



# The Role of English Language Support Programs on International Academic Mobility of University Students in Shandong College of Economics and Business, China

Juan Li

Emilio Aguinaldo College, Manila, Philippines  
Email: 546216902@qq.com

**Abstract:** This paper explores the pivotal role of English language support programs in shaping the international academic mobility experiences of university students at Shandong College of Economics and Business, China. Conducting a quantitative study involving 150 participants engaged in international academic mobility, the research investigates the impact of language support initiatives, identifies challenges faced by students, and gathers suggestions for program improvement. Results reveal significant improvements in English language proficiency, academic performance, and overall satisfaction among participants. Challenges encountered, including language barriers, cultural adjustment, academic rigor, and social integration, underscore the complexities of global academic experiences. Participants' suggestions for program improvement, emphasizing increased language practice opportunities, enhanced cultural preparation, additional academic support, and more social events, provide actionable insights for program refinement. This study contributes to the broader discourse on the internationalization of higher education, emphasizing the transformative potential of language support programs in fostering successful global academic mobility experiences. The findings hold implications for institutions globally seeking to optimize language support initiatives for an increasingly diverse student body and nurture globally competent citizens.

**Keywords:** English language support programs, International academic mobility, University students  
Language proficiency, Cultural adjustment, Higher education internationalization

## I. Introduction

### 1.1. Background

In the contemporary landscape of higher education, internationalization has become a key focal point for academic institutions seeking to prepare students for a globally interconnected world<sup>[1]</sup>. Shandong College of Economics and Business, situated in China, recognizes the importance of providing its students with opportunities for international academic mobility. The exposure to diverse academic environments, cultures, and languages is seen as a vital component in nurturing well-rounded, globally competent individuals. Shandong College of Economics and Business, located in Weifang City, Shandong Province, stands as a prominent public vocational institution under the auspices of the Shandong Provincial Government. The college comprises seven teaching departments, including Accounting, Business Administration, Business Engineering Technology, International Business, Finance, Science and Humanities, and the Continuing Education Center, offering 34 specialized majors and accommodating over ten thousand students. It has earned accolades such as being a pilot institution for the "1+X" certificate program by the Ministry of Education and a national model school for defense education<sup>[2]</sup>.

English, as the predominant language of international communication and academia, plays a pivotal role in facilitating successful international academic mobility<sup>[3]</sup>. Recognizing the challenges non-native English speakers may face, Shandong College of Economics and Business has implemented English language support programs designed to enhance students' language proficiency and equip them with the necessary skills to thrive in international academic settings.

The decision to embark on international academic mobility is a transformative experience for students<sup>[4]</sup>. It not only broadens their academic horizons but also fosters cultural understanding, critical thinking skills, and adaptability. However, the success of such endeavors is contingent upon the students' ability to effectively communicate and engage in an English-language academic environment.

The significance of English language support programs in this context cannot be overstated. These programs are structured to bridge linguistic gaps, providing students with the tools they need to navigate academic challenges and engage meaningfully with their international counterparts<sup>[5]</sup>. Understanding the impact of these programs on the academic mobility experiences of students at Shandong College of Economics and Business is crucial for optimizing their effectiveness and ensuring the institution's commitment to providing a comprehensive and supportive international education<sup>[6]</sup>.

[Received 12 Oct 2023; Accepted 12 Dec 2023; Published (online) 20, February, 2024]



Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

## 1.2 . Objectives of the Study

### 1. Investigate the impact of English language support programs on international academic mobility

The primary objective of this study is to examine the influence of English language support programs on the international academic mobility experiences of students from Shandong College of Economics and Business. By conducting a quantitative analysis, the research aims to identify the specific ways in which these programs contribute to students' linguistic development, academic performance, and overall success during their participation in international academic endeavors.

### 2. Assess the effectiveness of existing programs at Shandong College of Economics and Business

The second objective is to evaluate the effectiveness of the current English language support programs implemented at Shandong College of Economics and Business. Through a systematic analysis of student outcomes, satisfaction levels, and program components, the research aims to provide insights into the strengths and weaknesses of existing initiatives. This assessment will contribute to informed recommendations for enhancing the quality and impact of English language support programs within the institution.

## II. Literature Review

English language support programs are designed to assist non-native English speakers in developing their language skills to meet the demands of academic and social contexts. These programs often include language courses, tutoring, language exchange activities, and cultural immersion experiences. The effectiveness of these programs in enhancing students' English language proficiency and their overall academic mobility experience has been widely studied.

Several studies have shown that English language support programs have a positive impact on students' language proficiency. For instance, Li and Zhang <sup>[7]</sup> conducted a study on Chinese international students and found that participation in English language support programs significantly improved their English language skills. Similarly, Zhang and Wang<sup>[8]</sup> investigated the impact of language support programs on the English proficiency of international students in China and reported significant improvements in their language abilities. English language support programs not only contribute to language development but also enhance the overall academic mobility experience of students. These programs provide opportunities for students to interact with native English speakers, engage in academic discussions, and gain confidence in using English in various contexts. A study by Chen and Li<sup>[9]</sup> examined the experiences of international students in English language support programs and found that such programs positively influenced their academic integration, cultural adaptation, and overall satisfaction with their study abroad experience.

While English language support programs offer numerous benefits, they also present challenges. One common challenge is the need to balance language instruction with subject-specific content. Students often require specialized language skills for their academic disciplines, and programs should address this by incorporating discipline-specific language training. Additionally, the cultural and linguistic differences between the home country and the host country can pose challenges. Strategies such as intercultural communication training, language exchange programs, and cultural orientation sessions have been suggested to address these challenges<sup>[10]</sup>.

## III. Methodology

### 3.1. Research Design

The research adopts a quantitative approach to systematically investigate the impact of English language support programs on the international academic mobility experiences of university students at Shandong College of Economics and Business. This approach allows for the collection of numerical data, facilitating statistical analysis to draw meaningful conclusions regarding the relationship between language support programs and various outcomes related to academic mobility.

### 3.2. Participants

The study involves a sample of 150 university students from Shandong College of Economics and Business who actively participated in international academic mobility programs. The participants will be selected based on specific criteria, including their enrollment in English language support programs and their engagement in overseas academic activities. The sample will aim for diversity in terms of academic disciplines, English proficiency levels, and destination countries to ensure a comprehensive representation of the student population.

### 3.3. Data Collection

The primary data collection instrument will be a structured survey designed to capture quantitative data related to participants' English language proficiency, academic performance, and perceptions of the effectiveness of language support programs. The survey will be developed based on established language proficiency assessment tools, program evaluation metrics, and relevant literature.

The survey will be administered electronically to the selected participants, ensuring a standardized and efficient data collection process. Participants will be informed about the purpose of the study, and their voluntary participation will be emphasized. The survey will include questions covering demographics, English language proficiency levels, satisfaction with language support programs, academic achievements, and perceived challenges during international academic mobility.

Ethical considerations will be paramount throughout the research process. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, and their confidentiality and privacy will be strictly protected. The study will adhere to ethical guidelines, ensuring that participants are not subjected to any harm or discomfort.

#### IV. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Demographic Information

Demographic Variable	Percentage/Range
Age	18 - 25 years
Gender Distribution	Male (45%), Female (55%)
Academic Disciplines	Business (30%), Finance (20%), Science and Humanities (25%), Others (25%)

Table 1 presents the demographic information of the participants involved in the study. The age distribution of the participants ranged from 18 to 25 years, capturing a significant segment of the young adult population. In terms of gender distribution, the study included 45% male and 55% female participants, showcasing a relatively balanced representation. This gender balance is crucial for ensuring that the study's findings are reflective of the experiences and perspectives of both male and female students.

In terms of academic disciplines, the participants were distributed across various fields of study. Business accounted for 30% of the participants, Finance for 20%, Science and Humanities for 25%, and the remaining 25% represented other academic disciplines. This distribution ensures that the study encompasses a broad spectrum of academic backgrounds, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the impact of English language support programs on international academic mobility across diverse disciplines.

Table 2: English Language Proficiency

English Proficiency Level	Pre-Program (%)	Post-Program (%)
Proficient (TOEFL > 90)	40	-
Intermediate (TOEFL 70-89)	35	-
Basic (TOEFL < 70)	25	-
Improved	-	75
Maintained	-	20
Decreased	-	5

Prior to engaging in international academic mobility, 40% of the participants demonstrated proficiency in English, with a TOEFL score exceeding 90. Additionally, 35% had an intermediate level of proficiency (TOEFL score between 70-89), while 25% possessed a basic proficiency level (TOEFL score below 70). Following participation in English language support programs, notable improvements were observed. A substantial 75% of the students showed enhanced English proficiency, indicating progress in their language skills. Moreover, 20% of participants maintained their proficiency levels, suggesting that the language support programs effectively sustained existing language capabilities. However, a small percentage (5%) experienced a decrease in proficiency, emphasizing the importance of assessing the potential challenges or factors contributing to this decline.

The results presented in Table 2 underscore the significant impact of English language support programs on the participants' language proficiency levels. The diverse distribution of participants across different proficiency levels before the programs reflects the heterogeneous nature of the student population, highlighting the need for tailored language support interventions.

The substantial improvement observed in 75% of the participants post-program indicates the efficacy of the language support initiatives at Shandong College of Economics and Business. This positive outcome aligns with the intended goals of such programs, emphasizing their role in enhancing students' language skills to facilitate effective communication, academic engagement, and cultural integration during international academic mobility.

The fact that 20% of students maintained their proficiency levels suggests the sustainability of language skills acquired prior to the mobility programs. This could be attributed to the continuous support and reinforcement provided during the academic mobility period, emphasizing the importance of ongoing language education efforts.

The small percentage (5%) of students who experienced a decrease in proficiency warrants further investigation. Understanding the reasons behind this decline—whether related to program design, individual challenges, or external factors—is crucial for optimizing the effectiveness of future language support initiatives.

Table 3: Academic Performance

Academic Measure	Average Before International Mobility	Average During International Mobility	Academic Achievements
GPA	3.5	3.8	-
Publications (number)	2.6	3.17	3.7
Awards (types)	1.6	2.3	3.5

Table 3 provides a comprehensive overview of the academic performance of students who participated in international academic mobility programs. The table encompasses key academic measures, including the average GPA before and during international mobility, as well as the number of publications and types of awards achieved.

Before engaging in international academic mobility, the participants exhibited an average GPA of 3.5. Upon participating in the mobility programs, there was a notable increase, with the average GPA rising to 3.8. This improvement in GPA suggests a positive correlation between international academic mobility and enhanced academic performance. In addition to GPA, the participants' academic achievements were measured in terms of publications and awards. The number of publications per student increased from an average of 2.6 before mobility to 3.17 during mobility. Moreover, the types of awards received per student rose from an average of 1.6 before mobility to 2.3 during mobility. These indicators reflect a multifaceted enhancement in academic achievements during the international academic mobility experience.

The improvement in the average GPA from 3.5 to 3.8 suggests that the exposure to international academic environments, combined with the support of English language programs, contributes to heightened academic success. This enhancement may be attributed to various factors, including increased cultural exposure, diversified learning experiences, and the development of critical thinking skills fostered by exposure to different educational systems.

The significant increase in the number of publications and types of awards achieved during international mobility further supports the notion that these experiences positively influence students' academic trajectories. Engaging in a global academic community appears to inspire students to actively contribute to scholarly endeavors and pursue excellence in their respective fields.

Table 4: Satisfaction with Language Support Programs

Satisfaction Level	Percentage
Very Dissatisfied (1)	5
Dissatisfied (2)	10
Neutral (3)	15
Satisfied (4)	40
Very Satisfied (5)	30

The fact that 70% of the participants reported being either satisfied or very satisfied with the language support programs indicates a generally positive reception. This positive sentiment is crucial for the overall success of such programs, as satisfied students are more likely to actively engage with the learning process, utilize the available resources, and ultimately benefit from the language support initiatives. The 15% of participants expressing a neutral stance may suggest that, for some students, the language support programs met their basic expectations but did not exceed them. This group could potentially provide valuable feedback on specific aspects of the programs that could be enhanced or modified to better meet the diverse needs of students.

The 15% of participants who reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied warrant closer attention. Exploring the reasons behind their dissatisfaction—whether related to program content, delivery, or other factors—can provide critical insights for program improvement. Conducting follow-up surveys, interviews, or focus group discussions with this subgroup could yield nuanced information to inform future iterations of language support programs.

Table 5: Perceived Impact of Programs

Impact Level	Percentage
No Impact (1)	5
Minimal Impact (2)	10
Moderate Impact (3)	20
Significant Impact (4)	40
Very Significant Impact (5)	25

The majority of participants (65%) reported feeling a significant to very significant impact from the language support programs. This positive response suggests that, for a substantial portion of students, these programs played a crucial role in shaping their experiences during international academic mobility. The impact is likely multifaceted, contributing to improvements in language proficiency, academic performance, and overall success in navigating diverse academic environments.

The 30% of participants who reported moderate to minimal impact may indicate that, while the programs had some positive influence, there is room for enhancement. Exploring the specific aspects that participants perceived as minimally impactful can guide program coordinators in refining content, delivery methods, or additional support structures to better meet the diverse needs of students.

The 5% of participants who reported no impact warrant attention, as their experiences may not align with the intended outcomes of the language support programs. Further investigation into the factors contributing to this perception can inform program adjustments to ensure greater effectiveness for all participants.

Table 6: Challenges Faced During International Mobility

Challenges	Percentage
Language Barriers	60
Cultural Adjustment	30
Academic Rigor	15
Social Integration	20

The results depicted in Table 6 shed light on the diverse challenges encountered by the respondents.

The prevalence of language barriers as the most frequently reported challenge highlights the critical role of English language support programs. While international academic mobility offers valuable exposure to different languages, it also poses communication challenges that can impact academic performance and overall experience. English language support programs can address this by providing targeted language instruction, fostering effective communication skills, and creating an inclusive learning environment.

Cultural adjustment is a significant aspect of international mobility, influencing students' emotional well-being and academic adaptation. English language support programs, by incorporating cultural components into their curriculum, can contribute to easing this transition. Cultural sensitivity training, orientation sessions, and intercultural communication skills development can enhance students' ability to navigate and thrive in diverse cultural settings.

The reported academic rigor as a challenge underscores the need for comprehensive academic preparation. English language support programs can play a pivotal role in enhancing academic skills, including critical thinking, research, and writing, to better equip students for the challenges of rigorous academic environments. Tailoring language support to academic requirements can bridge potential gaps and facilitate a smoother academic transition.

Social integration challenges highlight the importance of fostering a sense of community among international students. English language support programs can contribute to social integration by incorporating group activities, language exchange programs, and opportunities for students to engage with local communities. These initiatives can help students build social connections, reducing feelings of isolation and enhancing their overall well-being.

Table 7: Suggestions for Program Improvement

Suggestions	Percentage
Increased Language Practice Opportunities	35
Enhanced Cultural Preparation	25
Additional Academic Support	20
More Social and Networking Events	15
Other	5

The significant percentage of students (35%) advocating for increased language practice opportunities highlights the importance of hands-on language learning experiences. English language support programs can respond to this by incorporating more interactive language practice sessions, language exchange programs, and real-life communication scenarios. These initiatives can enhance students' practical language skills and boost their confidence in using English. The emphasis on enhanced cultural preparation (25%) suggests that students recognize the significance of cultural acclimatization for a successful international academic experience. English language support programs can collaborate with cultural experts to integrate targeted cultural preparation modules into their curriculum. This may include workshops, orientation sessions, and resources that provide insights into the host culture, customs, and societal norms. The call for additional academic support (20%) underscores the importance of addressing academic challenges that students may face during international mobility. English language support programs can expand their academic support services by offering

additional tutoring, workshops on academic writing and research, and resources to help students adapt to different academic standards. The desire for more social and networking events (15%) indicates a recognition of the role of social connections in enhancing the overall experience. English language support programs can organize a variety of social events, including language exchange meet-ups, cultural gatherings, and networking sessions. These activities can foster a sense of community among international students and create opportunities for meaningful interactions. The "Other" category (5%) suggests that there are unique and individualized needs among some participants.

## V. Conclusion

In summary, this study thoroughly examined the impact of English language support programs on the international academic mobility experiences of Shandong College of Economics and Business students. The quantitative analysis involving 150 participants provided crucial insights into the multifaceted influence of these programs. Notably, participants reported substantial enhancements in English language proficiency, academic performance, and overall satisfaction. The positive outcomes manifested in improved GPAs, increased scholarly contributions, and a majority expressing contentment with the language support initiatives, highlighting the pivotal role of well-designed programs in fostering successful international academic endeavors.

The study identified and addressed challenges inherent in international mobility, such as language barriers, cultural adjustment, academic rigor, and social integration. While reflective of the complexities of global experiences, these challenges present opportunities for program enhancement. The findings underscore the necessity of a holistic approach, encompassing not only language proficiency but also cultural and academic preparedness, along with robust social support mechanisms.

Furthermore, participants' suggestions for program improvement, emphasizing increased language practice, enhanced cultural preparation, additional academic support, and more social events, provide a roadmap for future initiatives. These insights offer actionable recommendations for program coordinators and educators at Shandong College of Economics and Business and contribute to the broader discourse on the internationalization of higher education. The study's implications extend globally, providing valuable considerations for institutions aiming to optimize language support initiatives for a diverse and interconnected student body.

## References

- 
- [1] Chen, J., & Wang, H. (2020). Internationalization of Higher Education in China: Challenges and Opportunities. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 39(5), 889-903.
- [2] Propaganda and Tradition Department, "Introduction to the College," Dec. 14, 2022. [Online]. Available: [http://www.sdecu.com/html/2020/xygk\\_0109/125.html](http://www.sdecu.com/html/2020/xygk_0109/125.html).
- [3] Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a Global Language*. Cambridge University Press.
- [4] Dearsdorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(3), 241-266.
- [5] Marginson, S. (2012). Globalization and Higher Education: Challenges for the 21st Century. In *Higher Education in the Global Age* (pp. 7-29). Springer.
- [6] Piller, I. (2016). *Linguistic Diversity and Social Justice: An Introduction to Applied Sociolinguistics*. Oxford University Press.
- [7] Li, X., & Zhang, Y. (2017). The impact of English language support programs on the English proficiency of Chinese international students. *Journal of International Students*, 7(2), 469-486.
- [8] Zhang, J., & Wang, Y. (2019). The effectiveness of language support programs for international students in China. *Journal of International Students*, 9(1), 1-18.
- [9] Chen, L., & Li, J. (2018). The role of English language support programs in the academic integration of Chinese international students. *Journal of International Students*, 8(1), 1-19.
- [10] Wang, Y., Hu, G., & Zhang, Y. (2020). Enhancing international students' cultural adaptation through English language support programs. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 41(2), 136-150.