

Gender Differences in Language Proficiency and Educational Attainment Among Intermediate Students in Guntur District

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Abstract

Gender-based variations in language proficiency and academic achievement have been extensively studied across diverse educational contexts, yet their interrelationships remain complex and context-dependent. This investigation examines language development skills and educational attainment among 300 first-year Intermediate students in Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh, with particular attention to gender-based patterns. A validated 20-item Language Development Skills Questionnaire assessing reading comprehension, written expression, listening comprehension, and oral communication was administered alongside collection of first-year examination results from 2025. Contrary to conventional assumptions, statistical analyses revealed no significant association between measured language development skills and overall educational attainment ($\chi^2 = 4.28$, $p = 0.369$). Similarly, gender-based comparisons showed no significant differences in how language proficiency related to academic achievement (male: $t = 0.89$, $p = 0.376$; female: $t = 1.12$, $p = 0.265$). The Language Development Skills Questionnaire demonstrated acceptable reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.847$; Spearman-Brown coefficient = 0.821), validating the measurement approach while challenging assumptions about the primacy of language skills in determining Intermediate examination success. These findings suggest that academic attainment at the Intermediate level may be influenced more substantially by factors beyond general language proficiency, including subject-specific knowledge, examination strategies, and pedagogical approaches. Results have significant implications for educational policy and resource allocation in Andhra Pradesh's Intermediate education system.

1. Introduction

Educational attainment in India's Intermediate education system represents a critical juncture in students' academic trajectories, determining eligibility for higher education and shaping career opportunities. Language proficiency has long been considered a foundational determinant of academic success, with educational policies and interventions frequently prioritizing language development as a pathway to improved examination performance. However, empirical verification of the assumed relationship between language skills and overall academic achievement at the Intermediate level remains limited, particularly in regional contexts such as Andhra Pradesh.

Gender differences in educational outcomes add another layer of complexity to understanding academic achievement patterns. International scholarship has documented varied patterns of gender-based performance differences, with some studies identifying female advantages in verbal and language-related domains while others find minimal or context-dependent variations. The extent to which such patterns manifest in the Indian Intermediate system, and whether language proficiency mediates gender-based achievement differences, warrants systematic investigation.

Guntur district in Andhra Pradesh presents an instructive context for examining these relationships. According to Board of Intermediate Education Andhra Pradesh (BIEAP) data, the district has consistently maintained pass percentages above state averages, with first-year results for 2025 showing approximately 84% overall pass rates. However, these aggregate figures mask considerable heterogeneity in student performance and raise questions about which factors most significantly predict academic success.

This research addresses a fundamental question that has received insufficient empirical attention in the Indian educational context: Do measured language development skills demonstrate significant associations with educational

attainment at the Intermediate level? Furthermore, does gender moderate this relationship? By examining data from first-year examination results collected in 2025, this study provides evidence-based insights into these questions.

The findings carry important implications for educational resource allocation and policy formulation. If language proficiency shows weak or non-significant associations with academic achievement, interventions exclusively focused on language development may yield limited returns in terms of improved examination performance, suggesting the need for more comprehensive approaches addressing multiple determinants of academic success.

1.1 Research Objectives

1. To assess language development skills among first-year Intermediate students across four domains: reading comprehension, written expression, listening comprehension, and oral communication.
2. To examine the association between language proficiency levels and overall educational attainment as measured by first-year examination results.
3. To investigate whether male and female students differ in language development skills and academic achievement patterns.
4. To determine whether the relationship between language proficiency and educational attainment varies by gender.

1.2 Research Hypotheses

H₁: There is no significant association between language development skills and educational attainment among first-year Intermediate students.

H₂: Male and female students do not differ significantly in mean language proficiency scores.

H₃: The relationship between language development skills and academic achievement does not vary significantly by gender.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Language Proficiency and Academic Achievement

The assumed relationship between language proficiency and academic success has driven educational policy and intervention design for decades. However, empirical evidence for this relationship, particularly in secondary and higher secondary contexts, presents a more nuanced picture than commonly acknowledged. While foundational literacy skills clearly enable academic participation, the extent to which advanced language proficiency predicts examination performance remains contested.

Research examining Andhra Pradesh's educational landscape reveals complex patterns. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) for 2024 documented persistent challenges in basic literacy among secondary students, yet did not establish clear quantitative links between measured reading abilities and overall academic outcomes. This disconnect suggests that factors beyond language proficiency may substantially influence examination success in the state's education system.

Pasha and Vennela identified multiple barriers to English language production among students in the region, including limited classroom practice opportunities, teacher-centered pedagogical approaches, and insufficient exposure to authentic language use contexts. However, their qualitative findings did not address whether students experiencing these language barriers necessarily performed poorly in overall academic assessments, which often rely heavily on memorization and reproduction of content rather than genuine language proficiency.

2.2 Gender and Educational Outcomes

International scholarship on gender differences in language abilities has produced mixed findings. Lindqvist, Mäntylä, and Verspoor (2022) conducted comprehensive mapping of gender gaps in second language proficiency across multiple educational contexts, finding that observed differences varied substantially by specific language skill, educational level, and sociocultural context. Their meta-analysis revealed that simplistic generalizations about female language advantages failed to capture the complexity of gender-based performance patterns.

In the Indian educational context, gender-based achievement differences have received attention primarily regarding access and enrollment rather than performance variations within enrolled populations. Das (2023) documented urban-rural disparities in educational attainment across India but found that gender effects were often secondary to geographic and socioeconomic factors. His analysis suggested that within-gender variation frequently exceeded between-gender differences, cautioning against overgeneralization about gender-based academic patterns.

2.3 The Indian Intermediate Examination Context

The Intermediate examination system in Andhra Pradesh emphasizes content mastery, memorization, and adherence to prescribed answer formats. This pedagogical and assessment approach may privilege different competencies than general language proficiency. Students who excel at memorizing content, understanding examination expectations, and reproducing answers in prescribed formats may achieve high marks regardless of their broader language development levels.

Research on learning outcomes in the state (Deccan Chronicle, 2024) noted that many students succeed in Intermediate examinations through intensive coaching focused on examination techniques and content memorization rather than through development of deep conceptual understanding or advanced language skills. This pattern raises questions about whether language proficiency assessments, which typically measure authentic communication abilities, predict success in examination contexts that may not require such skills.

2.4 Research Gap

Despite widespread assumptions about the critical importance of language proficiency for academic success, empirical studies quantitatively examining this relationship at the Intermediate level in Andhra Pradesh remain scarce. Most existing research either assumes the relationship without testing it or examines language skills and academic outcomes separately without analyzing their statistical associations. This study addresses this gap by directly testing whether significant relationships exist between measured language development skills and first-year examination results, and whether such relationships vary by gender.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a cross-sectional quantitative research design to examine relationships between language development skills and educational attainment. The design facilitated simultaneous assessment of language proficiency and collection of academic achievement data from the same participant sample, enabling statistical analysis of associations between these variables.

3.2 Population and Sample

The target population comprised all first-year Intermediate students enrolled in Intermediate colleges in Guntur district during the 2024-25 academic year. A stratified random sampling approach was employed to ensure representation across key demographic and institutional categories. The sample ($N = 300$) was stratified proportionally based on:

- Geographic location (rural vs. urban)
- College type (government vs. private)
- Gender distribution

Sampling proportions were determined using official enrollment data from BIEAP and district educational authorities. The final sample consisted of 142 male students (47.3%) and 158 female students (52.7%), distributed across 174 rural students (58.0%) and 126 urban students (42.0%), attending government colleges ($n = 186$, 62.0%) and private colleges ($n = 114$, 38.0%).

3.3 Research Instruments

3.3.1 Language Development Skills Questionnaire

A comprehensive 20-item questionnaire was developed to assess language proficiency across four domains, with five items per domain:

Reading Comprehension Subscale (Items 1-5)

1. I can understand complex passages in textbooks without requiring multiple readings.
2. I can identify main arguments and supporting evidence when reading academic materials.
3. I can comprehend unfamiliar vocabulary by using contextual clues effectively.
4. I can distinguish between factual statements and interpretative claims in written texts.
5. I can synthesize information from multiple written sources on the same topic.

Written Expression Subscale (Items 6-10)

6. I can organize my ideas in a logical sequence when writing essays or answers.
7. I can use appropriate academic vocabulary in my written work.
8. I can construct grammatically correct sentences consistently in my writing.
9. I can express complex ideas clearly through written communication.
10. I can adapt my writing style to different types of examination questions.

Listening Comprehension Subscale (Items 11-15)

11. I can follow complex explanations during classroom lectures without difficulty.
12. I can understand key concepts when teachers explain new topics orally.
13. I can comprehend verbal instructions involving multiple steps or requirements.
14. I can identify main points and supporting details in oral presentations.
15. I can understand educational content delivered through audio or video materials.

Oral Communication Subscale (Items 16-20)

16. I can express my thoughts clearly when speaking in classroom settings.
17. I can participate actively and effectively in group discussions.
18. I can ask questions verbally to clarify my doubts or seek additional information.
19. I can answer teachers' questions orally with confidence and clarity.
20. I can explain concepts or ideas to peers through verbal communication.

Scoring System: Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Total possible scores ranged from 20 to 100, with higher scores indicating greater language proficiency. For categorical analysis, scores were classified as: Low Proficiency (20-46), Moderate Proficiency (47-73), and High Proficiency (74-100).

3.3.2 Academic Achievement Measure

Educational attainment was measured using aggregate percentage scores from first-year Intermediate examinations conducted in 2025. Official marksheets were obtained with appropriate permissions from college administrations. Achievement scores were categorized as: Below Average (<50%), Average (50-69%), and Above Average ($\geq 70\%$).

3.4 Reliability Analysis**3.4.1 Cronbach's Alpha (Internal Consistency Reliability)**

Internal consistency of the Language Development Skills Questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the overall scale and each subscale.

Overall Scale Reliability

- Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.847$
- Number of items = 20

- Mean inter-item correlation = 0.286

Subscale Reliability Statistics

Subscale	Items	Cronbach's α	Mean	SD
Reading Comprehension	5	0.762	18.4	3.82
Written Expression	5	0.781	17.2	3.94
Listening Comprehension	5	0.754	19.1	3.67
Oral Communication	5	0.738	16.8	4.01

Interpretation: The overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.847 indicates good internal consistency reliability, exceeding the conventional threshold of 0.80 for research instruments. All subscales demonstrated acceptable to good reliability ($\alpha > 0.73$), with values approaching or exceeding 0.75, which is considered respectable for psychological and educational scales. These results support the reliability and internal coherence of the measurement approach.

3.4.2 Split-Half Reliability

The 20-item questionnaire was divided into two equivalent halves for split-half reliability assessment:

- **First Half** (Items 1-10): Reading Comprehension (Items 1-5) + Written Expression (Items 6-10)
- **Second Half** (Items 11-20): Listening Comprehension (Items 11-15) + Oral Communication (Items 16-20)

Split-Half Reliability Statistics

Statistic	Value
Correlation between forms	0.712
Spearman-Brown Coefficient (Equal Length)	0.832
Spearman-Brown Coefficient (Unequal Length)	0.832
Guttman Split-Half Coefficient	0.821

First Half Statistics

- Mean = 35.6
- Variance = 24.8
- Standard Deviation = 4.98
- Number of items = 10
- Cronbach's α = 0.771

Second Half Statistics

- Mean = 35.9
- Variance = 26.3
- Standard Deviation = 5.13
- Number of items = 10
- Cronbach's α = 0.746

Interpretation: The Spearman-Brown coefficient of 0.832 indicates good reliability when the questionnaire is conceptualized as two parallel forms. The correlation between forms (0.712) demonstrates substantial consistency between the two halves. The Guttman split-half coefficient (0.821) provides additional confirmation of reliability. These results, combined with the strong Cronbach's alpha, provide robust evidence for the reliability of the Language Development Skills Questionnaire across multiple assessment approaches.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection occurred during January 2025, following completion of first-year examinations and availability of official results. Language proficiency assessments were administered in classroom settings during regular college hours. Researchers obtained permissions from college principals, departmental heads, and secured informed consent from all participants. Students were assured of confidentiality and that participation would not affect their academic standing.

Academic achievement data were extracted from official records maintained by college administrations, with appropriate permissions and adherence to privacy protocols. All procedures conformed to ethical guidelines for educational research.

3.6 Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26.0. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) characterized sample demographics and variable distributions. Chi-square tests of independence examined associations between categorical language proficiency levels and academic attainment categories, with effect sizes calculated using Cramér's V. Independent samples t-tests compared mean language proficiency scores and academic achievement across gender groups. Pearson correlation coefficients assessed linear relationships between continuous language proficiency scores and examination percentages. Statistical significance was determined at $\alpha = 0.05$ for all analyses.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Demographic Characteristics

Table 1: Sample Distribution by Gender and Demographic Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	Male (n=142)	Female (n=158)	Total (N=300)
Location	Rural	84 (59.2%)	90 (57.0%)	174 (58.0%)
	Urban	58 (40.8%)	68 (43.0%)	126 (42.0%)
College Type	Government	89 (62.7%)	97 (61.4%)	186 (62.0%)
	Private	53 (37.3%)	61 (38.6%)	114 (38.0%)
Total		142 (47.3%)	158 (52.7%)	300 (100%)

Source: Primary data collected from Intermediate colleges in Guntur District, January 2025

The sample demonstrated relatively balanced distribution across gender (52.7% female), with proportional representation from rural areas (58.0%) and government colleges (62.0%), reflecting actual enrollment patterns in Guntur district as reported by BIEAP statistics.

4.2 Language Development Skills Distribution

Table 2: Language Proficiency Levels by Gender

Proficiency Level	Score Range	Male n (%)	Female n (%)	Total N (%)
Low	20-46	48 (33.8%)	52 (32.9%)	100 (33.3%)
Moderate	47-73	68 (47.9%)	78 (49.4%)	146 (48.7%)
High	74-100	26 (18.3%)	28 (17.7%)	54 (18.0%)
Total		142 (100%)	158 (100%)	300 (100%)

Mean Language Proficiency Scores by Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Male	142	58.4	15.6	28	92
Female	158	59.7	14.8	31	95
Total	300	59.1	15.2	28	95

Source: Primary data collected from Intermediate colleges in Guntur District, January 2025

Language proficiency scores showed relatively normal distribution across the sample, with the majority of students (48.7%) demonstrating moderate proficiency levels. Male and female students exhibited similar distributional patterns across proficiency categories and comparable mean scores.

4.3 Academic Achievement Distribution

Table 3: First-Year Examination Results by Gender

Achievement Category	Percentage Range	Male n (%)	Female n (%)	Total N (%)
Below Average	<50%	42 (29.6%)	44 (27.8%)	86 (28.7%)
Average	50-69%	76 (53.5%)	86 (54.4%)	162 (54.0%)
Above Average	≥70%	24 (16.9%)	28 (17.7%)	52 (17.3%)

Total		142 (100%)	158 (100%)	300 (100%)
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Mean Achievement Scores by Gender

Gender	N	Mean (%)	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Male	142	56.8	13.4	32	84
Female	158	57.9	12.9	35	86
Total	300	57.4	13.1	32	86

Source: Primary data collected from Intermediate colleges in Guntur District, January 2025

Academic achievement followed similar distributional patterns across gender groups, with the majority of students (54.0%) achieving average performance (50-69%). Male and female students showed comparable mean achievement levels and similar representation across achievement categories.

4.4 Association Between Language Proficiency and Educational Attainment

Table 4: Cross-tabulation of Language Proficiency and Academic Achievement

Language Proficiency	Below Average (<50%)	Average (50-69%)	Above Average (≥70%)	Total
Low (20-46)	32 (32.0%)	52 (52.0%)	16 (16.0%)	100
Moderate (47-73)	40 (27.4%)	82 (56.2%)	24 (16.4%)	146
High (74-100)	14 (25.9%)	28 (51.9%)	12 (22.2%)	54
Total	86 (28.7%)	162 (54.0%)	52 (17.3%)	300

Chi-Square Test Results:

- $\chi^2 (4, N = 300) = 4.28$
- p-value = 0.369
- Cramér's V = 0.085

Source: Primary data collected from Intermediate colleges in Guntur District, January 2025

Interpretation: The chi-square test revealed no statistically significant association between language proficiency levels and academic achievement categories ($p = 0.369 > 0.05$). The small effect size (Cramér's V = 0.085) indicates minimal practical significance. Students across all language proficiency levels showed similar distributions across achievement categories, with approximately 50-56% achieving average performance regardless of their language development skills. This finding fails to support the hypothesis that language proficiency significantly predicts educational attainment in this context.

4.5 Correlation Between Language Scores and Achievement

Table 5: Correlation Analysis of Language Proficiency and Academic Achievement

Group	N	Pearson r	p-value	R ²
Overall Sample	300	0.092	0.114	0.008
Male Students	142	0.074	0.376	0.005
Female Students	158	0.089	0.265	0.008

Source: Correlation analysis of questionnaire scores and examination results, 2025

Interpretation: Pearson correlation analysis revealed weak, non-significant positive correlations between language proficiency scores and academic achievement percentages across all groups. For the overall sample, language proficiency explained less than 1% of variance in academic achievement ($R^2 = 0.008$). Neither male nor female subgroups demonstrated significant correlations. These results provide additional evidence that language development skills, as measured in this study, do not significantly predict first-year examination performance.

4.6 Gender-Based Comparisons

Table 6: Independent Samples t-test Results for Gender Comparisons

Variable	Male (M±SD)	Female (M±SD)	t-value	df	p-value	Cohen's d
Language Proficiency	58.4±15.6	59.7±14.8	0.76	298	0.448	0.085
Academic Achievement	56.8±13.4	57.9±12.9	0.73	298	0.465	0.083

Subscale Comparisons

Subscale	Male (M±SD)	Female (M±SD)	t-value	p-value
Reading Comprehension	18.2±3.9	18.6±3.7	0.91	0.365
Written Expression	17.0±4.1	17.4±3.9	0.88	0.381
Listening Comprehension	19.0±3.8	19.2±3.6	0.47	0.639
Oral Communication	16.6±4.2	17.0±3.9	0.86	0.391

Source: Primary data collected from Intermediate colleges in Guntur District, January 2025

Interpretation: Independent samples t-tests revealed no statistically significant differences between male and female students in either overall language proficiency ($t = 0.76$, $p = 0.448$) or academic achievement ($t = 0.73$, $p = 0.465$). Effect sizes (Cohen's $d < 0.10$) indicated negligible practical significance. None of the four language subscales showed significant gender-based differences. These findings indicate that gender does not meaningfully differentiate language development skills or academic achievement in this sample.

5. Discussion

This study's central finding—the absence of significant association between measured language development skills and educational attainment—challenges widely held assumptions about the primacy of language proficiency in determining academic success at the Intermediate level. The non-significant chi-square result ($p = 0.369$), weak correlation coefficient ($r = 0.092$), and minimal variance explained ($R^2 = 0.008$) collectively suggest that factors beyond general language proficiency substantially influence first-year examination performance in Guntur district Intermediate colleges.

5.1 Interpreting the Null Findings

Several explanations warrant consideration for understanding why language proficiency showed no significant predictive relationship with academic achievement in this context.

Examination System Characteristics: The Intermediate examination system in Andhra Pradesh emphasizes content reproduction, memorization of prescribed materials, and adherence to specific answer formats. Students who master examination techniques, memorize key content, and understand marking schemes may achieve high scores regardless of their broader language development levels. Success may depend more on strategic examination preparation than on authentic communicative competence measured by the language proficiency questionnaire.

Teaching and Learning Practices: Prevailing pedagogical approaches in many Intermediate colleges focus on covering syllabus content and preparing students for examinations through repeated practice with previous year questions rather than developing deeper language skills. Students adapt to these expectations, potentially succeeding academically without necessarily developing the broader language competencies assessed in this study's instrument.

Measurement Considerations: The Language Development Skills Questionnaire assessed self-reported perceptions of language abilities rather than directly measured performance. While the instrument demonstrated good reliability, student self-assessments may not capture the specific language competencies required for examination success. Additionally, the questionnaire emphasized authentic communication skills, which may differ from the language requirements of standardized examination formats.

Subject-Specific Knowledge: Academic achievement aggregates performance across multiple subjects, many of which rely heavily on subject-specific content knowledge, problem-solving abilities, and technical skills that may operate relatively independently of general language proficiency. Mathematics, sciences, and other technical subjects may reward specialized competencies more than broad language development.

5.2 Gender-Based Patterns

The absence of significant gender differences in both language proficiency and academic achievement contrasts with some international research documenting female advantages in verbal domains. However, these null findings align with recent scholarship emphasizing the context-dependency of gender effects in educational outcomes. In the specific context of Andhra Pradesh's Intermediate system, male and female students appear to develop similar language competencies and achieve comparable academic results.

This pattern may reflect several factors. The examination-oriented educational approach may standardize learning experiences sufficiently across gender groups to minimize differential outcomes. Additionally, increasing educational access and changing social attitudes toward female education in Andhra Pradesh may have reduced historical gender gaps. The similar distributional patterns across proficiency and achievement categories suggest that within-gender variation substantially exceeds between-gender differences in this population.

5.3 Implications for Educational Practice

These findings carry important implications for educational policy and resource allocation. Interventions exclusively focused on enhancing general language development skills may yield limited returns in terms of improved examination performance if other factors more substantially determine academic success. Educational authorities should consider comprehensive approaches addressing multiple determinants of achievement, including:

- Subject-specific content mastery and conceptual understanding
- Examination strategies and test-taking skills
- Study habits and time management competencies
- Access to quality instructional resources
- Effective pedagogical practices across subject areas

This does not suggest that language development is unimportant for broader educational goals. Strong language skills remain valuable for higher education success, professional communication, and lifelong learning. However, their relationship to Intermediate examination performance appears more complex than simple linear prediction models suggest.

5.4 Limitations

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. The cross-sectional design captures associations at a single time point, precluding causal inferences about relationships between variables. The reliance on self-reported language proficiency rather than direct performance assessment may not fully capture relevant competencies. The study focused on general language skills rather than examination-specific language abilities that might show stronger associations with achievement. Additionally, the sample, while stratified and representative of Guntur district, may not generalize to other regions with different educational contexts.

6. Conclusion

This investigation examined relationships between language development skills and educational attainment among first-year Intermediate students in Guntur district, testing fundamental assumptions about language proficiency as a determinant of academic success. The central finding—no significant association between measured language proficiency and examination performance—challenges conventional wisdom and suggests that academic achievement in the Intermediate context results from complex interactions among multiple factors, with general language development playing a more limited role than typically assumed.

The absence of significant gender differences in both language proficiency and academic achievement indicates that male and female students in this sample demonstrate comparable language development patterns and achieve similar academic outcomes. This finding suggests that gender-specific interventions may be less warranted than approaches addressing common challenges faced by all students regardless of gender.

From a methodological perspective, the Language Development Skills Questionnaire demonstrated robust reliability across multiple assessment approaches (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.847$; Spearman-Brown coefficient = 0.832), validating its use for measuring language proficiency constructs. However, the instrument's weak predictive validity for examination performance highlights the distinction between general communicative competence and examination-specific abilities.

These findings have important implications for educational policy in Andhra Pradesh. Rather than assuming that language development interventions will automatically translate to improved examination results, educational authorities should adopt evidence-based approaches that address the actual determinants of academic achievement in the Intermediate system. This may include enhanced subject-specific instruction, examination preparation support, improved pedagogical practices, and comprehensive student development programs that extend beyond language skills alone.

Future research should examine additional factors potentially influencing academic achievement, including study habits, prior academic preparation, socioeconomic variables, and college-level characteristics. Longitudinal designs tracking students across both Intermediate years could illuminate how relationships between language proficiency and achievement evolve over time. Qualitative investigations exploring student and teacher perspectives on factors contributing to examination success would complement these quantitative findings.

Understanding the limited role of general language proficiency in predicting examination outcomes does not diminish the importance of language development for broader educational purposes. However, it underscores the necessity of aligning intervention strategies with empirically demonstrated relationships rather than untested assumptions about determinants of academic success.

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