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Languages Canada

STUDENT OUTCOMES IN PUBLIC SECTOR ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES PROGRAMS

FINAL

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Academica's office is located on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Chonnonton peoples. This land is part of the McKee Treaty of 1790 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. The region continues to be home to many diverse Indigenous Peoples, including the Deshkan Ziibiin (Chippewas of the Thames), Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Nalahii Lunaapewaak (Munsee-Delaware Nation)—sovereign nations with longstanding relationships to this land. We are deeply grateful for the opportunity to work on these lands and are committed to actively seeking ways to deepen our understanding and strengthen our relationships with Indigenous communities.

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Executive Summary

In Canada, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs and French for Academic Purposes (FAP) programs provide a pathway into higher education for students who do not meet the language proficiency requirements for direct admission. While both domestic and international students can take an EAP/FAP program, it is often a pathway used by international students. These programs typically consist of multiple levels from beginner to advanced, and focus on developing students' skills in academic reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

To date, relatively few studies have examined the effectiveness of EAP/FAP programs on academic achievement, and the results of the studies that have been completed have been mixed (Clark et al., 2021; Fox et al., 2014; Schmidt, 2020; Schmidtke et al., 2024; Thorpe et al., 2017; Pearson, 2020). Importantly, previous studies have relied on data from a single institution, typically where the research team was based, which limits the generalizability of their findings. To our knowledge, there have been no multi-institution studies in Canada focused on the academic outcomes of international students who have taken an EAP/FAP program.

This report addresses this gap by presenting the findings of the first multi-institution study of EAP[1] student academic outcomes in Canada. Five academic years of de-identified administrative student data from six universities and three colleges were analyzed to assess the relationship between attending an EAP program and two academic outcomes: first year GPA and retention to second year.

For universities, we compared academic outcomes of international students who attended an EAP program (N=2,306) with those who did not attend an EAP program (N=10,997). Both the retention rate and GPA were significantly higher for EAP students than for non-EAP students. This relationship was confirmed by the regression analyses which show a significant positive relationship between EAP program enrolment and both Year 2 retention rate and Year 1 GPA, after multiple factors were controlled for (including gender, age, home country, academic year, program area, and institution).

In the college data, EAP students (N=2,424) had significantly lower retention to second year and lower first year GPA compared to students who entered their credential program without attending the EAP program (N=86,913). Regression analysis revealed, however, that these lower academic outcomes were due to differences in the demographic and academic composition of EAP and non-EAP students. Once these variables were controlled for, the academic outcomes of

[1] The study aimed to include both EAP and FAP programs, but we were unable to obtain sufficient data from FAP programs.

college international students who attended an EAP program were equivalent to those of their counterparts who did not attend an EAP program.

These results suggest that EAP programs can help international students perform not only on par with their peers academically, as in the case of colleges, but even better than their peers, as shown for universities. This benefits not only the international students who gain the skills and confidence to thrive in a new academic environment, but also the institution, which sees stronger student outcomes, higher retention rates, and expanded student access. By investing in well-designed EAP programs, postsecondary institutions can strengthen their commitment to student success and advance broader goals related to access and inclusion.

Introduction[2]

Postsecondary institutions in Canada generally require proof of proficiency in the language of instruction as part of the admissions process. For students whose first language is not English or French, this requirement can present a barrier to studying in Canada. In response to this challenge, many postsecondary institutions have developed language pathway programs to meet the needs of these learners. These programs are designed to build the academic language skills necessary for success in a postsecondary environment while also providing a structured route for admission. By offering an alternative admission route, language pathway programs enable a wider range of qualified students to access postsecondary study in Canada.

Previous studies have found that students' English proficiency can predict their postsecondary academic achievement (e.g., Thorpe et al., 2017), and that English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs at postsecondary institutions can help improve students' English proficiency (e.g., Crossman, 2014; Pearson, 2020). However, relatively few studies have examined the effectiveness of an EAP or FAP program on academic achievement directly, and the results are mixed (Clark et al., 2021; Fox et al., 2014; Schmidt, 2020; Schmidtke et al., 2024; Thorpe et al., 2017; Pearson, 2020). Importantly, previous studies collected data from only a single institution, typically where the research team was based, which limits the generalizability of their findings. To our knowledge there has never been a coordinated effort across institutions to collectively understand EAP program outcomes in Canada. In addition, EAP and French for Academic Purposes (FAP) programs at Canadian postsecondary institutions are thought to serve a purpose beyond merely preparing students linguistically. The programs also aim to create an immersive experience to help international students adapt to the Canadian academic environment and campus before they enter their credential program. As such, we sought to understand how the academic outcomes of international students who attended an EAP/FAP program compared to international students who entered through a direct admission route.

Understanding the relationship between EAP attendance and academic outcomes requires clearly defining academic outcome measures and identifying potential confounders that may impact academic outcomes. Among previous literature (Clark et al., 2021; Pearson, 2020; Schmidt, 2020; Schmidtke et al., 2024; Thorpe et al., 2017), common academic outcome measures include GPA, academic standing, number of credits earned, and number of courses attempted/completed. Common control variables include English proficiency, gender, age, home country, subject area of study, and high school grade. Building on this previous literature, we conducted a multi-institution study to answer the following research questions:

[2] This research was supported by funding from Languages Canada.

- Is there a relationship between EAP participation and academic outcomes (e.g., GPA, retention) among international students?
- How are EAP program factors (e.g., length, timing) related to the academic success of international students?

Method

The research was based on secondary use of institutional data. De-identified student data were provided by nine participating postsecondary institutions. Ethics approval was granted by the Research Ethics Boards at the nine participating institutions, and all data collection procedures adhered to institutional guidelines for research involving secondary use of de-identified data.

POPULATION

The population for this study was international students[3] who entered the first year of an academic program at each participating college and university between September 2018 and May 2023. Students enrolled in continuing education, apprenticeship, and graduate studies were excluded, though students enrolled in a graduate certificate at a college were included. Despite efforts to obtain a national sample, the participating institutions were predominantly from Ontario. In addition, efforts were made to include French language programs, but we only obtained sufficient data from English language programs. Therefore, only EAP programs are represented in the study. Across the nine participating institutions, there were a total of 104,724 students represented in the data. Data cleaning resulted in 2,084 cases being removed due to missing values. Table 1 shows the numbers of cases included in the data analysis by EAP enrolment and institution type. Across the six universities, 21.0% of international students attended an EAP program. This figure was significantly lower among the three participating colleges, with 2.7% of international students having attended an EAP program.

Table 1. Number of cases included in the analysis

	Enrolled in EAP	Not enrolled in EAP	Total
Universities	2,306	10,997	13,303
Colleges	2,424	86,913	89,337

[3] For the purposes of this study, international students were defined as students who were charged international tuition fees by their institution.

VARIABLES

Data obtained from participating institutions included the following variables (note that not all variables could be obtained for each institution):

- **Academic outcome information**: Year 2 retention status (retained/graduated, not retained), Year 1 GPA
- **EAP program information**: Program enrolment (enrolled, not enrolled), program timing (pre-sessional, concurrent), program length (number of weeks)
- **Demographic information**: Gender, birth year, home country
- **Academic background information**: Cohort year, program of study (CIP code), credential pursued, institution, English proficiency test score

Year 2 retention status was coded as 1 for being retained/graduated and 0 for not retained. All Year 1 GPAs were converted to the 4.0 scale using the Undergraduate Grade Conversion Table at the Ontario Universities Application Center (OUAC)[4]. EAP program enrolment was coded as 1 for enrolled and 0 for not enrolled. Program timing was coded as 1 for pre-sessional and 2 for concurrent.

Gender was coded as 1 for man and 2 for woman. Non-binary and other gender identities constituted less than 1% of the population, therefore the sample size was too small to include in the analysis. Birth year was subtracted from cohort year to determine the age at the time of entry to their credential program. Based on the age distribution in the university and college data, age was grouped into two categories for universities (19 or younger, and 20 or older) and into four categories for colleges (19 or younger, 20-24, 25-29, and 30 or older).

Cohort year and term of entry were combined to determine academic year (e.g., academic year is 2018/19 if cohort year is 2019 and term of entry is spring) and was dummy coded.

Given that certain countries (e.g., China, India) dominate the representation of students' home countries, dummy codes were assigned to China (vs. all other countries) in university data, and were assigned to China, India, Vietnam, and Philippines (vs. all other countries) in college data.

Program of study (CIP code) was classified and dummy coded for Arts & Humanities; Social Sciences; Sciences; Engineering & Technology; Business; Health & Social Services, and Multidisciplinary Studies for the university data. For the college data, program of study was dummy coded for Applied Arts; Social Sciences; Applied Sciences; Engineering & Technology; Business; and Health, Social & Community Services.

From the universities, we requested data only for international students in undergraduate degree programs. Credential pursued in college data was dummy coded for certificate, diploma,

[4] https://www.ouac.on.ca/guide/undergraduate-grade-conversion-table

advanced diploma, graduate certificate/post baccalaureate diploma, and bachelor. Institution was dummy coded for each participating institution.

We requested high school grades and English proficiency test scores, but most participating institutions were unable to provide these variables.

ANALYSIS

With respect to the data analysis, we first compared overall academic outcomes (Year 2 retention rates and average Year 1 GPA) between EAP students and non-EAP students across universities and colleges respectively, without considering any confounding factors. Chi-square tests (for Year 2 retention rates) and independent sample t tests (for Year 1 GPA) were used to examine corresponding statistical differences between the two groups.

Next, we performed regression analyses for university data and college data separately, with Year 2 retention status (logistic regression) and Year 1 GPA (linear regression) as the dependent variables, and the following as independent variables: EAP program enrolment; demographic variables including gender, age at the time of entry, and home country; as well as academic variables including academic year, program area, credential pursued (for college data only), and institution. For both the university and college models, the program area with the largest number of students was used as the reference category. Likewise, the institution with the largest number of students was used as the reference category in each model.

We fit a series of regression models, sequentially adding blocks of control variables. Model 1 included only EAP enrolment, Model 2 added demographic control variables, and Model 3 added academic control variables.

Lastly, to understand how EAP program features are related to the academic success of international students, we performed additional regression analyses among EAP students with Year 2 retention and Year 1 GPA as the dependent variables, and EAP program length, demographic variables, academic year, program area, institution, and credential pursued (for college data only) as independent variables. EAP program timing was not included in the models because the "concurrent" timing category comprised only 6% (n=61) of university data and less than 1% (n=6) of college data. Including a variable with such small cell counts can lead to unstable estimates and offers little information to the model.

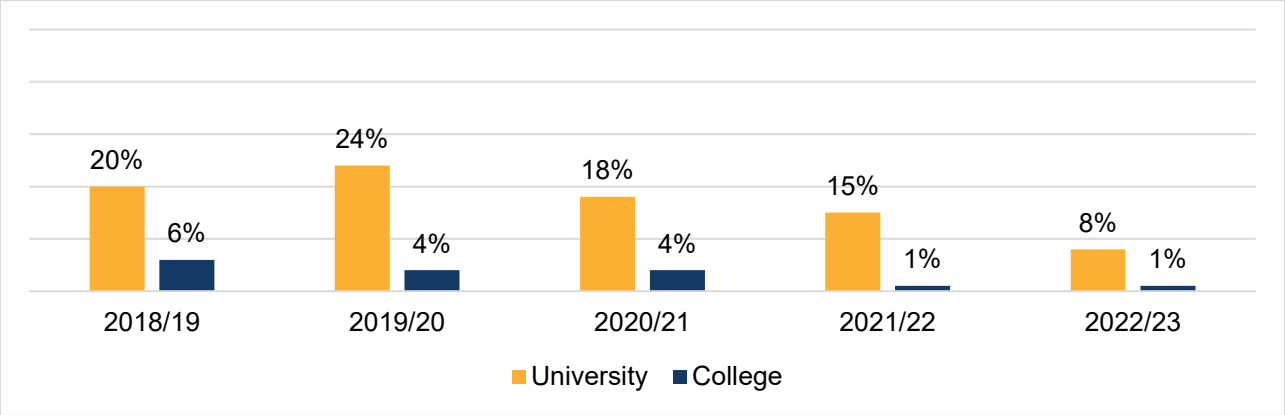
For all regression analyses, we report Beta coefficients (B), standard errors (logistic regression) or robust standard errors (linear regression) of Beta coefficients (SE / robust SE), and significance for independent variables, as well as McFadden's rho-squared (logistic regression) / R^2 (linear regression) for each model.

Research Findings

STUDENT PROFILES

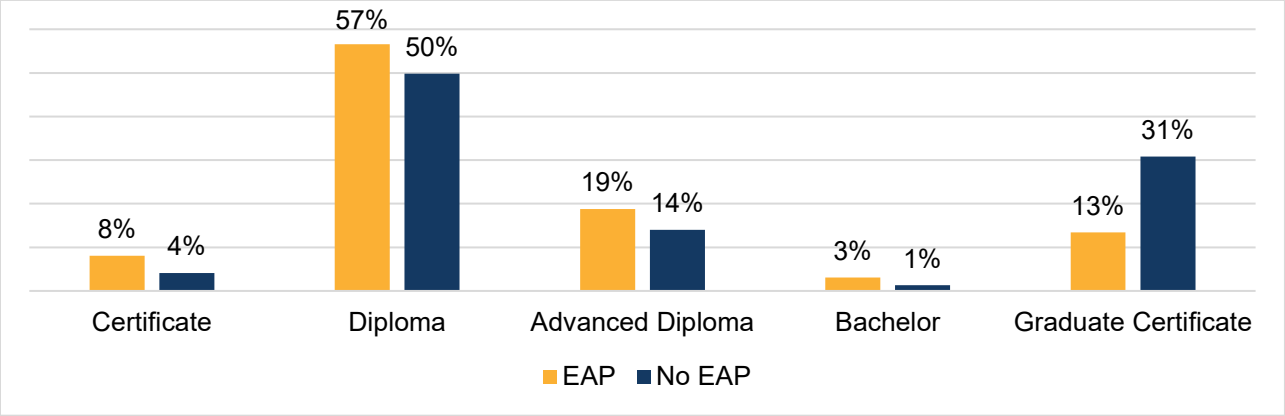
The proportion of international students entering postsecondary through an EAP program has declined over the past five academic years across both universities and colleges. Notably, the proportion of international students entering through an EAP program is significantly lower among colleges compared to universities (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Percentage of international students that attended an EAP program



For universities, we only looked at students entering bachelor's degree programs. For colleges, the credential make-up of the EAP and non-EAP groups differ (Figure 2). EAP students primarily entered diploma programs (57%), followed by advanced diploma programs (19%). Among non-EAP students, diploma programs were also most common (50%), while the next most common were graduate certificate programs (31%).

Figure 2. Credential distribution, colleges



Regarding program areas of study, across universities, a slightly higher proportion of EAP students entered Arts & Humanities and Social sciences programs than non-EAP students, while a slightly higher proportion of non-EAP students entered Sciences, Business, and Health and social services programs than their EAP peers (Figure 3).

Among college international students, Business was the most common program area for both EAP and non-EAP students, although a higher percentage of non-EAP students were in business programs. A higher proportion of EAP students went into Health, social, and community services programs compared to non-EAP students (Figure 4).

Figure 3. Program area distribution, universities

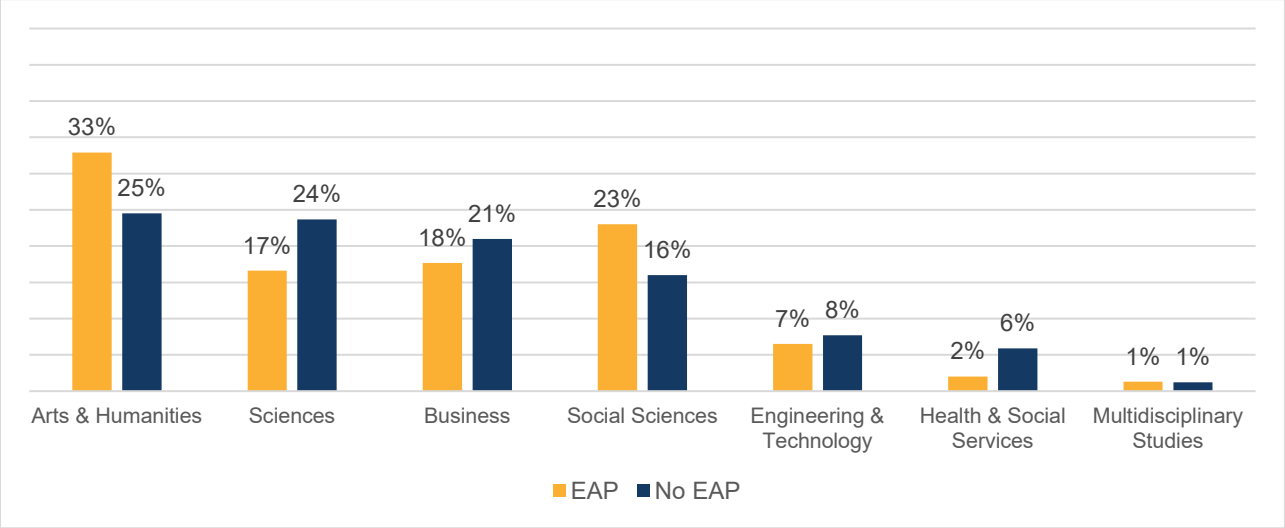
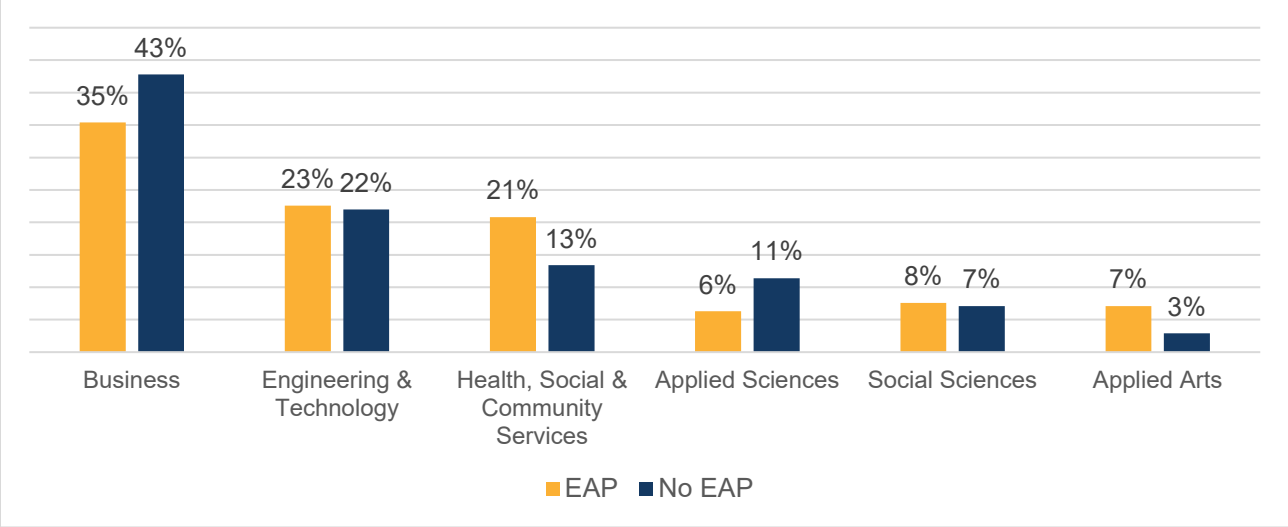


Figure 4. Program area distribution, colleges



The vast majority (90%) of university EAP students were from China. The top source countries for international students who did not take an EAP program were China (31%), India (20%), and Nigeria (10%) (Figure 5). College EAP students came primarily from China (34%) and Vietnam (23%), while most non-EAP students came from India (62%), followed by Philippines (7%) and China (4%) (Figure 6).

Figure 5. Top home countries, universities

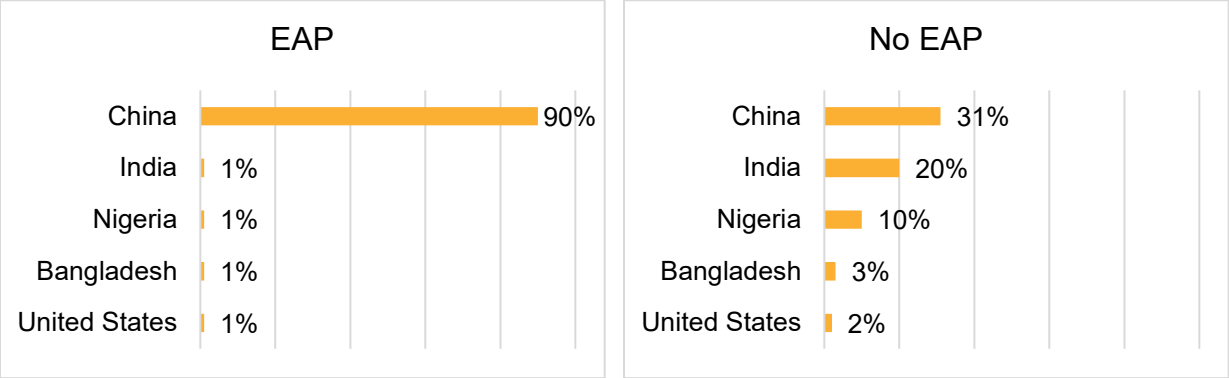


Figure 6. Top home countries, colleges

Across both universities and colleges, the gender distribution of the EAP and non-EAP groups was similar, with women comprising 48% to 51% of the student population (Figure 7; Figure 8).

Figure 7. Gender distribution, universities

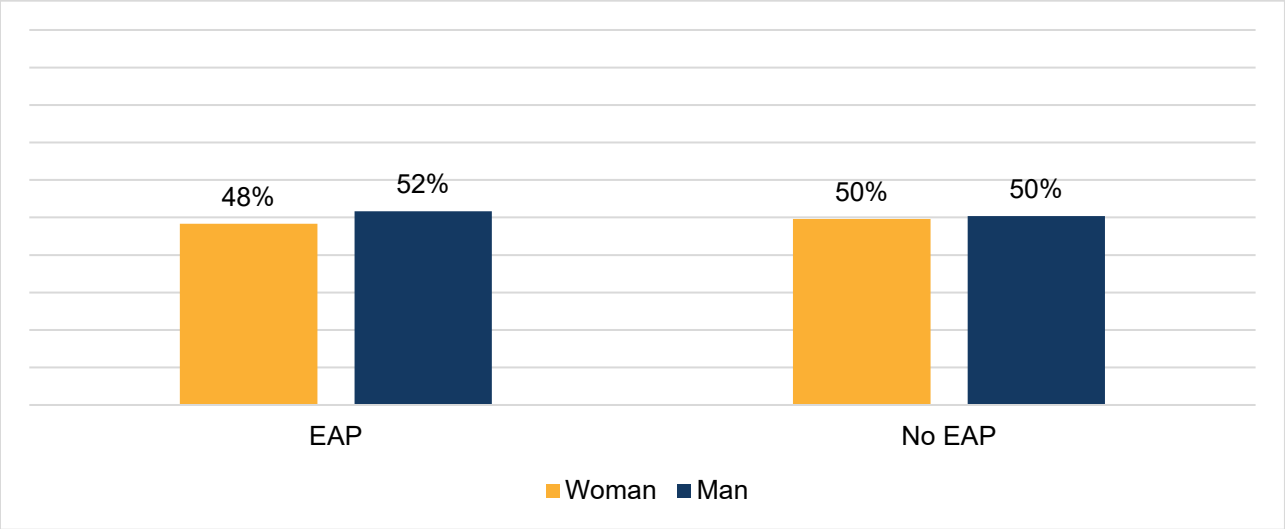
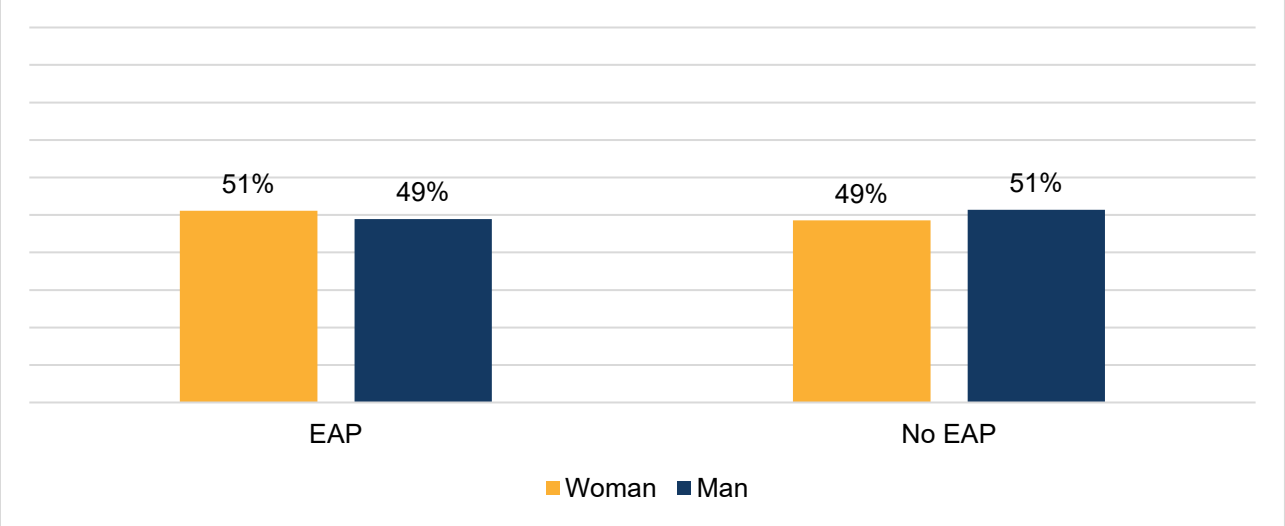


Figure 8. Gender distribution, colleges



Across universities, the average age at the time of entry to an undergraduate degree program among international students who took an EAP program is 19.7 compared to 18.9 among those who did not take the EAP program (Figure 9).

For colleges, the average age at the time of entry to a college credential program for those who took an EAP program is 25.8 compared to 24.0 among those who did not take an EAP program (Figure 10).

Figure 9. Age distribution, universities

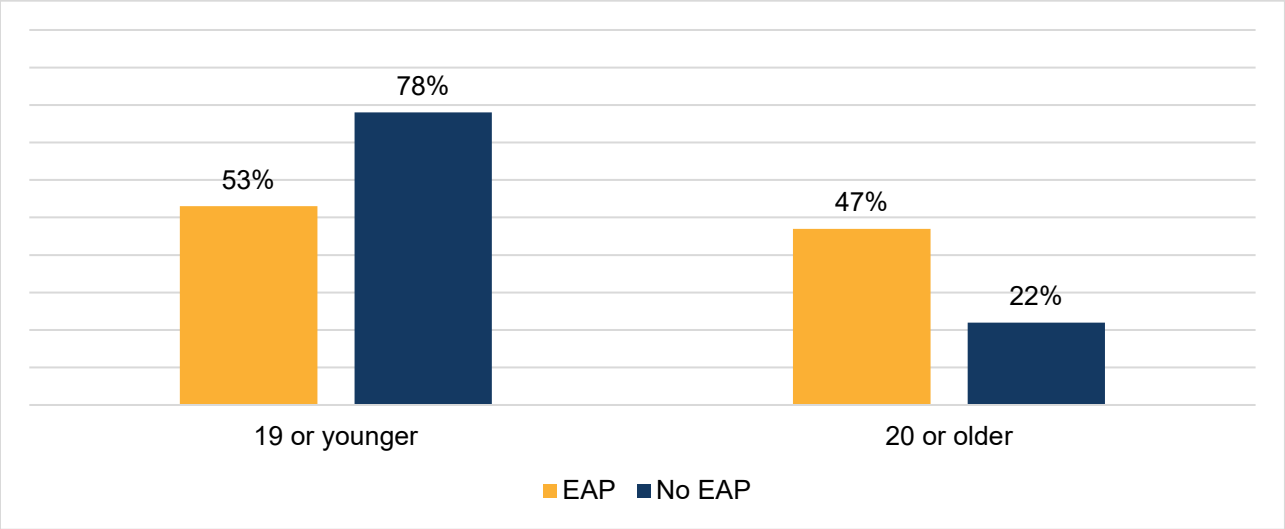
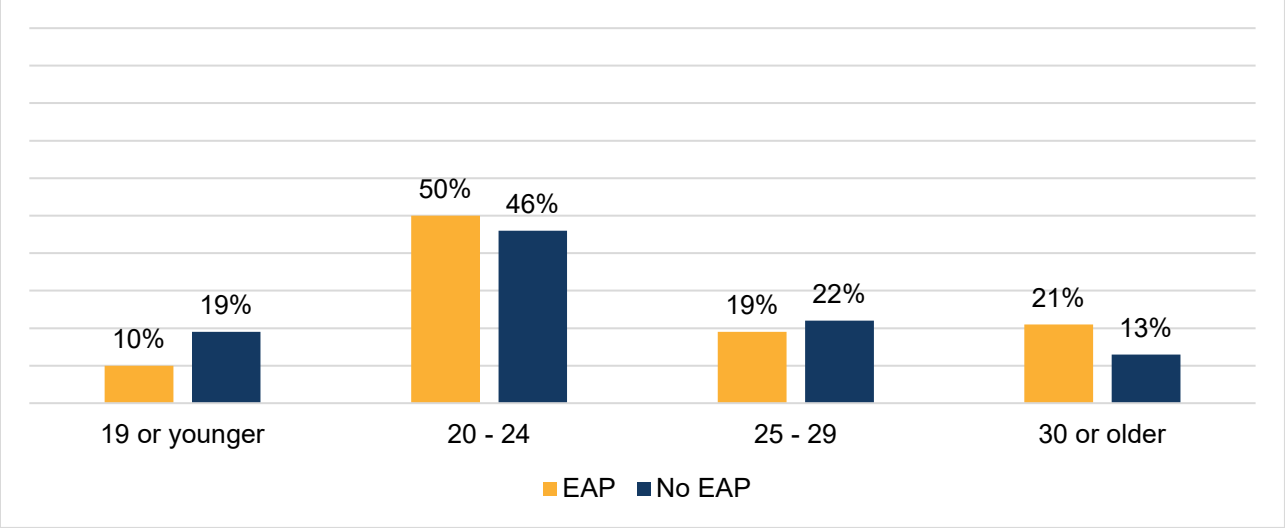


Figure 10. Age distribution, colleges



In college data, the average English proficiency test score (IELTS equivalency) was 5.5 for students who attended an EAP program, which was significantly lower than the average score among non-EAP students (6.9; $t_{(534)}=29.7$, $p<0.001$).

ACADEMIC OUTCOMES OF EAP AND NON-EAP STUDENTS

Table 2 and Table 3 show the summary of Year 2 retention status (% retained/graduated) and average Year 1 GPA for EAP students and non-EAP students respectively across universities and colleges, without considering any other factors. Year 2 retention rates differed markedly between university data and college data. EAP students were significantly more likely to be retained/graduated (86.0%) compared to non-EAP students across universities (82.7%; $p<0.001$). In contrast, the proportion retained/graduated was significantly lower for EAP students (80.1%) relative to non-EAP students (87.0%; $p<0.001$) across colleges.

Similarly, average Year 1 GPA was significantly higher for EAP students (2.8) compared to non-EAP students (2.6; $t_{(3,787)}=7.00$, $p<0.001$) across universities. College data shows the opposite pattern, in which GPA was significantly lower for EAP students (2.8) compared to non-EAP students (3.0; $t_{(2,526)}=-7.39$, $p<0.001$).

Table 2. Year 2 retention rates (% retained/graduated)

	Enrolled in EAP	Not enrolled in EAP	Chi-Square	p
Universities	86.0%	82.7%	14.42	<0.001
Colleges	80.1%	87.0%	98.24	<0.001

Table 3. Average Year 1 GPA

	Enrolled in EAP		Not enrolled in EAP		t-Statistic	p
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation		
Universities	2.8	1.0	2.6	1.1	7.00	<0.001
Colleges	2.8	1.1	3.0	1.0	-7.39	<0.001

THE ROLE OF EAP ENROLMENT

Regression analyses revealed that EAP enrolment had a significant positive relationship with Year 2 retention in the university data, both before and after controlling for demographic variables (gender, age, and home country), academic year, program area, and institution (Table 4).

In the college data, Model 1 shows a significant negative relationship between EAP enrolment and Year 2 retention. However, EAP enrolment no longer predicts Year 2 retention after controlling for demographic and academic variables (Model 3 in Table 5). This indicates that the

lower retention rate observed for EAP students in Model 1 can be attributed to differences in the composition of each group rather than participation in the EAP program, highlighting the importance of using a multivariate approach.

Table 4. Logistic Regression Coefficients for Year 2 retention rate, universities (n=13,303; *: p<0.05)

Independent Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Enrolled in EAP	0.25*	0.07	0.23*	0.07	0.31*	0.08
Gender (reference: Man)						
Woman	-	-	0.29*	0.05	0.33*	0.05
Age (reference: <=19)						
>= 20 years old	-	-	-0.38*	0.05	-0.47*	0.05
Home country (reference: Others)						
China	-	-	0.21*	0.05	0.17*	0.07
Institution (reference: University 6)						
University 1	-	-	-	-	-1.34*	0.09
University 2	-	-	-	-	-1.26*	0.10
University 3	-	-	-	-	-1.05*	0.10
University 4	-	-	-	-	-0.85*	0.10
University 5	-	-	-	-	-0.53*	0.11
Program area (reference: Arts & Humanities)						
Sciences	-	-	-	-	0.42*	0.08
Health & Social Services	-	-	-	-	0.67*	0.13
Engineering & Technology	-	-	-	-	0.62*	0.11
Business	-	-	-	-	0.74*	0.08
Social Sciences	-	-	-	-	0.38*	0.09
Multidisciplinary Studies	-	-	-	-	0.23	0.23
Academic year (reference: 2018)						
2019	-	-	-	-	0.15	0.08
2020	-	-	-	-	0.01	0.08
2021	-	-	-	-	-0.20*	0.08
2022	-	-	-	-	-0.24*	0.08
Intercept	*1.57**	*0.03*	*1.46**	*0.04*	*2.03**	*0.12*
McFadden's rho-squared	*0.001*		*0.011*		*0.065*	

Table 5. Logistic Regression Coefficients for Year 2 retention rate, colleges (n=88,013; *: p<0.05)

Independent Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Enrolled in EAP	-0.51*	0.05	0.09	0.06	0.01	0.06
Gender (reference: Man)						
Woman	-	-	0.23*	0.02	0.30*	0.02
Age (reference: 20-24)						
<=19 years old	-	-	0.05*	0.03	0.13*	0.03
25-29 years old	-	-	0.31*	0.03	0.20*	0.03
>=30 years old	-	-	0.34*	0.04	0.27*	0.04
Home country (reference: Others)						
China	-	-	-0.56*	0.04	-0.45*	0.04
India	-	-	0.55*	0.02	0.54*	0.03
Vietnam	-	-	-0.30*	0.06	-0.24*	0.07
Philippines	-	-	0.75*	0.05	0.77*	0.05
Institution (reference: College 3)						
College 1	-	-	-	-	0.01	0.03
College 2	-	-	-	-	-0.47*	0.03
Credential pursued (reference: Diploma)						
Advanced diploma	-	-	-	-	-0.06	0.03
Bachelor	-	-	-	-	0.17*	0.08
Certificate	-	-	-	-	-0.24*	0.05
Graduate certificate	-	-	-	-	0.34*	0.03
Program area (reference: Business)						
Applied Arts	-	-	-	-	0.11*	0.05
Applied Sciences	-	-	-	-	0.53*	0.04
Health, Social & Community Services	-	-	-	-	0.37*	0.03
Engineering & Technology	-	-	-	-	0.60*	0.03
Social Sciences	-	-	-	-	0.32*	0.04
Academic year (reference: 2018)						
2019	-	-	-	-	0.07*	0.04
2020	-	-	-	-	-0.21*	0.04
2021	-	-	-	-	-0.27*	0.03
2022	-	-	-	-	-0.01	0.03
Intercept	*1.90**	*0.01*	*1.35**	*0.02*	*1.19**	*0.04*
McFadden's rho-squared	*0.001*		*0.022*		*0.038*	

In the university data, EAP participation showed a significant positive relationship with Year 1 GPA both before and after adjusting for covariates (Table 6).

In the college data, similar to the retention results, Model 1 shows a significant negative relationship between EAP enrolment and Year 1 GPA. However, after adjusting for available controls, there is no longer a significant relationship (Model 3 in Table 7).

Table 6. Linear Regression Coefficients for Year 1 GPA, universities (n=13,132; *: p<0.05)

Independent Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	Robust SE	B	Robust SE	B	Robust SE
Enrolled in EAP	0.16*	0.02	0.16*	0.03	0.20*	0.03
Gender (reference: Man)						
Woman	-	-	0.23*	0.02	0.22*	0.02
Age (reference: <=19)						
>= 20 years old	-	-	-0.18*	0.02	-0.10*	0.02
Home country (reference: Others)						
China	-	-	0.07*	0.02	-0.12*	0.03
Institution (reference: University 6)						
University 1	-	-	-	-	-0.30*	0.03
University 2	-	-	-	-	0.35*	0.03
University 3	-	-	-	-	0.08*	0.03
University 4	-	-	-	-	-0.22*	0.04
University 5	-	-	-	-	-0.03	0.04
Program area (reference: Arts & Humanities)						
Sciences	-	-	-	-	0.20*	0.04
Health & Social Services	-	-	-	-	0.15*	0.05
Engineering & Technology	-	-	-	-	0.02	0.04
Business	-	-	-	-	0.29*	0.03
Social Sciences	-	-	-	-	0.05	0.04
Multidisciplinary Studies	-	-	-	-	0.10	0.09
Academic year (reference: 2018)						
2019	-	-	-	-	0.27*	0.03
2020	-	-	-	-	0.26*	0.03
2021	-	-	-	-	0.09*	0.03
2022	-	-	-	-	-0.11*	0.03
Intercept	*2.61**	*0.01*	*2.51**	*0.02*	*2.34**	*0.04*
R^2	*0.003*		*0.020*		*0.071*	

Table 7. Linear Regression Coefficients for Year 1 GPA, colleges (n=89,334; *: p<0.05)

Independent Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	Robust SE	B	Robust SE	B	Robust SE
Enrolled in EAP	-0.17*	0.02	-0.08*	0.02	-0.03	0.02
Gender (reference: Man)						
Woman	-	-	0.17*	0.01	0.18*	0.01
Age (reference: 20-24)						
<=19 years old	-	-	-0.08*	0.01	-0.01	0.01
25-29 years old	-	-	0.41*	0.01	0.30*	0.01
>=30 years old	-	-	0.54*	0.01	0.47*	0.01
Home country (reference: Others)						
China	-	-	-0.43*	0.02	-0.42*	0.02
India	-	-	0.00	0.01	-0.07*	0.01
Vietnam	-	-	-0.02	0.03	0.00	0.03
Philippines	-	-	0.13*	0.01	0.23*	0.01
Institution (reference: College 3)						
College 1	-	-	-	-	0.12*	0.01
College 2	-	-	-	-	0.09*	0.01
Credential pursued (reference: Diploma)						
Advanced diploma	-	-	-	-	0.17*	0.01
Bachelor	-	-	-	-	0.21*	0.03
Certificate	-	-	-	-	0.00	0.02
Graduate certificate	-	-	-	-	0.43*	0.01
Program area (reference: Business)						
Applied Arts	-	-	-	-	0.17*	0.02
Applied Sciences	-	-	-	-	0.26*	0.01
Health, Social & Community Services	-	-	-	-	0.25*	0.01
Engineering & Technology	-	-	-	-	0.32*	0.01
Social Sciences	-	-	-	-	0.22*	0.01
Academic year (reference: 2018)						
2019	-	-	-	-	0.15*	0.01
2020	-	-	-	-	0.03*	0.01
2021	-	-	-	-	0.02	0.01
2022	-	-	-	-	0.14*	0.01
Intercept	*2.97**	*0.00*	*2.75**	*0.01*	*2.35**	*0.01*
R^2	*0.001*		*0.083*		*0.124*	

THE ROLE OF EAP PROGRAM LENGTH

Among students who participated in an EAP program, program length did not show a significant relationship with Year 2 retention rate in either the university data or the college data after including the control variables (Table 8 and Table 9).

Similarly, there was no significant relationship between EAP program length and Year 1 GPA in the university data after adding the control variables. Although the regression coefficient for EAP program length in college data was significant, the effect size was very small (B=0.01) (Table 10 and Table 11).

Table 8. Logistic Regression Coefficients for Year 2 retention rate, universities (n=1,774; *: p<0.05)

Independent Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
EAP Program Length	0.06*	0.01	0.06*	0.01	0.01	0.01
Gender (reference: Man)						
Woman	-	-	0.31*	0.15	0.42*	0.16
Age (reference: <=19)						
>= 20 years old	-	-	0.30	0.16	-0.07	0.18
Home country (reference: Others)						
China	-	-	-0.42	0.30	0.29	0.37
Institution (reference: University 6)						
University 1	-	-	-	-	-2.29*	0.46
University 2	-	-	-	-	0.29	1.09
University 3	-	-	-	-	-2.39*	0.57
University 4	-	-	-	-	-3.27*	0.55
Program area (reference: Arts & Humanities)						
Health & Social Services	-	-	-	-	-0.14	0.56
Engineering & Technology	-	-	-	-	0.90*	0.34
Business	-	-	-	-	0.46	0.62
Social Sciences	-	-	-	-	0.15	0.55
Multidisciplinary Studies	-	-	-	-	-1.65	0.94
Academic year (reference: 2018)						
2019	-	-	-	-	0.30	0.20
2020	-	-	-	-	0.31	0.24
2021	-	-	-	-	-0.38	0.25
2022	-	-	-	-	-0.14	0.32
Intercept	*0.75**	*0.17*	*0.93**	*0.35*	*3.57**	*0.71*
McFadden's rho-squared	*0.049*		*0.056*		*0.206*	

Table 9. Logistic Regression Coefficients for Year 2 retention rate, colleges (n=2,423; *: p<0.05)

Independent Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
EAP Program Length	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Gender (reference: Man)						
Woman	-	-	0.07	0.10	0.19	0.11
Age (reference: 20-24)						
<=19 years old	-	-	0.30	0.18	0.36*	0.18
25-29 years old	-	-	0.60*	0.15	0.44*	0.15
>=30 years old	-	-	0.90*	0.16	0.80*	0.17
Home country (reference: Others)						
China	-	-	0.48*	0.13	0.39*	0.14
India	-	-	0.62	1.11	1.06	1.13
Vietnam	-	-	0.36*	0.14	0.27	0.15
Philippines	-	-	0.63	0.54	0.84	0.56
Institution (reference: College 3)						
College 1	-	-	-	-	-0.23	0.17
College 2	-	-	-	-	-0.25	0.14
Credential pursued (reference: Diploma)						
Advanced diploma	-	-	-	-	-0.29*	0.14
Bachelor	-	-	-	-	-0.15	0.32
Certificate	-	-	-	-	-0.70*	0.18
Graduate certificate	-	-	-	-	0.71*	0.21
Program area (reference: Business)						
Applied Arts	-	-	-	-	0.36	0.22
Applied Sciences	-	-	-	-	0.43	0.24
Health, Social & Community Services	-	-	-	-	0.38*	0.15
Engineering & Technology	-	-	-	-	0.60*	0.15
Social Sciences	-	-	-	-	0.11	0.21
Academic year (reference: 2018)						
2019	-	-	-	-	0.13	0.14
2020	-	-	-	-	-0.07	0.16
2021	-	-	-	-	-0.36*	0.18
2022	-	-	-	-	-0.27	0.19
Intercept	*1.34**	*0.10*	*0.73**	*0.14*	*0.64**	*0.19*
McFadden's rho-squared	*<0.001*		*0.021*		*0.045*	

Table 10. Linear Regression Coefficients for Year 1 GPA, universities (n=1,766; *: p<0.05)

Independent Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	Robust SE	B	Robust SE	B	Robust SE
EAP Program Length	-0.01*	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Gender (reference: Man)						
Woman	-	-	0.24*	0.04	0.23*	0.04
Age (reference: <=19)						
>= 20 years old	-	-	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.05
Home country (reference: Others)						
China	-	-	0.02	0.08	-0.01	0.09
Institution (reference: University 6)						
University 1	-	-	-	-	0.02	0.10
University 2	-	-	-	-	0.02	0.13
University 3	-	-	-	-	-0.34*	0.14
Program area (reference: Arts & Humanities)						
Sciences	-	-	-	-	-0.09	0.07
Health & Social Services	-	-	-	-	-0.14	0.09
Engineering & Technology	-	-	-	-	-0.08	0.12
Business	-	-	-	-	-0.09	0.06
Social Sciences	-	-	-	-	0.04	0.17
Academic year (reference: 2018)						
2019	-	-	-	-	0.28*	0.06
2020	-	-	-	-	0.22*	0.07
2021	-	-	-	-	0.00	0.08
2022	-	-	-	-	-0.06	0.09
Intercept	*2.94**	*0.04*	*2.77**	*0.09*	*2.70**	*0.11*
R^2	*0.008*		*0.026*		*0.058*	

Table 11. Linear Regression Coefficients for Year 1 GPA, colleges (n=2,424; *: p<0.05)

Independent Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	Robust SE	B	Robust SE	B	Robust SE
EAP Program Length	-0.01*	0.00	-0.01*	0.00	-0.01*	0.00
Gender (reference: Man)						
Woman	-	-	0.32*	0.05	0.34*	0.05
Age (reference: 20-24)						
<=19 years old	-	-	0.09	0.08	0.08	0.08
25-29 years old	-	-	0.33*	0.06	0.31*	0.06
>=30 years old	-	-	0.68*	0.06	0.65*	0.06
Home country (reference: Others)						
China	-	-	-0.04	0.06	-0.11	0.06
India	-	-	-0.06	0.60	0.18	0.63
Vietnam	-	-	0.12	0.06	0.09	0.07
Philippines	-	-	-0.17	0.14	-0.02	0.16
Institution (reference: College 3)						
College 1	-	-	-	-	0.05	0.06
College 2	-	-	-	-	0.43*	0.06
Credential pursued (reference: Diploma)						
Advanced diploma	-	-	-	-	-0.07	0.07
Bachelor	-	-	-	-	0.07	0.12
Certificate	-	-	-	-	-0.27*	0.09
Graduate certificate	-	-	-	-	0.17*	0.06
Program area (reference: Business)						
Applied Arts	-	-	-	-	0.25*	0.10
Applied Sciences	-	-	-	-	0.40*	0.10
Health, Social & Community Services	-	-	-	-	0.24*	0.06
Engineering & Technology	-	-	-	-	0.26*	0.06
Social Sciences	-	-	-	-	0.11	0.09
Academic year (reference: 2018)						
2019	-	-	-	-	0.06	0.05
2020	-	-	-	-	-0.10	0.07
2021	-	-	-	-	-0.14	0.08
2022	-	-	-	-	-0.07	0.08
Intercept	*3.03**	*0.04*	*2.55**	*0.07*	*2.40**	*0.09*
R^2	*0.017*		*0.101*		*0.144*	

Discussion

Overall, the positive relationship between EAP attendance and academic outcomes—both retention and GPA—appears to be robust for universities. This suggests that EAP programs not only support international students in developing the academic language skills to succeed in a university environment, but may also foster broader academic readiness, resulting in more positive outcomes compared to those who enter without having taken an EAP program.

For colleges, the findings show that international students who have completed an EAP program perform comparably to their non-EAP peers when variables such as age, program type, and country of origin are controlled. This indicates that EAP participation neither places international students at the college level at a disadvantage or advantage compared to their peers. Rather, the findings suggest that EAP programs effectively support students who initially do not meet the language proficiency requirements to participate in college-level study without disadvantage, reinforcing the value of EAP programs as an equitable pathway into postsecondary education.

Several factors may help explain the discrepancy between the university and college findings. For example, universities tend to be more selective, admitting higher-achieving international students who may benefit more from the academic and linguistic preparation provided through EAP programs. The composition of the international student population also differs between the sectors: China is the top home country among university international students in our data, while India is the top home country among college students. This may introduce systematic differences. In addition, EAP programming itself may vary across the sectors, as may the academic demands and student motivations of international cohorts—all of which can shape how EAP participation translates into academic outcomes. It is also important to note that we had only three participating colleges compared to six universities, and the proportion of international students who had attended an EAP program at each college was quite low.

There are several limitations in this study. First, there were key variables that we were not able to include in our analysis. English proficiency scores and high school grades have both been shown to be associated with academic outcomes, but most participating institutions were unable to provide these variables. Further, the relatively low McFadden's rho-squared (logistic regression) and R^2 (linear regression) in the models indicates that we were only able to explain a small portion of the variance in the academic outcomes, suggesting that other unmeasured factors may also play a significant role. Second, there are sizable structural imbalances between the EAP and non-EAP group with respect to home country, which might not be entirely ruled out by including the factor in the regressions. Third, by pooling data across institutions, the findings represent an average effect and may mask important differences in how EAP programs are structured and delivered, which could influence student outcomes.

In terms of future directions, research should explore what features make a university EAP program successful in improving the academic outcomes of international students. It should also examine whether EAP programs have similar impacts for all international students or whether the impacts vary across subgroups. In addition, future studies should consider how EAP attendance affects longer-term academic outcomes as well as non-academic outcomes such as confidence, satisfaction, and belonging, and how study findings can be used to guide quality improvements in EAP programs.

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