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The Predictive Validity of IELTS and Vietnam High School Graduation Examination English Test: Evidence from English Majors

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Article information	
Abstract	The university admission testing scenario in Vietnam has seen a mix of different tests, including the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and the Vietnam High School Graduation Examination (VHSGE). This study investigated the predictive validity of IELTS and VHSGE English test scores on GPAs of a population of 99 English Language majors at a university in Vietnam in the 2022 intake and also compared their GPAs, factoring in the admission tests and VHSGE admission blocks. Pearson correlation analyses revealed no significant relation between students' first-year GPA and VHSGE English scores and IELTS scores. However, independent samples *t*-tests confirmed that English courses' GPAs and first-year GPA of students admitted through IELTS were higher than those of students with the VHSGE English test. Additionally, analyses by the VHSGE admission blocks indicated inconsistent correlations between VHSGE English test scores and students' GPAs, and one-way ANOVA tests confirmed a statistically significant difference in VHSGE English test scores but no differences in GPAs among these blocks. The findings highlight the importance of further consideration for the use of these test results in university admissions and the need for providing academic skills to support newly-admitted English Language majors for university success.
Keywords	IELTS, Vietnam High School Graduation Examination, predictive validity, admission testing
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1. Introduction

Formerly known as the Vietnam National High School Graduation Examination (VNHSE), the Vietnam High School Graduation Examination (VHSGE) has been one of the most popular pathways to university admissions and a requisite for high school graduation in Vietnam. The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has administered VHSGE with three mandatory subjects: Mathematics, Literature, and English. In addition to these, one of two subject combinations, including Natural Science (Physics, Chemistry, and Biology) or Social Science (History, Geography, and Civic Education) have to be selected. Based on

intended majors and career interests, students applying to universities use test results from three subject tests, which form different admission blocks. Chief among them are as follows: Block A: Chemistry, Mathematics, and Physics; Block B: Mathematics, Chemistry, and Biology; Block C: Literature, History, and Geography; Block D: Foreign Language, Mathematics, and Literature. English is commonly selected for university applications among foreign languages, as it is typically part of the curriculum in most schools in Vietnam.

However, VHSGE is now a less favored method for university admissions than it used to be due to the availability of other pathways. In 2020, MOET decided to temporarily switch to online teaching and refine the curriculum for the second semester because of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, the VNHSE was renamed and revised as a graduation examination. Additionally, since 2005, Vietnam has promoted university autonomy policies to transfer decision-making to the institutional level and improve efficiency, which allows universities to use the results of this high-stakes exam according to their own needs. This scenario, consequently, gave rise to the widespread use of different pathways to university enrollment, prompting an increase in the number of test takers sitting for international standardized tests for admissions, especially the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), the results of which can be an alternative to VHSGE English test scores in many institutions.

Given the mosaic of different admission tests in Vietnam, it remains unclear whether international and national examinations, specifically IELTS and VHSGE, can accurately predict the future academic achievement of university students. The subject matter is often known as predictive validity, which refers to the degree to which a test can predict candidates' subsequent academic outcomes, often measured by their grade point average (GPA) (Woodrow, 2006). While there is no study into the prediction of VHSGE, that of IELTS is only limited to international contexts. Due to the widespread use of IELTS in assessing the readiness of students from non-English-speaking countries for English-medium courses, the predictive validity of this test is of major concern for many scholars (Green, 2007). However, research on the predictive power of IELTS has yielded uncertain results. Some research detected a positive correlation between IELTS test takers' band scores and their academic achievement in higher education (e.g., Hu & Trenkic, 2021; Thorpe et al., 2017), whereas other studies did not (e.g., Cotton & Conrow, 1998; Dooey & Oliver, 2002). This indicates there may be variation in the ability of IELTS to predict future academic performance depending on the circumstances and participant groups. It is, therefore, necessary to conduct a study into the predictive validity of these currently used admission tests on students' subsequent academic performance in Vietnam.

At the International School – Vietnam National University, Hanoi (IS–VNU), in 2022, the IELTS and the VHSGE English test scores were widely used by students to apply to the program of English Language offered by the Faculty of Applied Linguistics. The VHSGE English test scores were part of the three admission blocks used for admissions to the undergraduate program English Language, namely D01 (Literature, Mathematics, and English), A01 (Mathematics, Physics, and English), and D78 (Literature, English, and Social Sciences). This four-year undergraduate program has been offered since 2021, so it is crucial to research the validity of these admission tests to inform university admission policies further. In an attempt to investigate the predictive validity of IELTS and the VHSGE English test, this research aims to address the following research questions (RQs):

1. To what extent did IELTS and VHSGE English test scores predict English courses' GPAs, first-semester GPA, second-semester GPA, and first-year GPA?
2. Do differences exist in English courses' GPAs, first-semester GPA, second-semester GPA, and first-year GPA between students admitted by IELTS and those admitted by the VHSGE English test?
3. To what extent did VHSGE English test scores predict English courses' GPAs, first-semester GPA, second-semester GPA, and first-year GPA by different VHSGE admission blocks?
4. Do differences exist in VHSGE English test scores and English courses' GPAs, first-semester GPA, second-semester GPA, and first-year GPA by different VHSGE admission blocks?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Research into Predictive Validity

A crucial aspect of test validity is the extent to which the tests match their intended purposes (Kane, 2006; Messick, 1989; Weir, 2005). University admissions depend on the assumption that proficiency in the language of instruction is associated with academic achievement (Xi et al., 2014). This assumption forms the basis for examining predictive validity, which refers to how well performance on an entrance language test is associated with subsequent academic achievement (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019). GPA has commonly been used in research on predictive validity (Johnson & Tweedie, 2021). Notwithstanding this, there is growing consensus on the need to use multiple criteria to predict academic potential, as a single indicator may fail to adequately reflect this complexity (Johnson & Tweedie, 2021; O'Connor & Paunonen, 2007). Despite this, GPA continues to be a commonly used measure of academic achievement and an important requirement for university admissions, scholarships, and job opportunities. However, research has consistently shown only weak correlations between English language proficiency test scores for university admissions and later academic performance (Ihlenfeldt & Rios, 2023) and in some cases, no relationship (Krausz et al., 2005).

Possibly confounding these inconsistent results is the impact of various factors, including levels of training, prior educational experiences, attitudes, learning approaches, support systems (Oliver et al., 2012; Pearson, 2020), which may combine with or offset one another. In other words, due to heterogeneity, the predictive power of English language proficiency tests for academic outcomes may be masked. Another factor is range restriction, a common statistical problem in predictive validity research that occurs when the sample's scores cover a narrower range than those of the overall population (Sackett & Yang, 2000). For example, studies examining the academic performance of students who were admitted to the program, excluding those who did not apply or were rejected because of insufficient performance, result in a sample comprising only proficient students. Consequently, the observed score range is restricted to a subset of the target population of test takers. Test preparation or coaching is another source of validity concern, a well-documented form of washback prevalent in exam-oriented educational systems (e.g., Clark & Yu, 2021; Hu & Trenkic, 2021). High-stakes testing can incentivize students to engage in intensive preparation to increase their scores rapidly (Cheng et al., 2015), thereby distorting test performance and undermining the construct and criterion-related validity of the test.

In this study, the population remains heterogeneous across different VHSGE subject combination blocks. Such heterogeneity may contribute to variability in the strength and direction of the relationship between language proficiency and academic achievement, thereby attenuating aggregate correlations. It is important to perform disaggregated analyses to examine whether correlations in the whole population could mask patterns within specific groups (Bridgeman et al., 2016). The population comprises only proficient students, resulting in a restricted score range within the subset of candidates who took IELTS and VHSGE English tests, which should be taken into consideration when interpreting predictive validity results. Additionally, IELTS and VHSGE are commonly used for university admissions in Vietnam, and many students intensively prepared for these tests at the time of this study. Thus, the test scores collected in this period should be interpreted carefully when used as predictors of future academic outcomes.

2.2 Research into Vietnam High School Graduation Examination

Prior studies on VHSGE have seen mixed findings, most of which have focused on the exam's washback. While the English graduation benchmark policy in Vietnam has been found to improve students' English skills, its negative implications, including increased stress and test-oriented studying, may exert pressure on students (Pham & Bui, 2019). In addition to the washback of VHSGE, scores from this high-stakes exam were also analyzed in correlation with other socioeconomic and institutional factors by several researchers. By examining provincial test scores, Duong et al. (2024) found that a province's overall performance is closely connected to its per capita GDP and the average number of students per high school. Van Le and Tran (2024) also emphasized that an increase in per capita income in Vietnam is associated with an increase in national test scores, which are influenced by institutional quality and poverty levels. Given the existing body of research, there has been little to no empirical investigation into the validity of the VHSGE. In an attempt to study the university entrance examination English test, Tran et al. (2010) developed a model to validate the 2008 English test results for student recruitment to the English Department of the College of Foreign Languages at Vietnam National University, Hanoi. However, previous research focused on a different exam and overlooked the empirical evidence for the validity of IELTS and VHSGE English tests in predicting the academic performance of Vietnamese students, which demands further examination.

2.3 Research into the Predictive Validity of IELTS

In many previous prediction studies, Pearson's correlation analysis was widely used to detect the association of students' IELTS scores and their first-semester GPA and first-year GPA, yet their results are inconclusive. IELTS overall scores were widely reported to be moderately and positively correlated with GPA (Al-Malki, 2014; Hu & Trenkic, 2021; Schoepp, 2018; Woodrow, 2006), while other research found a weak relationship (Johnson & Tweedie, 2017; Oliver et al., 2012; Schoepp & Garinger, 2016), or an insignificant association (Cotton and Conrow, 1998). Although there are attempts to examine the correlations between GPA and IELTS sub-band scores, the results are fairly mixed. Several studies found a positive correlation between students' GPA and their band scores in IELTS reading, listening, and writing but not speaking (Schoepp & Garinger, 2016). Other studies, however, concluded that there is a positive correlation between students' GPA and their IELTS listening and speaking

scores but insignificant correlations with their IELTS reading scores (Woodrow, 2006) or IELTS writing scores (Oliver et al., 2012). Participants in earlier studies were mostly from Australia (e.g. Woodrow, 2006), the United Arab Emirates (Schoepp & Garinger, 2016), and China (e.g. Hu & Trenkic, 2021). In addition, they were drawn from a single institution and a specific major such as business and education. Moreover, Dang and Dang (2023) found a significant positive correlation between IELTS scores of Vietnamese students studying in 31 universities in the UK and their academic results. Since the relationship between language proficiency and academic performance may vary according to contexts and student groups, research examining the predictive validity of IELTS for subsequent academic performance of students is warranted. There is little to no research into the predictive validity of IELTS for subsequent GPA of undergraduate students across universities in Vietnam, including IS–VNU. Therefore, further research needs to be undertaken.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Context

This research was carried out at the Faculty of Applied Linguistics, International School – Vietnam National University, Hanoi. Since its establishment, the faculty has been in charge of providing English language training for English-medium courses and conducting research in applied linguistics. In 2021, the undergraduate English Language program (Specialization in Business – Information Technology) at the faculty was launched. Therefore, it is important to investigate the validity of admission tests to inform admission policies better.

Admissions to the program were available through different pathways. One of these involved four VHSGE subject combination blocks, consisting of A01 (Mathematics, Physics, and English), D78 (Literature, Social Sciences, and English), D01 (Mathematics, Literature, and English), and D90 (Mathematics, Natural Sciences, and English). Moreover, applicants could also be recruited based on a minimum overall IELTS band score of 5.5 in combination with either VHSGE scores or high school academic records of subjects other than English. In addition, other admission pathways included international standardized assessments such as SAT, ACT, and the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma; local competence-based examinations; and the National Academic Excellence Competition. However, among these pathways, only three VHSGE admission blocks, including A01 (Mathematics, Physics, and English), D78 (Literature, Social Sciences, and English), and D01 (Mathematics, Literature, and English), and IELTS results were used by the 2022 cohort enrolling in this major.

IELTS assesses the language proficiency of candidates aiming to study or work where English is used. There are two test modules, namely IELTS General Training and IELTS Academic. The former assesses English language proficiency in everyday contexts, so those who wish to work or study below degree level in an English-speaking country can take this test module. In contrast, the latter measures candidates' ability to use English in an academic environment, which is suitable for those who need to study at the undergraduate level or postgraduate level. There are four language skill tests in IELTS. The same Listening and Speaking tests are used for both modules, but Reading and Writing tests differ.

Since 2015, the VHSGE English test has been compulsory for high school students in Vietnam. The 2022 VHSGE English test comprised 50 multiple-choice questions, measuring candidates' grasp of phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, and reading skills within a 60-minute timeframe. Furthermore, there were 24 test codes, derived from two primary ones. Each item

was scored dichotomously, with correct answers carrying equal weight and no penalties for incorrect responses. The final score served as a measure of candidates' English proficiency and contributed to their overall exam score for university enrollment.

Table 1

First-Year Course Structures of English Language Undergraduate Program

Semester	Course	Course objectives
1	Listening 1	Helps students develop listening skills, including listening for main ideas and specific details, taking notes on main ideas, predicting content, and interpreting speakers' opinions.
	Speaking 1	Helps students develop communication skills, including presenting, debating, describing, offering opinions, and discussing ideas.
	Reading 1	Helps students develop essential reading skills, including reading for main ideas, reading for specific details, predicting contents, and summarizing contents.
	Writing 1	Helps students master the writing process, grammatical structures, lexical knowledge, and rhetorical modes required for sentence and paragraph writing.
	Introduction to English for Purposes of Business and Information Technology	Helps students learn about the training program, curriculum, specialized modules, practicum courses, internships, job positions, credit transfer, and academic exchange programs with partner universities;
	Introduction to Informatics 2	Helps students acquire basic concepts of computers and essential skills in using Microsoft Office Suite, including Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Access.
2	Listening 2	Helps students develop listening skills, including listening for contrasting opinions, summarizing, and synthesizing, taking notes on main ideas and details, interpreting speakers' ideas, and recognizing inferences.
	Speaking 2	Helps students express ideas fluently, and apply proper language and concepts effectively for social, academic, and professional purposes.

Reading 2	Helps students develop reading skills, including reading for main ideas and specific details, predicting contents, and summarizing texts.
Writing 2	Helps students master the writing process, grammatical structures, lexical knowledge, and rhetorical modes required for sentence and paragraph writing.
Introduction to Vietnamese Culture	Helps students understand basic concepts and features of Vietnamese culture, and apply the knowledge about Vietnamese culture in their field of study.
Intercultural Communication	Helps students understand the dynamics of intercultural communication, reflect on their own beliefs and practices, and draw implications for their intercultural communication and appreciation of cultural similarities and differences.
Marxist-Leninist Philosophy	Helps students understand basic and specialized knowledge of Marxist–Leninist political economy and form scientific worldview, logical thinking, and scientific methodology.
General Logic	Helps students master the laws of logics, forms and methods of correct thinking, methods of scientific reasoning, identifying and rejecting sophistry.
Critical Thinking	Helps students develop the ability to understand, evaluate, and create arguments.

As illustrated in Table 1, in their first academic year at IS–VNU, English Language majors were offered English courses, including Listening 1, Speaking 1, Reading 1, Writing 1, Listening 2, Speaking 2, Reading 2, and Writing 2, which aim to develop their English proficiency. In this study, we analyzed their English courses' GPAs along with their GPAs in each semester and the whole academic year. Although the student body completed the other courses, the results of these courses were not examined due to their less direct relation to the students' English competence.

3.2 Dataset

This study was conducted on the entire population ($N = 99$), consisting of 20 examinees taking IELTS and 79 examinees taking the VHSGE English test in 2022, all of whom enrolled in the English Language undergraduate program in the same year. The total number of VHSGE English test examinees that year was slightly over 1 million. To investigate the GPAs of students admitted using IELTS and those of students admitted using VHSGE English test, the researchers conducted a secondary analysis of IELTS scores, VHSGE English test scores, English courses' GPAs, first-semester GPA, second-semester GPA, and first-year GPA of these 99 students.

In addition, the dataset was structured and categorized using the following variables. First, a categorical variable named "admission tests" with two values, namely "IELTS scores" and "VHSGE English test scores", was introduced. Second, another variable titled "VHSGE admission blocks" was created with three values being the three admission blocks to the English Language undergraduate program, namely D01 (Literature, Mathematics, and English), A01 (Mathematics, Physics, and English), and D78 (Literature, English, and Social Sciences). 40 students were admitted through block D01, followed by 20 students choosing A01, while 17 students were classified under D78 admission block. However, two students with VHSGE English test scores were not categorized into any of the admission blocks due to missing data.

3.3 Data Analysis

To answer the first research question, Pearson correlations (two-tailed) were run for the whole population of 99 students to examine the relationship between their IELTS / VHSGE English test scores and their GPAs. Subsequently, to address the second research question, a series of independent samples *t*-tests was performed to compare the GPAs of students admitted through IELTS with those of students with VHSGE English test scores.

Following that, subgroup analysis of correlations between students' GPAs and VHSGE English test scores disaggregated by different VHSGE admission blocks was examined to answer the third question. However, because of the unavailability of auxiliary data, the researchers were unable to correct for range restriction. For the last question, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine whether differences in students' GPAs by admission blocks exist.

4. Findings

4.1 RQ1: To what extent did IELTS and VHSGE English test scores predict English courses' GPAs, first-semester GPA, second-semester GPA, and first-year GPA?

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of examined English majors' IELTS band scores, VHSGE English test scores, English courses' GPAs, first-semester GPA, second-semester GPA, and first-year GPA. Specifically, IELTS band scores (N = 20) ranged from 5.500 to 8.000 (M = 6.175, SD = .613), whereas VHSGE English test scores (N = 79) varied from 7.000 to 9.700 (M = 8.314, SD = .517). Among all courses, Speaking 1 GPA recorded the highest mean (M = 3.508, SD = .602), whereas the lowest mean was observed in Listening 2 GPA (M = 2.457, SD = 1.076). The first year GPA (N = 99) ranged from .000 to 3.800 (M = 3.091, SD = .606).

Table 2

Descriptive statistics of IELTS scores, VHSGE English test scores, and GPAs

	N	Min	Max	*M*	*SD*
IELTS scores	20	5.500	8.000	6.175	.613
VHSGE English test scores	79	7.000	9.700	8.314	.517
Listening 1 GPA	99	.000	4.000	2.906	.867

Speaking 1 GPA	98	.000	4.000	3.508	.602
Reading 1 GPA	99	.000	4.000	3.457	.714
Writing 1 GPA	99	.000	4.000	3.364	.580
Listening 2 GPA	96	.000	4.000	2.457	1.076
Speaking 2 GPA	96	.000	4.000	3.271	.719
Reading 2 GPA	94	.000	4.000	2.828	.908
Writing 2 GPA	95	.000	4.000	3.309	.706
First-semester GPA	99	.000	3.950	3.181	.572
Second-semester GPA	96	.000	3.800	3.096	.580
First-year GPA	99	.000	3.800	3.091	.606

Note: VHSGE English test scores are reported on a 0-10 scale.
IELTS scores are reported on a 0-9 scale.
GPAs are reported on a 0-4 scale.

For research question 1, a series of Pearson correlation analyses was computed to assess the linear relationship between IELTS scores and English courses' GPAs, first-semester GPA, second-semester GPA, and first-year GPA. According to Cohen (1988), the effect size of the correlation coefficient was small when $0 \leq r \leq 0.29$ and medium when $0.30 \leq r \leq 0.49$, and large when $0.50 \leq r \leq 1.00$. Table 3 shows that while IELTS scores and Listening 1 GPA were found to be moderately correlated, $r = .481$, $p = .032$ (two-tailed), there were no statistically significant correlations between them and English courses' GPAs, first-semester GPA, second-semester GPA, or first-year GPA.

Table 3
Pearson correlations between IELTS / VHSGE English test scores and GPAs

Measures	IELTS scores		VHSGE English test scores	
	r	*p*	*r*	*p*
Listening 1 GPA	.481*	.032	.028	.806
Speaking 1 GPA	.034	.890	.026	.817
Reading 1 GPA	.130	.584	-.138	.224
Writing 1 GPA	.097	.684	-.070	.539
Listening 2 GPA	.346	.135	.309**	.007
Speaking 2 GPA	.314	.178	.142	.221

Reading 2 GPA	.334	.149	.265*	.022
Writing 2 GPA	.291	.213	.021	.855
First-semester GPA	.178	.454	-.044	.700
Second-semester GPA	.124	.603	.092	.427
First-year GPA	.053	.825	-.039	.731

Note: *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001

Additionally, Pearson correlation analyses were also computed to assess the linear relationship between VHSGE English test scores and English courses' GPAs, first-semester GPA, second-semester GPA, and first-year GPA. As indicated in Table 3, VHSGE English test scores moderately correlated with Listening 2 GPA, $r = .309$, $p = .007$, and weakly correlated with Reading 2 GPA, $r = .265$, $p = .022$, whereas there were no statistically significant correlations between VHSGE English test scores and the other English courses' GPAs, first-semester GPA, second-semester GPA, or first-year GPA.

4.2 RQ2: Do differences exist in English courses' GPAs, first-semester GPA, second-semester GPA, and first-year GPA between students admitted by IELTS and those admitted by the VHSGE English test?

To answer research question 2, a series of independent samples *t*-tests was run to determine if differences exist in GPAs between students admitted by IELTS and those admitted by VHSGE English test scores. As shown in Table 4, IELTS candidates' Listening 1, Speaking 1, Writing 1, Listening 2, Speaking 2, Reading 2, and Writing 2 GPAs were significantly higher than those of students with the VHSGE English test. This trend was also observed in first-semester GPA and first-year GPA. In contrast, IELTS test-takers' Reading 1 GPA and second-semester GPA were not significantly different from those of students with the VHSGE English test.

Table 4

Descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests for GPAs by two different admission tests (IELTS and VHSGE English test)

Measures	IELTS			VHSGE English test					
	N	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*p*
Listening 1 GPA[a]	20	3.730	.258	79	2.697	.843	9.303	93.764	<.001
Speaking 1 GPA	19	3.853	.187	79	3.425	.638	2.881	96	.005
Reading 1 GPA	20	3.735	.315	79	3.386	.769	1.980	97	.051
Writing 1 GPA	20	3.640	.346	79	3.294	.608	2.444	97	.016
Listening 2 GPA	20	3.660	1.027	76	2.141	.844	6.840	94	<.001
Speaking 2 GPA	20	3.715	.888	76	3.154	.623	3.260	94	.002

Reading 2 GPA	20	3.685	.976	74	2.596	.739	5.443	92	<.001
Writing 2 GPA	20	3.775	.896	75	3.185	.593	3.516	93	.001
First-semester GPA	20	3.409	.433	79	3.123	.590	2.025	97	.046
Second-semester GPA[a]	20	3.326	.882	76	3.035	.460	1.421	21.783	.170
First-year GPA	20	3.380	.523	79	3.018	.607	2.444	97	.016

Note: [a]Indicates equal variances not assumed

4.3 RQ3: To what extent did VHSGE English test scores predict English courses' GPAs, first-semester GPA, second-semester GPA, and first-year GPA by different VHSGE admission blocks?

For research question 3, VHSGE English test scores were further disaggregated to probe whether different patterns might emerge for English Language majors depending on the VHSGE admission blocks they applied, consisting of D01 (Literature, Mathematics, and English), A01 (Mathematics, Physics, and English), and D78 (Literature, English, and Social Sciences). Regarding the D01 (Literature, Mathematics, and English) block, VHSGE English test scores and Reading 2 GPA were found to be moderately correlated, $r = .432$, $p = .008$. In contrast, there was no statistically significant correlation between it and the other English courses' GPAs, first-semester GPA, second-semester GPA, or first-year GPA.

Table 5

Pearson correlations between VHSGE English test scores and GPAs disaggregated by VHSGE admission blocks (D01, A01, and D78)

Measures	VHSGE English test scores in D01 block		VHSGE English test scores in A01 block		VHSGE English test scores in D78 block	
	r	*p*	*r*	*p*	*r*	*p*
Listening 1 GPA	-.008	.961	.455*	.044	-.469	.058
Speaking 1 GPA	-.158	.330	.365	.113	.222	.391
Reading 1 GPA	-.303	.057	.320	.169	-.357	.159
Writing 1 GPA	-.176	.277	.001	.998	-.180	.489
Listening 2 GPA	.300	.072	.447*	.048	-.047	.859
Speaking 2 GPA	.312	.060	.598**	.005	-.286	.266

Reading 2 GPA	.432*	.008	.433	.056	-.154	.584
Writing 2 GPA	.185	.280	.365	.113	-.338	.184
First-semester GPA	-.216	.181	.513*	.021	-.346	.174
Second-semester GPA	.269	.107	.611**	.004	-.228	.379
First-year GPA	-.195	.227	.613**	.004	-.221	.394

Note: *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$

In terms of the A01 (Mathematics, Physics, and English) block, VHSGE English test scores were found to be moderately correlated with Listening 1 GPA, $r = .455$, $p = .044$, and Listening 2 GPA, $r = .447$, $p = .048$. Additionally, there was a strong correlation between VHSGE English test scores and Speaking 2 GPA, $r = .598$, $p = .005$, first-semester GPA, $r = .513$, $p = .021$, second-semester GPA, $r = .611$, $p = .004$, and first-year GPA, $r = .613$, $p = .004$. In contrast, VHSGE English test scores were not significantly correlated with the other English courses' GPAs.

With respect to the D78 (Literature, English, and Social Sciences) block, no significant correlation was found between VHSGE English test scores and English courses' GPAs, first-semester GPA, second-semester GPA, or first-year GPA.

4.4 RQ4: Do differences exist in VHSGE English test scores and English courses' GPAs, first-semester GPA, second-semester GPA, and first-year GPA by different VHSGE admission blocks?

For research question 4, a series of one-way ANOVA tests was computed to examine mean differences in VHSGE English test scores and GPAs across three VHSGE admission blocks and GPAs, including D01 (Literature, Mathematics, and English), A01 (Mathematics, Physics, and English), and D78 (Literature, English, and Social Sciences). A one-way ANOVA test with VHSGE admission blocks as the independent variable and VHSGE English test scores as the dependent variable confirmed a statistically significant between-group difference, $F(2, 74) = 3.790$, $p = .027$, $\eta 2 = .093$. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for VHSGE English test scores of the D01 block ($M = 8.180$, $SD = .472$) was significantly lower than that of the A01 block ($M = 8.530$, $SD = .500$), $p = .032$, 95% confidence interval (CI) = [.025, .675]. However, VHSGE English test scores of the D78 block ($M = 8.428$, $SD = .543$) did not significantly differ from that of D01 block, $p = .202$, CI = [-.095, .591], and that of A01 block, $p = .806$, CI = [-.493, .289]. In contrast, there was no significant effect of D01, A01, and D78 admission blocks on English courses' GPAs, first-semester GPA, second-semester GPA, or first-year GPA.

Table 6

Descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVAs for VHSGE English test scores and GPAs by VHSGE admission blocks (D01, A01, and D78)

Measures	D01 block			A01 block			D78 block			df	F	p	η^2
	N	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*				
VHSGE English test scores	40	8.180	.472	20	8.530	.500	17	8.428	.543	2, 74	3.790	.027	.093
Listening 1 GPA	40	2.705	.919	20	2.670	.754	17	2.765	.793	2, 74	.058	.944	.002
Speaking 1 GPA	40	3.313	.828	20	3.535	.360	17	3.582	.270	2, 74	1.422	.248	.037
Reading 1 GPA[a]	40	3.313	1.012	20	3.550	.267	17	3.412	.455	2, 40.838	1.335	.274	.017
Writing 1 GPA	40	3.218	.797	20	3.430	.283	17	3.347	.324	2, 74	.856	.429	.023
Listening 2 GPA	37	1.992	.815	20	2.525	.786	17	2.118	.876	2, 71	2.772	.069	.072
Speaking 2 GPA	37	3.235	.531	20	3.180	.517	17	3.024	.883	2, 71	.671	.514	.019
Reading 2 GPA	37	2.600	.684	20	2.770	.666	15	2.400	.967	2, 69	1.058	.353	.030
Writing 2 GPA	36	3.250	.446	20	3.215	.502	17	3.065	.915	2, 70	.564	.571	.016
First-semester GPA	40	3.053	.775	20	3.262	.286	17	3.159	.289	2, 74	.845	.434	.022
Second-semester GPA	37	3.061	.298	20	3.120	.298	17	2.904	.807	2, 71	1.060	.352	.029
First-year GPA	40	2.962	.742	20	3.177	.271	17	2.984	.563	2, 74	.858	.428	.023

Note: ANOVA = analysis of variance

[a] Indicates use of Welch statistic for F value (homogeneity of variances not met)

5. Discussion

At the early stage of implementing the undergraduate English Language program at the Faculty of Applied Linguistics at IS–VNU, investigating the predictive validity of IELTS and the VHSGE English test is warranted, since it can contribute to criterion-related validity evidence for them and admission policies. This study examined IELTS scores and VHSGE English test scores in relation to university students' GPAs in the first academic year. It offered comparisons, taking into account the admission tests and VHSGE admission blocks.

5.1 The Predictive Validity of IELTS and VHSGE English Test Scores for GPAs

The findings reveal that IELTS scores moderately correlated with Listening 1 GPA but did not significantly correlate with the other English courses' GPAs, first-semester GPA, second-semester GPA, or first-year GPA. These findings are supported by previous studies (e.g., Cotton & Conrow, 1998; Dooey & Oliver, 2002). In contrast, VHSGE English test scores showed a moderate correlation with Listening 2 GPA and a weak correlation with Reading 2 GPA, but there were no statistically significant correlations between VHSGE English test scores and the other English courses' GPAs, first-semester GPA, second-semester GPA, or first-year GPA. There are several possible reasons for these observations. Firstly, the VHSGE English test focuses on English language elements, including vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, and receptive skills, which weakens the link between its scores and students' GPAs. Secondly, the VHSGE English test is a multiple-choice test without writing or speaking components. Vietnamese students, especially those in public schools, often focus more on grammar and vocabulary in preparation for the VHSGE English test, which may lead to their struggles with English writing and speaking tasks in their first year of higher education. Thirdly, there is a gap between IELTS tasks and university-level assignments. For example, while personal experiences and anecdotes are generally acceptable in the IELTS writing test, accurate findings from established studies are required for tertiary-level writing assignments (Moore & Morton, 2005). Moreover, first-year GPA is the credit-weighted average of all courses completed by students in an academic year, including non-English courses in this undergraduate program, so it can affect how well these admission tests predict students' future performance. Lastly, as with all research into predictive validity, factors beyond English tests come into play (Oliver et al., 2012). In heterogeneous samples, these factors can obscure the predictive value of IELTS scores and VHSGE English test scores.

5.2 Differences in GPAs between IELTS and VHSGE English Test Admission Pathways

Additionally, students admitted through IELTS scores experienced higher GPAs in English courses and first-year GPA than those accepted with the VHSGE English test scores. This could be because IELTS test-takers concentrate more on enhancing the receptive and productive English skills, whereas those preparing for VHSGE English test often focus more on grammar and vocabulary. Another explanation is that instead of being directly related to the tests themselves, other factors such as sample characteristics or external influences could contribute to the differences in students' academic performance. For instance, a larger number of academically weaker students might have applied to the program using their VHSGE English test scores, which may explain their lower GPAs. One major obstacle preventing students from sitting for IELTS was its high and rising cost (Alsagoafi, 2018). Therefore,

VHSGE English test was more affordable than IELTS for students from less advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, who also generally have lower academic outcomes (Muttaqin et al., 2022).

5.3 The Predictive Validity of VHSGE English Test Scores for GPAs by Admission Blocks

After conducting an analysis of VHSGE English test scores by VHSGE admission blocks, the findings reveal variation in the predictive validity of VHSGE English test scores. In the A01 (Mathematics, Physics, and English) block, VHSGE English test scores were found to be correlated with Listening and Speaking GPAs, first-semester GPA, second-semester GPA, and first-year GPA. This suggests that VHSGE English test scores may be predictive of academic performance for students with a background in Mathematics and Physics. In contrast, regarding the D01 (Literature, Mathematics, and English) block, VHSGE English test scores were found to be moderately correlated only with Reading 2 GPA. With respect to the D78 (Literature, English, and Social Sciences) block, no significant correlation was found between VHSGE English test scores and English courses' GPAs, first-semester GPA, second-semester GPA, or first-year GPA. The lack of significant correlations in the D01 and D78 admission blocks indicates that VHSGE English test scores alone may not sufficiently explain university academic performance of students from different academic backgrounds as each admission block represents a distinct combination of VHSGE English test with other subject tests. These findings align with earlier studies (e.g., Ihlenfeldt & Rios, 2023; Woodrow, 2006), supporting the idea that language proficiency is not a major indicator of academic success in higher education, and its predictive power can vary depending on contexts. Moreover, the observed correlations may be further attenuated due to the small group size, and range restriction resulting from student admissions.

5.4 Differences in VHSGE English Test Scores and GPAs by Admission Blocks

One-way ANOVAs examined differences in VHSGE English test scores and first-year GPAs across three admission blocks: D01, A01, and D78. Results showed a significant difference in mean VHSGE English test scores, with post hoc comparisons indicating that D01 students scored significantly lower than A01 students, while D78 students did not differ significantly from either group. In contrast, no significant differences were observed across blocks in English courses' GPAs, first-semester GPA, second-semester GPA, or first-year GPA. This pattern suggests that although the VHSGE English test differentiates students' entry-level English proficiency, such differences do not translate into meaningful differences in academic performance. One plausible explanation is the relatively high and homogeneous VHSGE English test scores across the three examined admission blocks. This reflects the effects of range restriction, whereby limited variability in test scores reduces the likelihood of detecting corresponding differences in GPA (Sackett & Yang, 2000). Another important factor concerns the alignment in terms of construct and task format between the VHSGE English test and university-level English courses, which may limit the extent to which differences in VHSGE English test scores are reflected in students' GPAs. Prior research has shown that language proficiency is more predictive of academic outcomes when it aligns closely with the academic task format; in cases of misalignment, predictive validity may be influenced (Wudthayagorn & Nipaspong, 2025). Furthermore, the absence of mean GPA differences

across admission blocks may be attributed to the course instruction which offered sufficient scaffolding to accommodate students from different academic backgrounds.

6. Limitations and Future Research

Notwithstanding its contributions, this study has several limitations that necessitate further research. First, the researchers were unable to correct for range restriction owing to the inaccessibility of auxiliary data from the broader population. Second, students admitted through IELTS and VHSGE English tests were considered independent samples in this study. Consequently, no statistical comparison of their predictive abilities was conducted. It was also difficult to determine whether the lower GPAs observed for VHSGE test-takers were attributed to the tests themselves, score calibration issues, or external factors such as socioeconomic backgrounds or academic potential. Third, although the entire population was examined, this study had imbalanced group sizes, which requires caution in interpreting the test results. Finally, using only GPAs in the first academic year as criterion measures is also a limitation. For multi-year degree programs, examining whether IELTS and VHSGE English test scores can predict academic performance in subsequent years would be useful. While this study provides valuable preliminary evidence of the predictive validity of IELTS and VHSGE English test scores regarding academic success, criterion-related validity alone does not establish construct validity (AERA et al., 2014). Given the significant role of these tests in English-medium universities in Vietnam, a range of complementary supporting evidence is needed to validate their interpretations and uses of test scores (Chapelle, 2021).

7. Conclusion

The study sought to examine the predictive validity of IELTS and VHSGE English test scores for students' GPAs and provide comparisons between them, taking into account the admission tests and VHSGE admission blocks. The main finding was that the examination of IELTS / VHSGE English test scores revealed no significant correlations with first-year GPA. However, GPAs in most English courses and the first-year GPA of students admitted through IELTS were higher than those of students with VHSGE English test scores. Additionally, analyses by admission blocks (namely A01, D01, and D78) revealed that VHSGE English test scores were predictive of most English courses' GPAs and first-year GPA for A01 students while having little to no predictive validity for those of D01 and D78 students. There was a statistically significant difference in VHSGE English test scores but no significant difference in GPAs among these admission blocks.

There are several implications based on the study's findings. From a theoretical perspective, these findings suggest that IELTS and VHSGE English test scores may not be the sole predictors of students' academic potential, highlighting the need for further research on other predictors across different contexts. From a practical perspective, to aid prospective students admitted through IELTS and VHSGE English tests in transitioning effectively to tertiary study, universities could offer them sample lectures or courses during the admission process, which allow them to understand the differences between high school and university tasks. Moreover, EAP courses should be provided to students so that they are better prepared for future learning experiences. Additionally, to address the gap between IELTS requirements and university-level assignments, their similarities and differences should be explained to students in order for them to utilize their language knowledge while developing other academic

skills, such as critical thinking, synthesis, source usage, and specialized vocabulary relevant to their degree programs. Finally, from an admission policy perspective, owing to the limited empirical evidence for the predictive power of IELTS scores and VHSGE English test scores, they are less likely to guarantee the academic success of their test-takers in English-medium universities. Therefore, when recruiting students, the combination with other criteria or even the use of other admission tests should be taken into account and test score interpretations should be more tentative.

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10. Declaration of AI Use

The authors declare that AI tools including ChatGPT were used to assist with language editing, grammar checking, and checking the structure of writing. All content, data interpretation, and conclusions remain the responsibility of the authors.

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