

**English Proficiency as a Predictor of Academic  
Performance of Project Management  
Postgraduate Students in UAE**

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## **Abstract**

This research investigated the correlation between English language proficiency and academic performance of postgraduate project management students. Data were collected from the electronic students’ record, students' questionnaire and professors' interviews. Results showed a significant positive correlation between English proficiency and academic performance for all participants, female participants and for non-native participants. Other significant positive correlations were for Iranian students and another group of other languages but these to results must be dealt with cautious as the population samples were very small to be considered.

The interview and questionnaire confirmed the direct relation between English and academic performance. They also identified other factors that may have a relation with the academic performance such as attendance and attitude toward learning. Other areas were also explored through the interview such as academic support program. The study provided recommendations. The significant one was regarding reprocessing the academic support program. Further studies were also suggested to have an insight to the areas of need for future investigations from the point of view of the researcher.

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents. I appreciate their love and prayers for me. It is also dedicated to my two sons, Mohammed and Adham. I appreciate their patience and their lovely presence that supported and motivated me to accomplish my Master Dissertation.

## **Acknowledgments**

First of all, I thank Allah for his bless and help to finish my study without which nothing was possible. I am really grateful to my great supervisor Dr. Clifton Chadwick for his support, advice, knowledge, guidance, experience and presence that he provides to me all the way of my study till finishing my dissertation. I really appreciate all his contributions to me. I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Mick Randall for his continuous assistance and support. I am also grateful to Dr. Eman Gad who enlightens the way to me to study in the university. I also feel grateful to Lynn Randall for her academic support and for her contribution that improves me as a researcher. I would like to thank also all the staff of BUiD who helped me during my study.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Undoubtedly, English has become a world language rather than the language of specific countries such as UK (United Kingdom) and USA (United States of America). As the number of people using English in their daily life activities increases, the need for English proficiency has become of high priority especially in Universities and educational settings using English as the language of instruction. All Arab nations are aware of the fact that learning a common foreign language is of essential importance in order to adopt the most modern technological and scientific innovations from all over the world.

English is the primary language of instruction in many universities in the UAE (United Arab Emirates). The government, regarding the future plan of education, states that, “Improving English language skills at all levels of education is a government priority under the ‘Education 2020’ plan and a new English language syllabus is in the process of being introduced to all government schools”. For the detailed report on this subject, see Appendix 1.

Academic performance is a vital determinant of the student future success. The academic performance of the student is affected by many factors such as English proficiency, as an academic factor affecting the student performance, which is studied in this paper. Other factors such as age, gender, attitude and socioeconomic status are of concerns in many studies. To measure the academic performance, an average of the course grades is considered, Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA). “The CGPA is a common measure used by most universities” (Al- Tamimi, H. & Al- Shayeb, A., 2002). Academic performance is simply represented in the form of final school marks. The question of which skills determine educational performance is often highlighted.

In that respect, Jacobs (1995) states that “academic success at higher education levels depends on developed academic skills, such as reading, writing, listening, speaking, using mathematical reasoning, studying and observing”. Those skills are of major importance for getting a degree and succeeding in the University, especially for a Post Graduate Research - based program.

### **The Study Aims:**

The main trends of education in UAE in reference to the 2020 vision report ,in Prospect III, are explained as “Education for future and adapting to change, education to develop a creative personality capable of building and contributing to knowledge, education in a globalized environment while strengthen the national feeling, education to assess responsibility and accept social accountability, and education to compete in a global economy a free trade world. This requires the mastering of modern sciences, mainly languages, science, arithmetic, computer, and openness to other cultures.” For details, see appendix 2.

In that respect, Chadwick & Valenzuela (2008), state that Education reform and major movements to improve education are occurring not only in the UAE but throughout the world. They also added that “It seems clearly that in countries not typically classified as advanced, the change methods to be used, the probability of success and even the ways of measuring achievement most likely will vary on the basis of contextual differences and diversity.”

This paper serves the vision of education in UAE by describing the situation of English as an admission criterion in an English medium university in Dubai where Emirati students in addition to students from Arab nations and non Arab countries study in an active learning environment that uses research based learning as its method of instruction. This paper is unique in The British University in Dubai, BUiD, and may be in UAE, as it is the first major research that investigates the relationship between English proficiency and student success.



In addition, this paper will explore the effect of English proficiency as an admission criterion of the successful applicants to the Master of Project Management, BUiD, Dubai, UAE, on their academic performance as it may help in the prediction of student success. This study will also focus on this criterion and how it has an influence on student performance. ‘The aim is not only to know facts and understand relations for the sake of knowledge. We want to know and understand in order to act “better” than we did before’ (Langeveld 1965:4) cited by Bell (2005).

This paper will also review, critically, the English performance score as the most important datum and its correlation with the overall GPA. Sex differences will be analyzed to determine if there is any correlation between gender and the student academic achievement as it may contribute to student success as a non academic factor. We review the current situation of English as a language of instruction and whether the level of students’ knowledge of it, as a language, affects their academic achievement.

The study will provide results and recommendations suggesting better criteria to balance the recruitment target with the goal of high quality outcomes for the students. The research will also serve the program in the university by guiding the admission personnel to determine the extent to which recent English score requirements predict the academic achievement of their students and may to help them to apply changes when needed. The research may provide insight and lead the university to explore related issues.

English score as an admission criterion is chosen to be assessed in this study for the following main reasons:

- The program of the study is only in English so the required course work in addition to the thesis must be submitted in English.
- English language is the second language of the majority of the students who have joined the program as shown in the following table.

**Table 1: Distribution of the Students according to their Mother-tongue.**

Mother-tongue Language	Nationality	No. of Students	Percentage of Students
Arabic-Native Speaker	Emariti	147	68%
	Non Emariti	34	16%
English-Native Speakers		7	3 %
Other Languages	Indian	13	6%
	Pakistani	4	2%
	Iranian	7	3%
	others	5	2%
Total No. of Students		217	

- The assessment methods of the students requires a mastery of the language as it used in a form of assignments as well as exams which must be submitted in English since the university curriculum is British one.

The students are expected to be self- directed learners during the introduction of courses as well as submission of the assignments.

## **Chapter Two: Background**

Recent efforts to improve education in universities have focused on aspects such as students, learning strategies, curricula, teachers and administrative issues. There is general agreement that the entrance to higher education is the student admission process. In this chapter the background of admission criteria internationally and mainly in UAE will be discussed. In addition, the situation of higher education in UAE as well as the English proficiency test will be reviewed. Finally, a brief presentation is given of the BUiD Project Management Program, where the study takes place and the learning approaches used in running this program.

### **2.1. Admission Criteria and Academic Performance:**

Students Admission is an important process. Every admission has three closely correlated components: student recruitment, requirements for admission, and the method of student selection (Karin Roding, 2005, P.9). Admission criteria are believed to be basic elements in the admission process.

Admission criteria and their effect on the students' achievement is a major issue in the education field all over the world, and in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). As it is fundamental in education to evaluate student learning and the outcomes of this learning, admission criteria have been studied and tested by many universities and their respective colleges in many countries. Research groups and research committees focus on studying their admission criteria and updating or modifying them according to the findings of their effectiveness. The main concern of the research is to measure the effectiveness of the admission criteria. Some universities use the correlation between one criterion, or all the admission criteria, with a major indicator that is the student achievement or academic performance in the program.

This issue is also examined because of the presence of huge numbers of fee-paying international students in these universities who are considered as an important source of income that can not be neglected. For example, it has been reported in Australia that the

overseas fee paying students contribute 79 per cent of university fee-paying revenue. (AVCC Fact Sheet 2, 2001. p.1) cited in Feast(2002).

## **2.2. The situation of Higher Education with UAE:**

Over the past twenty years, UAE universities have seen a rapid growth in the student numbers joining higher education and developing themselves by improving their educational skills and knowledge. By 2008, there were over 30 higher education institutions in the UAE. The first university was established in 1977 and the rapid growth started in new universities from the mid 1990s. Higher education is offered by the government universities and colleges, private and other universities and colleges and campuses of foreign universities operating in the Knowledge Village. For a detailed report, see appendix 3.

UAE universities and institutes provide a chance to earn undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. The programs designed for undergraduate students include foundation programs, certificate programs, diploma programs, higher diploma, and associate degree and bachelor degrees. There are structured programs for postgraduate students that include the masters' and doctoral degrees. For details, see appendix 4.

Increasing the number of the students has led to much debate on issues concerning admission criteria especially related to the student's English language proficiency requirements. To date, however, only a few researches have explored the relationships between English proficiency and academic performance in the Arab world.

From a teaching point of view, the majority of the students have non-English speaking background (NESB) and they need attention to the effect of their background on their academic performance. The CAA (Commission for Academic Accreditation) of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research conducts a program of licensure and accreditation of institutions and universities and their programs. The CAA program edits the standards of licensure and accreditation for the Universities and institutions. One of the most important policies is the admission policy in which the English proficiency is

considered an important entry requirement to the post graduates programs. For the detailed report, see appendix 5.

### **2.3.English Proficiency Tests:**

The most popular and widely used Standard English tests, in UAE post- graduate study universities, are Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Since 1989, IELTS is considered a trusted test to measure the English proficiency. It assesses the mastery of the English language by examining four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The IELTS score is expressed in the form of bands. Possible scores range from band 9 (expert user) to band 1 (non-user). As most IELTS requirements by [universities](#) fall between 5.5 and 7.0., bands 7 to 5 are of interest. For more details, see Appendix 6.

The band and its description for band 7, 6 and 5 as follows:

- Band 7 Good User

Has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.

- Band 6 Competent User

Has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.

- Band 5 Modest User

Has partial command of the language, coping with overall meaning in most situations, though is likely to make many mistakes. Should be able to handle basic communication in own field.

A full description of the bands, see Appendix 7.

The CAA of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research states that an IELTS score of 6.0 or its equivalent score in the TOEFL test is required for joining post graduate studies in UAE universities and institutes.

At the examined university (British University in Dubai), most of the students take the English language service (IELTS) tests as a measure of their English proficiency. The BUiD has instituted numerous changes to English language requirements in recent years. The current English language proficiency requirement is equivalent to IELTS 6.5 or TOEFL 580.

## **2.4. Project Management Program, BUiD:**

BUiD, where this study is undertaken, is considered one of the well known research-based universities in UAE. The respected university offers various post- graduate degrees. This study is done on the Master in Project Management Program. This program is available for students who wish to study in both full-time (one year) and part-time (two years) to facilitate the continuation of study for those who may wish to work and study.

The student is expected to complete eight modules (15 credits each) and the dissertation (60 credits). The first module is the Foundation that provides an overview of the project management. The second one is the Strategy module while the third one is the Planning and Resources management module. The fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh modules are Cost and Value Management module, Commercial and Procurement module; and People and Culture module. The eighth and the last module is the Research Method module. This module provides students with knowledge needed in the area of research and helps them to prepare for the dissertation. The assessment method for all the modules, excluding the research methods module, is in a form of written exam and a submission of course work in a form of an essay. The course work (the submitted assignment) weight to the written exam is 50 % to 50 %. The research methods module is assessed through a submission of two course work assignments. One is an individual submission while the other one may be done individually or in pairs. The problems presented and discussed in the two

assignments must be different in order to stimulate critical thinking and problem solving skills. BUiD Student Handbbok, 2008-2009.

## **2.5. The Learning Approaches:**

The learning approaches used in the program are lectures and tutorials in addition to an important approach which is self- Directed Learning. The student should follow up by reading different references and textbooks and reflect on the sessions' discussed learning material. As self-direction is a natural human tendency, human quests for mastery of their environment, control self-empowerment and continuous life long learning. The learner plays active role in achieving the goals of the program through active participation in the learning activities. As it is very challenging to achieve that, some factors may hinder or enhance the process of self- direction and in turn affect the performance of any person. The assessment of those factors help in the success of the program. It is believed that one major contributing factor to students' continuous learning as a lifelong disposition is empowered by assessment. Costa and Kallick, (2004) state that "individuals who are open to feedback from environment, from the selves, and from others, enjoy and apply the results of assessment as a source for clarifying their own goals, for establishing their own personal learning, and for self – initiated change".

Moreover, the students are being assessed at the beginning of the program for their writing skills in a form of institutional diagnostic exam. Based on the exam result and in addition to the English proficiency exam, the student is enrolled in supportive programs. All students are supported by auxiliary academic programs such as Study Skills Support classes as well as English Language Support Classes to empower their academic capabilities and to improve their English skills in addition to individual tutorials to support on an individual basis.

## **Chapter Three: Literature Review**

This study focuses on the linguistic factor affecting student achievement by investigating the impact of English language proficiency as an admission criterion on academic performance of project management students. There are many factors that influence learning outcomes. Ashman & Conway (1997) classified these factors into those related to the learner, the teacher, the setting and the curriculum. In an attempt to exclude some of the factors related to the learner, English as an admission criterion is believed to play an important role in the student's academic achievement.

This chapter provides a general overview of English as an admission criterion is provided. Then, a distinct between TOEFL and IELTS will be highlighted as a tool of language assessment. After that, a review of the limited English proficiency is provided. Gender as a predictor of student academic achievement will be discussed and the academic performance assessment in research-based learning approach will be highlighted. Finally, the culture diversity of UAE and how it serves in enriching the learning environment will be introduced.

### **3.1.1. English as an Admission Criterion:**

Camara and Kimmel (2005) defined a criterion as “An admission or selection context, which generally refers to a dependent variable or outcome measure. The criterion is a measure of the desired outcome and is what is used to evaluate the validity and utility of the predictors”.

As admission criteria vary from one place to another according to each country's education policy and universities' system, each university needs to do its own research in order to establish the correlation between the English proficiency and student academic achievement. The level of foreign language proficiency required for academic success may vary according to academic major or institution. One way of clarifying the relationship between English proficiency and academic success at a given institution



might be to conduct an institution specific study (Educational Testing Services 1990; Light *et al.* 1987 cited by Vinke and Jochems, 1993).

English proficiency is an essential criterion in admission to postgraduate studies. English proficiency can deter individuals from enrolling in college (Vernez & Abrahamsen, 1996). Kiang (1992), states that “those who do enroll may struggle academically because language barriers prevent them from understanding lectures”. With the new advances in education learning strategies, the matter has extended to more than lectures; it is a matter of referring to textbooks, searching for references via internet and using computer software programs to help in statistics and many other examples which are mainly mediated in English and needs appropriate level of language proficiency.

Baker (2006:13) explains the differences between conversational fluency and academic language competence. The term conversational fluency is a surface fluency that may include the ability to hold a simple conversation in the market or the street and may be acquired in short period mainly two to three years. Academically related language competence in a second language may need longer time to be mastered, five to eight years, or even longer. Conversational fluency is not sufficient to be enrolled in an academic program. In the same topic, Collier Combs and Ovando (2006:130) emphasized that academic language development is a continuous process and requires a minimum of 5 to 10 years to attain grade-level norms in academically related language competence in a second language (Figure 1). Oller’s (1982) much disputed claim for one global language factor provides a starting point for a distinction between two different language abilities. Cited by Baker (2006:13)

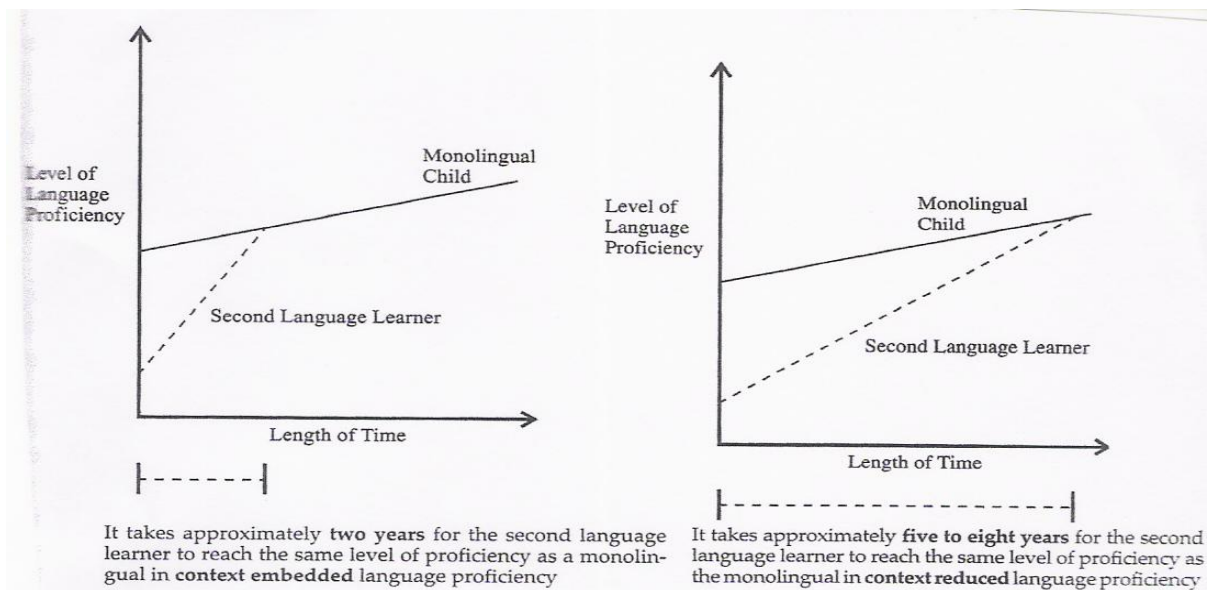


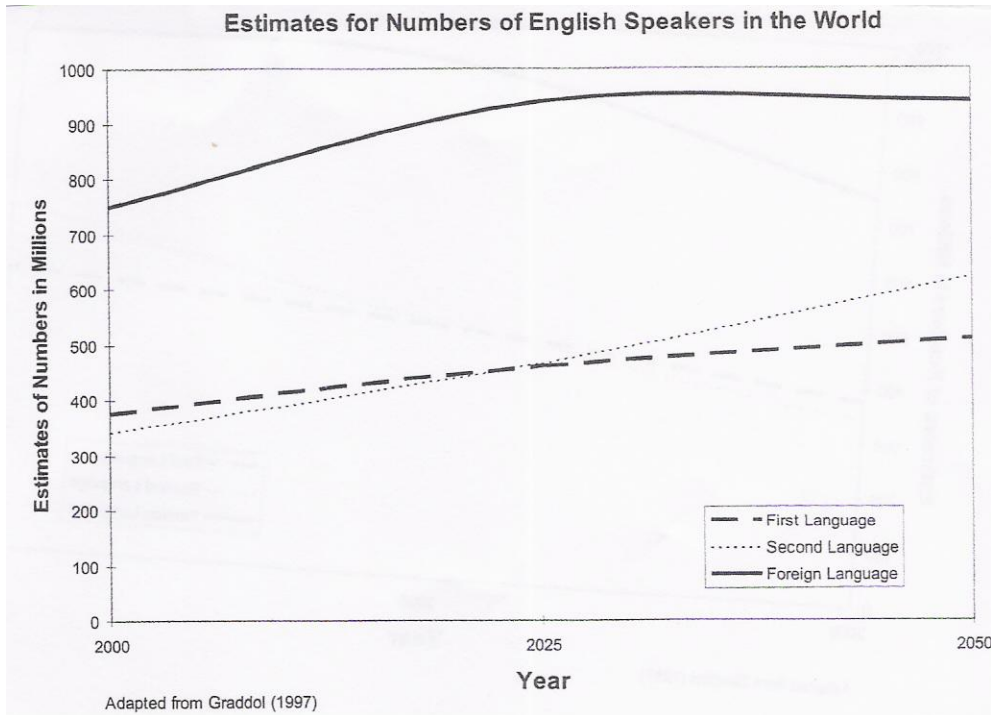
Figure 1: **Language Development Length of Time to Achieve Language Proficiency.**  
**From: Baker (2006).**

In addition, language as a barrier for university access was highlighted in some articles with regards to UAE. Morgan(2008) states that “education deficiencies among universities entrants in the United Arab Emirates have promoted the government to institute broad reform of the school system. Although Arabic is the primary language of instruction in states schools, most universities tuition in English. At present around one-third of university budgets is spent on foundation courses designed mainly to help students improve their English.”

Baker (2006: 124-125) identifies the ‘individual’ reasons for learning languages. One reason is for culture awareness and the second reason is for careers and employment. While the third reason is for achieving affective goals, and the fourth reason is for cognitive development. Baker (2006:124) states that “The learning of foreign languages has been for general educational and academic value.”

Baker (2006: 88) explains the future of English as it is with Spanish and Arabic, for example, also having prestigious socioeconomic associations (Figure 2). Baker’s point of view support the idea that the increase of English language users highlights its

importance and correlation with fields that depends on it as a main media of communication, on of which is Education.



**Figure 2: Estimates for Numbers of English Speakers in the World 2000-2050.**

**From: Baker (2006).**

### **3.1.2. English tests as a tool of language assessment**

Slavin (2005), states that “A way to make information meaningful is to build on prior knowledge.” English is a basic knowledge that must provide a channel to understand the required new knowledge.

Language assessment is an institutional practice, whether it takes the form of large-scale proficiency tests or curriculum – related assessment. Until recently most published research in language testing has focused on proficiency tests, particularly two international tests of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), used to facilitate the admissions processes of universities in English – speaking countries, the American Test

of English as a foreign language (TOEFL) and the British/Australian International English Language Testing System (IELTS). McNamara, 2005, p. 775.

In that respect, there have been a number of studies that investigate the predictive validity the IELTS, TOEFL or both of them as English requirement in relation to the student academic performance. Academic performance is usually measured by CGPA of the student. Stappenbelt (2006) states that studies have been done that recommend using English Proficiency test as an admission criteria to ensure suitable and consistent level of English level competency for admission to universities.

A proficiency assessment tool is used by universities all over the world. As some universities prefer to create their own test, other universities depend on IELTS or TOEFL or both of them as English requirement in their admission process. The validity of the test, which concerns the truth- value of a test and its scores, is an important element of many researches that focus on the correlation between language command and student performance. “A deductive argument is valid whenever its conclusion necessarily follows from the premises; if the premises of the argument are true, then its conclusion cannot be false; the conclusion too must be true. (Angeles, 1981, p. 310) cited by Davies, A. &Elder, C., 2005, p. 795.

Extensive research has been conducted to examine the role of IELTS factor on academic achievement (Dooley P. & Oliver R. 2002; Feast V., 2002; Woodrow, L. 2006; Huong T. 2001). While Woodrow, L. (2006) found that language proficiency as measured by IELTS has a significant relation to student achievement, English proficiency was considered as a moderate predictive of academic performance for the student sample of this study.

The Feast (2002) study findings revealed significant and positive relationship between overall IELTS scores and academic performance. She also investigated the need to raise the minimum IELTS Score that international students should gain to be admitted to University of South Africa. Her study included the undergraduate students as well as the post graduate students. With regards to the postgraduate students, Feast investigated the

impact of English proficiency as measured by IELTS on GPA and student numbers using six methods:

1. An overall IELTS at least 7.0
2. Each module score at least 7.0 without considering the overall scores.
3. Writing and Reading module at least 7.0 with an overall score of minimum (7.0).
4. Overall IELTS at least 6.5.
5. Each module at least 6.0 and regardless of the overall IELTS score.
6. Reading and Writing module at least 6.0 and the overall of 6.5.

Feast's recommendations concluded that in case there is a desire to raise the English language entry requirement at the University of South Africa, the preferred and suggested method to be used is method 6; the other methods were not recommended as they will lead to loss of a large number of international students.

On the other hand, she recommended keeping the minimum IELTS Score at 6.0 as it was before the study took place. She suggested raising university support levels of the international students to improve their English proficiency level. Her study supports the need for individual universities to undertake their own research in order to study the relationship between students' English proficiency and their academic performance.

Also, Huong (2001) found a significant correlation between IELTS overall and academic performance measured by GPA in semester 1 and semester 2. Other Studies have found a weak but significant relationship between English proficiency measured by IELTS and academic performance (Elder, 1993 cited by Woodrow, L. 2006, page 54).

On the other hand, Cook, *et al* (2004) studied the correlation between the IELTS as admission criterion and student achievement for International undergraduate studying psychology and for MSc. Food Product Management students. Their results did not show any relationship between IELTS and student academic success for the first group but a significant relation was found only between a reading subtest and academic performance.

In addition, some studies found no significant relationship between IELTS as an admission criterion and academic achievement of the students. Cotton & Conrow, 1998 stated that their study revealed no relationship between overall IELTS score as an entry requirement and academic performance. Similarly, a study done by Dooey and Oliver (2002), found no correlation between IELTS and student performance.

The studies of the TOEFL test as an English requirement predicting student performance also show various results. While Person (2002) found TOEFL is a valid and reliable measure to predict student academic performance, a study done in Bahrain by Al- Ansari and Al- Musawi (2002) emphasizes the importance of using TOEFL as it predicts the achievement of students.

Vinke and Jochems (1993) found a cut-off point in the relationship between English proficiency measured by TOEFL scores and academic success. On this basis, they stated that “There is a range of TOEFL scores within which a better command of English increases the chance of being academically successfully.”

A study done by Viravaidya, Panyakul and Thonglek (2007) on students of an international Master’s Degree Program in Chemical Engineering in Thailand, showed a significant positive correlation between English proficiency represented in TOEFL and English proficiency but they ranked it of a second importance after the undergraduate GPA. They state that, “We believe that the language barriers do affect the academic performance in ChEPS. An applicant with a good command of English, as reflected by a high TOEFL score, is more likely to perform better academically.”

On the other hand, a study done by Ayers and Quattlebaum (1992) found that “TOEFL scores was not an effective predictor of academic success, as measured by total GPA based on all course required in the program of study” cited by Person, 2002, p. 7.

As many universities give students a chance to sit for TOEFL or IELTS exam to meet the required score to enter the desired study field, TOEFL IELTS Equivalency Table serves in converting the scores from TOEFL to IELTS and vice versa ( Figure 3).

TOEIC	TOEFL Paper	TOEFL CBT	TOEFL IBT	IELTS	VEC Online Score	Approximate VEC Level
0 - 250	0 - 310	0 - 30	0 - 8	0 - 1	0 - 34	<a href="#">2</a>
	310 - 343	33 - 60	9 - 18	1 - 1.5	35 - 38	<a href="#">3</a>
255 - 400	347 - 393	63 - 90	19 - 29	2 - 2.5	39 - 45	<a href="#">4 - 5</a>
	397 - 433	93 - 120	30 - 40	3 - 3.5	46 - 53	<a href="#">6 - 7</a>
405 - 600	437 - 473	123 - 150	41 - 52	4	54 - 57	<a href="#">8</a>
	477 - 510	153 - 180	53 - 64	4.5 - 5	58 - 65	<a href="#">9 - 10</a>
605 - 780	513 - 547	183 - 210	65 - 78	5.5 - 6	66 - 73	<a href="#">11 - 12</a>
	550 - 587	213 - 240	79 - 95	6.5 - 7	74 - 81	<a href="#">13 - 14</a>
785 - 990	590 - 677	243 - 300	96 - 120	7.5 - 9	82 - 100	<a href="#">15</a>
<b>Top Score</b>	<b>Top Score</b>	<b>Top Score</b>	<b>Top Score</b>	<b>Top Score</b>	<b>Top Score</b>	<b>Top Level</b>
<b>990</b>	<b>677</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100</b>	<a href="#">15</a>

**Figure 3. TOEFL IELTS Equivalency. From: [Vancouver English Centre](#).**

### **3.1.3. Limited English Proficiency Students:**

The Bilingual Education Act was replaced by new federal legislation entitled No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001. The one of the main reasons behind the public and political support for NCLB is the underachieving of the language minority students especially in English language test scores. Baker (2006:198) explained the reasons of underachieving and the high drop-out rates in bilinguals by referring to many factors such as socioeconomic background, gender, attendance. Baker gave the priority of these factors to the cause of being bilingual. Baker (2006: 205-206) states that “only when both languages are insufficiently developed to cope in the curriculum can ‘blame’ be attributed to bilingualism itself. Even then, the blame should not go to the victim, but to the home, neighborhood or societal circumstances that create under-developed languages.

Researchers group students according to various criteria one of which is spoken language at student home. LEP student according to this classification is defined as “Student comes from a home where a language other than English is used”, {Careaga and Gingrace (1989)}.

However, Careaga and Gingrace (1989) highlighted an important defining characteristic of LEP student which is a limitation in their English proficiency. They emphasized the fact that the level of English proficiency cannot be necessarily related to language usage or ethnic group.

Cohen (1998, page 4) defined language learning and language use strategies as “those processes which are consciously selected by learners and which may result in action taken to enhance the learning or use of a second or foreign language, through the storage, retention, recall, and application of information about that language”.

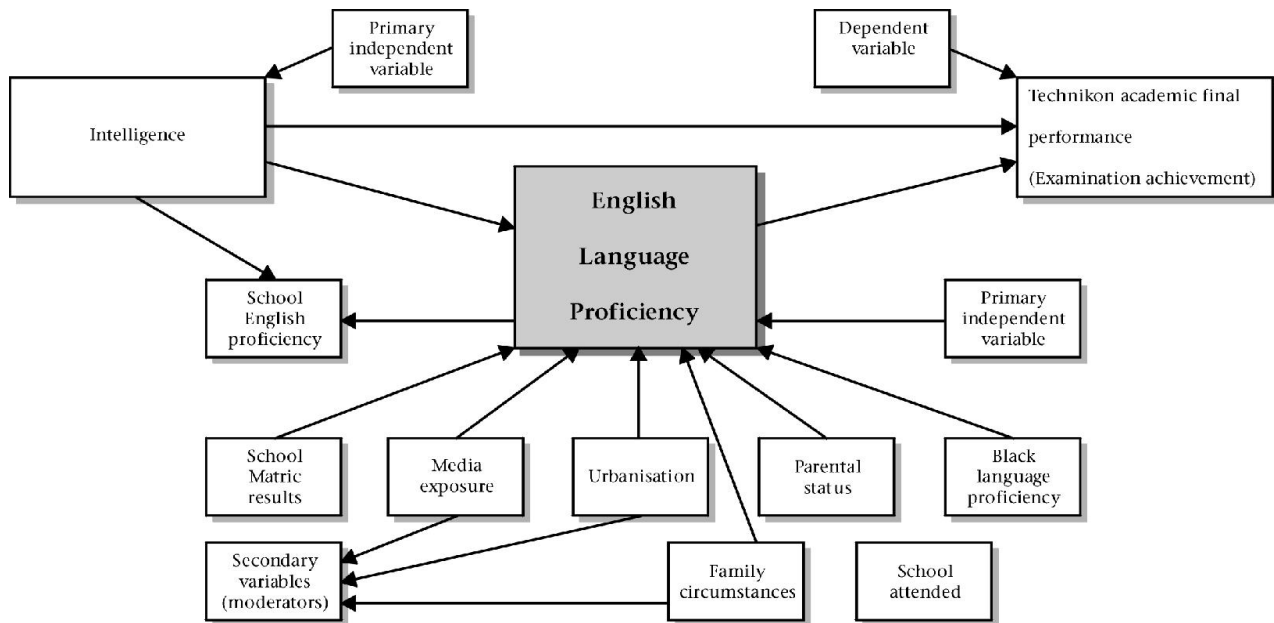
Lewelling (2006) identified the LEP Student as a group at risk of academic failure. Also, Careaga, and Gingrace(1989) emphasized that LEP students are often among those who have a high dropout rate at school. The term “Student Dropout” is often defined as “A pupil who leaves school, for any reason except death, before graduation or completion of a program of studies without transferring to another school”. (OERI, 1987) cited by Careaga, R.C. and Gingrace (1989).

Collier, Combs and Ovando (2006:14) used another term rather than LEP which is English Language Learners “ELL”. They state that this term is better than LEP because it conveys that the student is in the process of learning English without having the connotation that the student is in some way defective until he or she attains full English Proficiency. At the same time they mentioned that the term “ELL” is still somehow not describing the situation of the student who has a problem with a second language acquisition.

Moreover, the following interesting schematic diagram, Figure 4, indicates English proficiency as a primary factor predicting student achievement. This diagram based on a



study done on a black and Indian student in human resources management at a tertiary institution by Jordaan, Stephen and Welman (2004). The diagram emphasizes the importance of English proficiency in relation to academic performance.



**Figure 4: English language proficiency and academic performance. From: Jordaan, Stephen and Welman (2004).**

Hoare (2005) states that “Leaping the language barrier can be by turning to premaster courses to bridge the gap to further study.” He also emphasizes that “students develop language skills through classroom interaction and by being a part of the wider community, living among native English speakers”.

With regards to this aspect, supportive programs were structured in order to help the students to leap the language barrier. Gasazza and Bare (2006, p.123) focused on the importance of the supportive systems as essential elements in the student development and success, this supporting system could serve the academic and emotional purposes.

### **3.2. Gender as a predictor of student achievement:**

The direct relationship between gender and student academic performance has also been widely studied (Leppel, 2002; Ting & Robinson, 1998). Investigation of the gender gap in relation to academic achievement is an area of assessment and study in many settings.

Pajares & Valiante (2001), state that “in areas related to language arts, male and female students exhibit similar confidence even though the achievement of girls typically is higher.” (cited by Schunk and Pajares 2002).

The current situation was explained by Machin & McNally (2006) in reference to the national statistics for 2004 which reveals lower achievement of boys than girls. They related gender to the language by stating that girls always perform better in English than boys.

Another study was done in the Middle East by Dayioglu and Turut-Asik (2004) on undergraduate university students in Turkey, to determine whether there are significant gender differences in academic performance among male and female students. The findings of the study show that female undergraduate students outperform their male counterparts and they achieve higher grades than male students.

Ergul (2004) examined the correlation between student characteristics and academic achievement, his study reveals no significant correlation between gender differences and academic performance of students at the school of civil aviation, Turkey.

In addition, Morgan (2008), states that, “According to the latest UNESCO figures (for 2002), 37% of Emirati women and 13% of men gain university degree. Fewer men than women seek higher education in UAE because attractive employment opportunities are available to them, especially in the civil services.”

On the other hand, Leppel (2002) investigated the impact of gender on academic performance. The results revealed that gender negatively impacts academic success

among female students who have external commitments that compete with academic demands. Ting & Robinson (1998) study revealed that inequity impacts negatively on female students resulting in poor academic achievement.

### **3.3. Performance Assessment:**

It is commonly agreed that assessment is the single most powerful driver on learning in postgraduate education. Effective assessment methods are held to be very important in maximizing students' learning, motivating students, fairly and reliably evaluating the subject and providing informative feedback to lecturers and to students on their learning approaches (Zou, 2008, p. 80).

A written midterm and final exam that evaluate only student ability to recall information is inadequate in today's education environment specially after introducing new teaching-learning strategies. Nowadays, academic achievement can be assessed through assignments, written exams and classroom discussion. As classroom discussion is very difficult and needs a very clear assessment tool, written exams and assignments, course work, are used in measuring student performance.

As the students' assignment is considered one of the important documents to assess the students' achievement particularly important for the student who studies using research based study. "Most student research projects require some sort of written reports that the student's advisor grades. These reports can be a valuable assessment source that requires little or no extra work on the part of faculty advisor. Faculty can use the written reports to assess students' ability to write, to analyze and synthesize, to think critically, and to understand research methodology" (Rueckert(2008), p. 273).

On the other hand, standardized tests are used for the purpose of performance assessment. Zaaiman (1998, p.63), states that, "debate often revolves around the use of open-ended essay type questions or multiple choice questions, or combination of the two." While essay questions are easy to be structured, multiple choice items are difficult to be structured if carefully designed. Heyneman (1988) raised the importance of using Bloom's hierarchical taxonomy of educational objectives, namely knowledge

(remembering), comprehension (understanding), application (solving), analysis (analyzing), synthesis (creating) and evaluation (judging) should form the basis of educational evaluation (Zaaiman, 1998, p.63).

Moreover, Gredler, (1996, p. 121), states that, “in program evaluation, scores can be used to subdivide a sample on prior achievement and to provide information about growth”. This gives us an idea about the achievement of the students that reflects the program itself and helps in assessment and evaluation process.

Performance assessment is a major step in any program evaluation and it includes many elements or domains through which we can measure the achievement of any program students. Brookhat and Nikto (2007) explained the performance assessment crafting as “A process used to evaluate the performance and it can be used for evaluating student achievement.” They defined achievement dimensions as “the knowledge, skills, and abilities that you want students to learn as a result of your teaching.” Brookhat and Nikto, 2007, P. 262.

### **3.4. Research-based education:**

Research based education is concerned with guiding to learning process itself and enhancing the problem solving abilities of the students. As Griffith (2004, p 2) reminds us, there is an old proverb which states “Give a man fish and he eats for a day. Teach him how to fish and he eats for a lifetime”. Applied to the research based education and learning field needs nowadays, this proverb might mean that it is better to teach the student strategies to work out the problem solving for them and let them be empowered to manage their own learning.

One aim of education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to cultivate the problem-solving critical thinking and higher order thinking skills necessary for students to adapt to the rapidly changing “Information Age” (Greenspan, 2001; Kerka, 1992; Literacy: A positive Paper on Informative Problem-Solving, 1995 cited by Ball, A.L. &Garton, B, 2005).

“Active learning refers to techniques where students do more than simply listen to a lecture. Students are doing something including discovering, processing, and applying information.” McKinney, 2009. Research –based education reflects that through the learning process as well as the performance assessment.

Randeree (2005/2006) explained the situation of active learning strategies in engineering education in the Arabian Gulf countries. He states that “The value of active learning must be considered within the appropriate context when dealing with students in a gulf setting.

In a research based university, the student is expected to be motivated to learn and to achieve set objectives using critical thinking abilities. Randree (2005/2006) states that “In education, this relates very closely to the mindset of the Gulf archetypal students, where students in the early stages of tertiary education require or expect a “spoon-feeding” approach to learning, with little or no critical thinking and no effort beyond the limits of what has been stated by the instructor”.

### **3.5. Culture diversity:**

Randeree (2005/2006) states that “a major issue here is to understand that a positive learning experience can only occur when diversity is appreciated.” he refers this to the situation of education in gulf as it has different issues one of which is referred back to the culture of the region.

Collier, Combs and Ovando (2006:96) explained that “an underlying, basic concept of the active, inquiry-based classroom is that authentic, personally meaningful learning must connect to students’ prior knowledge. This crucial principle means that learning in a diverse class incorporates the rich linguistic and cultural life experiences that each student brings to the classroom.

Baker (2006:68) emphasize that “bilinguals are presented in every country of the world, in every social class and in all age groups. Numerically, bilingual and multilinguals are in the majority in the world: it is estimated that they constitute between half and two thirds of the world’s population”.

Also, Baker (2006:90) clarified the relationship between Islam and English as it is a topic of current concerns and by referring back to other authors opinions as Mohd-Ashraf (2005) who suggest that ”the Qur’an invokes proselytizing by the learning of other languages, and the gaining of wisdom from other cultures through their languages”. Concluding from this, in the Arabian Gulf, as it is obvious that education is in a recent step of opening the way to international schools curriculum as well as international universities to introduce and improve the education in Gulf. In turn, this emphasizes the importance of studying the relationship between English language proficiency and the student of Academic performance in Arabian region as it is the used language of instruction especially in higher education and postgraduate studies.

In the chapter that follows methodology of collecting data is going to be discussed as well as the participants, procedure and limitations of the study.

### **The objective of the this paper:**

To clarify the relationship between English proficiency as an admission criterion to the British University in Dubai, UAE and the students’ achievement on basis of IELTS scores for female and male students concerning their grades.

### **Research Questions:**

#### **Main Q:**

The research project will determine if there is a relationship between English proficiency represented by overall IELTS score as an admission criterion and the students’ academic achievement measured by CGPA.

- To what extent does English proficiency as an admission criterion predict the students' academic performance?
- How does English proficiency as an admission criterion help to assess students' readiness to succeed?
- Is there any correlation between students' gender and their academic achievement? (If so, to what extent)?
- What are the recommendations could help to improve The English proficiency as an admission criterion for the benefit of having high quality post-graduate Education?

## **Chapter Four: Methodology:**

To achieve the purpose of this research, the triangulation method is used to ensure validity and reliability and avoid bias which may happen if not enough methods are used. Qualitative and quantitative research methods are applied to the research, involving data from students' record, semi-structured informal interviews with professors and students' questionnaire. Bell (2005), states that, ' It is perfectly possible to carry out a worthwhile investigation without having detailed knowledge of the various approaches or styles research, but a study of different approaches will give insight into different way of planning an investigation, and, incidentally, will also enhance you're your understanding of literature' (4<sup>th</sup> ed, pg:1).

The illustrated figure in Bell (2005:67) gave the researcher an idea about structuring the main components of the study as shown below (Figure5):

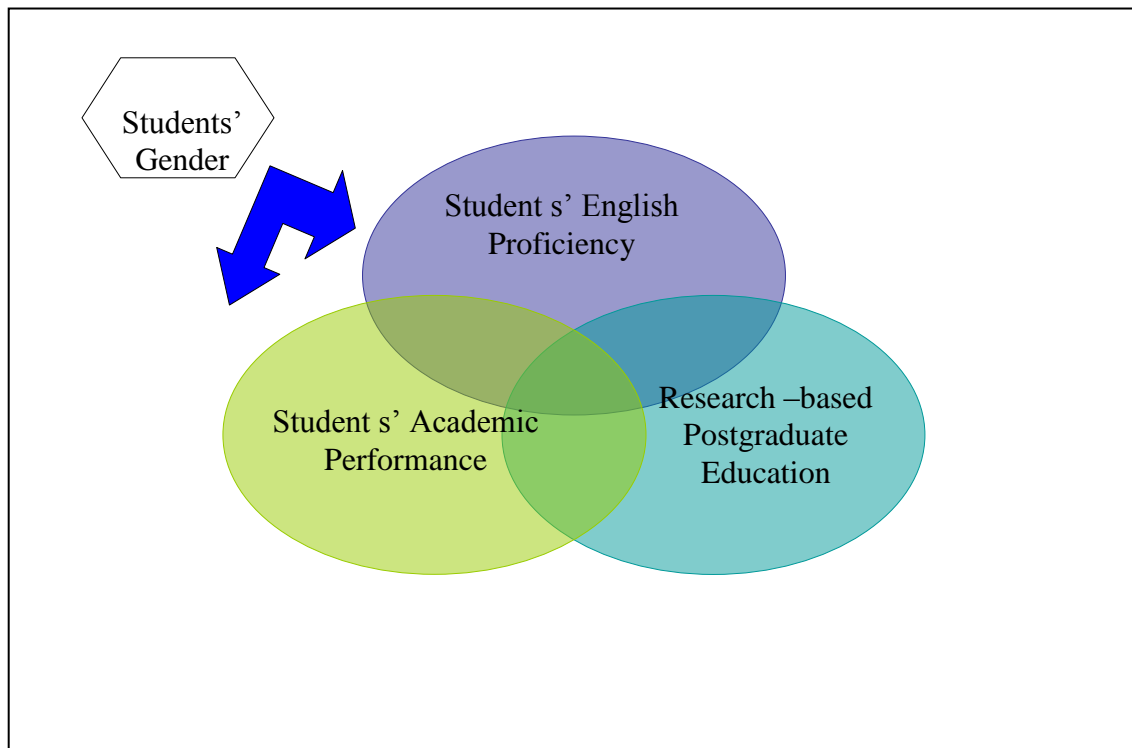


Figure 5: The Main components of the Study.



## **Participants:**

The research takes place in The British University in Dubai. The study population is students in the Project Management Master Program enrolled in the period of September 2004 until September 2008. The database contains 217 postgraduate students, 154 male students and 63 female students. The nationality of the students varies although a high proportion of the students are Emirati students (68%); native speakers are 3% of the total participants. Arab Non- Emirati students are 16% of total students' percentage while other nationalities represent 13% (Table 1). The participants come from different cultural backgrounds in addition to different first degree qualifications and work experience.

## **Materials:**

In order to be able to answer the research questions, it is essential to collect data concerning the following:

- Language Proficiency Scores of the students.
- Students Grades (CGPA).
- Course Work requirements and assessment methods.
- Brief about the Project Management Program and the process of learning all over the program.
- Students Demographics i.e.: gender and nationality.
- The student study status.
- Students' areas of difficulty concerning their language proficiency when dealing with the course work, home reading and preparation in addition to the classroom work and discussion as those are the most three significant domains the students use language during their study.
- Factors hindering or improving the students' academic achievement.
- Students and professors opinion and recommendations for improving the language proficiency and academic performance of students.

While data regarding the English proficiency score, student's grades, study status, nationality and gender came from the Electronic Students Data Record, the required data concerning the assessment methods, Course Work requirements came from the student yearly handbook (2008), BUiD and the university website. Other information used for discussion and recommendations was supported by the interviews with two professors teaching the Project Management Master Program Students and by students' questionnaire.

Microsoft Excel Program and SPSS program were selected for the analysis of data as it is one of the most programs used for predictive analysis. Snap 8 Professional Program was used to gather the students' questionnaire as it facilitates the collection and analysis of students' responses. Face to Face informal semi-structured interviews were carried out with two Project Management Program professors in order to collect different points of view and to gather recommendations.

### **Procedure:**

- Permission is given to start the study.
- A letter was sent to the IT support department including a summary about the study and the needed data from the student record.
- Encoded data were sent on Microsoft Excel Program sheet. Coding the raw data is applied to ensure that there are no names or identifying features used. Informed consent by the students is not required as only the legitimately held record is used.
- Data regarding the students' grades were provided as separate grades for each module completed by the students for that reason a calculation of the average grade is done to get the CGPA which served as the dependant variable for the current study.
- The students who do not have grades were excluded during the process of analysis.

- Data from the encoded students' records were analyzed using both Microsoft Excel Program and SPSS program for ensuring the validity of the results. The Bivariate Correlations procedure computes Pearson's correlation with significance levels to measure the correlation between the study variable.
- The sample of Project Management students was subcategorized based on their mother tongue, completion of the study (Status) at the time of gathering the data, and the students' gender. All these data were analyzed according to what was obtained from the electronic university system of students' record
- A soft copy of the analyzed data was given to a second person to check the analysis of the data to validate the research results.
- Interview questions were structured as semi-structured. Informal professors' interview was carried out in order to clarify some concepts and get their recommendations. The interview with each professor was carried out separately. The interviews were recorded manually and the responses are analyzed and summarized. The data used in this study represents only a portion of the interview of two Project Management professors. Their answers regarding to English proficiency correlation with academic performance of the project management students were identified and reported.
- The students' questionnaire was structured as semi-structured type. The questionnaire comprised open and close questions. The questionnaire is prepared as a soft copy in a form of 5- Point Likert rating scale mainly frequency scale and an open ended questions part reflects opinion of the students. The first part was based on the three areas where the students used there English classroom discussion, course work and lastly, preparation and home reading. Each part has a set of difficulties the students may face according to their English proficiency level. The second part is mainly in a form of ranking the answer by yes or no then answering open ended questions related to this ranking.

- Permission was given to send the students' questionnaire via e-mail in addition to availability of it on the student blackboard.
- The questionnaire was transferred to Snap 8 Professional Program for facilitating getting the responses of the students as well as analyzing them.
- The questionnaires responses (32 responses) were calculated and analyzed using Microsoft excel Program then data aggregated in a form of figures to facilitate the analysis and discussion.
- The discussion of the results and findings takes place.
- Throughout the discussion stage, snap shots of the results is used to illustrate each result and to highlight the significant correlations and the important issues and recommendations.

### **Limitations of the study:**

- The small number of students has contributed to the limitation of the study. The total number of the students is 217 but 174 only of the students have CGPA. In addition to that, 37 of the students have missed data regarding to the English proficiency prove which conclude that the actual participants' number is **137**. In addition, the questionnaire is passed to the students in summer vacation time, so **32** only of the students respond to it.
- It would be useful to conduct further research on a larger size population and to cover more than program in the same university or to do a comparative study with a similar program on another university.
- The mother tongue of the students is not well identified since students were not interviewed to know whether they are native English speakers or no as some of the other nationalities speak English since birth as their mother tongue.

## **Chapter Five: Results:**

### **5.1. Results related to Students' Records Data:**

The correlations are calculated based on the two variables English proficiency of the student measured by IELTS score and the academic performance measured by CGPA of the students.

“A” stands for English proficiency of the student measured by IELTS score.

“B” stands for the academic performance measured by CGPA of the students.

The first table presents the correlation between English proficiency of the students measured by IELTS score and the academic performance measured by CGPA of all participants (137 students).

		A	B
A	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.255**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.003
	N	137	137
B	Pearson Correlation	.255**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.
	N	137	174

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

**Table 2: Correlation between English Proficiency and Students' Academic Performance of all participants.**

The second table presents the correlation between English proficiency of the students measured by IELTS score and the academic performance measured by CGPA of all non native speakers.

**Correlations**

		A	B
A	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.236**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.006
	N	135	135
B	Pearson Correlation	.236**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.
	N	135	168

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

**Table 3: Correlation between English Proficiency and Students' Academic Performance of all Non native Speaker Students.**

The next two tables present the correlation between English proficiency of the student measured by IELTS score and the academic performance measured by CGPA for both male and female students. While female students' number is 43, male students represent 94 of the total student number. These numbers represents the actual number of all female and male students after excluding the students with missed data in academic achievement (CGPA) and English proficiency scores.

**Correlation for Female Students:**

**Correlations**

		A	B
A	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.273
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.076
	N	43	43
B	Pearson Correlation	.273	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.076	.
	N	43	51

**Table 4: Correlation between English Proficiency and Students' Academic Performance of Female Students**

**Correlation for Male Students:**

**Correlations**

		A	B
A	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.239*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.021
	N	94	94
B	Pearson Correlation	.239*	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.021	.
	N	94	123

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Table 5: Correlation between English Proficiency and Students' Academic Performance of Male Students.**

The next couple of tables show the correlation between English proficiency of the student measured by IELTS score and the academic performance measured by CGPA for all Emirati students vs. all non-Emirati students as follows:

**Correlation for All Emirati Students:**

**Correlations**

		A	B
A	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.178
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.075
	N	101	101
B	Pearson Correlation	.178	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.075	.
	N	101	123

**Table 6: Correlation between English Proficiency and Students' Academic Performance for All Emirati Students.**

**Correlation for all non- Emirati students:**

**Correlations**

		A	B
A	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.271
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.109
	N	36	36
B	Pearson Correlation	.271	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.109	.
	N	36	51

**Table 7: Correlation between English Proficiency and Students' Academic Performance for All Non-Emirati Students.**

**Correlation for students with other languages:**

The following set of tables show the correlation for students with other languages excluding Arabic and English native speakers:

**a. For All Students with Other Languages rather than Arabic and English:**

**Correlations**

		A	B
A	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.344
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.209
	N	15	15
B	Pearson Correlation	.344	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.209	.
	N	15	20

**Table 8: Correlation between English Proficiency and Students' Academic Performance for All Student Speaking other Languages rather than English and Arabic.**



**b. For Indian Students:**

**Correlations**

		A	B
A	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.685
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.061
	N	8	8
B	Pearson Correlation	.685	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.061	.
	N	8	12

**Table 9: Correlation between English Proficiency and Students' Academic Performance for Indian Students.**

**c. For Iranian students:**

**Correlations**

		A	B
A	Pearson Correlation	1.000	1.000**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.
	N	2	2
B	Pearson Correlation	1.000**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.
	N	2	3

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

**Table 10: Correlation between English Proficiency and Students' Academic Performance for All Iranian Students.**

**d. For Pakistani Students:**

**Correlations**

		A	B
A	Pearson Correlation	1.000	-.481
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.681
	N	3	3
B	Pearson Correlation	-.481	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.681	.
	N	3	3

**Table 11: Correlation between English Proficiency and Students' Academic Performance for Pakistani Students.**

**e. For All others/ other languages:**

There are five students whose mother tongue is not one of the above mentioned languages. The other students are Tanzanian, Colombian (Spanish Language), Eritrean, Russian and Ethiopian, one student from each nationality. Two of them are legible for the study as they have an English proficiency score as well as CGPA, the Tanzanian and Columbian students. Their correlation is as follows:

**Correlations**

		A	B
A	Pearson Correlation	1.000	-1.000**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.
	N	2	2
B	Pearson Correlation	-1.000**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.
	N	2	2

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

**Table 12: Correlation between English Proficiency and Students' Academic Performance for All other / other languages.**

**Native English speakers:**

Seven of the students enrolled in the program till the date of collection of data are native speakers, one of them withdrawn in the beginning of the study without any achievements and the remaining six continued the study. The next figure presents the students whose mother tongue is English. Their nationalities are Canadian, American, British and Irish.

**Correlations**

		A	B
A	Pearson Correlation	1.000	-.185
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.726
	N	6	6
B	Pearson Correlation	-.185	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.726	.
	N	6	6

**Table 13: Correlation between English Proficiency and Students' Academic Performance for Native English Speaking Students.**

**Correlation for Arab Non -Emirati students:**

The following table shows the correlation for students speaking Arabic but not Emirati.

**Correlations**

		A	B
A	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.079
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.748
	N	19	19
B	Pearson Correlation	.079	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.748	.
	N	19	25

**Table 14: Correlation between English Proficiency and Students' Academic Performance for Arab Non -Emirati students.**

**Correlation for Non –Arab, Non- Emirati students:**

The following table shows the correlation for all students not Arabic speaking. The total actual participants are 17 students.

**Correlations**

		A	B
A	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.354
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.164
	N	17	17
B	Pearson Correlation	.354	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.164	.
	N	17	26

**Table 15: Correlation between English Proficiency and Students' Academic Performance for Non-Arab Non -Emirati students.**

**Correlation for students who withdrawn, dismissed or suspended study:**

There is a total number of 45 students who withdrawn, dismissed or suspended study. The actual participants in this correlation are 32 students.

**Correlations**

		A	B
A	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.335
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.061
	N	45	32
B	Pearson Correlation	.335	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.061	.
	N	32	41

**Table 16: Correlation between English Proficiency and Students' Academic Performance for Students who did no Complete the Program.**

**Correlation for Graduated Students:**

While 26 students were completed their program successfully, 17 students had data regarding to English proficiency proof.

**Correlations**

		A	B
A	Pearson Correlation	1.000	.072
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.784
	N	17	17
B	Pearson Correlation	.072	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.784	.
	N	17	26

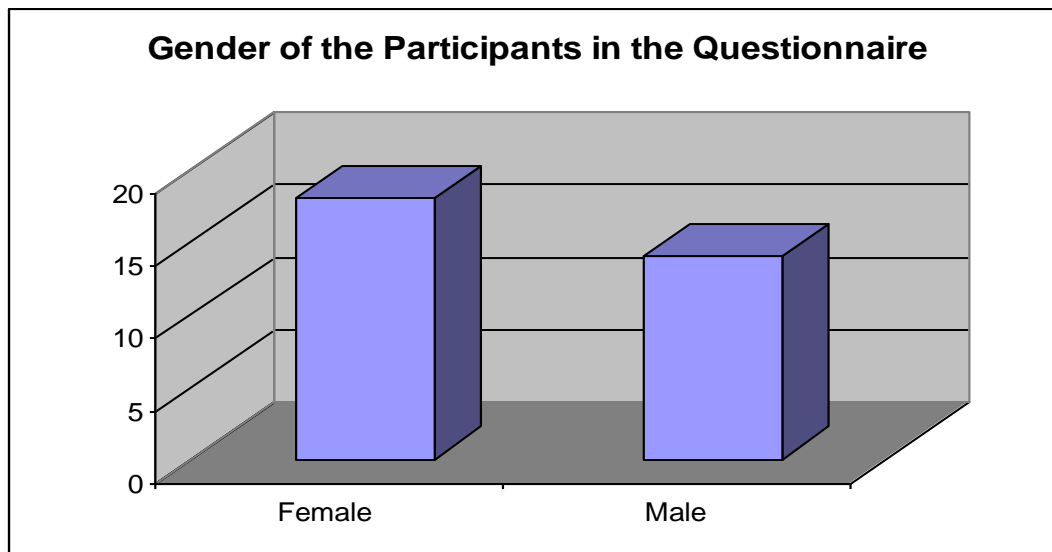
**Table 17: Correlation between English Proficiency and Students' Academic Performance for Arab Non -Emirati students.**

## **5.2. Results related to Students' Questionnaire:**

The questionnaire was designed to explore the study area, which the students may find a difficulty in when trying to achieve it, with regards to English proficiency and the study itself. Also, the questionnaire looks into how students view the role of the English proficiency test as a criterion in the admission process with respect to their previous experience and Gender. In addition, it looks at the attitude of the students toward the academic support provided by the university. Finally, it gives an idea about the extent of using English language in the daily life civilities, for the detailed questionnaire, see appendix 8 and for summary of the results, see appendix 9. The questionnaire was divided into three sections and the responses were as follows:

### **Section One:**

This figure information was driven from the first section which asked the students about their gender. The total number of participants was 32. Female respondents were more than male.

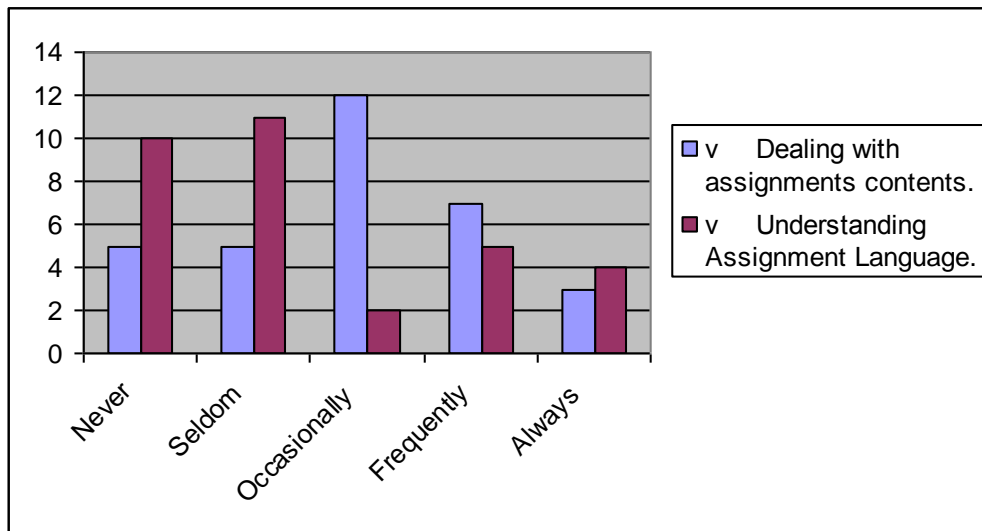


**Figure 6**

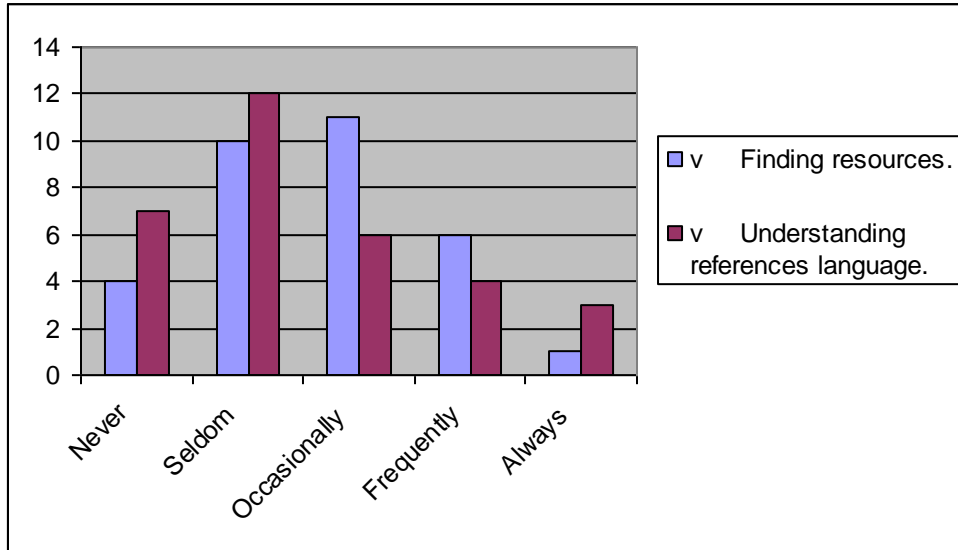
## Section Two:

The next figures provide information regarding the study areas the students face difficulty in. the study areas were divided into areas related to the course work, areas related to classroom work and discussion and lastly areas related to home reading and preparation. For the purpose of proper analysis, some of the charts include two study areas in comparison as follows:

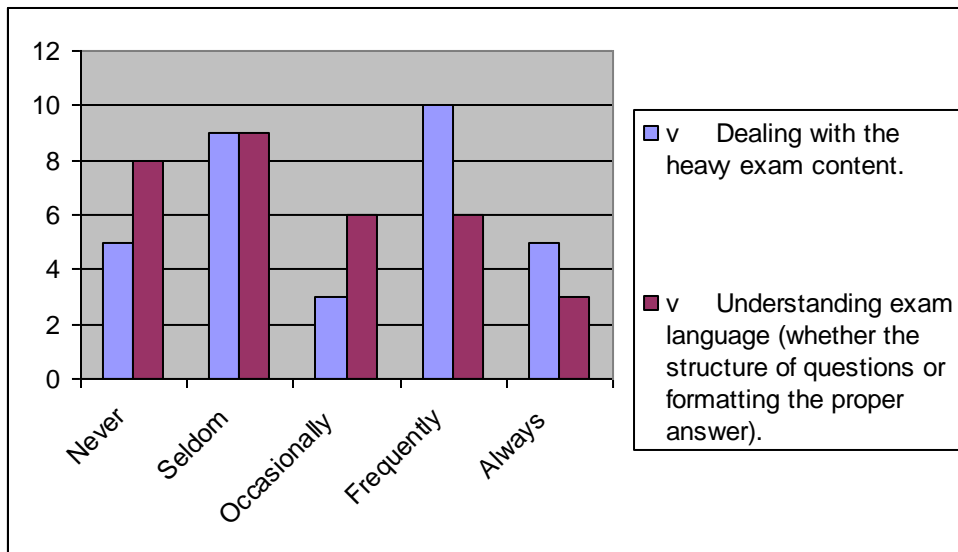
### I. Course Work:



**Figure 7: Degree of Difficulty in Dealing with Assignment Contents versus Understanding Assignment Language.**

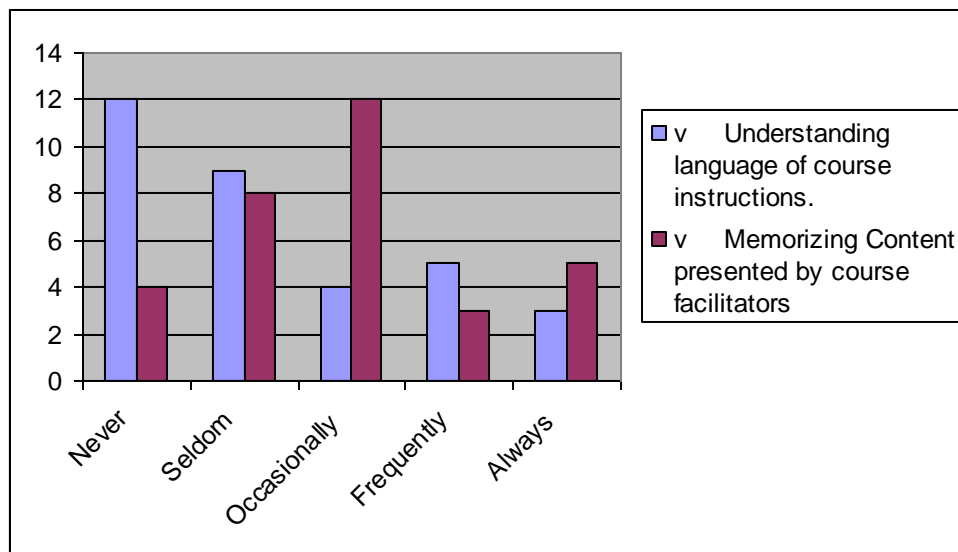


**Figure 8: Degree of Difficulty in Finding Resources versus Understanding References Language.**

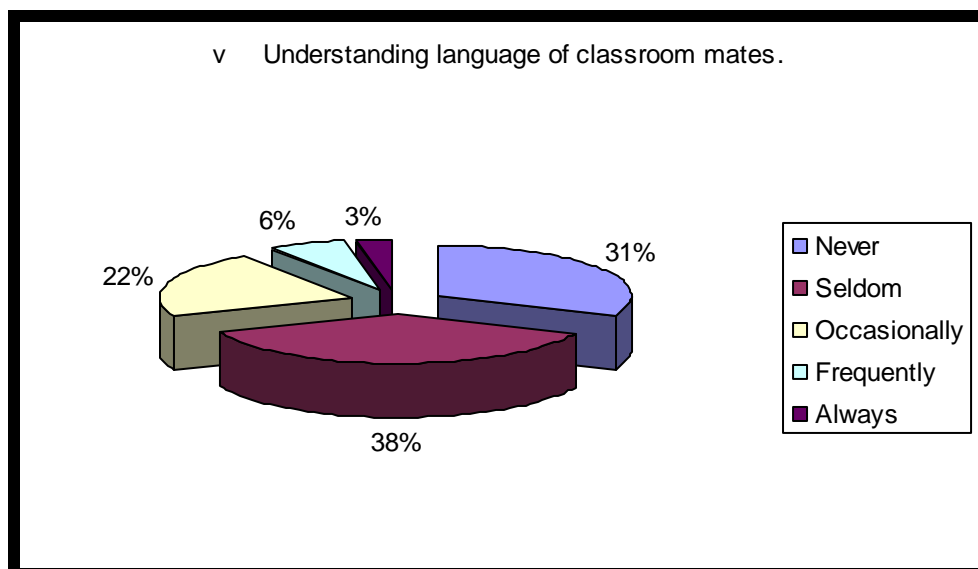


**Figure9: Degree of Difficulty in Dealing with the heavy exam Content versus Understanding Exam language.**

**II. Classroom Work and Discussions:**

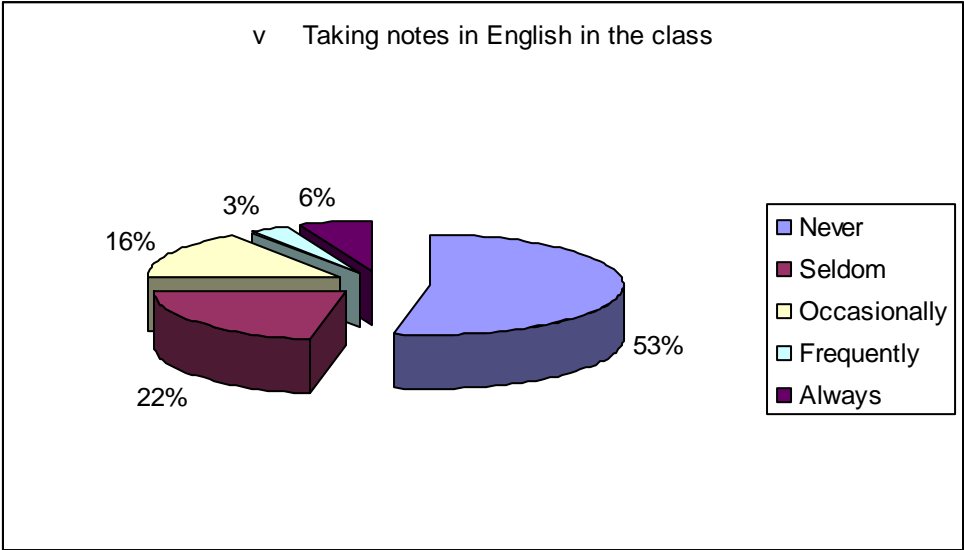


**Figure 10: Degree of Difficulty in Understanding Language of Course Instructions versus Memorizing Content Presented by Course Facilitator.**

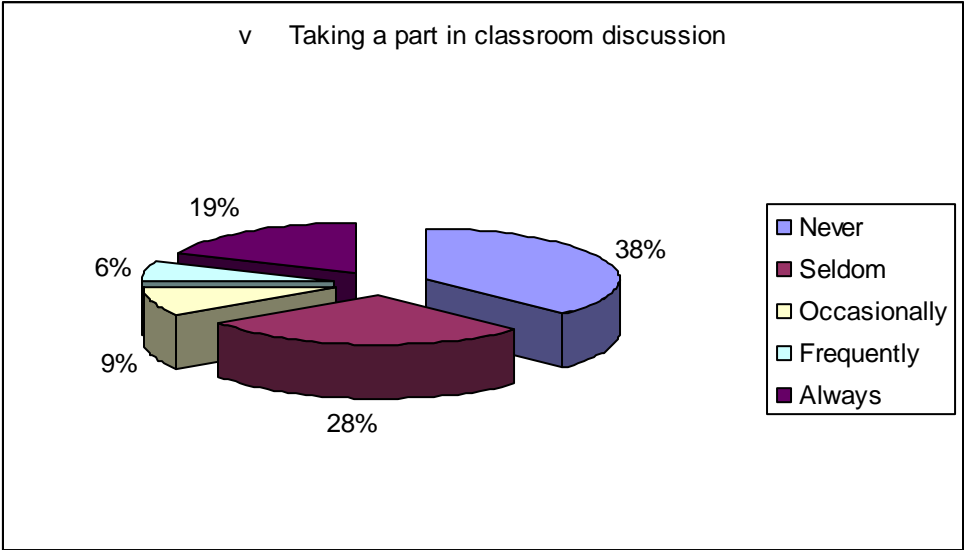


**Figure 11: Degree of Difficulty in Understanding Language of Classroom Mates.**

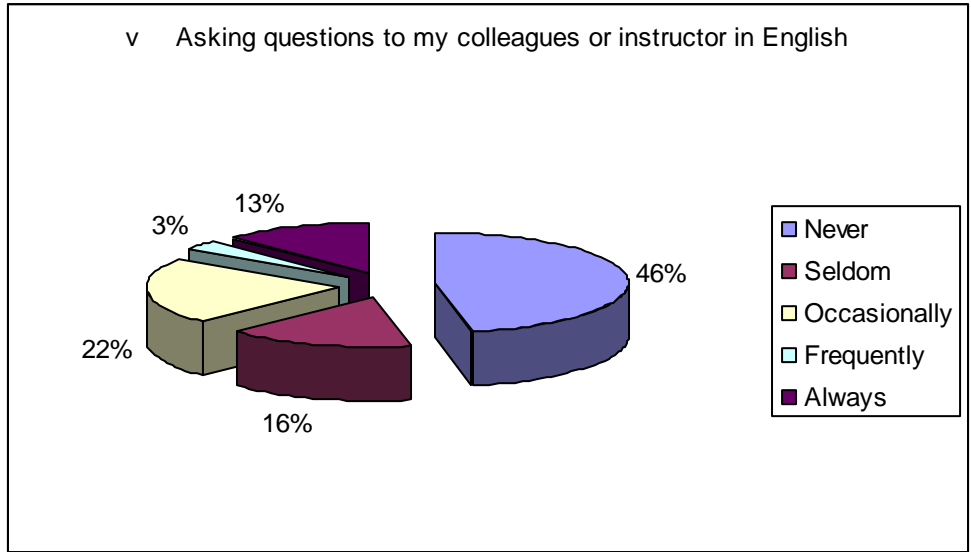




**Figure 12: Degree of Difficulty in taking Notes in English in the Class.**

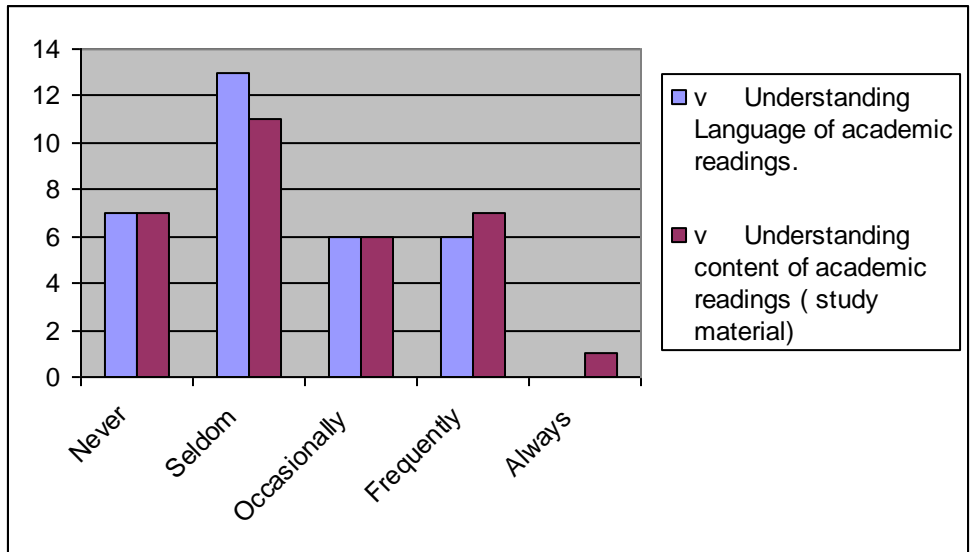


**Figure 13: Degree of Difficulty in Taking a Part in Classroom Discussion.**



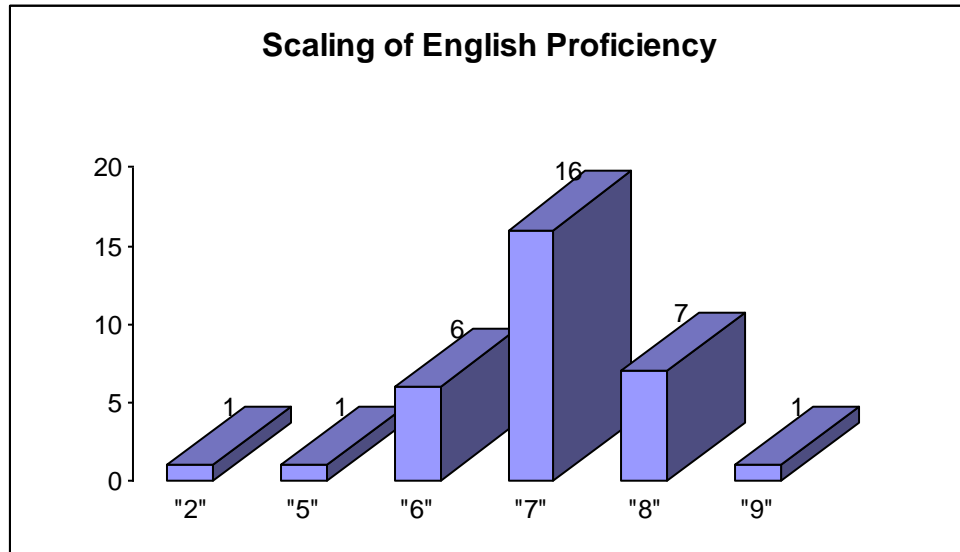
**Figure 14: Degree of Difficulty in Asking Questions to Colleagues or Instructor in English.**

**III. Home Reading and Preparation**

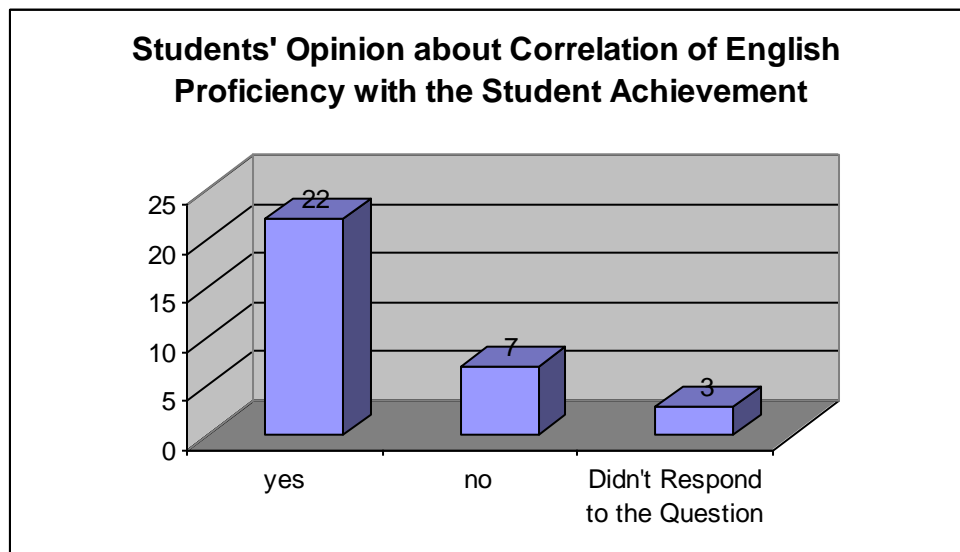


**Figure 15: Degree of Difficulty in Understanding Language of Academic Reading versus Understanding Content of Academic Readings.**

**Section Three:**



**Figure 16**



**Figure 17**

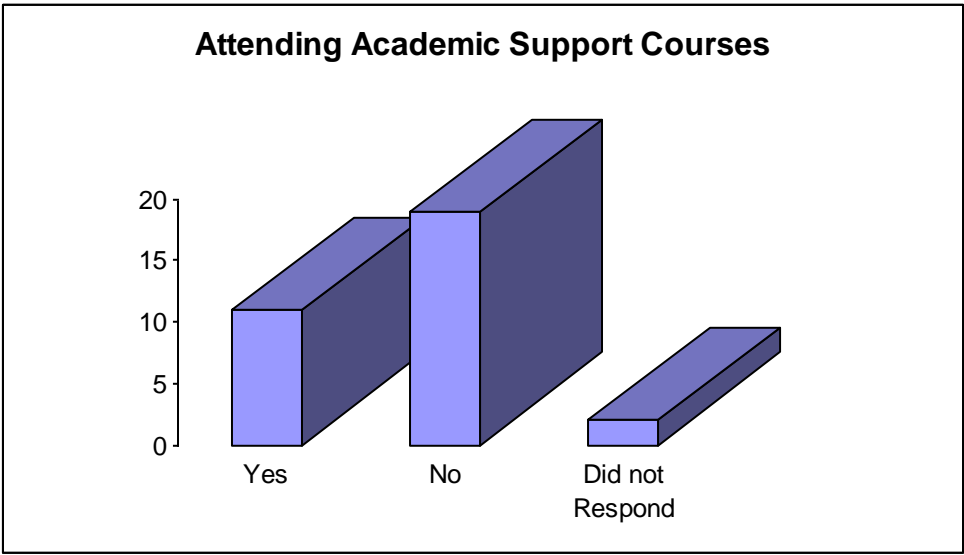


Figure 18

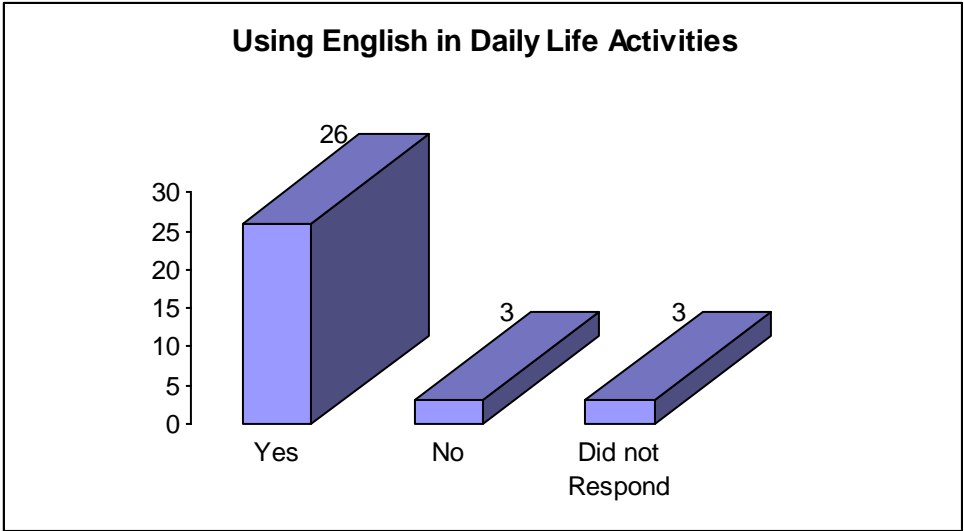


Figure 19

**Written Responses for Section III:**

Table 18	
<b>English level relationship with the courses' achievement, Whether hinder or assist</b>	
<b>1.</b>	Due to the nature of the study that requires individual ability to read, understand and analyze the contents. Without a good education founded on strong English language focus, much of my achievement would not be possible.
<b>2.</b>	It does have effect but it is not the main factor.
<b>3.</b>	Yes it does assist since it build the vocabulary and the language
<b>4.</b>	It helps in all aspect of my studies especially the assignment.
<b>5.</b>	It affects the writing in the exam and assignment; hence it affects the final mark which is already not fare.
<b>6.</b>	Assist
<b>7.</b>	If I am fluent in English it will be defiantly very easy for me to participate in the class and express my thought and opinion.
<b>8.</b>	To a large extent, because if you posses good English skills it would reflect on your comprehension of requirements and references and consequently on your presented material which is what is your digestion of topics read by you.
<b>9.</b>	Mastering the English language facilitates understanding the material provided, although some material is technical and requires the student to look for the meaning in a dictionary.
<b>10.</b>	Most of the assignments are research- based where writing in English need to be professional.
<b>11.</b>	I can produce higher quality assignments and better exam answers.
<b>12.</b>	Mainly in delivering and communicating the ideas that I have. Words selection and composition can make our ideas more appealing. In writing, persuasion skills are important.
<b>13.</b>	Yes, it would improve the achievement but 05-10%.
<b>14.</b>	Directly impacts the written material, delivery of the discussion point (whether written or spoken) and ease in explaining point of view during exams &/or discussions.
<b>15.</b>	Not the language as such, but memorizing is the most difficult part in my studies. I hope the exams get less percentage than the report so we have better chances to get more marks in the overall. That's of course my point of view.
<b>16.</b>	Better understanding of ideas, and relate them to real life. Faster reading of academic material, more content and ideas covered which results in better assignments and exams.
<b>17.</b>	The exams, assignment and coursework is in English language and hence explanations need to be in English, the clarity of explanation requires good English.
<b>18.</b>	It allowed me to present my ideas more accurately.
<b>19.</b>	It helped me to read many journals which assist me with the knowledge

	and findings.
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Table 19 <b>Benefits from attending Academic Support Courses</b>	
1.	Yes, especially since the masters course required new skills of critical analysis and formal writing style.
2.	Some times.
3.	It did help in academic writing, standards of referencing, certain dos and do not of academic writing.
4.	It helps.
5.	Referencing
6.	I learned a lot from these classes especially how to do my assignments and how to do the bibliography and references. Furthermore, improve my writing skills.
7.	Academic Support Courses give more familiarity with English Language through life conversations and examples given by the lecturers as well as side discussions with colleagues
8.	I did attend the study skills classes. It helped improve the reference procedures and properly rephrasing direct quotations.
9.	I have attended some classes at the beginning. It was good I also suggested having online English support course with some soft of measurement to the student understanding.
10.	

Table 20 <b>Using English in daily life activities</b>	
1.	Due to work environment and daily interactions in life.
2.	Yes, I work in English medium.
3.	All the time during my 9 hours a day job! And with my friends.
4.	I use English most of the time in workplace as I deal with tourists.
5.	Sometimes not always since I think in English not Arabic.
6.	My work language.
7.	At work.
8.	Yes. In work as a civil engineer, in web browsing, to watch TV and to achieve simple daily activities as shopping , dining and transportation.
9.	While working and shopping.
10.	During work.
11.	Sometimes during the work with my non-Arabic colleagues.
12.	Work.
13.	In class –with friends –at work –presentations.
14.	In work, communicating with forging people. Many people learned English from the American movies; this is good but not good enough for Academic purposes especially in a British University and at a Master Level.

<b>15.</b>	I do work, and all our correspondences are in English language and all our meetings are in Eng. Lang. as well.
<b>16.</b>	Work, writing emails, preparing my dissertation, reading novels, watching movies. In short, better English, better life. It is not that I hate my mother tongue (Arabic), I love it and respect more than English, but the knowledge language is English.
<b>17.</b>	At home.
<b>18.</b>	For communication with colleagues and friends.
<b>19.</b>	I work for a multicultural company were English is the common mean of communication.

### 5.3. Results related to Interviews with Professors:

The interview was recorded and transcribed for both professors as follows. For the interview questions, see appendix 10.

**Table 21**

Professor A	Professor B
<b>1. Q1: In your opinion, what are the principles factors affecting student achievement in Project Management Program?</b>	
<p>1. Diversity in terms of sector as it creates very rich environment for discussion.</p> <p>2. Diversity in gender.</p> <p>3. Ethnic diversity enriches also the discussion.</p> <p>Those can be considered as general factors.</p> <p>1. Level of English proficiency (Good level of English proficiency especially verbal as it is believed that the student has poor verbal English language proficiency achieves low in the written one but it is common to get a student with good verbal and weak written English.</p> <p>2. Experience (background) that helps in raising the standard of discussion.</p>	<p>1. Attitude toward learning. Those who have positive attitude to learn will ask more questions and will be more concerned about material.</p> <p>2. Study skills of student.</p> <p>3. Educational background:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Past experience classroom learning as the active learning needs critique.</li> </ul> <p>4. English language: the most critical issue. As project management attracts people from different areas like Turkey and China, there is a massive problem with English verbal and written.</p>
<b>2. Q2: Do you think English proficiency has a direct relationship with student success? Why?</b>	
<p>Yes it has as:</p> <p>1. Student with good level of English is much more adopted to catch the new knowledge.</p> <p>2. A person with Basic English will find it easier to learn new terminology and to catch up with the program as it is English mediated.</p> <p>3. Course work will be performed better.</p>	<p>Yes, as English is fundamental for student's success. English proficiency is not alone; together with other factors as study skills and Educational background. Of course, student who has poor English perform lower in the exams.</p> <p>Spoken English has a positive relation with written English and significant relation with performance especially in essay exams.</p>



<b>3. Q3: In case you have a student with LEP, what are the most common areas or academic achievement domains in which the student may demonstrate low performance?</b>	
<p>Usually those students are :</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Withdrawn in the class and not active therefore not involved in discussion (they are the last volunteer to give idea).</li> <li>2. In written exam as there is no body to check for draft, time limitation, expressing ideas that need good English language and this type of exam is considered more challenging.</li> </ol> <p>But students may show high performance in written assignments if used proper resources.</p>	<p>It is obvious that the students with poor English Language will be absent or leave early. The students with LEP usually perform low in essay exam and oral presentation.</p> <p>But:</p> <p>High achievement in classroom discussion as people are good in understanding definitions (learn it perfectly).</p>
<b>Q4:What type of Academic support program do you have for your students?</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Study skills.</li> <li>2. English language Support.</li> <li>3. Retake of the module.</li> <li>4. Diagnostic tests in the beginning of the enrollment process but not supported.</li> </ol> <p>The academic support program run by two facilitators only.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The academic support provided by university.</li> <li>2. Support in classroom, as the program is taught by Arabic speaking and English speaking professors.</li> <li>3. Students are supported emotionally in the classroom but <i>we need nationals in the staff.</i></li> </ol>
<b>Q5: With regard to the exams of the students, what type of exams is used to assess the students?</b>	
Written exam in a form of essay in addition to the assignment submission	Essay exams, reports (assignments) and oral presentation for Strategy Module.
<b>Q6: What do you recommend to help students whose performance is low because of their English level?</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Institutionalizing things in mandatory way. Identify certain individuals who needs help and let them do extra work out of the courses time.</li> <li>2. Integration of learning approaches within the class.</li> <li>3. Draft revision needs more resources; manpower as we</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create parallel academic support with program content.</li> <li>2. English program and study skills should not be optional. it should be integrated and in the same continuum with the courses.</li> <li>3. Learning environment should be improved as presence of</li> </ol>

need technical tutor and language tutor.	mic to help the students to concentrate and listen will.
<b>Q7: What is the relation between English proficiency and continuing the master program?</b>	
High English level motivates students to improve and continue the program.	Yes as the students with poor English language needs extra load of work to achieve. Students are expected to be self-learners.
<b>Q8: Do you have a special form to fill in for evaluating the students' course work?</b>	
Yes, we have.	We have but it does not grade the English Language.

## **Chapter Six: Findings:**

### **6.1. Findings related to Students' Records Data:**

As it was mentioned earlier, this research aims at investigating the correlation between English proficiency measured by IELTS score and students' academic performance presented in a form of CGPA. The focus of the research also is to find the correlation between gender of the students and the academic performance based on their English proficiency. The extent of both correlations is also an area to be explored and discussed in the current paper.

The data set for this study provided an opportunity to look at the entering characteristics of the project management students who compromised the sample through their records in the university electronic records as well as the students who are currently enrolled in the program through questionnaire and interviews.

With regards to the correlation between English proficiency of the students measured by IELTS score and the academic performance measured by CGPA of all participants, the results were based three methods of data collection; students' records, students surveying and professors' face to face interviews.

Data analyzed by Pearson bivariate correlation showed a significant positive correlation at 0.01 levels for 137 students. As it was mentioned before, the 137 students represent the sample that has both variables (English proficiency score and CGPA). The results of the correlation revealed that English proficiency as an admission criterion plays an important role in academic performance (table 2). In other wards, students who have low English proficiency score or no evidence of English proficiency may be at risk of low academic performance.

An interesting significant finding in the study that English proficiency has a positive correlation with academic performance for non-native English speaking students. That is to say that English is an important predictor of students' academic success for students whose mother tongue is not English (table 3).the previous mentioned two results revealed that English is considered an important factor in determining students' success. Caution must be used when generalizing these results, as the number of the native English speaking students is very small overall.

In investigating the correlation between English proficiency and the academic performance for female and male students, the study revealed another interesting positive significant correlation for male students (table 5). On Contrary, There was no correlation between English proficiency and the academic performance for female students (table 4). In other words, female students may study harder and do more efforts to achieve in the program than male students. That is to say that there was a significant main effect for being a female or male on the academic achievement.

It was noted that while 94 (68.6%) of the participants are male, only 43(31.3%) are females. In other words, male students are more than doubled female students. It would be informative to compare the two groups within the other programs as a whole at the BUiD, but this beyond the scope of the current study.

Moreover, the analysis of the Emirati students in terms of the relationship between their level of English proficiency and their academic success revealed that there is no significant correlation between the mentioned variables (table 6). Further investigations are needed to explore the other factors that may contribute to the Emirati students' performance. An investigation of other program for the purpose of comparison is also recommended. In constant, the analysis of the results for the non- Emirati students found that there is no relationship between English proficiency and students' performance (table 7).

If we compare table (7) with table (8), we can reveal the following observation. Emirati students represented around 74% of the total number of the students that necessitate looking closely and separately at their sample while non- Emirati students represents only 26% of the total percentage of the students.

Likewise, the correlation for students with other languages excluding Arabic and English native speakers found no significant relationship for all the students who speak other languages rather than Arabic and English as well as the findings for Indian and Pakistani students that revealed the same correlation( table 9,11). The total number of students who are not English or Arabic native speakers and who were legible for running the correlation is 15. While 8 of them were Indian and 3 Pakistani, two of them only represent the number of students who speaks other/ other languages whose correlation was significant( table 12). As the samples of Pakistani and the other/other languages are very small overall, caution must be used in generalizing these findings. Further investigation on a larger sample may help to clarify the correlation.

The Iranian students' correlation revealed unexpected findings as it was significant for the correlation between IELTS scores and CGPA (table10). However, the number of the students was also very small as the correlation involved only 3 of the students. Further investigations are suggested to explore the correlation between English proficiency and academic achievement for Iranian students.

Native speakers' students' findings showed also no significant correlation between English proficiency and student performance(table 13). Nevertheless, it may be instructive in future studies to investigate the correlation of this group as the sample was very small.

For students who are Arab non- Emirati, the number of students who participated in running the correlation was 25. 19 of them were eligible for the correlation. The correlation did not show any interesting findings (table 14). The correlation between English proficiency and academic performance was not significant. Similarly, the

correlation between IELTS scores and CGPA for non-Arab non-Emirati was also not significant (table15). Further investigation is recommended.

Findings for the 32 students who had withdrawn, dropped-out or dismissed did not show any significant relationship between English proficiency and academic performance (table 16). The students represented 23% of the total students who have IELTS score and completed at least one module. The percentage is relatively significant so it may be instructive to investigate the reason behind incompleteness of the study in future researches.

Finally, the graduate students' correlation findings revealed no correlation between English proficiency and academic performance for a total of 17 students (table 17). 9 students did not participate in the correlation as they have missed data regarding to their English proficiency scores.

To sum up, the analysis of the data from the students' records revealed significant correlation between English proficiency and academic performance for all students and non native English speaking students. The findings indicate that English is a predictor of students' academic performance. The findings of male students showed another positive significant correlation which in turn may indicate that English proficiency predicts the student performance of male students. The findings of Iranian students as well as all other/ other languages were also positively significant but the number of the participants that was two for each group. This indicates cautious dealing with the findings in case of generalizing it and recommends further investigations on larger samples.

The correlation between English proficiency and academic achievements for other groups were not significant but they provide an opportunity for more investigations to determine the extent of the correlation between the English proficiency scores and CGPA of the students.

## **6.2. Findings related to Students' Questionnaire:**

Moreover, as mentioned before, this study employed another data collection method in a form of completing questionnaire distributed on the Project Management students. As can be seen in appendix (7), the students' questionnaire included two closed question sections as well as an open questions section. The respondents were 32 students who are currently enrolled in the program.

The first section consists of one question asking about the gender of the participant. The aim behind that is to help in analyzing the response of the other sections. The participants were 18 male students and 14 female students. All of them are students in project management students.

The second section consists of three parts. Each part covers study areas where students may find difficulty in covering three major domains in the student dilemma of learning namely course work, classroom involvement, and lastly home reading and preparation. This section helps to identify the extent of English proficiency involvement in the learning activities that leads to completion of the study successfully from the students' point of view. The findings of each domain were as follows:

### **I. Course Work:**

Figure 7 provides information regarding dealing with assignment content as well as understanding assignment language. As we can see from the data, 10 students (31%) reported they do not have a problem in understanding assignment language. 11 students said that seldom have difficulty in understanding assignment language. The students, of these two categories, represent 65% of the total number of the participants. Only, 4 students said that they always have a problem with understanding assignment language.

The findings showed that the students also do not face a significant level of difficulty in dealing with the assignment content. While 13% reported they always face a problem in

dealing with it and 16% claimed that they frequently have difficulty in dealing with assignment content, 66% reported that they seldom or never have such a difficulty.

(Figure 8) shows the study area difficulties of finding resources and understanding reference languages. The findings revealed that minimum percentage of students have difficulty in these two areas.

The interesting findings were regarding the difficulty of exams as study area (figure 9). 16% of the students said they always have a difficulty in dealing with heavy exam content in addition to 31% said that they frequently face this difficulty. This represents almost half the students. For understanding exam language, 9% only mentioned that they always have difficulty in it in addition to 19% frequently face difficulty in understanding exam language.

## **II. Classroom Work and Discussion:**

For understanding language of course instructions, findings showed that most of the students (N =21) do not have difficulty in this study area. Similarly, no significant difficulty was reported for memorizing the content presented by course facilitator (figure 10).

For understanding language of classroom mates, 69% of the students answered by never or seldom. In other words, most of the students do not find difficulty in understanding the language of their colleagues (figure11). Also, taking a part in classroom discussion, 66% of the students reported that they rarely or never face a difficulty in sharing in the classroom discussion (figure13). In other words, the findings may indicate that the most of the students do not face a problem in the discussion with others whether in the class or with colleagues.

An interesting and unexpected finding that 53% of the students do not have any difficulty in taking notes in English in the class in addition to 22% have seldom difficulty. 6% only



reported that they always face difficulty in that while 3% said that they frequently face such a difficulty (figure 12).

Around half of the participants expressed that they do not have difficulty at all in asking questions to their colleagues or instructor in English (figure14). That reflects again that the students found that they do not have a problem in their verbal English.

### **III. Home Reading and Preparation**

For understanding language of academic readings, 20 of the students reported that they do not have or rarely have a difficulty in this study area while none of the students reported that they always have a problem in understanding language of academic readings. Same for understanding content of academic reading, 18 of the students reported rare difficulty or no difficulty while only one reported facing difficulty in understanding content of academic reading (figure 15).

On the other hand, a combination of closed and opened questions were structured and placed in the third section. The first question in this section asked the students to scale their English proficiency level from 1 to 10. While 50% of the students scaled their English proficiency level as “7”, 38% scaled themselves at level “6” and “8”.for the details, see figure (16). In other words, most of the students found that their level of English is relatively appropriate for their level of learning and they do not face a problem in dealing with the language.

The second questions explored the students’ opinion regarding the correlation between their English proficiency level and their academic achievement. The students were asked to mention whether their English proficiency level and their academic achievement are correlated. Then, the students who answered by “yes” should clarify their answer. An interesting finding that 22 of the participants (69%) reported that English level has a correlation with academic achievement. 22% of the students said that there is no relationship between them while the remaining 7% did not respond to the question, see

figure (17). That is to say English is an important predictor of students' achievement as reported by the students.

Commenting on the second part of the question, the students explained the relation behind considering the correlation between English proficiency and academic achievement as English language is important in understanding the material, classroom discussion, reading and understanding references. The majority of the students mentioned that good English proficiency helps in fulfilling the course requirements "course work" and therefore better academic achievement. For detailed responses, see table (18).

The third question in the same part asked about attendance of academic support program provided by the university. Only 34% of the students (N =11) said that they attend the academic support program classes. 6% did not answer the questions. Most of the students said that they do not attend the academic support program classes, around 60% (figure18). That is to say that the students do not recognize the importance of attending the academic support program which in turn affect their academic achievement.

Only 9 students commented on the second part of the question regarding the benefits of attending the academic support program classes. 4 of them mentioned its importance in writing bibliography. Five students reported that it is important in academic writing skills while one student said that it is important in the daily life conversation and discussion in the class and with colleagues. One of the students suggested to have online English support course (table 19). In conclusion, high percentage of the students who were surveyed does not attend the academic support program. The students' comments were mainly focused on the study skills course mainly academic writing skills and citation.

The last question in this part asked the students whether they use English in their daily life activities. The majority of the students ( 81%) agreed that they use English in their daily life. Three of the students said no and the same number of students did not respond to the question (figure 19).

The students written responses revealed that 12 out of the 19 students responded to this part related the use of English to the work condition mainly. Others mentioned as they use with friends and at home (figure20).

In other wards, English seems to be an important language in the work of the students and that is explained by the multi culture environment in UAE that require the use of English especially at work.

### **6.3. Findings related to Professors' Interviews:**

The interview was composed of 8 questions in a form of semi-structured questions. The purpose is to identify the points of view of the academic staff regarding English proficiency correlation with academic performance in addition to obtain recommendations and identify the other factors that may have an impact on the student achievement. For the interview questions, see appendix 8 and for the professors' responses, see table 21. The interview took place after arranging for an appointment separately with each respected professor.

Both professors identified English proficiency as a principle factor affecting students' achievement in project management program. Both professors raised background as an important factor. While professor (A) identified experience background as a principle factor, professor (B) identified the classroom learning background as an important factor. Attitude toward learning was prioritize as the most important principle factor by professor (B). Other factors such as diversity in gender, ethnicity diversity and diversity in terms of sectors were identified as positive general principle factors by professor (A). Study skills were considered also as a principle factor affecting project management student achievement.

In the second question, both professors emphasize on the importance of English proficiency in student success. It is identified as fundamental and a factor for better performance. In other words, English proficiency has a direct relationship with students' achievement as reported by professors.

In the third questions, essay exams were identified by both professors as an area where students with LEP demonstrate low performance. Other factors such as withdrawal in the classroom and irregular attendance were also identified. It is noted by professor (A) that the reason of low performance in written exams may be due to limited English to express ideas, limited time, no body to check for draft and that essay exam is considered challenging method of assessment.

With regards to the academic support programs offered to students, both professors mentioned that study skills course and English language support course are provided by university. Professor A considered retake of the module as another support for the students while professor B added the support in the classroom academically and emotionally. An important point was mentioned by professor regarding to another academic support program which is identifying the students with low English proficiency in the beginning of the program by diagnostic tests but he said that it is not supported by the university or in other words no proper follow up after it. In other words, the university along with the professors provides academic support for the students. However further studies should investigate the extent of accountability of the students in getting use of these programs in addition to, the issue of diagnostic tests.

The professors reported that the students are assessed through written exam and assignment at the end of each module in addition to oral presentation for Strategy module. There is a special form to score the students but it does not grade English language. Further study on the effectiveness of the evaluation form in grading the students is recommended.

The interesting finding that both professors recommended to integrate the learning approaches in the classroom; English and academic skills along with the content to be covered. Another significant recommendation, both professors recommended to mandatory not optional. Another recommendation by professor (B) is to use mic in the classroom to facilitate concentration of the students in the learning environment.

Finally, both professors emphasize the importance of English proficiency as a factor in completion of the study as it motivates the students and the students with poor English is in need to struggle more to achieve.

To conclude, it was unexpected to have much similarity in the responses of both professors however similar responses may identify significances. The English was identified as a principle factor that has a direct relationship with student performance. Essay exams were identified as a challenging type of assessment. The students are provided by different academic support programs but integration of these programs along with the courses and making it mandatory is a recommendation raised by both professors. Further studies are needed to investigate the correlation between English proficiency and program completion in depth.

## **Chapter seven: Discussion and Recommendations:**

This study revealed some interesting results that are important for future development and improvement of the postgraduate education generally and mainly for project management students at BUiD. As mentioned earlier, this study is unique in the university because it is the first major study to investigate the relationship between English proficiency and academic performance. This paper's main strength is that it provides insight into the correlation from different dimension of through using different types of data collection as well as data analysis that help in supporting the study.

The primary objective of this study was to examine the correlation of English proficiency with academic performance for the students of Project management Master Program. The correlation was examined according to different categories as the status of the students mainly for graduated and dismissed students, nationality and language of the students and gender of the participants.

Interestingly, the findings of the current study showed that the relationship between English proficiency at admission and the academic performance of postgraduate students at BUiD is significantly positive to a certain extent. It was mainly positively significant for all students enrolled in the program between September 2004 and September 2008. Also, it revealed a positive correlation for all non-native English speakers but this result can not be generalized as the number of native speaker students is relatively small.

The relationship between English proficiency and academic performance for male students showed a significant positive correlation. On the contrary, the correlation was not significance for female students. Such an interesting finding may suggest that the female students, even with limited English capabilities, can study harder than male students in order to achieve. These findings require further study.

In literature, (Wainer & Steinberg, 1992) state that, “Other researchers have argued that women receive higher grades than men because they work harder at school”. Cited by Castagnetti & Rosti (2007:17).

Other significant correlations were found in analyzing the data of Iranian students and two other languages (Tanzanian and Spanish). Positive significant correlations of both groups were found but the issue that both groups have a very small sample that needs further studies on larger sample.

The researcher finds that the issue of English proficiency depends on the capabilities of the students and their language skills as the analysis of the results for, being Arabic speaking whether Emirati or from other Arab countries, being native speaker, or speaking other languages such as Indian and Pakistani did not revealed any significant correlation for the late mentioned groups.

Students’ questionnaire results support the same finding as 69% of the currently enrolled students mentioned that English proficiency has a direct relationship to their academic performance as they study in English mediated university and they are expected to read, write, discuss and be evaluated in English. Additionally, the interviewed professors confirm that by emphasize on the direct relationship between English proficiency and students performance in terms of catching required knowledge, having active role on the classroom and performing well in the exams.

In literature, Oller’s (1982) language proficiency factor has been allied to the language abilities needed to cope in the classroom. Most (but not all) language tests are closely linked to the cognitive, academic language skills of the classroom. Cited by Baker (2006:13)

Barrett-Lennard & Stappenbelt (2006) emphasized the importance of English proficiency on admission “ ... it is important to ensue English language entry levels are maintained at a suitable level.”

The first suggestion may seem pointy-headed but it is the most important in education that policies should be evaluated using scientific methods- experimental methods, if at all possible. The major interventions such as drop-out and English proficiency as an admission criterion should be based on studies and should be followed up and modified based on the findings.

In addition, The Implication of the fact that research- based postgraduate programs may require more English language skills as the students are expected to be active learners necessitates intensive supporting academic programs. The researcher finds that the students especially from non-English background will need help with their language skills from the beginning of the program and even till they finish their study at universities using English as language of instruction. The academic support for their academic skills and their English language proficiency helps them to improve their abilities to use academic skills in their assignment and exams and to improve their language skills, especially writing skills and thus enhance their academic performance.

By referring to the results of the students' questionnaire, it was found that 60% out of the participants do not attend the academic support programs. In other words, analysis revealed poor students' attendance for the academic support programs. Likewise, the professors mentioned the need of the students to attend the academic support programs as they help in improving their performance level. A recommendation of integrating the academic support programs with the content was raised by both interviewed professors.

The Feast (2002) study, on the international students at University of South Australia recommended strengthen English language proficiencies of students and supporting them since enrollment into university. She also recommended employing extra staff skilled as an option to support the students.

The researcher explained the academic support program in relation to the Project management Postgraduate Program (figure 20) as follows:



1. On admission, the students are assessed based on English proficiency test (IELTS or TOEFL). As it is admission criterion, all students must meet this criterion.
2. During the enrollment process, the students are assessed for their writing level of English language by institutional diagnostic test.
3. Identifying the students with LEP, the students are referred to academic support program that is facilitated by two instructors.
4. English language is used as the language of instruction in running the program. Academic support courses take place as optional course.
5. Evaluation of the students after finishing each module until completion of the study.

In other words, English proficiency is assessed as an admission criterion which is mandatory and as a diagnostic test. As it was reported by professor (A), diagnostic test needs more support to be effective. Identification of the LEP students along with the process of improving them need more staff as currently there is only two facilitators. The university provides academic support for the students but the students have the choice to attend the provided courses. As it is reported by the students that high percentage of them do not attend the academic support classes

From this, it is recommended that academic and English support programs to be given more attention. Moving forward, there are two recommendations for bringing about real change. The first is to prepare students through initiating pre-requisite master program through which all the needed academic skills and intensive English course will take place (figure 21).

In literature, Hoare (2005), states that, “The school’s one-year pre-master programme has a 90% success rate and a smattering of students go on to Oxford and Cambridge as well as prestigious institutions such as UCL, Kings, Imperial College, Durham and Warwick”.

The second is to integrate the academic support program to be in parallel context with the program courses. This can be done as separate mandatory classes or even at the same

time of the class by having two instructors one from academic support department and the other is from the program faculty (figure 22).

In addition, increase the number of staff is recommended to help in facilitating the academic support services and provide students with more focus and attention.

Moreover, training of the students on the available resource; how to use blackboard, access to the electronic resources will be helpful in improving students performance.

On the other hand, a recommendation was highlighted by one of surveyed students to have online English courses which are very practical especially as it helps in case the students are full time students, have other commitments or not willing to attend.

Randeree (2005/2006) emphasizes on the use of different new technology which can help to promote independent learning such as communication through e-mails and chatting, student-student collaboration to enhance communication skills. The researcher illustrate that the use of different new technology can help in turn to enhance the language of the students.

The majority of the students mentioned also that they use English in their daily life activities in dealing with their colleagues, in market and mostly in work. In other words, UAE is a rich country regarding to the presence of various nationalities in it and this highlight the importance of culture diversity as a factor in many areas in the country. An important area to be mentioned is Education.

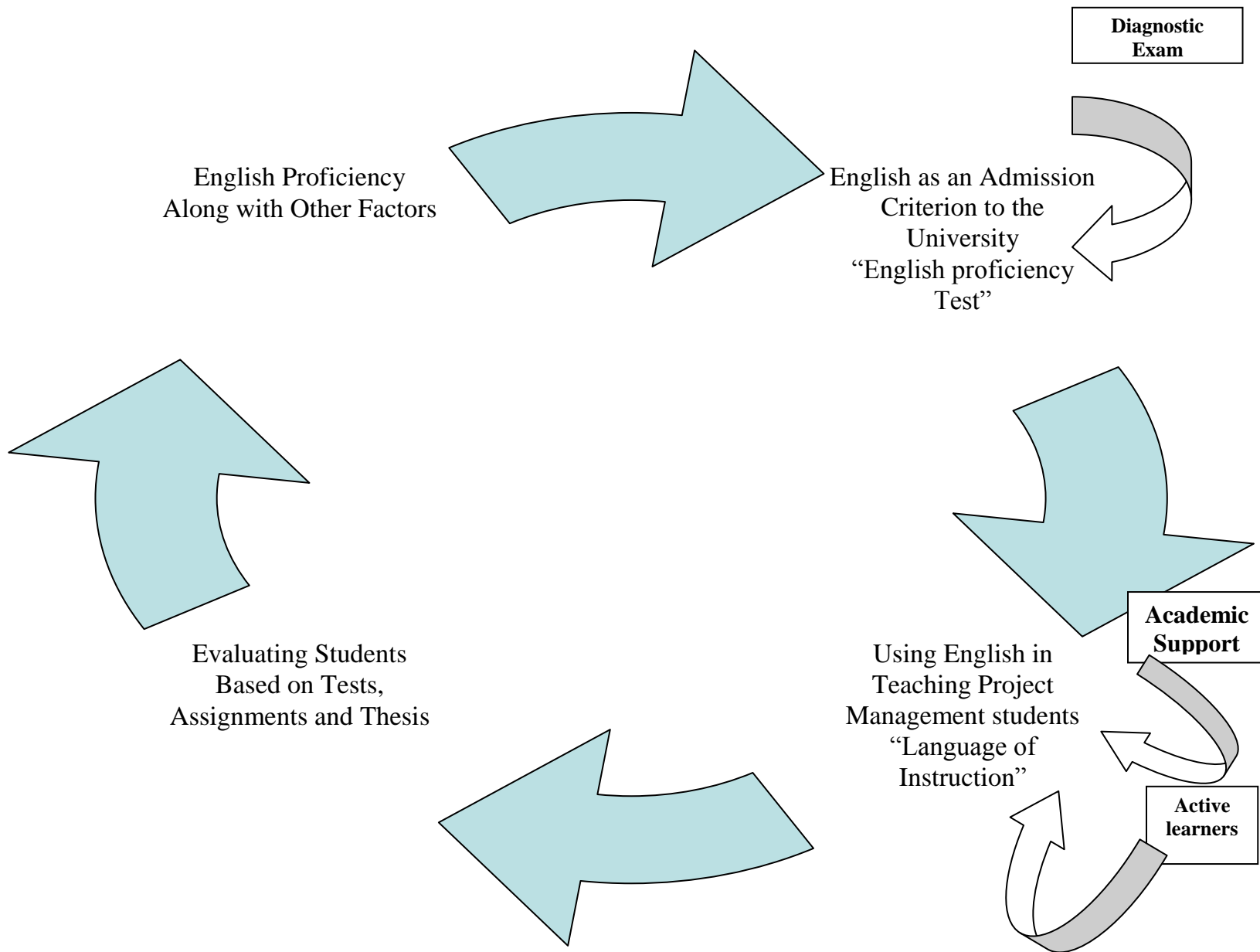
### **Future Studies:**

“To understand is hard, once one understands, action is easy”  
(Sun Yat Sen, 1866-1925)Cited by Cohen, et al (2003).

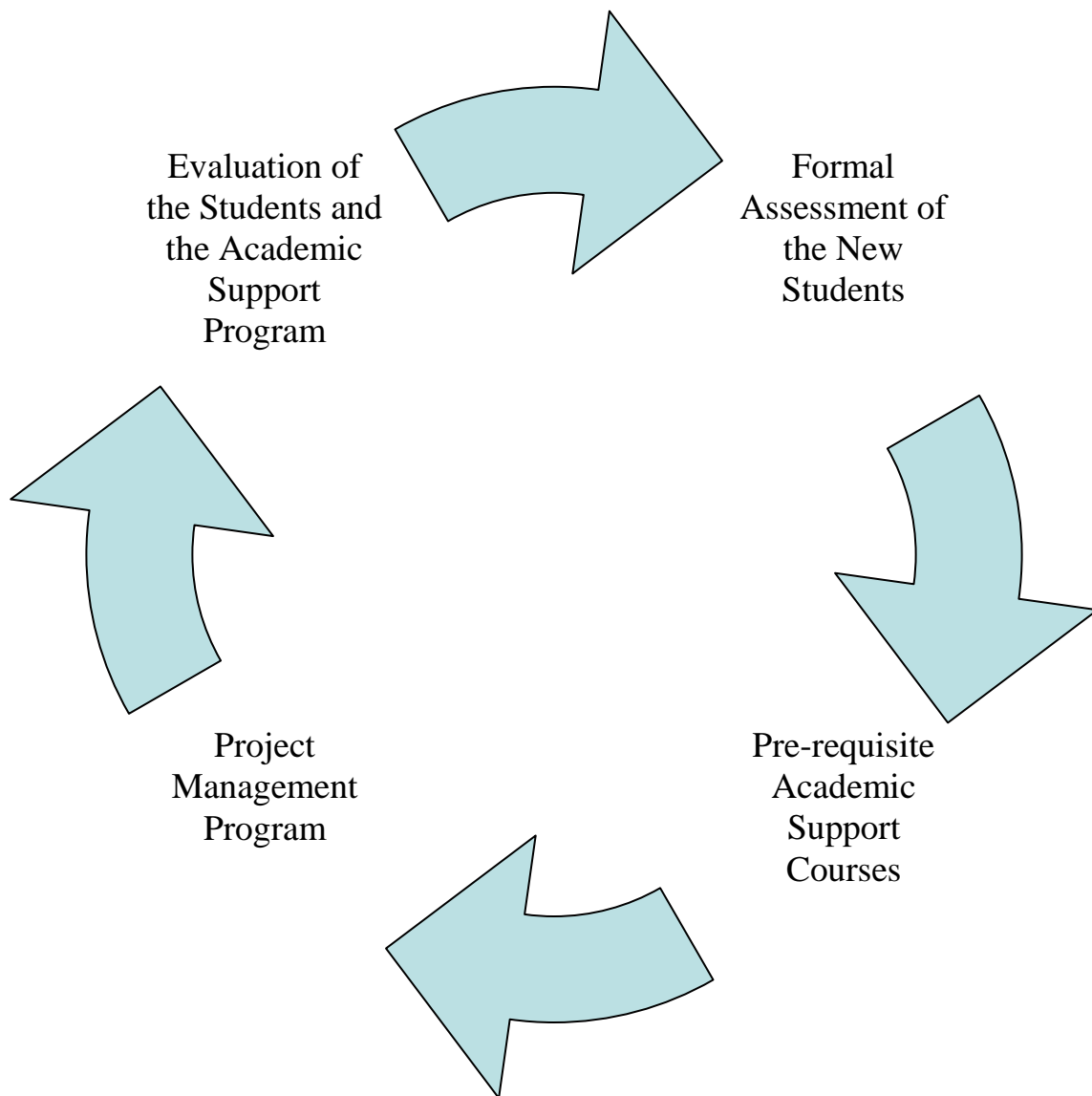
Since English proficiency is a significant admission criterion predicting the academic performance as mentioned earlier, the following interventions are recommended:

- ❖ Since the program is designed using active learning approach, further research should study the approach deeply by adding different demographic characteristics like culture, motivation, self efficacy, socioeconomic and attitude of student toward learning.
- ❖ A large weight factor could potentially be assigned to the English proficiency criterion. As the current study examine a limited number of students, future studies can cover a large sampling from different departments or to compare with the same type of program in another university.
- ❖ Previous academic performance is often a good indicator of a student future academic performance so it is recommended to study the previous GPA of the students and their academic background and correlate to the current GPA.
- ❖ Attendance of the students could be an interesting area to be studied in terms of each relationship with student success.
- ❖ The relationship between English proficiency and attitude, and the completion of the program could be an area of investigation.
- ❖ Identification of the reasons of incompleteness of the study including data on student employment and change in the marital status while in the university.
- ❖ Further investigation on the relationship between gender and academic achievement in a form of comparative study with other university could be an area of interest.

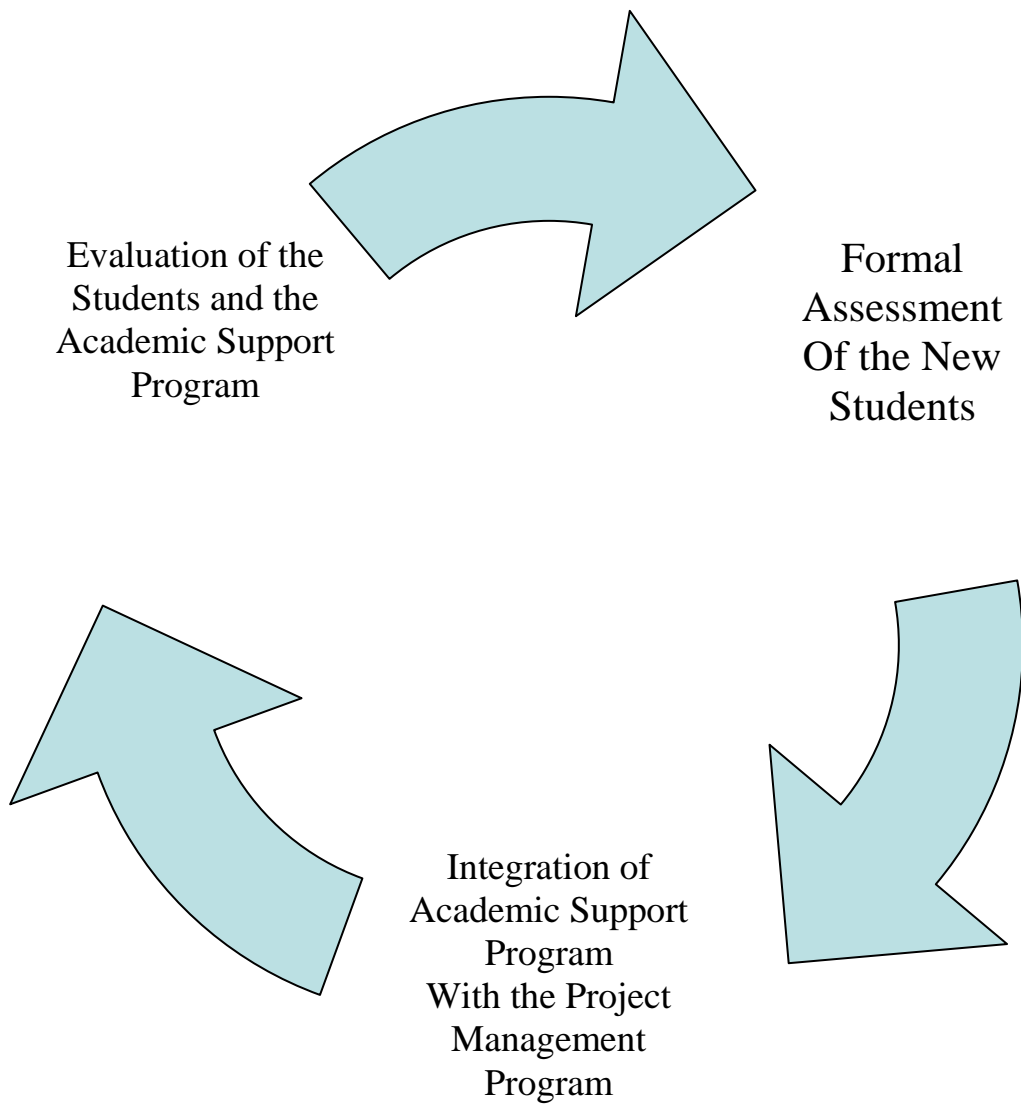
- ❖ The correlation between IELTS test components (reading, writing, listening and speaking) and the academic performance of students could be an interesting area of investigation.
- ❖ A study to compare the achievement of the first semester to the second semester of graduate full time students and first year to second year of part time students could be helpful in measuring achievement of both groups in two periods.
- ❖ Effect of culture diversity in the learning environment and thus on students' performance is a recommended area of investigation.



**Figure 20: The Current Position of Academic Support Program.**



**Figure 21: Pre-requisite Academic Support Courses in the Cycle of Learning Process of Project Management Postgraduate Program.**



**Figure 22: Integration of Academic Support Courses in the Cycle of Learning Process of Project Management Postgraduate Program.**

## **Chapter Eight: Conclusion:**

This study has investigated the correlation between English proficiency measured by IELTS and academic performance as measured by CGPA. English proficiency tests scores were accredited by Higher Education to be used as a criterion in assessing individual level of English proficiency of applicants. The most common used tests are IELTS and TOEFL. The aim of assessing the English language is to determine whether or not the applicants have a level of English proficiency to be able to adapt to study in English language mediated university.

The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. Professors' interview and students' questionnaire were employed for the collection of data in addition to the raw data from the students' records available in the electronic system of the university. The analysis of data is done by using SPSS program and Excel spread sheet to ensure the validity of results.

A strong conclusion is that English proficiency has a significant positive correlation with academic performance. In other words, students who have good English proficiency achieve, academically, better than students who have poor English proficiency. This study serves as a baseline for the future studies that may deal with this topic. It clarified the correlation of the English language and the academic success for Emirati students as well as other Arab non-Emirati students. It also studied the correlation for all other students with other languages rather than Arabic in the sample of the project management students. In addition, it explored the correlation between English proficiency and academic performance for both male and female students.

Interestingly, it was found that there was a positive significant correlation with academic performance of all students participated in the study at the 0.01 level. The results of all non-native English speakers revealed a positive significant correlation with academic performance at the 0.01 level. The generalization of the last findings may not be high as the comparative sample: native English speakers sample is very small. The results of Iranian and a small group of other languages consist of one Tanzanian and other Spanish



speaking student revealed a positive significant correlation. Those last correlations should be investigated in further study on a larger sample as the sample was very small.

On the other hand, no significant correlation was found between English proficiency and academic performance for Indian students, Pakistani students and native English speakers. As a large population of the students was Emirati, the Emirati group was subcategorized and compared with other groups. No significant correlation was found for the Emirati category, the non-Emirati category, the Arab non- Emirati and non-Arab, non-Emirati students.

Furthermore, results of the students' correlations between English proficiency and academic performance based on their gender showed interesting findings. The correlation for male students was significant at the 0.05 level but no significant correlation was found for female students. Also, the results showed no significant correlations for the graduates and the students who did not complete their studies.

Professors' questionnaire as well as professors' interview reported the direct correlation between English proficiency and academic success. Professors identified other factors related to students' academic performance such as educational background, experience background, study skills, and attitude toward learning. The positive factors related to academic issues may be the diversity in ethnicity in the classroom, gender diversity and sector diversity. These areas are recommended to be investigated in future studies. There was an observation that English was used in the daily life activities of the most of the questionnaire participants (81%) as well as in the classroom. This may be related to the culture diversity in Dubai.

Students' interviews also revealed that most of the students do not attend the academic support programs. Interview of the professors showed that the professors encourage integration of the academic support program with the courses. That is to say, there is a need to revise the process of the academic support program.

Therefore, it is recommended to run the academic support programs in another way besides requiring English proficiency proof in the process of admission. The recommended process of academic support program may be proceeding according to one of two options. First option is that the academic support program can be done through assessing the students in the beginning of the program and then introduce pre-requisite courses to be sure that the students start the program supported regarding their academic English skills. Second option is to integrate the academic support program in parallel with the courses. These are just suggestions for the decision makers regarding this issue.

Increasing the number of academic support staff is also recommended. The data regarding English proficiency and the drop-out rate should be reviewed, with interventions to be carried out based on the findings.

Finally, this study is one of the papers that examined the correlation between English proficiency and academic performance of the students. This study supported other research that found correlation between English proficiency and academic performance. Further investigations are encouraged to study deeply the recommended areas or to go deeply in one of the areas that covered in this study.

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