le Quy Don specialized school in Vung Tau province, Vietnam. Le Quy Don is a specialized high school known for its rigorous academic standards and emphasis on English language education. The school attracts

highachieving students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds within the province. The selection of a specialized high school provides a valuable context for investigating the relationship between IELTS scores and academic performance among a cohort of students with a demonstrated aptitude for learning and a strong commitment to English language development.

C. Data Collection Instruments

Two primary data sources were used in this study:

- **Mock IELTS Scores:** At the beginning of Term 1 of the 2022-2023 academic year, students participated in a mock IELTS test administered by The Forum, a reputable educational organization in Vietnam. The Forum's mock IELTS test is designed to closely simulate the format and content of the actual IELTS exam, providing a reliable and standardized measure of English language proficiency. The mock test assesses all four language skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Scores are reported on the IELTS 9-band scale.
- **End-of-Term Grades:** Official end-of-term grades for Term 1 of the 2022-2023 academic year were obtained from school records. These grades represent students' overall academic performance in their English language course, encompassing various assessments such as tests, quizzes, assignments, and classroom participation.

D. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The following statistical techniques were employed:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Means, standard deviations, and ranges were calculated to describe the distribution of both IELTS scores and end-of-term grades. Histograms were generated to visually represent the data distribution.
- **Data Normality:** Q-Q plots (Quantile-Quantile plots) were used to visually assess the normality of the data distribution for both variables. Normality is an important assumption for many statistical tests, including Pearson correlation and linear regression [12].
- **Reliability Analysis:** Cronbach's Alpha, a measure of internal consistency, was calculated to assess the reliability of the combined data set (IELTS scores, mid-term grades, and end-of-term grades). A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.7 or higher is generally considered acceptable for research purposes [13].
- **Correlation Analysis:** Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) was used to examine the strength and direction of the linear relationship between IELTS scores and end-of-term grades.

Linear Regression Analysis: Simple linear regression was performed to model the predictive relationship between IELTS scores (predictor variable) and end-of-term grades (criterion variable). The regression equation, R-squared value, and significance levels were reported.

E. Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the school administration and The Forum. Student participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from parents/guardians. Data were de-identified to ensure student anonymity and confidentiality.

4. RESULTS

A. Descriptive Statistics

This section presents the descriptive statistics for both end-of-term English course grades and mock IELTS scores of the 371 participating students.

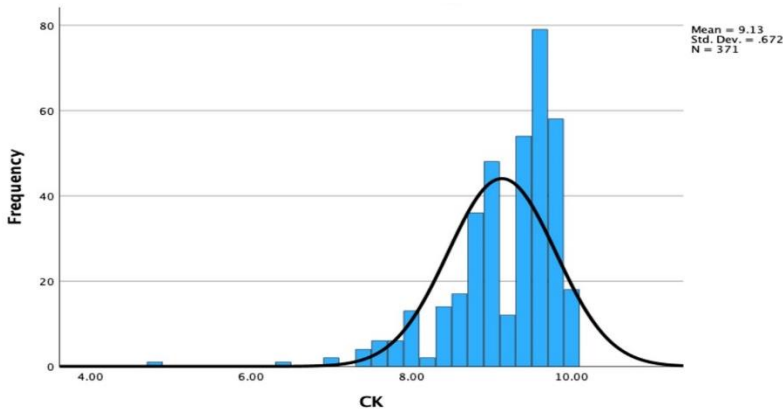


Figure 1: This histogram visually represents the frequency of each end-of-term grade. The x-axis should represent the grade ranges, while the y-axis represents the number of students achieving those grades.

1) Overall Performance: Table I provides a summary of the central tendency and variability for both variables. The average end-of-term grade was 9.128 out of 10, with a standard deviation of 0.672. This suggests that, on average, students performed well in the English course, with scores tending to cluster around the mean. The mock IELTS scores, however, showed a slightly different pattern. The average IELTS score was 5.284 out of 9, with a larger standard deviation of 1.183. This indicates a wider spread of scores, suggesting greater variability in English proficiency levels among the students.

Table I: Descriptive Statistics for End-of-Term Grades and IELTS Scores.

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
End-of-term	371	4.80	10.00	9.1280	- 0.67200
IELTS	371	2.00	7.50	5.2844	1.18293

2) **Distribution of Scores:** Figures 1 and 2 depict the frequency distribution of end-of-term English course grades and mock IELTS scores, respectively. The histogram for end-of-term grades (Figure 1) reveals a somewhat negatively skewed distribution, with a higher concentration of scores towards the upper end of the scale. This pattern aligns with the high average grade and suggests that a majority of students achieved commendable results in the English course. In contrast, the histogram for mock IELTS scores (Figure 2) presents a more symmetrical, albeit slightly positively skewed, distribution. This pattern, coupled with the larger standard deviation, indicates a wider range of English proficiency levels within the student sample.

B. Data Normality and Reliability

Prior to conducting correlational and regression analyses to examine the relationship between IELTS scores and end-of-term grades, it's crucial to assess the data's adherence to key statistical assumptions. This section details the findings regarding the normality and reliability of the dataset.

1) **Normality Assessment:** The assumption of normality, which posits that data are normally distributed, is essential for many parametric statistical tests, including Pearson correlation and linear regression. To assess the normality of the data distribution for both end-of-term English course grades and mock IELTS scores, Q-Q plots (Quantile-Quantile plots) were generated. In a Q-Q plot, if the observed data points closely align with the diagonal line, which represents the expected values under a normal distribution, it suggests that the data are approximately normally distributed. Deviations from the line indicate departures from normality.

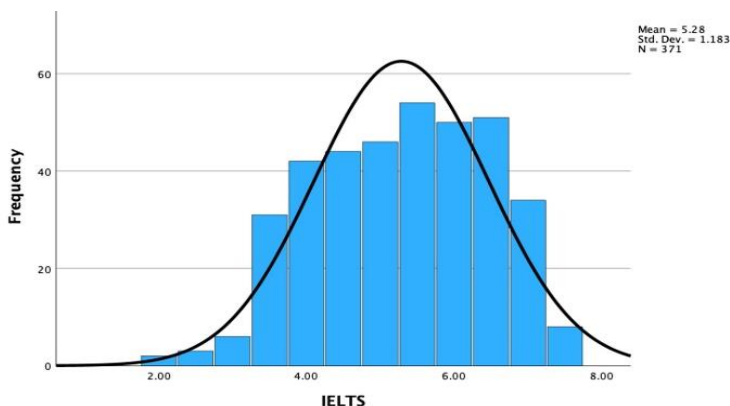


Figure 2: This histogram visually represents the frequency of each IELTS band score. The x-axis should represent the IELTS band scores, while the y-axis represents the number of students achieving those scores.

Visual inspection of Figure 3a reveals that the data points for end-of-term English course grades generally adhere to the diagonal line, suggesting a relatively good fit to a normal distribution. Similarly, Figure 3b demonstrates that the mock IELTS scores also exhibit a relatively good fit to the normality assumption, with the data points clustering closely around the diagonal line. Although minor departures from the line are observed in both plots, these deviations are not substantial enough to raise significant concerns about the violation of the normality assumption.

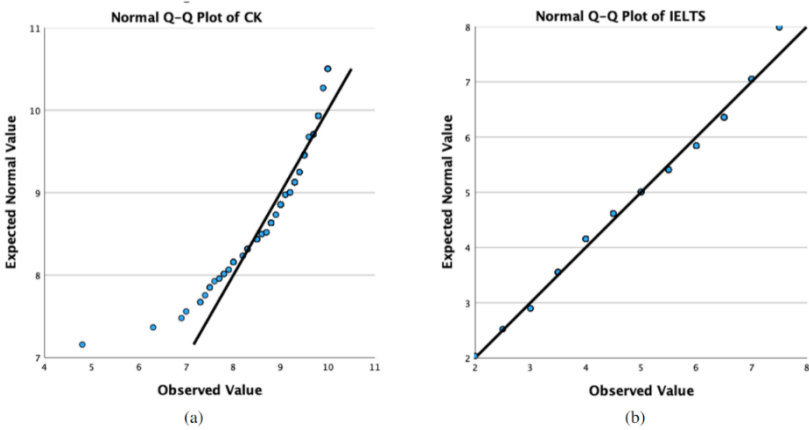


Figure 3. The Q-Q plots of end-of-term English course grades and mock IELTS scores.

2) Reliability Analysis: Reliability refers to the consistency and stability of measurement [14]. In this study, Cronbach's Alpha, a widely used measure of internal consistency, was calculated to evaluate the reliability of the combined dataset, encompassing IELTS scores, mid-term English course grades, and end-of-term English course grades. Cronbach's Alpha assesses how closely related a set of items are as a group, indicating the extent to which they are measuring the same underlying construct.

The analysis yielded a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.701 for the combined dataset. This value exceeds the generally accepted threshold of 0.7, which is considered indicative of good internal consistency [14]. This finding suggests that the measures used in this study, including the mock IELTS test and the English course assessments, are reliably capturing the underlying constructs of English language proficiency and academic performance. The high internal consistency strengthens the validity of the subsequent analyses and enhances the confidence in interpreting the findings.

3) Conclusion: The normality assessment through Q-Q plots and the reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha provide compelling evidence that the data meet the essential statistical assumptions for conducting further analyses. The relatively good fit to normality for both end-of-term grades and IELTS scores, coupled with the high internal consistency of the dataset, support the robustness of the subsequent correlational and regression analyses used to explore the relationship between these variables.

C. Correlation Analysis

Having established the data's normality and reliability, a Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to examine the strength and direction of the linear relationship between mock IELTS scores and end-of-term English course grades.

The analysis revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between mock IELTS scores and end-of-term grades, $r(369) = 0.432, p < 0.001$. This indicates that higher IELTS scores are moderately associated with higher end-of-term grades.

- **Correlation Coefficient (r):** The correlation coefficient (r) of 0.432 signifies a moderate, positive linear relationship. This means that as IELTS scores increase, end-of-term grades tend to increase as well, and vice-versa.
- **Significance Level (p):** The p-value of less than 0.001 indicates that the observed correlation is highly statistically significant. This means that it is highly unlikely to have observed such a strong correlation by chance alone if there were no real relationship between the variables in the population.

1) **Conclusion:** The correlation analysis provides evidence for a significant positive relationship between mock IELTS scores and end-of-term English course grades among the participating Vietnamese high school students. This finding suggests that IELTS scores, even when obtained through a mock test, can provide valuable information about students' likely academic performance in an English language course.

D. Regression Analysis

Building upon the significant correlation between mock IELTS scores and end-of-term English course grades, a simple linear regression analysis was performed. This analysis aimed to model the predictive relationship between these variables, allowing us to estimate end-of-term grades based on IELTS scores.

E. Model Summary

The regression model was statistically significant,

$F(1, 369) = 84.81, p < 0.001$. The model explained a significant proportion of the variance in end-of-term grades, R-squared value = 0.187.

- **Significance (F-statistic and p-value):** The significant F-statistic and the associated p-value of less than 0.001 indicate that the regression model, as a whole, is a statistically significant predictor of end-of-term grades.
- **R-squared:** The R-squared value of 0.187 indicates that the model explains approximately 18.7% of the variance in end-of-term grades. In other words, IELTS scores, as used in this model, can account for about 18.7% of the variability observed in students' English course grades.

1) **Regression Equation:** The following regression equation represents the relationship between the variables:

End-of-Term Grade = 5.843 + 0.501 × (IELTS Score)(1)

- Constant (5.843): This is the y-intercept, representing the predicted end-of-term grade for a student with an IELTS score of 0. However, it's essential to interpret this value cautiously as IELTS scores typically range from 1 to 9, making an IELTS score of 0 practically implausible.
- Regression Coefficient (0.501): This coefficient represents the change in the predicted end-of-term grade for every one-unit increase in the IELTS score. In this case, for every one-band increase in IELTS score, the model predicts an increase of 0.501 points in the end-of-term grade.

Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of individual student scores (represented as blue dots) and allows for a visual assessment of the models' fit to the observed data. The solid line represents the best-fitting linear regression model, demonstrating a clear positive slope consistent with the significant positive correlation identified earlier. While the dashed line (quadratic model) and dotted line (cubic model) offer slight variations in curvature, they do not appear to follow the overall data trend more closely than the linear model. This visual comparison suggests that a linear model provides a reasonable and parsimonious representation of the relationship between IELTS scores and end-of-term grades within the studied sample.

The linear regression analysis provides robust statistical support for the observed relationship between mock IELTS scores and end-of-term English course grades. The statistically significant model ($F(1, 369) = 84.81, p < 0.001$), coupled with the positive regression coefficient (0.501), reinforces the finding that higher IELTS scores are associated with higher predicted end-of-term grades. While the model accounts for a significant portion of the variance in grades (R-squared value = 0.187), it is essential to acknowledge that other factors beyond English proficiency, as measured by the mock IELTS, contribute to students' overall academic performance.

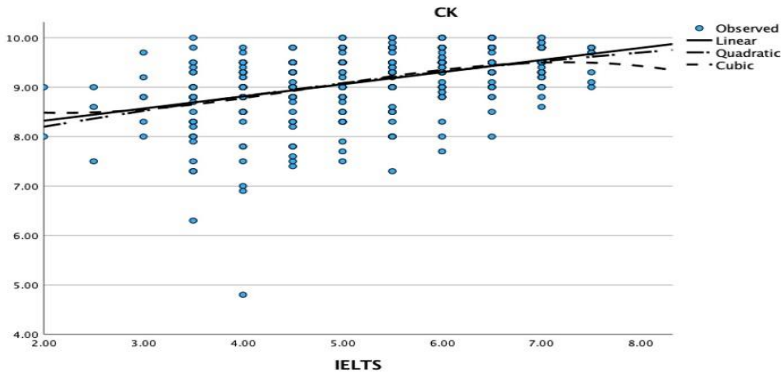


Figure 4: This figure illustrates the scatter plot of the observed data points, along with the fitted lines for the linear, quadratic, and cubic models. As evident from the plot, the linear model closely follows the general trend of the data, suggesting that a linear relationship provides a reasonable approximation of the association between IELTS scores and end-of-term grades.

The visual representation in Figure 4 further supports the suitability of a linear model to approximate the relationship between the variables. The consistent upward trend of the linear model closely reflects the general pattern observed in the data, suggesting that for this dataset, a linear model offers a reasonable and interpretable representation of the relationship.

These findings have important implications for educators seeking to understand and utilize IELTS scores as a potential predictor of academic success in English language courses. However, it is crucial to interpret these results within the context of other factors that influence student learning and to avoid overreliance on a single measure for predicting academic outcomes.

F. Conversion Table

Based on the statistically significant linear regression model (End-of-Term Grade = $5.843 + 0.501 \times \text{IELTS Score}$), a conversion table was developed to provide a practical tool for estimating end-of-term English course grades based on mock IELTS scores.

Table II: The relationship between IELTS scores and end-of-term grades.		
IELTS Score	Unrounded End-of-Term Grade	Rounded End-of-Term Grade
6.0	8.849	8.75
6.5	9.0995	9.0
7.0	9.35	9.25
7.5	9.6005	9.5
8.0	9.851	10.0

The table II presents estimated end-of-term grades for IELTS scores ranging from 6.0 to 8.0, as these scores represent the typical range observed within the studied sample. The “Unrounded” column provides the precise grade estimations based on the regression equation, while the “Rounded” column offers practical grade conversions aligned with the school’s grading system.

5. DISCUSSION

This study investigated the relationship between mock IELTS scores and end-of-term English course grades among a sample of Vietnamese high school students, aiming to establish a statistically sound conversion method for practical application in an educational context. The findings provide valuable insights into the link between English proficiency, as measured by the IELTS, and academic performance in a specific Vietnamese high school setting.

A. Interpretation of Findings

The statistically significant positive correlation between mock IELTS scores and end-of-term grades ($r = 0.432, p < 0.001$) confirms a clear trend: students with higher IELTS scores tend to achieve higher grades in their English course. This finding aligns with a substantial body of research demonstrating a positive relationship between language proficiency and academic achievement across various educational contexts [15].

The linear regression analysis further strengthens this finding by providing a statistically significant model ($F(1, 369) = 84.81, p < 0.001$) for predicting end-of-term grades based

on IELTS scores. The positive regression coefficient (0.501) indicates that for every one-band increase in IELTS score, the model predicts an increase of 0.501 points in the end-of-term grade. This result underscores the predictive validity of IELTS scores, even when obtained through a mock test, in estimating students' potential for success in an English language course.

However, it is crucial to interpret the model's explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.187$) within a realistic framework. While the model accounts for a significant portion of the variance in grades, it is essential to recognize that multiple factors beyond English proficiency influence students' overall academic performance. Variables such as learning styles, motivation, study habits, classroom engagement, and teacher pedagogy likely contribute to the remaining variance in end-of-term grades [16].

B. Practical Implications

Despite its inherent limitations, this study offers several practical implications for educators:

- **Informed Decision-Making:** The conversion table provides a practical tool for teachers to estimate students' potential academic performance in the English course based on their IELTS scores. This information can be valuable for setting realistic expectations, grouping students strategically, and tailoring instruction to meet diverse learning needs.
- **Targeted Support:** By identifying students who might be at risk of lower academic achievement based on their IELTS scores, educators can proactively provide targeted support and interventions to address potential language learning gaps.
- **Enhanced Communication:** The conversion table can facilitate more transparent and data-driven communication with students and parents regarding the relationship between English proficiency and academic expectations in the English language course.

C. Comparison with Previous Research

This study's findings align with a substantial body of international research highlighting the positive correlation between language proficiency, often measured through standardized tests like IELTS, and academic achievement in various educational settings [6], [17]. The moderate correlation coefficient ($r = 0.432$) found in this study falls within the range typically observed in studies examining the predictive validity of IELTS scores for academic performance.

However, direct comparisons with previous research within the Vietnamese context are limited due to the scarcity of studies specifically investigating the relationship between IELTS scores and high school grades. This study contributes to a relatively under-researched area within the Vietnamese educational landscape, providing empirical evidence to support the relevance of IELTS scores in understanding academic potential within this specific context.

D. Limitations and Future Directions

While this study offers valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations:

- **Sample Size and Generalizability:** The study was conducted with a sample of students from a single specialized high school in Vung Tau, which may limit the generalizability of

findings to other schools, provinces, or educational contexts within Vietnam. Future research should aim for larger, more diverse samples to enhance generalizability.

- **Cross-Sectional Design:** The cross-sectional nature of the study limits insights into the longitudinal relationship between IELTS scores and academic performance. Longitudinal studies tracking students' progress over time would provide a more nuanced understanding of how English proficiency relates to academic growth.
- **Limited Explanatory Variables:** The study focused solely on the relationship between IELTS scores and end-of-term grades. Future research should incorporate additional variables (e.g., learning motivation, study habits, socioeconomic factors) to develop more comprehensive models of academic achievement.

E. Conclusion

This study provides valuable empirical evidence supporting a significant positive relationship between mock IELTS scores and end-of-term English course grades among Vietnamese high school students. The developed conversion table, while context-specific and requiring cautious interpretation, offers a practical tool for educators to estimate students' potential for academic success based on their IELTS scores. By integrating these findings into pedagogical practices and decision-making processes, educators can strive to create more supportive and effective learning environments for students with diverse English proficiency levels.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between mock IELTS scores and end-of-term English course grades among a sample of Vietnamese high school students. The findings contribute valuable insights to the understanding of how an internationally recognized English proficiency test, like IELTS, can be meaningfully related to academic performance within a specific educational context.

A. Summary of Key Findings

The study's key findings can be summarized as follows: **Significant Positive Correlation:** A statistically significant positive correlation was found between mock IELTS scores and end-of-term English course grades, indicating that higher IELTS scores are associated with higher grades.

- **Predictive Linear Model:** A simple linear regression model demonstrated that IELTS scores could statistically significantly predict a portion of the variance in end-of-term grades, suggesting predictive validity for academic performance.
- **Practical Conversion Table:** Based on the regression model, a conversion table was developed to provide educators with a practical tool for estimating end-of-term grades based on IELTS scores within a defined range.

B. Contributions to the Field

This study makes noteworthy contributions to the field of English language assessment and education in Vietnam: Bridging the Gap: It addresses the need for research that connects international English proficiency standards, as reflected in IELTS scores, to the practical realities of academic assessment within Vietnamese high schools.

- **Context-Specific Evidence:** It provides empirical evidence specific to the Vietnamese educational context, contributing to a deeper understanding of the relationship between IELTS scores and academic performance in this setting.
- **Practical Tool for Educators:** The development of a conversion table, while requiring cautious interpretation, offers a valuable resource for educators to make more informed decisions regarding student support, placement, and curriculum development.

C. Final Thoughts

As English language proficiency continues to be paramount for academic and professional success in Vietnam, understanding the relationship between standardized test scores and academic performance is crucial. This study serves as a starting point for further research exploring the nuances of this relationship in diverse educational contexts within Vietnam. By continuing to investigate and refine methods for interpreting and utilizing international language proficiency measures, educators can strive to create more equitable and effective learning environments that support all students in reaching their full potential.

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